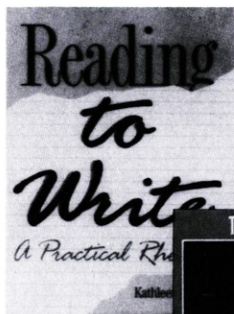# JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

New Ideas in Writing

Reading to Write
A PRACTICAL RHETORIC
KATHLEEN ANN KELLY,
Northeastern University

A basic, pragmatic rhetoric that focuses on the purposes and processes of writing, rather than on skills-based drills. The connection between reading and writing is established and illustrated by an abundance of examples from 35 students and 100 professional writers. Assignments after every point of content guide students in applying it immediately to their own writing, and several assignments per chapter call for collaboration and for small-group discussion. Students are shown how to maintain a "double-entry journal" and a "grammar log" throughout the course to help them recognize the features of effective writing, and how to diagnose and avoid their personal troublespots. Fifteen revision worksheets guide students through the writing process and help them assess their purpose, ideas, organization, and tone.

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Discovery
AN INDUCTIVE APPROACH TO WRITING
THOMAS E. TYNER,
Kings River Community College

This developmental rhetoric takes an inductive approach to learning how to write effectively. Through guided reading activities, collaboration in small groups, and provocative writing assignments – including journal keeping and essay projects – students learn to discern the elements of good writing, express their ideas effectively, assess their own work critically, and learn from their mistakes. An extensive editing Handbook – complete with exercises and instruction in grammar, punctuation, and spelling – and 23 complete readings and 12 sample paragraphs from professional writers help students discover how to be better writers.

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Guidelines
A CROSS-CULTURAL
READING/WRITING TEXT
RUTH SPACK, Tufts University

A truly innovative rhetoric that integrates a variety of cross-cultural readings with a progression of increasingly challenging assignments based on the readings. The readings – personal essays, research studies, argumentative essays, and news articles – cover such topics as perceptions of time/punctuality in various cultures, definitions of friendship, various aspects of education, and intercultural communication. The text includes detailed guidance for each type of writing and extensive treatment of reading/writing skills – summarizing, paraphrasing, annotating, citing/documenting sources – to help students master each type of writing.

Paperbound. 338 pages (probable)
Just published
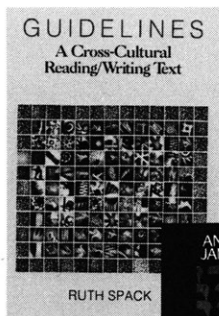*Instructor's Manual* available

Writer's Craft, Teacher's Art
Teaching What We Know

Edited by Mimi Schwartz, Stockton State College

The premise of this new collection of essays (all written expressly for this book) is that teachers are writers, that what they do on notepad or on a word processor affects their teaching about writing. Teaching and writing are not two unrelated roles, rather, they are interrelated.

Here 17 writer/teachers - poets, journalists, fiction writers, physicists, and English professors - describe the connections between how they write and teach. They represent a range of experiences in both endeavors and cover a variety of issues in composing based on these experiences. Their essays are conversational and personal, and all share one goal: to keep the "I" permanently on center stage to narrate their stories and to present the theories and practices that emerge from them.

Writer's Craft/Teacher's Art will provide its readers with some insights on how they write and teach and how these are connected; at the same time, it gives some useful ideas on many pedagogical issues and writing ideas for dealing with those same issues.

C O N T E N T S

Strategies
Teaching what we do as prewriters, revisers, eavesdroppers, researchers, risk-takers, etc. Essays by Gabriele Rico, Kim Stafford, Neal Tolchin, Mimi Schwartz, Lynn Bloom*, Charles Moran and William J. Mullin

Insights
Teaching what we've learned on the job: as editors, from editors, in writing groups, from critics and mentors. Essays by Richard Marius, Ken Autrey, Stephen Tchudi, Susan Osborn, Michael Robertson, David Huddle

Dilemmas
Ongoing conflicts about creativity, competence vs. excellence, guiding dissertations, authenticity of voice, limited time, and writer's block. Essays by Stephen Dunn, Joyce Greenberg Lott, Stephen Goldfield, Linda Williamson Nelson, Andrea Hermann

Nov. 1990   *192 pp*   *Paperback*

* Lynn Bloom's essay *Finding a Family, Finding a Voice: A Writing Teacher Teaches Writing Teachers* is reprinted in this issue of *Journal of Basic Writing*.

JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

Cover design by E. H. Jaffe

JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

EDITORIAL BOARD

JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

VOLUME 9 NUMBER 2 FALL 1990

CONTENTS

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 four copies of a manuscript accompanied by an abstract of about 100 words. To assure impartial review, give author information and a biographical note for publication on the cover page only. 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. We require the new MLA style (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers,* 1984). For further guidance, send a stamped letter-size, self-addressed envelope for our one-page style sheet.

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 matters such as the social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; rhetoric; discourse theory; cognitive theory; grammar; linguistics, including text analysis, error descriptions, and cohesion studies; English as a second language; and assessment and evaluation. 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; cross-disciplinary insights for basic writing from psychology, sociology, anthropology, journalism, biology, or art; the uses and misuses of technology for basic writing; and the like.

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; collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy; and teaching logs which trace the development of original insights.

A "Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award" is given to the author of the best *JBW* article every four issues (two years). The prize is $500, courtesy of an anonymous donor. The winner, selected by a jury of three scholars/teachers not on our editorial board, is announced in *JBW* and elsewhere.

Sarah D'Eloia Fortune

Sarah D'Eloia Fortune, a founding member and, from 1980 through 1985, editor of the *Journal of Basic Writing,* died of cancer on June 8, 1990. She was a member of the English Department at The City College since 1970, and an assistant to Dean Paul Sherwin since 1986. As a specialist in linguistics, she studied social dialects in American English and earned high regard for her articles, "Issues in the Analysis of Black English" (*Journal of English Linguistics,* 1973), the definitive review of J. L. Dillard's book, *Black English;* "The Uses—and Limits—of Grammar" (*JBW* Spring/Summer 1977); and as coauthor of *From Experience to Exposition: Patterns in Basic Writing* (Harper & Row, 1984). She often spoke at national conferences on writing, and at the time of her death was working on research surveying sixteenth- and seventeenth-century grammars and dictionaries. She will be missed by her colleagues at The City College and at the *Journal of Basic Writing.*

Journal of Basic Writing
edited by Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller
announces its second biennial

MINA P. SHAUGHNESSY WRITING AWARD

given for the best *JBW* article every two years (four issues). The winner's prize is $500, courtesy of an anonymous donor. This second competition covered papers published in the 1988 and 1989 issues of *JBW*.

Winner: Kathleen G. Dixon
"Intellectual Development and the Place of Narrative in 'Basic' and Freshman Composition"
Spring 1989 *JBW*, Volume 8, Number 1

Members of the Jury: Deborah Holdstein (Chair)
Governors State University
University Park, Illinois

Charles Cooper
University of California
San Diego, California

Evelyn Webb
Mississippi Gulf Coast
    Community College
Gulfport, Mississippi

Editors' Column

As this issue goes to press, news has come of the untimely death of Sarah D'Eloia Fortune, the second editor of *JBW*. Professor Patricia Laurence of our editorial board has written a tribute which appears elsewhere in this issue.

We are also saddened to have to report the passing on July 9, 1990 of Sandra M. Schor, associate professor of English at Queens College, CUNY. Formerly director of composition, she was named a master teacher in CUNY's Faculty Development Program. The author of the *Random House Guide to Writing* (with Judith Summerfield) and the *Borzoi Handbook for Writers* (with Frederick Crews), she was a frequent contributor of poems and short stories to distinguished journals. Her novel, *The Great Letter E,* was published by North Point Press this Spring. She was the first recipient of *JBW*'s biennial Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award for her article "An Alternative to Revising: The Proleptic Grasp," published in Spring 1987 *JBW*.

On a more cheerful note, we are delighted to announce that Kathleen G. Dixon, a doctoral candidate in the English and Education Program at the University of Michigan, who is currently teaching at The Ohio State University at Lima, has been selected as the winner of the second Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award, given for the best article published in *JBW* over the past two years. The winning article appeared in Spring 1989. The award carries a cash prize of $500 provided by an anonymous donor in memory of the founding editor of *JBW*. The panel of judges consisted of Professors Charles Cooper, University of California, San Diego; Deborah Holdstein, Governors State University, University Park, IL (Chair); and Evelyn Webb, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Gulfport, MS. We greatly appreciate their hard work during the summer in choosing the winning entry.

Another news item concerns the organization and layout of *JBW*. Beginning with this issue, we are including an abstract with each

article, a practice which we feel is appropriate for a scholarly publication and to which we committed ourselves as a goal when we assumed the editorship. Due to the volume of publication in the field of basic writing, readers require more than titles to guide them in screening and searching.

Finally, before turning to the contents of the current issue, we wish to report that both the quantity and quality of manuscripts passing over the transom continues to be high. We are particularly pleased that a very wide range of authors—from undergraduate tutors to scholars and researchers with national reputations—are sending their manuscripts to *JBW*. We hope this fact is also reflected in the range of articles finally selected for publication. However, there continues to be at least one area in which we have an overabundance of submissions (ESL) and another in which there is virtually none (computers in basic writing).

In the first article of the current issue, Lynn Z. Bloom describes the remarkable discoveries that she and her students make as writers, resulting from the convergence of a writing course and imminent personal tragedy.

Following Lynn Bloom, Jane Zeni and Joan Krater Thomas report the results of a two-year study involving suburban African-American basic writers.

In the third article, Frances Zak explores the effects on students and their writing when she restricts her responses to exclusively positive comments, bypassing all questions, suggestions, and corrections of mechanical errors.

The fourth article by Patrick Slattery finds that, depending on the nature of the assignment, the student writer is perfectly capable of thinking and writing in different ways, reflecting different models of intellectual development.

George Moberg, in the fifth article, traces the development over the past decade of renewed interest in rhetoric, and provides an annotated bibliography of some of the significant publications in the field.

Vivian Zamel, in the sixth article, offers three case studies of the various difficulties encountered by ESL students as they advance into freshman composition from the ESL writing courses.

The final article by Jody Millward presents a number of ways that the UC Santa Barbara Placement Program, working with ten local high schools, transforms the testing situation into a meaningful pedagogic enterprise.

Bill Bernhardt and *Peter Miller*

Lynn Z. Bloom

FINDING A FAMILY, FINDING A VOICE: A WRITING TEACHER TEACHES WRITING TEACHERS[1]

ABSTRACT: "Finding a Family, Finding a Voice" explains how and why a paradigm shift occurred in Professor Bloom's way of teaching new TAs to teach writing. The three crises, one life-threatening, two institutional, that converged at the beginning of the semester freed Bloom from teaching conventionally. In the two months the class had changed, utterly, from students in the process of reading about teaching in order to teach writing, to students in the process of becoming writers in order to teach writing. As students and teacher became a family, a community of writers, each person in that community found a voice.

A paradigm shift, says Thomas Kuhn, arises in response to a crisis. Old ways don't work, old explanations don't fit, and a crisis makes apparent the need for a new paradigm that fits better. This is the story of how three crises (two new, one of longstanding) converged to precipitate a paradigm shift in the way I teach writing teachers to teach writing. In the twinkling of an eye, the class

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Lynn Bloom is professor of English and holds the Aetna Chair of Writing at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. She has written over a dozen books, ranging from Doctor Spock: Biography of a Conservative Radical *to* The New Assertive Woman *to* Fact and Artifact: Writing Nonfiction. *This essay was a turning point for her as writer and teacher, she says, since having taken risks in its writing, it led to her becoming committed to more daring expression, more creative, more personal, far more difficult—and more fun—than any of her conventional academic writing done over the past thirty years. Fittingly, she is now working on a book on first person writing called* Our Stories, Our Selves: Reading, Researching, Writing Autobiography."

3

metamorphosed from students in the process of learning about teaching in order to teach writing, to students in the process of becoming writers in order to teach writing. Having effected the change, quite by accident, I can't go back; the new paradigm has supplanted the old.

I had taught "Teaching Composition," a graduate course in composition theory and pedagogy required of all new TAs, on and off for a decade, and I was looking forward to teaching it again at Virginia Commonwealth University. Following a widely accepted paradigm that was familiar, workable, and comfortable, I knew exactly what I would do. My students would read enough central works of rhetorical theory and composition research to enable them to sail, rather than stagger, through their first semester in the classroom. They would chart their course according to the principles and practices of such master mariners as Lindemann, Shaughnessy, Tate and Corbett, and Graves; their own teaching would mirror mine, which would of course model the best available information.

Initially the TAs would write an analysis of their own composing processes, to help them understand the process-oriented composition course they were teaching. They'd analyze a master's style. Later on, they would compile an annotated bibliography of current research and use these sources in a term paper of their choice. But whether or not these new teachers of writing wrote much or cared much about their own writing except to produce the requisite papers in appropriate academic form was beyond the expectations of myself or indeed of any of our graduate offerings other than writing workshops. Even though I write all the time (a day without writing is a day lost forever), I would not impose that additional burden on my students. They already had enough to do.

In my role as instructor I would provide an exemplary model of a professional writing teacher: always prepared, always able to anticipate their questions and answer them, always cheerfully in control. I could do no less. So I launched into the first day's ritual introduction to the course, but as I enthusiastically outlined what we'd do and why, it became apparent that something was wrong. The students seemed perplexed when I asked what writing assignments they were giving their freshmen. They looked unhappy when I suggested they bring in a sample of the diagnostic freshman essay to discuss in class, and finally, when I asked them to prepare a syllabus for the first two weeks of class they admitted that only two of the fourteen somber students around the conference table were actually teaching. Some were tutoring in the writing center; some were grading papers for professors in literature courses; some

had fellowships that freed them from other work; some were just taking the course for fun. Furthermore, the second edition of Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers,* which I had intended as the core of the course, was delayed by the publisher; it wouldn't be available for a month, maybe longer. By the end of this very very long 90-minute session, I knew I would have to discard my well-wrought, carefully refined semester syllabus and redo the whole course.

In the two days between class sessions (we met twice a week) I began the walk along the tightrope that stretched from experience to innocence. Being by nature a risk-taker (no I don't ride Harley-Davidsons or dive off the 15-meter board), I am always trying new things: jobs, book ideas, and now—the riskiest of all—some creative nonfiction and poetry. (In the process of learning how to do it I am finally finding the welcome, personal voice I have for a lifetime been too scared to use—which balances the discomfort and vulnerability of public exposure.) So I moved headlong toward the innocent, the unknown end. In risk-taking I would do risk-teaching.

Because my students had no students of their own, I decided to ask them to examine their own writing. For a decade I had been asking students in virtually all my classes to write a first paper on "How I Write," as a way of helping themselves and me to better understand their composing process(es), and to anticipate and correct pitfalls. However, such papers, which I used to find fascinating, were becoming predictable to all of us; "How I Write" was the equivalent of "What I Did on My Summer Vacation" to these students, who had come of age in a process-oriented curriculum. Then, after all these years, I finally recognized the obvious—what good was a process without a compelling motive to use it? "Why I Write" had to precede "How I Write." And I knew that it would be far more difficult to write such a paper than "How I Write," but there was no alternative.

I began the next class, my once-elegant and comprehensive syllabus, embodying the old paradigm, now reduced to a few tentative key words, by announcing the first writing assignment, "Why I Write." "Here I am," I said, "trying to model for you the Right Way to Give a Writing Assignment, and I'm doing it all wrong. I usually like to talk an assignment through with my students, focusing on useful key words" (major ideas, primary traits) "and appropriate rhetorical strategies, anticipating the problems, and offering suggestions for How to Do It. We look at some sample papers to see what other students have done.

"But I can't do these things with this assignment. I've never given it before" (How could I, in thirty years of teaching, have

overlooked the obvious?) "so I don't know what to expect. I don't know why you write, but I do know that if writing is important to you your paper will be very revealing and it will be very hard to do. It's not fair," I continued, "to ask students who don't know the teacher and whom the teacher doesn't know to expose themselves on a personal level before the class has had time to create a community of trust and understanding, and yet I'm asking you to do this." (So much for the exemplary model.) "We can read why George Orwell and Joan Didion and Elie Wiesel say they write" (I distributed copies of their essays for the next session), "and we can see what the writers in *In Praise of What Persists* and *The Paris Review* series say, and we will—but maybe their reasons aren't your reasons. I tell you what" (I hesitated before taking the plunge because I knew the water would be cold and that I would be vulnerable, even, to drowning), "I'll go first, and we'll see what we can learn from my experience."

I had always been reluctant to impose my writing on my students. The focus of our classes should be properly on their work, not mine. I suspected I could write better than they could, and I didn't want to establish a climate of competition. (But this class contained a published poet and a prizewinning novelist, so the students could set the competence level for their peers.) Yet I could think of no other way to establish a climate for teaching writing as a process than by examining the question fundamental to that process—not "Why do it?" but "Why do *I* want to do it?"—and now I believe there is no other way.

"Teaching Composition" was getting tougher, unpredictable and therefore potentially out of control, though the students seemed very willing to explore "Why I Write," especially since I'd volunteered to test the waters. Our class, myself included, had also agreed to keep notebooks of reactions not only to the assigned and eclectic readings, but to what went on in class; we'd see what we could learn from the writing in progress and the teaching in process.

The character of the course—an unstructured, off-balance, ad lib response to a crisis, like street theater in comparison with a scripted play on a proscenium arch stage—was becoming a metaphor for my personal life. My husband, also a professor and writer, and always cheerfully healthy, had begun waking up with headaches. After he woke up earlier and earlier and sometimes did not sleep at all, he consulted our usually cheerful dentist who said, "Nope, it's not a toothache," and sent him off to our usually cheerful internist, who suspected sinus problems and prescribed ten days of decongestant. But the headaches got worse, and the internist, no longer cheerful, sent my husband, who was having difficulty reading by this time, to

the local ENT specialist. Ordinarily a dramatic joker who treated even accident victims with puns and funny faces, this doctor said, impassively, "I can see something in there, but I can't tell what it is," and sent him to a specialist at the state's major medical center, the Medial College of Virginia. By this time I was driving my husband everywhere he needed to go, for he could not see well enough to drive, though with blind faith he continued to teach.

In class I felt like an Easter candy, with a eggshell veneer over a liquid center; poke it and I'd collapse, the interior running out. I was terrified that I would become a widow. At home, I masked my tension in Girl Scout good cheer and after one long sleepless night I couldn't cry any more and forced myself to eat and to swim and to go to bed and even to play hostess to a succession of houseguests, some from overseas, invited months before. "We don't have anywhere else to go," they announced from Dulles Airport, "you have to take us in." As so we did.

In this context I wrote "Why I Write." For the first time in my literary life I could be uninhibited (graduate school training had made me such a self-effacing writer that I'd never before written anything except poetry in the first person). In relation to the mortal combat being waged in our household, everything else became a trivial pursuit. I was finally free to say what I wanted; our existential crisis was, at least, liberating.

Only I wasn't free. At least, not on the first draft, or the second, or the third. The first time through I wrote the easy part: "I write because I can't not write. From the moment I learned to read, enamored of the joys of Dr. Seuss, I knew I· wanted to write. I thought at the age of six that to delight readers with words was the most wonderful thing in the world. I still think so." Only later did I have the courage to add, "To write is to touch one's readers, to make friends and risk enemies, to become a member of the human family—to belong, even in exile."

That first version was a piece of cake, six pages in two hours—a lost faster than I usually write, even with the computer. Maybe what I was asking my students to do wasn't so hard after all, though as I commented at the time in my teacher's/writer's notebook, "The metamorphosis from child reader to adult writer dashing off book after article after book makes the act of writing seem pretty simple, and pretty simple-minded, and unbelievable."

Indeed, the reasons for writing that we were discussing in class didn't make it sound that easy. George Orwell's "Why I Write" is a political manifesto: "My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. . . . I write because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention

. . ." (394). Orwell's motive resonates in Joan Didion's claim, in another "Why I Write," that all serious writers say *"listen to me, see it my way, change your mind"* (17). The message of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel is unfailingly moral; in "Why I Write: Making No Become Yes," he explains that he writes as a witness to the memory of the Holocaust victims:

> I owe them my roots and my memory. I am duty-bound to serve as their emissary, transmitting the history of their disappearance, even if it disturbs, even if it brings pain. Not to do so would be to betray them, and thus myself. . . . Why do I write? To wrench those victims from oblivion. To help the dead vanquish death (24, 27).

The day before my paper was due I started at 9 a.m. to polish it—an hour's task, I anticipated. By 4 p.m. I needed a break; at 9 p.m. I was still writing; I finally finished, drained, at 1 a.m. The resulting nine-page version wasn't much longer than the original draft, but the substance had changed considerably as I imposed a grid of the hard stuff over the original text. Why I write—as Orwell and Didion and Wiesel know full well—is who I am, and when I had plumbed "the deep heart's core" I knew I had said enough.

In elementary school, I told my students, I wrote to distance myself from conventional classmates—I wrote satires (about them) while they wrote yet again about their summer vacations; writing was social criticism. In high school I wrote to find a voice, to distance myself from my overbearing *"paterfamilias* of four good German names (and a nickname of 'Odd')," who sought to impose his pompous, professorial style on my writing as on my life; writing was rebellion. In college I wrote to learn what I had to say and in graduate school and afterward I wrote to understand what others (writers, especially) had to say and how they said it. Writing was profession. So I wrote my way into job after job, too often filling others' demands for reports, reviews, encyclopedia articles, critical essays, textbooks, chapters of other people's books. In writing so much as somebody's professor, somebody's colleague, somebody's friend, I was losing my voice.

I was also writing, however, in hopes that my parents would be once again proud and "would invite me, the published author, back into the family they had thrown me out of, stunned, at 24 when I married out of their non-religion, a Jew." But "my father carefully misread my major books, the ones the reviewers especially liked, and ignored the rest. He never praised one syllable." I said all this in the essay for my students; I told them what I had never told anyone in public before, more even than my sister and brother knew. How

could I make myself so vulnerable to the very students, whom I still didn't know very well, whose authority figure I was supposed to be? How could I live with them for the rest of the semester? But—I took a deep breath—how could I not write "Why I Write" without being as candid with them and tough with myself as I expected them to be in their own writing?

So I concluded the essay: My husband, "best critic and best friend," and the job security and independence that have come from doctoring and mastering academic writing have enabled me to regain my voice. I love being back where I started, with writing that is risky, daring, subversive, the writing "that most engages my heart and soul, the writing that is about families, parents and children," in biography, oral history, autobiography, poetry.

> My father is dead now, and whether he ever loved me or my writing enough is beyond change. . . . In writing about families, in creating and re-creating them, I rejoin the family of my own choosing. I am part of them. They cannot throw me out; I take them in. I write to remain a member of the human race, the family that encompasses us all.

The morning after I finished "Why I Write" my husband and I saw films of the CAT scan. We could not talk about the clenched-fist white spot under his right eye, bigger than a golf ball, pressing against his brain. Indeed, we said very little on that very long drive to school that morning, for the diagnosis was a malignant brain tumor. "I'm prepared to die," he told me matter-of-factly. "I want you to know I have no regrets about our marriage, all 29 years. None." Just as matter-of-factly I replied, gripped the wheel so I wouldn't crack us up, "Well, I'm not prepared for you to die, and I want you to fight this." And so I went to class, with "zero at the bone" burning in my brain, to read the essay that I decided to give my husband for his impending birthday. We make our own presents, future or no.

My voice began trembling and my hands started shaking long before we got to "Why I Write," which I saved for the very end. The good reason for this was, of course, the pedagogical decision not to take up too much class time with my own work. I cannot remember what we said, that day, about Corbett and Aristotle on invention. I think we talked, that day, about Eudora Welty's concept of "confluence" in *One Writer's Beginnings,* and Tess Gallagher's "My Father's Love Letters" and the *Paris Review* interview with Thurber: "I'm always writing. I write even at parties. Sometime my wife looks over at me and says, 'Dammit Thurber, stop writing' " (96).

Finally I took a deep breath and told the class about how I wrote

the essay, that it had taken all my life and one week and would take more. I know I did not tell them about the CAT scan. I know also that although I am usually careful to make eye contact with my students, and to vary the pace of my presentation and allow for interruptions and relevant digressions and questions, I clung to the paper and without looking at anyone read the essay straight through in one gulp. There were tears in my eyes as I finished, as indeed there are as I write again about this day of days, and there was silence in that room.

No one said anything, but the time was up anyway. On their way out, however, several of the students said it was a good class, some shook my hand, and one gave me a hug. That had never before happened so early in the semester. It was like leaving church.

For the rest of the term I heard about that class, from the students in person and in their notebooks. In risk-taking, risk-teaching, showing them how much I cared about writing, I had complicated their lives. They had to care too. A writing center tutor wrote, "All over Richmond I run into lynn bloom [sic] students moaning about their papers—they all want to put a lot into it; they feel the paper is demanding a lot of them." An ex bass-player corroborated: Damn you, Lynn Bloom. Have you let me in for a life of writing, for a life of struggle to create, to express, to move from a state of knowing less to a state of knowing more or less what I want to say?"

Nevertheless, the class was, as one student said, "charged up and full of energy." The novelist observed: "Here I am on a dismal rainy day, with my family life falling apart (and yes that makes me cranky, yes that makes it harder to get something done) *and this class cheers me up* and helps me believe I am a writer." Another analyzed her experience as a graduate student in this way:

> Although I went through four years of college and posses a bachelor's degree [in business administration], I am attending college for the first time. . . . I am now in school for the sole purpose of learning and I can't seem to get enough. . . . For the first time ever I have understood the idea of getting satisfaction from the project itself rather than concentrating on the grade.

A first-time composition teacher, whose term project was research on "ways to make students care about their writing," said:

> There is an atmosphere where everyone cares about their writing. . . . I have tried to think back over what may have prompted this atmosphere in our class . . . it was Lynn Bloom's reading her paper on why she writes. She took so

10

many chances in that paper—invested so much confidence in our class—went out on a limb to make us feel like we were a gathering of writers with whom she wanted to share her work. [Before that] the risk had gone out of my writing . . . but when I heard her read, and when I heard some of the other students' papers, I realized that this class was going to take a different turn from my other graduate classes, and that maybe it was going to give me the ability to earn the distinction of calling myself a writer.

There's not much more to say. Through taking risks, through letting my students see me as a writer-always-in-process who cares deeply about what I write and can admit vulnerability and change, I effected a paradigm shift. Within two months' time, my class had changed from students in the process of learning about teaching in order to teach writing, to students in the process of becoming writers in order to teach writing. They learned about teaching writing as they wrote, and as they read—research essays, finally Lindemann—and each other's writings—while they wrote. As a student writer-in-process said, "I am grateful that the class was structured (de-structured?) to allow us to answer our own questions." Another exulted, "[This] has turned out to be a writing boot camp for me." Even the single holdout, the elementary teacher who never wanted to write, succumbed to the new paradigm within a month:

> I surrender! I'm just going to let myself be surprised with the directions this class takes. Risky voyages can take you where you never thought of going. Safe voyages are limited. Dr. Bloom has decided on the risky voyage and I admire her courage for picking it. I can be game enough to cast off my mooring ropes ("But I thought this class was supposed to . . .") and sail on down the river with her.

In becoming writers, the class was becoming a community of writers, as well. The depth of their investment in their own writing mirrored a receptivity to the work of their peers: "When [someone] reads a paper aloud, intelligent and instructive discussion follows. When a teaching problem is presented . . . we solve it as a class and we learn." Thus the students' engagement with "Why I Write" and their own emerging commitment to writing (two-thirds of them enrolled, the next semester, in my graduate workshop in Writing Nonfiction, including the formerly resistant teacher), to each other, and to teaching writing enabled me, two weeks later, to tell them that if I had to miss class because of my husband's impending

surgery and its potentially terrifying aftermath, they could teach themselves until I returned. Just as they were already doing.

The operation was swift, the outcome sweet. The surgeon's grin stretched above his mask when he came to give me the news. He repeated, over and over, what a lucky man my husband was. My own good luck was obvious. (The biopsy revealed that the cyst the doctor had just removed was the most benign of possibilities, composed of the same cells that form teeth, and the most rare—so rare that he might encounter only one such case in his career.) But although the surgeon has since become a kind friend, he could not know then or even now, how doubly lucky I have been in finding a new voice as a writer, and a new paradigm of teaching writing teachers, themselves a new family, as I have weathered this watershed experience.

Coda

After my husband's good health had remained stable for a year, I finally had enough perspective on the class and on my own still-emerging commitment to the risky realm of belletristic writing to attempt this essay. I had put it off as long as I could, but I had agreed to read it at a professional meeting—my first public appearance in my private voice in fifty years—and the deadline was fast approaching. From the safe distance of time (and a move to Connecticut) I began to wonder whether I was romanticizing the experience, investing it with as much of an impact on the students as it had on me. There was only one way to find out.

I sent the sixth draft to the students, and on a rainy March afternoon went to Virginia to find out. "Did I get it right?" They knew I was as vulnerable to them then as I had been the year before, and as we huddled together in a small room in the writing center it was clear that they had remained a community of writers and teachers and that they regarded me as part of that community. "Yes," they said, it reflected both the letter and the spirit of our class—which they demonstrated over and over again as they told me about their teaching and their own writing.

My students were teaching their students to write the way their experience told them that real writers learn to write. "Writers read a lot," they said, "and pick up vocabulary and sentence patterns, a sense of style, as they read." "Writers learn from reading aloud, paying attention to the sound." "Writers learn from copying texts by hand as Corbett recommends, from getting the feel of their sentences, from imitating texts." "They learn from writing and revising work that really means something to them, and from

submitting multiple drafts for portfolio grading." "Writers learn from reading their works to each other." "Writers learn from teachers who write, who are part of a group of writers."

Indeed, my students were real writers, in process and in product. Two students had switched from the M.A. to the M.F.A. program in creating writing. One student was trying, with some frustration, to control his sprawling style and vary his repetitive vocabulary. Another was in the process of transforming a collection of personal essays into a bildungsroman. A poet was experimenting with prose, to see what he'd learn. The prizewinning novelist had completed another novel and won honorable mention in the AWP (Associated Writing Programs) contest. And the most resistant student, the elementary schoolteacher, had edited a book of the uncollected writings of her favorite author, E. B. White, and submitted it to Harper & Row.

Another student, a high school teacher who took "Son of Paradigm Shift" last summer, told me simply, in a letter last Fall, "you made me a writer. I'm getting up at 5 every morning to write for an hour before school." A letter in February said that on the strength of an essay he'd written about fatherhood, he had been invited to become a magazine home repair columnist. In May his short story won first prize in the Writer's Federation of Nova Scotia contest.

I have begun the most difficult writing of my life, about my life and the lives of others close, distant, compelling. It's risky, but exhilarating, to invest so much and care so much, but there is no other choice. I have been invited to share drafts not only with my students, one kind of community, but with an informal network of essayists, another community, whose work is so good that the prospect of their criticism terrifies me. There is no other choice here, either. For this is the way to find our voices, find our families, find ourselves.

Note

[1] Dedicated, with love and respect, to my English 636 ("Teaching Composition") class at Virginia Commonwealth University, Fall 1987: Sara Brown, Linda Burmeister, Linda Christian, Becky Dale, Christian Gehman, Warren Hayman, Karen Johnston, Joan Lanzillotti, Jay Looney, Mark Morrison, Kathleen Reilly, Dana Smith, Judy Taylor, Karen Weatherspoon; and to my husband, Martin Bloom.

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It also appears in *The Writer's Craft, The Teacher's Art: How Writing Practice Shapes Pedagogy.* Ed. Mimi Schwartz. Portsmouth: Heinemann Boynton/Cook.

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Jane Zeni
Joan Krater Thomas

SUBURBAN AFRICAN-AMERICAN BASIC WRITING: A TEXT ANALYSIS[1]

ABSTRACT: Six secondary teachers inquire why African-American writers were scoring below White classmates on a districtwide holistic assessment. This paper reports on a comparative text analysis of low-scoring papers, examining an array of rhetorical and mechanical features. The texts show that White basic writers differ little from Black basic writers. African-Americans tend to use a stronger personal voice and drop standard word endings, but most use no more than one such feature per page of writing. The researchers conclude that dialect is not the key issue.

African-American students have consistently scored below their White classmates in holistic assessments of writing. The Webster Groves School District is confronting this problem in collaboration

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The action research team also included the following secondary teachers who collaborated on the assessment: Nancy Cason, Minnie Phillips, Theresa Simon, Sandra Tabscott, and Gail Taylor.

with the Gateway Writing Project (GWP) at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Our study deals with writers in grades 7 to 12, but the patterns described may be found at any level of schooling. Low-achievers in junior and senior high often graduate to become basic writers in college.

Looking for answers, six secondary teachers and a university consultant embarked on three years of action research. Action research is based on a paradigm that contrasts with experimental research. It is conducted by people with a stake in the issues they investigate, not by detached evaluators. The roles of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers are fluid. Hypotheses are flexible rather than predetermined, emerging from guiding questions in the process of inquiry (Elliott, "Action"; Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography;* Smith, "Evolving Logic").

We began research in 1987 by examining the writing samples of Black and White students who placed below the mean on Webster Groves' annual assessment. Three questions guided our analysis:

> (1) "Do the characteristics of papers by low-scoring black writers differ systematically from those of low-scoring white writers?" (2) "How prevalent is black nonstandard dialect among low-scoring black writers in this suburban district?" (3) "Do the scorers in our writing assessment view dialect forms more negatively than other departures from standard usage?"

Answers to these questions would shape the way teachers planned to work with African-American writers. If our students had idiosyncratic patterns of errors, they might require special linguistic programs of remediation. But if they were generally weak in rhetorical as well as mechanical skills, the solution might lie in carefully tailored writing process instruction.

We were concerned that weaknesses in rhetoric and composition might, in the case of African-Americans, too quickly be labeled "Black English," causing teachers to focus mainly on surface errors. In a time of areawide desegregation, some teachers have returned to the language attitudes of the past—an obsession with the different-ness of Black oral style, and an assumption that if Black students slip into this style on paper we must "fix" their speech habits before teaching them to write. Our experience with African-American writers in Webster Groves made us doubt that dialect was the key to their writing problems.

Suburban African-American Basic Writers

Our project examines a population neglected in most of the

literature: middle and lower-middle income suburban students of African ancestry. Their writing problems—and solutions—cannot automatically be inferred from research on language in the inner city. Therefore, we must define our population clearly.

The School District of Webster Groves, a St. Louis suburb, educates 3,751 students representing the full range of socio-economic levels, with parents on welfare as well as in the professions. Over 70% of the high school students expect to attend college. African-Americans comprise 25% of the school population: among them, 20% are Webster Groves residents, while 5% come from St. Louis City through a voluntary interdistrict desegregation program. (The proportion of transfer students is similar among Black students who scored below the mean.)

Since 1983, Webster Groves has conducted a districtwide assessment of writing each Fall. To simulate some of the conditions for the writing process, students are given two hours to write, with the second class hour for revision. Explanatory, expressive, and persuasive prompts are assigned to different classes in alternate years.[2] Papers are read following procedures recommended for holistic scoring (Myers, *Procedure;* White, *Teaching*).

Year after year, most Black writers have scored low. Table I reports the performance of Webster Groves students in grades 7 to 12[3] on two annual assessments. Scores are based on an 8-point rubric with two readings, yielding a range for each paper of 2 to 16. The data show cause for our concern. Not only do African-American writers score significantly below their White peers, but they do not close the gap as they move through secondary school.[4]

This pattern fits the findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress: "Black . . . students perform at substantially lower levels than do White and Asian-American students," and the difference "remains essentially the same at grades 4, 8, and 11" (45–46). Like our assessment, NAEP tests actual samples of writing in expressive, persuasive, and explanatory modes.[5]

Our action research would first investigate the causes of low achievement among African-American writers in our particular setting, and then plan an intervention to help them succeed.

What the Literature Shows

During the three-year study, the research team has been closely involved with the literature. Each teacher received Farr and Daniels' *Language Diversity and Writing Instruction,* Charlotte Brooks' *Tapping Potential: English and Language Arts for the Black Learner,* and a thick stack of articles. These readings helped us understand

our students' composing processes, rhetorical problems, and mechanical errors; they also suggested some promising classroom strategies.

First we surveyed the linguistic research and saw that we could not rely on most descriptions of Black writers. Studies of Dillard, Labov, and Smitherman published in the seventies were based on speech samples from ghetto youth. Some Black Webster Groves students had, in fact, transferred from St. Louis City, but most had grown up in a stable suburban neighborhood where African-American families had lived for generations.

We next examined writings on dialect and schooling, starting with the *Students' Rights to their Own Language.* We could affirm the major theses of the 1974 statement: that Black nonstandard English is a rule-governed system, not a sloppy form of standard, and that language, culture, and selfhood are intimately linked. Yet we had to put these affirmations into practice for today. Our suburban students, and their parents, did not question the need to learn standard edited English, to make it their "own" for communicating with a public audience—especially in writing. Instead, they asked how to master the standard forms efficiently.

Similarly, we did not question the value of community speech patterns for an appropriate audience and purpose. Instead, we wanted to learn more about the language and culture African-American teenagers brought to school. The Ann Arbor vs. King School decision of 1979 stated that teachers must understand their Black students' linguistic resources to help them become literate. We studied Brooks' collection, which stresses oral language strengths, meaningful literature and composition, and teaching written standard English while editing.

This advice sent us to Shaughnessy and her followers. Studies of texts and their authors (Laurence; Hull; Tricomi; Connors and Lunsford) show that basic writers are not so much deficient as inexperienced, new to academic discourse. Teachers can examine the linguistic patterns of individual writers to discover which rules they intuitively use and which rules of standard English they must acquire. Students learn correctness through guided editing, not through survey-style grammar lessons.

Empirical research suggests that low-achieving Black writers fit the category of basic writers. When Sternglass analyzed community college papers, she found no patterns of exclusively "Black" dialect. Most errors of Black and White basic writers were identical in kind; Black students more often made certain errors typical of basic writers at large. Farr-Whiteman has confirmed these findings based on papers written for the National Assessment of Educational

Progress by 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old writers. An ongoing study by Smitherman (personal communication, 1989) using NAEP data also shows only occasional signs of African-American oral dialect features in writing.

So we looked beyond dialect and error to the whole process of composing. Although most of our teacher-researchers had studied in the writing project, we took a critical stance toward process pedagogy. Many success stories by process advocates have described affluent White high achievers: Moffett's *Active Voice* grew out of assignments developed at Exeter Academy.

We searched for process approaches that were effective with African-American basic writers. Fowler, reporting that dialect speakers need more time to write fewer words, uses freewriting to build fluency. Griffith found that a positive use of oral language helped underprepared college writers. Even Farrell, who fears that "oral" culture limits cognitive growth, recommends peer response, putting "orality at the service of literacy" (43). Farr and Daniels offer a comprehensive process pedagogy, tailored and structured for speakers of nonstandard English.

Analyzing the Texts

Based on these insights from the literature and from the classroom, we reexamined our assessment data. We considered both rhetorical issues and error patterns, comparing Black and White student papers grouped by holistic score. Later, we would use this inventory to plan instruction in the writing process.

For a week in August 1987, the scoring team met: ten Webster Groves teachers and a university consultant from the Gateway Writing Project. We based our analysis on the district's annual report which listed specific features of writing, with descriptors for these features characteristic of papers at each performance level and each grade level. We developed descriptors for low-scoring Black and White students based on the same features.

First, the team prepared for the analysis by freewriting our predictions of what we would find. Reading these aloud made our expectations public. Some of us were looking for error patterns, others thought fluency or confidence would be key issues—but all expressed uncertainty, a willingness to learn from the data.

Next, the scorers tested these predictions on ten papers paired by grade level and score, each pair with a White and a Black writer. The group correctly classified three pairs of papers, but missed two. We asked readers their cues, in usage as well as style and content. The exercise showed that these cues were misleading; it helped us

question all assumptions about "Black English" and focus on the texts at hand. (See Appendix B.)

Finally, the team examined the data. In the tradition of action research, we did not try to eliminate "observer bias" but to revise it. The holistic scoring had been blind (scorers did not know race or age), but for this analysis we had to see our variables. At each grade level we compared equal-scoring papers by Black and by White writers: sensing styles, checking patterns, counting certain linguistic features. We did not use the sociolinguists' method of calculating a ratio between nonstandard forms and total forms of a given feature; we simply counted "errors" as we built an overall impression of each set of papers.

Scoring Categories

For each paper, we made notes on two record sheets, one for rhetorical skills, the other for editing skills. We analyzed rhetoric and the writing process with an inventory like those used by Diederich to guide general impression marking.

Rhetorical Features

Writing process (signs of planning and revision from drafts)
Fluency (approx. length)
Development (use of specifics)
Organization (paragraphing, introductions)
Style (sentence maturity, word choice, tone)
Audience and *purpose* (signs of the writer's awareness)

We approached editing skills from an analysis of specific linguistic features. In deciding which items to count, we drew on published descriptions of "Black English," as well as on teachers' experience of common errors. These categories were expected to appear mainly among African-American writers:

Black Nonstandard Features

Special verbs (3rd person singular -*s*, past -*ed*, *to be* forms)
Noun/pronoun/adjective endings (final consonants, possessives, number markers)
"Self" pronouns (such forms as "hisself"/"theirselves")
Repeated subjects (the man, he).

The following categories were expected to include errors common to basic writers, both Black and White:

Spelling
Paragraphing (omitted or inappropriate indentation)
Miscellaneous verb usage
Fragments or run-ons
Capitalization errors
Miscellaneous (punctuation, apostrophes, etc.)
Double negatives
Homophones and Words Confused (to/too/two, also such
    often-muddled pairs as fill/feel).

Linguists do not call the last two items "Black English." But from classroom experience, we expected errors with homophones and double negatives to be more common among Black writers.

Scoring Procedures

To examine rhetorical characteristics, we divided into three subgroups which read and discussed papers from grades 7–8, 9–10, and 11–12 respectively. Groups first filled out record sheets with three sample papers to establish consistency. Then they read all Black student papers from the grade level folders, and an equal number of White student papers with the same scores. Team leaders led discussions and recorded each group's views of the key features. Since the Black students scoring below the mean varied from grade to grade (a low of 33, a high of 44), the sample size also varied. A total of 475 Black and White student papers from the 1986 assessment were read for rhetorical skills.

To examine editing skills, two scorers were trained on the error analysis record sheets. All items were counted twice for reliability— once by a scorer, then independently by the university consultant. Since this task was lengthy, we restricted our analysis to a sample. Papers from half the Black students and the same number of Whites were chosen nonsystematically for each below-average rubric point. We checked mechanics on 238 papers, 119 each from Black and White writers. To validate, we repeated the analysis a year later on a slightly larger sample of 1987 papers.

Finally, we synthesized the data assembled for each grade level of each score point. The team leaders wrote descriptors for the rhetorical features and the university consultant prepared descriptors and statistics on the mechanical features. Both were recorded on master charts for each grade level.

Interpreting the Data

The results told a consistent story. When the writing of Black

and White students was matched by grade and score, few differences appeared. That is, White ninth grade papers scored "6" and Black ninth grade papers scored "6" were similar in length, style, control of usage, and overall skill. But this statement does not change the fact that the lower rubric points had greater proportions of African-Americans. Black writers were more likely than Whites to score low, and therefore to be weak in fluency, correctness, organization, etc. But within each low-scoring category, the work of Black and White writers differed little. We did not find otherwise-competent papers scored low because of dialect or culture. This finding reassured us that scorer bias was not causing Black students to fail.

Rhetorical Categories

We compared papers at the same grade level and rubric point:

Rhetorical Categories—Results

1. *Process, fluency, development, awareness of audience and purpose:* No consistent Black/White differences were noted.
2. *Organization:* Black writers in grades 7 and 9 showed a slightly greater tendency to omit introductions or endings.
3. *Style and voice:* This is the only rhetorical category that clearly distinguished between Black and White writers:

    Black students tended to use a more informal voice and to get personally involved with their subjects. Yet they often lacked control of voice, so their style wavered from inappropriately casual to inappropriately formal. Younger Black students wrote very personally, informally, conversationally, while older ones usually retained a note of sincerity even when attempting a too-formal style. At all ages, Black writers used "I" more, gave more personal examples, and more often wrote in the long, compound sentences characteristic of speech.

    White writers tended to be less personal, more formal. For example, in a letter-writing task, younger Whites addressed the principal by position rather than as a person; older Whites often become more detached until in the later grades their writing was stilted, artificial, and stuffy.

In general, when matched by score and grade level, papers by Black basic writers seemed slightly stronger rhetorically than those by their White peers. The frequent sound of a convincing personal voice—though not always controlled—was an asset.

Mechanics and Usage Categories

Students improved from grade to grade in editing skills. But our findings challenged some assumptions about Black usage:[6]

Mechanics and Usage Categories—Results

Features Which Do Not Distinguish Black and White Basic Writers

1. *Spelling; Capitalization; Punctuation; Paragraphing:* Both Black and White students made many errors, especially in the younger grades. No consistent differences appeared.
2. *Repeated Subjects; Self Pronouns; Double Negatives:* Though identified with Black dialect, these forms almost never appeared either in Black or in White student papers.

Features Which Distinguish Black and White Basic Writers:

"Black Nonstandard" Features:

1. *Special Verbs:* Almost three times as many Black writers omitted some third-person singular -s or past -ed endings or used nonstandard "to be" forms. The frequency declined from grade to grade among Black writers, but the pattern among Whites is erratic. Overall, 35% of the Black students and 13% of the Whites used at least one such form.
2. *Noun/Pronoun/Adjective Endings:* More than twice as many Black writers (47%) as White (19%) omitted noun plural -s, possessive -'s, and other consonant endings. The trend from grade to grade is erratic among both groups.

"General Nonstandard" Features:

1. *Homophones/words confused:* (Substituting any real word for a word that sounds alike to the speaker: fell/feel, mine/mind). Although homophone errors were common among basic writers in general, more Black writers (over 60%) than White (40%) confused at

least one such pair. These errors may reflect Black oral language patterns.

2. *Fragments/run-ons:* Although common among most basic writers, more Black students (61%) than Whites (46%) made at least one sentence error.

3. *Miscellaneous Verb Usage:* Other nonstandard verbs were fairly common. They appeared erratically from grade to grade, sometimes more among Black writers, sometimes more among Whites. Overall, 17% of the Black writers and 8% of White writers used at least one such form. On the 1987 data, we counted only irregular past participles and invariant 'don't,' but found a similar, erratic pattern.

For this population of suburban basic writers, therefore, only two features known as "Black dialect" appeared frequently and predominantly among Black students: *special verbs,* and *noun/pronoun/adjective endings.* Three other features common to basic writers in general were somewhat more common among Black writers.

It is no surprise that African-Americans drop some endings when writing in the style of informal speech. What is striking is that the two dialect features were so rare even on low-scoring papers. Since our sample excludes papers at or above the mean, dialect is clearly not the main problem facing these writers.

Most Black basic writers (55%) used no more than one dialect feature per page (*special verbs* or *noun/pronoun/adjective endings*). And "Black dialect" was not limited to Blacks; low-scoring Whites also wrote such forms, though less often. Results from grades 7–12 thus confirm the Sternglass data from college.

Tables 2 through 5 show the four categories which clearly distinguish African-American writers in our sample: *special verbs, noun/other endings, homophones/words confused, fragments/run-ons.* Each table shows the number and percentage of papers with at least one error, the changes from grade 7 through 12, and the comparisons between the 1986 and 1987 data.

It is also revealing to show how frequently a feature is used. To measure the frequency of Black nonstandard usage, Table 6 combines the two dialect forms common in our setting: *special verbs,* and *noun/pronoun/adjective endings.* More than three such forms per page of text are listed as "**high**" dialect, two or three as "**some**" dialect, and one or zero as "**(nearly) none.**" (With shorter papers the items are multiplied; two forms on a half-page text equal four forms on a full page, or "**high.**")

24

The two key dialect features combined have a weak impact on our texts. Just 12 of 119 Black students (10%) in grades 7 to 12 (1986 data) show **high** usage of Black nonstandard forms. (Two of 119 White students also score **high** on these forms.) By contrast, 66 Black students (55%) show **nearly none** of these forms (as do 103 of the White students—87%). These patterns recur among 1987 writers: 28 Black (15%) and 11 White (7%) show **high** dialect usage, but 112 Black (61%) and 144 White (85%) show **nearly none.**

African-American students make steady progress in editing nonstandard features in formal writing.[7] Table 6 shows that 25% of Black 7th graders and 85% of Black 11th graders used no more than one such form per page (1986). This pattern is repeated in 1987: 40% of Black 7th graders and 79% of Black 11th graders used no more than one of these dialect forms.

What Do African-American Basic Writers Need to Learn?

For most suburban students, problems with standard written English are moderate, not high. Even in our sample, nonstandard usage stands out on relatively few papers. "Black dialect" is clearly not the key issue for African-American writers in this suburban community. Dialect simply is not a problem for most; for others, it is part of the problem, but not the main problem.

Why, then, do so many Black writers perform poorly? They seem to be weak in overall writing abilities: process, content, and organization, as well as standard usage. For some low-scoring Black students, slightly stronger rhetorical skills may be overshadowed by slightly more frequent errors, especially in highly stigmatized forms. Yet since most Black students rarely use such forms in writing, we cannot attribute their low scores to a bias against dialect in the holistic scoring. A more likely scenario is that in the classroom, nonstandard usage may consign some students to workbook exercises with little writing. By focusing on error rather than on communication, such students may fall farther behind with each year of "remediation."

So what can we recommend to improve the performance of our Black basic writers? We conclude, first of all, that premature or primary stress on dialect and error is counterproductive.

Instead, our teachers drafted a broad, learner-centered program, with a structured approach to writing processes and to matching voice with audience. Based on their own experience and on the literature, they chose a set of strategies (originally six, later eight) to emphasize and investigate in the classroom.

Emphasize writing processes
Individualize and personalize
Encourage cooperative learning
Build bridges to more challenging tasks
Use the computer
Build on strengths
Increase involvement with writing
Increase control of language

Each teacher then selected two to four target students from her own English classes—Black writers who scored well below the mean. During three years of action research, teachers are observing these target students and their responses to the eight strategies. They conference with target students, keep writing samples, and write fieldnotes.[8] The 41 target students are observed in normal classroom life. They are not singled out as an experimental group. Each month, teachers meet to discuss and interpret what they are learning. Our goal is to identify effective teaching strategies to support the eight principles.

We share Patricia Bizzell's hope that writers may "become comfortable with two different cultural literacies if these are acquired in social situations where both are highly valued" (135). Through this project, we expect to understand better the learning processes of African-American basic students and the journey through which they can become successful writers.

Appendix A: Tables

TABLE 1: MEAN WRITING SCORES OF BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS

Grade	Mean	1986 Data White	Black	Difference
7	7.0	7.4	6.1	1.3
8	8.8	8.7	6.5	2.2
9	8.2	8.7	6.9	1.8
10	9.6	10.1	7.7	2.4
11	10.2	10.7	7.9	2.8
12	11.0	12.1	8.2	3.9

Grade	Mean	1987 Data White	Black	Difference
7	6.69	7.0	5.2	1.8
8	8.36	8.8	6.9	2.0
9	7.67	8.1	6.4	1.8
10	9.37	9.7	8.1	2.6
11	10.69	11.1	9.3	2.8
12	11.04	11.0	8.7	2.4

Note: Scale = 2 - 16

TABLE 2: SPECIAL VERBS
(omitted 3rd person singular -s or past -ed, "to be" forms)

	Below Mean Black Writers			Below Mean White Writers		
	N	N min. 1 form	% min. 1 form	N	N min. 1 form	% min. 1 form

1986 Data

Grade						
7	20	12	60%	20	3	15%
8	17	7	41%	17	0	0%
9	22	8	36%	22	2	9%
10	21	6	29%	21	3	14%
11	20	4	20%	20	4	20%
12	19	5	27%	19	4	21%
Total:	119	42	35%	119	16	13%

1987 Data

Grade						
7	30	13	43%	29	7	24%
8	33	12	36%	30	1	3%
9	32	6	19%	28	6	21%
10	27	9	33%	22	2	9%
11	33	5	15%	33	1	3%
12	30	6	20%	27	2	7%
Total:	185	51	28%	169	19	11%

Examples

Black Writers	White Writers
It occur[s]	She get[s]
The teacher be calm	What['s] happening?
Webster have	There be a guardsman

Note. N min. 1 = number of papers with at least 1 nonstandard form per page of writing. % min. 1 = percent of papers with at least 1 such form per page of writing.

TABLE 3: NOUN / PRONOUN/ ADJECTIVE ENDINGS
(omitted noun plural -s, possessive -'s, other consonant endings)

	Below Mean Black Writers			Below Mean White Writers		
	N	N min. 1 form	% min. 1 form	N	N min. 1 form	% min. 1 form

1986 Data

Grade						
7	20	12	60%	20	5	25%
8	17	6	35%	17	5	29%
9	22	13	59%	22	2	9%
10	21	6	29%	21	4	19%
11	20	6	30%	20	3	15%
12	19	13	68%	19	4	21%
Total:	119	56	47%	119	23	19%

1987 Data

Grade						
7	30	10	33%	29	7	24%
8	33	12	36%	30	1	3%
9	32	11	34%	28	5	18%
10	27	9	33%	22	6	27%
11	33	13	39%	33	4	12%
12	30	13	43%	27	1	4%
Total:	185	68	37%	169	24	14%

Examples

Black Writers	White Writers
thing[s]	time[s]
qualification[s]	qualification[s]
prejudice[d]	sandwich[es]

Note. N min. 1 = number of papers with at least 1 nonstandard form per page of writing. % min. 1 = percent of papers with at least 1 such form per page of writing.

29

TABLE 4: HOMOPHONES AND WORDS CONFUSED

	Below Mean Black Writers				Below Mean White Writers		
	N	% min. 1 error	% min. 4 errors		N	% min. 1 error	% min. 4 errors
1986 Data							
Grade							
7	20	70%			20	50%	
8	17	70%			17	41%	
9	22	68%			22	32%	
10	21	66%			21	43%	
11	22	55%			20	35%	
12	19	47%			19	42%	
Total:	119	63%			119	40%	
1987 Data							
Grade							
7	30	73%	40%		29	28%	3%
8	33	64%	24%		30	30%	7%
9	32	59%	9%		28	54%	14%
10	27	48%	4%		22	32%	5%
11	33	70%	6%		33	55%	6%
12	30	67%	17%		27	44%	4%
Total:	185	64%	17%		169	41%	7%

Note. % min. 1 = percent of papers with at least 1 error per page of writing. % min. 4 = percent of papers with 4 or more errors per page of writing. This measure was obtained only on the 1987 data.

TABLE 5: FRAGMENTS AND RUN-ONS

		Below Mean Black Writers				Below Mean White Writers	
	N	N min. 1 error	% min. 1 error		N	N min. 1 error	% min. 1 error
1986 Data							
Grade							
7	20	15	75%		20	13	65%
8	17	8	47%		17	5	29%
9	22	15	68%		22	10	45%
10	21	13	62%		21	11	52%
11	20	13	65%		20	8	40%
12	19	8	42%		19	8	42%
Total:	119	72	61%		119	55	46%
1987 Data							
Grade							
7	30	28	98%		29	20	69%
8	33	23	70%		30	10	33%
9	32	17	53%		28	17	61%
10	27	12	44%		22	8	36%
11	33	21	64%		33	18	55%
12	30	10	33%		27	11	41%
Total:	185	111	60%		169	84	50%

Note. N min. 1 = number of papers with at least 1 error per page of writing. % min. 1 = percent of papers with at least 1 error per page of writing.

TABLE 6: STRENGTH OF TWO DIALECT FEATURES
SPECIAL VERBS AND WORD ENDINGS

	HIGH (min. 4 per page) Black/White		SOME (2-3 per page) Black/White		(nearly) NONE (0-1 per page) Black/White	
1986 Data						
Grade						
7	20%	5%	55%	20%	25%	75%
8	0%	0%	59%	24%	41%	76%
9	14%	0%	36%	5%	50%	95%
10	0%	0%	29%	10%	71%	90%
11	5%	0%	10%	10%	85%	90%
12	21%	5%	21%	5%	59%	89%
Mean %:	10%	2%	34%	10%	55%	87%
Total N:	12	2	41	14	66	103
1987 Data						
Grade						
7	33%	17%	27%	21%	40%	62%
8	15%	3%	30%	0%	55%	97%
9	13%	14%	28%	11%	59%	79%
10	7%	0%	4%	3%	63%	77%
11	9%	0%	12%	0%	79%	100%
12	13%	4%	20%	0%	67%	96%
Mean %:	15%	7%	24%	8%	61%	85
Total N:	28	11	45	14	112	144

10-3-1*

Dear ████████ _____

I know you are trying you best with the lunch conditions. But I think that the lunch should be longer because some kids don't want to eat cafeteria food. Then they rush trying to get to ██ their destiny and in their hastiness they may cause an accident. Then there are the kids that can't drive yet and they don't like the cafeteria food either, and they can't make it to McDonalds in a ½ an hr. I hope you will agree with me on this if not we can sit down an talk about it.

Sincerely,

████████████

*Grade 10 Score 3 Black writer

10-3-2*

Dear ████████

I would like to comment on the problem of the lunch periods being to short. For one thing having second lunch means, the food isn't as hot you get a lot of leftovers, and there is not as much of the more popular foods. But on top of that you have to wait in line for about ten minutes, then you have to scarf your food down so the bell does not ring while you are eating, and you cant eat after the bell because of the tardy/cut policy. So I'd rather starve then serve one of those saturday detention: But I do think action should be taaken before these matter get out of hand.

████████

9-4-1*

dear ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ There will be a time, when none are more of our teachers have to leave school, and never come back, we need hents on what kind of teacher we should get with all these qualification: patience, students need a teacher with patience, in order to know something. (ask with out being yeld at) enjoyable learning student would love to have a fun class; they would learn more in a fun class; an have a teacher giving more than one chance of doing something. techniques showing them long or short ways to solveing a problem and Politness, teacher should be polite to children who are polite to them.

Your Student

35

9-4-2 *

Dear ██████████   10/3/86

I think that the new teacher that you are hiring should have a good sense of humor. And make learning enjoyable. Some one how takes time to explain the assignment. Some one how will spend extra time before or after school. A teach how uses a variety of methods of learning. They don't tell you one method every time. And wont git made every time you do it a notter way then what they told you. He/she should have discipline but shouldn't over do it. They shouldent git made at every little thing that happends. He/she should dow some think at the big thigs. If stay dont the class whould git away with everything.

Sincerely
██████████████████

Notes

A report on two years of research based on this text analysis earned Joan Thomas the first place in the junior high/middle school category in the

annual Classroom Action Research Awards of the Institute for Educational Research, Glen Echo, IL.

[2] Two different prompts were used:

Explanatory—grades 7, 9, 11

Imagine (name of school) is hiring a new teacher. Write a letter to (name of principal) explaining the qualities of a good teacher that you think (he/she) should look for when interviewing teachers.

Persuasive—grades 8, 10, 12

(Name of principal) has asked for suggestions about how to make things better at (name of school). Write a letter to your principal telling just ONE thing you think should be changed and how the school will be improved. Your job is to CONVINCE the principal to make the change.

[3] Students seemed to find the explanatory prompt more difficult, which would explain the uneven progression of scores from grade to grade.

[4] The data show an equally large gap between male and female writers. These means from the 1987 data are representative:

Grade	White		Black	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
7	8.2	6.2	6.0	4.6
12	11.8	10.4	10.5	7.4

At every age, White females had the highest mean scores. Next, matching their grade level means, came Black females and White males. Last, 2 or 3 points below the mean, came Black males. Based on these findings, we decided to focus the classroom research on our Black male students. Perhaps the problem is not so much the linguistic exclusion of Blacks from the world of literacy, but the social alienation of males, especially Black males, from the world of school.

[5] Note that while the Webster Groves assessment gives students two hours spread over two days, time enough for them to put into practice their instruction in writing processes, the NAEP assessment allows just 15 minutes per essay. In fact, students generally write to all three NAEP prompts, back-to-back, in a single 45-minute class period. It is easy to explain the poor performance of Black students on the NAEP assessment by the fact that they lack the time to plan, draft, and also frequently edit into standard English form. On the Webster Groves assessment, however, students at least had a reasonable chance of demonstrating what they know about writing. So the low achievement of Black writers was still more troubling.

[6] The summary is based on 1986 assessment data. The 1987 assessment confirms the same patterns of errors. For details, see Tables 2 through 6, which present both 1986 and 1987 data.

[7] The 12th graders' performance was slightly weaker in both years. This may reflect the special nature of the senior year—the omission of students who have completed their English requirements, and the inclusion of those who must take one last course after repeated failures. The performance of 11th graders seems more representative of high school completion.

[8] Results from two years of work are encouraging. Among 18 target students, the first year's data show a 15% gain in holistic scores; among 23 target students, the second year's data show an 18% gain in holistic scores

along with distinctly more positive attitudes. Students were observed through classroom interaction, did the same work as their peers, and were not singled out or identified as targets.

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Frances Zak

EXCLUSIVELY POSITIVE RESPONSES TO STUDENT WRITING[1]

ABSTRACT: An in-class research project was conducted in two sections of EGC 100—Introduction to the Writing Process, for native and non-native speakers not ready for Freshman Composition—to explore different modes of responding to student papers. In one section, the usual range of positive and negative comments, advice, criticisms, and corrections was used. In another section, only praise or acknowledgement was offered for what worked or moved in the right direction. Results of the project showed that no significant differences existed in performance between the two classes. Further, while students in the "regular" section often merely followed the teacher's comments or corrections in their subsequent drafts, students in the "positive only" section frequently initiated their own changes or corrections, and seemed to gain greater authority over their writing.

In May, 1986, a note arrived in my mailbox. It was from Peter Elbow, and read:

> Fran, can I talk to you sometime about the possibility of your doing an experiment with one section of 100? Lots of freewriting, sharing, and working up to feedback—but restricting the feedback to what you might call 'believing' feedback: trying to understand and hear what the person is saying, and praising what you like. I.e., *no* evaluation or

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criticism. Both with peer feedback and from you. (This means training them *not* to give evaluative feedback.)

We suspect this might be close to what you already do. But we'd like to try it out. And collect all the writing. And one of the grad students (or you?) might be able to look at it carefully and write up the results. See what we can learn.

Let's talk. No pressure. (No hurry)

Peter

The course referred to in the note was EGC 100, Introduction to the Writing Process, a fourteen-week transitional, nongraded basic writing course offered by the Writing Programs at SUNY/Stony Brook, designed to give additional writing experience to freshmen prior to entering EGC 101, Freshman Composition. The classes of fifteen are composed primarily of foreign students and non-native speakers who either completed the most advanced writing course in ESL or scored two in the Stony Brook English Placement Test.[2]

For the five years I taught EGC 100, fluency was my primary goal. Students wrote a great deal in class, both freewriting and frequently more experiential and personal essays than exposition. I also required every student to hand in a piece of writing each week, and planned class activities around the idea that practice makes progress. The more students wrote, the better they wrote. If I could help them separate their "writer" from the "critic," they would be able to generate more text more readily. When we began to work on revision around midterm, I almost naturally assumed one of the cornerstones of an English teacher's faith: after students had worked on several drafts of their paper in groups and with me, I would help further by marking, correcting, and writing comments.

For the most part, my approach seemed to work: by the end of the semester, students were writing longer, more meaningful, and sometimes powerful essays, with only one or two mechanical errors in their final draft. At the end of the term, students selected their best work for publication in a class anthology.

After the note arrived, Peter and I talked about trying the experiment as an in-class research project in two sections of EGC 100.[3] The idea seemed simple enough. In one section, I would mark, correct, and comment—let loose the full array of written responses, both positive and negative, that I ordinarily made. In another section, I would restrict myself to writing positive comments only, and exclude all marks, comments, or corrections of mechanical errors.

My initial impulse was to say that I didn't want to participate in the project. After all, how could I deny students the help they

41

clearly needed and asked for, and also betray one of the deepest articles of faith I held true for myself as a teacher of writing? Still, I began to wonder if student writing improved for reasons that had little or nothing to do with what I wrote on their papers *per se.* Further, I asked myself what kinds of responses to writing *do* effect changes? And what kinds of changes result? I knew I was spending vast amounts of time and energy correcting errors, making remarks in margins, and writing summary comments. I wondered if all my correcting, commenting, and advice-giving accomplished anything. I continued to have my doubts about the project, but I finally agreed, and began to explore new modes of responding. What follows is a record of this inquiry.

September, 1986. By random number, I selected five students in each of two sections. On the students' papers in the Regular class, I moved through my usual array of responses to the text. In the Positive Only section, my responses followed a different pattern. At the time, I did not analyze carefully the kinds of feedback I gave. Nor did I think through precisely what I meant by positive and not positive. But looking back at the actual papers, the comments I made in the Regular class seemed to fall into the following general categories:

First, I used a quick and effective shorthand mode of responding which seemed consistent with my goals. I put wavy lines under text that was strong, effective, or vivid, text that pleased me, or that worked. Then I began the written comments with what can be called positive responses: *Praise:* "Three pages. Good for you." "I notice you included a conversation here. You handled the quotations well." *Encouragement, Support, or Appreciation:* "I can see you spent a lot of time on your draft. Keep at it!" *Approval:* "I like that you risked writing about a dream. Inventive." "I like the way you contrast the happiness with the sorrow. We see you had mixed emotions." *Observations:* "I see you used lots of adjectives. They make the nouns more specific, precise, so the reader can see them more clearly." "I see here you show the reader with an example. This works well." *Human responses:* "I enjoyed reading the dialogue. Witty." *Neutral Descriptions of the text:* "I notice you have seven paragraphs on a single page."

In addition to those above, I also made the following kinds of responses. *Questions:* "Can you tell us about this in more detail?" "Can you add more information here?" "Did you leave something out here?" *Suggestions:* "Try to be more specific." *Advice:* "Watch out for verb tense shifts." "Read and fix." And finally, *Negative Comments:* "Using the third person isn't working for me here." "Confusing." "I don't understand what you mean."

I corrected spelling and pointed out problems of all kinds by underlining the plethora of tangled sentences and grammatical errors. Occasionally, I made remarks about them in the margins as well.

In the Positive Only class, I was to make only positive responses, but initially I wasn't quite sure what that meant. Positive as contrasted to negative? I assumed my comments, especially in this section, were designed to reinforce metastrengths, moves in the right direction without "evaluation" or "criticism." Thus, in the Positive Only class, I made the same kinds of positive and neutral responses to the texts as I did in the Regular class: *Praise. Encouragement. Support. Approval. Observations. Human responses. Descriptions of the text.*

But, in the Positive Only section, I did not make suggestions. I did not ask questions, give advice, or point out problems. And I did virtually no correcting. The mechanical and grammatical errors were legion, at least in the first drafts, but in the Positive Only class, despite my apprehensions I deliberately avoided noting, marking, or fixing any of them. Perhaps here it might be helpful to focus on one student writer from each section, including excerpts from their writing, to provide further examples of the kinds of comments I made in each group:

In the Regular class, Savath begins by telling us: "High! my name is Savath. I originally came from Cambodia, the tiny spot of land between Thailand in the west and Vietnam in the East. I was born in this cancerous, murderous and chronic-bloody country in 1965, the year that gave me bad fate. Willing to overcome my suffering, and stagnant life, I decided to leave my family in 1978, the time that Vietnam invaded Cambodia . . ."

Savath was thirteen years old when he left home, and eighteen when he finally arrived in the U. S., direct from a refugee camp in Thailand. In Savath's first paper, a barely understandable description of a room in the library, I put wavy lines under what I liked or thought worked, and made comments as, "I like that you give specific details here." Or "I like your use of analogy here." That was all.

At midterm, Savath wrote about his "turning point," the day he flew out of Bangkok. The story is told in two overlong paragraphs, riddled with every kind of error imaginable. I put in every missing word, corrected every problematic verb form, and fixed each spelling error, a tedious and time-consuming endeavor. I wrote, "I don't understand what you mean here." "All one paragraph? Break it up." "Then what happened? Is something left out of the story here?" "Can you explain this more clearly?" "Can you tell us more

about this?" I did not direct the students' attentions to these kinds of problems or make these kinds of responses in the Positive Only class.

When he revised his paper, the major changes he made had to do with making meaning clear, and were in response to my comments. For example, I had written, "All one paragraph on this page?" And, "Then what happened?" Here is a bit of his revision: ". . . my mind was shocked by the clamour of the gigantic explosion. Soldiers were in the town supressing the rebellions attempted by the people who wanted to express their feeling toward atrosities by the government." Then, Savath looks out of the airplane window as he leaves his homeland: ". . . my mind flipped off and flew back to my poor family that I left behind in Cambodia, the land of war. I was so depressed that I flew away from them to the unknown and far away world without saying any words of 'Goodbye.' I was told they had a funeral for me because they thought I was killed in the fighting. They don't know that I am still alive. I had been saved from the bloody flood in the darkness of hell in which life was like a piece of dirt. That was my turning point. I realize that I am out of hell and in heaven and I hope my life is going to change."

At the end of the semester, Savath's achievement peaked. He wrote the story of how he experienced discrimination when he applied for a job at an engineering firm on Long Island. He handed in his first draft of "Last Straw But First Taste," a two-line introduction, a two-line conclusion, and two long paragraphs in between. I gave Savath advice: "I want to know everything that happened, see it, hear it, and feel it and even smell and taste it as you did. Try to include some dialogue and tell us more about your friend John." On the second draft, I simply wrote, "We want to know more." On the third, I underlined the spelling and mechanical errors and wrote, "Almost there. Fix." for his final draft, Savath turned in a four-and-a-half page, typed, double-spaced paper, and most of the spelling and mechanical errors were gone.

In her introductory letter to me, Mildred in the Positive Only class wrote, "I am a Puerto Rican and I'm really proud to be one. I faced a lot of discrimination at the high school I attended here on Long Island. People would laugh as they heard me talk because they supposidly couldn't understand what I was saying."

Mildred's first paper described the serenity of a duckpond, which she used as a springboard to a reflection on a dying aunt—a two-paragraph paper, with a one-sentence conclusion. The writer contrasted the "beautiful" scene outside with the sad reality of her feelings. Her final paragraph was an apology: "I know I'm not

supposed to be writing about my feelings but this is what's inside of me and i have to let it come out someway."

The only spelling errors were *rhthm and enviroment*. I didn't correct the spelling, nor note the one fragment. My comments on this first paper of the semester: "The peacefulness made you introspective and reflect on this . . ." and in response to her apology I wrote, "I'm glad you did (write about your feelings). Touching."

By midsemester, Mildred had doubled her content to one-and-one-half pages of typed text, which began: "Memories are like boats that navigate on the river of my mind." Once again we witness a flashback, to the moment the writer had to leave Puerto Rico for the continental U. S., and then there is a flashback *within* the flashback. She thinks back to when she left Puerto Rico, and then looks back from that time to the years preceding her departure. The transitions are clear. I write: "I like the way you contrast the pain and sorrow with your excitement and happiness through the whole piece." "I like the way you handled the flashback. The reader understands your time sequence here." "I see you used an analogy, or comparison. Good idea. Analogy enriches the image for the reader." I commented only on the paper's strengths; I didn't correct any of the spelling or grammar errors.

The last paper of the semester was only four paragraphs, considerably shorter than the previous ones. It was developed from a journal entry on the painful discrimination she suffered at her Long Island high school, culminating with someone delivering a book to her with a note about the "foul-mouthed, oversexed, garishly dressed Puerto Ricans." The paper resembled an outline, but it was clear the writer was involved with her subject. My response: "Painful events!" "I like when you include lots of specific details, as you did here."

I reviewed Savath's and Mildred's papers at the end of the semester. Savath's improvement was continuous over time; each of his succeeding papers was better than the previous one. Mildred's improvement and change was most notable at the beginning and in the middle of the semester, but seemed to plateau and even regress a bit at the end.

Still, comparing papers written at the beginning and the end of the semester, both students' writing had improved significantly. These two patterns recurred in the papers of the other eight students in the project, in both sections, suggesting that at this level of development, improvement takes place constantly but sporadically as a result of increased writing experience over a period of time. Despite the differing modes of commenting, the more students

write, the better they write, but not necessarily in evenly spaced increments.

At about midterm, I asked students in both classes: "Do you think your writing has changed since the beginning of the semester? What has had the greatest influence on your writing this semester so far?" No one in the Regular class mentioned anything about the comments on their papers. However, the following responses were written by students on papers in the Positive Only section.

(1) "The most influence on my writing is the common on the paper. Everytime I got back the paper, I could read that over and saw what's wrong in that paper, what I needed to write more and knew what do the reader like or what they don't understand."

(2) "After I read the comments, I had more ideas which could rebuild my composition . . . the comments have helped me to figure out what I missed in my story. I like these comments because it helped me to feel more comfortable with my composition. I wish my teacher can give me more comments . . . I appreciate these comments . . ."

(3) "Through Fall Semester, EGC 100, all we recieved was positive feedback on our writing. From my own experience It helped me a lot. Recieving a positive feedback made me think that my writting was very, very good and it made me try to do better and better everytime. In fact, it made me have a competition towards myself. I wouldn't hand in anything that I didn't think was good enough."

This last response was written by Mildred.

Part Two—the Log

Throughout the experimental semester I kept a log. This was a periodic record of my perceptions and reactions, and speculations on how strange, even alien at first, my behavior felt in the Positive Only section, followed by my growing pleasure as the semester progressed. Some of the material in the log may echo statements made in other parts of the text, but it is a quite different thing to record experience as it takes place than to reflect and write about it at a later time.

The original log was over sixty pages, written without consideration to audience. I have made extensive cuts, indicated by ellipses, and have tried to improve the prose by leaving out words, sentences, and paragraphs, but otherwise (have) left the entries exactly as they were written. The writing may occasionally sound excited and enthusiastic, sometimes even a bit "preachy" but it

46

reflects a reasonable record of my emotional and intellectual involvement at the time.

Week 1. When Peter first told me about his idea for this experiment, my first response was NO! . . . FZ begins to wonder about the experiment . . . how to proceed . . . My goals? Whatever I thought would be "generative" and would help the student help herself to produce "good" writing . . . I wonder how we even describe what we, as writing teachers, are trying to do here?

Week 4. I now go over papers from the Regular class first—so when the impulse to "fixit" and "changeit" occurs, I can give in to it and indulge in a teacherly activity—albeit in the back of my mind already a little voice is saying, "Do you really think that will change x's writing?" One answer says YES! because he will see the way it looks correct, and in his mind, will register that way and imprint it on his MINDDISK for next usage time. The other side says NO! *Seeing* it is not enough—he has to *hear* it, *say* it, *feel* the words and the sounds and the rhythms in his mouth and also write it, so his hand gets acquainted with the new form . . . I still think students can improve their writing by *listening* to their texts, *hearing* their words. Will someone comment, help me with this? It is an ongoing question, which hasn't to date, been resolved to anyone's satisfaction.

Week 5. I am now reading some revisions (from both classes) . . . and am much encouraged to see that so many of the students have really improved and progressed and I tell myself that they will survive and maybe even shine in 101. In the Positive Only group, I merely told them to take the papers home and make them better . . . that's all. And they came back better. Longer, typed neatly, cleaned up of surface errors to some degree. They have added a great deal of new information to these papers . . . they have the right idea . . . they're on the right track.

—Then another set of papers will come in and all hopes are dashed, and I despair and doubt that they are learning anything at all.

—I am a bit disturbed, re: the Positive Only class. Without any formal copyediting, how will we clean up the papers? How will we do revisions? How will they . . . get rid of surface errors and mechanical problems so we can publish papers? egads!

Week 6. It's so much harder like this, in the Positive Only class. It requires a great deal of thought, focus, and concentration—to NOT direct, NOT point, NOT give instructions or suggestions . . . I've become more sensitized to praisable features—and . . . respond to more of them . . . that's easy, and fun. Still, it's more difficult and problematic with the Positive Only section . . . I have to . . . limit

myself to . . . positive feedback . . . it's an act of self-discipline . . . it's difficult . . . it results from feeling you're giving the students gifts . . . nothing but good . . .

Week 9. On these clean drafts . . . I shifted from pen to pencil to write my margin notes—to mark and note softly and quietly, lightly, so as not to disturb the text, the effort, the integrity of these well-thought out, well-planned, and carefully executed pieces . . . This is the last draft before publication, so now I will *mark,* not correct, places where corrections need to be made. Up to now, I have not done so—just told *them* to fix up the mechanics . . . I see now I am doing a closer reading . . . and observing things I neither noticed nor noted before . . .

—On the matter of spelling, grammar, mechanics. I am getting the sense that my correcting students' papers is making me feel effective, that I'm doing something to help . . . Whether or not it's helping the students, I don't really know.

—All things turn out to be equal. Fascinating. In the Positive Only class, I marked the mechanics not at all, all semester. However, the moment before publishing our anthology, I marked (did *not* correct) the errors left by that time, which weren't many . . . It appeared that the errors on the papers of the "stronger" writers, were mostly cleaned up, and those on the papers of the "weaker" writers, remained, even after they were marked . . . In the Regular class, where I marked and corrected errors all along, but not all of them, most of the ones I noted were cleaned up, and most of the ones I did *not* underline or correct were left unchanged!

. . . My conclusion about mechanics. It seems to me not to make any difference whether we mark them or we do not mark them. If anything, I tend to believe that we do better not marking the errors or fixing them on the drafts, at least until the final revisions. In short, both ways seem to work and not work fairly equally. There was change in both sections, but my hunch is that in the Positive Only section, where the students had to figure out how to correct by themselves, they probably learned more than the students in the Regular class, who simply copied my corrections . . .

Week 10. In the Positive Only class, the . . . responsibility for correctness was theirs, not ours, and they met it.

—If we fix too much, will we homogenize the piece? Or does it depend on what we mean by fix. Pat Belanoff's comments today at the staff meeting related to that point. Do we . . . really know what we mean when we talk about errors? Exactly what are we referring to . . . what is it exactly that we want our students to fix or change . . . we need to be careful.

Week 11. Students learn, and not necessarily because we teach

them . . . we need them to teach, but they do not need us to learn . . . a humbling thought that came out of Peter's *Writing Without Teachers.*

—These kids (in both classes) were talking like WRITERS today and I told them so. They came up with their own questions about the text: "Will it work better if I put this paragraph here instead of there?" "What do you think about this ending?" "Do you think I need more description here?" "Will more reasons strengthen my argument?" It was . . . exciting! They had come a long way from the first week of class when they were concerned mainly with the surface "correctness" of their work . . . and comments like "tell me what's wrong with this . . ."

Week 13. I'm going to encourage them to do lots more talking . . . In fact, they prefer . . . to make their own decisions on what changes to make . . . of course, they'd like us to find and fix (errors) for them, but . . . once we make up our minds, that the authority and . . . the ultimate responsibility for their own writing rests with them . . . we free ourselves of a huge, heavy burden . . . the bonus is that the students take real pride in becoming and being authorities over their own work. It's a situation where student and instructor both win.

(The log for Fall Semester, 1986, ends here.)

During the following semester of Spring, 1987, I again taught two sections of EGC 100 and limited comments on papers to Positive Only in both sections. The following entries were written in the log during the first two weeks of that semester. I include them here as they touch on another important outcome of the previous semester's work.

Week 1. After last semester's marathon . . . the idea . . . of (only positive responding) is recharging my batteries in a big way . . .

—Just control yourself, f.z. Squiggle line under what you like and make one positive comment at the end of the text. Even on the weakest of papers? But aren't I giving a false impression that the paper is good, and I'm being patronizing? No. The comment can be about the subject, a response to meaning, or an *I notice* comment.

—I see that the responses have fallen into a pattern, and I'm trying to be consistent. 1) wavy lines under what I like, what works, what sounds good. 2) comment at the end in response to what the text *says,* or meaning, and 3) one short comment at the end about structure. "Oh, I see you already know how to paragraph a text." "Your conclusion really does reflect back on the text, etc." Like that.

—Responding, going through texts like this, in this manner is more . . . interesting, and quicker because I know clearly what I am going to do, and how. And I don't have to agonize over the plethora

of awful things going on—that tend to discourage, dismay, dishearten, and disappoint.

—Yet, at a meeting of our composition discussion group, Sheryl Fontaine raised a relevant question: "What you're saying then, is that it all came down to about the same amount of work, and the results were about the same, so why should we do one and not the other? Didn't you just bring out that it really doesn't matter what we do?"

Answer: . . . At least part of the point doesn't have to do with what the "method" does for the student, but what it does for the teacher. The "Positive Only" has a regenerative effect . . . it relieves (us) of those dreary and draining feelings we get when we go on and on marking and correcting and underlining and "red-pencilling" in our own individual ways . . . if we're happier with our teaching, we'll be better teachers, and our students will benefit . . .

But, this is easy to hold to, because . . . the positive reinforcement and praise I give my students about what is good about their writing has boomeranged . . . the positive responding is rewarding me!

Week 2. —Some papers—very difficult, almost impossible to find a positive feature. Seem hopeless. Work harder. All kinds of patronizing comments come to mind. Work harder to find an honest comment about the text or structure. Try . . .

Now I feel I know what to do and how to do it . . . The process is terrific, energizing . . . Now . . . I know ahead of time . . . there is no need to obsess about mechanics and respond to everything . . .

—Some papers really tax creativity and responding skills. They take your breath away when you read them, and would ordinarily be so depressing to read and think about . . . . And to work on . . . collectively those sets of papers grind us down. Set by set. Semester by semester. Year by year.

—I'm happier than ever now . . . I think my teaching is better. And I think the students are learning just as much, if not more.

—It's late . . . I'd better close . . . writing these reflections about teaching has been a high . . . END OF LOG

Reflections

It is over two years now since the original project with positive responding was completed, time enough to let all of the "carried away" writing in the log settle and to reflect on the experience. I find I still do not have definitive answers and cannot completely explain exactly what happened as a result of this inquiry. But I can

make a few observations about student writing and writing teachers and raise some questions that might suggest future lines of research:

First, there were no significant differences in performance between the two classes despite the different modes of responding. The writing of the students involved in the project in both sections improved. The papers at the end of the semester were better than they were at the beginning. They were longer. They contained much more information and specific detail. They were livelier, with more figurative and descriptive language, and they included dialogues. The papers were more focused, more interesting.

What puzzles me is not that the Positive Only class, with all the positive responding, didn't do so much better than the other, but that the Regular class, for all the suggestions and advice they received, didn't do better. Yet the writing in both groups improved.

After cataloguing my comments, I was quite surprised to discover more possibilities than I was previously aware of for making positive and supportive comments on student papers. Once I began to realize that the students' writing would improve from either mode, I began to recognize more and more choices for comments on their papers, and more ways to talk to students about their writing and what it was doing. I had less need to suggest, give advice, or make corrections.

Still, I am left with some perplexing questions. The project left me wondering whether writing comments on student papers is useful at all. Nancy Sommers' findings in her article "Responding to Student Writing," confirm what I think many of my colleagues and I experience. She writes, "More than any other enterprise in the teaching of writing, responding to and commenting on student papers consumes the largest proportion of our time. Most teachers estimate that it takes them at least 20 to 40 minutes to comment on an individual student paper. . . ." I wonder if we could be just as helpful by doing less, or by using our time and energies in more productive ways. I now feel ready to see what would happen by eliminating *all* written comments on students' papers.

I wonder, too, if all the "helping" in the Regular class, the giving advice and suggestions and the fixing of errors, is just another way of establishing our own authority over our students' papers and thereby maintaining control of their texts.

Errors somehow speak louder in a text than positive features. Because they don't belong, they stand out—demand we take notice. And for the students, errors drown out considerations of anything else about the paper. Thus it's a lot easier to deal with them than to look for something to praise. But marking and/or correcting the

51

grammar errors in the Regular class was of questionable value. The papers from both classes were mostly error-free before publication.

This outcome reflects Connors and Lunsford's research[4] which shows that the more writers focus on making meaning more clear, the fewer errors s/he makes. In both sections, students made multiple revisions of each paper in the effort to clarify their meaning and purpose and to find their own voices. By the final drafts before publication, most of the tangled syntax, spelling, and mechanical errors were gone.

Another outcome of this project was its effect on the writing teacher. It was more difficult responding in the Positive Only class. Making only positive and supportive comments and refraining from giving advice and suggestions required a great deal of resourcefulness and restraint. My impulse was to point out problems, make suggestions for change, and to correct errors. In the Regular class, where I was free to indulge those teacherly activities, I felt more related and more connected to the texts; I felt more effective.

About midterm, I noticed that the way I related to the papers, and ultimately to the students, was changing. The project began with an idea, and at first I wrote positive comments in response to it. But soon I found myself commenting positively in a much deeper way. New habits took over. It became habitual, a part of me, and deeply satisfying to look for and find even the smallest bits that worked even in the weakest papers, and praise them. The more I did it in the Positive Only class, the more I found myself doing it in the Regular class. I felt energized and rejuvenated by the process. I was happier. Perhaps one of the important outcomes of this research project was the discovery of an antidote to teacher burnout.

I couldn't help but think, too, that if I were a more enthusiastic teacher, my students would do better, and if I were more supportive and more clearly focused on their strengths, they would develop greater control and authority over their own writing, becoming more effective writers and more responsible for their own learning.

Notes

[1] Earlier versions of this paper were presented at: Pennsylvania State University Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, July, 1987; Basic Writing Conference, St. Louis, September, 1987; and Conference on College Composition and Communication, St. Louis, March, 1988.

[2] All students admitted to Stony Brook are required to take the English placement test. Students who score 3 are placed in EGC 101, Writers

Workshop, the regular freshman composition course. Students who score 2 are placed in EGC 100, offered by the English Department, and those who score 1, register for ESL, in the Department of Linguistics.

EGC 100 is graded S/U—no letter grades, and students receive three credits towards graduation upon its successful completion. It is liberating to not have to assign grades in this course. It allows me to establish and maintain a clear and unambivalent relationship to the students in a community of trust and support. I don't have to perform the complex and intensely uncomfortable shift between the roles of coach/ally and judge/evaluator. Thus, I am free to try to create a culture of learning in a cooperative setting. In a culture of support, each student can be given the gift of ongoing and continuous possibility for improvement and change. Positive responding contributes to achieving this goal. In addition to the regular assignments, students are required to write two pages daily in their journals; the journal writing is private: I count pages for credit, but do not read or comment on it.

[3] For a discussion of how teacher practitioners create knowledge about writing, see North, *The Making of Knowledge in Composition,* and Goswami and Stillman, *Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change.*

[4] Robert J. Connors and Andrea A. Lunsford, "Frequency of Formal Errors in Current Writing, or Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research." *College Composition and Communication* 39.4 (Dec. 1988): 395–409.

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Patrick J. Slattery

APPLYING INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY TO COMPOSITION

ABSTRACT: After summarizing a scheme of intellectual develop-
ment, and the debate that has taken place over applying such a
model to composition, this article presents the findings and
pedagogical implications of a study that focuses on intellectual
orientation and multiple-source writing. The findings of the study
suggest that first-year college students who write from sources can
approach divergent points of view from a variety of intellectual
orientations and that students' assumptions about paper topics and
academic disciplines influence the approaches taken in particular
essays. These results imply that to foster critical thinking, teachers
can respond individually to students' papers in terms of their
specific intellectual approaches.

Over the last decade, a number of researchers have applied
models of intellectual development to composition studies, arguing
that these schemes illuminate the difficulties of beginning writers
and suggest pedagogical strategies for helping them improve.
However, some teachers have criticized developmentalists not only
for incorrectly attributing differences in student writing to varia-
tions in intellectual orientation, but for wrongly claiming that basic
writers cannot think abstractly. In this essay, I would like to present
one model of intellectual development and to summarize the debate
that has taken place in the *Journal of Basic Writing* over applying

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such a scheme to composition. After briefly summarizing this debate, I would like to continue the discussion by explaining the findings and pedagogical implications of a study that suggests that beginning college writers can think in a variety of different ways.

According to developmentalists such as William Perry, and Karen Kitchener and Patricia King, as students progress through college—attending classes, writing papers, and participating in dormroom bull sessions—their implicit metaphysical and epistemological assumptions become increasingly complex to accommodate the diversity of values and opinions found in the college environment. Developmentalists further suggest that as students' assumptions about knowledge and reality grow more sophisticated, so do their ways of thinking about multiple perspectives and reaching and justifying personal judgments. Both Perry's and Kitchener and King's models describe an evolution from an early state of dualistic thinking, through a middle period of multiplistic thought, to a form of critical relativism.

Perry maintains that most college students who construe reality from a dualistic orientation have already begun to realize that complex topics generate a diversity of opinion, but that they accommodate this diversity in terms of black and white. While these students might not believe that they themselves have access to knowledge about reality, they believe that legitimate authorities do. Thus, they confront diversity from dualistic orientations, unreflectively adopting the point of view of the "right" authorities, and dogmatically denouncing the position of the "wrong" ones. Other students, however, those who have confronted the fact that even good authorities do not know everything yet, and in at least some areas may never acquire total knowledge, have different metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. These students, who construe experience from a multiplistic orientation, might implicitly assume that objective reality exists, but they do not believe that it can be known without uncertainty. And since multiplistic students assume that absolute knowledge is not available to even the experts, they believe that one point of view is as valid as another. Finally, according to Kitchener and King, there are other students who, having been confronted by teachers and peers who have asked them to support their opinions with evidence and reasoning, come to approach the experiences of college with reflective thinking constructs. These students accept the inherent ambiguity of knowledge and yet, through evaluating and analyzing alternative opinions, make judgments concerning which points of view probably offer better or worse approximations to reality. They realize that even though authorities cannot know reality without

uncertainty, some perspectives are more rational or based on stronger evidence. Since reflective students understand the knowing process to be fallible, however, their decisions are necessarily tentative and contingent upon reevaluation.

The Debate

In "The Development of Discursive Maturity in College Writers," Janice Hays, a spokesperson for developmentalists in composition studies, refers to student essays as evidence that basic writers fit the lower level of this developmental scheme. For her research, Hays asked students enrolled in freshman writing seminars at Skidmore College to write essays on either abortion or marijuana, instructing them to imagine themselves speaking on a panel composed of representatives from appropriate community groups. Analyzing excerpts from these essays, Hays contends that the basic writer argues dogmatically without analyzing divergent points of view—that he or she "still perceives a multiplicity of perspectives as alien intruders into a dualistic universe" (133). In "The Conventions of Expository Writing," however, Myra Kogen challenges Hays' description of basic writers as cognitively immature, arguing that these students have problems with argumentative writing because they are unfamiliar with the conventions that govern academic discourse (36). Responding to Kogen's critique in "Models of Intellectual Development and Writing," Hays asserts that despite her efforts to teach beginning writers the conventions of argumentative writing, they continue to have difficulty with academic discourse because it is the "additional time in the college setting plus the nature of that setting itself that makes it possible for freshmen to progress cognitively until, by the time they are seniors, most of them perform like 'seniors'" (16).

In "Socio-Cognitive Development and Argumentative Writing: Issues and Implications from One Research Project," Hays presents the findings of a second, more sophisticated study. For this research she asked high school and college students to argue their positions on drunk-driving laws to both friendly and unfriendly audiences, conducting a statistical analysis of the relationships between the students' demographic characteristics, ratings on Perry's scheme, holistic paper scores, and audience adaptions. Hays concludes that "audience activity predicted strongly for overall writing performance with both friendly and hostile readers" and that the "level of Perry Scheme performance predicted most significantly both for overall writing performance and for certain kinds of audience adaption" (50). In "Reconsidering Cognition and the Basic Writer,"

however, Joseph and Nancy Martinez argue that "researchers' methodology is seriously flawed **when** essays alone are used to assess students' capacity for thought" (80). According to Martinez and Martinez, "The common method of analyzing essays as though they provided a direct measure of cognitive processes ignores the myriad affective and situational factors which can influence learning outcomes" (79).

Intellectual Orientation and Multiple-Source Writing

For the study discussed in the remainder of this essay, I collected five papers from, and conducted an interview with, each student who participated. This design—both the use of interviews and the collection of several papers from every student—allowed me to consider some affective and situational factors and to observe a complex relationship between intellectual orientation and student writing. The study focused on twelve students, nine women and three men between the ages of seventeen and nineteen, who were enrolled in the same section of the 1987 Fall semester freshman composition course at Indiana University. The course required students to use specified sources to write two argumentative essays on assigned topics—-the "Cinderella" fairy tale and Stanley Milgram's famous experiment on obedience to authority—and to find their own sources to write three argumentative papers on topics of their choice. I chose to analyze the papers assigned in this particular course because I reasoned that argumentative, multiple-source writing challenges students to read about several views on a complex topic and to stake out and justify their own positions. In addition to gathering these five essays from each participant, I interviewed the students after they completed the course.

The interviews consisted of three tasks: For the first one, students responded to a question inviting them to comment on what they found noteworthy in their own experiences with writing from sources—"Does anything stand out in your mind about the papers you have written over the past semester?" Unlike this opening question, which asked students only to respond in terms of what they found salient, the next two tasks were more structured. For the second one, participants read three student papers that reflected the intellectual orientations described by developmentalists—a dualistic essay on using animals in laboratory experiments, a multiplistic paper on watching soap operas, and a reflective composition on decreasing terrorism at U. S. embassies. The essay on animal experimentation, for example, summarized the contradictory viewpoints of antivivisectionists and scientists and, without evaluating

these perspectives, concluded that the people in favor of such experimentation were "right" and that those against it were "wrong." After reading the three papers, students ranked them according to "how well each one used sources" and then explained their ranking. The final task required participants to read a set of seven statements, which were typed on cards, about the relative/ absolute nature of knowledge in different types of sources and disciplines, and then to arrange the cards into meaningful groups and explain them. For example, one statement read, "When two articles contradict each other, they can't both be right." To elicit illustrations and exact explanations without over-directing students' responses to these three tasks, I formulated a number of comments to probe for details without suggesting specific answers, responses such as "That's interesting, but I'm not quite sure what you mean" and "I think I see what you mean, but could you give me an example?"

Before discussing three essays of one student in detail, let me quote from several students' interviews. During their interviews, a number of students spoke of varying their ways of confronting divergent points of view according to differences in academic disciplines. For example, while responding to the third interview task, one student suggested that he approaches contradictory views differently in the fields of psychology and biology:

> When you're writing a paper in areas like psychology, there is no true answer. You just have to do what you think is best. Biology is pretty exact. You've got reasons for what things happen. We can test and get exact answers, whereas in psychology it varies with the individual. There are so many different theories in psychology, you can never find *the* answer.

This student's assumption that in biology it is possible to find "*the* answer" seems to reflect the dogmatism of the dualistic intellectual orientation, but his assumption that the validity of psychological theories varies from one person to another seems to suggest the subjectivity of the multiplistic orientation. In response to the same task, another student commented that she approaches writing from sources differently in the fields of literature and history. She explained, "In literature, [two different interpretations] can both be right, but I [might] like one interpretation better." In the discipline of history, however, "There are more set things. It happened like this, like in chronological order." Judging from this student's statement, she approaches topics in literature with assumptions typical of the multiplistic orientation, but addresses issues in

history with assumptions associated with the dualistic orientation. As she summed up, "Literature is point of view, but history is all set stuff."

In addition to perceived differences in academic disciplines, affective factors seem to play a role in determining how the students write about multiple perspectives. During their interviews some students suggested that their perception of a topic's importance influences how they approach the divergent viewpoints in their sources. While ranking the three papers used in the second interview task, for example, one student indicated that the "seriousness" of a topic influences the appropriateness of an approach. Responding to the essays, she commented, "For that kind of subject [soap operas], I mean, it is your personal opinion, and there is advantages and disadvantages." According to the student, the conclusion of the soap opera paper—"It all depends on your own view of soap operas"—is "true because the viewing of soap operas is not as, I mean not as serious as terrorism or, I don't know, killing animals or whatever in laboratories, so [it's] your decision to watch it or not." Explaining the distinction further, she asserted, "It won't affect other people, whereas the other ones will affect things." This student's assumption about what she believes are insignificant topics seems to reflect the multiplistic orientation, but her assumption about what she thinks are important issues—those that affect other people's lives—seems to reflect an orientation from which she would make a judgment. These interview comments suggest that students can write about divergent points of view from more than one type of intellectual orientation and that students vary their approaches depending in part on affective responses to different topics and on perceived differences in academic fields.

One woman, Susanne, wrote essays that in many ways typified those of the students who participated in the study. She seemed to write some papers from a dualistic, some from a multiplistic, and some from a reflective intellectual orientation. Her essay on the Milgram experiment reflects a dualistic approach. Susanne understood that the experiment is controversial, for she writes, "Studies concerning the Milgram experiment have both praised and criticized the ethics and validity," explaining that "Richard Hernstein emphasizes the validity of the experiment and praises its brilliance and genius while Diana Baumrind specifically criticizes its ethics and validity." Although she does not justify her judgments, Susanne insists that "Milgram performed everything possible to sustain the subjects' health and dignity and there is nothing unethical in his actions" and that "there is no question concerning the validity of the experiment." Ironically, however, she

also asserts that although "it is clearly evident that the experiment is valid and ethical," it is also "hopelessly worthless." Again illustrating the all-or-nothing type of thinking typical of the dualistic intellectual framework, she comments, "So we all know that people on the average follow authority. What good will that do? . . . Any information understanding human characteristics will not alter society's actions or benefit society in any form." Because she finds the experiment completely ethical and valid, Susanne's judgment that it is "worthless" seems even more dogmatic.

In response to the "Cinderella" assignment, which required students to write about two different interpretations of the fairy tale, however, Susanne approaches divergent points of view from a multiplistic orientation. In her introduction she writes:

> Bruno Bettelheim, a distinguished psychologist and educator, and Modonna Kolbenschlag, a feminist author, have studied this fairy tale and developed their different analogies of "Cinderella." Bettelheim directs his ideas to interpret the "Cinderella" motifs in a Freudian view, using sibling rivalry as one of his supporting arguments, whereas Kolbenschlag bases her angle on the Prince motif to support her feminist interpretation of "Cinderella."

The body of Susanne's paper evenly presents Bettelheim's and Kolbenschlag's arguments; in the second paragraph, she explains Bettelheim's view:

> When Cinderella's father re-marries, his new wife brings her daughters (how many will vary from version to version) to live with Cinderella and her father. To win more of his wife's love, the father gradually degrades his own daughter for the love of his new step-daughters. Throughout the fairy tale, Cinderella is treated like a servant . . . while her sisters enjoy life.

And in the next paragraph, she summarizes Kolbenschlag's interpretation of the tale:

> She feels that this fairy tale has stereotyped the female as an innocent, pure, docile and fragile person who patiently waits and endures hardships until something comes along to sweep her away and care for her, as portrayed through the Prince motif.

This balanced, nonjudgmental presentation of the critics' interpretations seems to reflect a multiplistic orientation. Although Susanne realizes that the perspectives represent "two totally different

approaches," she does not argue that one view is more comprehensive or fully supported than the other.

It is difficult to understand why Susanne approaches contradictory views so differently in these two essays. Some developmentalists might suggest that she was in a transitional state in which she was moving from the dualistic to the multiplistic stage, but since I followed Susanne for only a short period of time, I cannot speculate on the sequential nature of her two approaches. It is very likely, however, that she tends to view topics in science and in literature from different intellectual orientations. Although Susanne does not hesitate to claim that the Milgram experiment was ethically and scientifically "right," while responding to the third interview task, she commented, "I think English, not just English but like reading literature or poetry, is more like opinion. You know, like we can both interpret it in different ways." The disciplinary concerns that Susanne and other students described during their interviews seem to play a role in determining how she approaches the multiple points of view expressed in her sources on the Milgram experiment and on the "Cinderella" fairy tale.

But in an open-topic paper, "Gun Crimes in the U. S.: A Curable Disease?" Susanne approaches her sources more reflectively. After explaining how "gun-related deaths and injuries in the United States are at epidemic proportions," she summarizes two contradictory proposals for addressing the problem. First, she explains that because "behavioral scientists have connected increased violence in society with the excessively violent television programming . . . proposals have been made to ban television violence, an alleged catalyst to excessive handgun crimes." According to Susanne, however, banning violent programming would not only fail to decrease gun crimes effectively, but would raise other controversies involving freedom of expression. Censoring programs "falls short in many ways because first of all, there are already crazy people running around with violent ideas implanted in their minds, and second, this idea raises controversy with the media and our constitutional rights of freedom of the press." Because of these major drawbacks, Susanne asserts that "this possible solution wouldn't go over well" and "would probably have little impact."

Following this evaluation, she explains a second proposal—"to strike all handgun control laws from legislature to give all citizens the natural right to protect themselves from possible gun criminals." One civil rights leader, she says, believes that "the gun control laws have done very little to disarm the criminal and everything possible to disarm the citizen," and other experts contend that "most

criminals receive their guns illegally anyhow, so why have a law restricting the innocent?" Although Susanne acknowledges that "these points are solid reasons why all laws restricting the use of handguns should be abolished to prevent excessive gun-related crimes," she asks, "What about the countless number of children and adolescents who manage to get a hold of these handguns accidentally or unintentionally?" "It is in those circumstances," she answers, "that accidents happen." Considering the idea that owning a handgun is a citizen's constitutional right, she asserts that "as a democracy, our individual rights only exist until they infringe upon another person, it is then, when someone must draw the line." "Having no gun control laws," she writes, "endangers other's rights as people and as U. S. citizens." Although she understands why people would logically want, and should philosophically have, unlimited access to handguns, Susanne reasons that this freedom would limit other people's freedoms and therefore should not be granted.

As she moves toward closure, Susanne suggests, "After researching other possibilities, the best solution to *help* prevent the injuries, crimes, and deaths resulting from handguns, is to establish the Handgun Crime Control Bill":

> This bill still enables citizens to own guns if they are qualified and prove, by government standards, to be responsible and honest citizens, so if a person really wants to secure their defense with a gun, they can. At the same time it gives less access to handguns going through the black market and less access for criminals to buy these guns.

Although Susanne reaches a judgment in this paper, her decision that "as a whole, the bill would benefit society and should be seriously considered" does not resemble the dogmatic decisions she made in writing about the Milgram experiment. Concluding the handgun legislation essay, she reiterates that the bill, even with its limitations, is the best solution: "Injuries and death resulting from guns can never be abolished, but there is a definite need for a law to help prevent it in the United States." Susanne reflectively considers divergent perspectives, comparing their advantages and disadvantages, and, even after taking a strong stand, remains somewhat tentative in her claims.

I do not know exactly why Susanne takes a reflective approach in her paper on handgun legislation. The answer, however, might lie in her personal response to this topic. As a child, she witnessed a man accidentally shoot himself, and while answering the open interview question, she told me about the incident. "I had it happen

to me, not me but a friend of the family," she commented. Describing the accident in more detail, Susanne recalled, "I had been five years old, and there was a gun on the counter because he was a hunter, and he shot his hand." "You know," she explained, "he was playing with it. He was talking on the phone and snapping the trigger like. He blew a hole right through his hand." Susanne seemed to have more at stake—more personal investment—in the gun legislation paper, and perhaps this investment led her to consider the topic more analytically. It is interesting to speculate that she approaches handgun legislation from a reflective intellectual orientation in part because she thought her decision, which could affect the fate of other people, was more important than decisions about her other topics. Susanne concludes her Milgram paper by stating that the experiment is "hopelessly worthless" because it "will not alter society's actions or benefit society in any form," but she concludes her gun legislation essay by stating that "the bill would benefit society and should be seriously considered." The perceived importance of a topic—that is, its potential to affect the lives of other people—referred to by some students during their interviews seems to play a role in determining how Susanne writes about the multiple points of view expressed in her sources on handgun legislation.

Pedagogical Implications

The interviews and papers from this study indicate that freshmen writers can confront divergent points of view multiplistically and reflectively as well as dualistically, and that affective factors and assumptions about different disciplines influence the intellectual approaches students take in particular essays. Hays' research, however, indicates that the argumentative papers of basic writers reflect the dualistic intellectual orientation and that the essays of more advanced writers reflect higher levels of cognition, suggesting that college students progress more or less systematically through the stages described by developmentalists.

Based upon the findings of her research, Hays argues, "If we know that multiplicity follows dualism, we will not assign dualistic students relativistic tasks, a practice that would require them to respond two or three positions beyond where they presently are." She adds, however, that "students can be stimulated by assignments designed to challenge them with tasks just one position above their current level" ("Socio-Cognitive Development and Argumentative Writing: Issues and Implications from One Research Project" 52). But if a single student can think in a variety of different ways, we

will not design assignments for basic writers based upon the goal of moving them from dualistic thought to the next highest level of cognition. Rather, we will adjust our goals according to how a student approaches different assignments, responding individually to every paper written by each student. That is, if a basic writer takes a dualistic approach in one paper, as Susanne did in her essay on the Milgram experiment, a teacher could encourage the student to write more multiplistically. Or if a student writes an essay from a multiplistic orientation, as Susanne did with her paper on the "Cinderella" fairy tale, a teacher could help him or her to think more reflectively. And finally, if the basic writer already thinks about a topic reflectively, as Susanne did about handgun legislation, a teacher could foster the same type of thought in other content areas. This advice is appropriate for composition teachers, I think, because we already tend to individualize our responses to students' papers when we write comments on them or hold student-teacher conferences.

Applications of intellectual development theory to composition are obviously not problem-free. They can lead us to reduce the complexity of how students think to a series of sequential stages, encouraging teachers of basic writing in particular to pigeonhole their students into the lower levels of cognition. But while we need to keep in mind the potential problems with these applications, I believe that models of intellectual development can be very useful to composition teachers—that such schemes can, for example, help us to better understand not only basic writers' difficulties but also their successes.

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THE REVIVAL OF RHETORIC: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

ABSTRACT: The author asserts that renewed interest in rhetoric, evident throughout the professional discourse of English studies, is having a salutary effect on the theory and practice of the teaching of composition and basic writing.

The recent turn to theory in the English departments, especially poststructuralism, has brought "literature" and "composition" blocs closer together precisely in their joint arena of rhetorical studies. The result has been a strengthening of the subdiscipline of "rhetoric and composition" relative to the former hegemony of literary studies.

Looking at the convergence of classical and contemporary rhetoric, we see at least three important points of intersection where teachers of basic writing should want to look: First, rhetoric is not science, but *humanist* discourse aiming to promote democratic processes in public discourse. We find a second intersection in the return to prominence of the art of *persuasion*, as distinct from neutral communication. Yet a third area where old and new rhetorics intersect is the holding up of *invention* as a crucial tactic for the writer. After a survey of the historical texts, the article critically analyzes and recommends some practical guides for basic writing teachers.

Is the interest in rhetoric back because its time has come? As Dominick LaCapra puts it, "The study of rhetoric is once again on the agenda of humanistic studies. Scholars in various disciplines have become sensitive to the losses involved in its eclipse over the last three centuries, and a flurry of interest has marked the recent

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past (15)." This renewed interest in rhetoric is evident throughout the professional discourse of English studies—especially in the "conversation" of the composition community. I'm convinced that this return to rhetoric is, on the whole, having a salutary effect on the theory and practice of the teaching of writing.

In talking about rhetoric, many argue that only persuasive discourses belong to its domain, claiming Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as authority. Others, again turning to classical texts, particularly Cicero and Quintilian, claim all "normal" discourse is basically rhetorical. This view is shared by contemporary theorists such as James Berlin, Terry Eagleton, Vic Vitanza, and Ross Winterowd. They would argue that "informative" writing, for example, cannot be neutral but must persuade the readers that the facts are correct; scientists are most eager to persuade their peers (and the public) that their view of material reality is accurate; and poets are compelled to coax their audiences into their imaginary worlds.

The variety of meanings attached to rhetoric need not be confusing, however; this kind of semantic breadth is common. What is clear is that after being thought to reside chiefly in speech departments, rhetoric is now appearing more and more within the realm of English composition, an academic subdiscipline that now is speeding along new currents, perhaps toward some adventurous rapids. We can see this change in the new terminology: "composition" is now gradually being replaced by "rhetoric," or the two are linked together as in "rhetoric and composition." One root cause for this shift can be found in a current development within English departments:

Until recently, there has been a gulf between "literature" and "writing" in most English departments, the literature faculty enjoying greater prestige and salary than the "compositionists." But poststructuralism has, during the last decade, brought the two blocs closer together. Chiefly, the impact of deconstruction and neopragmatism comes from the insistence that language is not a mere technology, but the very ocean in which humanity swims. This is an epistemological position which asserts that our use of language is what constructs society, that reality is not described in language— rather that there is no reality except as soaked in discourse. When this philosophical notion is applied to rhetoric, we get the term "epistemic rhetoric," one which is apparently emerging from among various versions of rhetoric as the prevailing one. As James Berlin has written, "Epistemic rhetoric holds that language is the key to understanding the dialectical process involved in the rhetorical act. Knowledge does not exist apart from language" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 166):

Truth then is not located in some eternal and immutable realm of things of ideas or even relationships. It is a product of discursive formations, of individuals or groups or classes engaging in dialogue. This of course places rhetoric at the center of knowledge since it is in understanding the uses of language that we understand what an individual, group, or class holds to exist, to be good, and to be possible. ("Rhetoric Programs after World War II" 12)

If Berlin is correct, producing discourse—as in a writing class—obviously is not a "skill," like carpentry, but the motor for engaging in social life. Such a rhetorical approach dismisses the old attitude of looking at English composition as a toolshed where people hone a practical skill, as in detecting sentence fragments, and instead places it among the highest forms of human endeavor: learning how to define reality and how to have one's own effect on it at the same time.

In a parallel development, distinguished professors of literature such as Jonathan Culler, Paul de Man, Terry Eagleton, Gerald Graff, Frank Lentricchia, and Robert Scholes have taken a renewed interest in the evolution of composition studies. New winds from the spheres of literacy criticism have filled the sails of composition/rhetoric. Practitioners of deconstruction, for example, find enigmas in "plain" language and nonsense or contradictions in intricate reasoning; in short, they want to read texts against the grain, to reverse hierarchies—just as Mina Shaughnessy and other pioneers in the basic writing movement have done. Now, if with-the-grain readings of basic writers' essays seek errors, deconstructive readings might instead locate wisdom in student work, thus turning "correcting papers" into worthwhile reading. Thus rhetoricians among composition teachers now find allies in the land of literature. Discussions of rhetoric and deconstruction by Crowley, Derrida, Eagleton, and Neel are noted in the annotated bibliography which follows this essay.

Old and New Rhetorics Meet

Looking at the convergence of classical rhetoric and contemporary composition—this dancing embrace—we can see at least three important points of intersection where teachers of basic writing should want to look. First, rhetoric is not science, but *humanist* discourse, and, historically, was the primary subject of study in classical education. Its province has always been the contingent, dealing with judgments in human affairs rather than scientific truth.

For example, we can make assertions with certainty about matter in chemistry and physics that we cannot make about candidates in a political election (who would make a better president, for instance). Yet, for most of us, the second situation is far more crucial in daily affairs. In this sense, rhetoric is potentially more important. Aristotle's notion that rhetoric is an art that purports to define not scientific reality but social probability is a brilliant stroke: what rhetoric is about is not the provable but the *probable*. As James Raymond remarked:

> Rhetoric, applied to the humanities or any other field is even less certain than science, but also more useful, because it deals with questions that science methodologically excludes: questions about values, ethics, esthetics, meaning, politics, justice, causality involving human motives, and causality involving an indeterminate number of variables. In short, physics can tell us how to build a nuclear reactor, but it cannot tell us whether we ought to build one, or whether, on balance, the costs will outweigh the benefits. (781)

We can see how misdirected have been our common instructions to students, to above all, write rationally and logically and why the texts thus produced sound so inhuman.

We find a second intersection of classical and modern rhetoric in the return to prominence—at least in theory, if not yet in many classrooms—of *persuasion,* as distinct from neutral communication. During the past few decades the word communication has come to suggest a mechanical moving of bits of information from A to B, like the United Parcel Service, or even like electrons along wires or water through pipes, as though without human interference. Rhetoric, on the other hand, is about the aims and effects of language used by all human beings trying to have their way, raising their voices, perhaps, but employing no other means. The rhetorical writer is an initiator, not a channel; active, not passive. Rhetoric is about power and makes writing social and political.

Finally, the holding up of *invention* as a crucial tactic for the writer is yet a third area where old and new rhetorics intersect. Invention was the first of Aristotle's canons, others being arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—sometimes also known as "stages in composing." Invention had been gone for centuries from formal rhetoric, and is still largely absent from current-traditional pedagogy. Thus the rereading of the classics and the bringing back of invention—sometimes termed "heuristic," a method of argument leading to discovery—coincided with and perhaps inspired the "process" approach in composition. Invention had

been one of the missing stages in traditional teaching. Its reintroduction helped reconstitute rhetoric itself and shake new life into the teaching of writing, shaping new agendas with such elements as freewriting, prewriting, and group writing, variously termed "process teaching" and "the new rhetoric." Karen Burke LeFevre recounts these developments in her enthralling *Invention as a Social Act,* as well as in her articles about invention/heuristics in Tate/Corbett, and in Winterowd's *Composition/Rhetoric* (35–46).

History

Originally, rhetoric arose as the art of persuasive discourse in public life: the social practice of *using language to effect.* In developing this art of public speaking, or the art of persuasive discourse, the ancient, ill-fated Greek sophists, who have suffered both in their own time and now from a worse reputation than they deserve, according to Susan Jarrett's recent scholarship, were the first teachers of rhetoric. Since most of their clients—at first mostly lawyers and politicians—wrote their speeches before delivery, many of the classical pointers apply to writing as well. By Cicero's time, certainly, the art of rhetoric included both oratory and written composition. Richard Enos, in fact, has demonstrated that the notion of dialectical interdependence (rather than separation) of orality and literacy, which is so central to contemporary composition theory, was a notion already familiar to the Romans. Gradually through medieval times—especially after the invention of printing—rhetoric as a term came to include the rules for producing discourse in general. The meaning was further stretched to include the study of old speeches and other texts as examples, thus in fact becoming literary analysis. Still today, rhetoricians such as Berlin, Eagleton, Schilb, Vitanza, Walker, Wells, Winterowd suggest that literature could well be subsumed under the rubric of rhetoric. Many more would include even electronic and visual discourse as the proper objects for rhetorical study.

In common with other signs, as linguists would say, rhetoric expresses and carries forward its own particular history (see John Schilb, "The History of Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of History"). Actually, we have no "standard" history of rhetoric. Histories of rhetoric are just now being written. A good place to begin reading would be the capsule history in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (594–630) by the founding father of the Revival, Edward P. J. Corbett. For a more detailed historical study, see James Murphy's *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric.* I also recommend Murphy's 1982 MLA anthology—the book that first

stirred my interest in the subject—*The Rhetorical Tradition and Modern Writing,* one of the best introductions to that amphitheater of speculative debate, i.e., rhetoric. The most recent book on the subject that I have seen is Susan Miller's interesting *Rescuing the Subject: A Critical Introduction to Rhetoric and the Writer* (1989), a revisionary history of rhetoric that proposes a *textual* rhetoric. See especially her last chapter, "The Educational Result: Rhetoric and Composition" (149–170).

In these works and other secondary sources we learn that the first job of the rhetorician was to capture the attention of the audience. The early teachers of rhetoric, Protagoras among them, offered classes to anyone who paid the fees, upsetting many, like Plato, who worried greatly that unworthy people might learn the "mechanical" skills of persuasion and use them to evil ends. Plato left two dialogues about rhetoric, the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus.* His fear that rhetoric would be abused is clear, and I would put his chief admonition this way: use rhetoric only to seek truth and the good, a suggestion lost in many composition texts.

We might also consider William Covino imploring us to play and wonder in our writing (*The Art of Wondering*), and add to our instructions for our students that their search for truth in their writing should not be too quick on the draw, but that they might wander and wonder first. Certainly Plato's dialogues don't pounce on the truth but amble down different lanes, searching and discovering. Writing is learning through discovery of meaning. But Aristotle was excited by the promise of rhetoric and wrote down its detailed organization; his *Rhetoric* has remained.the classic text on the epistemology, semiotics, ethics, and politics of rhetoric.

In Rome, Cicero (*De Inventione*) and Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*) wrote educational texts about rhetoric that dominated schooling in Europe for a thousand years. Rhetoric has endured spasmodic shrinkage in the sense that most of Aristotle's functions (or "canons") were left by the wayside, with the focus remaining on one function, style. Rhetoric became the keeper of tropes. Unfortunately often the "high" style became mere ornament, as the Host complains in *The Canterbury Tales* when asking the Clerk to tell a tale:

> Telle us some myrie thyng of aventures.
> Youre termes, youre colours, and youre figures,
> Keepe him in stoor til so be that ye endite
> Heigh style, as whan that men to kynges write,
> Speketh so pleyn at this tyme, we yow preye,
> That we might understonde what ye seye.

This was a typical attitude during the Middle Ages, reflecting the prevailing idea that rhetoric was adornment in "high style" and had little to do with ordinary discourse: rhetoric was for scholars and kings. From this we have the specialized derogatory sense of "insincere style," as in "mere rhetoric." By the end of the Middle Ages, rhetoric had lost much of its glamour and was severely narrowed, often only to a concern with adornment. In the twentieth century, rhetoric has returned to prominence—first in commerce and in the media, and now finally in the teaching of writing.

Though rhetoric enjoyed some renewed temporary prestige during the Renaissance, until our century it was often neglected in the cultural affairs of Europe and America—or, as Kinneavy says, "exiled from entire disciplines." Let's turn now to the infant discipline of composition to trace its new association with classical rhetoric.

The Beginning of Composition

Many accounts of the displacement of old rhetoric as a discipline by "English" and its companion, "composition," have recently been written. Some of the most interesting are Richard Ohmann's in *Politics of Letters;* William R. Parker's "Where do English Departments Come From?" Tanner/Bishop's "Reform Amid the Revival of Rhetoric," and of course Berlin's *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges.* As part of the business of education, "composition" had its start in the last decades of the 1800s at Harvard. Just as today, business and government thought they had a "literacy crisis" on their hands. The need for *practical* writing instruction was felt so strongly because of the quick growth in the skilled work force along with the rise of American capitalism.

The new composition courses were placed in the newly emerging English literature department rather than in the old rhetoric department largely because it was felt rhetoric applied to oratory rather than to writing. In reality, of course, the precepts in the art of rhetoric are indeed applicable to written discourse. Nevertheless, until the current revival, traditional rhetoric remained an esoteric field of inquiry chiefly for philosophers, classicists, and speech scholars.

The Recent Return of Classical Rhetoric

Corbett's major work, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student,* appearing in 1964, is often cited as a forerunning text, a sign of things to come. In a recent interview article, written by Victor

Vitanza—who with Covino believes in the power of rhetorical playfulness and is the movement's rhetor/clown par excellence— Corbett reminisces about the circumstances that made him produce that modern classic. Corbett reveals that, as a young instructor in the 1950s, he knew how to take a poem apart but was utterly mystified by nonfiction prose. Then he discovered rhetoric, eventually coming "to see rhetoric as the keystone to [the] liberal arts" (Vitanza 251).

After Corbett, James Kinneavy's *Theory of Discourse* (1971) has had a strong influence, though his theoretical model has come in for some criticism. But rhetoric is not a realm of isolated "giants"; it has been a group effort sustained by great numbers of teachers, scholars, and critics. Many of their works appear in rich anthologies like Donald McQuade's *The Territory of Language.* Another source is *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse,* edited by Robert Connors, Lisa Ede, and Andrea Lunsford. In one of its pieces, "On Distinctions between Classical and Modern Rhetoric," Lunsford and Ede come close to glorifying the benefits that the study of classical rhetoric will bring today's students. Though this view is spreading, it's not shared by all other rhetoricians.

Indeed, it's time now to assert that "the rhetorical imagination" is *not* dominating English composition, at least not yet. Though it has come to exercise a powerful influence on theory it has only a tiny impact on practice, so far. Many scholars and critics who have enriched our domain of writing instruction in recent decades don't speak of themselves as rhetoricians and in fact speak softly. David Bartholomae, for instance, said about his apprehension: "I am continually amazed, however, by the degree to which we speak and write as though we had control of the rhetorical tradition—as though it were ours and we could name its key figures and projects. At the moment, rhetoric is very much out of our control" (46).

Another warning appears in *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* by Jasper Neel who, while essentially pro rhetoric, cautions against uncritical reliance on classical theories. He fears that Platonic and Aristotelian influences on composition students may not be in their best interests. He sees especially Plato as a powerful model for the worst in current-traditional classrooms: the useless formalistic modes of development; the notion that we must think before we write; and above all the view that literary studies are superior to composition (1–29). Instead, he shares with Sharon Crowley the view that the best classical sources for students of composition are the principles and practices of the ancient sophists, like Protagoras and Gorgias (202–211). *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* (1989) is one of

the most useful books for compositions teachers interested in the rhetoric movement.

But the most celebrated—or infamous—dissent is found in *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing* by C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon. They call classical rhetoric "That Old-Time Religion" (22). Their chief complaint is philosophical and political. They claim the ancients didn't afford rhetoric the ability to create knowledge, only to mechanically transfer it (the banking concept of Paulo Freire). "The purpose of discourse in this ancient epistemological context was very simple: its moral imperative was to convey the truth in a verbal dress that would make it attractively visible to particular audiences on particular occasions" (23). They are worried that the ancient "ceremonial" aura remains not only in current-traditional classrooms, but in the rooms of teachers who believe they're progressive.

For their assault on the negative influence of classical rhetoric—and on their unwitting colleagues—Knoblauch/Brannon received much attention, notably a counterattack in the pages of *CCC* (37 [1986]: 502–506). In an interesting article aptly titled, "The History of Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of History" (11–32), John Schilb has contrasted their critical approach with the highly favorable one in *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse,* edited by Connors et al. His point is that what's important is not who is right or wrong but what we can learn from the dialogue.

We should note also a weakness in the new rhetoric movement, the relative lack of attention it has paid to the role of minority rhetorics. Though much work has been done in Black linguistics during the last two decades, very little attention has been given to rhetorical features of Black English—with the notable exception of *The Signifying Monkey* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. And regarding women, Catherine Peaden wrote in 1989, "Despite nods to feminism in recent journal articles and conference sessions, many rhetoricians, particularly historians of rhetoric, have yet to confront feminism and its transformative implications both for writing and for teaching the history of rhetoric" (116). Nevertheless, her article was included in a new section entitled "Rhetoric and Feminist Theory" in the 1989 edition of Charles Kneuppert's biennial anthology published by the Rhetoric Society of America.

The Rhetoric Movement and Basic Writing

Our concerns as teachers of composition often lead us into discussions about literacy, another concept that is currently being

reexamined by theorists, such as Ross Winterowd ("Literacy, Linguistics, and Rhetoric"). This is natural enough since our basic writing courses have sprung upon us precisely to cure an alleged increase in illiteracy. At the 1989 Conference on College Composition and Communication in Seattle, Lisa Ede said:

> I would argue that rhetoric is situated at a crucial moment in its history. Rhetoric is being called upon or invoked by theorists in a number of fields, including English and composition studies, and it has the potential for offering a site (as it has in its past) for a genuinely interdisciplinary, critical theory and practice—a theory and practice that would, for instance, remove conceptions of literacy from the margins (where functional illiterates are supposed to reside, next to the homeless) and place them at the center of the cultural debate (9).

Thus, while "rhetoric" and "literacy" may embody abstract concepts, they both bring forth practical implications for everyday classroom work. Rhetoric more than any other version of writing instruction highlights the inherent power of those trained in public discourse. Because rhetoric is a humanistic discipline rather than just a mechanical skill, we avoid the dehumanizing disasters so common in current-traditional classrooms where the goal may be the construction of a correct five-paragraph theme. That rhetoric empowers, we know from the media, and though we don't promise that rhetorical practices will make people rich, our students need hearing that professional-economic advantages come with an ability to write well.

Some of these practical and political implications can be found in books and articles such as Erika Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers.* She shows in "Writing as Economic Power" (4–5) that this is still true in spite of all the audiovisual electronics of our age. Another notion of most rhetorics is that speakers and writers begin by taking a stance vis-à-vis their audience, and clearly announcing their topic and aim. Such a stance is helpful to our basic writing students, many of whom hem and haw while attempting to open their essay with a funnel, as their teacher told them. Wayne Booth, one of the pioneers in the revival of rhetoric, has put this point well:

> The common ingredient that I find in all of the writing I admire—excluding for now novels, plays, and poems—is something that I shall reluctantly call the rhetorical stance, a stance which depends on discovering and maintaining in any

writing situation a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort: the available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character, of the speaker. (141)

Another healthy effect of the rhetorical model is its disprivileging of the romantic image of lonely writers locked in combat with their own solitude. Instead we get a rhetorical writer in the context of social struggle, a far more appropriate image for the basic writing room. "Perhaps the most important contribution of classical rhetoric is precisely this focus on context. Classical rhetoric assumes that the function of writing is not to express oneself but to effect change in the human community in which one lives," as Patricia Bizzell has put it (60). Though I am convinced basic writing students need to *practice* expressive writing as part of the learning process, this is not the sole end but rather a stage in a strategic movement toward producing discourse with a social *effect*.

In stressing that writing is social in origin, contemporary rhetoric embraces dialogue among writer and readers during the practical process of production: group work or "collaborative learning" is paramount. Thus rhetoric coincides with, and encourages, that element in "process" pedagogy that insists on revision after feedback from peers and teacher. Bakhtin has a discussion of "the dialogic imagination"; Gere of history and theory of group writing; and Moberg of classroom suggestions.

In fact the main virtue of teaching writing with a rhetorical approach may be the social learning experience inherent in the engagement of writer with readers. Rhetorical writers situate themselves in a social context, defining themselves in relation to their readers and asking to become an influence on them and ultimately on themselves, thereby gaining knowledge. Above all, this epistemological dimension is fitting for us teachers: as students engage in dialogue, they learn. The art of writing is a learning act. The art of rhetoric is not presenting knowledge but creating it. In this fashion rhetoric also facilitates awareness of contemporary concerns, such as the gender, race, and class of writer and audience, vital information inherent in the rhetorical *stance* taken by the author, the stuff usually absent in current-traditional discourse.

Some Practical Guides for Basic Writing Teachers

One of the most helpful articles for coaching basic writers is William Pixton's in a recent issue of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*,

especially the thorough discussion of "rhetorical stance" and audience identification (267–279). Two other useful pieces that originally appeared in *Journal of Basic Writing,* are Lynn Troyka's "Classical Rhetoric and the Basic Writer" and Andrea Lunsford's "Aristotelean Rhetoric: Let's Get Back to the Classics."

As for classroom texts, most authors seem unaware of even the basics of rhetoric, but there are a few exceptions (see also Donald Stewart's "Composition Textbooks and the Assault on Tradition"). In fact, Stewart himself has written a sound text, *The Versatile Writer.* It's a fine example of a "new/old rhetoric" for students of English composition based on Aristotle. Its major parts include Invention, Arrangement, and Style. Another college English text that imitates the classical model, even more closely than Stewart's, is Winifred Bryan Horner's *Rhetoric in the Classical Tradition.* And Ross Winterowd's *The Contemporary Writer: A Practical Rhetoric* is one of the best texts for college writers; among other felicities, this book has the clearest explanation of Kenneth Burke's Pentad (his method for invention) that I have seen (96–100).

I've always found "handbooks" too formidable to use in class, and one of the newest—*The St. Martin's Handbook* (1989)—is colossal in both its mass and grasp, yet the specially produced "Annotated Instructor's Edition" has frontal matter about the history, theory, and practice of rhetoric that is useful for basic writing teachers. No wonder: the authors of this handbook are two of the leading rhetoricians today, Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors. I've been tempted to assign some of these texts, but they may be a touch too advanced for the work usually done by basic writing students.

Finally, A Pedagogical Suggestion

Instead of beginning a basic writing course with the usual lesson in sentence structure or modes of development, how superior it would be to start students off with an oral and written discussion of a piece of discourse relevant to the writing course itself, such as the following extended metaphor about humanity's unending conversation, taken from our greatest living rhetorician, Kenneth Burke:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all

the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (*Philosophy* 110–111)

Kenneth Burke's rhetorical and epistemological notion of discourse as a "conversation of mankind," or of "the social construction of knowledge," or of "interpretive communities," clearly anticipates the later formulations of Kenneth Bruffee, Richard Rorty, and Stanley Fish. The more closely we look into modern rhetoric, the more we can see it as a multidisciplinary nucleus, a *global* discipline as Vitanza calls it (261). Similarly, Ross Winterowd refers to it as "the ecumenical umbrella under which grammar, poetry, logic, composition, and public speaking can find shelter" (*Composition/Rhetoric* vii).

A writing pedagogy informed by some of these rhetorical precepts would be superior to the fill-in-the-blanks grammar and composition "service" course which according to available reports—in spite of all the theoretical progress in recent composition studies—still dominates actual classroom practice in America. Best of all, when students have been trained to create persuasion, they are likely also to have learned *not* to be persuaded by treacherous rhetoric (see Dietrich). They practice taking care of themselves. "Empowering the students" can be a fanciful way of talking, but surely we fail our basic writing students if we don't pull them into the kind of rhetorical language use that confers power. This kind of rhetoric instruction can make college writing the most important course in our freshmen's curriculum. If taking this stand be arrogance on our part, then perhaps we have been unduly meek in the past. Viewing ourselves as rhetoricians is a fighting stance, one that wants our students to be given an opportunity to enter the discourse of real social struggle.

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Vivian Zamel

THROUGH STUDENTS' EYES: THE EXPERIENCES OF THREE ESL WRITERS[1]

ABSTRACT: A case study of three ESL student writers and their experiences in two different classrooms was undertaken in order to better understand the relationship between writing development and writing instruction. The study revealed the ways in which their disparate experiences in these classrooms affected their reflections about and attitudes toward writing. The findings point to the central role that students' beliefs, expectations, and perspectives play in the classroom; suggest the need to examine the constraints that shape instructional decisions; and underline the importance of investigating the contexts in which writing takes place.

Research on writing has given us insight into the complexity of the composing processes of both native speakers and ESL students. While these studies have revealed the generative, exploratory, and fluid nature of writing and have suggested the ways in which instruction can promote writing, too often, writing processes have been examined in experimental settings, thus making it difficult to determine the extent to which instruction and student writing are related. In order to better understand this relationship, therefore, researchers have undertaken studies of writing classes, studies which point to the links between the development of writing and writing pedagogy (see, for example, Graves, Applebee *Contexts,* Edelsky, Perl and Wilson). This classroom-based research has given

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us a fuller and richer "picture" of instructional context. It has revealed the constraints that influence and impinge upon both teaching behavior and writing development, it has helped us to understand how student writers acquire their assumptions and notions about writing, and it has suggested that what is taught and what is learned (or what is not learned) are interrelated.

Among the critical components of instructional context are students' own experiences, responses, and perspectives. As researchers (Brooke, Newkirk, Rose *When A Writer,* Ritchie) have demonstrated, students' unique and personal histories, reactions, expectations, and points of view play a central role in the writing classroom and contribute to students' assumptions about writing and their sense of themselves as writers and as learners. These factors are "important performers in the writing class, interacting in various ways, contributing shifting themes, tones and resonances to the way students . . . experienced the class" (Ritchie 157).

The investigation that I undertook was a further attempt to explore students' perceptions of and reactions to their classroom experiences. It consisted of a case study of three ESL student writers, but so as to determine the extent to which context impacts on students, this study examined these writers' experiences in two different classroom settings. In order to capture the writing classroom as it was seen through these students' eyes, and in order to trace their perceptions and reactions as they moved from one classroom situation to another, I collected interview data over the course of two semesters, meeting with each student four times each semester. These open-ended interviews lasted approximately two hours each (two went on for three hours), and were tape-recorded and transcribed. While the primary data of my study consisted of what students said about their classroom experiences, their attitudes toward writing, and their views of themselves as writers, I also interviewed these students' teachers and, in the case of two teachers, the tutors that were assigned to work with them. All of these interviews yielded a wealth of data, but it was not difficult to locate the dominant themes. The interview statements that were selected and included for the purposes of this study represent these themes. Finally, I carried out classroom observations, taking notes on the focus of instruction, the classroom interaction, and the roles that students and teachers played. These observations, along with the teacher and tutor interviews, provided other perspectives that could be brought to bear on the students' perceptions.

The three students that became the focus of my study were all enrolled in the same ESL precomposition course at the time that I met them and were chosen because each represented a different

level of writing proficiency. I discovered during my initial interviews that each of these students represented very different cultural and educational experiences as well. Carlos, who was judged by his precomposition teacher to be the best writer of the three, was from Colombia and had had extensive reading and writing experiences throughout high school. He complained, however, about most of the writing he had been required to do, both in high school and in a previous ESL course, because it had little to do with his interests. Mohammed, who was considered to be an average writer, was from Somalia and had taken grammar courses and been required to read and summarize his reading, but had not done any extensive writing. He had also taken two ESL courses in which he practiced paragraph writing and studied grammar. Mohammed admitted to not liking these courses because of the artificial topics assigned and the organizational formats he was expected to reproduce. Nevertheless, he indicated that studying grammar helped him, and his expectation was that teachers were supposed to correct, not comment on his ideas. Nham, the least proficient writer of the three, was from Cambodia, where he was in school for a total of only three years. He attended high school in the U.S., during which time he did well in science and math, but had great difficulty in ESL classes. He recalled studying grammar and doing very structured writing, but resisted this work because the teacher always seemed to appropriate what he wanted to say. Before entering the precomposition class, Nham attended a special summer program in addition to one other lower level ESL course in which he was encouraged to use writing for self-expression.

The recollected experiences of these students highlight those factors that served to shape their assumptions, expectations, and attitudes about writing before they entered the precomposition course. Carlos felt confident about his writing, but resented previous limitations that he felt had prevented him from exploring his interests. Mohammed had come to expect that writing in English was done to practice grammar and admitted to needing this practice. And Nham felt hopeful about continued opportunities to write so as to both develop his English and his ideas.

What happened to these students in their precomposition course?

During my classroom observations of the precomposition course, I noted the ways in which the teacher acknowledged, validated, and extended students' contributions. She recapitulated, paraphrased, and provided generalizations for students' ideas, whether they took the form of opinions, guesses, or new questions. She consistently

used phrases like, "So what you're saying is," "In other words," or "So what we're seeing is," thus legitimizing what students said and modeling the kind of engaged listening she expected of other students. She invited students to clarify and to challenge, and they did indeed ask questions of both her and one another. The in-class writing involved responses to questions that asked students to weigh the issue under consideration, to go off in new directions, to interpret, or to find as yet undiscovered connections. The composition topics which she offered, rather than assigned, and which always allowed for a student's own choice of topics, were extensions of the in-class reading, writing, and discussion, and by drawing on this work, she validated its importance. Even the grammar work grew out of and was given a context within the reading and writing. Finally, when students worked together and shared each other's writing, they responded to one another in the same way that their teacher had reacted during class discussions, as if they had internalized the role she played as an interested reader/listener.

My interview with this teacher revealed both the philosophical underpinnings of her instruction and the congruity between this philosophy and her practice. She spoke of wanting her students to explore their own thoughts because "it is critical to let students discover their personal ideas first rather than guessing what the teacher wants." She indicated the importance of finding out "what students know so that you can build on it." The readings she had organized around particular themes were chosen in order to provide alternative perspectives since she "want(s) them to understand that there's more than one point of view." Much of the writing was never collected or read but rather offered her students "ways into the reading and writing." With reference to topics students wrote about, she indicated that, while she provided suggested topics for writing, the most intriguing topics grew out of the class discussions. She also admitted that she allowed students the option of writing about whatever they wanted, explaining that it was essential that students "be involved if they are to make progress as writers" and that "because these students are beginning writers, they don't have the confidence and don't know how to write about a topic they're not interested in." She indicated that giving students confidence and getting them to say more were her primary goals: "Writing doesn't have to be a threatening, overwhelming task. But students are likely to think it is, unless a teacher can trick students into writing without their thinking about it." She spoke of providing students the opportunity to do self-evaluations of their own writing development so they could articulate what they thought they had

and hadn't learned and so that her instruction could better accommodate their perceived needs. Finally, she recalled her previous, more traditionally oriented, teaching experiences which gave her far greater control over what students were to produce but with which she came to be dissatisfied. She explained that her own transformation occurred when it was no longer "easier to blame the students."

The interviews with Carlos, Mohammed, and Nham reflect the ways their experiences in this writing course affected them. Carlos talked about being able to write easily about ideas that "came from [him], not the book," about "questions that made him think," about not being afraid because "all ideas are o.k. . . . . There's no right or wrong," about "writing for [him]self, not for a grade." He remarked that "the idea of a teacher is usually the idea of a grade. It means that I have to do my work because I need a grade, but if she asks me for work and I like the work, I don't do it for the grade. I can read my papers and see I'm doing better." He valued the freedom he was given to develop his own ideas ad the encouragement that "made [him] continue work on [his] papers." He referred to the kinds of questions the teacher raised in her responses and how he had learned to anticipate her concerns: "I can sit down and ask myself the questions that I know she's going to ask me." He characterized her responses to his writing and his subsequent revisions as a "kind of conversation between teacher and student. It's like we're working together on the same paper. It's a kind of team. Maybe it won't be perfect, but it will be the best we do." (Note the "we.") Finally, he remarked that what differentiated this teacher from others was that "she is not only a teacher, but a friend . . . who is helping me how to write . . . I can say she is also a student because she is trying to know something about us . . . she learns from us. Other teachers are trying to teach us something and forget about us as people."

Mohammed, despite his previous expectations that writing meant practicing grammar, spoke about the same factors that Carlos had identified. He talked about the ease with which he could now write because, instead of being given an outline to follow and instead of thinking first about mistakes, both of which had characterized his concerns the previous semester, "you can write down whatever you want to and then you can change it when your reread it." He described the process from which he felt his writing had benefited:

> She lets students get their ideas down first. While I am writing, I get ideas, and then you can start controlling, add things and switch things. Then she asks what student means

and then student will understand how he was misunderstood. By doing this, I can know if my papers are clear, if it makes sense, if it's complete.

He valued the teacher's primary focus on his ideas:

The teacher wants to know about the ideas in your mind. She takes ideas serious. This makes me feel good. The teacher wants to talk to you, wants to know what's on your mind and you feel courage to revise . . . All these books won't help, you won't use your brain. You never develop your ideas.

He spoke of the freedom to write about topics he had chosen: "It's good to let students write on what students are interested because it encourage you to write." And the dialogic relationship, identified by Carlos, came up again with Mohammed: "From the conversations I have with her, I learn why it's better to organize again or add things or explain more, and from these conversations, I learn I can be a writer."

Nham's comments echoed much of what Carlos and Mohammed said. He spoke of no longer fearing writing because this teacher was "open" and valued what he had to say: "If teacher is too tight, ideas never develop." He talked about feeling comfortable with writing and realizing that writing "lets [him] think, lets [him] learn, and lets [him] learn English cause you look for words to express ideas." He spoke of wanting to write because "It's fun. I like to think. When you write, you think a lot, you learn a lot. For me, I didn't have a good education before. Now I have opportunity to learn and the writing lets me do that." He recalled hating writing throughout high school but indicated that his attitude was now very different: "[This teacher] doesn't change my ideas. She *follows* your ideas." He described the process through which his writing evolved:

If I write something, there is many, many mistakes. But she doesn't care about that. She cares about the main ideas and shows me. When the main idea, the big thing comes, then you can work on small things . . . That's what a teacher should do. If you have to write only one draft, then you have to do everything at once. But if you can do it many times, you can work on important thing first.

He also spoke of his own development: "You can't be perfect right away. She's calm. She lets us think. She lets us talk. That's how I get my ideas. That's how we learn. I feel I want to study forever."

Clearly, the same themes resonate throughout these interviews. This writing classroom had affected all three students, their

previous experiences and expectations notwithstanding, in similar ways. All had come to view writing as a means of generating ideas and to see themselves as participants in this process. All had come to understand the organic, recursive, and open-ended nature of writing, and could appreciate how this had contributed to their own development. Students and teacher were indeed, as Carlos put it, a "team"; interaction both during classroom discussion and throughout the writing process was a kind of dialogue; students were recognized as knowers; and knowledge, both about writing and that which the writing was about, did not exist out there and get taken in, but rather evolved through negotiation and collaboration.

What happened to these students the following semester?

Carlos entered his ESL freshman composition course full of enthusiasm and eager to continue using writing as a means for exploring and communicating his ideas. As he indicated at the end of the previous semester, "I look forward to the writing course. Now I like writing and want to keep working." However, he encountered considerable frustration as the semester progressed because he felt that his own intentions were repeatedly undercut by the goals set by the teacher.

The classroom sessions that I observed focused on abstract discussions that defined, in essence, what was appropriate and what was not. During one particular class, the discussion focused on a student paper and the extent to which this text met a set of criteria outlined on the blackboard. The discussion was dominated by the questions raised by the teacher, to which only one or two students responded. Attempts made by the teacher to involve other students in the discussion were not successful. As the silence suggested, most students could not make the connection between the questions posed and the specific text under discussion.

My interview with the teacher indicated the constraints he was trying to address and some of the conflicts that he was aware of. For example, he acknowledged the importance of students' own exploration and inquiry, of allowing for greater collaboration, but had come to feel "at peace" with his decision that students produce certain kinds of prescribed texts. He explained the importance of producing papers that followed the rhetorical formats described and modeled in the composition textbook because students "would need these to function in all their courses." The following is representative:

I have a kind of general uneasiness about controlling

[students'] intellectual lives but I've become less uneasy with that, and I do know more than they do, and that really part of the traditional expectation is that student get direction from their teachers. And, in time, I'm beginning to see that a textbook knows at least as much as I do, and I can get some direction on what to emphasize for any rhetorical component such as comparison/contrast or argument or process analysis.

The conflict revealed here between the instructor's "uneasiness about controlling," on the one hand, and "know[ing] more than they do," on the other, had serious consequences. As the tutor for this course indicated to me, the major problem for most students in the class was their inability to organize papers well, but they could not understand the assignments that were meant to deal with this very problem.

With reference to topics, the teacher talked about "tightening the reins." And when asked about Carlos in particular, he offered the following:

He'll get through in a kind of mediocre way. I think he thought he worked hard, but he didn't work hard enough. There's a certain kind of avoidance. He does what he's told, but not more than that. He's not what I would call an intellectual, which is the stuff of a college . . . It's interesting that I know very little about him or about any of my students.

One of the things he knew little about was that Carlos, whom he characterized as a student who "does what he's told, but not more than that," wrote quite a few pieces on his own which he showed me, but which he never felt comfortable sharing with his teacher.

This foreshadows what Carlos revealed about the frustration he had experienced. For example, he couldn't understand why students weren't writing more:

This is a writing class. We're supposed to write a lot. Why don't we write in class? We learn things like finding a thesis . . . but why don't we do writing? If he teaches something today, why don't we practice it? If we practice, we're going to master it. When I write, I just follow steps, but we need to practice.

He also experienced considerable tension because he was interested in writing about a particular topic for the assigned research paper and had collected data over a period of several weeks. But he was troubled because he wasn't sure whether this topic would fit the teacher's requirements for a "controversial paper," and he was

hesitant to approach the instructor to discuss this dilemma. As a result, Carlos wrote an entirely different paper, one that he knew would meet these requirements, but one that he had no involvement or interest in whatsoever. Carlos' own inquiry had thus been sidetracked by what he was given to believe was, as he put it, "the correct way."

Mohammed and Nham, the other two students in my study who, like Carlos, had looked forward to further opportunities to write, found themselves together in another ESL section of freshman composition, and again, like Carlos, came to feel discouraged over the course of the semester. In this particular class, the teacher stressed that she wanted to promote engaged and meaningful writing, but in the final analysis was not able to reconcile this professed philosophy with her need to have students fulfill the goals of a less explicit agenda. Thus, while classroom sessions were given over to small groups that commented on excerpts of students' writing, it became obvious that students had little sense of the purposefulness of this activity. They seemed to understand that these sessions, in fact, had little to do with the ways in which writing was evaluated by the teacher. As the tutor for the course put it, "the group work wasn't effective because the final message came from the teacher."

During my interview with the teacher, she discussed what she called her "process orientation" and her commitment to focusing on meaning. She described the thematically organized readings, the sequences of activities that led to final drafts, the peer review. However, classroom instruction that focused on finding thesis sentences and formulating introductions and conclusions, her responses to student writing, and the uniform structure students were expected to reproduce in their papers, revealed her real priorities. For example, for one assignment, despite the fact that the teacher did not explicitly specify that she expected them to follow a particular format (in fact, she indicated in the interview that it was important not to tell them this), this is indeed what she was looking for. As the tutor for the class indicated, "There was an expected way papers were to be written." Thus, when students' own intentions led to interpretations that did not conform to the preexisting framework, as was the case for both Mohammed and Nham, they experienced conflict.

My interviews with Mohammed pointed to the concerns and problems as he perceived them. Although he appreciated that the instructor had tired very hard to explain what she wanted, he felt that "the rules" she gave them made it not only very difficult to write papers but often confused him. Furthermore, he admitted to

not being able to write papers when he had no interest in or little information about the topics assigned: "The problem I have is the subjects. If you're not sure what you are writing, you can't organize it." He also found it difficult to make predictions because of what he viewed as mixed messages: "Teacher first said she wanted something from our experiences, but we read all this stuff and she really wanted that." He consistently felt disappointed after papers had been returned to him because rather than being credited for his ideas, his organizational and grammatical problems were pointed out. Finally, and most importantly, Mohammed's own sense of himself as a writer seemed to have been undermined. By the end of the semester, he sensed that he had learned little from the course and that his initial confusion had never left him: "I'm just not making progress. I don't know why. Maybe I need a different level course. Last semester felt like I made progress, but it went away."

My interviews with Nham demonstrate the impact that the teacher's agenda had on his sense of himself, not only as a writer, but as a learner. By midsemester, he began to reveal his anxiety and talked about having "tried so hard, but it never comes out right." He called himself a "stupid person who can't do anything the way she wants it. Since class started, I have not learned improvement . . . Next paper will be wrong. I'm sure." He consistently voiced his concern about getting things right:

> I get satisfaction because I'm thinking and getting my ideas out. But I'm worried because I don't think it's what the teacher wants. And when I worry, I cannot put more ideas out.

He spoke of students' unwillingness to participate in class:

> I would assume that teacher is too tight . . . She doesn't expect students have different ideas. It's not open for students to give ideas. I assume she wants students to have ideas she wants. That's why students have a hard time. For me, since I start this class, I keep my mouth shut.

By the end of the semester, he summed up his thoughts in the following way:

> I feel really inadequate. The way she teaches, it has to be correct. She's so tight, strict. That's why I'm not prepared for it. For student who is not concerned about introduction, thesis sentence or conclusion, that makes them confused. How to find these things before they have ideas. I know I still have trouble . . . If a teacher is tight and won't let go, student

is afraid to put his ideas. I have more ideas even, but I know it's wrong. The more information I put into paper, the more wrong. So I leave things out. When a teacher is so tight, your lose everything.

His sense of failure and his conclusion that he has consistently been unable to write "correctly" have left him feeling disillusioned and defeated.

Listening to these students' voices, one can hear the common themes that symbolized their experiences as they moved from one instructional context to the next, this despite the fact that these students represented a range of language and writing ability as well as very different literacy and schooling backgrounds. And what they perceived about their experiences explains the disparate ways in which the two semesters impacted on them. During the first semester, the interview data suggest, they felt acknowledged for what they could contribute. They were given to understand that their attempts to articulate their thoughts played an important part in their development as writers and language users. And they seemed to appreciate the rationale for the collaborative and open environment that was established to promote this development. In sharp contrast, their reactions to the second semester revealed the extent to which this confidence in themselves was undercut. These students were troubled by their inability to make their intentions fit those of their teachers. They seemed to question the purposes of the writing practiced and assigned, didn't quite understand what they were asked to do and why, and felt confused when their work was found inadequate.

Although the focus of my study was these students' perceptions and responses, I was struck by the ways in which my classroom observations and interviews with the teachers and tutors served to corroborate and inform what the students' had said. During the first semester, writing was promoted by engaging students in rich and integrated experiences with language. It was assumed that writing would evolve as ideas were generated, shared, and responded to. It was in this way, the teacher felt, that texts could be shaped to approximate more closely the target language—academic discourse. Given this situation, it is not surprising that Carlos, Mohammed, and Nham, who had worked diligently and consistently throughout the semester, were viewed by their teacher as having made excellent progress.

The goals of the two freshman composition classes, on the other hand, were shaped by a set of different concerns. Although these two courses were quite different from one another from the

standpoint of curriculum, the sequence of assignments, the topics students wrote about, these were surface features. At a deeper level, they represented an instructional model whose goal it was to promote and sanction a particular kind of discourse. As a result, when students' attempts to generate their own meanings led to less standard texts, and this, as might be expected, happened to the greatest degree in the case of Nham, their unique interpretations were neither understood nor acknowledged.

What implications can be drawn from the findings of this study?

Findings from case studies such as this are not meant to be generalizable; after all, they are tied to the experiences of individual students in the context of particular instructional settings. At the same time, however, such studies are illuminating precisely because they reveal that it is the particularities of classroom events and the ways in which these events impact on students that shape these students' experiences and their perceptions of these experiences. Thus, while the "stories" of Carlos, Mohammed, and Nham may not have been representative, may even have been idiosyncratic, the significance of this study lies in the realization that, as teachers, we are always dealing with the unique and individual realities and interpretations of students and must take these into account. As researchers (Brooke, Purves, Ritchie, Rorschach and Whitney) have argued, because they play a central role in the writing classroom, students' beliefs, expectations, and perspectives, need to be explored. By doing so, we are likely to discover the discrepancies between our intentions and goals and those of our students, we are likely to locate the mismatches between students' perspectives and our own. In the case of Carlos, Mohammed, and Nham, such an exploration would have helped explain why they were experiencing difficulty in their composition classrooms. These students had internalized and were operating according to a set of assumptions about writing that was at odds with the concerns and goals of their composition instructors, and this conflict, as this study revealed, had serious repercussions.

A further implication of this study is the need to examine the constraints that motivate and shape the instructional models we adopt, the expectations that underlie our practices, and the decisions we make about our students. In the case of the precomposition teacher, her main concern was involving students in their own meaning-making through writing, for it was her conviction, fueled by her own teaching experiences and her understanding of the pedagogical shift in composition, that the

acquisition of norms of discourse and language would evolve as students attempted to articulate and reflect upon their own ideas. Her conviction notwithstanding, however, she suspected that her focus on engaging students in inquiry and fostering individual development would not necessarily be congruent with the concerns of the following semester. She realized, to some extent, that she may have been encouraging students to take part in what Brooke characterizes a "disruptive" form of activity that is incompatible with more traditional school-based goals. As she admitted, "Sometimes I feel like I am throwing them to the wolves."

The composition instructors, on the other hand, felt obligated to put aside students' own purposes for and responses to writing and focus instead on practicing and producing "academic" texts that reflected fixed norms and conventions. Why these composition instructors chose to adopt this framework, this despite their knowledge of recent theory and practice, is an intriguing question to explore. It could very well be that these instructors were responding to what they perceived as the larger institutional demands of writing in the academy, demands which required them to take on a more authoritative stance. They knew, for example, that these students eventually needed to pass a rigorous college-wide writing exam that applied a common set of criteria for evaluating all student writing and may have felt that their instructional focus addressed this concern. Furthermore, both instructors taught the two required freshman composition courses interchangeably, and the standards they brought to bear on assigning and evaluating student work may have been influenced by the analytic writing and lengthy research papers they expected students to undertake in their second semester.

Yet another constraint may have been the ESL composition textbooks which both teachers relied upon, textbooks which, like those written for native speakers, represent a very limited and limiting view of writing, prescribing narrowly defined tasks and formulaic rhetorical formats (Rose, "Sophisticated, Ineffective Books"). Thus, despite the "uneasiness" Carlos' teacher admitted to, he nevertheless viewed the mastery of these tasks and formats as necessary precursors to students' future academic work. In the case of Mohammed's and Nham's instructor, despite the invitation she extended to her students to use writing for exploration and interpretation, the concern with convention and form dominated.

What becomes obvious is the struggle these teachers faced as they allowed their interpretations of their roles within the institution to supersede what they knew about language acquisition and writing development. Given these interpretations, it is

understandable why what these teachers knew and what they had even occasionally tried to implement were subordinated to what they perceived as the institutionally sanctioned curriculum. That this phenomenon, whereby teachers' perceptions of institutional pressures subvert their attempts to engage students in genuine acts of learning, is an all too familiar one (Applebee, "Problems," Sola and Bennett), and underlines the need for instructors to reflect upon the incongruities between what they know and what they actually do. And when they make decisions that, upon analysis, seem to contradict what they otherwise believe, even espouse, they need to explore the constraints that influence these decisions and consider alternative, theoretically sound, ways of addressing these pressures, or even resisting them altogether (Bizzell, Myers, Rose "Language of Exclusion"). The work of Bartholomae and Petrosky not only demonstrates that such alternatives are possible, but suggests that instructors need to address institutional concerns together if they are to provide students with coherent, sustained, and integrated experiences as they move from one course to the next.

One final implication underscores the importance of investigating the contexts in which writing takes place. The different ways in which the three students in this study were affected by their two classroom experiences attest to the fact that what students do and do not do as writers and how they come to view themselves as writers are a function of instructional context. Thus, it is critical that research explore more fully the experiences of writers within classroom settings and examine the ways in which the behaviors, strategies, and difficulties of writers are related to and determined by situation-specific factors. As Reither has argued:

> Writers and what writers do during writing cannot be artificially separated from the social rhetorical situations in which writing gets done, from the conditions that enable writers to do what they do, from the motives writers have for doing what they do. (621)

But this recommendation to study writers within instructional settings should not be taken up by researchers alone. Ideally, such investigations would involve teachers in studies of their own. This teacher-generated research, because it is connected with the web of factors and circumstances of their specific situations, and because it allows them to "reclaim the classroom" (Goswami and Stillman), is likely to have a far greater impact on their teaching than the reported findings of others. By looking closely at their students and raising questions about why they seem to write the way they do, by paying attention to students' reactions to tasks and assignments, by

considering students' own intentions and purposes for writing in relationship to their own agendas and goals, teachers are likely to discover the picture of the classroom, as seen through students' eyes. And, as is the case with all learning, this new perspective is what ultimately might compel these teachers to revise, to see again, with new eyes.

Note

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1988 International TESOL Convention in Chicago. I am indebted to Sondra Perl and Nancy Wilson whose book, *Through Teachers' Eyes*, suggested a title for this paper.

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Jody Millward

PLACEMENT AND PEDAGOGY: UC SANTA BARBARA'S PREPARATORY PROGRAM

ABSTRACT: Although assessment serves crucial functions, many composition instructors remain somewhat skeptical about the efficacy of placement exams. While research has provided valuable information about the complex nature of testing, the knowledge we receive through the "epistemology of practice," and the application of these insights, enables us to more clearly define problematic areas. The UC placement program warrants attention because it serves a large, culturally diverse student population, acknowledges the variables embedded in the testing situation, and helps clarify what issues remain unresolved. UC Santa Barbara's Preparatory Program, a collaborative project between UCSB and ten high schools, directly addresses the issues of students' perception of purpose and audience, the artificial nature of the single writing sample, and the issue of conflicting social contexts. To transform placement into a pedagogical enterprise, we provide strategies designed to help both mainstream and underrepresented students meet these rhetorical demands and gain control in these testing situations.

Despite the advances made in testing over the last twenty years, most composition instructors retain a healthy skepticism toward the efficacy and validity of placement and proficiency exams. Erika Lindemann's summary of the 1985 CEA debates on the issue reveals both the source of our discomfort and the passionate responses

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writing assessment evokes: "If you can't avoid testing, do the best you can to insure that tests are fair, that results are interpreted responsibly, and that students receive constructive help"; "If you've inherited an unfair, irresponsible, and destructive testing program, do all you can to change or destroy it" (18–19).

While acknowledging the need of placing students in their proper courses, many of us remain concerned about the ways in which the testing situation affects writing performance. There is concern, too, that these exams have a greater impact than simply determining proficiency levels. Like stones skipped across a pond, test results have a rippling effect on students, teachers, and the profession itself. An off-the-cuff, impromptu essay can often draw a hard and fast line between a "good" writer and a "failure," an image that fades much more slowly for the student than any recollection of the prompt or the draft. Too often these same scores become a measurement of teacher instruction as well. Leo Ruth and Sandra Murphy caution that we must be "wary of using examination data in ways that erode confidence in teacher judgment and undermine curriculum. . . . Tests have a way of feeding back into the educational process in unintended ways," and the danger is clear—"what the writing examination sanctifies, we must teach."[1] This inevitably inhibits creativity, innovation, and genuine inquiry in the classroom.

Given the complex nature of assessment, it is easy to understand Lindemann's rather acerbic advice—"If you're not in the testing business, stay out of it" (18). Yet if we abandon our responsibilities, we will only compound the danger and increase the possibility of abuses. We may lose the ground we've gained in determining how students are tested, what they are tested on, and the standards by which they are assessed. By acknowledging the inherent dangers of the process, we can develop ways to combat them. Researchers in the field have enabled us to identify these dangers with some precision. In 1963, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer defined "the assignment variable, with its four aspects: the topic, the mode of discourse, the time afforded for writing, and the examination situation" (qtd. in Ruth and Murphy 42, 43). In *Designing Writing Tasks for the Assessment of Writing,* Leo Ruth and Sandra Murphy provide a comprehensive survey of the research into these areas and discuss the difficulties we encounter in our attempts to control these variables.

Yet, Ruth and Murphy insist that research alone will not provide the strategies necessary to meet the challenge. Instead, they incorporate what D. A. Schön has called the "epistemology of practice," relying on "professional action as a primary source of

knowledge" (Ruth and Murphy 37). While research into trends and solutions provided in guidelines are essential, the knowledge we receive by reviewing the application of these insights in current testing programs will enable us to target those areas which require further attention.

For the past four years, UC in collaboration with ETS has offered a statewide placement exam to determine whether or not incoming freshmen need Subject A, the skills-sharpening course offered at individual campuses at the University of California. The UC model warrants attention because, like many state universities, it serves a large, culturally diverse student population and encompasses a large geographic area. In 1990, 23,165 UC-bound high school seniors were invited to take the Subject A exam; of those, 13,663 participated in the placement program. Reviewing the measures that ETS and the Subject A Committee employ to close the gap between test designers, test takers, and test raters in California may prove instructive.

Test Design

In their chapter titled "Guidelines For Designing Topics For Writing Assessment," Ruth and Murphy suggest test designers must acknowledge the hidden variables of assessment throughout the entire assessment process. Clear agreement on the exam's purpose will guide the choice of subject and the structure of the topic. Because UC places students on the basis of reading comprehension and writing competency, the Subject A exam offers an expository passage—ranging from 700 to 1,000 words in length—and a text-bound topic. The Subject A Committee avoids passages that are too specific in nature (for example, a biographical portrait, a specific historical event, or a detailed explication of a process) which would require special knowledge from students, as well as controversial topics which may engender "snap answers or simple parroting of opinions" or "arouse strong biases in readers." They choose instead "topics that invite possible and reasonable generalization" (Ruth and Murphy 261, 262), passages that provide an insight into the human condition.

In their phrasing of the topic, the Committee avoids both overprompting which can generate "literal-minded quiz like responses" and undercueing which forces students to "set their own limits and construct their own rhetorical purposes."[2] A one-sentence summary of the central idea is followed by a question which invites individual engagement with the text at hand: "What do you think about his views?" Their last directive statement—"Use

101

examples from your own experience, reading, or observation in developing your essay"—follows Ruth and Murphy's guideline for successful cueing: "cues for content should suggest options, not impose restraints" (275). The instructions which precede the topic enable those students schooled in the composing process to employ those techniques in the two-hour time frame. Students are encouraged to underline the passage, make notes, and plan their essays before they begin writing and to "allow time to revise and proofread . . . and to make any revisions or corrections [they] wish."

Test Takers

To discover the built-in dangers of a topic—i.e., demands for special knowledge, inherent cultural bias, or conflicting social contexts—UC field tests the exam in northern, southern, and central California. Nevertheless, the problems of dual purpose and dual audience remain. Both Fitzgerald in "Rhetorical Implications of School Discourse for Writing Placement" and Robert M. Esch in "Rethinking the Junior-Level Exit Exam" suggest that students have a clearer perception of what is expected of them when they have the assessment criteria and the purpose and method of placement explained to them prior to testing.[3] In the Subject A Examination Booklet issued to California high schools, UC provides a brief history and explanation of the institutional purpose of the test, along with sample topics, sample essays, and evaluations of those essays to help clarify the assessment process. Unfortunately, given the large number of schools involved, the Testing Committee cannot guarantee that students preparing for this exam receive this information. Moreover, the relatively low percentage of students who will attend UC may make the Subject A examination of low priority for most teachers.

Unresolved Problems

As careful and progressive as the UC model is, it does not calm all our fears. There is still the issue of the efficacy of a timed exam, the questions about equality and fairness for students who simply do not perform well under time pressure. Moreover, if it is impossible for this test to drive curriculum (since not all high school students plan to attend UC), there is the danger that students may feel this writing task has little or no connection to their high school courses. And questions concerning how cultural diversity affects interpretation of and response to the topic remain. To deal with these problems, many of the UC campuses have developed

articulation programs with local high schools. Because these programs originated at the grass roots level, they differ in size, design, and execution. UC Santa Barbara's effort began as an informal experiment with one local high school in 1984; we now include ten area high schools and reach 1,250 students.

As director of this preparatory program, my primary concerns have been to explore the pedagogical possibilities of written assessment and to profit from the knowledge gained in the epistemology of practice. Merely telling students what the exam requires and how it is assessed, what the topic means, what readers are looking for, and how the levels are differentiated on the scoring guide does not guarantee that test takers will interpret the writing task within the parameters intended by test designers. Under pressure, these things sound like jargon, like generalized statements that have little or no direct connection to test takers or their individual styles of writing.

Kathryn R. Fitzgerald reminds us just how disconcerting the notions of purpose and perception of audience become for students in a testing situation. Although test designers strive to supply students with an "intrinsic" goal—conveying individual discoveries or thoughts about a given subject—students cannot easily dismiss the institutional or "external" purpose of the exam: determining "the level of the writing course at which students begin their college instruction" (62). Understandably, the institutional purpose colors a student's perception of the audience evaluating the essay. J. Hoetker discovered that attempts to posit a nonthreatening readership (for example, a friend, family member, or peer) had little effect: "Most students, regardless of what role they are asked to assume or what audience they are asked to imagine, write for what they imagine is their real audience—hypercritical English teachers" (qtd. in Ruth and Murphy 150).

For such students, the examination context in and of itself precludes any notion of fairness in testing: the professionals have expert knowledge of grammar, rhetoric, and the subject at hand; the student must prove mastery of all three under severe time constraints in order to be judged successful. Roger Shuy's claim that this is akin to asking people to "walk on a slippery pavement with a broken toe and high-heeled shoes" seems particularly apt for those who find it impossible to meet the conflicting demands inherent in the duality of purpose (qtd. in Ruth and Murphy 83). Narrowing the gap means entering the classroom and allowing students the opportunity to participate in the process.

This has led to a profitable collaboration with the teachers of high school composition and has done much to mitigate the onerous

effects that testing can have. Although our "institutional purpose" is to inform the students about the Subject A exam in order to improve their performance, our "intrinsic purpose" is to clarify for ourselves the qualities of good writing, to exchange ideas about how best to teach the process of composition, to build student confidence, and to establish for ourselves and the students a sense of continuity between high school and university composition.

The 1989 Subject A exam indicated that these student-centered issues had a special significance for students of color. At UCSB, although 50% of those tested fail the Subject A exam, only 30% of the mainstream population are held for English 1, while 70% of the minority population are held for this skills-sharpening course. (There are several causes for this disparity: some of the mainstream students are exempted from English 1 on the basis of standardized tests, others take classes to fulfill the requirement before they enter UCSB.) We wished to insure that students traditionally excluded from such projects would receive the benefits of individual assessment and personal contact with a UCSB instructor and to diminish, if possible, the problems inherent in cultural diversity. To meet this goal, we chose schools that had a high minority enrollment: of 1989's participants, 42% were students of color.

Preparatory Test Design and Administration

Because we emphasize instruction, we test high school juniors who will have time to apply what they have learned from assessment and revision. To familiarize them with the Subject A exam format, we use the same test directions and a topic that employs the language, grammatical structure, and rhetorical demands of the official exam. High school teachers administer the test in accordance with the procedures established by ETS. The major difference between the two testing situations is the time alloted for student response: in the official exam, students have two hours to respond; in the practice exam, they have one academic class period—fifty minutes. To compensate, UCSB's Testing Committee adapts a passage that has been used previously by the Subject A Committee, shortening it by half.

Assessment of Preparatory Exam

To provide students with a clear sense of how their essays would be judged in the official scoring sessions, readers use the UC Scoring Guide as the basis for holistic assessment. They do not make allowances for the shorter time limit or the fact that the essayists are

high school juniors. To end the assessment process there, would exacerbate the very problems we are trying to solve: we would simply have a high failure rate, which would destroy student confidence, and send a message to the schools that their methods are not working, at least according to UC standards. Instead, the readers, who teach the sequence of composition courses at UCSB and participate in the UC scoring sessions, comment on these papers as they would a draft submitted in a composition course, focusing on what the students do well and what they can do to improve. For example, if the essay reveals the writer froze during the test and could produce no more than a paragraph, the readers identify the strengths in the limited response and then suggest prewriting techniques that will get the student started. With a more complete response, the reader usually suggests revision strategies that will enable the student to develop or sharpen the argument. We then choose sample essays illustrating a range of scores to use in conjunction with the prompt and UC Scoring Guide as a basis for class discussion.

Promoting Understanding of the Prompt

In their guidelines for test design, Ruth and Murphy maintain that designers can begin to assert control over testing variables by openly acknowledging their impact and the limitations of the testing instrument. Fitzgerald and Esch take this a step further in their efforts to inform students of the logic and mechanics of the testing process. But I would suggest that we can only succeed when we allow students to assume some of the responsibility. We can do so by having students bring their concerns—i.e., the hidden variables—to light. If we permit students to identify and voice their fears and we openly discuss which of these are legitimate or unfounded, they may be able to exert greater control over the rhetorical situation. At the very least, it would help to narrow the distance between test designers and test takers, since students would be less likely to misread cues, to view them as threats or strictures, or to struggle to find the "hidden message" buried deep within the prompt. Consequently, we spend a good portion of our class discussion determining what views of audience and purpose students held prior to the practice exam and assessing their validity.

Class discussions illustrate the truth behind Ruth and Murphy's statement that "even when the instructions appear to be clearly written," students may misinterpret the cues; even "a single word may mislead the students" (9). The Subject A Committee provided a one-sentence summary of the excerpt from Sissela Bok's *Lying:*

Moral Choice in Public and Private Life and then asked students "What do you think about the position she takes here?" Some participants in the practice exam had a difficult time deciphering the purpose of the writing task. A few thought they should defend her right to adopt a position, her right to voice her views. Others believed—despite being encouraged to "draw on your reading, personal experience, or observation of others to develop your essay"—that they should simply analyze the validity of the single example Bok provided as a way to meet the restriction of "here." For some, then, the instructions elicited a very general response, while others felt severely restricted. A discussion of sample essays clarifies for students the dual task required by the Subject A Committee—comprehension of the subject (which often necessitates a brief summary of the passage) and the ability to illustrate their understanding by applying the author's insights to specific examples of their own choosing.

Promoting Understanding of Audience

Bombarded by standardized tests that require right answers and specific knowledge, students too often assume that institutions want right answers and certain facts. Although the topic permits them to either agree or disagree with the author, many believe that only one of these stances is appropriate. Since the passages provide a general insight into the human condition, they have a very difficult time deciding which stance is right. Do they dare disagree with Bok? Or is Bok looked down upon by university professors? And although the topic invites students to choose their own examples, many mistakenly believe that our only concern is to determine whether or not they can summarize the passage with grammatical precision, that we cannot possibly take seriously their ideas when we have an "expert's" view at hand.

Promoting Self-esteem Through Prewriting Techniques

Despite the test designers' efforts to control the variables of prior knowledge, social context, and cultural diversity in their choice of subject, many students falter when they encounter specific words or allusions in a passage, fearing that they lack the necessary information to successfully meet the writing task. In 1988, we used a passage from C. S. Lewis approved by the UC Subject A Committee in which he alludes to the Nazi surrender. Those who knew little or nothing about this historic event began their writing task with a sense of defeat: in 1989, students who had little interest

in politics believed it was impossible to pass an exam which required them to analyze Bok's insights into public lying.

These responses support Hoetker's premise that most students write for hypercritical English teachers. Indeed, when asked to describe their readers, they paint portraits of detached, tweedy men, or myopic, tense women hunched over the essays with red pen in hand. Defining the test's purpose in practical terms does much to allay their fears. Once they realize it is to the institution's economic benefit to pass as many students as possible, they breathe a bit easier. A discussion of the Scoring Guide and sample essays helps clarify for students the dual task required by the Subject A Committee—comprehension of the subject (which often necessitates a brief summary of the passage) and the ability to illustrate their understanding by applying the author's insights to specific examples of their own choosing. A review of the language of the Scoring Guide confirms that assessors are encouraged to view these exams as drafts. We then discuss passing essays that challenge or support the author's views and note that these pass despite minor surface errors. This enables students to picture a more sympathetic, open-minded audience.

More importantly, we design the classroom presentation to meet the pedagogical goal of showing students how to gain control of the exam through linking it to the writing process. The first step is to permit students to discover for themselves just how much knowledge they have and to validate their responses. We have the students read the passage aloud and identify the major points of the argument. We circle the abstract terms the author employs—such as truth, or justice, or morality—and note how these terms are qualified or defined in the passage. The class brainstorms examples of how these general ideas work in light of their own observations—and we stress that all types of examples are acceptable.

To get them started, we suggest that one way to explore the topic is to ask how it applies in their daily lives, their school, their community, their nation. Some offer concrete illustrations based on personal experience of family or school interaction. Others suggest situations they've heard on the news or refer to movies and rock musicians. This leads to another way to generate ideas. Since the topic asks about their reading, we ask if their history, political science, or literature courses offer any examples. This, in fact, ties the test to curriculum and provides a framework for the topic. And the collective brainstorming produces multicultural illustrations which serve to validate the diverse experience and knowledge of underrepresented students.

Once they realize that they are not bound to the facts offered in

the passage and that the test is not discipline-specific, students discover that they have more than ample knowledge to handle the writing requirement. Within 20–30 minutes, the passage is outlined and the board is covered with concrete examples that both support or challenge the author's insights. When asked how long it would take them to write an essay after they have generated examples and established a stance, the estimates range from a half-hour to an hour. As a result, the time limitations seem less burdensome, even reasonable.

This prewriting exercise addresses many of the central problems in testing, and its significance lies in the fact that the students themselves discover solutions that will work for them. Those who tend to freeze up in timed-writing now have a way to get started, to get ideas down fast; those who have a tendency to focus on a minor point of the argument now have a method to insure that they will identify the central concerns of the passage; and those who respond with mere summary or vague, unsupported generalizations gain confidence that they have sufficient knowledge to do well on the test. They agree that discovering what you want to write as you are trying to produce clean, precise prose is a near-impossible task. Prewriting transforms the enterprise into a process, familiar and doable.

Promoting Confidence through Sample Essays and Revision

Perhaps because tests so often define "failure," classes easily recognize a sample essay's weaknesses yet have very little to say about its strengths. But when asked to offer suggestions on how to improve the argument, they point out what works in the essay, what they like and do not want to see thrown out. As we praise certain aspects of the writing, students learn to look at these "tests" in a new way. What is done well is just as important—if not more important—than the flaws, for it shows the writer's ability to successfully convey ideas. Finally, with their knowledge of the testing purpose, students offer cogent and specific advice on how the essayist can earn a higher score.

Ending the program there would underscore the notion that the placement test is a one-shot proposition, one that prohibits "the unfolding of a natural process of conception, development, revision, and editing" (Ruth and Murphy 241). Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff suggest that the single writing sample has detrimental effects for teachers and students alike, that it may "undermine good teaching by sending the wrong message about the writing process: that proficient writing means having a serious topic sprung on you (with

no chance for reading, reflection, or discussion) and writing one draft (with no chance for sharing or feedback or revising."[4] The artificial nature of such an enterprise is immediately apparent. In the real world, none of us ever submits an unedited, unrevised first draft to an audience, and few of us submit a product that has not been reviewed and commented on by at least one reader.

Therefore, we encourage students to consider the written comments on their exams, the new ideas generated by collaborative brainstorming, and the insights gained through discussion of the sample essays and to then "re-view" their responses. Their teachers give them the opportunity to rethink the topic and rewrite their papers, to transform an underdeveloped or incoherent response into a competent essay that will meet the requirements of university discourse outlined in class discussion. One teacher noted the benefits of revision for "a C−/D student, who wrote only one paragraph during the test time. The rewrite was excellent—by far the best thing she has done this semester." If we must employ the single writing sample in assessment, it is necessary to provide students with the opportunity to discover what rhetorical demands the placement test shares with other writing tasks. Revision may not only help students identify successful rhetorical strategies, but practice may also make it easier for them to employ these strategies in a timed situation.

Student Response to Assessment

Once assured that the purpose of placement is not to punish bad writing but to determine what skills students have and those they may still need to develop to meet the demands of university-level discourse, students view both the exam and "failure" in a new light. Their teachers report that the individual attention provided by university readers encourages students to take their own writing more seriously and that the focus on the potential in their writing helps to boost their confidence and raise their expectations of what is possible. We believe that this is particularly important for underrepresented students: the direct, personal response indicates that the university views them as valued participants in the academic community.[5]

The statistics indicate that student confidence is well-founded. In 1986, we offered this preparatory program to five high schools and an early exemption Subject A test to seven high schools. Those tested included high school juniors and seniors: 48% of the students who participated in the preparatory program improved their scores by at least one numerical point; 43.4% moved from a

failing score to a passing score. The pass rate for these students was 40%; the pass rate for those who took the Subject A exam cold was significantly lower: 27%.

Two negatives of the Preparatory Program free us from the usual dangers of how our test results are used: Not all students who participate plan to attend UC, and schools cannot afford to change their curricula to serve the needs of some at the expense of others: the scores are not used in assigning grades and have no effect on how students are assessed when they take the official Subject A exam. Consequently, once we identify the skills the Subject A exam deems necessary for university writing, our attention shifts to successful ways to develop these skills.

We explore ways to adapt the program to the individual campuses and have experimented with videotape, including high school teachers in the assessment process, and including school administrators in class presentation. As several articles in *The Freshman Year Experience* attest, this can have significant impact on the recruitment and retention of underrepresented students. For example, Manuel J. Justiz and Laura I. Rendon maintain that while high school faculty "have vague notions about what is expected of college students . . . [colleges] do little in the way of coordinating efforts to help schools do a better job at educating minority students." They suggest one step toward bridging the gap would be to have college faculty "talk to faculty, counselors, and administrators about specific skills and content prerequisites they require of incoming freshmen."[6] We find the Subject A exam provides a springboard for such discussions. We also meet with teachers to discuss ways to use these materials to generate discussions on good writing, ways to strengthen the links between high school and college composition, and ways to aid those students who have traditionally been excluded from universities. As a result, the practice test becomes a part of the process and not an end in and of itself.

This collaborative effort affirms that teaching composition is an ongoing enterprise. The students discover that UCSB corroborates much of what they have been learning about the composition process as they hear echoed in the reader's comments the suggestions and encouragement provided for them throughout the semester. Teachers welcome an outside voice that confirms their writing advice, as their students gain a new appreciation of the attention they receive from a familiar source. Because the high school teachers share their reading and writing assignments and their pedagogical techniques, my colleagues and I have a better understanding of our incoming students. These collaborative

methods help to dispel the myth that some students perpetuate and that some of us at the college level all too quickly accept: "My high school teacher didn't teach us anything." A very real benefit of this program is that it provides a clear picture of just what *is* being done to prepare students for university writing. UCSB lecturers end the project with a deeper appreciation of the quality of high school teaching.

Summary

This exchange means that the UCSB Preparatory Program continues to evolve as we try to find new ways to apply what knowledge we gain in the epistemology of practice. By working with the teachers who prepare these students, by providing students with specific feedback to their essays, by meeting with students to discuss their performance, and by providing the opportunity for revision, we not only send a clearer message about purpose and audience, but we enable students and teachers alike to participate in a pedagogical enterprise. Although we have only begun to explore the complicated issues inherent in addressing the needs of California's ethnically diverse student population and the issue of a single-sample, timed response, we believe we have discovered profitable avenues to follow in our attempts to make testing fairer and to turn placement into pedagogy. The literature and ongoing dialogue reveal that change in assessment has begun, for the most part, at the grass roots level and has had a profound effect on those who design testing programs. By sharing successful strategies, we can hold the ground we've gained and minimize the dangers for both our students and ourselves.

Notes

[1] Ruth and Murphy, 247. Marie Jean Lederman concurs: "testing, which should be an outgrowth of and subordinate to curriculum, in reality often drives curriculum," 44.

[2] Ruth and Murphy, 275. The many researchers who have focused on the issues of under- and overcueing and how both affect student performance have provided vital information about the ways in which students respond to the phrasing of a topic. For example, we know that when the topic is too generalized, too "free-floating," some students have difficulty obtaining a focus, locating a thesis, and constructing an argument. Yet, if the instructions are too specific—demanding either a strictly personal response

or requiring a paraphrase and support of the author's view, and/or requiring such tasks be met in a predetermined number of words or paragraphs—students are equally inhibited. Creative and critical thinkers alike feel hamstrung, forced to produce a formulaic essay that prohibits intellectual dialogue, authentic voice, or sophisticated rhetorical development. Still much work remains, since "the formal literature of educational testing says little about the actual working of topics: We have mainly anecdotal information from veteran essay examiners . . . but even very little of this . . . is available in the more accessible professional publications. It still remains to be gleaned, collated, synthesized from myriad sources" (Ruth and Murphy, 281).

3 At the University of Utah, the administrators of the test explain the levels of freshman writing courses and the assessment criteria to students before they begin writing (Fitzgerald, 63). To quiet resistance to the exit exam, the testing committee at University of Texas, El Paso proposed a *Guidebook*—similar to UC's Subject A Examination Booklet—which explained test format and time constraints, discussed the subject matter of the questions, and provided sample topics (Esch, 16).

4 "Portfolios As A Substitute For Proficiency Examinations," 336. As early as 1982, Janet Emig identified the false nature of and the faulty assumptions behind the single writing sample. She maintains that accepting the results of such tests indicates that evaluators believe that a student can "write in that specific mode . . . on any subsequent occasion" or "in any mode" and that this reflects the belief that "language is a fixed phenomenon." She is concerned about "decisions . . . made on the basis of this one sample that affect placement in a course, a college career, or, indeed, a full human nature" (Ruth and Murphy, 240).

5 In *Minorities on Campus: A Handbook for Enhancing Diversity*, Madeleine F. Green suggests that feedback which goes beyond "grades on tests and papers, and comments in the margins" is crucial for minority students. She concludes, "if delivered constructively, criticism can help students understand areas in which they need to improve and leave them feeling positive and motivated," 140. In his recent article, "Getting In," Louis C. Attinasi, Jr. stresses the importance of such articulation programs or "simulative experiences" for nontraditional students who lack knowledge about "college-going behaviors and attitudes," 258.

6 Justiz and Rendon, 271. See also Augustine W. Pounds' "Black Students" in the same volume and Attinasi's "Getting In," 247–77. The controversy over the proposed junior-level exit exam at the UT, El Paso, reflects the problematic nature of cultural diversity in single writing samples and timed testing. Robert Esch records that "the primary objection" to an exit exam came "from all quarters—including students, faculty, and community leaders," who believed an exit exam would be "yet another impediment to the educational advancement of Hispanics." Consequently, the program was cancelled in favor of promoting pedagogical strategies in the writing-across-the-curriculum program, 16.

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NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Council of Writing Program Administrators is currently accepting proposals for its 1991 research grants. Several small grants (up to $1,000) will be awarded for research relating specifically to the concerns of writing program administrators. Proposals should not exceed four single-spaced typed pages and should describe the research problem and objectives, research procedures, time-line, and budget. Researchers planning surveys may include in their proposal the free use of the WPA mailing list. Deadline is November 16, 1990 (an extension is possible upon request). Send proposal *and two copies* to: Prof. Karen Greenberg, Chair, WPA Grant Committee, Dept. of English, Hunter College, CUNY, 695 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021.

CBW: The Conference on Basic Writing, a special interest group of CCCC for teachers and researchers who work with basic writers, invites memberships: $5 for one year, $9 for two years, or $12 for three years. Included is a free subscription to CBW's *Newsletter*, published twice a year. Contact: Peter Adams, English Dept., Essex Community College, Baltimore, MD. 21237.

CALL FOR PAPERS: Western Ohio Journal's 1991 issue will have as its theme "Minority Literature: Definitions, Applications, Concerns, and Opportunities." Articles, poems, and reviews will be featured. Teachers can also submit classroom narratives for an idea exchange section. Manuscripts not related to the theme, previously published material, black-and-white drawings and cartoons will also be considered. Deadline: January 15, 1991. Submissions to: Western Ohio Journal, c/o James Brooks, Sinclair Community College, 444 West Third Street, Dayton, OH 45402.

The 14th annual conference of **CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors (CAWS)** will take place Friday, October 26, 1990 at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY, 445 West 59 Street, New York, NY 10019. The conference theme will be "The Challenges of Diversity," and the keynote speaker will be Professor Patricia Bizzell, College of the Holy Cross. Information about this year's conference and about printed abstracts of the proceedings of the last three conferences ($1 each) may be obtained from Professor Ben Hellinger of the College's English Dept.

Journal of Advanced Composition (JAC) announces the following awards: The James L. Kinneavy Award for the most outstanding essay of 1989 published in *JAC* goes to David Bleich for "Genders of Writing," an expansion of the notion of genre using feminist perspectives. Susan Miller wins the first annual W. Ross Winterowd Award for the most outstanding book on composition theory, *Rescuing the Subject: A Critical Introduction to Rhetoric and the Writer* (Southern Illinois UP, 1989); and Charles Bazerman gets honorable mention for *Shaping Written Knowledge: the Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science* (U of Wisconsin P, 1988). Send nominations for the 1990 W. Ross Winterowd Award by January 1991 to Gary A. Olson, Editor, Journal of Advanced Composition, Dept. of English, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620.

Regional Language Centre (RELC) of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), will hold its Regional Seminar on "Language Acquisition and the Second/ Foreign Language Classroom" in Singapore, April 22–26, 1991. For further details on participation and submission of papers, write to The Director (Att.: Seminar Secretariat), SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, 30 Orange Grove Rd., Singapore 1025.

OMISSION: In our last issue, Spring 1990, the biographical note for Donald A. McAndrew, author of "Handwriting Rate and Syntactic Fluency" gave his title as professor in the Rhetoric and Linguistics graduate program but omitted the name of his institution, Indiana University of Pennsylvania. We regret this omission.

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