Plymouth State College Journal on Writing Across the Curriculum

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Editorial Board

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On Becoming a Composition Student
by Robert S. Miller

As part of my sabbatical work during the fall 1993 semester, I took the course EN 120 Composition with Meg Peterson-Gonzalez. I did this because I wanted to become a writing teacher. Imagine my surprise, when I became a writer instead.

In the past several years as I have gotten deeply involved in our WAC program, now as its coordinator, I have become increasingly interested in the related questions of how students develop as writers and how writing teachers help them do so. These questions are actually psychological ones, and so it seemed appropriate to me, in applying for sabbatical leave from the Psychology Department, to make them the focus of my proposal. Taking the course EN 120 was not originally a part of the proposal, however. That came about almost accidentally.

One day last spring I was talking to Barbara Blaha in the Reading/Writing Center, where I volunteer as a writing consultant. We were discussing different methods of writing facilitation. I decided to take the risk of confiding to her a secret desire I had recently developed. "You know," I said, "what I'd really like to do some semester is teach a section of Composition." She did laugh, but not as hysterically as I had feared she might. In fact, she made an encouraging and supportive suggestion: that I audit the course before I try teaching it. Not a bad point. It had, after all, been 28 years since I'd taken a composition course. It just might help to brush up.

I realized the upcoming sabbatical would be the time to do this. I asked Barbara who the best composition teachers were. Later I asked Sally Boland and Roy Andrews the same question. One of the names that was on everyone's list was

Meg Peterson-Gonzalez. Getting into the student role right away, I rushed to the *Time and Room Schedule* to see whether her section of the course had a desirable meeting time. It did, which I took as a signal from the Divine that I should enroll.

Meg hesitated only momentarily. I know the dilemma— it's not the easiest thing to have a faculty member taking your class. I told her I would play whatever role would make her most comfortable: passive observer to full participant. She quickly declared that the only way I would get anything out of this experience would be to do the same writing as the students. I told Meg I was sure I could pass for an 18-year old freshman. She did laugh hysterically. I decided, therefore, I would try to pass as a nontraditional student.

I planned to do all the assignments, but as the course started, I was still thinking that I was really there to observe. Everyone said how good Meg was. I'd been told she used the process approach, which I expected would contrast with the approach I vaguely remembered in Freshman Composition at Amherst College 28 years ago. I had heard that Meg ran Composition as a writing workshop. That would be new to me. I went into the course planning to watch carefully and see how this woman worked her magic. I never expected she'd work it on me.

The evening after the first class meeting, I wrote a lengthy entry in my personal journal recording several initial reactions to the course. First, I was much impressed with how involved Meg got us that first day. She had us freewrite about writing, divided us into groups to discuss what we had written, and then led a full-class discussion which was remarkably lively. Second, I was surprised to discover how ill at ease I was in the nontraditional student role. I kept having to hold myself back. I wanted to answer every question. In my small group, I couldn't help being the leader, even though I tried not to be.

But the strongest reaction was to the syllabus, which Meg

distributed near the end of the meeting. In my journal I wrote:

Then she distributed the syllabus and discussed the course. From the student side of the room I was much more aware, than I am as instructor, of how much tension suddenly filled the place. Some of it was mine. The idea of having to turn in five pages of writing every Thursday is scary. Though I suspect freedom to choose topics is good, I immediately experienced my old What-will-I-write-about? panic.

I realize now that my reaction to the syllabus hints at how real the student role was to become for me, but for a while longer I clung to the security of thinking of myself as an infiltrator from the faculty, there to observe how to teach writing.

In the next week I wrote additional journal entries, each about what Meg was doing to make the course like a workshop. On Tuesdays we were to spend about half the class in our five-person discussion groups talking about pieces of writing we had read, and the other half writing or reading each other's drafts. On Wednesdays each of us had a scheduled 10-minute individual conference with Meg to discuss whatever we were writing to turn in on Thursday. Thursdays were to begin with an opportunity to read to the class the pieces we were turning in, and to end with a lesson usually based on assigned reading in Murray's *Write to Learn,* which was the text for the course.

That first week I wrote about how skillfully Meg was drawing the students into each of these experiences. Meanwhile I was keeping to myself, trying to maintain a low profile in class, and brooding about what I would write about. The workshop model made me decide my audience for these pieces was the other students in the class. Therefore I didn't want to write about anything that would reveal my true

identity as a faculty member. I particularly didn't want to write about my real reason for taking
the course. So obsessed was I with that thought that, of course, it ended up being my chosen topic for the first paper.

Boy, did that paper suck! My conflict about the topic came through in every paragraph. I am much impressed with how encouraging Meg managed to be in the comment she wrote: "The voice is unified and the tone consistent. . .the piece is very accessible to a lay audience." She did, however, admit confusion as a reader: "I found myself arguing with the piece. . . I wasn't sure how serious you were being." And, of course, that was exactly the problem. Meg wasn't sure as a reader, because I wasn't sure as a writer. I needed a new topic.

At the end of one of my first-week journal entries is the single
sentence,"Maybe I should write about Cliff Conant." The second week I decided to do so.

That decision was a turning point for me in the course, and I wish I could remember all the factors that contributed to it. One was that the first week Meg read her own piece (she does the same writing she asks of the students), and it was based on a personal experience. Another was that in my first conference with Meg, we talked about how personal writing can be therapeutic, if it is honest. And another was that our first lesson had been to think of writing as storytelling. I had a personal story to tell about Cliff Conant, and I suspected doing so might be therapeutic.

It was a challenging assignment I set for myself: telling a complicated story, pieces of which were spread out over a period of 25 years, a story that could easily be sentimentalized. I had known Cliff Conant in college. We had had a brief, but intense, friendship.   I had lost track of him until I read two years ago in the *Amherst Alumni News* that he had died of AIDS. The obituary hinted that he had led a conflicted and lonely life. This summer I had found copies of letters I wrote

to Cliff right after college. They had made me realize now, as I don't think either of us had then, that we had been in love. Each too conflicted about our sexuality to act on what we were feeling, we had simply drifted apart. Finding those letters had thrown me into a state of regret and grief that was still ongoing the first weeks of Composition.

I put the story through about five drafts, working on it several hours a day for several days. Writing about this deeply personal matter, but for an audience I did not know very well, somehow made me consciously aware of my writing process. I began to notice, as I wrote, what I was doing, what worked, and what didn't. Meg had told me in conference that the secret of good writing is honesty. I tried to reduce the Cliff story to what I knew was true. That seemed to keep me away from sentimentality, and I discovered when I was done that I understood the story in a way I had not when I began. Furthermore, I liked what I had written. So did Meg. So did the two students who read it the day Meg asked us to circulate something for others to read.

I realized I had other stories to tell, other matters to resolve. Meg encouraged me to continue with this kind of personal writing, and as I did so, her honest, open responses to what I was writing—what worked for her, what didn't, what questions remained—helped me focus and revise. So did the feedback I got from Nancy Hill and Roy Andrews at the Reading/Writing Center, where I occasionally took an early draft. Over the next several weeks, I wrote a series of papers that together constitute my coming-out story as a gay man. I found myself spending two to three hours a day writing. After weekends when I left town and therefore my word processor, I found myself hurrying home to write.

One day it occurred to me with stunning suddenness that it had been four weeks since I had written in my journal about what Meg was doing in the Composition course. It had been

that long since I had really noticed. Just a week into the course I had abandoned my observer role and had become a student. My focus had shifted from the question of how to teach writing to the question of how to write.

It took a while longer, however, for me to feel fully integrated into the writing workshop the class was meant to be. I was at first reluctant to share the coming-out pieces with the first-year students. Learning to trust them enough to do so was complicated by the fact that eight weeks into the course, I was still trying for acceptance as a nontraditional student and hiding my identity as a faculty member. However, during the ninth week one of my classmates finally asked me who I really was, and once I had answered his question honestly, word quickly got out. I noticed I was more warmly accepted as a faculty member than I had been as a nontraditional student, but that may have been because I was more comfortable not having to keep the secret.

The next week I decided to get rid of my other secret as well. We were discussing a short piece Meg had assigned us to read. It was a gay man's account of the development of his awareness of AIDS. I told the class, "I relate strongly to this story, because it is my story too." I know nothing quite so liberating as the sound of the closet door slamming behind me. The next week I circulated one of my coming-out pieces and got supportive and helpful responses from my fellow student writers. At last I was a member of the workshop.

My experience in Meg Peterson-Gonzalez's course was one of becoming. I became a student. I became a member of the writing workshop. I became a writer. I became aware of my writing process and of the fact that writers must be honest.

My process of becoming was well underway by mid-semester when we submitted portfolios to Meg for evaluation: our three best polished pieces, plus supporting materials. That week our individual conferences expanded to 30 minutes. During these Meg discussed with each of us our writing processes and our goals for the rest of the semester. When she asked me my goal, I replied without hesitation, "To write fiction." I had long harbored a secret desire to contribute to

Buffy, Elvis, and Introductory Psychology: Two Characters in Search of a Dialogue
by David Zehr and Kathleen Henderson

Introduction
by David Zehr

Few students enrolled in an introductory psychology course ever become professional psychologists. And realistically, only a small percentage of psychology majors end up employed in psychologically-oriented professions. For that simple reason many students often fail to see the relevance of learning about research methods. In the introductory course students want to learn about, among other things, deviant behavior, altered states of consciousness, and psychotherapy. I've yet to encounter a student who comes to introductory psychology drooling over the prospect of discussing internal validity, falsifiability, and the differences between experimental and correlational research. "Why do we need to know this stuff?'' and "I'll never use this" are questions and statements I hear every semester. I usually counter by saying that every student is a decision maker, and that by learning about research methods one can become a better decision maker. At this point their incredulous stares suggest that I need to be a bit more explicit, so I ask them to consider the following scenarios:

A friend tells you that the son of a friend committed suicide after listening to heavy metal rock music. Your daughter loves heavy metal. What do you do?

A member of a Presidential Commission reports that pornography causes rape. You find a *Playboy* magazine under

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your son's bed. Will he rape?

A magazine article reports that working mothers are more likely to raise behaviorally troubled children than women who stay home. You work and are thinking of starting a family. Should you quit your job?

I encourage them to admit that before they'd censor records, burn magazines, or give up a promising career they'd seek more information, evaluate it, and then arrive at a decision regarding the best course of action. Every one seems to realize, that yes, one needs to know what information is pertinent, what its source is, who's disseminating it, and whether it is valid. After my lengthy verbal exhortation about how research can help answer these sorts of questions, students admit that maybe knowledge of research methods could benefit them in some way. At this point in time I claim victory in a skirmish, but still face an uphill battle: getting students to see how research can be relevant in their own personal experiences and getting them to master often difficult and dry material.

Developing Writing Assignments

When I began teaching introductory psychology I knew that I needed to create assignments that would help my students better understand research methods, for without that foundation much of the content matter is difficult to master. It was apparent from prior experience that merely lecturing about methodology did little more than encourage them to memorize information that might be seen on an upcoming exam, and I wanted them to be able to think clealy about methodological issues and apply what they had learned. So, to supplement my lectures on the topic I began to develop writing assignments that I assumed would induce the critical analysis that I sought.

One of my first assignments was based upon a supplementary reader. Students were asked to read both sides of some controversial issue in psychology, for example, is psychotherapy effective, or, can attitudes affect recovery from illness. They were then asked to write a paper identifying strengths and weaknesses of the two arguments. It was my expectation that they'd see right through major flaws, of which there were many, e.g., drawing causal inferences from correlational data, or generalizing findings from biased samples.

Did the assignment work? Of course not! Students read both sides of the issues, but their papers were, for me, a major disappointment. Invariably they'd write papers praising the side of the issue they agreed with initially, while disparaging the opposing viewpoint no matter the merits of its supporting evidence. I was learning a lot about my students' attitudes toward controversial issues in psychology, but they weren't learning a darn thing about research methodology and its relevance to their lives; I subsequently adopted a different supplementary reader.

The new reader promised that it would help students "think straight" about psychology. It promised to explain how science is done, how science is different from pseudosciences, and how one could avoid pitfalls in evaluating the flood of information we are confronted with daily in the mass media. Those are pretty hefty promises and I suspected from my experience with the first supplemental text that merely reading the book was not going to do the trick. So once again I sat down to devise an appropriate writing assignment based on the reading. My initial attempts were less successful than envisioned. I'd assign certain chapters for students to read, then I'd ask them to do something along the following lines: identify ten important concepts from your reading, define the terms, and write a short paper telling me where you see these

principles illustrated in "real life." That's an oversimplification of the assignment but it does give you a sense of what the students were up against. Oh sure, every semster I tried something a little bit new, but it was always the same assignment in different clothing, and I was therefore chronically depressed when I did the grading. All of the papers sounded the same. Students didn't really seem to understand a lot of what they were reading, and therefore couldn't even begin to explain the relations between methodological issues and the outside world. For example, the idea that a good theory is one that is falsifiable was problematic for many students. Upon hearing the term "falsifiable" they automatically assumed it meant a given theory was false, and therefore no good.

On sabbatical in the Spring of 1991, I spent time critically examining several of my courses. Looking at my experiences in introductory psychology I realized that my writing assignments were too directive and lacked meaning for the student. It was as if I was having the students do an intellectual scavenger hunt. Scavenger hunts are a fine form of entertainment but a lousy pedagogical tool. So it was back to the drawing board.

I'm not really sure where the idea came from, but one day I decided that I had to do something to allow the students to use their own unique talents in mastering the material; I had to do something less directive; and I had to do something that would allow me to assess whether students really understood the principles I wanted to convey. Then it hit me. I often adopt the personas of different characters in my classroom when I want to illustrate certain things. Acting out the material certainly gets students' attention, and they seem to remember those classes more than the ones that are straightforward lectures. And so I thought, if I can act out certain ideas, why couldn't the notion of acting be incorporated into my writing assignments?

Buffy and Elvis Make Their Debut

The assignment was short and direct. After reading their methodology text, students wrote plays incorporating the content into a dialogue. I provided two characters and a general theme. The characters were Buffy and Elvis, two students enrolled in an introductory psychology course. Buffy had read and loved her methodology text; Elvis had not read it and therefore not loved it. The theme was as follows: Elvis had just finished watching a TV show featuring Dr. Elmo Zehr (my evil twin), who made an incredible statement regarding human psychology. Elvis was duly impressed. Students were told to put the words in Dr. Zehr's mouth; they could write whatever they wanted but it did have to deal with psychology. They were further instructed to write a dialogue between Buffy and Elvis in which Buffy must convince Elvis, based upon her knowledge of methodology, that Dr. Zehr is a complete charlatan. Students were told that they could add additional characters, expand the setting, in essence, do whatever they wanted to do with the material and the characters.

Did the assignment work? I certainly think that it did. The play that appears at the end of this article is just one among many that induced copious tears of joy. To me it is quite clear that this student knows what the methodological concepts mean. I sense that the student found the assignment challenging and had fun doing it. From my vantage point as grader, this was one of the best things I ever did in a class. There was little ambiguity in assessing students' levels of knowledge, plus, each paper was different. When I have to grade 90 or so papers, variety helps. I also had little fear of students violating academic dishonesty norms; two students independently writing two identical plays would have been something that not even Elmo Zehr would foresee as possible.

Skip the Sauce and Hold the Jalapenos
by Kathleen Henderson
(a paper written for Dr. Zehr's Introductory Psychology
course)

Concepts (in order of appearance):

> breakthrough
> great leap
> converging evidence
> Einstein syndrome
> connectivity
> artificiality
> falsifiability
> replication
> "Man Who"
> single case

Scene: An under-maintained, over-priced student rental in
Plymouth. Buffy is at the kitchen table studying diligently
when her friend and fellow classmate, Elvis, bursts through
the door clutching a videotape.

Buffy [startled]: What are you doing here? I thought you had
a class?

Elvis [flushed with excitement]: I didn't go. I was too busy
recording this. [Fumbles with VCR] How do you work this
thing, anyway?

Buffy [somewhat put out, goes to the VCR and puts in the
tape]: I've got a lot of studying to do for that psych paper.
Have you even started the reading yet?

Elvis: When you see this tape you'll realize how unimportant

all that stuff is.

Buffy [rolling her eyes, sits next to him on the sofa]: This better be good, Elvis. I'm busy.

[TV recording starts.]

TV Announcer: And now, it's live with B.S. Daley! America's favorite talk show host!

Buffy: You didn't! You skipped class for B. S. Daley?

Elvis: This is the most monumental psychological break-through of our time. Listen to this!

B.S. Daley [with microphone in hand before the live audi-ence]: We are indeed fortunate to have with us as today's guest, America's most renowned psychologist to tell us of his revolutionary new method of psychoanalysis. Here he is, ladies and gentlemen—Dr. Elmo Zehr!

[Wild applause. Dr. Zehr enters stage and takes seat next to host.]

B.S. Daley: Dr. Zehr, I understand that your years of research have led to a startling new approach to psychoanalysis. Please tell us about it.

Dr. Zehr: The clinical term I've given my procedure is cuisinanalysis. It's the process of analyzing an individual according to what he or she eats.

B. S. Daley: Amazing, just amazing! Can you tell us how it works?

Dr. Zehr: Certainly. It's a well known and often stated fact that we are what we eat. Well, I've taken that concept one step further and actually studied the behavior patterns and personality traits of people who habitually choose certain types of food. In every instance, I obtained the same findings.

B.S. Daley: Can you elaborate on some of these findings?

Dr. Zehr: In a total departure from previously held beliefs about personality and behavior, I've discovered that the food people consume is really "telling all," as they say. For instance, those who always smother their food in sauces and gravies are actually suffering from feelings of insecurity. The sauces are like a—a security blanket for these people.

B.S. Daley: Of course. That makes perfect sense! Please tell us more.

Dr. Zehr: One discovery most people find particularly disturbing is related to the consumption of hot spicy foods. These people only eat those things when there's someone there to watch them. It's a desperate, almost masochistic attempt to get attention. And those who pile on the condiments—it's not an insult to the meatloaf, but a sign they're trying to hide something.

[Gasps from women in the audience.]

B. S. Daley: No wonder your research has catapulted you to the forefront of your field. Can we take a few questions from the audience now? Yes—you up there.

[Popping up from her chair like a coiled spring, a young rosy-cheeked co-ed waves at the camera.]

Co-ed: Yea, what about people who eat really gooood, like tofu and mineral water?

Dr. Zehr: Very interesting cases. Extremely deep feelings of guilt. This response represents a subconscious attempt to purify themselves—to cast off this guilt, so to speak.

Co-ed: Oooo, thanks. I guess.

B.S. Daley: Do we have another question?

[Overweight middle-aged man in very loud tight suit, slowly stands.]

Middle-aged man: Yea, doc. I'm a butcher, and I want to know about people who always come in and buy up all the organ meats—liver, kidneys, you know?

Dr. Zehr: Classic expression of self-hate.

Buffy [leaping up from the sofa and turning off the TV]: That's enough!

Elvis: No! No! There's more!

Buffy [thrusting the tape back into his hands]: Tell me you don't really believe this, Elvis. Please!

Elvis: Of course I do, and you would too if you'd listen to the rest of this tape.

Buffy [snatching her Stanovich text from the table and holding it before her like the cross before Dracula]: This, Elvis. This is what I believe!

Elvis: But this guy's for real! I mean, he even helped the FBI crack a murder case. They put him on a stake-out in a buffet line and he picked the guy out on his way back to the sausage and peppers!

Buffy [pulling out chair for Elvis]: Sit down, Elvis. We're going to talk.

Elvis: You're not going to read that thing to me?

Buffy [putting Stanovich aside]: No, I'm going to ask you something. Doesn't it seem odd to you that years of research by brilliant psychologists just got flung out the window by that—that—guy!

Elvis: He's a revolutionary. I mean, didn't Einstein startle people? And I bet you would have pulled the plug on him, too.

Buffy: Einstein didn't totally discredit the work of others who had also done some extremely worthwhile things. Maybe they weren't right on the money like he was, but it was all important. Real breakthroughs in science don't happen overnight. They build on what's already established.

Elvis: He's worked hard, too. Five years it took him! Hiding behind potted plants in restaurants, working the salad bar at Bonanza...

Buffy [interrupting]: What about controlled conditions?

Elvis [hostile]: I know what that means—a lab! You think he's a quack because he got his findings out in the real world and not some sterile lab with rats and buzzers and test tubes!

Buffy: Don't you see? None of his theories can be proven one way or another. Other researchers can't test his theories because they can't replicate his research.

Elvis: It doesn't take a scientist to see how right he is. I know a man who used to put sauces all over everything and then eat a jar of pickled jalapenos for dessert. And do you know what? He was abandoned as a child and no one ever noticed him. Isn't that just a bit amazing?

Buffy: That's a single case! How would you explain that millions of Mexican people eat spicy food all the time? Do you honestly think they're all starved for attention?

Elvis [momentarily subdued]: That's different. That's—culture.

Buffy: It's more than that, Elvis. It's multiple causation. His research is flawed. Not only that, but it's flawed research that has absolutely no commonality with any meaningful work that's ever been done in the field. Show me the converging evidence!

Elvis [sinking deeper in chair]: That tape is all the converging evidence I need. I mean, take me for instance. I bet after watching that tape you can tell a lot about me.

Buffy [scrutinizing him caustically]: You're right. You should stop eating scambled eggs and screwdrivers for breakfast!

[Buffy jumps up from the table and goes to the refrigerator. Elvis follows.]

Elvis: What are you doing?

Buffy: I'm going to have my lunch.

Elvis [breathless at the opportunity to obtain his own empirical evidence]: And just what might that be, may I ask?

Buffy: Breaded fishsticks.

Elvis: Wow, I wonder what that means?

Buffy [cutting frozen sticks apart with knife]: It means that I'm starved for protein and carbohydrates, and if Elvis doesn't get out of my apartment right now, he'll be dead for sure this time.

[The End]

Confessions of a "Bumpy Writer"
by Michelle Anne Fistek

As I was cleaning out my back room last summer, I stumbled
upon some of my old college papers. One in particular caught my
attention. It was a paper for a Diplomatic History class with
the late Dr. Kenneth Crosby at Juniata College in Huntingdon,
Pennsylvania. Dr. Crosby was famous for being a professor
who worked closely with his students, and from the amount of
red on my paper I can attest that he must have spent hours
grading student papers. Looking at this paper and his com-
ments made me begin to think about how I learned to write.
Had these red marks been helpful to me?

Another question that came to mind was, am I subjecting my
students to the same style of teaching? Conversations with
Robert Miller made me feel there must be a better way to help my
students with their writing than all those red marked pages.

I then attended Elaine Maimon's workshop in June and
many of my questions were answered. But first, let me go back
to my
college writing experiences to see why these red marks were
of so little help to me as a writer.

College Writing

The professors at Juniata required much written work. I
can't remember a class that did not require a paper. Classes
were demanding and challenging.

Despite all that writing, I have never enjoyed writing very much. I enjoy the research end of papers but the writing has always been torture for me.

My usual mode of writing a paper was (is?) to wait until the last possible minute to begin the composition of the paper. I would write out the first few pages, but then because of the snail's pace at which I type, would end up sitting in front of the typewriter "composing and typing" the last half of the paper. This would take all night long. Finally, I would read it over for typographical errors and make corrections. I always marveled at how I could reach the professor's door just seconds before the deadline. The paper would be deposited under the door, and I would hope to never see it again. Of course, I assured myself I worked best under pressure.

What, if anything was I learning about writing? Unfortunately, this style of writing was reinforced as professors rewarded me with A's and B's on all my papers. I never received many of those papers back, but when I did, I would find the grade and read the comments, which tended to perplex me rather than help. There was never the chance to revise any of the work I had submitted. As Elaine Maimon says, the professor was "the first
and last person" to ever read what I had written.

What were the comments which so perplexed me? On my paper for Dr. Crosby, "Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations," he wrote on the front, "B, The paper is certainly informative. You deserve credit for effort, too. You still need to work, though, on organization and composition. The writing is too bumpy— too uneven. Work on it!" What was I to do? How does one make one's writing less bumpy??? What on earth is "bumpy writing"? Although the comment was well-intentioned, it gave me no direction.

I even went to Dr. Crosby's office and he tried to help, but since he wasn't a bumpy writer, he couldn't quite figure out how to help me stop being one!

I think the sheer volume of writing I did in college helped me improve my writing skills. I found another paper I did a year after the League of Nations paper. It was much better organized and, I suppose, less bumpy. The paper was in a course I found to be much more challenging, and the topic was one of my own choosing, unlike the assigned topic in Dr. Crosby's course. The difference may have been that I found the paper more interesting and engaging.

As I review papers written in graduate school, I still find comments about the organization and style of my writing. So, what finally helped me to write better? I believe the change came when I began my dissertation.

The process of writing shifted tremendously as I wrote this document. Many people read drafts and made suggestions, and I was allowed to make revisions based on their comments. It was the first time I had a "work in progress." The comments were the comments one makes to colleagues rather than the comments which seem to justify the grade on a student's paper. They gave me suggestions about how to improve the document, they asked
questions if something wasn't clear, they challenged me to improve with each draft.

Professional Writing

My lessons in writing have continued as a professional. One of the best learning experiences I have had was in the writing of a chapter on interest groups in New Hampshire for a recently published book with my colleague Bob Egbert. We divided the writing duties and then came together to edit and revise the chapter. We had colleagues read the chapter and comment on it.

We again revised as their comments came in to us. Then we submitted a draft to the editors of the book, and they made comments. We revised. The editors had problems coordinat-

ing all of the authors for the book, so as time ticked away, our chapter became dated. We revised. Reviewers for the publisher made comments. We revised. Proofreaders made comments. We revised.

This is the writing process professionals use. We, as professional writers, don't send in first drafts as completed works, yet that's what most of our students do when they write papers.

I was never taught how professionals write until I worked on my dissertation. I could proofread and make some gram- matical corrections, but I never knew how to revise what I wrote. We were always warned to do our own work, so I was afraid to have friends "help" with papers. I didn't want to bore them to death, either.

The only examples I saw in my books were completed works, never works in progress. I despaired that my writing could never be that good. Perhaps our students despair that their writing will never be as good as the writing in the texts they read. I think we owe it to them to show how those texts and other professional pieces were written. The process is important. We must teach our students how our professions communicate ideas and research.

Peer Review: Modeling the Professional Writing Process

How do we teach our students to write as we do? I think one answer may be to create an environment which requires them to simulate the process we go through to have our writing published.

Elaine Maimon presented some wonderful ideas on this last June at the workshop she conducted for us. She gave examples of how her colleagues in a variety of disciplines adapted peer review techniques to fit the requirements of their own areas.

My Public Policy Analysis course is usually one of my

smaller classes, so I thought it might be a good place to try peer review. At the beginning of each new topic, I assigned an essay. The students brought their first drafts to class as a basis for class discussion. I added my own lecture material as we discussed the topic, and they revised their essays to incorporate this new information. After we covered three topics, I dedicated a 50-minute class to peer review. Students were given forms which asked them to think about what help they might need and then the reviewer answered these requests for help.

At the beginning of the first peer review session, we discussed the style of comments they should be making on each other's work. They were instructed not to rewrite other student's work. I used a series of models created by Roy Andrews of types of comments which are helpful in encouraging revision and those which discourage revision.

At the end of the semester, they had written and revised ten essays. They turned in a portfolio of all of the work they had done, and indicated which five essays they wanted graded.

The essays they wrote basically addressed the same kinds of essay questions I would have asked on exams. I feel, though, that they became so immersed in the information, by revising their own essays and by reading the essays of their peers, that this process may have been better than the traditional formal exam in helping them understand the material and remember it. They also had a paper to write on a topic of their choice and a presentation to give. The paper was subjected to peer review as well.

I believe that because of peer review the amount of learning increased on many levels. The students learned to revise their work along with learning the subject matter. They learned which comments were helpful to their writing process and which to ignore. They learned to make comments to others and that writing is not something you do without the

input of others. Roy Andrews and Robert Miller, who attended some of the peer review sessions, were also enthusiastic about the students' reactions and work. This has been an exciting experience to share with my students and colleagues!

I found the portfolios to be much easier to read than exams and their papers had fewer grammatical and spelling errors than usual. Their grades were comparable to classes in the past. Some really worked hard, others just did the minimum required. All of them discussed and thought about their writing processes extensively.

Student evaluations of the class were mixed. Several wanted to return to the exam format. I had problems with some students feeling that peer review days were days they could skip class. One of their biggest complaints was that they had no idea what their grade was until the last week of the semester. Most of them, however, were very excited and engaged by peer review, so I am encouraged! Many commented that they learned more about writing in this class than in their Writing class.

I am using this technique in another class this spring semester. Some changes were necessary, but I am pleased with the results from last semester. I have made attendance mandatory at peer review sessions for my class, and this time I am allowing them to turn in their portfolio for a preliminary grade before the due date. Though resistance to change is to be expected, I am convinced that peer review combined with portfolio evaluation is a valuable way to learn to write and write to learn. I wish my professors had used this approach when I was an undergraduate.

Shylock and Falstaff

by Flo Powell

When Dr. Vittum gave his Shakespeare 1 class a choice of one of three pairs of male characters for a critical essay, I chose Shylock and Falstaff. Shylock and Falstaff were grouped together because they both had been intended as comic characters. I took a personal interest in Shylock because, as a Jew myself, I found this reading of *The Merchant of Venice* very disturbing.

Twenty years ago when I encountered Shylock for the first time, I was, perhaps, too callow to respond adamantly to his character. This time I found that I was furious that he was portrayed as such a one-sided, wicked caricature. When I learned that Elizabethans had never really known any Jews, because the Jews had been expelled from England by Edward I in 1290, I was even more furious.

All of these emotions contributed to the writing of this paper. I had internalized the character of Shylock because he was a Jew and, therefore, a part of me. I wrote from that emotion. It was difficult, at first, to restrain myself from just venting. When Shylock was stripped of his livelihood and fortune and forced to convert to a belief system that he despised, I felt personally threatened. During our class discussions I was angry and subjective about all the characters in *The Merchant of Venice*, and when we passed on to another play, those feelings remained unresolved.

Most students, I think, find Shakespeare's characters difficult to relate to. The men and women he created seem to exist on the periphery of modern experience because the plays were written centuries ago. The more I identified with

Shylock, though, the more I understood what the playwright had done with all of his characters. To me, these characters became comments about either society as a whole or the human condition, and they were as relevant to modern society as they had been in the 16th and 17th centuries. With this as a starting point I came to see Falstaff as a "rite of passage" not just for Henry IV, but for all of us, and Shylock became more of a universal victim than a villain. His character exposed a very complex disparity between Christian ethic and practice. This distinction does not necessarily belong to Christianity exclusively, and my interpretation grew to include any superior group that makes itself a measure of the norm. For those unfortunates who are outside that group, and have suffered the label of "deformity," there really is no justice, and Portia's famous mercy speech takes on a new meaning.

To me, this is, in part, the genius of Shakespeare. He can convincingly gather up all that it means to be despised, or to be young and reckless, and place them into one characterization. When I realized this my anger abated. Shylock, as despicable as he may have been portrayed, spoke the truth. I think that if he had been any less ostracized or hated the audience might not have felt the full impact of his isolation.

During the two and a half years that I have been a full-time student at Plymouth State, I have written hundreds of pages for Dr. Vittum's classes. At 47, I have a great deal to say, and he is always receptive. His assignments allow me to work out my own life through writing and literature, and I am very grateful for this. As a person who hopes one day to be a successful writer of literature, I welcome the challenge to deeply examine character, plot and technique. With his help, and the help of all of my professors, I often accomplish this goal.

Shylock and Falstaff
(a paper written for Dr.Vittum's Shakespeare 1 course)

The test of human realism that any character might display on stage is found in the reaction of the audience. The psychological and social complexity of all of Shakespeare's characterizations are two elements that insure his longevity. The mirror of ourselves that the playwright sets before us is often unexpected and disturbing, but it always provokes us to examine the nature of our own humanity.

Shylock and Falstaff are two such portrayals of human frailty. They are both slightly larger than life, but that enlargement elicits a response from audiences that is rarely indifferent.

The Jew, Shylock, was intended to be a comic figure, but, to modern audiences, may only be comic in the fact that he is a member of a despised race. He is also the villain of Venice, and the question of his villainy is the focal point of the play. His case against Antonio is never clear-cut because we can all feel the injustice that comes to a man who is stripped of everything meaningful in his life.

Shakespeare makes it clear from the beginning that Shylock has been denied any degree of dignity.

> Signior Antonio, many a time and oft
> In the Rialto you have rated me
> About my moneys and my usances.
> Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
> For suff'rance is the badge of all our tribe.
> You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,
> And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,
> And all for use of that which is mine own.

Well then, it now appears you need my help.
Go to then. You come to me and you say,
'Shylock, we would have moneys' — you say so,
You that did void your rheum upon my beard
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur
Over your threshold! Moneys is your suit.
What should I say to you? Should I not say,
'Hath a dog money? Is it possible
A cur can lend three thousand ducats? Or
Shall I bend low, and in a bondman's key,
With bated breath and whisp'ring humbleness,
Say this:
'Fair sir, you spit on me on Wednesday last,
You spurned me such a day, another time
You call me dog; and for these courtesies
I'll lend you thus much moneys'?   (I. iii. 102-124)

Antonio boldly responds that even if Shylock agrees to lend him the money he desires, the animosity between them will remain.

I am as like to call thee so again,
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
As to thy friends...   (I. iii. 128-132)

The audience is moved by Antonio's willingness to borrow money so that his friend can court Portia. We see him immediately as a good man, a loving man, who gallantly engages in the Christian ethic of charity. We are even more amazed at Antonio's willingness to risk his life to secure this loan. Throughout the play examples of Shylock's wickedness and Antonio's goodness abound, but Antonio's previous speech raises questions about his core of goodness.

Shylock is a social deviant in his Jewishness, ambition and greed. Shakespeare makes this evident, but, in some way, most of mankind is deviant from what society maintains as normal. Shylock experiences a deformity of spirit because he appears to have little or no capacity for love.

"Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation..." (II. ii. 24). If this is so, why are we moved to pity this devil Shylock? We can feel these feelings, even understand Shylock's drive for revenge, because some part of ourselves identifies with and fears Shylock's detestable nature. When the Jew rails:

> ...I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? —fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should   his sufferance be by Christian example? Why revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but   I will better the instruction.
> (III. i. 51-63)

When Shylock asks "...Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions...?" our conscious, or subconscious, mind can easily substitute, "Hath not a cripple, black person, fat person, thin person, Moslem, etc., eyes?" Thus we pity the man we should hate, and, like him, we challenge Antonio's Christian ethic. In this way we are all drawn into the Jew's final crucible, and, when he loses all, including his identity, it is difficult to feel that he got what he deserved.

Superficially this play exhibits the moral that the drive for

revenge consumes and destroys itself. On a deeper level, though, it also examines Christian charity. Antonio gives it to Bassanio because, initially, it is easy to give to Bassanio. Antonio loves Bassanio. It is more difficult to give to Shylock, and the Christian society that Antonio moves in does not require that Antonio be charitable to a Jew. Antonio's, and society's, Christianity can be questioned even more deeply when we, as an audience, remember that Christ gave most to the despised and unclean, and that this charity has always been a tenet of the Church.

Antonio not only refuses to be charitable in any way towards Shylock, he gloats, just as Shylock might have gloated, to see the man in his final pathetic circumstance.

> Nay, take my life and all! Pardon not that!
> You take my house when you do take the prop
> That doth sustain my house. You take my life
> When you do take the means whereby I live.   (IV. i. 372-375)

This last scene poses the question whether revenge actually does destroy itself. As the tables turn, Antonio becomes the avenger and Shylock resumes his role as victim. Elizabethan audiences might have felt the satisfaction of the powerful Christian conformist over the disempowered Jewish nonconformist, but most modern audiences might find this victory tainted with bitterness.

Falstaff is also an affront to Christian morality because he embodies the call of the senses. He is rogue and repentant in *Henry IV, Part I*. In this play we can believe in Falstaff's sincerity, but in Part II he falls from grace completely.

The theme of Falstaff's relationship with Hal takes form in the first Act.

Indeed you come near me now, Hal; for we that
take purses go by the moon and the seven stars, and not by
Phoebus, he, that wand'ring knight so fair. And I
prithee, sweet wag, when thou art a king, as, God save
thy grace — majesty I should say, for grace thou wilt
have none —   (I. ii. 12-16)

"...When thou art a king..." is the crux of Falstaff's
influence on Hal's life in Part I and later in Part II, and Falstaff
awaits his rightful rewards as a companion to a future king.
     While Hal might serve as a bridge between the "low life"
and the "royal life," Falstaff serves as a bridge between Hal's
own unleashed sensuous pleasure and the demands of monar-
chy.

...There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an
old fat man; a tun of man is thy companion...
wherein [he is] villainous, but
in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing?
                                    (II. iv. 425-436)

Falstaff responds, "...If sugar and sack be a fault, God
help the wicked! ...Banish plump Jack, and banish all the
world" (II. iv. 447-455)!
     The "devil" of Falstaff haunts us all. He is the pull of
merriment and the sensuous, the desire to play, when we are
steeped in responsibility. As a surrogate father to Hal, he is the
man who is present mentally and physically, while the true
father, the King, is involved with the affairs of state. The King
fears for the future of his heir and his kingdom under the
influence of Hal's apparent weakness of character. Briefly,
even Falstaff questions the penalty of all of this merriment.

...But I prithee,
sweet wag, shall there be gallows standing in England

> when thou art king? and resolution thus fubbed as it is
> with the rusty curb of old father antic the law? Do not
> thou, when thou art king, hang a thief.   (I. ii. 53-57)

At the end of Part I Falstaff establishes his goals for the
future. "...I look to be either earl/ or duke, I can assure you"
(V. iv. 139-140).

The Falstaff who greets us in the beginning of Part II is
more the braggart and less endearing. It appears from the
beginning of Act I scene ii that he is less in control as Hal
approaches the throne. He becomes more representative of
the senses, more inconstant, and more focused in his desire for
the sweet life. The frailties apparent in Part I become even
more glaring and grating in Part II. His irreverence increases.
He is even less scrupulous in money matters and almost
completely reprehensible in his dealings with people.

The doctor's message that Falstaff's page relates to him
sums up his decline. "He said, sir, the water itself was a good
healthy/ water; but, for the party that owed it, he might have/
moe diseases than he knew for" (I. ii. 3-5).

Instead of examining the "diseases" that he might suffer
(which might be the impetus for some self-examination) he
proclaims his wit and paints a vivid physical picture of the
Falstaff we are to come to know in this play. "...I do here
walk/ before thee like a sow that hath overwhelmed all her/
litter but one..." (I. ii. 10-12).

As his frame becomes larger, we begin to see more
distinctly the waste of him. When the Chief Justice confronts
him with his claim to youth,

> ...Have you not a moist eye? A dry hand? A
> yellow cheek? A white beard? A decreasing leg? An
> increasing belly? Is not your voice broken? Your wind
> short? Your chin double? Your wit single? And every
> part about you blasted with antiquity?...   (I. ii. 171-175)

Falstaff answers, "...Well, I cannot last ever./ But it was alway yet the trick of our English nation, if/ they have a good thing, to make it too common...(I. ii. 201-203). What Falstaff grieves as the fault of the "English nation" is his own vice. He, in fact, makes all good "common," and this eventually becomes less humorous and more of an insult to the morals necessary to a nation.

In the remaining acts Shakespeare begins to alienate Hal's and the audience's affection for Falstaff. The demands of the senses bring out a dishonest, nearly criminal, character. When Hal realizes what Falstaff represents in his own personality, he has no choice but to deny him.

> ...I have long dreamed of such a kind of man,
> So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane,
> But, being awaked, I do despise my dream...
> Reply not to me with a fool-born jest.
> Presume not that I am the thing I was.
> For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,
> That I have turned away my former self...   (V. v. 50-59)

In Part II Falstaff and Hal meet only once, but Falstaff plays a greater part in this play than in the previous one. This adds to the effect of Hal's growth from youthful irresponsibility to the demands of the monarchy. This encounter serves to reunite, for the last time, the quick duet of wit that Hal and Falstaff encourage in one another. This meeting, though, is fleeting when Hal is reminded of his duties by Peto. "By heaven, Poins, I feel me much to blame,/ So idly to profane the precious time..." (II. iv. 337-338). When Hal leaves, Falstaff remembers a time that once was, "Now comes the sweetest morsel of the night, and we must hence and leave it unpicked..." (II. iv. 343-344). This timely remark reminds

us that the richest core of us all is often the "sweetest morsel" of the impish and the unbridled. It is the call of the Id that becomes so buried by the demands of serious adult day-to-day living that it must remain "unpicked" eventually to die, unnoticed, on the branch.

Shylock and Falstaff are powerful literary personalities. They express a universal appeal with a host of human emotions. Centuries after their parts were written, Shylock and Falstaff still pull from audiences feelings that we all strive to hide behind an armor of modern technology. These emotions, though, are what validate our humanity, and separate the human   artifice   from   the   common   machine.

Exploring Voice in Business Writing
by Daniel P. Moore

Abstract

Many upper division business courses focus on applying the concepts and techniques studied throughout the undergraduate curriculum. The case method, which is often used to teach upper division business courses, exposes students to complex situations, aids in developing their analytical skills, and provides students with an opportunity to offer integrative solutions. An assortment of writing assignments for these case courses can enhance learning. Writing business memos and reports from a variety of organizational perspectives and to a number of organizational audiences enables students to explore the realities of crafting business documents meant to communicate and convince. The use of various perspectives and audiences challenges students to recognize the impact of organizational position in creating and maintaining a voice when writing.

Assignments that Permit an Exploration of Voice

By design, many of Plymouth State College's upper division business courses are integrative. As an example, to enroll in Administrative Policy students need to have completed courses in finance, accounting, and operations. These prerequisites provide the necessary conceptual background for a more comprehensive investigation of the complex business situations presented in a policy course.

To facilitate understanding and permit students some practical experience, a policy course uses a case approach. A business case presents realistic information from a particular organization and emphasizes analytical discussions of this

situation. A case requires students to sift through factual information, to evaluate a variety of issues, and to develop a range of possible solutions (Christensen, 1987).

Students use various methods for case analysis. Open class discussions, small group reviews, and group or individual presentations provide different approaches to case evaluation. One of the more frequently used review techniques is the written case analysis (Penrose, Rasberry & Myers, 1989). Although there are no "ironclad procedures" for a written case analysis, the papers are usually segmented into three sections: issues, analysis, and recommendations (Thompson & Strickland, 1987, p. 273). Generally, students write rather dry formula evaluations. However, creative writing assignments that mimic organizational situations offer students an opportunity for realistic decision making.

Students can be required to assume the role of a particular character in the case and to write business memos and reports that reflect their understanding of that character's position and organizational situation. Composing documents from a variety of different perspectives to a number of potential audiences allows students to experience the organizational realities surrounding communication. Thus, assignments can challenge students to recognize the impact of organizational position in creating and maintaining a voice when writing.

Form

PSC's General Education Program requires students to take First Year Composition and a designated writing course in their major field. For students majoring in business this writing course is Organizational Communications (OC), which exposes students to various forms of business writing. OC assignments stress the highly stylized business approach to writing. Students learn to design documents for impact by using a direct language, choosing simple words to fully

convey ideas and concepts, and arranging information in an easily-followed professional format.

Although not a prerequisite, most business students take OC before registering for Administrative Policy. Doing writing assignments designed to capture the realism inherent in the Administrative Policy course's case approach, students create the stylized mainstays of business communications, memos and reports, which reflect their analysis and recommendations of the case material. Therefore, students build upon writing techniques learned in OC and practice writing through their curriculum.

Content

A writer's audience is his or her reader (Hacker,1992). Choice of an audience often influences the tone, approach, and language of a document (Crews & Schor, 1989). Because business people often write to particular persons, they generally know a great deal about the values, desires, and special interests of their audiences, and compose accordingly.

As stated earlier, a business case provides general conditions, background material, and particular facts concerning an organizational situation. Each person or group mentioned in a case represents a potential audience. Writing assignments that require students to communicate their case evaluations to various people or groups from the case forces students to recognize the values, desires and interests of these different audiences, and use a communication style or voice which connects with the particular audience.

For instance, students could be assigned to assume the role of an outside consultant and write a report to the organization's chief executive. Students would then have to structure their report to reflect the realities surrounding the situation. This requires an analysis of the case and an assessment of the audience. A primary consideration would

be the values and attitudes of an executive receiving the report. The report must incorporate these values.

A slight shift in the assignment exposes students to a different communication style or voice. Instead of the outside consultant, the student's role can be that of a subordinate communicating with the chief executive as his or her superior. This situation requires students to be aware of the significant status and power differences that exist between a subordinate and his or her boss. The facts are identical. The executive receiving the report is identical. However, the tone, approach, and language must reflect the nuances of the subordinate's voice. The consultant can be blunt, direct, and formal using his or her expertise as justification for his or her voice. The subordinate needs a different voice, a voice which recognizes the on-going relationship of authority and responsibility inherent in the superior and subordinate dyad, and balances duty with respect.

A third role-play allows students to explore yet another voice. Students can be required to write to a subordinate. This forces an awareness of what it is like to be the boss. Students experience the contradictions surrounding management, leadership, and authority. Should the writer inform, cajole, plead, or demand? The voice will communicate the writer's understanding of this position and situation.

Example

Consider the following scenario. Gerry Plotnik, the division superintendent at Sharon Steel's Posner Works in Farrell, Pennsylvania, has just received a letter from Kaiser Refractories, stating that Kaiser is shutting down its brickworks in Warren, Ohio, and therefore, will no longer supply the refractories Sharon Steel uses to line its furnaces and soaking pits. Plotnik knows that he can buy a lower grade but more expensive refractory from Harbison-Walker in Buffalo. Plotnik

has multiple concerns. One is that, because the Harbison-Walker refractory linings are of lesser quality than Kaiser, they need to be constantly monitored for wear and replaced more often. A second concern is that his production supervisors are currently paid bonuses based upon output, and the down time associated with monitoring and relining furnaces takes away from these bonuses. A third concern is that his boss, Henry Tevans, the Executive Vice-President of Operations, has instituted a quality assurance program that focuses on producing the highest grades of defect-free steel, which can only be maintained when furnaces are kept well insulated. Finally, Plotnik's own goals for Posner Works are to be Sharon Steel's lowest cost steel producer.

Realistic writing assignments would have students role-playing Plotnik and composing memos or reports to the production supervisors and Tevans concerning the impact of Kaiser's closing. Students must consider Plotnik's plight: how to convince the production supervisors to engage in practices that may lower their bonuses and to inform Tevans that production costs are definitely going up, while quality may decline? These two distinctly different audiences require distinctly different voices.

Summary

The realism of the case approach can be converted into the practice of creating a writer's voice. The above discussion has focused on the Business Department's Administrative Policy course. However, any course that uses cases has the potential for allowing students the opportunity to experiment with a variety of voices. The only requirement is that of multiple audiences. Students can then be assigned a variety of roles and learn to write with a variety of voices.

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Writing Assessment at Plymouth State College
by Russell Lord

The Nature and Purpose of Assessment

Traditionally we associate the term assessment with appraisal of real estate or other property. An assessor attempts to set a market value upon a particular object by comparison with similar property.   It is thus an attempt to evaluate something for market purposes. When we attempt to apply the term to academic pursuits, we tend to transfer these connotations to the academic community, where there is a developing, and some believe destructive, trend toward applying the idols of the marketplace to the free pursuit of knowledge, where they do not belong. And yet a college, especially a state college, must set a nice balance between its accountability to the public, which gives it support, and those professors who remain committed to the ideals of the most effective teaching as they envisage it. Measuring the results of such teaching is as complex as the teaching process itself; and, as our experiment proved, its results are by no means so dramatic as the marketplace tends to demand.

Background

In the spring of 1989 the Writing Across the Curriculum program at Plymouth State College had been established and functioning for approximately four years. The Dean of the College (Theo Kalikow) and a group of faculty chaired by Sally Boland determined to judge whether the college curriculum improved student writing during students' four-year college experience. Pressures from the legislature in New Hampshire and, indeed, throughout the nation demanded some type of evaluation procedure, and this committee

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bravely set out to avoid the pitfalls of too mechanical an assessment, dependent on an objective test or two which could give neat statistical results but which would fail to address the complexity of the writing process itself. The committee devised a combination of an essay test graded outside the college and portfolios evaluated by our own faculty. The essay tests would be given at the beginning and end of the first-year Composition course, and then during the spring semester of the fourth year. The portfolios would contain written material primarily from general education classes gathered over four years of the students' college experience.

The Instrument

For the outside-graded portion of the assessment, the committee ultimately chose the essay test provided by the American College Testing Bureau (ACT) in Kansas City, Missouri, a segment of the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) testing program. The test consists of two 20-minute writing samples requiring students to support a position on a clearly defined issue. In the Fall of 1989 the test was graded on a four-point scale. Currently ACT uses a six-point grading system, but the company agreed to return to the four-point system for our Spring 1993 tests so that our results might be consistent. The criteria for the four-point scale follow:

4--Substantially developed appropriate argument. These papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt and support that position with an argument of one or more appropriate reasons. The argument's main ideas are logically connected and substantially developed.

3--Moderately developed appropriate argument. These papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt and support that position with an argument of one or more appro-

priate reasons. The argument's main ideas are logically connected and one or two may be moderately developed, but the argument as a whole does not constitute an elaborated argument.

2--Minimally developed appropriate argument. These papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt and support that position with a brief argument of either two or three appropriate but undeveloped reasons, or one appropriate reason only minimally developed. These papers recognize the grounds upon which the issue will be resolved, but the argument does not focus on those grounds.

1--Insufficient or inappropriate argument. These papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt but offer only one undeveloped appropriate reason in support of that position. Or these papers take a position but do not support that position with any appropriate reasons.

The portfolios in that segment of the study graded by our own faculty consisted of materials ranging from term papers or other student essays, to lab reports and essays on examination questions. The courses involved were primarily drawn from those in the General Education program at Plymouth State College, although other courses with adequate written responses were also included over seven semesters of the students' college experience. Grading by our faculty used a holistic scale with criteria that we decided should include the following elements:

• Quality of thought. This included a student's depth of understanding of the problem involved and ability to convey that understanding to a reader.

• Quality of expression. This involved the organization of the materials in a coherent mode that showed an understanding of rhetorical principles fitted to the nature of the

essay involved.

•   Mechanics. These involved a mastery of sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and diction appropriate to the writing situation.

We used a six-point scale to evaluate these elements, placing more weight on the first two criteria than on the third.

Development and Characteristics of the Instrument

Members of the English and Education Departments, with cooperation of the Dean of the College, devised the instrument. They decided to draw a random sampling of six first-year Composition classes to be divided into three groups: two classes to serve as a control group to be assessed only by the outside graders; two classes for whom portfolios of significant writing would be maintained for four years; and two classes for whom portfolios would be maintained but who in addition would be coached in their writing for the four years. Since each class had approximately 25 members, our study would cover initially about 150 students. Each student signed a form, indicating willingness to take part in the study, with the opportunity to withdraw at any time from it. Five Composition teachers chose to be involved (Sally Boland, Arthur Fried, Mary Lou Hinman, Walter Tatara, and Gerald Zinfon) and Russell Lord became Director of the project.

Our first need was to devise a way to gather and house the portfolios. Peter Hart from the Computer Center, in cooperation with Bill Clark of the Registrar's Office, devised a computer program to store the names of designated students and requested their instructors to send copies of papers for the portfolio. The papers were kept in manilla folders maintained in a file cabinet in my office.

During the second year of the study, we held a workshop

directed by   Sharyn Lowenstein from the writing center at UNH Manchester. We discovered that a holistic approach with loosely defined elements yielded a much greater degree of consensus than a method using a rigorous series of weighted criteria, and this experience formed the model for our later grading of the portfolios themselves.

As is almost inevitable in such a study, a serious problem evolved during this same year. The students who were to be coached during their college experience did not desire that benefit. We were therefore forced, for this pilot project, to restrict the portfolio study to the effect of the normal college program itself on writing progress over four years.

Because of attrition we ended the study with 43 of the original 85 usable portfolios; 19 of these students took the CAAP test in their Senior year. In addition, seven from approximately 27 students remaining in the control group took this CAAP test.

Five faculty members did the Portfolio grading: three English Professors (Mary Lou Hinman, Arthur Fried, and Russell Lord), one Psychology Professor (Robert Miller), and one Chemistry Professor (Wavell Fogelman). Two readers examined each paper, whenever possible representing two disciplines, and through discussion arrived at consensus. Student names, dates, and grades were removed from each portfolio essay to be evaluated.

Statistical Results of the Study

Robert Hayden of the Mathematics Department, in a statistical analysis of the results, made essentially the following observations:

I tried many multiple regression models to see how portfolio grades were affected by the other variables. Only two variables were consistently important: although Portfolio grades generally tended to rise by about 0.1 point over the

period, a student who received above C on the English Composition grade generally had a portfolio grade about 0.7 points higher at the end of the 7th Semester than at the beginning of the college experience. There was thus some evidence that students with A's and B's in English Composition showed more improvement over time than those with C's or below.

I also found CAAP scores and the various GPA measures to be interrelated, but this family of measurements was not particularly related to portfolio grades or English Composition grades. Also, the grade received in the course in which a portfolio sample was evaluated was not related to the grade the relevant portfolio essay received.

Conclusions

1. For a project of this type, in order to negate the influence of attrition, a larger initial sampling would be desirable. From our experience we might predict approximately half of the initial sample would remain over four years.

2. A deeper commitment of students to the program needs to be carried through the four years. For that purpose the college needs to offer students greater incentives. We gave refreshments to induce them to attend the CAAP test in their senior year; yet the offer failed to draw many of them. Almost none showed interest in the proffered coaching during their four years. Academic recognition of some type seems necessary if we expect more deeply engaged students. And although the Dean and I wrote several letters to the students during the course of the study, publicity directed toward the students needs to be created.

3. Although statistical results were generally not impressive, comparison of the portfolio essays with Composition grades seems to show that success during the first-year English Composition course influences writing progress over the four years.

4. Statistics support a correlation between the CAAP essay test and the GPA, but not between CAAP and the portfolio or composition grade. This result may indicate that the writing samples are better related to issues of critical thinking than to rhetorical techniques, and are thus more an indication of overall academic progress than of writing per se.

5. Although it was not conceived as a goal of the study, one of the most productive results was its effect on the faculty. It created an interest in student writing as a means of effective expression and analysis of course content, rather than as an almost irrelevant ancillary to the content itself. And to those actively involved in the Assessment process itself, it provided an opportunity to think more effectively about just how to evaluate student papers.

Assessment Steering Committee Conclusions

At its final meeting the Steering Committee concluded from the study the following points:

1. If we were to repeat such a study, we would have to have a much more committed group of student volunteers, with powerful incentives.

2. Portfolios would need tighter control of material, so that uniform contents would yield more measurably consistent results.

3. Providing the assignments for each portfolio essay would be desirable for proper judging of contents.

4. The most telling results might come not from graded essays at all, but from surveys of student attitudes toward writing during their college careers. How the students perceive themselves as writers would form a better indication of the way our process-oriented WAC program is succeeding than the portfolios could possibly reveal.

Was the study worthwhile?

As an indication of the success or failure of the WAC program at Plymouth State College the study has many weaknesses. As a means of creating faculty interest in writing, however, it has had some unexpected success. By gathering and sending materials to be included in portfolios, teachers became actively involved in developing writing awareness. Those involved in grading portfolios gained experience interacting in a process which tends too often to be a private preserve with little oversight. The steering committee gained experience in facing unforeseen problems and in solving them in novel ways. The study was thus valuable in revealing need for much more thorough accounting of student motivations and heeding them.

The most significant statistical result of the study, a greater improvement in writing over four years for those doing well in their First Year Composition course, might provide the impetus for fine tuning that course to yield the incentives for greater student interest in their own writing. Current plans to establish a WAC writing center would then provide a means to carry on that interest through the student's college career.

(Note: Data and statistical workings of this study are available upon request.)

Can the Path Be Found in the Divergent Stream?

by Michael Brien

On the first night of last fall's Composition class, a student very hesitatingly took the syllabus I offered him and asked, "We don't have to take this seriously, do we?"

I answered by offhandedly offering an abbreviated quote from Sandra Cisneros. "Writers are liars," I said.

He looked at me rather quizzically and accepted the syllabus
from my hand.

Later, I asked myself what that moment of confrontation had
meant to the two of us? At first I thought it had all to do with authority. Do as I say. There it is, in your hands, in black and white, struggled over during the summer, put together with thought, and afterthought, and some sense of anticipation. Yet, I had not anticipated this student's response . . . "We don't have
to take this seriously, do we?" Do we?

Very early in his book, *Inter Views*, written with Laura Pozzo, James Hillman, noted psychoanalyst, is confronted by Ms. Pozzo with a statement similar in intent to the question my student had asked of me. Hillman responds by saying, "When I am asked a question directly, in confrontation, I am a coward . . . I need some kind of ruse between me and you in order to be sincere."

Had my glib response to my student been such a ruse? Had I too played the coward? Had my agenda been so inflexible that

there was no room to wander from it? Can we ever be so certain about where we tread?

Hillman is cautious as he continues his discussion. He knows not to confuse truth with sincerity. They are not the same thing. "Truth," he says, "is revealed. It cannot ever be told . . . It has to appear inside the telling."

Sandra Cisneros agrees. "Real life doesn't have shape," she says, " . . . real stories do. No wonder they call writers 'liars'."

Franz Kafka, too, had once said that confession and lie were the same thing. "We cannot communicate what we are," he said, "exactly because we are it. We can communicate only what we are not, that is, only the lie."

How often do we expect that truth take only one path? Quite possibly we have heard our fathers or mothers, and maybe even ourselves, utter, "It's my way or the highway." Yet, in getting a student to communicate effectively, we should not be expecting, nor be satisfied, that the student merely reiterate our "truth" in their responses. Instead, we should expect that their response be

full of the knowledge of context and commitment, that it be a narrative that is full of passionate attention to character. We do need to be emphatic in asking for this high level of sincerity. The Fathers of the Eastern Church maintain the focus of their disciples with the simple phrase, "Wisdom. Let us be attentive." Insincerity amounts to a student turning their back against the opportunity to learn wisdom.

I think the question this student raised for me was very similar to the questioning of James Hillman, Sandra Cisneros, or Franz Kafka. "Is this the only way I can come to know the truth?"

Laura Pozzo later chides Hillman to explicate himself. "How do you tell what is revelation and what is camouflage?" she asks.

Hillman answers, "Camouflage is revelation . . . because each person has his or her way of hiding. Camouflage is simply another way of revealing yourself."

If I could, (and I am lucky because with each new class of students, I can), relive that moment of confrontation with this composition student, I would repeat Hillman's answer to Laura Pozzo. "Truth is revealed. It cannot ever be told . . . It has to appear in the retelling . . . That is why," Hillman said, "we listen to what is not said in psychoanalysis . . ."

One of the lessons that I assign to my Composition student deals with the mutual needs and exclusive differences of "facts" and "inferences." I try to get them to understand that neither is less than the other, but together they draw a more complete picture of our relationships with each other. The educated guess and the physical reality serve the same purpose, to get at truth.

When Ernest Hemingway said that the written word was merely the tip of the iceberg, I believe he was reflecting on Hillman's idea of revelation. The mountain of ice that we see rising above the surface of the water is indeed fact, but its inference to the greater mountain that lies below can only be imagined. Perhaps as educators, it is our job to enable our students to reflect on the tips of their icebergs in order that they can also begin to imagine the immensity of what may lie below.

My student's question forced me to remove yet another "truth" found in Hemingway's iceberg metaphor: That in our feeble attempts to qualify "truth," both parties need to get out of the way.

Another one of my composition students, struggling with the choice of examples provided in the text from which she was to choose a topic to write on, said, "None of these makes any sense to me. I can't relate to any of them."

"Come up with one of your own, then," I challenged her.

It was the intent, the idea, the search for truth, that was important. The examples given were not the only way to do it. They were not the only roads that led to Rome.

In the end, I cannot make the connections for my students. Their connections are already made. They exist only with them. I can only help them hear and react to the ideas that are already gestating in their spirits. I need to let them tell me their stories. I need to listen to their narrative, and challenge them to listen to it themselves.

Often, in my Composition courses, this takes the form of weekly private-reflection assignments on values-readings. When completed, these reflections are shared with fellow students. The result is a compilation essay in which the ruminations of four or five students are synthesized into a five-page critical essay. In reality, that final piece of writing has no single owner, it has been created by them all.

I disagree with Laura Pozzo, when in her unwavering banter with James Hillman, she insists that, "Patients aren't poets." I wonder if this isn't the same paradigm many of us educators use to deflect our students' search for truth in our courses. "Students aren't ready to be poets, mathematicians, accountants," we say. "Step by step, they need to follow our direction, and when the time is right, then we will have guided them to become poets, mathematicians, accountants."

We should be as sensitive to their hopes, memories, and present wrestlings, as we ask them to be in wrestling with the "Great" texts that we require in our courses. In my Introduction to Literature classes, I invite each student to create their own voice in the various literary genres that we are studying. Practice the art of sharing your stories, your lives, I tell them. What right do we have to criticize, or admit defeat in trying to understand what the poet, novelist, or dramatist, is saying, unless we at least attempt to trace the symbols, utter the sounds, and commit some portion of our own testimony to paper?

In his short story, "The Storyteller," Saki (H.H.Munro), illustrates the wonderful, sustaining possibilities of immersing oneself in the telling of the story:

> "Come over here and listen to a story," said the aunt . . . The children moved listlessly towards the aunt's end of the carriage. Evidently her reputation as a story-teller did not   rank high in their estimation . . .
>
> In a low, confidential voice . . . she began an unenterprising and deplorably uninteresting story about a little girl who was good and made friends with everyone on account of her goodness, and was finally saved from a mad bull by a number of rescuers who admired her moral character . . .
> "It's the stupidest story I've ever heard," said the bigger of the small girls, with immense conviction . . .

There has been a bachelor on the train listening to the aunt's vain attempt at capturing the children's attention. I think he, along with the children saw and tasted the staleness of her "truth." Challenged by the aunt to come up with better, the bachelor proceeds to tell his tale, letting it spin out of control, it seems, as he incorporates each child's incessant questions and concerns, until his tale is complete and embedded into the children's imagination.

Erich Heller has written that, " . . . The only real world is the world of human inwardness . . ." That's it, isn't it? Truth lies embedded in our imagination. Our only job as educators is to make our students hungry with the desire to feed on their imagination. In offering them both fertile pastures and divergent paths to choose from, we may all, in time, find that elusive center of understanding.

The Collaborative Textbook As Teaching Tool
by Mark Evans and Lela Edgar

Creating a Textbook

Writing Across the Curriculum activities have been successful not only in improving the art of writing but in fostering a wide variety of other skills critical to collegiate learning, such as conceptual integration (Weiss & Walter, 1980) and interdisciplinary study (Hamilton, 1980).

The creation of a collaborative textbook, documents in which student writing representing the bulk of course work is assembled, has been used extensively with young students (Weiss and Walter, 1980). Its use as the exclusive text in a college setting remains unreported in recent educational literature, although this does not mean it is untried.

Each semester during the 1992-93 academic year, two sections of undergraduates at Plymouth State College studied introductory psychology without purchasing any text or reserve materials. Students in these sections instead used a Writing-Across-the-Curriculum approach, in which writing and research skills were developed through mutually supporting projects. The students wrote their own textbook after researching key topics, while other students edited their work for accuracy, concepts, and form. All students reviewed and critiqued professional journal research for their semester papers. The students even proposed and wrote the questions on their final examinations.

By the end of their term, participants had found, read, and critiqued journal-level research with the familiarity of graduating seniors. They had written an average of two pages of critical essays each week. Three out

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of four had used databases such as LOLA, ERIC, PsychLit, Dissertation Abstracts International and ProQuest within any given week of the course.

We will describe a course model used in one section per semester of an introductory psychology course currently taught at Plymouth State College. The course is intended to be an introduction to the major issues in psychology as well as the methods used to learn about human thought, behavior, and feeling. Like all courses at Plymouth State College, it is also designed to help develop scholarship, writing, critical thinking, and research skills.

Creating a Framework for Collaboration

Weekly research or writing assignments are not unusual in curricula. In most college courses, however, written exchanges between the instructor and students are conducted as private communications. For example, a student may write a term paper which is read only by the professor, and receive comments on the work only from the professor.

In the course design discussed here, assignments were read by the instructor, graded and received instructor commentary, but the learning exchange widened to include other readers.

The centerpiece of the course was the creation of a "collaborative" textbook. During the first night of class, a syllabus was distributed which described the ten chapters to be assembled, expectations for research and writing, sources of outside help, and samples of accepted citation and reference formats.

The introduction and written summaries of lectures had been compiled before the beginning of the course and arrangements had been made to print and copy each chapter for the students as they were produced. At the end of the semester, the chapters were combined, laser-printed and bound, and a

cover was added with student-designed artwork. Each participant received the book upon completing the course.

This course concept was the result of a desire for a break from the limitations of both instructor and student roles in more
traditional course designs. Mark Evans was the psychology instructor who designed the course. Lela Edgar was a sophomore psychology undergraduate who led the editing of the collaborative text and assisted in the evaluation of this approach.

Prior to initiating this course design, Evans found himself frustrated that the depth of discussions during class was not reflected in multiple-choice examinations and short-essay assignments. A writing-centered curriculum for psychology students was developed with the assistance of then-Psychology Department chairperson Dr. James McGarry and incoming chairperson Dr. Boyce Ford. The final course design required that a selected group of undergraduates would collaborate with the instructor in evaluating and editing a student-published psychology textbook.

The first student approached for such an assignment, Edgar, recalled having no past experience reading or writing journal research. Once the meaning of statistical information needed for this type of writing was mastered, the emphasis moved to working with other student editors to sift through weekly assignments searching for the unusually interesting or particularly relevant. Collaboration required consideration of a variety of viewpoints and some negotiation, since there were many times editors disagreed regarding the merit of a student submission or the best way of improving it.

Course Design
The goal of this course design was not only to promote expository writing skills, but to integrate these with

critical reading and research skills as well. The collaborative textbook was, therefore, only one component of the course design. Students were presented with a succession of projects which were intended to communicate complex concepts or procedures to undergraduates who were likely not familiar with them.

Like many other classes, this course met once per week for 2 1/2 hours. There were 14 regular class sessions and a scheduled final examination period in each semester. Unlike similar classes, the focus of this class was the development of writing projects which were goal-directed, published or shared in class discussions. The class topic also became the topic for the students' research, editing, and the chapter in the published textbook.

Only one hour of class time was devoted to a lecture upon the topic selected by the instructor. Lecture topics were the same as those in that week's text chapter. Chapter topics in psychology included subjects such as motivation, learning, and abnormal psychology. During the class period, each student received an assignment relating to these topics, due when class met again. Another hour of class time was devoted each week to a class-wide discussion of the completed individual assignments from the previous week's topic. Students, called upon either at random or at their request, summarized their assignments and outcomes. The instructor then linked these with concepts addressed in lecture, the results of other student assignments, and topics addressed in previous weeks. The method was Socratic, the use of class notes to answer questions was encouraged, and full participation was required.

Assignments For Text Chapters

Each chapter of this collaborative textbook was created by combining essays specifically assigned to ensure that the

most important concepts of the chapter's topic were all represented. The instructor determined the topic of the assignment, but participants might receive any one of nine different types of assignments, each requiring a specific set of research skills and writing style:

1. Journal Research — Summarization and citation of an original research article in a psychological journal. For example, in one week, students were asked to summarize recent research on eating disorders and another week, others were asked to address studies on mood.

2. Essays — Discussions which feature expository or persuasive essays, stories from literature or film, jokes or anecdotes, in which all outside sources were to be cited. For example, a pair of students were asked to read a children's book and address issues of memory and recall, and one student wrote a gumshoe detective story illustrating the concept of "instrumental aggression."

3. Conducting and Reporting Surveys — Design, reporting, and discussion of a survey or interview. Informants were asked by one student to define behavioral indicators of "love" in one survey. In another survey, subjects were asked to identify behaviors through which anger was expressed in their primary relationships. One student replicated research into children's artistic renderings of traumatic experience (Terr, 1991). Assignments required a discussion of design, subject selection, and a discussion of the findings, as well as outcome summary.

4. Conceptual Understanding — Explanation of a key concept in clear and concise language, using cited outside sources. The struggle to understand sometimes difficult or technical concepts and "translate" them into clear and simpler terms was reflected in essays such as those in which students described the major effects of traumatic brain injury

or de-mystified the Rorschach "inkblot" test.

5. Concept Application — Identification of a process in "real-world" settings. For example, one student created a hypothetical situation, in which an individual's desperate need for high-priced AIDS medication locked in a store conflicted with a belief in law and order, to examine how moral conflicts are resolved. Another student who was interested in children's evolving cognitive styles obtained artwork from children of different ages and discussed features of each drawing which reflected changes in cognition throughout childhood.

6. Biographical Research— Biographical sketches of major contributors to the field of psychology from cited sources. These contributors have ranged from psychoanalyst Karen Horney to Helen Keller.

7. Personal Integration—Discussion of a student's personal experience which was related to the topic area. Many personal essays were light in tone, but serious self-examination was shared, such as one student's discussion of the challenge of being described as "dyslexic" in school, and another's recollections of puberty.

8. Citation/Quotation — Reporting quotations from cited works by or about persons assigned by the instructor, or providing several references available at PSC which would serve as a starting point for further reading, such as one student's collection of fiction in which group processes are illuminated.

9. Artwork — Creation or procurement of originally-drawn artwork of specific focus, on occasion requiring additional analysis. Our text cover came from an art major randomly assigned to sketch a portrait of Sigmund Freud. Another student portrayed the brain's pre-frontal cortex as it would appear in a magazine advertisement.

The type of assignment varied from week to week in order to present students with a wide range of research and writing challenges through the course of the semester. For example, a review of assignments made during a week in which brain physiology was studied included tasks such as:

* Interviewing a client case manager for an area head-injury rehabilitation center, discussing the major effects upon brain functions the social worker saw in her or his clients.

* Writing an expository essay in which the question of whether women and men have different brain physiology is discussed, and the student was expected to compare cited studies with her or his own perceptions.

* Explaining how knowledge about opioid neural receptors had helped brain researchers understand and counter drug addiction, citing at least three recent studies.

How the Text Was Edited

The assignments were first read and evaluated by another group of students. A group of "editors" met once a week during the instructor's office hours to select assignments for publication in the collaborative text.

Each editor read all submissions, marking those she or he found particularly informative, relevant, or entertaining. The submissions were ranked by the number of markings. Assignments could be selected exactly as written; changed in order to clarify, shorten, or correct factual errors; or not accepted for publication. Selected entries were corrected as necessary. Editors then took turns typing the entries directly into a computer file via a laptop computer.

The instructor worked with the editors to improve their critical reading, evaluation, and text-editing skills. This group met in Lamson Library, in part because editors were required to correct any citation or reference omissions and

mistakes during the process of assembling a chapter for the collaborative text.

These decisions were independent of instructor grading, which follows later. Grading was based primarily upon the extent to which the student addressed the exact requirements of the assignment. Use of proper citation and reference formats was also evaluated, as was writing clarity.

Individual Writing and Research Assistance

The instructor held regular office hours in Lamson Library one evening a week. The Reference staff of the library had been briefed as to the nature of the course standards. Between the instructor and library staff, in-library assistance was provided to almost all class participants during the semester. Students were also provided with specific information about the PSC Writing Center.

The "process" of scholarship was emphasized through instructor reviews of assignment or paper drafts, without grading, before any due date. The instructor kept writing guides and other references available.

Supervision of the student editors was also provided during this time. The review of content, citation and reference review, grammatical construction, and text-editing in order to co-mingle student assignments and instructor lecture notes were all addressed.

The "Term Paper" in Support of Collaborative Text

Participants were also required to complete a multi-part research project during the semester which was not included in the collaborative textbook. The final product of this effort was a "term" paper.

Students were required to use computer data bases and other library resources to identify three articles that reported

original research in a psychological journal. The three studies had to be related to one another. For example, the articles selected by one student included: "Police Stress in an Occupational Context," "The Impact of Providing Help: Emergency Workers and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Attempts," and "Emergency Workers' Cognitive Appraisal and Coping with Traumatic Events."

Students then wrote a review of each article, summarizing its hypothesis, methods, subjects, analytical design, and findings. Proper citations-in-text and references, using the format accepted by the American Psychological Association, were required.

A discussion of the three articles followed in which the methods and findings of the studies were compared and contrasted for reliability and validity. Student papers also included a conclusion, in which other directions for future research were suggested.

Each stage of development for the student's research review received instructor comment before the final product was due for grading. A student had one deadline for producing three journal-published studies for review, a later deadline for ordering these articles through the interlibrary loan program, another for a draft of the review and, lastly, a deadline for correcting the research paper for errors noted in the draft by the course instructor.

Each student wrote an abtract of her or his review. All abstracts were gathered and, like the collaborative textbook, made available to all participants at the end of the semester.

Discussion in Support of Collaborative Text

Individual responsibility and integration of the semester's material were reinforced through classes in which the students worked in small groups to apply their knowledge.

For example, during one session, groups of students were assembled in different rooms. Each was provided with a psychological or interpersonal profile and asked to separate, describe, and summarize the elements of the situation, its possible antecedents, possible consequences, and suggested interventions.

In another session, students acted as a group to define research terminology and design an empirical study from start to finish. During the spring semester, this was augmented with a six-part workbook exercise students were expected to complete away from class.

A popular colloquium activity was the use of short excerpts of popular films as a springboard for a review of concepts presented throughout the semester. Students in the Fall 1992 section analyzed sections of "Silence of the Lambs" by Jonathan Demme, "Truth or Dare," about the singer Madonna, and "Aria," a series of short-subject films set to operatic arias.

Small groups were assembled at the end of the semester in order to compose a final examination. Each group was given sections of the text to review, and asked to compile both fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice questions. Questions were reviewed by the instructor and modified until mutually acceptable. From the group-developed questions, 20 of each type were selected by the instructor for the final examination.

Outcomes of the Collaborative Format

Two semesters during which this format was utilized have been examined in terms of frequency of publication, grading, and student surveys. We have also included a more subjective evaluation of this format's impact upon student writing and the collaborative process.

Perhaps the most tangible outcome of this format was the

self-publication of a psychology textbook, averaging approximately 210 pages in length, featuring student art on the cover and student writing throughout its pages. Many students reported that they had used these texts in later semesters as a source of review for advanced psychology or other courses. We found that no participant has declined to keep her or his textbook. Copies of the text were shelved in the college library and in twelve other area school and public libraries.

Every participant had at least one essay published in the collaborative textbook in both semesters that we created the texts. The frequency of publication by students and their assignment grades were compared through an analysis of variance, and no signficant relationship between the grades of student and the likelihood of publication was found.

The class mean for the 37 students receiving letter grades during the Fall 1992 trial was 82.3 with a Standard Deviation of 4.5, representing 17 "A"s, 10 "B"s, 6 "C"s, 2 "D"s, 3 "F"s, and an "incomplete."

The average grade for 34 students in the Spring 1993 trial was 84.1 with a Standard Deviation of 4.9 points, representing 11 "A "s, 10 "B"s, 8 "C"s, 2 "D"s, and 3 "F"s.

The average grades for the weekly assignments, semester papers, and discussion groups were also compared for differences in performance between types of academic work as well as between the two test groups of students. We found that the class average for weekly assignment grades in the Fall 1992 section was 82.9, while their average grade on their research papers was 84.0 and 79.9 for class discussions. All three grade averages fall within one standard deviation of the norm for the group, representing a remarkable consistency in writing performance despite the need to address different topics and utilize different formats or

styles when writing.

It was also found that there was no significant difference between groups of students who were part of this type of WAC curriculum. The class average for weekly assignment grades in the Spring 1993 section is 82.0, the average grade for research papers, 83.0, and the average grade for discussion work, 81.0.

Samples of Student Writing

The flavor of such accomplishment is not best shared through outcome studies or student comments, but through the words of student writers and editors who have together sought to bring the subject matter alive for themselves and their readers.

Excerpts of the collaborative texts have been selected which illustrate the blending of personal and professional, experimental and expository, achieved by students through repeated efforts to master a wide range of research and writing approaches. These excerpts follow.

In preparing a chapter regarding cognition and memory, a pair of students were asked to address thought patterns universal to all humans versus those which might be substantially different across cultures, using a Mexican children's story as the basis for comparison:

"Hill of Fire" (Lewis & Sandlin, 1971) is the story of a Mexican farmer who is unhappy because his life is the same day-to-day. Then a volcano erupts in his cornfield. His farm and the whole village are destroyed, and the locals are moved to a place of safety by soldiers...

...The cognitive styles of the rural farmers portrayed in "Hill of Fire" are no

> different than those which would emerge
> following a natural disaster in a more
> urban setting such as Plymouth, NH. People
> here would use a variety of cognitive
> factors to frame their understanding of a
> powerful and mysterious circumstance.
> (Philbrick & Rodimak, 1992; p.51)

For a chapter in which theories of emotion and motivation were to be discussed, a student was asked to demonstrate his clear understanding of major emotions, such as anger, fear, guilt, depression and happiness, by preparing "lonely singles" ads presenting the attributes of each emotion in a humorous fashion:

> DEPRESSED: My name is Oscar. I'm looking
> for someone to sit around and smoke
> cigarettes. I don't leave the house ex-
> cept to rent movies. (Sakellarios, 1992;
> p.87)

Another student was asked to recall the emotional, social, and cognitive effects of puberty upon girls, for a chapter covering topics in human development. She chose to write a highly personal reflection on this process, which provoked a great deal of classroom discussion:

> Puberty did not hit me by surprise at all.
> I was not embarrassed by it, as some of my
> friends were. I was basically begging for
> it. I was a late bloomer...Finally, after
> two years which seemed like ten, I once
> again felt content with my body. (Caron,
> 1992; p.95)

Another personal essay was written by a student who talked with a relative in order to better understand the process of latent learning, in which information is not consciously remembered during the trauma of combat:

> My grandfather is a veteran of combat during World War II. He was wounded twice, and awarded the Purple Heart. His battles were waged in North Africa and Sicily. They were fought 50 years ago. Yet his memories of these events have not faded with time. What is it that prompts him to recall episodes half a world away and half a century away? (D'Agostino, 1993; p.89)

A dance teacher participating in the class was asked to describe the perceptual processes involved in her craft, using precise terminology wherever appropriate:

> Dance is an expression of feelings. In an artistic sense, the dancer must feel completely present and empassioned by whatever theme the dance is conveying. The stimulus for dance can come from varying sources. The choreographer can not only use the music and the dancer as a means to express an idea, feeling, or emotion (an affect), but also stage props, lighting, costuming, and make-up (visual stimuli). (Milley, 1993; p.38)

In a final example, a student used the "Appalachian Spring Suite" by American composer Aaron Copland to examine

a theory of emotion which proposes that external stimuli are filtered through bodily changes and memory before emerging as a particular emotion:

> Time after time, changes in tempo brought changes in mood, or flushed out an old memory. Stanley Schacter's ideas on emotion seem to play out well — I 'feel' the music, filtering it against my thoughts and, then, my memory. (Santos, 1993; p.109)

All student submissions received grammar, content, and citation editing from a group of 3 or more student editors, so these excerpts, like the collaborative textbooks themselves are, in fact, a product of collaboration between students. It can also be noted, however, that even after being edited by another group of students, these selections reflect a wide range of writing ability as well as a diversity in student perspective.

Survey of Student Evaluations

Due to the unusual nature of the instructional format, student assessment of the course was not only sought through the department's standard computer-recorded surveys, but through custom-designed surveys as well, conducted during the last scheduled class meetings. Computer print-outs of all student assignments and copies of the syllabus were made available in order to refresh the memory of participants.

Students were asked to rate the difficulty, level of learning, and enjoyment of each of their 10 assignments using a 10-point scale. Among the Fall 1992 participants, the average rating of assignment difficulty (1-very easy..10-very difficult) was 4.98 (with SD=2.68). The degree to which students learned

from the writing assignments (1-not at all..10-considerably) was given an average rating of 6.24 (SD=2.66).

The surveyed Spring 1993 participants rated their assignments as having an average difficulty of 5.02 (SD=3.45). They also indicated that the degree to which they learned through this format was, on average, high (M=7.33, SD=3.53). The enjoyment of the collaborative research assignments (1-not at all..10-very enjoyable) was reported in Fall 1992 as a mean 6.24 (SD=2.9), and in Spring 1993 as a mean 7.01 (SD=3.40).

Participants found a high degree of correlation between grades awarded for assignments and their level of difficulty (68% of 31 respondents in Fall, 77% of 11 respondents in Spring); an even higher percentage (88% and 90% respectively) reported a correlation between the grades awarded and the amount of effort they expended upon the assignments.

The degree to which classroom discussion of the assignments assisted students in the learning process was also assessed, using a 10-point scale (1-not at all helpful..10-very helpful). An average rating of 8.46 (SD=1.83) was reported by Fall participants, and an average of 8.75 (SD=2.92) by Spring students.

Participants in the Fall 1992 section also rated on a scale the effectiveness of each type of collaborative assignment in learning the concepts of psychology. The categories of weekly research projects which appeared most effective were 'personal experience' (M=8.77, SD=1.64) and 'concept applications' (M=8.29, SD=1.63).

One hundred percent of responding students in both sample groups answered 'yes' to an item asking whether or not they found this curriculum an effective method of learning psychology. Almost all (97% in both groups) also endorsed a statement that this curriculum was an enjoyable method of learning this subject.

Writing as a Collaborative Process

One outcome of this course which is difficult to measure is the sense of community in scholarship promoted by peer publication, peer editing, and peer supervision. Students commented to us that they felt that bonds between class members were established which are often lacking in large class sections. One student commented on this:

It's hard to describe. You go to the library to get help on a difficult assignment and you see this group of other people in the class all sitting around a table debating how to help improve somebody else's paper, and you realize that this is what's behind most of the marks on your last paper. They say hello and offer you suggestions.... You get the feeling that you really are some kind of scholar or something.

Another student focused upon the impact of being peer-published in the collaborative text:

I couldn't believe it when I saw my article on Sigmund Freud in the book. There it was — in black and white, edited, with a nice heading, laid out on the page of a real book, my name right there above it. Maybe I shouldn't make too much of this, but I was so proud of myself that I showed the page to my roommate and mailed it home to my mother. She told me she didn't think I knew so much about psychology. Well, I guess I do.

A number of students commented upon similar lines, suggesting that the combination of collaboration and visible recognition of scholarship promoted their sense of academic mastery, participation in scholarship, and self-esteem.

Evaluation of the Curriculum

The actual effectiveness of this course design as a WAC process cannot be assessed without further measure. The lack of a pre- and post-test of students' critical reading, writing, and citation skills needs to be addressed. Furthermore, such measurements have limited comparative value until there are college-wide standards for critical skills to be addressed and accepted techniques for doing so.

Student surveys indicate that the collaborative assignments were neither too difficult nor too simple. As well as a reported sense of enjoyment and learning, it appears that weekly, varied assignments produce a great deal of satisfaction. The wide range of grades was in marked contrast to the high agreement that the total curriculum package produced substantive learning.

Student editors noted that almost all completed assignments addressed more topics than those required by the instructor. This indicates to us that a WAC curriculum promotes motivation in students to perform to higher, self-determined specifications than to group standards of performance. Testing performance is determined by the normative scores of students, whereas research writing performance reflects the individual motivation, interests, and abilities of students.

These findings tend to confirm research by Robert Weiss and Simon Walters (1980). They report that a WAC curriculum,when compared to a control curriculum, did not result inbetter writing or a reduction in anxiety for students, but did significantly increase both learner- centered education and conceptual skills among participants (p.15).

The outcomes of the PSC psychology WAC curriculum also suggest that students seek not so much good grades as the clear opportunity to learn the heuristics of solid

scholarship: research, organization, and presentation.   In fact, there were calls for more classroom structure, integrative assignments, and audio-visual aids which would supplement this educational milieu.

Special Requirements Upon Instructors

The collaborative and writing-intensive course curriculum we have described may require more time, written feedback, and course preparation than many lecture and testing models of instruction. The prospective creator of a collaborative text curriculum needs to be forewarned that this format often requires more frequent availability by the instructor, additional teaching hours during which student editors are supervised in their efforts, coordination with campus-wide writing and research resources, and considerable preparation time.

It has been estimated that weekly preparatory time for such a format is approximately double that of a lecture-testing teaching format. There is weekly grading and comment; office hours are almost completely devoted to assisting students in their research and writing efforts, so that "office hours" are best held in the library rather than the office. There are frequent conferences with library staff. Colloquium preparation requires additional time and study.

It is suggested that instructors contemplating the use of this curriculum weigh their teaching commitments carefully and begin pre-course work three to four months prior to the start of classes.

The delegation of research, editing, and re-writing duties expands the opportunities to learn for motivated students in the class, while reducing instructor-focused activity and its accompanying workload.

The development of a close working relationship with the college library and audio-visual staffs is believed essential

to the success of such a collaborative process. These professionals are ready and able to share the demands of creating a rigorous and textured educational experience if they are briefed, consulted, and supported.

Conclusion

Students who have participated in the collaborative textbook teaching format report that they enjoy their most success when integrating concepts with personal experience, learning to explain theory, and finding "real-world" examples of a concept. A course which includes opportunities for both inductive and deductive logic, empirical research and personal reflection, and reading and writing is highly desirable for both student and instructor.

One student commented several months after the course ended:

> Our textbook seems real easy, really comfort-able to read. It's not only the one textbook I've looked at after the end of a course, it's a book I've browsed through or re-read any number of times. It's different because it's a book   written exactly at the level of an undergraduate in college, instead of a watered-down version of a graduate school textbook.

This comment reflects what is perhaps the unique value for this type of curriculum: the marriage of developmentally-appropriate expression with academically-appropriate standards of research and writing excellence.

Overall, the authors feel strongly that this is a rich and rewarding method for learning, both for student and instructor. There has been excitement in re-creating the variability of life's learning challenges in the classroom and library setting. Its adaptation to other coursework and settings is strongly endorsed.

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A Model of Collaboration:
One Teacher's Composition Class and
the Reading/Writing Center

by Roy Andrews, Bruce Johnson, Mike Puiia, Pat Parmenter, and Nancy Hill

Part one: A View From the Writing Center
by Roy Andrews

About a year ago, Bruce Johnson, a composition teacher at Plymouth State College, stopped by the Reading/Writing Center to tell me that he had restructured his course and that his students were going to start using the Center a lot. He explained that he would now use Donald Murray's *Write to Learn*, and that his approach would be a process approach, which, he gathered from our faculty mailings, would work well with what we do at the Center. I expressed my enthusiasm and promised that we would do all we could to reinforce what he was doing in class.

When he left, I wondered if his students really would visit. Each semester I talk with faculty from just about every department, and most of them tell me that they value what is done at the Center and recommend the Center to their students (in person, on their syllabi, in notes on papers they pass back) but that despite their efforts, most of their students still don't use the Center enough.

It did not take long for me and another writing consultant, Nancy Hill, to realize that something unusual was happening in Bruce's composition classes. Not only did his students start visiting the Center, but they came to write. These were writers, engaged in their papers, who asked specific questions, such as "Do you think I should focus this paper on what

homeopathic medicine is or on how the AMA keeps trying to discredit it?" or "Do you think this paper on free will versus determinism is too dry and technical for a composition class?" These first-year students were writing about things they cared about, wanted to think deeply about, and wanted to communicate to others. They were writers. We at the Center responded to their writings and became involved in learning with them. We watched some of these students reshape early drafts as they reconsidered their audience or sharpened their focus. We listened to one student talk at length about his night and day in jail and how that was going to ruin his life, and then we watched him reclaim control of his life by turning his misadventure into a fascinating paper.

Nancy and I began to speculate on what was going on. Not only were Bruce's composition students pouring into the Center in record numbers, but Bruce also visited during the semester, sometimes to ask questions about specific writing concerns, such as documentation conventions, and always to ask how his students were doing. We had been sending him notes about all visits from his students, and when he visited we would talk in depth about some of those. We also took the opportunity of his visits to ask him about the secrets of his success.

In the last few weeks of the semester, Bruce's students began to ask different kinds of questions: "When can you use a semi-colon?" "Do you think this paragraph is too wordy?" "Can you help me check my paper for errors?" His students were going back over their papers and polishing them for their final portfolios. They had writing they were proud of, writing that mattered to them, so they were willing to spend the time and energy it takes to fine-tune and proofread carefully.

Nancy and I began to realize, after talking with Bruce, observing his students, and talking with each other, that the kind of collaboration he had initiated between the writing

center and his composition classes could be initiated in other courses across the curriculum. During one of his visits to the Center, we suggested he write something for the *WAC Journal* that explained how he encouraged the collaboration. It evolved into the following.

Part two: How I Encourage Collaboration Between My Composition Classes and the Reading/Writing Center
by Bruce Johnson

The major goal of a composition course is to encourage students to become the best writers they can. This means that C students can become A or B students, and that A students can become A+ students. It is expected that they will learn from this course and apply their new skills to other courses, and therefore, college success. In this endeavor, I stress that I am on their side, by their side, lending support.

Recently I made some major changes in my approach to teaching writing. Because of my strong desire to help students write their best papers, I want to challenge them to their individual limits. I want to see them putting more effort into their work, even those already producing top papers, and I want to see overall quality improve. Some of the changes relate to reshaping my efforts regarding the course. Other changes relate to incorporating the Plymouth State College Reading/Writing Center more fully.

Students in my composition classes focus on three major learning components. The first component is learning to write through reading. The course text is Donald Murray's *Write to Learn*, and the emphasis is on creating and using a writing process. Students read and respond, through writing and speaking, and share ideas. The second component stems from

Donald Murray and includes regular daybook writing. The emphasis is on consistent writing, not necessarily quality. This writing allows students to write daily, freely, on individually chosen topics. Daybook topics can relate to what students are thinking about and communicating. Writing becomes real. Many students tend to use daybook entries as ideas for paper assignments. The third and final component relates to assigned papers. Although assignments often relate to certain criteria, and all papers require some sort of writing process, students are encouraged to make papers their own and choose their own topics. For example, for research papers they are asked to write about a person or topic within their major course of study. They are then free to choose their topics and pursue personal interests. Students are respected for their variety of interests and opinions.

On the first day of classes, I share with students that "What you get out of this class depends upon what you put into this class." If students want to participate fully, read and respond to all of the readings, complete the daybook honestly, create and use a writing process, and write and rewrite papers, they will not only earn the highest grade, but improve their writing. In other words, I challenge students to become the best writers they can become. To further this, I talk to each student daily, in class, and share some sort of enthusiasm and interest in their writing.

Through positive reinforcement, I recognize the best in a student's work, and I encourage that student to continue writing. I offer suggestions carefully without saying, "You must do this," but rather, "Try this. It might work." In addition, I incorporate peer editing, which further encourages the writer to try something new. If the new way works, fine; if not, that's fine, too. The writer, not the teacher or the peer editor, has the final say.

Similarly, I employ portfolio concepts where students

pass in all assigned papers, drafts, and pre-writing activities and decide which papers are their best at showing off their writing skills and therefore should be graded. The main expectation is that chosen papers show the use of a writing process. With the idea that the best writing takes time to develop, students are encouraged to use one of the writing process models discussed in class, or they are encouraged to create their own writing process. The portfolio allows students to show growth, and most importantly, to take risks and try something new, without the fear of the final grade. If the risk works, the paper can be graded. If the risk doesn't work, something else will, and the next paper can be graded.

When students are successful, motivated, and engaged in writing, they feel at ease and have a strong desire to learn. I encourage students to use all resources available to improve their writing skills. The most obvious resource is the classroom teacher. A second resource is classroom peers and dormitory or other friends. Another resource is the Plymouth State College Reading/Writing Center.

The writing consultants in the Reading/Writing Center emphasize a writing process, and the help they offer parallels the help I offer in class. The writing consultants are not available for just proofreading papers, but are more available for helping students brainstorm ideas, develop focus or main idea statements, and work on outlines and organization. Students who improve their papers at the Reading/Writing Center before visiting me for conferences have better and more polished papers to talk about. The readers at the Center allow me to become a second or third reader and concentrate on a variety of additional writing skills.

I find that most students are, at first, skeptical about visiting a place like the Reading/Writing Center. This is particularly true of first year students to whom such services may be something new. Yet, once the students stop into the

Center, see what the Center offers, and meet the writing consultants, they are likely to return for help. I begin presenting the Center to students on the first day of classes. Here are four ways to encourage students to visit:

1. Invite Reading/Writing Center writing consultants to visit classes and share ideas about what they offer. Teachers can tailor the presentation to individual class needs. For example, in a recent visit to a composition class, I asked the representative, this time Roy, to share the importance of a writing process and how the Center and I are in synch and work well together.

2. More importantly, as teacher, continuously talk up the Reading/Writing Center. Mention daily, even if in just one sentence, for one half minute, that writing consultants at the Center are available for help. Ask students who have been to the Center to share their reactions with the class. The short amount of time this takes pays off with additional student visits.

3. Entice students to visit the Reading/Writing Center by allowing them to write (for credit) a short, one page response of their reactions to a visit. This often yields a double bonus as students tend to write something positive and therefore end up encouraging themselves to return.

4. Finally, when students visit the Center, the writing consultants are willing to record and send reports to teachers. Ask for these reports and read them carefully. Follow up by talking with the students individually. Ask questions about the paper worked on. Also ask questions about the services available at the Center and show an honest interest in what they are doing.

I consistently ask students about their visits to the Center, and I listen to their reactions and respond with questions. Sometimes the questions are simple, such as "With whom did you work?" or "What did you work on?" Other times the questions are more specific, such as, "What is

glossing a paper?" or "How was the glossing activity help-
ful?" What is most interesting is that when students begin
talking about their experiences, they tend to realize more fully
the value of the time they spent there.

In addition, I read and reply to students' written responses.
These may be responses for credit, something in a daybook, or
something included in a portfolio. Student responses are
wonderfully revealing. Here are some examples of student
comments:

- "The Reading/Writing Center was great."
- "All in all, the Reading/Writing Center receives an A+
   for outstanding help."
- "I am very impressed with my work now that I have gone
   to them (Reading/Writing Center)."
- "I left the Reading/Writing Center confident that I could
   find help whenever I need it."
- "It seems like he (the writing consultant) knew the
   Writer's Reference Guide like the back of his hand."

Sometimes I reply to these reports in writing and some-
times orally. A simple response goes a long way towards
reinforcing the importance of time spent at the Center. Al-
though it is important to react to student responses immedi-
ately, it is also important to remind successful students a week
or so later, after two weeks of not visiting the Center, to return.
This is the time to remind them of their comments that the
Center is, in their own words, "Great," or that the Center
deserves an "A+" for effort.

One day during a recent class discussion about the Read-
ing/Writing Center offerings, I asked students to share success
stories. Many students shared positive experiences related to
visiting the Center. One asked me if I had success stories to
share. I reiterated my original stand that the Center helps all

students, including A and B students, not just those having difficulty. Then I added another thought: I have encouraged over 300 students to visit the Center. I have had only one, just one student, return with a negative comment. All other students have returned with positive comments. That, without a doubt, is a success story.

Students who are excited about learning and writing have fire in their eyes and pens. The students who are most excited are the ones who are encouraged to work with both their teacher and the Reading/Writing Center consultants. These students achieve the ultimate success, the best papers possible. Here are testimonials from two such students, Mike and then Pat.

Part three: An Environment Where a Student Writer Feels Valued
by Mike Puiia

What makes my writing better now than it was in the past, before Mr. Johnson's composition class and my discovery of the Reading/Writing Center? That, to me, is a query that cannot be answered in complete entirety, yet there are certain traits/characteristics that Mr. Johnson and the people at the Reading/Writing Center instilled in me that enabled me to improve my writing.

Mr. Johnson's success in making better writers of students and enabling some of them to appreciate writing as an art form can be explained in short by a list of three individual yet interactive ideas:

1. "You get what you put into this class."
2. The three R's—reinforcement, recognition, and repetition.
3. Constructive guidance, NOT constructive criticism.

"You get what you put into this class," a quote from Mr. Johnson, was the basis for my success in composition. To excel in his class, you had to put forth an honest effort. If you came in as an "A" writer from high school, fine, but you would not obtain an "A" if your writing did not show improvement; each paper should be like a stepping stone in the long path to perfecting one's writing.

The pathway to improvement is comprised of three key elements: reinforcement, recognition, and repetition. What I call the three R's. It would be impossible for me to recall the number of freewrites Mr. Johnson had the class perform. Mr. Johnson always picked an idea that we had to write about, and I prided myself on being able to find a controversial aspect to it. The freewrite, to me, was the best part of the class; everyone could share ideas, and most important of all, you were allowed to speak your mind about others' writing. I am sure I made a few enemies because of my constructive comments; yet I learned one thing—to see the flaws in other students' writing and try to avoid them when I wrote. Mr. Johnson would always respond after each student read his/her piece, and I can't ever recall a negative comment on his part. He just wanted us to write. Believe me, our freewrites were far from perfect. The theory behind his madness was recognition of one's ideas and attitudes, regardless of writing ability, and the need to continually write in order to learn. Mr. Johnson made me feel good; the freewrites, the students, his response to work, and the sharing made me feel like an integral part of the class. Simply stated I felt good; therefore, I liked to write.

The final step in the process of bettering one's writing centers around constructive guidance, not constructive criticism. Mr. Johnson assigned three take home essays. Each essay was designed to measure the amount of progress made from the previous one. You did not have to be a perfect

writer to earn a good grade; you simply had to show a reasonable level of improvement. Mr. Johnson's expectations were so high, I knew that to succeed I would have to get some feedback. Acknowledging this, I went to the Reading/Writing Center.

I cannot place a value on the Center's existence. I have learned so many things: glossing, proper use of semi-colons, run-on sentence identification, wordiness, . . . the list could go on, but it doesn't have to. The point is that the Center and the people there have helped me improve my writing in a manner that stays with me. I am continually learning from them.

Perhaps of more importance, however, is that I feel welcome there. When I walk in I am greeted energetically and with a smile. These people know me by name. I feel like I'm Norm on the set of *Cheers*. I sense that I always have a place to go where I can do relatively no wrong. My writing usually concerns personal views of things that have happened to me. The people at the Center made me realize that writing can take many forms, can mean many things, and can be a way of getting to know yourself and heal old wounds. After only one semester here, I look at writing from a new perspective.

By writing this paper, I have realized two things. First, to better one's writing, it is almost necessary to write on a topic or in an area that in some way makes you feel like you're a good person, that makes you feel proud or relieved, that makes you feel like you have contributed to society in some form that will change opinions, unite beliefs, and better your environment. Second, it is much easier to learn in an environment where you feel comfortable and valued. Mr. Johnson's composition class and the Reading/Writing Center have found the key to creating that environment—love passionately what you do AND appreciate the individuals upon whom you are trying to instill knowledge. Get to know your students apart from their I.D. codes, and try to create a setting filled with

good thoughts and constructive guidance.

Part four: The Importance of Response
by Pat Parmenter

My experience with the Reading/Writing Center has been like many students' in some ways, but my perspective may be different than most. Like many non-traditional students, I worked for years before returning to college. Writing was an important part of my responsibilities, especially in my most recent position as Marketing Manager at a computer mapping company. I am probably more aware than most students of the amount of writing we are expected to do when we enter the work force and how much someone else's reaction and opinion can help achieve the desired results.

I began my Plymouth State College experience last semester following completion of my associate degree requirements at another school. One of my first courses was English Composition with Mr. Johnson. He immediately introduced us to the help available at the Reading/Writing Center. Shortly thereafter, Ms. Smith informed those of us who were taking Introduction to Education that we would be writing a "log" about our twenty or more hours of observation and participation at a public school during the semester. She, too, encouraged us to use the Reading/Writing Center while informing us that spelling, grammar, and form would weigh heavily in our grade for the paper. Both of these instructors emphasized that writing is a process rather than something to be hammered out on a typewriter or computer the day before our papers are due.

Having worked in jobs that required a great deal of writing, I had my own process fairly well developed before

taking these courses or visiting the Reading/Writing Center. My main concern was learning to write effectively for the audience I wanted to reach and to improve my form. I learned what works for one paper doesn't work for the next, and each new undertaking requires a process of planning, drafting, discussing, and revising.

My first visit to the Reading/Writing Center was for a research paper on the Alaskan oil spill for Mr. Johnson's class. I had acquired a wealth of information on the topic but felt that the paper didn't flow very well and that it may have been too technical for an English composition class. Part of our writing process for that class was sharing our papers with our peers, and I was concerned that I would lose my audience with the technical details that interested me but may have been of little interest to my classmates. Roy helped me most by discussing alternatives and answering honestly when asked if he felt certain parts were too dry. Our sessions together consisted mostly of discussing alternative forms of expressing an idea or concept on the first draft, with follow-up sessions to refine the essay to create a final draft.

The drafting, discussing, and refining process served me well when the time came to write our Introduction to Education "log." This was an entirely different type of paper than we had been writing in English composition both in form and length. With an expected result of eight to twelve pages, my drafting process consisted of writing one or two of the many sections and bringing just that portion to the Reading/Writing Center for review. Writing and assessing one section at a time was much more effective for me than bringing a completed draft to the Center and trying to work on the whole thing at once.

Perhaps the biggest help I receive at the Center is hearing someone else read aloud what I have written. "Is that really what you want to say?" Roy sometimes asks. "Oops," is my frequent response. I'm often so familiar with what I'm trying

to say that I don't catch errors through proofreading alone. Hearing my words spoken by someone else often shows me where I need more work.

When Roy approached me to write a portion of this article, we immediately entered into a familiar conversational pattern. "What's the objective?" I asked. "Who's the audience?" Roy replied. These are questions Roy and I have been over time and again during my frequent visits to the Reading/Writing Center. These now familiar questions are what begins the writing process for me.

Part five: A Summary of Mr. Johnson's Success Creating a Collaborative Relationship with the Reading/Writing Center
 by Nancy Hill

I have had the opportunity to work with many students from Bruce Johnson's composition classes. Certain characteristics about these students stand out. First, they don't rush into the Center at the last minute, hoping that someone here will quickly proofread their papers. Instead, they visit us shortly after an assignment is given and continue these visits throughout the entire writing process. Second, most of Bruce's students have a positive attitude about visiting the Center and are enthusiastic about the papers they are working on. Third, these students are willing to take some risks with their writing—to talk openly about their ideas and experiences and to try new things.

I have learned that what we are seeing in these students is a direct result of Bruce's attitude toward young writers. From the outset, he lets them know that he has high expectations; he believes that they can take responsibility for themselves and

that all of them have ideas, thoughts, opinions, and interests worth writing about. Bruce has faith in his students, and through genuine encouragement and respect, he is turning out enthusiastic writers who are willing to put effort into improving.

Bruce further communicates his respect for and faith in students through his teaching methods and assignments. Because there is freedom within all of his assignments, writing becomes personal and not just another grueling task. He also allows students to develop their own writing processes within certain guidelines, thus fulfilling the need some may have for structure while still allowing for individuality. Because both the topic and the process belong to them, the student writers thrive.

Three other invaluable methods that Bruce uses in his class are daybooks, freewrites, and portfolios. The daybook and freewrites fulfill the need for consistent writing, and both allow the student to take some risks. The portfolio allows for risk-taking as well. When a student knows that not every assignment will be graded, the anxiety level is significantly lowered. Students who come to the Center from classes that use portfolios are much more willing to try out new writing techniques or explore new ideas than those who come from classes that use more traditional grading procedures. Because the portfolios are usually not due until mid-semester and again at the semester's end, there is plenty of time to explore and revise. Final editing and proofreading can be done after the higher order concerns are addressed, thus giving both process and product the proper amount of time and attention.

All of Bruce's teaching techniques communicate to the students one very important message: He wants them to succeed. Because of this, he encourages them to use all resources available, including the Reading/Writing Center. He does not, however, single out less experienced writers, but

rather invites all students to visit the Center right from the start; no one feels pressured or forced to come, only encouraged. This gives a clear message that all writers, no matter what level, need readers and feedback during all phases of their writing.

Several teachers from courses other than composition have had success in encouraging their students to use the Center—Dr. Warren Mason, Dr. Robert Miller, and Dr. Stacey Yap, to name a few. Many of them, like Bruce, start out by visiting us themselves to discuss ideas and concerns and follow this by inviting us to visit their classrooms. These collaborations have been valuable learning experiences for all involved: professors, writing consultants, and, most importantly, students. We look forward to doing much more collaborating in the future.