Volume 2
Number 2
Fall 2008

Open WORDS

Access and English Studies

In this issue

Editor's Introduction:
Teaching Beginnings for
Multicultural Reform
John Paul Tassoni

Group Work and Autonomy:
Empowering the Working-Class Student
Alexandra Hidalgo

Bilingual Students in the
Composition Classroom:
Paving the Way to Biliteracy
Elaine Fredericksen and Isabel Baca

Writing in Ecological Microcosms:
A Pedagogical Field Map
for Re-thinking Process
Kenneth Gillam

What's Wrong with Larry?
Or a Case for Writing Appropriate
Comment on Student Writing
Beth L. Virtanen

In our commitment
to support the
composition community,
Pearson Higher Education
is pleased to sponsor
the publication of
OPEN WORDS.

PEARSON

Volume 2
Number 2
Fall 2008

Open WORDS

Access and English Studies

Co-Editors

John Paul Tassoni
Miami University Middletown

William H. Thelin
University of Akron

Assistant Editor

Leann Bertoncini
College of Wooster

Editorial Board

Deborah Adelman
College of Dupage

John Alberti
Northern Kentucky University

Helane Androne
Miami University Middletown

Jennifer Beech
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

William DeGenaro
University of Michigan–Dearborn

Kristin Dietsche
Northern Kentucky University

Rex Easley
Thomas More College

Chris Gallagher
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Amy Goodburn
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Sue Hum
University of Texas–San Antonio

Seth Kahn
West Chester University

Julie Lindquist
Michigan State University

William J. Macauley, Jr.
College of Wooster

Pegeen Reichert Powell
Columbia College

Mike Rose
UCLA

Tony Scott
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Ira Shor
CUNY

OPEN WORDS: Access and English Studies is dedicated to publishing articles focusing on political, professional, and pedagogical issues related to teaching composition, reading, creative writing, ESL, and literature to open admissions and non-mainstream student populations. We seek critical work in areas such as instructional strategies, cultural studies, critical theory, classroom materials, technological innovation, institutional critique, student services, program development, etc., that assist educators, administrators, and student support personnel who work with students in pedagogically difficult settings. Articles should consider the particularities of these settings—issues, for example, surrounding the identifier of "open access," intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability, regional and cultural differences, and the range of competencies students bring with them to classrooms—in light of the aims of English studies to empower students' critical and creative endeavors. We value works pertinent to specialists yet accessible to non-specialists, and we encourage submissions that take into account what interactions with students teach us about the broader, democratic goals of open access educations and English studies.

OPEN WORDS: Access and English Studies accepts manuscripts year-round and is interested in theory, critique, qualitative or quantitative studies, narrative, biography, history, or pedagogical practice. Prospective contributors should prepare manuscripts in MLA style with all identifying references to the authors deleted. Submissions should include a cover page, giving the name, address, and institutional affiliation of the author. We do consider longer works, but submissions should try to stay under 30 pages. We will acknowledge receipt of submissions immediately and inform contributors of the status in approximately 8–12 weeks.

Electronic submissions should be sent to John Paul Tassoni at *tassonjp@muohio.edu* or William H. Thelin at *wthelin@uakron.edu*. Paper submissions can be sent to John Paul Tassoni, OPEN WORDS, Department of English, Miami University Middletown, Middletown, OH 45042. Please prepare three copies.

OPEN WORDS: Access and English Studies is published twice a year. Single issues are available at $5.00 a copy. Checks should be made out to William H. Thelin and be sent to OPEN WORDS, Department of English, University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325-1906. Personal and institutional subscriptions should inquire at *wthelin@uakron.edu*.

Volume 2
Number 2
Fall 2008

Open WORDS

Access and English Studies

Table of Contents

1 *Editor's Introduction:*
Teaching Beginnings
for Multicultural Reform
John Paul Tassoni

3 Group Work and Autonomy:
Empowering the Working-Class Student
Alexandra Hidalgo

24 Bilingual Students in the
Composition Classroom:
Paving the Way to Biliteracy
Elaine Fredericksen and Isabel Baca

43 Writing in Ecological Microcosms:
A Pedagogical Field Map
for Re-thinking Process
Kenneth Gillam

67 What's Wrong with Larry?
Or a Case for Writing Appropriate
Comment on Student Writing
Beth L. Virtanen

© 2008 by William H. Thelin and John Paul Tassoni

Printed in the United States of America.

Journal design/Robert Farrar-Wagner

Editor's Introduction

Teaching Beginnings for Multicultural Reform

AT THE RISK OF GOING TO THE WELL ONCE TOO OFTEN WITH JOHN ALBERTI'S award-winning *College English* essay, "Returning to Class: Creating Opportunities for Multicultural Reform at Second-Tier Schools,"[1] I've got say I couldn't read this issue of *Open Words* without recollecting Alberti's call for English teachers to "revers[e] our perspectives" on college life in order to take "second-tier schools as the norm in higher education." Such a reversal, he points out, raises opportunities for English Studies to ground itself in "the key questions of access and cultural democracy that have always been at the heart of the multiculturalist movement" (563). With this issue of *OW*, such a reversal is more than underway.

For the authors of the essays collected here, teaching begins with the interests and concerns of students historically considered nontraditional; and the authors use this point of departure to articulate alternatives for English pedagogies that affirm historical trends of exclusion, sometimes even in these trends' very attempts to ensure student agency. Resisting the stereotypical (white, middle-class, native-speaking) representations of elite research institutions and liberal arts colleges more often than not posited as the norms of higher education, students at the center of this issue of *OW* are African American, they are working-class, they are minority language learners. At the heart of their teachers' considerations, these students' experiences call into question and in some cases alter pedagogy. They demystify common elements of English instruction—process pedagogies (Gillam), prewriting activities (Fredericksen and Baca), group work (Hidalgo), end comments (Virtanen)—and call attention to the political ramifications of these practices and to representations of them that buttress "first-tier" views of higher education.

The articles in this issue, as in prior issues, indicate not only a reversal in perspective away from these "first-tier" views and discussions of pedagogy that result from them, but also an acknowledgement of the many beginning points to which democratic teaching responds, an acknowledgement that situates teaching in the lived lives of a diverse citizenry rather than in connivance with the elitist standards of a mythical average norm. For Hidalgo,

---

[1] John's article is referenced in the introduction to *Open Words* 2.1 as well.

DOI: 10.37514/OPW-J.2008.2.2.01

Gillam, Virtanen, Fredericksen and Baca, elements of college writing instruction do not fall prey to what Paulo Freire would call a "technistic vision of education,"

> which renders it purely technical, or worse yet neutral, [and] works toward the instrumental *training* of the learner. It assumes that there is no longer any antagonism between interests, that everything is more or less the same, and that all that really matters is solely technical training, the standardization of content, and the transfer of a well-behaved *knowledge of results*. (98)

These instructors situate their practices within the "antagonism of interests" too often flattened in "best practices" genres that uncritically assume a neutral backdrop to good teaching. Together, these articles help manifest the type of norm Alberti identifies in his *College English* article, a norm reflective of the complex human geographies we'd all like to chart and encourage with each new issue of this journal.

John Paul Tassoni

June 2008

Works Cited

Alberti, John. "Returning to Class: Creating Opportunities for Multicultural Reform at Second-Tier Schools." *College English* 63.5 (2001): 561–584.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Heart*. Tr. Donaldo Macedo and Alexandre Oliveira. New York: Continuum, 1997.

Alexandra Hidalgo

Group Work and Autonomy: Empowering the Working-Class Student

THE EXISTENCE OF SOCIAL CLASS DIVISIONS IN THE UNITED STATES IS A TOPIC THAT HAS sparked much discussion in and outside academia. The mythology of our culture is crowded with Horatio Alger stories, with victorious underdogs who in spite of impoverished childhoods have become senators and doctors, CEOs and professors. Many of us pride ourselves on the idea that in America, the land of opportunity, such a transformation is more likely to occur than anywhere else in the world. It is not within the scope of this essay to evaluate the truth of such a claim but rather to analyze the difficulties that working-class students often face while attending college, which is seen as a crucial step on the way to high social status and prosperity in today's workforce. I will elucidate my initial observations as a composition instructor to suggest ways in which we can adapt the teaching of composition to help working-class students develop a proficiency in critical reading and writing that will help them succeed throughout their academic careers.

The fact that freshman composition is a mandatory class places it in the difficult yet advantageous position of reaching the whole student body. Only a portion of our students are genuinely interested in writing while the rest find themselves forced to take a class that may seem pointless or tedious. Thus, composition instructors must go to greater lengths to foster enthusiasm in what they are teaching. Whenever we do manage to elicit enjoyment in writing and reading from our students, however, we are promoting the development of skills that will help them throughout their college and often professional careers. If we accomplish our goal in teaching them to decipher academic texts and to write in a clear, persuasive fashion, they will be more successful in other classes, many of which include reading textbooks and writing papers or essay exams. These are particularly important skills for working-class students who often find the college experience intimidating and struggle to make ends meet while working toward their degrees.

In his article "Returning to Class: Creating Opportunities for Multicultural Reform at Majority Second-Tier Schools" John Alberti explains that "most college students in the United States do not attend elite, selective-admissions four-year institutions" (563). Instead they go to "second-tier, open-registration, regional two-and four year colleges—what I call 'working-class' colleges—that represent the majority of institutions of higher education" (563). The

DOI: 10.37514/OPW-J.2008.2.2.02

fact that most of our students are attending working-class institutions lends some credibility to the notion that with effort and dedication anyone can raise their socioeconomic status in the United States. However, just because these students are in college does not guarantee that they will be able to obtain a degree and prosper. As a matter of fact, as Annette Lareau states in her book *Unequal Childhoods*, "[i]n the United States, just under one-quarter of all adults have completed a bachelor's degree [. . . .] Even among younger people, for whom college education is becoming increasingly common, a clear majority (from two-thirds to three-quarters) do not graduate" (29). Many men and women begin their college careers, but an alarming number do not obtain a degree.

A school's inability to retain students is not problematic for the students alone. It also hinders colleges and universities themselves, especially since government funding for public universities has decreased during the current administration and the burden of financing the schools has been relocated to tuition. The 2007 *New York Times* article "College Costs Outpace Inflation Rate" argues that "[t]he changes in tuition at public institutions closely track changes in financing they receive from state governments and other public sources . . . When state and local support for public colleges declined over the last seven years, tuition and fees rose more quickly" (Glater). When faced with an inconsistent student body, the schools' funding is also unstable, making retention essential. The question is: Why are so many students going through the enormous expense and time commitment of attending college and not managing to graduate?

Alberti believes that one of the key factors is that "work outside of school, whether for pay or centered in the home, is no longer the uniquely distinguishing feature of the 'nontraditional' student; more and more, it applies to the entire student body at these second-tier (and increasingly at first-tier) schools as well" (573). Students who must work, raise children, or attend to ailing relatives cannot make school their first priority. They are often unable to complete assignments or purchase textbooks and other class requirements. As Mary Soliday states in her essay, "Class Dismissed," "[t]he number of hours worked and various family responsibilities are correlated strongly with both the type of institution that these students attend and their retention rates" (734). While it seems obvious that students with financial limitations and those who with other (job, family) responsibilities would have a harder time succeeding academically, the problems faced by working-class students are more deep-rooted and complex than that. Having their financial needs covered as well as enough time to study would certainly help, but it would only address part of the problem.

In her essay "From Outside, In," Barbara Mellix discusses her academic journey. As an African American from a working-class background who returned to school after her children were teenagers, Mellix faced many obstacles in her attempts to obtain her degree. She expresses her frustration during her first college writing classes by stating, "[m]y concern was to use 'appropriate' language, to sound as if I belonged in a college classroom" (264). Mellix was the first person in her family to attend a university. Unlike many middle-class children who grow up with college as their goal, it had not occurred to Mellix until adulthood to consider it an option. She did not feel that she was meant to be in those classrooms, and she feared that at some point her professors and the other students would find out that she was an impostor who should not be there:

> Whenever I turned inward for salvation, the balm so available during my childhood, I found instead this new fragmentation which spoke to me in many voices. It was the voice of my desire to prosper, but at the same time it spoke of what I had relinquished and could not regain: a safe way of being, a state of powerlessness which exempted me from responsibility for who I was and might be. And it accused me of betrayal, of turning away from blackness. (267)

In trying to learn the language of academia, she felt that she was abandoning the way in which she spoke to her family, and by rejecting that voice—even if it was only in the classroom and while writing school assignments—she feared that she might be turning her back on them. Her longing for a more rewarding profession and a higher income made her feel divided from her relatives; as if by choosing a path different from theirs, she was looking down upon the way they lived. Attending college did not only make her feel isolated while she was in school but also when she went home to the ones who could not relate because they had not had that experience.

Michèle Lamont corroborates Mellix's sense of alienation from her loved ones in her book *The Dignity of Working Men.* For her study, Lamont interviewed working-class men who had finished high school but were not college educated (2). One of her subject's girlfriends had left him when she began attending college because she felt that he was not ambitious enough. He described her newfound school friends as "'very cold, shallow people . . . concentrating a lot on finances and not that much on personal needs'" (108). Another worker complained about his brother who held a job at a corporation: "'I feel that I'm more sensitive a person. He's in a business atmosphere, where he has to be tough. He acts sometimes, you know, 'corporate' when he's talking to me, so I get upset . . . He doesn't show any sensitivity to some things that I would like him to show'" (108). Alfred Lubrano's *Limbo* examines the way "Straddlers," people who make the transition from working to middle class, deal with the duality of their lives. He

"unable to understand their newly educated children" argues that "[t]he academy can render you unrecognizable to the very people who launched you into the world. The ideas and values absorbed in college challenge the mom-and-pop orthodoxy that passed for truth for 18 years" (8). Not only are parents and relatives unable to understand their newly educated children, the students themselves may begin to question the way their family lives. Their beliefs and customs may seem antiquated or even illogical to students who have been urged by their professors to embrace multiplicity of thought and meaning, to examine, evaluate, and critique themselves and their surroundings.

This constant questioning of our assumptions is not foreign to students with a middle-class upbringing, whose teachers and college-educated parents often involve them in conversations that follow that pattern. However, as Patrick Finn shows in *Literacy with an Attitude*, working-class education is more concerned with the retention than the dissection of information: "Students wrote notes in their notebooks exactly as directed by teachers. They were later tested on the notes and if they passed, they got credits. . . . The routine allowed students no ownership of knowledge, nor did it include any opportunities to engage in analysis, synthesis, or evaluation of abstract, theoretical, high-status knowledge" (70). It is no wonder then that students who receive this kind of education find their composition teachers' requests for deep analysis of a subject challenging, if not altogether unreasonable. If they manage to learn what we are trying to teach them, though, they may end up being at odds with their family and friends, a chasm that can be extremely detrimental. Their sense of isolation both from the university, where they do not fit in, and from their home support system contributes to students abandoning their careers, and as such, it is an important problem to address in the teaching of composition.

During my first semester as an adjunct faculty member at The University of Akron, I taught four freshman courses, two sessions of English Composition 111 and two of English Composition 112. The University of Akron is primarily a working-class institution, where about 80% of the student body comes from blue-collar homes. The students I will discuss in this paper are part of the working-class majority in my classrooms. They were the ones I had to reach out to the most because their struggle with the college experience seemed deeper and, at times, paralyzing.

There is no consensus about the definition of class. As Paul Fussell states in "A Touchy Subject," "[a]lthough most Americans sense that they live within an extremely complicated system of social classes and suspect that much of what is thought and done here is prompted by considerations of status, the subject has remained murky. And always touchy. You can outrage people today simply by mentioning social class" (39). Though the today Fussell is referring to is 1983, his statement still holds true. Social class is not a topic Americans generally like to discuss. Not only because as a society we celebrate the belief that we are all equal but also because it is a slippery, labyrinthine topic. As Lubrano explains, "a plumber with an eighth-grade education can command a higher salary than a college professor with more degrees than fingers. The plumber is in an elevated economic class, but is he in a superior social class as well? The permutations are many and . . . well, confusing" (3–4). For the purpose of this paper, I will define class not on an economic basis but through education and occupation. I will adopt Lubrano's interpretation of the working class as "people [who] don't have college degrees and perform manual labor" while the middle class "are college educated and work at professional-type jobs" (4).

Lubrano uses Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital to deepen his definition of class. Bourdieu claims that children who grow up in a middle-class environment become acquainted with art and literature, with the different requirements of white-collar professions, without even realizing it. This knowledge becomes "a sense of entitlement that will carry them through their lives. This 'belongingness' is not just related to having material means; it has to do with learning and possessing confidence in your place in the world" (Lubrano 9). Working-class students often hear about Dalí, Fellini, and Tchaikovsky for the first time in college, and though they can certainly learn to enjoy and understand them, Lubrano claims it is "never as well" as those who grew up being aware of them since childhood (9). While it would be difficult to assess this latter claim—after all, many scholars of working-class origin specialize in the high culture to which Lubrano is referring—it is certain that understanding the value of studying these artists and thinkers is easier if students have been acquainted with them before arriving at school as middle-class children often have.

I began to distinguish my working-class from my middle-class students during the first week of class. I gave them the following writing prompt: "Why are you in college and what do you expect to get out of this experience?" and then asked them to read their responses out loud. The original goal of the assignment was to make the students aware of their purpose in school and to analyze that purpose and how English composition could help them achieve it. The prompt had a second, unintended effect, however, as it revealed the students' backgrounds. While some students said they were at The University of Akron because they were following in their parents' footsteps, the majority of them wrote about being the first in their families to go to college, some even the first to graduate from high school. As the semester progressed, they used their childhood experiences and their parents' blue-collar or middle-class lives to make points during our discussions, becoming more and more comfortable with interpreting their own past both in class and in their writing.

This openness, however, did not come naturally to most of the students. Some of them, especially my working-class students, found class discussions and the writing overwhelming and intimidating at first. One of my students, Sheila,[1] failed to turn in the first assignment and sent me an email a week after it was due explaining that she did not give it to me because she knew that it was an F paper. I invited her to my office, where I learned that Sheila had been an avid member of "Power of the Pen" in high school and was extremely fond of reading, but she did not think she could write research papers. She felt uncomfortable using academic language and found the research aspect of writing a paper daunting. After discussing ways in which to get over her fear of writing critical, persuasive papers, we turned to her class participation.

Sheila had never voiced her opinions in class, but during our conference I realized that she had comprehended the readings and retained them impressively. She could recall details from passages we had read weeks ago and talk about them in a perceptive manner. I asked her why, if she was reading, she was not participating. She replied that she was intimidated by the class, especially by another student named Anna who lived in the Honors Dorm. Sheila said that Anna was so smart that Sheila knew that whatever she said would sound stupid to Anna. I explained that in a reading discussion all participation was welcome, and that the wider the range of the opinions expressed, the better off we would be as a class. Furthermore, Anna was a kind and open-minded student who welcomed her classmates' input. She often dialogued back and forth during reading discussions, but even if Anna had been annoyed by Sheila's comments, it did not matter. They had both been admitted to the same university and had a right to say whatever they pleased in class as long as it did not insult anyone and referred to the topic at hand. Sheila promised she would try to get over her fear, and each class after that she began to participate more and more, until she became one of my most outspoken students, spearheading many lively discussions. The more she participated, the more confident she became and the more complex the ideas she expressed.

Like Barbara Mellix, Sheila had felt apprehensive and isolated. She was intimidated by a few other students who exhibited great ease when expressing their opinions in class. They exuded an undeniable sense that they belonged in college, while she was an outsider who could not use academic jargon the way they did. Once she realized that her participation was welcomed by the class, however, she was able to challenge herself and experiment with more intricate notions. Sheila had not realized that while five or six students were like Anna in her class of twenty-seven, the rest of them were as afraid as Sheila was to speak up. Not everyone was as quiet as Sheila had been, but during the first few weeks, most students did not volunteer to participate unless I called on them. I felt, though, that putting students on the spot to answer my questions would only intimidate them even more, worsening the problem.

---

[1] Students' names are pseudonyms.

At the beginning of the semester I went through three weeks of semi-successful discussions in which the same students raised their hands and intelligently answered my questions about the readings. I wanted to get everyone involved, however, so I asked the class to divide into groups of three or four students and assigned each one of the groups a different concept to examine in the reading. The groups were asked to figure out what the thesis was or to evaluate ethos, pathos, logos, audience awareness, language, what the author had done well and what he or she could have done better. I would give them about four minutes to discuss their part and then call on one group at a time. Whoever had the thesis always went first so we could agree on what the reading was about before we began dissecting it. Although the members of the group were the first to expound on their particular task, the discussion was then open to anyone else who wanted to add something, which was usually the case.

The first time I asked the class to divide themselves into groups, the discussion changed radically. It was lively and the reading was scrutinized in a thorough, dynamic way. When I told the students that I was pleased with how well the discussion had evolved that day, Naomi, one of my brightest students, replied, "That's because we like to be in groups." The rest of the class nodded in agreement as she said this. The reaction was the same in all of my other classes. The tenor of my classrooms changed dramatically. Suddenly half the students were eager to share their opinion, not just the usual outspoken few. I decided to keep the system as long as it worked, and since it continued to yield involved discussions, it became a permanent fixture in our routine.

Not only did the group system make the discussion go more smoothly, it also allowed for the key concepts we were learning to become part of everyone's thought process and vocabulary. The concepts rotated from group to group, and I would hear students ask their group mates, "What's pathos again?" and one or two would reply, "That's the emotional response," which would lead to an exchange about what emotional response meant and finally end with whether the essay had succeeded in eliciting one from them.

One could argue that having the students discuss the readings with each other before we addressed them as a class would allow those who did not read to pretend like they had by simply repeating what their classmates had talked about. While this is certainly true, open classroom discussions where students raise their hands and participate voluntarily present the same problem. If anything, dividing the class into groups puts pressure on at least one of the group members to do the reading so they can comment on their particular task. During the whole semester, I never came across a whole group that had not done the assignment. Though no doubt there were always some students who had not read, I addressed this by sporadically using in-class written responses in which I asked for a reaction to specific issues presented by the text. Furthermore, I believe that the fact that our discussions were much livelier after the group system was introduced inspired some students to read so they could be part of something engaging and enjoyable.

Another benefit of group work is that it leads to discussions on how to improve writing. While in their groups, the students felt free to express their frustration over how hard to understand or boring a piece had been. When they realized that others in the group agreed, they were more willing to admit their dislike to everyone else, and this led to useful discussions on how to write in a way that will be clear to the audience and help them relate and want to keep reading. Group work removed me, the authority, from the space in which the students were organizing their thoughts, giving them freedom to say what they pleased, however they pleased. They did not have to express their opinions about the reading in an overly coherent fashion. Rather, they would state their first impressions however they came out, gather them together, find places in the text that supported them, and then summarize them in a more eloquent way when it was their turn to speak. At times students within the group disagreed, so they would explain their differences and start discussions in which parts of the class supported each side.

Although at first each group had its spokesperson, every few classes I would request that someone new express the group's opinions, and as a result the spokespersons began to rotate. While not everyone took the lead, most of the students related their group's findings at least a few times during the semester. However, some students, like Sheila, felt intimidated by the class discussion even while in their groups. This was minimal, though. Most students seemed comfortable, respectfully joking around with each other and me. This technique also played on the strengths of the working-class students. As Lamont explains, "[s]ocial psychologists have shown that those groups that are in positions of dependency or with limited access to power most often value morality and/or collective over individualistic aspects of morality" (246). She argues that "because their market positions do not allow them to aspire to high socioeconomic attainment, they redirect their energies toward the pursuit of other, more attainable, goals, and these are found in the realms of family and interpersonal relationships" (115). This diverges from the middle classes' own values, in which wealth and education are emphasized as signifiers of success. Lubrano concurs, listing "[t]he need for close contact with extended family" and "loyalty; a sense of solidarity with people you live and work with" as characteristics of the working class (17).

In "Rhetoric on the Concrete Pour," Dale Cyphert reiterates the importance of community to the working-class culture. He writes that "[p]revious studies of groups that cope effectively with 'nonroutine' events (or perhaps more accurately, with 'routine trouble') find them to be thoroughly social with a dense web of interrelationships, less reliance on the talents of single individuals, and a strong collective memory of specific, material applications"

(155). Group work helps working-class students feel more comfortable with the learning process by recreating in the classroom the values of the collective over the individual that they grew up with at home, thus, making their transition into college life a smoother one.

Another way in which I tried to aid students in their transition to academia was by providing them with readings that mirrored the struggles many of them were experiencing. They read texts like the essay by Barbara Mellix, which many found inspiring. I wanted them to look beyond their own problems, however. I looked for texts that would motivate them to become engaged with society and discuss ways in which we can improve it, so the new generations will not be faced with the same difficulties. At first, in-class writing prompts like, "If you could change anything about the way our country is governed, what would it be?" were met with incredulity and resistance. Some students claimed they did not know what they wanted to change; others said that it did not matter since they had no power to change society anyway. I reminded them each time that soon they would be the generation in charge of the world and that then they would not only have the power but the obligation to change it for the better. As the semester went on and we read about topics such as global warming, outsourcing of jobs, and affirmative action, they became more involved and, at times, even enraged. When one of my students brought up the treatment of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, a group of his classmates asked me to assign an article about it for classroom discussion, which I did.

The fact that they did not simply want me to tell them where they could find the information but requested that this topic become part of our curriculum shows that they valued our class dialogue. They wanted to read the article, but they also wanted to talk about it in the atmosphere we had created together, where all opinions were welcome as long as their proponents were willing to let their classmates question them. The discussion of the article was one of the most polarized we had during the semester. While many of the students were appalled at our nation's treatment of the prisoners, some of them defended the use of torture as a way to keep us safe. They felt that the other side was torturing our soldiers too, and that as long as it helped halt terrorism, they were willing to accept the fact that guilty, as well as innocent, prisoners were suffering unspeakable pain and humiliation. Through the discussion of something as extreme as torture, the students on both sides were becoming aware of their own moral code and they were learning to speak of it in an eloquent fashion while defending their views from impassioned opposition. The students' ability to orally argue and sustain their points is crucial since it helps them develop techniques that they can also apply to their writing. Cultivating this oral proficiency, as I will show below, is part of the middle-class upbringing, but it is not something that working-class parents tend to focus on while raising their children.

In her book *Unequal Childhoods*, Annette Lareau examines the difference in upbringing between middle-class, working-class and poor families, and the way that each group's parenting methods prepare children for education and the workforce. She interviewed 88 families from different social classes and conducted involved observations of 12 families (8). While she found little difference between the upbringing of poor and working-class children, the divergence between them and the middle-class was vast. One of the main gaps she found was in the amount of conversation that took place in each household. In working-class and poor families, "[s]hort remarks punctuate comfortable silences. Sometimes speech is bypassed altogether in favor of body language—nods, smiles and eye contact" (146). On the other hand, middle-class homes are characterized by constant conversation in which the parents expect children to logically support their opinions (110–111). As Lareau says, "Parent-child dialogues can boost children's vocabulary, preview or deepen knowledge of subjects taught in school, and familiarize children with the patterns of verbal interaction that characterize the classroom and other dealings with adults in organizational settings" (110). This confidence in their ability to express and support their thoughts is what many of my students were lacking before I introduced the group setting.

One of the reasons why the group approach worked may be that, as Lareau found, while working-class and poor children do not usually have prolonged discussions with their parents (159), they enjoy bantering back and forth and having involved conversations with their peers (150). By allowing my students to react to the readings among themselves before presenting their opinions to the rest of the class and to me, I may have invoked the childhood space in which the exchange of ideas was pleasurable and uninhibited.

Another result of middle-class emphasis on conversation that the group approach does not address, however, is the problem of vocabulary. As Lubrano explains, in a middle-class home family members speak three times the amount of words on average than in their blue-collar equivalent (9–10). My working-class students often complained about being unable to understand the readings. I found myself defining words for them, and only then were they able to grasp the author's message. After a prolonged campaign about the importance of improving their vocabulary, I managed to inspire a few students to look up words in the dictionary. Others circled unfamiliar words and asked about them in class, where everyone could benefit from the meaning. Nonetheless, the problem went beyond the readings.

At times, they could not understand the words I used in class. On rare occasions they would ask me the meaning of a word while I was talking, though mostly they said nothing. Whenever I gave them prompts for in-class writing, however, they let me know what words were confusing to them, for otherwise they could not complete the assignment. The first time they did not understand one of the prompts, we were discussing technology. The prompt was:

"If you could invent a new machine, what would it be? What ramifications do you think it would have?" Only a few students began writing as I read it. The rest stared at me blankly until Taylor raised his hand and asked what a ramification was. Being an etymology enthusiast, I explained that the root of the word was the Latin *ramus*, which means branch, so if they pictured a tree, they could see ramifications as that which resulted from something else. Taylor's eyes were wide with confusion until Janine, an avid reader, raised her hand and said, "Consequences. Ramifications are consequences." A number of heads nodded in understanding and everyone began to write.

When developing the prompt, it did not occur to me that such a word might perplex my students, just as when I spoke I used the words that came naturally to me, some of which they did not understand. And yet, I could not change my vocabulary to suit them; because as the semester progressed, I realized some students had problems with words I generally considered simple, such as the verb "to alter." Moreover, if I did not expose them to "big" words, I was not fulfilling my job as a writing and reading instructor, since they would encounter advanced vocabulary in many of the texts they would read during their college career and might be expected to use them in future essays.

I tried to undermine the intimidation that resulted from their limited vocabulary by reminding them that I myself had to look up words all the time and by creating an environment in which they felt comfortable admitting that they did not know something. Furthermore, since the class saw itself as a community in which they figured things out together, students like Janine were free to help me explain the meanings of words, sometimes doing so in ways to which her peers could relate better.

Vocabulary played an important role in another divergence in upbringing encountered by Lareau. She found that while working-class and poor parents could be very assertive when they needed something from landlords and customer service providers, "they do not define this approach as appropriate when dealing with school or medical professionals, perhaps in part because they lack the requisite vocabulary to effectively challenge such individuals" (199). Parents were intimidated by their children's teachers, and thus could not make the school system cater to their particular needs the way middle-class parents did. This resulted in a sense of alienation from the school, as well as mistrust:

> Mothers who nod in silent agreement during a parent-teacher conference may at home, and within earshot of their children, denounce the educator as unfair, untrustworthy, or mean. Particularly in the area of discipline, working-class and poor parents are likely to regard the school's approach as inappropriate. Many encourage their children—in direct violation of school rules—to hit peers who harass them, specifically including the advice to take their retaliatory actions "when the teacher isn't looking." (199)

Instead of presenting their complaints to the teachers and explaining why they felt their children were being treated unfairly, working-class parents tended to tell the children to take matters into their own hands and defend themselves. While this approach may help children develop a sense of self-reliance, it also complicates our relationship with working-class college students, many of whom did not grow up seeing teachers as their allies in learning, but as authorities with unjust rules that needed to be broken. While the group discussion system addressed some of these issues by removing me from the time they used to gather their thoughts, my attempts to empower the class as a whole were crucial in easing some of the inherent antagonism many students felt.

> "did not grow up seeing teachers as their allies in learning"

In his book *The Working Class Majority*, Michael Zweig defines class as being "in large part based on the power and authority people have at work. The workplace engages people in more than their immediate work, by which they create goods and services. It also engages them in relationships with each other, relationships that are controlled by power" (3). Those who have no independence in the system have good reasons to resent those who control their time and actions, and thus autonomy and being one's "own boss" are some of the most prized characteristics in a profession. Since instructors need to develop syllabi and design and grade assignments, we are forced to assume a certain level of authority. Moreover, in freshman composition, where we often agree as a department on how many papers must be written and what texts will be read, the instructors themselves are working within a rather rigid format.

At the beginning of the semester, the director of composition suggested that I allow my students to choose what themes they wanted to write about as a way to empower them. For the first two papers they were to select the topic from those presented in our class texts, and for the third they would come up with their own topic for which I would find pertinent readings. We had an open vote for choosing the topic of the first paper. Each student told me her or his selection, and I tallied them on the board. There was great excitement in the class over this, the last few votes evoking screams of joy from some and disapproval from others. Quarters were passed around to buy votes—a practice I mildly reproved—and tension surfaced in the classroom, a sense of playful yet steep competition we had not experienced before. While some of the students did have a strong sense of what topic they wanted to explore, the level of involvement went beyond it. This was their chance to have control over what they would be studying in a college class, and they relished it. The fact that they could choose what they would read and write about made the assignment theirs, not mine, and as such, something they cared about.

For the second assignment some students approached me with concerns about our voting system. They wanted to have two votes: the first to choose the two most popular topics and the second to decide between the two winners. The students had never questioned my teaching methods, never suggested that I alter anything, but since they saw the selection of the assignments as their jurisdiction, they felt entitled to amend it. They proposed another change for the last vote. They noticed that people who voted towards the end felt compelled to select the topics that were already popular so their vote would count, since they could see that their actual choices had no chance of winning anymore. Their solution to that problem was that we implement a two-tier, blind-voting system, which we did.

For the last assignment in which we were not using the book, students nominated the topics that interested them on election day. I sometimes broadened their proposals so they would encompass their specific choice but also appeal to the rest of the class. For example, we went from lowering the drinking age to 18 to the wider topic of legislation in general. After everyone who had something to propose had spoken, we ended up with about ten issues on the board. The students then voted and helped me tally the results, and once we had a winner, they told me what issues within the chosen topic they wanted me to find readings for.

While one could argue that allowing the students to decide what they want to write about might result in shallow or overly simplistic topics, I did not find that to be the case. Their selections were legislation, crime, college life, and raising children—the latter was, to my delight, proposed by the previously detached Sheila. The discussions we had about these readings were the most mature and involved we had the whole semester. The quietest students were suddenly finding their voice and at any given moment there were four or five hands up, waiting patiently—and sometimes not so patiently—to add something to the community we had created. I was still the authority, the agent of the often confusing and intimidating institutional world, but they were empowered, not against me, but rather with me. While this method is not something that would work in science, math or history classes, we in composition have the enormous advantage of teaching certain techniques, not certain content. The students must learn to read academic writing and produce well-argued, critical essays, but there are no particular topics we must deal with in order to impart that knowledge to them. Giving my working-class students the freedom to choose what issues we would discuss eased some of the frustration many of them had felt for as long as they had been in classrooms.

Freedom, as Lareau reports in her study, plays a bigger role in the daily lives of working-class children than in that of their middle-class counterparts. She found that middle-class children's lives were brimming with extra-curricular activities (1–2). Thus, they were very comfortable dealing with adults, such as their coaches and gymnastics and music teachers. Since everyone had a busy after-school schedule, however, the whole family did not spend a lot of time together and the children rarely saw their cousins or other relatives (39). This ease with adults in a position of authority facilitated their future in the college and work setting, but having their parents organize their time made middle-class children less adept at entertaining themselves. Unlike working-class and poor children, they complained about being bored when they did not have an activity prepared for them (81, 112). Working-class and poor children, on the other hand, rarely had extra-curricular activities, as their parents could not afford them. Instead they filled their own time by designing games they played with other children who lived nearby (81). These children were often their relatives. "[F]amily members spent more time together in shared space than occurred in middle-class homes. Indeed, family ties were very strong, particularly among siblings. Working-class and poor children also developed very close ties with their cousins and other extended family members" (242). Lamont concurs with this assertion, claiming that working-class people "are often immersed in tight networks of sociability, in part because their extended family often resides within a few miles (the children appear to spend considerable time visiting their cousins)" (11).

We are faced again with the fact that while middle-class children are comfortable dealing with adults in positions of power, working-class children are more used to relating to their peers. They are accustomed to having strong ties with those they interact with. Lamont explains that this pattern continues into adulthood. Working-class people:

> value responsibility because they are highly dependent on the actions of others. They point out that the physical conditions in which they work and live and their limited financial resources make it difficult for them to buffer themselves from the actions of neighbors, coworkers, kin, and friends. They have no private space at work and live in neighborhoods where houses are set very close to one another. (27)

Not only does group work complement the working-class upbringing, it is a skill that will remain useful to students all their lives. Being able to work effectively with others is valued in many of the professions they are preparing for, and even if they do not manage to reach their goal, that ability would also be useful in blue-collar occupations in which independence is less prevalent.

After studying an Omaha concrete work crew, Dale Cyphert noted that they used "an implicit form of communal decision making that is grounded in the actions rather than the words of a public. This work group is never observed to articulate a choice. Instead it lets 'circumstances' or 'chance' decide the outcome of a decision-making process" (153). Cyphert's use of the word implicit is important, since according to Finn, members of the working and middle-class tend to express their thoughts differently. The middle-class uses explicit language in which people "are willing to discuss reasons for rules and decisions when they are challenged" (84). As Lareau also observed, middle-class parents will try to convince their children, to persuade them into obedience with the use of logic (110–111). Working-class parenting takes a more authoritarian approach in which children do what their parents ask them to without questioning them. "Where conformity is expected, where sex roles are rigid, where opinions are dictated by group consensus, there is no need to explain one's thoughts, beliefs, or behaviors. Communication is frequently possible by alluding to shared opinions and beliefs rather than by explicitly expressing them. In such groups communication tends to be implicit" (Finn 83). The problem for working-class students is that explicit communication is what is required of them once they arrive in school. "The language of the school, especially the language of school books, is explicit. The explicit language that more affluent children learn at home prepares them for the ever so much more explicit language of the school, particularly the language of books" (Finn 90). As they move up through middle school and high school they are further affected by their inability to use explicit language, many of them receiving poor grades regardless of effort or intelligence (Finn 90). Those who do make it to our composition classrooms are then expected to imitate the explicit language used in the essays we teach them in their own writing, presenting them once again with the obstacle they have been facing since the beginning of their education.

Another reason why working-class children use implicit language is the fact that as Lareau noted, they often do not have as much contact with strangers as their middle-class counterparts, since they do not participate in extracurricular activities and tend not to socialize with people outside their extended family and close friends. "Where individuals rarely have occasion to deal with strangers, they tend to rely on allusion to shared experience for communication; where individuals must communicate with strangers frequently, they learn they cannot rely on shared experience; they cannot be sure of what the other person knows or thinks" (Finn 85). If we are speaking with people who know our past as well as our opinions, we can hint at something and let them find the context themselves, but we cannot do the same when talking to strangers.

It can be argued that having working-class students discuss the texts in groups before addressing the whole class could lead them to rely on implicit language, since many of them became friends and were discussing something they had all previously read, thus being able to understand each other without having to explain themselves explicitly. I believe this is certainly possible and probably did take place in my groups, but the point of the group discussion is to make the students feel comfortable with the text and their ideas before they have to address the whole class, not to make them speak explicitly. When they were explaining their findings to the rest of us, the other students and I asked questions that would lead them to express themselves in the specific and direct manner that explicit language requires.

While the group discussions forged a sense of unity within the class, the real bonding came from another proposal by the director of composition. He recommended that I have students write a group paper. Although during the first day of class I had warned them that we would be doing a group project, they were anxious when it was time to begin working on it. Their main objection was the fact that the majority of them worked or had children and they did not see how they would be able to find time to meet. When I explained that they would only be meeting during class, they began to regard the project with curiosity rather than dread.

They gathered in groups of four or five, each of which would write a section of the paper. One member was to administer a questionnaire to at least twenty people about the topic and write his or her part analyzing the results and how they related to their thesis. They worked on the research together, then devised a thesis they all agreed upon and assigned the sections each one would be writing. The sections were divided based on each student's skills and interests.

One of the groups wrote about the negative effect that technology may have on the way we view and interact with our own bodies. The graphic design major in the group looked at the way that pictures of celebrities are altered with Photoshop and other programs to present unrealistic images in ads and magazines. The painting major researched the French performance artist, Orlan, who has undergone plastic surgery various times to transform her face in unconventional ways that challenge our ideas of beauty. Another member examined the history and risks of plastic surgery, as well as the situations in which it is actually needed, and another carried out a survey about how far people would be willing to alter their bodies and why. The last group member explored the psychological repercussions that these practices have in our society and the ways in which we can address the problem.

Once the students had written their parts, one member would take everything home and piece the first draft together, which they would read and edit in class. Then, one by one the rest of the group would take the text home and polish it until it was ready to be turned in. I spent about ten minutes a class with each group, not only making sure that everyone was doing their part but helping them with whatever questions or problems they were facing.

The students had already edited each other's work. They brought in drafts of their papers to class, which were read and critiqued by peer groups. However, their own grades had not been affected, so although they did try to help each another, they had neither the time nor the incentive to read the work as deeply and critically as they did the group papers. The results, although slightly uneven as expected from the fact that some groups contained both advanced and not very skilled writers, were of higher quality than anything else produced during the semester.

When the project was finished, we held a discussion concerning its pros and cons. The negative aspects were not surprising: some group members did not work as hard as the rest, email messages were mislaid and attachments could not be opened when assembling the paper. They also battled with the difficulty of unifying their writing styles, and some had a hard time dealing with the rigid structure in which the paper was written. However, the majority of the students had found the experience enjoyable and many learned unexpected things from it. Some of the better writers realized that they were not as competent as they thought and still had much to learn. The less accomplished writers said they became more aware of their problems by having others edit their work and show them how to better argue their point or construct a sentence. Tamara, one of my most outspoken students who had turned in her first paper three days late, said she could not believe their paper was ready two days before it was due. She had never done this before and found the lack of stress both pleasant and strange.

The greatest benefit of the paper, though, came with the bonding that resulted from the writing of it. After the group project was over, I told the students that they could leave their groups and join another discussion group if they wanted to, but apart from two or three people in each class, every group remained together, and they expressed distress whenever one of the members was missing. Tamara's group had two seventeen-year-old female members in it. One of them, Angie, was a diabetic, and when she did not arrive for class one day, Tamara said to no one in particular, "Where's Angie? How can we have class when one of my babies ain't here?" The next day when Angie returned, her group expressed worry about her and told her she had been missed.

While not all my groups were as warm as Tamara and Angie's, a sense of unity characterized most of them. A missing student was a source of mild concern and of incompleteness, something that was expressed when they returned. Cherry, another student who missed three classes because of a car accident in which she sustained minor injuries, was greeted with so many concerned questions from her group that she had to ask them to speak one at a time. This sense of belonging may be especially important to The University of Akron students, where as Jane Falk notes, "most undergraduate students live at home and commute from the surrounding tri-county area" (48). For students who do not live in dorms, these connections made in class are crucial, since they often do not get to be part of the university community outside the classrooms.

The sense of accomplishing a paper together, of deciding on a topic, doing the research and polishing each other's reasoning and language had created a visible bond between many of my students. After the group project, we seemed to have bypassed that sense of isolation Mellix and Sheila had described. Their worry for each other's wellbeing, and their clear sense that they were missed when they were not present, resembled to a certain extent the family relations that both Lareau and Lamont found to be so important to the working class. Each group was a unit that needed all of its members to function properly. Although they were still burdened with financial limitations, work and family commitments, the sense that they did not belong in college or were not as important to the class as other students began to erode as they realized that they were valued members of their groups.

We as instructors have little control over what our students go through in order to be in school. We cannot help them financially nor ease the complications of their family lives. However, we can help our working-class students overcome some of the frustrations and difficulties they encounter by adapting our teaching to their specific needs. In her essay "Class Work: Site of Egalitarian Activism or Site of Embourgeoisement?" Sharon O'Dair argues against modifying our classes to suit the needs of working-class students. She tells us that "[w]hat is not considered, however, is how long this process ought to continue—one semester? two? three? more?—or, more fundamentally, whether the continued delaying of the students' transition to the academic and middle-class worlds is not, in fact, irresponsible and antithetical to their ambitions" (598). In other words, we are hindering working-class students by making concessions to them when other professors and their future employers may not be willing to do the same. While that is a valid point and we do not want to create unreal expectations in our students or lower our teaching standards for them, the method I am endorsing does neither. By surmounting isolation and subverting some of the instructor's authority, group work and class empowerment allow working-class students to develop strong critical thinking and writing skills. These abilities will in turn promote their success in other classes and work environments, helping them achieve the ambitions O'Dair fears we may be betraying.

I am not arguing for a lowering of teaching standards, but rather for us to foster a classroom atmosphere in which all students feel welcomed and where their input is always valued. While not all of my students participated in our class discussions or became attached to their groups, the majority of them did take active part in our activities, often with visible pleasure and enthusiasm, and they developed close ties with their group members.

One could argue that steering our efforts towards the specific needs of working-class students may hamstring middle-class students, but I did not find that to be the case. My middle-class students seemed to enjoy and thrive as well as everyone else. As Lareau, Finn and Lubrano showed, the middle-class upbringing is more geared towards preparing students for their college careers so that many of them arrived to class with an advantage. Lamont found this to be the case as well: "In [middle-class parents'] worlds, paramount are saving for their children's college education and creating the conditions of their self-actualization and growth by exposing them to a wide range of experiences. Self-actualization, 'be all you can be,' occupies a key position in the upper middle class culture as a whole" (31). I did not undermine the advantage that my middle-class students' upbringing imparted on them but rather attempted to enable my working-class students to attain the same level of comfort in class so they could also reach their potential.

O'Dair tries to convince us that college is not for everyone. She argues that "it is time for society to rethink its attempt to ameliorate via ever-increasing amounts of education the invidious distinction between the working class and the middle and upper classes" (602). She supports this claim by arguing that "higher education offers upward mobility only to a small portion of the working class; the expansion of higher education in the postwar period benefited primarily the middle and upper classes" (601). While this is true, it does not mean that we should stop trying to help the working class attend college. It would be catastrophic, not to mention embarrassing, if as a nation we were to give up on our attempt to make higher education available to all who are willing to participate in it after only 60 years of trying. Our attempts to welcome working-class students to our universities are still young and much remains to be learned about how to make them successful. We must keep exploring and experimenting, however, especially if current economic trends persist.

O'Dair believes that working-class people should not want to abandon their origins because "middle-class culture is not superior to that of the working class" (603). She contends that the middle class is "individualistic, hierarchical and consumerist" while the working class, as already discussed in this essay, "places less emphasis on the individual and more on the group, whether clan or, as is the case today, the family" (603). Why should the working class want to abandon their principles for those of the middle class? The answer is simple: the working class would like to have serenity and prosperity. As Lamont explains, however, "the living standards of workers have been steadily declining since the seventies, and they often complained that they have to work more hours to make the same amount of money as before" (27). Our economy has changed in the past forty years, making it very difficult for the working class to make ends meet and still have time to spend with their family, which as we have noted, is one of their main priorities. Thus, a college education and the professional opportunities that it brings is becoming increasingly desirable to them, if not imperative.

We cannot ensure that students will stay in school simply because they feel a sense of kinship in one class. However, if we manage to help them overcome their sense of isolation and their fear that they are not as smart or eloquent as other students, they will be more successful in future classes. There are some marked differences between working and middle-class upbringing. The American dream then, the promise that any hardworking person may overcome poverty is much more tenuous than our lore would like us to believe. And yet, if we can make working-class students feel like they do belong in college, we will help them attain the economic and social benefits that come with having a degree. There is more to it, however. In her essay "Bourgeois Realism or Working Class Kitsch?: The Aesthetics of Class in Composition" Wendy Ryden argues that "[w]e might conclude that composition, even in current-traditional mode, has been concerned not merely with the composing of texts but the composing of lives—and thus the ethics of that composition" (4). As we try to induce our students to think critically and to write discerning papers, we may also inspire them to become responsible citizens who will attempt to transform our society into one where equal opportunity is more than something we hope for.

Works Cited

Alberti, John. "Returning to Class: Creating Opportunities for Multicultural Reform at Majority Second-Tier Schools." *College English* 63.5 (2001): 561–84.

Cyphert, Dale. "Rhetoric on the Concrete Pour" *Who Says?: Working-class Rhetoric, Class Consciousness, and Community.* Ed. William DeGenaro. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2007. 144–63.

Falk, Jane. "Shaped by Resistance: Work as a Topical Theme for the Composition Classroom." *Open Words* 1.2 (2007): 48–60.

Finn, Patrick J. *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Work-Class Children in Their Own Self-Interest.* Albany: SUNY P, 1999.

Fussel, Paul. "A Touchy Subject." *Created Equal: Reading and Writing about Class in America.* Ed. Benjamin DeMott. New York: Harper, 1996. 39–44.

Glater, Jonathan. "College Costs Outpace Inflation Rate." *New York Times* 23 Oct. 2007. 24 Nov. 2007 <*http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/23/education/23tuition.html*>.

Lamont, Michèle. *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000.

Lareau, Annette. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life.* Berkeley: U of California P, 2003.

Lubrano, Alfred. *Limbo: Blue Collar Roots, White Collar Dreams.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2004.

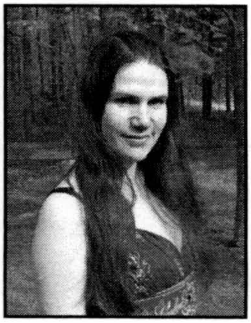
Mellix, Barbara. "From Outside, In." *The Georgia Review* 41.2 (1987): 258–67.

O'Dair, Sharon. "Class Work: Site of Egalitarian Activism or Site of Embourgeoisement?" *College English* 65.6 (2004): 593–606.

Ryden, Wendy. "Bourgeois Realism or Working Class Kitsch?: The Aesthetics of Class in Composition." *Open Words* 1.2 (2007): 4–23.

Soliday, Mary. "Class Dismissed." *College English* 61.6 (1999): 731–741.

Zweig, Michael. *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000.



Alexandra Hidalgo *was born in Caracas, Venezuela and moved to Ohio when she was 16. She is now a beginning doctoral student in Rhetoric and Composition at Purdue University. Her fiction has appeared in* West Wind Review, Bombay Gin, *and* One Less.

Elaine Fredericksen and Isabel Baca

Bilingual Students in the Composition Classroom: Paving the Way to Biliteracy

NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH, EVEN WHEN THEY GROW UP SPEAKING BOTH THE dominant language and their home language fluently, often flounder in the composition classroom. These bilingual learners may fear writing in English and lack the confidence to succeed in an English composition course. To compound the problem, many also feel inadequate in their native language. Fear and/or resistance interfere with their ability to produce ideas and think critically and deny them equal access to the benefits of this very important course. Well-meaning instructors take these students through the writing process but insist that each component be conducted in English, from freewriting all the way through research, editing, and publication (or evaluation). We would like to suggest, instead, an approach that fosters biliteracy—fluency in reading and writing two languages. We will concentrate on students whose dominant language[1] is not English, but the same methods can help fluent bilingual students who have equal strengths in English and another language. Through the approach we suggest here, students use their dominant language to strengthen their writing in English. In using their dominant language to produce ideas, bilingual learners can practice their literacy skills in their dominant language, improve their literacy in English, and gain confidence as writers.

New approaches are necessary because old ones have not worked. At one Hispanic-serving university on the US-Mexico border, one-year retention rates are 67%, and six-year graduation rates only 27% (UTEP Factbooks). Even some students who graduate often rate their ability to write in English as average or below. In a study conducted at a Hispanic-serving Community College (Baca), bilingual students from six Basic English Composition classes completed a preliminary student survey where they evaluated their English literacy skills.

---

[1] We use the terms *first language* and *native language* synonymously to refer to cases where students have learned a language fully before being introduced to English, as in the case of most international students and those who grow up in homes where no English is spoken. *Bilingual* students are those who grow up speaking two languages simultaneously. Many bilingual students have one language they feel most comfortable in; we call this the *dominant language*. Often students will speak one language (or dialect) at home and another in school. We refer to these as *home language* and *school language*. Either of these can be the student's dominant language.

DOI: 10.37514/OPW-J.2008.2.2.03

The majority identified their writing, reading, speaking, critical thinking, grammar, and vocabulary skills as average or below average. A minority of these students considered their skills to be satisfactory, and very few rated their skills as above average. These numbers are sadly typical of schools with large populations of students who speak English as a second language. Theorists and practitioners have labeled these students in different ways; they are variously called second language learners, non-native speakers, L2, ESL or ESOL, ELL, and bilinguals. For the purposes of this article, we will refer to these students as bilingual students or minority language learners, depending upon our context. We define bilingualism as the regular use of two languages—whether oral, written, or both.

The plight of these students has not gone unnoticed. In March 1998, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) published a position statement on national language policy, stating that everyone should be able "to participate in the life of this multicultural nation by ensuring continued respect both for English, our common language, and for the many other languages that contribute to our rich cultural heritage" (CCCC). This means that educators need to resist English-only legislation, efforts that CCCC's statement calls unnecessary, unrealistic, educationally unsound, and unconstitutional. Rather, educators, and particularly composition instructors, should welcome and take advantage of minority language learners' linguistic diversity and multiple literacy skills. By doing so, they will provide equal access to the educational process and give bilingual learners the start they need for a successful college career.

Theoretical Framework

A number of theorists have noted the lack of programs and instructor training for teaching composition to students who have learned, or are learning, English as a second language. Paul Kei Matsuda, for example, believes that "the vast majority of U.S. college composition programs remain unprepared for second-language writers who enroll in the mainstream composition courses" (637). He remarks further that, "those who are not native speakers of dominant varieties of English are thus being held accountable for what is not being taught" (640). Scott Wible looks particularly at African American languages and cultures in his 2006 article "Pedagogies of the 'Students' Right' Era" and states that "the most consistently reached conclusion among compositionists is that the students' right to their own language is a theory that rarely, if ever, has materialized in the writing classroom" (443). This conclusion applies to bilingual learners as well as African American students. Although individual teachers may use effective strategies for minority language learners in their composition classes, no standard pedagogical practices have been developed to address the special needs of this linguistically rich group.

Charles Hirschman criticizes assimilation theory, which "predicts that, over time and across generations, the descendants of immigrants will become more similar to natives—perhaps becoming indistinguishable from the general population" (318) as too general and suggests instead a segmented assimilation hypothesis. This hypothesis "predicts that adaptation is contingent on geographical location, social class of the family of origin, 'race,' and place of birth" (319). Hirschman suggests that immigrants should be able to adapt to American culture and education without losing their ethnic identity. If this were the goal of composition instructors, minority language learners might feel less threatened in the writing classroom. Their instructors could help them see second language acquisition as additive rather than subtractive—that is, they can keep what they treasure from their home language and culture while adding the advantages of their adopted language and culture.

"could help them see second language acquisition as additive rather than subtractive"

An important group of theorists have argued for students' right to their own languages and dialects (Gilyard and Richardson 2001, Delpit 1997, Smitherman 1994, Elbow 2000, Matsuda 2006). Unfortunately, composition instructors tend to get caught up in the drive toward academic discourse and Standard American English. While both of these represent important goals for young writers, their foregrounding does not always serve bilingual students. Rather, they may need to be reserved for the latter stages of document preparation after bilingual students have grappled with the complexities of conveying their critical ideas in early drafts. Guadalupe Valdes discusses "ways in which both subtle and blatant bigotry toward nonnative speakers of English is present in departments of English," and Michelle Hall Kells warns "that the vestiges of regional racism operate insidiously as language ideologies and prejudice that shape and permeate the college classroom" (29). Writing instructors owe their students the respect that avoids these damaging mindsets in order to provide the best possible educational experiences for bilingual students and, in fact, for all students.

The problem of linguistic prejudice extends beyond the composition classroom, affecting minority language learners at all levels of education and in all subject fields. Patricia Gandara reminds us that "English learners commonly face classrooms that either do not take their language needs into account or are structured to provide an impoverished curriculum that often does not prepare them to succeed academically" (233). If composition instructors do not recognize and address the need to prepare bilingual students for success by helping them become strong writers, this problem is not likely to abate, and bilingual learners will continue in an "educational pipeline" that is "rife with massive leaks" (Chapa 203). We would like to offer a plan for addressing these problems in the composition classroom.

Paving the Way to Biliteracy

New methodology offers hope for increased retention and graduation of bilingual learners. As Robert Milk et al. suggest, "the challenge for teacher education shifts to how to prepare teachers (both beginning and experienced) to move from wherever they happen to be in their current approach to teaching toward becoming the kind of professionals who can create an optimal learning environment for language minority students" (1). Since nearly every college student must get through the composition requirement, instructors who teach in this area have a particular obligation to address the needs of minority language students and to acknowledge what Keith Gilyard and Elaine Richardson would call the "students' right to possibility" (37), which is the right to use their home language and have its value acknowledged at the same time they struggle to learn the language of the academy.

Of course, the abilities of bilingual learners vary considerably, and any pedagogy designed to address their needs must be flexible. Patthey-Chavez et al.'s 2005 study indicates that students educated in their native countries and in their native tongues outperform college students who grow up bilingual and receive their education in the United States. We believe this is true because students educated in their native tongue become literate in that language. Students who speak English as a second language but who grow up in the United States often fail to learn to read and write well in either language. This occurs because they concentrate on learning English from the time they begin preschool yet may continue to speak only their native language at home and be read to from books in that language. Thus, English effectively becomes the "school language," and the native tongue remains the "home language." This division does not exist for students educated in their native language.

Problems also arise as minority language students begin to write in English but are not taught how to write in their native language. As Daniel Villa explains, "Due to patterns of migration and continued contact with communities of origin, Spanish is being lost between generations, as are other non-English languages in the United States" (90). Most school writing instruction focuses exclusively on English. Thus, these students receive no formal training or guidance in acquiring literacy in their first language. They do not learn to write the language of their parents unless they take special "foreign language" classes, sometimes offered only as electives. Their parents often cannot help them with their English language writing practice unless they happen to be well educated in that language themselves. Even parents who know both languages may ask their children to use the native tongue at home because they want their children to retain fluency. As a result, they may insist their children

NOT write to them in English. In school, students' second languages are not recognized and valued; the emphasis is on acquiring literacy in English alone, leading many educators to undermine or even penalize students using languages other than English.

Most composition teachers know that minority language learners have these problems but are at a loss when trying to decide how to deal with them. They would like to rely on English-as-a-second-language (ESL or ESOL) classes, but these are often available only to international students or those immigrants who did not attend secondary school in the United States. Even if such courses had room for all second language speakers, they could not do the job of the composition class because most of the energy in ESL must be spent first on learning to speak and understand English. Reading and writing have to take a secondary role in the ESL curriculum, at least at the lower levels. Students new to the country must also learn the cultural and rhetorical mores of the society and of academic discourse in the U.S. Thus, the educational context is more complex than one program can teach. The responsibility for educating bilingual students should be shared.

The solution lies in extending the language learning experience of bilingual students so that they take classes in speaking English, classes in reading English, and composition classes designed to help them use their first language as an asset rather than an obstacle to becoming good writers. Daniel Villa offers advice that can help students achieve the biliteracy—fluency in reading and writing two languages—that we feel is vital to their success. In his article "No nos dejaremos: Writing in Spanish as an Act of Resistance," Villa explains how important it is to recognize students' first languages and see their worth in the classroom. He says, "The voices that express themselves in primary discourse, in either English or Spanish, must be valued. To fail to do so may well alienate the writer, resulting in her disengaging from working toward literacy. Students from Spanish-speaking backgrounds also come from diverse English-speaking backgrounds; accommodating this diversity presents a challenge to all those involved in developing literacy" (89–90). Though Villa is addressing English-Spanish bilingualism, we believe the basic theory can be cautiously extended to other languages. Testing this assumption offers grounds for further research.

Using a Process Approach to Writing

In spite of some valid complaints from post-process theorists,[2] helping students learn to write through the recursive stages of prewriting, drafting, revising, proofreading, and editing can benefit bilingual learners as they venture into college composition. A. Suresh Canagarajah suggests an additional layer to standard approaches to process (prewriting, drafting, revision, proofreading/editing, and publication) that makes sense when teaching bilingual students. Canagarajah points out that "bilingual competence integrates knowledge of two languages and is thus qualitatively different from monolingual competence" and suggests that we "stop treating any textual difference as an unconscious error" and instead "consider it as a strategic and creative choice by the author to attain his or her rhetorical objectives" (591). We like the flexibility and recursive qualities of the process approach, combined with the attitudinal changes suggested by Canagarajah. In our approach, as with monolingual students, we begin with prewriting, but instead of urging students to "think in English," as we have so often done, we now encourage them to think through the topic in whatever language makes them feel most comfortable. For many students, this will involve code-switching, the process of moving fluidly from one language to another or from one dialect to another, depending on the topic, the audience, and the spatial location of the thinker/writer. Forcing students to engage in prewriting activities in English before they have a clear concept of what they want to say can waste time or, even worse, cause writer's block and/or extreme frustration. Students frustrated at this early stage in the process may well give up on the task and resign themselves to low grades and a poor learning experience. Worse yet, they will give up on writing as a whole and become more fearful or reluctant to communicate in English.

---

[2] We do not have space in this article to address the particular concerns of post-process theory but refer readers to Thomas Kent's important collection, *Post-process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm.*

In a 2006 study, Brian J McNely asked bilingual students in a regular college composition class to keep a "recursion log." In this log, the students noted whenever they thought about the paper they were currently working on for the class. One student reported writing all but one of her log entries in English "because the paper was to be written in English." Another student, however, logged 33 entries, of which 17 were written in Spanish and 16 were in English. This student explained that "the language in which she pretexted was contingent on the environment, that when she was with her family, thoughts and concomitant entries took place in Spanish, and that when she was on campus or in class, thoughts were predominately in English" (McNely). This indicates the value of encouraging students to prewrite in either language. If she had been limited to English, the second student mentioned above might only have thought about her essay when she was at school, thereby, eliminating all the prewriting that she did at home in Spanish and also eliminating some of the cultural values that go with the language. Allowing for prewriting in Spanish (or other home language) may encourage multicultural perspectives to flourish more readily. The recursion log approach advocated in McNely's essay also helps bring school into the home in more communicative ways and could be a useful tool to implement in composition classrooms with large bilingual populations.

Peter Elbow encourages writing instructors to let second language students use their "mother tongues" when writing in English. This, he argues, will help these students express their ideas more effectively. Instructors can concentrate on helping them with Standard Written English later in the writing process. He says, "Full attention to thinking and rhetoric is not possible unless we can make the classroom a place that is safe for all forms of language considered wrong" (329). John Edlund supports this idea in his discussion about teaching minority language learners. Edlund examines Steven Krashen's language acquisition theory and determines that the ideal classroom for minority language students is "a comfortable, nonthreatening place with rich opportunities for communicative interaction, lots of comprehensible input, and no grammar drills" (367). When instructors allow critical thinking in any language, they let students know that all parts of their linguistic repertoire add value to their writing expertise.

Critical thinking is key to producing excellent writing, and humans generally think most clearly in their native language or home dialect. As they think, bilingual students can use their most comfortable language to engage one of the common prewriting methods: freewriting, listing, outlining, clustering, mapping, cubing, etc. Obviously, most instructors will not be able to judge the quality of work at this stage because they will not have access to the many different languages their students use, but they can ask students to move gradually from the native language to English. Perhaps a student can freewrite in Taiwanese and then summarize in English. Or she can do a cubing exercise in Spanish and then write an English outline. This practice should result in much more copious pre-writing, better topic selection, and stronger groundwork for essays. By using their first language at this stage of the writing process, students begin with a stronger foundation for their ideas and arguments, giving their compositions more of the substance beginning writers often lack. It should also reduce frustration in the initial stages and encourage self-confidence.

Students themselves see the benefits and merit of being allowed to use their first language in the writing process. Lucia, a minority language learner and a Basic English Composition student at a Hispanic-serving college, wrote at the beginning of the semester in her writing journal:

> When I'm writing in English it is very difficult for me because my first language is spanish. I feel like I would be a better writer if the instructor give me a topic in spanish. I think I could write more than 10 paragraphs. I feel that when I'm writing I don't know what I'm doing. I have many ideas in my head, but I don't know how to express myself. I think that these contribute that I don't know how to write in English.

After being advised that she could use Spanish, her first language, at the prewriting stage of the writing process, Lucia's fear of writing and her lack of confidence lessened, if not disappeared. At the end of the semester, she wrote in her journal:

> I feel more confident in writing. Freewriting helps us just write without thinking in spelling or punctuation. I believe that freewriting help us to improve and put our ideas in paper. I believe that my favorite part of writing is that right now I can put my ideas correctly in the paper.

Lucia's new confidence in her writing abilities allows her to experiment more with her writing. She still makes errors but is more willing to venture out and explore possibilities in writing, whether in her first or second language. Allowing for second languages to be used in the writing process helps minority language students improve their writing.

Monolingual instructors may feel that immersion is the best practice; allowing students to rely on their first language can seem like coddling or can appear to slow down developing language skills. Instructors often complain about the convoluted syntax and false cognates minority language learners use when they translate from their first language to English. These are valid concerns because, as Constanza Gerding-Salas points out in the online *Translation Journal*, "There are many thorns that can mortify us during the translation process, whatever the nature of the text we face." These thorns include "reading and comprehension ability in the source language . . . linguistic untranslatability, . . and cultural untranslatability." As they attempt to translate from their native language to English, students may have problems beyond false cognates and syntax differences. They have to wrestle with unfamiliar idioms, neologisms, and even basic differences in grammar and usage like the placement of periods and commas before instead of after quotation marks. However, when, instead of drafting in their native language and translating into English, students prewrite in their native language and move gradually toward composing in English, they are less likely to make the kinds of errors they do when they do direct translation.

Teachers who speak other languages than English can help students who share that language by discussing topics and ideas with them outside of class time in the student's first language. They can also encourage same-language students to work together in out-of-class study groups, possibly sharing texts they have found in their native language and talking about possible approaches to a writing assignment. All of this can be part of the prewriting process that makes bilingual learners more comfortable in the composition environment. Further study may also indicate that these practices can help make the composition environment more comfortable in the students' homes.

Drafting

Drafting, a major component in process writing, presents problems for non-native speakers who tend to worry too much about correctness in the early stages. We urge students to disable grammar and spell checkers when they use word processors and to enable them only with near final drafts. We also urge instructors to read early drafts for content rather than correctness with the understanding that errors will change as students revise and reorganize their ideas. If a student's writing is incomprehensible, the instructor can get best revision results through individual student-teacher conferences. The student should prepare for the conference by thinking about the subject carefully in the native language, perhaps even jotting down notes and questions in that language. The teacher can then ask the student to try to explain in English what s/he wants to get across, stopping the student at appropriate points to say, "That's good. Write that down," or "I don't understand that. Can you say it in another way?" Non-native speakers of English may want someone to revise for them because they feel insecure. They are even more likely to beg someone else to proofread and edit their work. Since engaging in these practices themselves provides the best opportunities for non-natives to learn to write fluently, the responsibility should be placed squarely on their shoulders. During conferences, teachers should act as coaches, not as editors.

In a 2003 study, Elaine Fredericksen followed the revision process of her student Marisol, a young woman who had received most of her education in Mexico but who had chosen to attend a university in the United States. In an early draft of one paper, Marisol writes about how her dog, Toby, learns:

> So, What is then the difference between animal's and human's intelligence? In Toby's case, learning it has been encouraged in part by memories of continuous situations. What I mean by this is that every time Toby did something wrong I have called him with a strong voice and scolded him a little slap. Or when I have played with him, I have used a soft voice and give him a treat. I understand that he has also learned some things by his own like to eat or clean himself, but that can be called and instinct of supervivience—if he does not eat, he dies. (78)

This draft shows that Marisol is working though her ideas about animal intelligence, but her writing exhibits typical problems of minority language students: syntax ("what is then the difference"), use of idioms ("scolded him a little slap"), verb usage ("and give him a treat"), and false cognates ("supervivence," from the Spanish *sobrevivir*—to survive).

Marisol's final draft shows how she has benefited from revision. Much has changed in the essay, of course. What was one paragraph in the early draft became a longer, more detailed analysis. The following paragraph represents a segment of the revision of the previous example:

> Toby's lively and bright personality has always been in him; however, he is starting to learn how to control it. Now, the puppy seems to understand when someone corrects him or praises him. When he hears a strong, sharp voice calling him, he hides his tail between his legs and lowers his ears. On the other hand, the puppy's whole body shakes with excitement when I pronounce "Toby" with a soft voice. (85)

Still not quite native, Marisol's prose has reached near-native quality. The final draft was Marisol's sixth attempt, and critics could certainly argue that this does not represent her own ability to write English fluently. However, other evidence suggests that what she learned through drafting carried over into her other classes. For example, she misspelled the word *refrigitator* on the first draft of her essay. The word dropped out totally in her revision of this essay, but she later used forms of it correctly in a memo she wrote for her pre-engineering course:

> General Motors has used freon as refrigerant for decades. Without freon GM would have to spend billions of dollars trying to redesign the entire refrigeration systems in home, industrial, and commercial equipment. Replacing just the refrigerated transport of food would cost over 150 billion dollars. (89)

Since this revision example was published in 2003, Marisol has graduated from the university with an engineering degree—some indication that her earlier revision experiences helped her gain the writing skills and confidence necessary to achieve academic success.

Peer reviews, an important tool during the drafting and revision processes, present special difficulties for minority language students because their classmates usually see surface error as an impediment to understanding. The native speakers want to "fix" the errors rather than look at the overall argument and structure of the piece. Instructors can, however, train all students to break content revision and proofreading/editing into separate steps by having two peer reviews on different days: one for content only and another for surface error. Guided questions given by the instructor or written on a peer review form can help students focus on content alone the first time around. Once assured that they will get help later with correctness, minority language learners often feel free to write more.

"feel that they have nothing to contribute to a peer"

Before they approach classmates' papers, students need to practice peer reviewing with anonymous papers. During the full-class practice review, instructors should include essays written by bilingual learners that contain typical syntax and usage errors. Through her own positive attitude, the teacher can model appropriate responses: "Remember we only care about overall content on early drafts. We will get to surface errors later." "Let's overlook the syntax problems and find the good stuff. Did you notice the excellent description in paragraph two?" "What are the best aspects of this paper?" "How well does the essay respond to the prompt? Is it on target?" "If you can't understand a sentence, what is the best way of letting the author know?"

It is essential to train students to approach peer reviews as opportunities to find an audience for their work. Many students, and especially those who are not native English speakers, feel that they have nothing to contribute to a peer. Instructors can explain the value of an authentic reader and train students to respond to the content as an interested fellow human rather than as a critic or judge. Wei Shu argues that "compared to peer response groups composed of native speakers or second language learners exclusively, mixed groups are unique in that group members seem to bring differing levels of linguistic and cultural/pragmatic skills to peer response tasks" (188). This means that mixed peer response groups can provide a more culturally and linguistically diverse sophistication to the peer response process.

Instructors can also tell authors that they may accept or disregard a responder's comments. The purpose of peer review is not to take over the voice of the essay; rather, reviewers give their personal reactions to the piece. This helps bilingual learners gain confidence as readers and critical thinkers. They are able to evaluate the ideas and content of the native English speakers' writing. Not focusing on surface errors the first time around but focusing on the content alone allows bilingual students to feel more confident in giving feedback to their classmates. Because they do not feel knowledgeable or fluent enough in English to critique the "correctness" of the native English compositions, they feel more comfortable examining *what* these speakers have to say rather than *how* they say it.

Some critics feel that mixed-group peer response creates anxiety in bilingual learners, but practice sessions teach students to be productive responders and also help them overcome unrecognized prejudices they may harbor against minority language learners. When instructors emphasize positive readings, asking students to mention first what works well in the paper they are reading and to phrase suggestions for change in a positive way, the experience relieves tension and fosters feelings of community in the classroom. Thus, the peer review process can create more safety for native speakers. This comfort encourages students to write more freely. They come to understand that the response group can serve as a buffer between their first drafts and the fear of being graded. Once their peers have told them what is good about their efforts and have made suggestions to help them improve their writing even more, beginning writers feel more confident about turning in final drafts. These conclusions are drawn from observer experience and also from the comments of students themselves writing about the peer response process. These are some of their unedited comments:

- The thing that helped me overcome these difficulties were the peer group discussions. Reading my classmates papers and having them read mine greatly enlightened me.

- I did not feel pressure while I was writing because I knew I could get opinions from others and then revise.
- Help from my teacher and classmates made revisions much easier because I had been informed by a wide range of people what my paper needed.
- I liked the idea of getting in groups and letting other people read my papers and give me constructive criticism.
- The constant revisions and peer groups are a tremendous source of help.
- I could easily notice my weak points in peer group response and my peers gave me excellent suggestions on how to improve that I had not thought of.

Remarks such as these suggest that peer response does more to relieve writer anxiety than to promote it.

One advantage to peer response is that it encourages multiple revisions, a healthy practice for minority language learners who may require more drafts than native speakers. Instructors who grade second or even third drafts for these students may find the results disappointing, but when minority language learners are allowed to take their drafts to peer groups, tutors, teacher conferences, or in-class proofreading sessions and then revise and edit yet again, they often manage to create successful essays. To some, this might sound like an unfair advantage, but, in fact, the process of repeated revision not only levels the essential unfairness to bilingual learners, but it also helps them learn to write better. Each time they revise, they learn something new. The more they revise, the more English sentence patterns are imbedded in their subconscious, and the more likely they are to remember and use those patterns successfully in the future.

In addition to writing patterns, composition students must learn appropriate methods for research if they are to achieve success in higher education. Research requirements can cause particular problems for bilingual writers, but they can also play an important factor in increasing overall biliteracy. Library and Internet research poses problems even for native speakers. As Phillip Marzluf points out, academic discourse "displaces writers from their language. . . . Academic discourse is distant and detached, a mode of language that reflects back only to abstract concepts" (511). These problems become magnified when students must do this research in a second language. While reading background material in English serves a real purpose for language learners and should certainly be required, students should not be restricted to English-only materials. In fact, having the ability to do research in two languages broadens the research scope. Students may be more enthusiastic about conducting field research, such as interviews, if they can do so in their native language or home dialect. When they find a speaker of their first language to interview and then take the findings and write about them in English, students increase their opportunities to practice biliteracy. Doing research in two languages also gives students the opportunity for more in-depth understandings; what they read in their native language will usually make more sense to them and give them greater insight into what they read in English. Instructors may not understand titles written in other languages on the Works Cited page, but they can still find the articles to verify that they exist and even do a rudimentary plagiarism check by looking for similarities in the text. Using their first language may even help prevent plagiarism because when bilingual learners use English-only materials they at times just "copy" and place this information in their essays for fear of changing the meaning in these materials. Feeling inadequate in their abilities to paraphrase or restate the secondary authors' ideas, minority language writers play it safe. They may unintentionally plagiarize rather than risk sacrificing the style and correctness of the secondary sources. But if they are allowed to use sources in their native language, they are more likely to understand the ideas. When they integrate these ideas into their English-language texts, they are forced to paraphrase or restate.

Translation is a specialized skill, and direct word-for-word translations will produce an awkward text. Teachers can respond to this awkwardness by explaining that the best kind of translation is a paraphrase—that is, communication of the author's general ideas rather than a word-by-word approach. These kinds of explanations can reach even the native speakers and help teach the difference between paraphrasing, para-plagiarizing (changing only a few of the author's words), and outright plagiarism. Of course, teachers will explain the need to cite sources even when the text is paraphrased.

A possible way to convey these ideas to an entire class is through the example of idioms. The instructor might ask students how they would explain the idiom "Something is fishy here" to a non-native English speaker. The word *fish* would not appear in the explanation at all. Rather, a paraphrase might be "Something doesn't seem right about this situation." Thus the "translator" of the idiom ends up with what constitutes a good paraphrase.

Proofreading/Editing

Instructors do well to separate the process of proofreading and then editing out errors from content revision. Proofreading does the most good on near-final drafts when students have said what they want to say and revised the content to their satisfaction (and the satisfaction of their reviewers). At this point, a proofreading circle helps both native and non-native English speakers. In a full-class circle, students pass their drafts clockwise to the person sitting next to them. The proofreaders do not cross out or change anything the author has written; rather, they underline anything they have questions about and write, preferably in pencil and only in the margins, the concern they have about that part of the text. They might underline the verb *use*, for instance, and write in the margin "should be *used*." Other comments might be "Add a comma," "Check spelling," or even something like, "This doesn't sound right to me. Can you reword the sentence?" Such non-judgmental suggestions encourage authors to recheck and edit their writing.

When the first reader has proofread the entire essay, s/he looks around the circle to see who has also finished and trades papers with the other person. If no one has finished, the proofreader passes the paper on clockwise to the next person and waits for someone else to finish and give her/him an essay for a second proofreading. All papers should go through three or four readers. The papers then go back to the author who looks at the suggestions in the margins and asks the proofreader or the instructor for advice if necessary. Minority language writers can use this as an opportunity to get clarification, learn a rule, or discuss idiomatic constructions with other students or the instructor. When they correct their own writing at the point of need, students see how grammar is tied to meaning. As David Blakesley explains, "grammar has a fundamental role in making meaning" (196); it is a rhetorical tool that can help writers express themselves more clearly, not an obstacle they must overcome to avoid censure. After each proofreading session, non-natives may request another student-teacher conference in order to receive explanations of any items that remain unclear.

> "not an obstacle they must overcome to avoid censure"

Initially some native English-speaking students may be skeptical about the value of having minority language classmates proofread their writing, but punctuation or grammar may be a strength of any student. In fact, classes that teach English as a second language often focus on grammar rules, so bilingual learners may be well versed in the rules but not always able to apply them to their own writing. Once bilingual students have mastered the differences in English usage from their first language, they can impress their peers with their proofreading skills. They also can profit from reading other students' essays, increasing their literacy in terms of reading, and from discussions about punctuation, grammar, and linguistic choices.

After adequate practice in a positive environment, students tend to enjoy proofreading circles for several reasons: they get plentiful help with proofreading; they have a chance to show off their expertise with punctuation, grammar, and usage; and they have the opportunity to read other students' essays. Relegating surface error to this kind of session relieves students of anxiety as they work on early drafts and also helps them turn out error-free final drafts. This boosts their confidence and makes grading easier for the instructor.

Compartmentalizing tasks is particularly valuable for students struggling to write in a second language.

After distributing questionnaires to several classes at the end of the semester, Fredericksen noted that many students marked Proofreading Circles as one of their favorite classroom activities. Many students (and their evaluators) buy into the commonplace that good grammar makes good writers, and they feel that proofreading circles and workshops improve their final products. They offer evidence for this in their comments on end-of-semester reflections:

- My grammatical errors dramatically decreased in number, and [editing] enabled me to catch simple mistakes such as misspelled words, misplaced commas, and improper use of words.
- The spelling and grammatical errors that were pointed out were greatly appreciated. . . . I would not have noticed them.
- It is very important that very many different people have a look at your paper because one person in your revision group might be very good in grammar and another person might be very good in usage of vocabulary and syntax.
- The proofreading process is a necessary tool for all writers.

While we have no evidence to suggest that group proofreading sessions teach students to write more correctly on subsequent drafts, our students' responses let us know that these sessions make them feel more confident about their final drafts. Through the process, students also learn the value of having someone else check over their drafts and the merits of careful editing. These are tools that they can use to their advantage as they undertake future writing tasks.

Evaluating/Publishing

Most instructors find evaluating student papers the most difficult part of their job. When dealing with bilingual writers, the problem becomes more complex. Do they follow the same standards for these writers as for native English speakers? Do they make allowances? While all students should be exposed to certain kinds of rhetorical devices and situations, grading standards must be appropriate for the particular educational setting, including the makeup of the student population and students' prior experience in reading and writing English.

Beverly J. Moss worries that in most classrooms "We're either focusing too much on how we're all the same—which usually translates into all of us being held up to one single standard held by a group in a power position—or we focus on how we're different. There never seems to be a sense that we need to do both." She says, "I want my differences to be recognized and celebrated, and I want my similarities to be recognized and celebrated" (85). As composition teachers of bilingual learners, we need to acknowledge different levels of ability and make allowances for those differences as we evaluate their work. This does not mean that we pass essays that are poorly researched and poorly written. Rather, we must separate content from correctness and give praise for strong content while allowing certain latitude for minority language writers. This latitude may include an extra conference and more revision time for bilingual students. It may also include putting less weight on correctness in grading. This is good pedagogy when dealing with all students because students who worry about writing correctly write less. Even ancient rhetoricians recognized the value of copiousness in increasing fluency. Cicero recommends in *De Oratore* that aspiring rhetors "write as much as possible. The pen is the best and most eminent author and teacher of eloquence" (Qtd in Crowley and Hawhee 355). Our job is to encourage students to write more, not discourage them by marking every error and overlooking good ideas. As Constance Weaver notes in *Teaching Grammar in Context*, error is "a necessary concomitant of growth" (59). Students do not learn everything at once; they need to absorb knowledge little by little. We can insist that students rewrite until their papers are totally correct, but we should not punish bilingual writers with low grades before giving them the opportunity to edit and, in the process, to learn the rules of Standard English grammar and usage.

Teacher attitudes matter very much in the education of bilingual students. If we look at these students as inferior thinkers because we do not understand them, we do them great harm. It is crucial for writing instructors to listen to and acknowledge their students' ideas, no matter in what voice they are first conveyed—even if that voice mixes English with another language. One bilingual learner recalls her early days in school: "I remember being slapped on the hand in school if I was caught speaking in Spanish, and I was reprimanded at home for speaking English." Thus, for this learner, the bilingual experience was doubly negative. Teachers of bilingual writers should consider Julie Hagemann's argument that "good" or "right" English depends on the writer's audience and context. Standard Written English is not necessarily "good" English. It all depends on what the context is, what the purpose the writer has for writing, and who the writer's intended reader is. "Good" English should not mean giving up one's self-identity (142). Sensitive teachers can instruct their students about possible variations as they present the concept of diverse audiences and multiple purposes. In this way, students come to understand that many kinds of writing have value.

Educators can help bilingual students by recognizing their differences and honoring their ability to speak two languages. Teachers can also learn from these students. Susan Jarratt says, "Language difference holds out so much more promise as an area of humanistic study than is encompassed by the error-correction paradigm. A growing body of research in fields called 'bilingual writing' and 'contrastive rhetorics' views language difference as a resource, a feature of students' thinking and writing in English that warrants study" (1). By changing our methods only slightly to make them more inclusive, we can teach bilingual students the writing process and encourage their efforts toward success As we grant open access to these students and train them to be biliterate contributors to our society, we learn more about how writing is learned and how better to teach it. We also create a society that is open to all its citizens and the many voices they represent.

Works Cited

Baca, Isabel. "English 0310 Basic English Composition: A Study." Unpublished report, 2003. El Paso Community College, Valle Verde Campus, El Paso, Texas.

Blakesley, David. "Reconceptualizing Grammar as an Aspect of Rhetorical Invention." *The Place of Grammar in Writing Instruction.* Eds. Susan Hunter and Ray Wallace. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1995. 191–203.

Canagarajah, A. Suresh. "Toward a Writing Pedagogy of Shuttling between Languages: Learning from Multilingual Writers." *College English* 68.6 (2006):589–604.

CCCC. "Policy Statement: The National Language Policy." Conference on College Composition and Communication (March 1998). *www.ncte.org*

Chapa, Jorge. "The Problematic Pipeline: Demographic Trends and Latino Participation in Graduate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Programs." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 5.3 (2006): 203–37.

Crowley, Sharon and Debra Hawhee. *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students.* 3rd ed. New York: Pearson, 2004.

Delpit, Lisa. "Ebonics and Culturally Responsive Instruction." *Rethinking Schools* 12.1 (1997): 6–7.

Edlund, John R. "Non-Native Speakers of English." *Concepts in Composition.* Ed. Irene L. Clark. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003. 363–87.

Elbow, Peter. "Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond 'Mistakes,' 'Bad English,' and 'Wrong Language.'" *Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing and Teaching Writing.* New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 323–50.

Fredericksen, Elaine. "A New World of Writers: Teaching Writing in a Diverse Society." New York: Peter Lang, 2003.

Gandara, Patricia. "Strengthening the Academic Pipeline Leading to Careers in Math, Science, and Technology for Latino Students." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 5.3 (2006): 222–37.

Gerding-Salas, Constanza. "Teaching Translation: Problems and Solutions." *Translation Journal* 4.3 (2000): *http://www.accurapid.com/journal/13educ.htm.* December 2006.

Gilyard, Keith and Elaine Richardson. "Students' Right to Possibility: Basic Writing and African American Rhetoric." *Insurrections: Approaches to Resistance in Composition Studies.* Ed. Andrea Greenbaum. Albany: SUNY, 2001. 37–51.

Hagemann, Julie. "A Metalinguistic Approach: Helping Students Acquire the Language ofthe Academy." *Academic Literacy in the English Classroom: Helping Underprepared and Working Class Students Succeed in College.* Ed. Carolyn R. Boiarsky. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2003. 131–44.

Harris, Muriel. *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference.* Urbana: NCTE, 1986.

Hirschman, Charles. "The Educational Enrollment of Immigrant Youth: A Test of the Segmented-Assimilation Hypothesis." *Demography* 38.3 (2001): 317–36.

Jarratt, Susan. "Bilingual and Biliterate: How Students Use Multiple Language Competencies New Research in Student Writing." *Between the Lines: Newsletter of the School of Humanities.* June 2002.

Kells, Michelle Hall. "Understanding the Rhetorical Value of Tejano Code Switching." In Kells, et al. 24–39.

Kells, Michelle Hall, Valerie Balester, and Victor Villanueva, eds. *Latino/a Discourses: On Language, Identity & Literacy Education.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2004.

Kent, Thomas, ed. *Post-process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 1999.

Marzluf, Phillip P. "Diversity Writing: Natural Languages, Authentic Voices." *College Composition and Communication* 57.3 (2006): 503–22.

Matsuda, Paul Kei, et al. eds. *Second-Language Writing in the Composition Classroom: A Critical Sourcebook.* Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.

Matsuda, Paul Kei. "The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition." *College English* 68.6 (2006): 637–51.

McNely, Brian J. "Re-Visioning Revision: Recursion Theory and the Research Writing Class." Unpublished essay, 2006.

Milk, Robert, Mercado, Carmen, and Alexandria Sapiens. "Re-Thinking the Education of Teachers of Language Minority Children: Developing Reflective Teachers for Changing Schools." *NCBE Focus: Occasional Papers in Bilingual Education* 6 (Summer 1992). *www.NCELA.gwu.edu* January 2006.

Moss, Beverly J. "Cultural Differences as Resources." *In Teachers Thinking, Teachers Knowing*. Ed. Timothy Shanahan. Urbana: NCTE, 1994. 76–87.

Patthey-Chavez, G. Genevieve, Paul H. Dillon, and Joan Thomas-Speigel. "How Far Do They Get? Tracking Students with Different Academic Literacies Through Community College Remediation." *Teaching English in the Two-year College* 32.3 (2005): 261–77.

Shu, Wei. "Interaction and Feedback in Mixed Peer Response Groups." In Matsuda, et al. 186–209.

Smitherman, Geneva. " 'The Blacker the Berry, the Sweeter the Juice': African American Student Writers." *The Need for Story: Cultural Diversity in the Classroom and Community.* Urbana: NCTE, 1994. 80–101.

"Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers." Conference on College Composition and Communication. January 2001. cccstatement.html.

UTEP Factbooks. *http://www.cierp.utp.edu/Factbooks. 2004–2005.*

Valdes, Guadalupe. "Nonnative English Speakers: Language Bigotry in English Mainstream Classrooms." *ADFL Bulletin* 31.1 (1999): 43–8. *http://www.adfl.org/adfl/bulletin/V31N1/311043.htm*

Villa, Daniel. "No nos dejaremos: Writing in Spanish as an Act of Resistance." In Kells, et al. 85–95.

Weaver, Constance. *Teaching Grammar in Context.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1996.

Wible, Scott. "Pedagogies of the 'Students' Right' Era: the Language Curriculum Research Group's Project for Linguistic Diversity." *College Composition and Communication* 57.3 (2006): 442–78.

Elaine Fredericksen *has forty years of teaching experience at all levels. She earned a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition from the University of Alabama in 1996 and works as an Associate Professor of English. She directs a First-year Composition program at a mid-sized, Hispanic serving university. Her book* A New World of Writers: Teaching Writing in a Diverse Society *was published in January 2003 by Peter Lang, and she serves on the editorial board for the* Journal of Hispanic Higher Education.

Ismael Studio, El Paso, TX

Isabel Baca *has taught composition, technical writing, and business communications courses at levels ranging from the eighth grade to college, and she works as a university Assistant Professor of English. She has served as a workplace writing and communication consultant for numerous industries and institutions. Her research and publications focus on teaching writing at Hispanic-serving institutions, intercultural communication, community writing partnerships and service learning, workplace writing, and basic writing. She received her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Professional Communication and has served as English Discipline Coordinator and Service Learning Program Coordinator at a higher-education institution. She lives and teaches on the U.S./Mexico border where she was born and raised as a bicultural and bilingual individual.*

Kenneth Gillam

Writing in Ecological Microcosms: A Pedagogical Field Map for Re-thinking Process

Introduction: Why Ecological Theory?

Although the current age of composition studies has come to be called "post-process," in a phrase that marks the theoretical turn our scholarship has taken toward issues of power and society, most composition instruction is still heavily indebted to the expressivist and cognitivist leaps taken in the 1970s and 80s: specifically, as has become a commonplace in post-process scholarship, process pedagogy still reigns in the vast majority of college writing classrooms. But process pedagogy, if persistent, is far from perfect. Students' revision behaviors, as all classroom teachers know, often fail to deliver the high-quality writing or the substantive, "global," revisions we want and/or expect in college courses; as Flower and Hayes, et al. note, when students do revise globally, the draft may get worse (1986; see also, Faigley and Witte, 1981; Lindemann, 1987).

The metaphor of ecology that this article proposes is not a quick fix to the many practical shortcomings of process—indeed, as with most post-process thinkers, I maintain many practical elements of process pedagogy even as I suggest ways to rethink, critique, and improve it. But particularly in a hypertextual age, the metaphor of ecology may provide us a way to concretely add dimensionality to a process often (mis-)understood as linear. Further, the metaphor incorporates some of the suggestions of post-process theory to the extent as they can help us critique the power positions we necessarily represent whether we do so with or without disclosure and interrogation. An ecological metaphor—not mine originally, but far from exhausted in composition studies—can weave familiar process mechanisms with elements of social constructivism and a "post-process" critique of the power structures that determine "quality" in academic writing, particularly, as I present it here, tailored to students for whom those power structures are most foreign and impenetrable, and from whom the trust of one's own learning and communicating habits (as well as one's peers) may be most fleeting. I believe that a holistic, ecological theory, if practically applied in classroom pedagogy, can render writing more accessible—indeed, more respectful—to students at open

DOI: 10.37514/OPW-J.2008.2.2.04

access institutions and can profitably illuminate the often mystified world of academic and professional discourse.

Obviously, the above description of open-access students as those most unfamiliar with the powers that govern academic discourse is overgeneralized. But it is perhaps more fair than texts like Richardson, Fisk, and Okun's *Literacy in the Open-Access College*, which, in keeping with the experiences and opinions of many classroom teachers, depicts open-access students as immature, uncurious and grade-oriented, and, particularly in reading and writing, poorly prepared for college-level work (38–40). While I have experienced my own frustrations with poorly prepared students, my experience at institutions with open or low entrance requirements suggests that this ill-preparation is often particularly in terms of work habits, study skills, and general faith in the worth of their education. Many open-access students, furthermore, are much more involved with work and family obligations outside of school than are students in more traditional settings. Open-access institutions serve a wide range of students, but we may describe those less frequently found in traditional academic environments in three ways: a) students with poor high school grades or standardized test scores, aware of their measured shortcomings and fearful of trusting themselves or their peers to generate knowledge, language, or critique, b) first generation college students who may have weak, nonexistent, or simply unskilled support networks outside the university, and c) returning students who may feel that they have forgotten the "code" of academic-speak, if they ever knew it well in the first place. Understanding our students where they are (or where they have been) shows us that many of the assumptions of social-constructivist, expressivist, and cognitivist pedagogy that undergird the process model—the value of peer review, the desire and ability to revise to an evaluation rubric—fit even more uneasily at the open-access school than at more exclusive, traditional institutions, in part because of the very ecological issues of their lives that this pedagogy attempts to address.

Problems with Process

The problems with process may begin with a flawed student definition unfortunately enforced by even well-intentioned process-oriented professors. Theorists and teachers generally agree that "revision," at least in broad terms, refers to students' abilities to re-think, rewrite, and improve their papers on a variety of "global" levels of content and structure, regardless of, or at least postponing, editing and proofreading—revision, thus, is imaginative, generative work, at least as much as is prewriting ("invention" or "brainstorming"). As Nancy Sommers and others have demonstrated, however, when we determine that revision has failed, in many cases it is because students have focused primarily or even exclusively on editing skills and the surface changes they dictate (386–87). Flower and Hayes, et al. have identified a tendency of many students to see revision as a set of "rule governed actions for proofreading and correcting," rather than something more akin to the processes of invention and drafting, which inhibits both the substance of students' revisions and, ultimately, the quality of their writing (16). Richardson et al. observe that open-access students seem even more sensitive to rule-following than traditional students, rendering the intellectual energies of global revision more strange, more difficult, or simply less valued in the open access classroom, perhaps regardless of our preaching to the contrary.

At the same time, most experienced writers offer accounts of their writing/revision habits that differ entirely from this notion of rule governance and generally lack attention to external hierarchy, describing writing as organic, creative, and even spontaneous (see, for example, Sommers 1980; Faigley and Witte 1981; Murray 1978). Despite being an unquestionably disciplined act, writing cannot always be produced methodically and systematically, even according to a writing "process" theorized as generative and recursive but usually taught in temporal sequence. Arguably belying the "recursive" caveat that has become *pro forma* in descriptions of the writing process, textbooks still generally outline the writing process in a linear fashion: brainstorming, outlining, drafting, revising, (repeat as necessary), editing.[1] Each of these stages is clearly defined, and with the notable exception of revision, fairly easily explained, modeled, assigned, and evaluated with concrete techniques like "listing," "mapping," *et cetera*.[2] While professional writers understand the entire process as creative—spending late revisions, for instance, working out questions that their first several drafts raised—students do not typically create their own processes organically (Sommers 380). Coming at writing as something unnatural, mechanical, then being taught that imagination and thought inform the brainstorming stage—and taught, overtly or covertly, that the other stages are concerned with production alone, or that production is not imaginative—students either elide the space between "drafting" and "editing" or model their attempts to "revise" after one or the other, usually the latter (see, for example, Sommers 1980; Perl 1979;

---

[1] John Langan's *College Writing Skills*, for instance, breaks "Part One: Essay Writing" into four ordinal "steps": beginning with a thesis; supporting the thesis; organizing evidence; and revising and editing sentences. Though Langan does insist that "revising is as much a stage in the writing process as prewriting, outlining, and doing the first draft," and though the last section of Part One identifies the "Four Bases for Revising Essays," students who have read through the "four steps" of essay production learn in this section that the bases "can" be used to revise an essay, not subtly reinforcing their notion that revision is an option only to be exercised after the end product—their desired goal—has failed (34, 139).

[2] Textbook explanations of prewriting reveal numerous practical techniques that teachers can easily present, assign, and (arguably) evaluate. Langan, for instance, offers samples and activities to promote freewriting, questioning, listing, diagramming, and preparing a scratch outline; Minkoff & Melamed give student examples of brainstorming, freewriting, "issue trees," and peer critiquing.

Zellermeyer and Cohen 1996). With this set-up as foundation, teachers' attempts to define the last "stage" of the process, "revision," in such a way that it produces global changes, do not resonate meaningfully with students. To us, revision assumes imaginative work continuing throughout the entire process, but our students' practicing the steps of the process often means they have stopped imaginatively and generatively thinking as early, even, as the brainstorming stage. Revision fails, simply, because they can't re-think something they haven't been actively and continuously thinking about in the first place.

If the students' definitions of revision are simply wrong, why do so many textbooks fail to persuade them to change, or expand, their definitions? Professional writers often see their texts as taking on lives of their own, their revision characterized not merely by recursiveness but by the vitality of a text itself, growing—or demanding to grow—into its best self. This organic model of writing necessitates a view of a larger, vital world from which, and into which, the text is born. In the hierarchical system of the academy, however, student writers may perceive sets of rules and measures of quality as inherent to the hierarchy, learnable only with respect to the hierarchy, and susceptible to the mysterious whims of the hierarchy. With this attitude toward the fundamental features of the writing process, students persist in writing to please teachers and get grades (or failing to, or refusing to), rather than opening themselves up to the transformative potential of education (and, arguably, revision itself), that is, becoming capable writers and truly "educated" persons by becoming steeped in the larger and richer world they inhabit. Education and writing alike, in this best sense, integrate the individual into the world and its systems rather than isolate the individual from those persistently mysterious, invisible systems, providing "education" as an artificial (and separate) monolith with arbitrary rules and measurements.

In composition, the push to process pedagogy—amidst the social constructivist structures of peer review—emphasizes that writing to be shared or evaluated is something external, rather than something intrinsic, and this is indeed a responsible turn. I do not propose that we return to an expressivist pedagogy that links writing back to the self to the exclusion of its social function. But I think it has become too easy for students to see writing as a practice separable from the writer and dictated only by the institution. The resultant isolation is perhaps especially pronounced for the open access student. It is little wonder that students who have been long exposed to the social codes and hierarchies that determine the quality of writing—students who read, students with strong high school preparation—do well in freshman composition classes. It is even less wonder that those who have come late to college, those who come without a clear sense of collegiate success, or those who enroll without strong academic or professional backgrounds in written communication—students who make up a large part of the clientele of an open access college—struggle in those same classes.

My application of an ecological theory of composition, inspired by the work of Marilyn Cooper and Margaret Syverson, attempts to extend our notions of writing to include a network of potentially contributing forces and to demonstrate how this ecological framework may be used to rethink the process model and this alienating relation students may have to structures of instruction and of quality. Instead of teaching them steps to follow, easily misinterpreted and mispracticed as a strict linearity, I strive to illustrate the ways in which their lives already intersect with their work. Ecological theory makes possible a connection between our familiar "process model" and this more generative and organic understanding of writing. Ecological theory invites us to think in practical terms about students themselves as writers in their own ecological microcosms with different factors influencing them when they are engaging in presumably imaginative stages of writing and in the more technical ones. Not only must we consider students' assumptions, thought processes, and skill levels, but the even less frequently considered material differences in their lives and ours: our respective social support systems that enhance or inhibit our writing, the technological tools to which we have access and the savvy with which we use them, the variously fragmented natures of our attention spans and the demands thereon, the time we have to devote to generating ideas and text, self-discipline, and elements of our respective physical work environments. An ecological revision model must consider these visible and invisible elements of the act of writing. Furthermore, it must re-draw the maps of the communication world in such a way that students can appreciate the ways in which they are already deeply integrated into it.

"must re-draw
the maps of the
communication world"

The goals of the ecologically aware composition classroom, like those of the social-constructivist one, are both process- and product-oriented, ranging from students' intellectual development and critical thinking skills to their ability to research and recognize differences in discourse communities and disciplinary paradigms, their improved proficiency in the codes of grammar, syntax, and style, and their ability to participate in a community united by its communication practices. Perhaps most unconventionally, our goals are also environmental: students should become conscious of themselves as writers and thinkers and increasingly able to manipulate their interior and exterior ecologies—their individual ecological microcosms—to improve the quality of their participation in the larger macrocosm(s) of written communication. Our collective understanding of "writing" must be broad enough for us to pursue these diverse goals simultaneously. Modifying the ecological model presented by Syverson, we can profitably imagine an individual writing project as a philosophical and intellectual nexus—a single utterance that contains a multitude of opinions, ideas, and decisions. As the sample assignment sequence below illustrates, we can design our classrooms to encourage students to be conscious of the complexities within their own inhabited matrices and to see writing as simultaneously enriching and drawing on them.

An Ecological Theory of Composition

Marilyn Cooper's "The Ecology of Writing" uses the natural model of ecosystemic interdependence as an alternative to process models generally, if mistakenly, understood to be linear. Cooper claims that writing depends on the sociobiological notion of a dynamic dialectic between organism and environment (368). Like the dialectic nature of communication espoused by the social constructivists, writing in Cooper's schema never happens in a vacuum. But Cooper's system goes beyond a dialectical relationship between speaker and auditor (or writer and audience) to include the myriad other connections between a written utterance and the environment(s) that (perhaps unwittingly) collaborated to produce it. Margaret Syverson's *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition,* published more than ten years later, picks up on Cooper's work and begins to apply it to professional and academic writing environments. Syverson similarly defines ecology as "a set of interrelated and interdependent complex systems [or] interactions of . . . component parts" (3, 4), including environmental factors from pens and paper to instructional technology and classroom management (3, 5). She also identifies the ecological significance of intangible elements like theoretical frames, language, the paradigms of various academic disciplines, and students' expectations, whether accurate or not, and experiences with all these elements (5).[3]

According to Syverson, an ecology of writing can be described according to four main attributes: distribution, emergence, embodiment, and enaction. Each of these attributes can be further subdivided by social, spatial, psychological, temporal and physical considerations. Distribution includes the collaboration of elements of the physical environment and others' ideas with the writer's thoughts and actions; emergence deals with prescribed models or standards that influence writers; embodiment involves reading and writing as physical acts; and enaction describes the way that knowledge is "brought forth," and that written utterances themselves are complex "ecosystems." On the surface, these four attributes do not seem any easier to apply to revision problems in meaningful, practical ways than the general metaphor of ecosystem. If, however, we associate students' writing environments with Syverson's "distribution," the authorial personality with "embodiment," elements of the writing process with "emergence," and the "final" product submitted for evaluation with "enaction," we can more closely attend to revision as it has been defined by most current composition theorists, consider ecological theory *vis a vis* the behaviors that make up the writing process and examine possible contributors to writing success that have been thus far neglected (see Fig. 1).

---

[3] Though maybe surprising to compositionists, this does not demonstrate a radical departure from new directions in academic thinking; rather, systems theory already has been effectively applied to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences: Keith Warren and Cynthia Franklin, for instance, argue that systems theory, or a study of "nonlinear dynamics" aids social work by "seek[ing] to understand systems that change in ways that are not amenable to the linear cause and effect models familiar to social scientists" (358). Understanding that social interactions are dynamic systems, or "system[s] that change . . . over time" (358), they strive to map the changes in a predictable and diagnostic way. Similarly, we can see the writing process as a nonlinear dynamic system, and attempt to understand it as a system of interdependent influences so that we can more completely study it for any predictive characteristics and more effectively teach it to student writers.

Distribution: writing/revision environment(s) and occasion(s)

Syverson defines "distribution" as "processes . . . both divided and shared among agents and structures in the environment" (7). In Syverson's work, this refers to the exchange of ideas and the way that ideas arise from numerous sources among which they are distributed, so we may also profitably consider as ecological elements formal and informal peer group interaction; the sources of students' information sets about particular topics; the cognitive work and idea-synthesis used to prepare for writing, including all prewriting strategies; and time management. Various familiar prewriting strategies may be employed in the service of a newly refined ecological prewriting consciousness, what we will call in the following assignment sequence "mining the distributed environment."

At the same time, in her study of a student collaborative writing project, Syverson divides "distribution" to include three additional components: the physical environment in which her chosen study group composes (in this case a dorm room, described down to its decorations); their social preferences (here, for face-to-face groupwork rather than meeting over the telephone); and the decisions to compose on a computer. When I advise my students to be cognizant of their "distributed" realities, I add to this list other circumstances that may surround their writing or revising, especially the presence of anything that might direct their attention away from the project: television, music, other people's presence. While we do recognize that individuals differ in their comfort and ability to work with noise, clutter, fatigue, we tend to write off these details as insignificant matters of student preference, but in so doing, we may be ignoring a consistent predictive factor that students may not be individually equipped to monitor or change. Further, for practical or pedagogical reasons, we seldom manipulate our classrooms for this factor—allowing or encouraging some to work in isolation, others with music, some aloud, *et cetera.*

(Psychological) Embodiment: the authorial personality

In one of her more unusual departures from existing composition theory, Syverson proposes that materially central elements of the author (from where they live to their bilateral symmetry) can affect writing and thinking.[4] "Embodiment," she says, is the interaction of the body with the environment, texts, and others, "dependent on and reflective of physical experience" (12). The students in her study, for instance, experienced fatigue, complained of headaches, shared folk wisdom about health and illness, and critiqued one another's typing speed while drafting. Furthermore, students exhibit arguably constant personality traits that both govern their behaviors and attitudes and distinguish them from other people. Jensen and DiTiberio's *Personality and the Teaching of Composition* tailors a personality model specifically to composition practices, usefully outlining the writing processes and obstacles for the sixteen general personality types identified by the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator, and offering us a language for discussing some factors of students' embodied psychologies. Psychological embodiment may also be interconnected with the other ecological categories—for instance, distributed environmental elements may differently affect introverts, who are more internally-focused, than extraverts, whose energy is more comfortably focused on the exterior world. Differences in concentration, cognition, susceptibility to physical stimuli may all directly affect a student's writing comfort or success.

As with distribution, this dimension has fairly obvious ramifications for prewriting but may also inform revision. Students' awareness of their bodies' participation in the writing process can in fact authorize and encourage them to control what factors they may to improve their writing experience; teachers may experimentally manipulate the physical environment of their classrooms to illustrate benefits and drawbacks. Furthermore, some psychological orientations, such as that described by the T/F distinction, may influence students' basic attitudes toward the expectations of process writing: a T (thinking) type may be less inclined to consider the opinions of others, while the F (feeling) type is more sensitive to pleasing an audience. This may also shape students' attitudes toward forms to which they are purportedly trying to adapt their writing (see "emergence," below). As with any application of a behavioral measurement like the MBTI, a teacher must stress that all type descriptors are equally "normal"; moreover, and even more significantly, pedagogical applications of these descriptive personality categories must emphasize that one's preference is not destiny.

---

[4] Syverson cites Mark Turner's *Reading Minds* as an example of the affect embodiment can have on perception and cognition: "the physiological fact that humans are bilaterally symmetrical determines many of our fundamental concepts, causing us to perceive and interpret the world in terms of bilateral balance, binary oppositions, and other forms of symmetrical relations. Thus we 'naturally' construct argument as a battle between two opposing forces that seek a 'common ground'" (12).

A student whose "T" orientation might explain his or her resistance to revising to please a critical audience, in other words, must not be allowed to use the explanation as an excuse for refusing to thus revise any more than a preference for one subject allows students to graduate without taking others.

Enaction: the final product(s)

> "becomes organic insofar as one change necessarily changes the landscape for all of the paper's other elements"

Syverson defines "enaction" as "the principle that knowledge is the result of an ongoing interpretation that emerges through *activities* and *experiences* situated in specific environments" (13). In the specific environment of the classroom, obviously, there are many resultant knowledges and enacted products. The final paper demonstrates the most obvious "knowledge" both in content and form, but the various tangible elements of the process itself—an outline, a page of brainstorming—reflect a student's engagement with a process pedagogy and may even be graded or recorded by a conscientious process teacher. Our valuation of these types of "enaction" must address the ecologies of the written utterances themselves and of the evaluation system; student writing products, especially within an academic setting, are complex cooperative systems that must cohere in an ecological fashion to meet with our (complex, cooperative) ideas of end-product quality and what constitutes "successful" writing behavior. To see both writing and process as "enacted" knowledges, and to see them within an ecological framework, contributes concretely to a different (nonlinear, interconnected, holistic) picture of revision than we may be accustomed to. If an essay is a constructed utterance representative of and participating in an ecological macrocosm, it is also its own kind of microcosm, and its various elements work together as a kind of ecosystem. Revision, then, becomes organic insofar as one change necessarily changes the landscape for all of the paper's other elements. On a small scale, changing a verb can lead to multiple changes of number and tense throughout the particular paragraph or the paper as a whole. On a larger scale, one piece of information can initiate a "ripple effect" throughout the paper, as its presence affects the way the original arguments are problematized, may be improved, and likely will be received. On an even larger, macrocosmic scale, one rhetorical decision—like a reconsideration of audience—can change the paper profoundly as the evolving specimen, as it were, adapts to better thrive in its target environment. All of these revisions involve more or less generative thinking by insisting upon holistic awareness, rather than just stressing isolated corrective behaviors.

Emergence: processes of adaptation and coordination

The guides we use to determine whether these changes—from the surface to the global—are successful can be described under Syverson's explanation of "emergence." "Emergence" is essentially the process of students' making their own ideas and utterances conform to the communication expectations of their environments. Syverson explains adaptation and coordination as the "emergent properties of self-organizing systems," and dividing the category of "emergence" into these two processes, she explains it as the ways that writers experience their "internal structures" (103) within the larger meaning-making structures in which they participate: college in general, their academic institution in particular, the specific class, the assignment in question, small work groups in and outside of class, interactions with the teacher, and so on. Writers attempt to "*coordinate* their internal structures—such as prior experiences with, knowledge of, skills and strategies for, and beliefs about writing—with external structures, including my expectations, the other writers in the group, the emerging text, the structured task, the technologies for composing, and the demands of other course work" (103, emphasis mine). A main goal of emergence is students' "understanding of themselves as writers, the development of [the] writing group as a complex adaptive system, and the group's situatedness in an ecology of composing," says Syverson (104). The students involved in Syverson's study experienced "emergence" with elements ranging from real and mislearned rules (i.e., a paragraph must have at least three sentences) to the textbook's language ("invention").

Further, using the very Darwinian metaphor I employed above, she claims that students have to adapt to the "co-evolving" environment of the class, including workshops, conferences, class discussions, responses to their work, revision suggestions which produced more revisions and more suggestions, *et cetera*. Syverson does not clearly identity the writing process as institutionally prescriptive, but especially as we adhere to a process model of writing and revision, we must recognize that the "process" is itself many times a monolith to which students must adapt. In fact, despite the research that suggests students' writing processes are demonstrably different in predictable and classifiable ways (e.g. Jensen & DiTiberio, above), we may present this writing "process" as the single most important institutional structure to which students must respond. Syverson's model of the writing process certainly stands out as a weak point in her study. Outlining it strictly on her syllabus, Syverson reifies this institutional apparatus with no obvious critical attention of the ways she reinforces it. Requiring a "minimum of four pages" of prewriting and brainstorming, the stage she terms "invention"; one to three labeled rough drafts, "depending on the assignment"; and peer comments guided by a sheet of specific questions, Syverson carefully constructs an institutional apparatus very familiar to most contemporary teachers of writing, but in so doing she requires her students to adapt to her classroom, to coordinate their writing beliefs with the ones she values. But she does so without interrogating the apparently *a priori* position of that apparatus or inviting students into an awareness of the power structure the apparatus comes to represent.

Syveron's apparent misstep here is so typical as to be missed entirely by well meaning teachers and researchers. Martin Nystrand and Nelson Graff's ecological investigation of a seventh grade classroom, reported in 2000, reveals the assumptions about quality that teachers and researchers often make. Regularly, their subject teacher had found her students produced "hybrid drafts" of claims and "factoids" rather than sustained, coherent argument, and in response to low state scores in this area, she focused on this type of writing in her class. The teacher was committed to process-oriented pedagogy; "her students continuously wrote and rewrote; she often responded to drafts, not just final copies, and revision was an expected part of every major assignment" (2). Still, as Nystrand and Graff argue, the students' responses were products of a complex "classroom epistemology that favored efficient recitation, recall, and a mastery of givens, inimical to vigorous discussion and argument" (4). What emerges from their discussion though, is not only the claim that the writing environment, both tangible and intangible, wields power over the writing process and product, but that the role(s) and definition(s) of "quality" in ecologies of writing may go understated or unspoken entirely, despite their obvious centrality to any pedagogy of writing. Clearly, quality itself is ecologically determined and dialectical, fueling the very system that gives it meaning. The "quality" toward which a teacher pushes, nudges, or leads his or her students arises from its own "complex system": the teacher's previous experience, reading, his or her own writing process, the objectives embedded in day-to-day lesson plans, and the expectations for the lesson plans' ability to realize those objectives. Then, it becomes an inextricable part of the classroom and institutional ecologies that dictate student writing. To use Syverson's terms, "quality," though measured through enacted utterances, reveals the ultimate emergent process operating in the pedagogical ecology.

For any theory to be usefully applied to classroom practices, it must at least speculatively articulate the bases for a measure of success, but it is artificial to see "quality" as monolithic in a universe where everything else is contingent. The contributions of post-process theory may help us bridge the gap between ecological theory in the classroom and the communication macrocosm for which we try to train our students. The post-process period, marking the "social turn" that composition has increasingly reflected over the past two decades theoretically interrogates notions of power relationships within society and within the discourse construct of higher education. As Sidney Dobrin explains, "post-process in composition studies refers to the shift in scholarly attention from the process by which the individual writer produces text to the larger forces that affect the writer and of which that writer is a part" (qtd in Fulkerson 132). But scholars have noted a sizeable rift between theory and practice (Howard 52). This is especially ironic in the open access institution, as issues of power and social monoliths bear directly on students who may rely on little or long-ago academic preparation, have weak or nonexistent support networks, inhabit inconsistent discourse communities within academia and without, and/or negotiate with more numerous and various power structures in their everyday lives than traditional, high-performing students in more exclusive educational settings do. In view of our ostensibly democratic post-process ideals, classroom writing instruction still typically directs students toward writing models and quality standards imposed from without: it has to in its effort to create and promote a standard of quality translatable to the outside world. But in our failure to incorporate a meaningful interrogation of these models and standards *vis a vis* students' actual behaviors, beliefs, and practices, we miss a tremendous opportunity to invite students into the post-process mindset, illustrating the ways in which each utterance participates—or fails to—in a power structure far more extensive than our classroom. We miss the opportunity, further, to hold a mirror up to the student and the structure, revealing the fact that they are always already coexisting.

We can further clarify this structure and more concretely describe our classroom environments with notions familiar to composition theory, those of "discourse communities" and "contact zones." Porter describes discourse communities as a "group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse is regulated" (38–9), so a student's various discourse communities could include friends, family, and academic contacts. Their success in communicating with the first groups are rarely questioned; teachers' assessments of "quality" are generally restricted to the last group. But Pratt's contact zones are a better descriptor of the nature of this particular discourse community's relations, as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34). Definitions of quality, which inform a teacher's instruction and evaluation, are representative of this asymmetrical power structure. Syverson's notion of students' "coordinating and adapting" to a cooperative idea of quality, then, may fail to appreciate a system more characterized by competition and hierarchy, trapping them in a discourse-community mode, and teaching them to coordinate and adapt to an artificial discourse community (the college writing class) that is exceedingly difficult to translate to other discourse communities.[5]

Ken Lindblom's update of the sophistic idea of the "*nomoi*" and adaptation of H. P. Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) offer us another theoretical framework for identifying the hierarchical nature of our classrooms, the quality assessments that we make within them, and the "bridges" teachers provide for students between the academy and the larger world. Lindblom describes *nomoi* as a "collection of continuously renegotiated agreements for the making of meaning that makes discourse work in any particular community" (37)—or systems of meaning making within discourse communities. Lindblom's rearticulation of the CP interposes *nomoi* between the writer/speaker and reader/hearer. Unlike those who have interpreted Grice as saying that communication is cooperative between the speaker and the audience, Lindblom argues that communication is cooperative, first, between the speaker and his or her understanding of a *nomos* and, second, between the audience and a closely compatible *nomos* (54). The system of signification of the *nomos* in question is what legitimizes the utterances. It is here that we find the grounds for our assessments of quality and for our roles as post-process or ecological teachers.

Using this model of communication, we can see the teacher's evaluation practices as measuring the extent to which student writing cooperates with the teacher's privileged *nomos* (generally also one that is privileged in the larger world of communication). In order to reinforce the cooperative principle, we must not leave that *nomos* unspoken, understood, or, worse, individually (and often incorrectly) constructed by students according to their notions of "what teachers want," of grammar handbooks, and the "rough draft" of an academic, "standard-English" *nomos*, so to speak, that they've been constructing repeatedly as they move from teacher to teacher throughout their academic careers.[6] Rather, as *nomoi* are "a collection of social practices or processes to which the members of a given society appear to assent" (Lindblom 53), teachers must both share the privileged *nomos* with the writers and allow them to at least perceive their complicity in its construction. Some pedagogical theorists have long advocated distributing a draft of an evaluation rubric and allowing students to provide input and to negotiate change, or even creating as a class the list of criteria by which their papers will be evaluated (Lindemann). Still, students often don't understand the significance of the rubric as a factor in their attempts to communicate: they don't appreciate it as a vital component of the ecology of their writing.[7] And they don't understand that the *nomoi* are multiple, shifting, and communally agreed upon. In terms of real power, the rubric is still artificial. Students can't easily alter the *nomoi* of the macrocosm in which their utterances ultimately aspire to make meaning. They can, however, learn them.

---

[5] Syverson's own study of collaborative student writing stands as a good illustration of this point, if by opposition. When her student group coheres nearly too well—certainly too well to agree with the teacher's increasingly forceful suggestions that they change their topic—and produces a thinly reasoned, inconsistently argued draft, she despairs, though ultimately dismissing her own dissatisfaction with the quality of their work as appropriate to "some other time or place" and focusing instead on the "struggles of this ecological system of readers and writers and texts" (88).

[6] Lindblom actually uses "grammar handbooks" as an example of familiar *nomoi*, alongside scientific method, town zoning laws, etiquette, and specialized professional jargon (55–56)

Pedagogical Applications

Conscientious use of scales and models and careful rhetorical analysis that accompanies collaborative rubric design can help publish *nomoi* and provide a transferable skill. In order to encourage students to achieve "emergent" knowledge that transcends the individual writing group and writing classroom and "adapts" to the demands of the communication macrocosm in which we participate beyond freshman composition, I utilize various emergent models of quality—sample essays, the rubric, graded writing and teacher comments, and professional texts—and we discuss the similarities, the rhetorical effects, and the apparent community constructed by this wide variety of "good" texts. This approach, obviously, draws on some practices already current in composition pedagogy but furthers ecological and post-process goals. Indeed, many types of pedagogy lend themselves well to various elements of ecological theory: a personality type pedagogy like the one Jensen and DiTiberio explained in 1989 fairly obviously fits within Syverson's embodiment category, considering individual differences between students themselves to anticipate their different approaches to writing tasks. Teachers who use scales and models or style-imitation strategies in the classroom are emphasizing students' familiarity with the emergent forms of the communication world in which they strive to participate. Nearly any emphasis we place on audience awareness probably fits within the emergence category as well.

One of the places ecological theory can really contribute, besides just providing a framework for using these other types of pedagogical methods in concert with one another, is in the distribution category, where writing pedagogy has rarely ventured until now.

In part, distribution refers to the way that knowledge is constructed from shared reality, so in some small way any pedagogy that emphasizes groupwork already participates in the distributed environment. Controls on writing environment, however—or, attention to physical distribution of individual students' writing microcosms—could use the idea of distribution to enhance both classroom pedagogy and the advice teachers give for the way students perform their writing behaviors outside of the classroom environment. It might not occur to teachers to mention things like distractions and noise or even to dictate whether students should compose on computers or on paper; we control these things in the classroom and may be satisfied to write these things off as student preference outside our purview, assuming that students will prefer the things that best contribute to their success. The more we know, however, about the effect that such things have (or may have) on revision success, either for most students or for certain types of revisers, the better. We can also encourage students to manipulate their personal writing environments to the best end. Even encouraging students to be cognizant of where their work is done has the potential to be helpful.

---

[7] Ron White offers a useful way of maintaining and explaining standards within a social-constructivist model of communication, by adapting Grice's Cooperation Principle to writing tasks. Beginning with the assumption that "teaching writing well depends on recognizing that cultural expectations about how texts are written are as important as grammar and vocabulary" (Kirkpatrick 99), White evaluates the success of student writing on bases vouched for by members of the professional business community. In this case, he identifies a shared discourse that prefers brevity to prolixity, critiquing the draft of a student who, like many, desires to "write as much as possible in order to demonstrate linguistic skill" (89). Six out of seven readers from the professional world agree with the standards White applies to the text. White doesn't use Lindblom's idea of *nomoi* but discusses the CP as if it is cooperation between the speaker/writer and the audience—his student, apparently, is not told that her work is being evaluated according to a particular, and professionally shared meaning making system.

Attention to the elements of students' writing ecologies (and papers themselves as complex, cooperative systems) may inspire new classroom approaches and even greater emphasis on the flexibility and recursiveness supposedly inherent in process writing. In some small way, any pedagogy that emphasizes groupwork already attends to Syverson's notion of distribution. For instance, insofar as distribution refers to knowledge's being constructed from shared reality, distribution may also take us where writing pedagogy has rarely ventured until now, encouraging us to attend differently to the physical environments in which students write, to challenge them to manipulate their environments experimentally, consciously, or to deliberately alter our classroom environments. We may find ourselves more comfortable with classroom noise or apparent distraction, for example, or designing activities that incorporate music, television, or talking. We may carve out spaces wherein to address the increasingly multitasking student mind. The following assignment sequence gestures to novel methods that I believe deserve much more study and practice. But with the suggestions that follow, I am not trying to reinvent the field: indeed, I rely on familiar practices of groupwork, brainstorming, research, drafting, and revising. I do strive, however, to broaden current practices to accommodate a reimagining and recontextualizing thereof, within the more holistic model of ecology, the diverse ecological experiences of open access students, the power differentials that characterize the ecological macrocosm that supports our ideas of quality, and our students' inevitable engagement with that power.

One: exploring the distributed environment

Student writing often begins with a more or less formal brainstorming exercise with the purported aim of revealing to students the ideas they already possess so that they may select a topic about which they are knowledgeable and somewhat interested. The weakness of this notion is that it underrepresents the complexity of the very consciousness that students are mining: the student mind, into which he or she goes diving, at best believes in its own discrete boundaries, between itself and its community, between its essence and its ecology. At worst it has a mentally-drafted list of "potential paper topics" that the student has been collecting for years. Preferable, then, is a pre-writing exercise that examines the distributed nature of ideas and illuminates the connections that students have with their worlds. At this prewriting and topic selection stage, students should actively pursue those connections, beginning with a group session to generate possible topic ideas by following even insignificant-seeming moments of overlap between group members' interests.

Obviously, one cannot predict students' interests and assign topics accordingly. This seems even truer in an open-access institution where students may represent a wider variety of experiences, reasons for coming to college, and lifestyle features. But even in dissimilarity, there are but degrees of separation: students might choose to study local after-school programs for children, for instance, after realizing that they a) have been to such programs, b) suffered for lack of access to them, c) have sent their children to them, d) would like to send their children to them, e) would like to work for them, f) are concerned about who funds them, g) are concerned about who runs them, h) are concerned about equal access to them (the list goes on).

"an interesting game of counting degrees of separation"

Appropriate brainstorming from that moment forward could prompt students not only for what they already know about the topic, as is typical, or even to generate research questions to address the things they don't know, but why they might care about—and how they are already connected to—the topic. Better, and opening the door to students who aren't sure that they do care about the topic, it may include listing people the students might *know* who might have reasons to care about the topic, demonstrating the web over which knowledge on a topic might be distributed. Maybe the students have younger siblings or children themselves. Maybe they or their parents are coaches or teachers. Maybe they belong to low-income neighborhoods or fiscally conservative families and are thus more concerned about the proverbial playing field for lower-income students or about where their tax dollars go. Maybe they or their friends were latchkey kids who hated school or see themselves as having fallen through the cracks of the American school system. If students are shown that they are, of necessity, connected to the topic in *some* way, brainstorming can become an interesting game of counting degrees of separation, illuminating the web-like community in which students all, necessarily, participate. Any of the points of the web can provide a promising strategy of engagement with the topic, and any of them could propel a student toward further inquiry.

Of necessity, this behavior will be repeated throughout the writing process. Not just "brainstorming" to "topic selection" in a more-or-less linear fashion, this behavior fuels decisions about topic, issue, thesis, audience, evidence, and appeal. In early stages, students should be encouraged to draw something more like a web than an outline and to resist the thesis/audience/appeal decisions until their inquiry begins to take on a sort of vitality of its own; the goal is that they begin to recognize the multidimensionality of the topic (and all topics) and their participation in it.

Two: mining the distributed environment

The next so-called prewriting behavior in this project involves collecting information, but instead of sending students to the library to "find quotes," as so many of them refer to research, they should do a much more hands-on type of "research" project. Often, in our well-intentioned attempts to teach responsible secondary research, we create students who obsess about the commas on the works cited page or "how many sources" they are responsible for having represented in their paper. Instead, I encourage an information-collecting behavior that, like the topic selection behavior described above, steeps students in their ecological contexts. In an open-access setting with many commuter students, restricting research to library sources—done, justifiably, in the name of promoting "scholarly" inquiry—also reinforces a hierarchy of knowledge, tacitly separating students from the value of their own experiences and observations. Many of our students already have the power to find the answers they need in real life—at work, from family members, online, through organizational contacts. But "asking around" doesn't earn any respect whatsoever in the academy, regardless of what positive virtues it reflects: curiosity, initiative, investigation. But currently, few if any composition textbooks instruct students in writing polls, compiling survey data, conducting interviews, or doing observational field research; few if any textbooks illustrate to students the research value of anecdotes, letters to the editor, notes from PTA meetings, or blogs. Instead, they (and we) reify the invisible power structures that alienate students where they live, authorizing only select (and sometimes apparently unattainable) types of information.[8] We build the ecological model of writing as we authorize and enrich students' experiences as sources for writing: breaking down the intellectual hierarchies by illuminating the steps between them, bridging the environments our students mutually inhabit, we enable our students to see writing as a way of participating in the ecological macrocosm in which they live, work, and think.

---

[8] Sending students into their own worlds to gather information carries an additional bonus for open-access students: teachers may use this wider definition of research to model the rich interdisciplinary wellspring of information that is the college itself, encouraging students to ask teachers in other departments, counseling and advising centers, and administrative offices, besides just library sources. Not only is this a way of promoting skill transfer between disciplines, but it is an embodied illustration of the broad value of a college education (over, say, a trade school or on-the-job training): the complex cooperative system of higher education itself.

Returning to what should be a group's ongoing examination of their distributed knowledge, students should be encouraged to share their findings with the class and/or their small group, resisting traditional classroom notions of ownership over scarce information resources. If one student's grandmother has a direct tie to the topic, after all, each of his or her peer group members are only one step removed from someone with a direct tie to the issue. If one student's brother disagrees with said grandmother's position, the entire group's wisdom on the subject stands to be deepened and enriched. This example also illustrates how we may newly respect and validate our open-access students' experiences. Rather than divorcing their academic selves from their still-intact social networks, we aim to teach each whole student in the ecology he or she inhabits.

Three: reflection on distributed knowledge

I advocate including reflective writing throughout the project to help students more fully comprehend the ecological nature of their communication. Rather than have students collaborate on a writing project (as Syverson's students did), I encourage students to reflect on the collaborative learning they did as they explored and mined their distributed environments. In a project diary, they frankly discuss where the topic came from and where in the world their "information" was located. In so doing, they begin to sketch the interconnectedness of the topic's world and see their paper topics as potentially real utterances rather than arbitrarily chosen subjects for an inherently artificial academic writing occasion; they also "relocate" the information from its original sources to their project diaries (and thus into their personal microcosms), learning—beyond questions of what to cite as specialized information and what is generally known—to own what they have gathered. The "information" may have been originally located in an external site or many external sites, but by the end of the project, students see their own connections to the topical knowledge.

Here, too, students should be encouraged to differentiate sources by their quality, correctness, and respectability, but this too may be an easier message in the terms of distributed knowledge, which ascribes them some authority, rather than more common analysis of sources, which typically positions them oppositionally to "expert opinion." If grandmother and brother disagree, for instance, we are confronted with our own values and the values of the community in determining which source is better. In other words, we have a natural, immediate, and practical analogy for analyzing the hierarchy of published and scholarly sources, easing them into the complexities of informational and institutional power by starting with the familiar distributions of authority they already participate in (and in which, often, they assume some).

Four: reflection on physical distribution and embodiment

Students should at several points in the project reflect on the physical realities of their distributed environments and their personal embodiment(s) through personality preferences or another measure. I advise students to try different settings for writing, revision, or group conversation; teachers likewise might consider changing locations, welcoming background noise, or experimenting with technological tools that allow for real-time or asynchronous written communication, instead of or in addition to talking aloud. In a writing journal—separate from their project diaries in that they extend over a whole semester and ideally beyond—students focus on their ease and comfort with writing itself, independent of the topic-specific ideas that some writing journals often collect. In this step, which should be performed multiply or constantly, students become aware of how much they do (or can) control their material environments and begin to learn how to manipulate their environments for their own best success. Students in traditional environments—dorms, libraries—may find this step necessary as well, but to some extent the traditional environment is already controlled. Open-access students may be trying to fit writing into a significantly less conducive atmosphere without becoming deliberate and conscious of their efforts or the necessity thereof.

Five: interaction with emergent forms, the nomoi

Students should examine emergent forms of writing that are relevant to their topics. Here, by "relevant," I mean those forms of writing that are not only on the same subject but those that literally come in contact with the chosen topic. For instance, if students are exploring the topic of local after-school programs, they should examine memos to parents, press releases, legal documents, grant applications, or charters that keep the programs running. They should value whatever they can get their hands on: promotional material, applications, newspaper stories, letters to the editor, stories from their friends, siblings, children. Students should read the relevant written documents for their tone, style, vocabulary, and rhetorical features as well as for their content, always addressing these documents' relative power within the complex cooperative system of the issue, and they should keep a record of this analysis in their project diaries. Research thusly conceived contributes not only to the idea-generating part of the project but illustrates the CP that defines "quality" to the audiences that care most about the topic in question: often, they find their target audience outside of academics, but consistently they find value placed on relatively formal, Standard

Written English and strong rhetorical appeal and arrangement of ideas. I also encourage students to collaborate at this stage of the project, using their project diary entries to contribute to the group's wealth of knowledge not only of the topic but of the topic environment's CP. In this way, "research" becomes the analytical, imaginative, and profitably collaborative work that professional writers know it to be, and "quality" becomes something unfixed, situational, and knowable.

Six: producing the enacted products

Sooner or later, like any project assigned in our educational institutions, this one must assign some sort of enacted product. I don't lament this: writing is, after all, a communication code that adapts and coordinates in order to be effective for an audience. Indeed, I don't assign an end-product dramatically different from the essays traditionally assigned in writing classes; I do, however, think that studying "enaction" as an ecological category could be useful to students as they produce that essay. They should be aware, that is, of the conventions and limitations of the academic essay, the alternate forms of writing that might be appropriate in other situations, the rhetorical decisions they would face were the situation to change. At this point, I provide rhetorical and style models of academic writing on other topics and we briefly discuss the different demands of diverse disciplines in the academy. Appreciating that any written utterance is a small part of a large and complex matrix, students should be encouraged to compose thesis statements that are decidedly non-comprehensive, and they should be aware of the elements of the topic they are choosing not to talk about. A useful corollary exercise is a detailed freewrite in the project diary on the other products which could arise from this topic in its ecological context (including the writer him- or herself): I ask students what (thesis) they could write about were they to produce a very different product on the same topic and what (genre) they could use to effectively communicate the most important features of the topic to a different audience.

Further, since "enaction" describes both demonstrable process as well as the finished document, I ask students, first, to be cognizant of their own apparent preferences and, second, to consider manipulating their writing circumstances as they revise, reinforcing the reflective behaviors advocated in step four. Ideally, this encourages students to be conscious of the things they do as they write and revise, possibly empowering them to construct their own most successful situations and processes. Finally, rather than requiring a certain number of drafts or insisting on commenting on each one (and tacitly asking students to write to please only me), I ask students to annotate a final draft, where they note rhetorical decisions and revision events and to describe the ecological features that went into each one. I thus encourage them to consciously make changes and to take note of them, even if those changes occur within a "drafting" step rather than a "revising" one. In so doing, I hope to encourage the recursiveness of process writing and to dismantle its apparent linearity.

Seven: (final) reflection

This project concludes with an opportunity for reflective synthesis. As with the annotations on the enacted product, this final reflective document has as its primary benefit that it makes overt otherwise unconscious processes. Students formulate a clearer understanding of what they do by having to reflect on and to describe the assignment and their engagement with it. I think this end is best realized when students are guided to consider the ecological elements of their projects, from the early brainstorming to the final essay, from the distributed ideas arising from group conversations to the enacted product offered up for evaluation and their project diary. Ideally, this encourages students to examine their entire writing microcosms, giving them a full sense of their writing processes and their engagement with an ecological world of ideas and utterances.

Conclusion

Obviously, no single assignment can negotiate the innumerable difficulties and complexities of writing, for open-access students or for more traditional ones. But if our practice is to be reinvigorated by the democratic energies of the post-process movement, while maintaining our pedagogical aims of teaching "quality" writing, ecology provides us a useful metaphor for re-imagining our work. Ecological theory has been applied to numerous problems in the worlds of science and mathematics, and, more recently to social science and business fields. In the preceding application to the composition classroom, it has tremendous potential for helping students write by better comprehending writing, and helping teachers help students write across rhetorical situations by showing them how to learn to do it. It has not yet been thoroughly explored, however, and I earnestly hope that future studies will attempt to build upon what I have done here. Scholars have agreed that it is high time we integrated the lofty goals of post-process composition rhetoric and the activities of classroom teaching: I am eager to see a composition pedagogy that grows to incorporate the ecological features of writing, the academy, the social world beyond its walls, and the complex intellectual lives of the students who populate it.

Figure One: Working definitional matrix for ecological writing behaviors

	physical	**Social**	**psychological**	**spatial**	**temporal**
distribution: writing/revision environ-ment(s) and occasion(s)	physical space: how were students situated physically to revise? where were they? what environmental elements were present: noise?	exchange/ creation of ideas: to what extent did students engage with others while writing and revising? with teacher or students only?	cognitive elements: how did students intellectually prepare for writing? personal interest in a topic? brainstorming exercises?	objective concerns: how concerned were students with assignment-specific surface details: page length requirement, required research, format?	time usage: how did students manage time and deadlines; how and when did student work; how much time did students spend revising?
embodiment: personality type	what are students' consistent, apolitical, untaught personality preferences?				
emergence: influential forms, models, genres	quality forms: was the student familiar with models of the paper assigned? did the student use the rubric to revise?	social quality constructions: was the evaluative rubric perceived as a useful statement of the *nomos*? did they use teacher comments?	students' participation in larger-world communication: do students read? are they skilled and careful readers?	assignment criteria: do students compare own writing quality to models? to the rubric?	form evolution: do students see rough drafts as themselves emerging, possibly formally different from final drafts?
enaction: the process and the final drafts	physical drafts: does student present draftwork as a more or less linear process? Is the final draft proofread and professionally presented?	audience: is final argument audience aware? are students aware of audience and anticipatory of audience response to rhetorical appeal?	choices of appeal: are arguments self-aware about their own premises and the types of appeal that work most compellingly for them?	format: do final documents adhere to surface conventions? are they spell-checked? how important are these elements for student writer?	time management: are papers on time? do students see quality of portfolio revision or teacher's deadline as most important time consideration?

Works Cited

Cooper, Marilyn M. "The Ecology of Writing." *College English* 48.4 (1986): 364–375.

Faigley, Lester and Stephen Witte. "Analyzing Revision." *College Composition and Communication* 32.4 (1981): 400–414.

Flower, Linda, Hayes, John R., Carey, Linda, Schriver, Karen, and James Stratman. "Detection, Diagnosis, and the Strategies of Revision." *College Composition and Communication* 37.1 (1986): 16–55.

Fulkerson, Richard. "Of Pre- and Post-Process: Reviews and Ruminations." *Composition Studies* 29.2 (2001): 93–119.

Howard, Rebecca Moore. "The Dialogic Function of Composition Pedagogy: Negotiating Between Critical Theory and Public Values." *Under Construction: Working at the Intersection of Composition Theory, Research, and Practice*. Eds. Christine Farris and Chris M. Anson. Logan: Utah State UP, 1998. 51–64.

Jensen, George H. and John K. DiTiberio. *Personality and the Teaching of Composition*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1989.

Kirkpatrick, A. "Contrastive Rhetoric and the Teaching of Writing: Seven Principles." *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 14 (1997): 89–102.

Langan, John. *College Writing Skills*. 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004.

Lindblom, Kenneth J. "What Exactly Is Cooperative in Grice's Cooperative Principle? A Sophisticated Rearticulation of the CP." *RASK* 14 (2001): 49–73.

Lindemann, Erika. *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford, 1987.

Minkoff, Harvey, and Evelyn B. Melamed. *Visions and Revisions: Critical Reading and Writing*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990.

Murray, Donald. "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery." *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*. Eds. C. Cooper and L. Odell. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1978. 85–103.

Nystrand, Martin and Nelson Graff. "Report in Argument's Clothing: An Ecological Perspective on Writing Instruction." Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Albany: National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement, 2000.

Perl, Sondra. "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers." *Research in the Teaching of English* 13.4 (1979): 317–336.

Porter, James E. "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community." *Rhetoric Review* 5.1 (1986): 34–47.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession* 91. New York: MLA, 1991. 33–40.

Richardson, Richard, Fisk, Elizabeth C., and Morris A. Okun. *Literacy in the Open-Access College.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983.

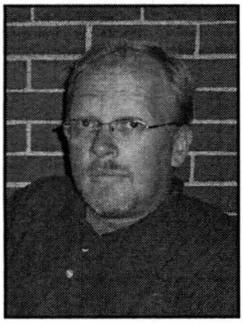
Sommers, Nancy. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers." *College Composition and Communication* 31.4 (December 1980): 378–88.

Syverson, Margaret A. *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999.

Turner, Mark. *Reading Minds: The Study of English in the Age of Cognitive Science.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993.

Warren, Keith, and Cynthia Franklin. "New Directions in Systems Theory: Chaos and Complexity." *Social Work* 43.4 (1998): 357–372.

Zellermayer, Michal, and Judith Cohen. "Varying Paths for Learning to Revise." *Instructional Science* 24 (1996): 177–95.



Ken Gillam *is Director of Composition at Missouri State University. He lives in Springfield, Missouri.*

Beth L. Virtanen

What's Wrong with Larry? Or a Case for Writing Appropriate Comment on Student Writing

> *The worldviews of many in our society exist in protected cocoons. These individuals have never had to make an adjustment from home life to public life, as their public lives and the institutions they have encountered merely reflect a "reality" these individuals have been schooled in since birth. When these privileged individuals—and they are privileged, whether they realize it or not—see others who operate from a different worldview, they can often comprehend them only as deviants, pathologically inferior, certainly in need of "fixing." Even when individuals believe themselves to have good intentions, their own biases blind them from seeing the real people before them. (74)* —Lisa Delpit

Introduction

Composition is often taught by instructors who have too many students in too many sections with too little time to develop relationships with individual students beyond the end comments we write on student papers. In these end comments, we try to make up for the lack of greater contact in the course and seek to motivate students to do their best work. Often, however, with our current course loads and the numbers of students occupying our courses, we may not have the liberty of time to contemplate students' potential responses to our attempts to motivate them to do their best work. In fact, sometimes our well-meaning comments lead to cases of extreme student alienation. In light of these facts, I examine a specific end comment and its effects on one student's writing within the context of his learning in order to assist us in moving toward creating appropriate commentary that fosters teaching and learning. I hope to help us as teachers of writing to reflect on our comments so that we don't alienate students unintentionally when we are really meaning to help them with the advice we so carefully write to them at the end of their papers.

Bruce Speck in his bibliographic essay published in 2000 notes significant limitations in the research on teacher response to student writing, noting difficulties in fitting evaluation and response into teaching based on a process approach, shifting terminology of

DOI: 10.37514/OPW–J.2008.2.2.05

evaluation that renders suspect instructors' meanings in assigning grades, and the emerging political, cultural, and ethical questions that confuse grading (2–3). Nevertheless, Summer Smith suggests that end comments form a remarkably stable genre (266). They are made up of three dominant forms: judging genres that evaluate student writing, reader-response genres that convey teacher reaction as a reader to the writing, and coaching genres through which teachers seek to prompt students to improve their writing (253). She also indicates that there is a finite pattern in which instructors employ these genres. Teachers start with a positive comment (261). Next, they offer criticism, using either an evaluative or reader response genre, followed by a coaching comment in order to motivate a student to improve his or her work. Smith suggests that students who read the comments, by noticing these similarities, "might tend to dismiss the advice they are given as formulaic and conventional" (266). To be more effective, she argues that personalizing the comment with specific details and examples aids in the sincerity of the comment, which makes it more credible to students. She also advocates the use of "complete sentences" and balancing positive and negative portions to render end comments more effective (266).

C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, anthologized in Richard Straub's 2006 collection on teacher response, further examine end comments in the context of the teaching-learning experience and not as isolated teacher tools designed to bring about immediate improvement in student writing. Recent researchers concur unanimously that "people become competent readers and writers over time as a result of their immersion in this web of influences, even if no one can pinpoint when, or how, or why (Knoblauch and Brannon 15). According to Knoblauch and Brannon, these influences include the large contextual world of teaching:

"cannot be seen in isolation of the process of learning across various contexts"

> Everything in teaching is part of something larger: one response in the margin of a draft is situated in a context of classroom communication, one assignment in a context of assignments, one classroom in a context of classrooms, and school experiences in a context (ideally) of all sorts of other reading and writing experiences. (14–15)

Clearly, end comments cannot be seen in isolation of the process of learning across various contexts.

Also discussing end comments, Gary Dohrer asserts that "teachers' written comments need to be part of a continuing dialogue between the teacher and the student, a dialogue that helps establish a system of values about writing" (7), a point reiterated by

Knoblauch and Brannon and by Richard Straub in their separate recent works. This dialogue within the context of the classroom must necessarily take into account the permutations in the various classrooms settings and among the various student and teacher populations. Chris Anson makes the point clearly: "Response is so rooted in context and human temperament that accepting diverse and even contradictory approaches or rhetorical styles may be more useful than searching for a single method [of responding to student writing] supported by empirical research" (362). Citing Schön's 1983 and 1987 work, Anson suggests that the shift in priorities from attempts to validate a single best practice to a move toward flexibility and informed choice

> . . . mirrors new theories of teaching effectiveness which place the locus of teachers' improvement not on the accumulation of research findings but on developing a higher consciousness, a kind of "thoughtfulness," often captured in the phrase "reflective practice." (362)

I think that the dialogue between teacher and student is essential in creating that vital learning dynamic within the classroom. To foster my own conversation with students and because I know that students don't always read the end comments I write on their papers, I allow students time in class to read and reflect on the comments I make on their papers so that I know that what I say there is clear to them. I ask them—then and there—to bring to my attention anything that is not clear or needs further explanation. I see it as a vital part of the revision process, and, like Dohrer, as well as Knoblauch and Brannon, Straub, and Anson, I think these comments serve to foster the dialogue between teacher and student through which we might come "to agreement about what [we] value concerning writing." As Dohrer suggests, "teachers must ensure that the comments do not betray the values established in the class" (7). In addition, according to Straub,

> . . . the metaphor of response as conversation asks teachers to do more than assume the role of a target audience; it urges them, in addition, to create themselves as demanding, expectant readers and lead students to look for more from their writing than clear communication alone. (352)

Here, it is clear that the end of good writing is not merely the production of error-free, thesis-driven prose but something substantively more, something qualitatively more. The classroom dialogue must of course take into account the negotiation of meaning and must see language as situated. James Berlin puts it very well:

> Our business must be to instruct students in signifying practices broadly conceived—to see not only the rhetoric of the college essay, but also the rhetoric of the institution of schooling, of politics, and of the media, the hermeneutic not only of certain literary texts, but also the hermeneutic of film, TV, and popular music. We must take

> as our province the production and reception of semiotic codes, providing our student with the heuristics to penetrate these codes and their ideological designs on our formation as subjects. (100–01)

If critical engagement by students in these conversations forms the goal of composition, then we must begin in the classroom by creating a dialogue with our students wherein they are comfortable questioning texts with which they are presented as well as questioning our comments on the work that they create.

We must not overwhelm students with the volume of comments we write on their papers. Teachers, Dohrer suggests, should separate the process of writing from evaluation in order to prevent students from giving up and not being able to exercise the opportunity to experience "writing as a tool for discovery" (8). Or put another way, I would like my students to begin the work of intervening in the formation of meaning in ways that Berlin suggests in his representation of the ideological function of language, for no single person is in control of language. Language is a social construction that shapes us as much as we shape it. "In other words," Berlin says, "language is a product of social relations and so is ineluctably involved in power and politics" (92–93). Furthermore, as Berlin notes:

> The subject is a construct of the signifying practice . . . [as] are the material conditions to which the subject responds. . . . [Further] the receivers of messages—the audience of discourse—obviously cannot escape the consequences of signifying practices. The audience's possible responses to a text are in part a function of its discursively constituted subject formations—formations that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and age designations. (90–91)

In this complex discursive environment, charged and ever-changing with competing ideologies, I want each student to be able to, as Berlin suggests, negotiate and "appropriate messages in the service of . . . [his or her] own interests and desires" (90). In this context, then, it is important for us to examine the trouble with the end comment on Larry's paper and why it nearly turned him off from writing entirely.

Drawing on the advice of these researchers regarding end comments and on the complex context of English Studies that Berlin provides, I will analyze and revise the end comment on Larry's paper to address the issues created when he received the end comment that did not meet his needs as a learner. Through this process, I hope to help us as teachers to be able to respond more effectively to the difficult stories students may sometimes write in response to the assignments we give them. Finally, I want to examine the implications for teaching and learning that come from the revising of the end comment on Larry's paper. To understand the story, the reader will need a little background on Larry and on the course where we met.

About Larry

I met Larry Miles[1] in a class I taught at a small bachelor's degree granting school located in northern Michigan, where I taught in the mid- to late 1990s. Larry had been recruited with a group of students from the Detroit and Chicago metro areas by an innovative admissions professional hired by the college to boost overall numbers of students and to increase diversity on the campus. His efforts resulted in a relatively sizeable influx of African-American students at the predominantly white school located in a working-class community with a population of less than ten thousand people. The college itself enrolled under 1,000 students at the time, the majority of those from northern Michigan and northeastern Wisconsin.

Larry and other African-American students in the classroom were from large, Midwestern urban centers such as Detroit, Milwaukee, and Chicago, while the other students in the classroom were predominantly from the rural Midwest. Thus, they had little in common, but much to share. Classroom discussions included what life was like in the big cities, on the rural farms, and in the country villages. And on the relatively small campus, the sharing that happened inside the classroom carried outside into the activities of the school. The students joined in campus activities together and worked collaboratively on snow statues. They also skied and fished together, creating the kinds of relationships we hope to attain through the recruitment of a diverse student population.

An African-American male of traditional college age (nineteen), Larry enrolled in my first semester composition course in the beginning of the second semester, not at all enthusiastic about having to do so. His attitude was clear as he sat in the middle of the room with his arms folded across his chest as I took attendance. He later told me that he took the course in spring semester because, upon admission, he had been placed into developmental writing based on an essay he had written during the orientation process and, therefore, he felt his placement had delayed, by one semester, his completing the composition sequence. But that explanation was only part of the reason for the anger he seemed to display on that first day.

About the Class

Larry's initial apparent anger confused me, but Larry participated in classroom activities more and more as time went on. In contrast to the angry person who came to class on the first day, I found him a likeable, outgoing young man who had a good sense of humor and a positive disposition. Other students in the class soon noticed his strengths as a writer through the collaborative and process-oriented pedagogy I employed in the classroom. Larry seemed to be able to work with many different students in the mixed classroom made up of

---

[1] A pseudonym

15 white students and 10 African-American students, significantly more racially balanced than many other writing classes at the same institution. This fortunate circumstance happened by accident, but the balance in the classroom created a subsequent balance in the cultural narratives shared by students, and this in turn allowed for the kind of sharing upon which trust is built.

I must point out that having a near balance of white and African-American students in a classroom at that institution was extremely unusual. In fact, it would be more likely to have none than to have more than one or two non-white students in any class. The improved recruiting, however, increased the diversity of students, creating conflicts and tensions that hadn't existed before. It also caused faculty to rethink their methods of presentation to accommodate the interests and communication styles of their students, and the faculty members worked hard to address the needs of students with whose cultures they had had little experience. The school has continued to increase enrollments and currently includes students from Finland, Japan, Turkey, and the Upper Midwest, as well as Native American and African-American students.

In that specific class, as in all the classes I teach, I strove to communicate to the students the idea that their participation in the classroom dialogue is essential and that agreeing with me as the instructor without their own critical input would do little for their learning. I try to communicate to students their importance in classroom dialogue. Using Ira Shor's words,

> A strong participatory and affective opening broadcasts optimistic feelings about the students' potential and about the future: students are people whose voices are worth listening to, whose minds carry the weight of serious intellectual work, whose thoughts and feelings can entertain transforming self and society. (26)

In other words, I encourage all students to make the class an exchange and investigation of ideas and knowledge that will lead all of us to new understandings, a class wherein we can learn from one another, myself included.

Sometime during the semester, after he had received feedback from me on two of the four required essays in the course, Larry asked me if I would read a paper he had written in his first semester preparatory writing class. He said that he wanted to revise the paper for the current course, but he wanted to know if it was okay to do so. By his tension, I could also see that something troubled him about the essay.

In the process of agreeing to read the paper, I asked Larry why he wished me to do so. He responded that he wanted to get my opinion of the work and of the response another instructor had written on it. Of course, I was uncomfortable with the fact that Larry found something awry with the way the other instructor had graded the paper. I agreed to read it, including the other instructor's comments, because he asked me to and because I was concerned about what had made him feel so uncomfortable in writing classes in general. Near tears when he gave the paper to me that day after class, Larry said, "This is it," and pushed it toward me. The paper was crumpled, as though he had wadded it up and then flattened it out again. I took the paper from Larry and put it in my bag and told him that I would read it and then talk with him after the next class.

Larry's Paper

The assignment to which Larry had been asked to respond suggested that he write an essay about a significant person in his life, one in which he described a person he considered to be a role model. The paper itself was four and one-half pages, hand written. Since the paper is relatively short, as was required by the assigned number of pages, I reproduce it here in its entirety, including errors.

Losing a Friend

> *The last two weeks of school seemed never-ending. Waiting to take exams for the last time. Thinking of how my summer is going to come about. Wondering if I'm going to be a Junior in High School or not. Finally I'm out, and I'm ready to go to Chicago to spend time with the family. It's the second week in June & the heat is blazing and I'm ready to go on vacation.*
>
> *It's early May, around and on Mother's Day. The family comes to visit my Great-Grandmother for this special day. This is one of the few time that I'm able to see them because I live in Milwaukee.*
>
> *It is also Sunday, so everyone gets dressed up to support her & the day.*
>
> *In the midst of everyone there is only one person that I can trust with anything & who tells me the things that he had done. The Sunday morning service was nice & the choir sung with graciousness.*
>
> *After church we all go back to my grandmother's house to eat & give my grandmother presents on this day. During the day My Uncle Anthony & I conversate as we normally does, He tells me about his new girlfriend & I do the same. So later on that I ask him to walk down the street with me, & he does. We get to the park that's down quite aways from the house, He tells me that he didn't want to play. We wants me to wait until I come back to Chicago. Anticipating the wait, I count down how many days that I had left in that school year & tells him so that he could be ready to play me in basketball.*
>
> *It's late now; everyone is getting ready to go back to the big city. As everyone clears I embraces them and show them love & kindness. When they pulled out of the driveway I started to cry, not knowing this will be the last time that I will see, hear, or touch my uncle again.*

> *Before I leave for Chicago I go say goodbye fo friends & when I return home my mother is crying. She tells me that my uncle has gotten shot & died from his wounds. Not knowing, I told her to stop lying to me & when I called Chicago to see if it was true, I was heartbroken.*
>
> *We has so many plans & so many things to accomplish. I felt as though I lost my best friend, brother, & a father. He had a big impact on my life. I wanted to be just like him in every way. What me love him & appreciate him even more is when I found out how he lost his life. I was on a Sunday, he was getting off from work & getting prepared to go to church.*
>
> *He stopped by my cousin's house so that he would be able to go also. While they are washing the car three guys are coming down the street shooting at my cousin. In fear they run. My cousin ran down the street & my uncle runs into his (my uncle's) house.*
>
> *My cousin's wife tells my uncle who is safe from the gun shots to go get the baby in which his coward father fleeds the scene. As he gets the baby our of the car, he goes through the gate, & up the stairs & gives the baby to its mother, a bullet pierces him through his side & goes all the way through.*
>
> *He eventually dies at the hospital. But I realized, for myself, that God sends everyone down on earth for a purpose & his purpose was to help me be a better person & save the life of another in exchange for his. Even though I lost him, he will always be a motivation & influence in the life of my younger cousins and definitely on me.*

In response to Larry's paper, the instructor commented on organization and verb tense. S/he also commented on "phrasing, sentence structure, and punctuation" as well as suggesting that "a sharper focus on [his] uncle and the narrative point(s) [Larry] made about him is needed." None of these comments came as a surprise as they were all things that needed attention if the goal of instruction was for Larry to acquire sentence-level correctness and develop the kinds of language practices that he would use throughout his academic career. To graduate from that university, Larry needed to acquire the kinds of language practices that were seen as appropriate there both by the faculty who, in essence, serve as gatekeepers and by Larry himself who wanted to assert his own interests at that institution and beyond by earning a degree that it certified.

In reviewing the work with Larry, I prompted him to make the changes the previous instructor requested, drawing examples from his paper and explaining what made the work occasionally confusing. Taking up the revision himself, Larry indicated how he might improve the work by changing wording and by including more information. He also agreed that the paper would flow better if he reorganized it chronologically and took care of the verb tense shifts by using the past tense throughout. Larry wanted to give his portrayal of his uncle a greater livelihood by adding some dialogue including quotations of the language they shared set in the context of their lives together. I supported his idea, and he continued to explain further the inclusions he was proposing. Larry and I never discussed the previous teacher's end comment, which I'll describe in more detail below. It seemed a moot point once he set to work on his paper.

The End Comment

Clearly, I don't know the context of the original assignment or the course in which it formed an important moment. Nor can I know of the interaction between Larry and his first instructor or the individual dialogue they created. Given these facts, my discussion of the end comment written by another instructor straddles some ethical boundaries that I feel must be respected. My revision of that end comment is done with the intention of elucidating what I think are the altruistic seeds present in that comment and to make the supportive intentions perceptible to the student. For Larry, I wanted to provide the support he needed to succeed in the writing course, which meant helping him to reengage in his own writing process to accomplish "his best work," as the original comment urged him to do. For the purpose of this writing, I want to help instructors avoid the problems that arose for Larry in response to this comment, especially when the purpose of the comment was clearly to motivate. With reflection, instructors can attain their intended rhetorical purposes in the end comment (whether or not students actually read them). I think that the interests of both instructors and students are served through the careful examination and revision of this particular comment.

"the insinuation that he had somehow dishonored his uncle's memory"

Larry's early resistance to English classes had nothing to do with the linguistic variation the previous instructor pointed out as errors in his work. His anger rose in response to the end comment. Preceding the coaching segment in which the instructor offered suggestions for revision, s/he began the end comment with the following statement:

> Writing about such an emotionally important event is often difficult—but doesn't your beloved and respected uncle deserve your very best writing?

End comments, according to Smith, move from praising to criticizing to coaching in that order, each with a specific objective in mind. The first sentence, here, clearly attempts to acknowledge the difficulty of writing on such a difficult topic and to establish a rapport with the student that continues to interaction of the classroom. However, the problem arises in the phrasing of the critical segment of the comment: "doesn't your beloved uncle deserve your best writing?" The rhetorical move is too strong and too abrupt from the first segment and undercuts its effectiveness. Obviously, Larry responded negatively to the insinuation that he had somehow dishonored his uncle's memory by not being able to reproduce Standard Academic English (SAE) in a text that was clearly emotional. In fact, the comment seems to embody the negative responses by teachers to African-American English that Robert Bowie and Carole Bond document in their work and which continue to plague teachers today in spite of the work done in multicultural education. Nevertheless, the comment can be revised easily to meet its pedagogical objective.

First, the intent of the first segment needs to convey fully the teacher's concern for and understanding of the student's feelings. Such a revision could look something like this: "Larry, I can see clearly from your work how important this topic is to you." By recasting this segment of the comment as a freestanding sentence, and not in its prefatory role for the second sentence, the first segment completes its work of praising and creating a link of understanding between teacher and student by acknowledging the efforts made by the student.

The intellectual link between teacher and student could be made stronger by recasting the second segment of the comment into further praise, holding criticism until even later. The second segment, following the standard pattern of end comments, could read thus: "While the topic of your uncle's death must be a difficult one, you show a strong determination to succeed by trying to capture in writing such an important and informing moment in your life." By disconnecting the unintentional link between the criticism of the work from the memory of the uncle, the revision removes the potential for the negative emotional response from Larry who was devastated by the first comment. Instead, the revision activates the powerful motivation that Larry initially brought to the essay—one which the teacher had intended he bring in making the assignment in the first place.

The segment of the comment devoted to constructive criticism should point out the confusion caused by the shift out of chronological order and by the use of linguistic features unfamiliar to the instructor (and perhaps the larger academic community) that Larry employs in his prose, and it must also help Larry to add important details to satisfy the readers' need to know and Larry's own need to draw an appropriate picture of his uncle. Most importantly, this segment of the comment needs to help Larry return to work on his essay rather than wadding it up and throwing it away. Such comments might be phrased as such: "There are some aspects you could address to improve your essay. The lack of chronological order that you use in telling the story makes it hard for the reader to follow. Also, the poignancy of your story creates a need for readers to have a clearer picture of your uncle and the relationship you share with him." This segment of criticism, then, sets up the final coaching segment, and importantly, it does not link criticism of the writing with criticism of the topic or the author. Instead, it acknowledges the importance of the subject matter and opens an avenue for offering suggestions for improvement.

Finally, the end comment should move to suggestions for improvement as it did, noting the need for a chronological approach and work, as explicated above, on content and usage. Thus the final segment could be revised as such: "To improve the work, perhaps you could reorganize the story to be told chronologically and also add detail to show the readers a more complete portrait of your uncle and of the relationship you shared with him. You should also use conventions of grammar and usage that you think are familiar to your readers. If you want to use variations that might be unfamiliar to them, you should be sure to include enough detail to ensure that your readers will understand. See the body of your text for my notes on the moments when I had trouble understanding your point." In this way, the criticism and suggestions segments are of use to Larry who can use the teacher's recommendations for improvement of his work as a guide to move his writing toward the intended aims of the course.

Finally, to be most effective, the end comment must culminate with the suggestion that Larry revise and resubmit the work to the teacher for reevaluation. The invitation could be worded thus: "Please stop by my office to arrange a new due date for your revised work so that you are able to turn in your very best writing." If the end comment has any purpose at all, it must be to motivate students to produce their "very best writing." To do so, students need the opportunity to revise.

I present the complete revised end comment here:

> Larry, I can see clearly from your work how important this topic is to you. While the topic of your uncle's death must be a difficult one, you show a strong determination to succeed by trying to capture in writing such an important and informing moment in your life.
>
> There are some aspects you could address to improve your essay. First, the lack of chronological order that you use in telling the story makes it hard for the reader to follow. Also, the poignancy of your story creates a need for readers to have a clearer picture of your uncle and the relationship you share with him.
>
> To improve the work, perhaps you could reorganize the story to be told chronologically and also add detail to show the readers a more complete portrait of your uncle and of the relationship you shared with him. You should also use conventions of grammar and usage that you think are familiar to your readers. If you want to use variations that might be unfamiliar to them, you should be sure to

include enough detail to ensure that your readers will understand. See the body of your text for my notes on the moments when I had trouble understanding your point.

Please stop by my office to arrange a new due date for your revised work so that you are able to turn in your very best writing.

Lessons Learned

I think our responses to student writing must reflect Mike Rose's admonition that "[t]he model [of language learning] we advance must honor the cognitive and emotional and situational dimensions of language. . . " (542). Clearly, pedagogy must take into account the real situations in which our students live. In this context, I think Larry's paper needed to be evaluated with consideration of his emotional moment and his situational dimension. Larry's hostile response to the original comment indicated that he needed both guidance and sensitivity from his teacher, who could help him meet the expectations he placed on himself in taking on this specific topic. Also, he needed to be able to revise this work and thus have opportunity to present his best work, the result of his process of learning and his process of writing.

In addition, teachers' comments on students' writing need to reflect what we know of the context of teaching and learning and, thus, move to create, as Straub and Anson advocate in their separate works, conversations in which students are moved to write. As Straub says, within the end comment, "what *is* important is that the teacher speak in specific terms about the content of the writing and use those comments to create a give-and-take discussion with the student—a conversation that is informal and expectant, one that is geared toward turning students back into their texts and their thinking" (359). Using the comment as a means of returning students to their work, as Straub prescribes, would address Larry's and other students' needs to develop skills in revision and in creating and meeting reader expectations in Ong's sense. Further, as Anson suggests, our reflections on our teaching practices and our comments on students' writing within the contexts of our classrooms "will lead us to educational practices that are informed by thoughtfulness, balance, and clarity of method" (378). Had Larry's first teacher engaged (or had opportunity to engage) in reflective teaching practices, perhaps the comment would have more closely met his/her pedagogical goals and Larry's needs as a student in his/her classroom.

In terms of writing pedagogy there are larger lessons hidden in Larry's story. These lessons have to do with students' rights to author for themselves, or at least to participate in the process of their being authored by various forces to fit into, the positions they will occupy in the classroom as well as in society beyond school, as noted by Berlin in discussion of the context of writing. According to Mutnik, many researchers have acknowledged students' needs to negotiate positions for themselves in relation to the knowledge within the academy. Some trade home culture and values for academic ones as has Richard Rodriguez. Other compositionists have suggested that basic writing students must eventually opt for academic culture as the more powerful even though they have much to lose in doing so (Mutnik 89), a view which I and others (see LeCourt) resist strongly. Yet others, like Deborah Mutnick, acknowledge the importance of becoming bi-cultural and bi-dialectical, rather than ceasing participation in the discourse of one's home community (190). She continues, pointing out David Bartholomae's observation that students, being outside the "habits of mind . . . that define the center of English Studies," must move inside (90). This moving inside must mean that students work to develop academic habits of mind, but it does not mean that they must lose touch with those they love.

"might find it in their best interest to temporarily set aside a cultural alliance"

This movement, I think, has often been over generalized to include a permanence and uniformity that is not possible, for human beings are not uniform or static in what they think or believe. Pressured one way or another by a variety of forces, including their instructors, students will make choices based on their own idiosyncratic reasoning, and these choices are not likely to be static and once-and-for-all. Simply, at one moment students might find it in their best interest to temporarily set aside a cultural alliance to explore the values and beliefs of another. At a subsequent moment, students will wish to reintegrate with their home cultures and beliefs. As Donna LeCourt suggests, "Working-class subjectivity *can* be negotiated and valued without being lost in the academy. Class identity is not nearly as predictable as we have depicted it to be nor as closed a signifier as an oppositional rhetoric suggests. It only becomes so when we have no other terms for understanding it" (42). For Larry, the negotiation process includes working out how he will authentically represent his home culture within the academic context in a way that preserves the integrity of the former and in a discourse sufficient to withstand the scrutiny of the latter that is enacted through the eye of the teacher.

To succeed at this task is no small feat, but for Larry there are additional issues at play, for he must also negotiate issues concerning dialect as well as class. Fortunately, however, as Sonja Launspach and Martha Wetterhall Thomas assert, no one actually speaks Standard Academic English (SAE) of the variety that is employed in academic circles and SAE is privileged over other dialects because of "*social* and not *structural* characteristics" (237). The significance here is that the preference for one dialect over the other is an issue of power and not of innate superiority of a discursive form. Launspach and Wetterhall Thomas continue:

> Speakers of middle-class Midwestern dialects have an easier time learning the standard because their home dialects are closer to SAE than others. . . . All students can benefit from the understanding that the standard is the language of power, and that in order to fully experience their own power students must master the standard dialect. (237)

Clearly, exploring the issues of dialect in the classroom will assist students in coming to understand the conventions of SAE in ways that don't stigmatize their home language practices. As Victoria Purcell-Gates asserts, "[T]wo sources of language knowledge—experience in use and explicit explanation of the language features that distinguish different types, or registers, of language—must inform the curricular decisions teacher make as they teach children to read and write" (139). And the social context of learning is of paramount importance as is pointed out by Arnetha Bell and Ted Lardner:

> . . . if the linguists are right that the social context is the driving force behind literacy acquisition, then *the social context of your English/language-arts classroom is the most powerful and important variable you can experiment with.* (469)

Students such as Larry need to work in classrooms free of the lowered expectations for students and negative biases by teachers against diverse versions of English. They need to work in classrooms where teachers actively reflect on the impact of their teaching on the individuals who occupy their classrooms, much as Ball and Lardner suggest when they advise us to place the teacher, the student, and the site of literacy at the forefront of our pedagogy (482). In Larry's case, and the case of all students whose dialect does not as closely resemble SAE as the dialects of others from middle class or elite backgrounds, understanding the relationship between his own dialect and the one he seeks to learn is useful and can be explored in an environment that nurtures him as a student.

Perhaps we would better serve students' needs by exploring the possibility of a positive and complementary relationship among the influences that inform them, as Peter Elbow does. By designing exercises for students to produce, study, and translate vernacular versions of English in the classroom, Elbow's work in some ways makes that space in which students might safely negotiate the clashes of culture and language in which they are immersed. Elbow's work helps us to dismantle the either/or dichotomy set up in the wider discussion, for students don't make a simple choice between home and academic cultures. The negotiations always mediate among a variety of influences, including but not limited to academic and home cultures, and these two are certainly not static entities.

Finally, using the language that is privileged in freshman composition and in the wider educated society is okay by Larry as long as he doesn't have to use it in places where it is not appropriate, such as putting it in the mouths of people who don't normally speak that way and in the moments when he talks to those people and doesn't himself speak that way. Using SAE in some circumstances does not eliminate the need for other dialects or versions of English, even in the classroom. Larry will develop competence to choose the appropriate language if he is given the opportunity.

Conclusion

Nothing is wrong with Larry. If we provide him with safe classrooms where his and others' languages and cultures are valued, Larry and all our students can begin the process of negotiating positions for themselves that reflect their own dynamic and growing awareness of the possibilities available through higher education. To foster their success, we need to assist students in developing their abilities to think critically and locate themselves appropriately. To do so, we need to remember to examine our own cultural lenses and to be aware of the ways we interpret in order to develop sensitivity for the ways others do, and we need to make sure our end comments leave room for students to address for themselves the negotiation process in which they are currently engaged.

Works Cited

Anson, Chris M. "Reflective Reading: Developing Thoughtful Ways to Respond to Students' Writing." *Key Works on Teacher Response: An Anthology*. Ed. R. Straub. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2006. 361–82.

Ball, Arnetha, and Ted Lardner. "Dispositions toward Language: Teacher Constructs of Knowledge and the Ann Arbor Black English Case." *College Composition and Communication* 48.4 (1997): 469–485.

Berlin, James. *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies.* West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2003.

Bowie, Robert L. and Carole L. Bond. "Influencing Future Teachers' Attitudes Toward Black English: Are We Making a Difference?" *Journal of Teacher Education* 45.2 (1994): 112–118.

Delpit, Lisa. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: New Press, 1995.

Dohrer, Gary. "Do Teachers' Comments on Students' Papers Help?" *College Teaching* 39.2 (1991): 48–55.

Elbow, Peter. "Vernacular Englishes in the Writing Classroom? Probing the Culture of Literacy." *ALT Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*. Eds. Christopher Schroeder, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2002. 126–38.

Knoblauch, C. H. and Lil Brannon. "Introduction: The Emperor (Still) Has No Clothes." *Key Works on Teacher Response: An Anthology*. Ed. Richard Straub. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2006. 1–16.

Launspach, Sonja J. and Martha Wetterhall, Thomas. "Beyond Grammar: Linguistics in the Composition Classroom." *In Our Own Voice: Graduate Students Teach Writing.* Eds. T. L. Good and L. B. Warshauer. Needham Heights, MA: Pearson Education, 2000. 232–41.

LeCourt, Donna. "Performing Working-Class Identity in Composition: Toward a Pedagogy of Textual Practice." *College English* 69.1 (2006): 30–51.

Mutnik, Deborah. "On the Academic Margins: Basic Writing Pedagogy." *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies.* Eds. Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. 183–202.

Ong, Walter. "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction." *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory.* 2nd ed. Ed. Victor Villanueva. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003. 55–76.

Purcell-Gates, Victoria. "As Soon as She Opened Her Mouth: Issues of Language, Literacy, and Power." *The Skin that We Speak.* Eds. Lisa Delpit and Joanne Kilgoure Dowdy. New York: New Press, 2002. 121–43.

Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez.* New York: Bantam, 1982.

Rose, Mike. "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction and the University." *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader.* Ed. Victor Villanueva. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003. 547–570.

Shor, Ira. *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Smith, Summer. "The Genre of the End Comment: Conventions in Teacher Responses to Student Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 48.2 (1997): 249–268.

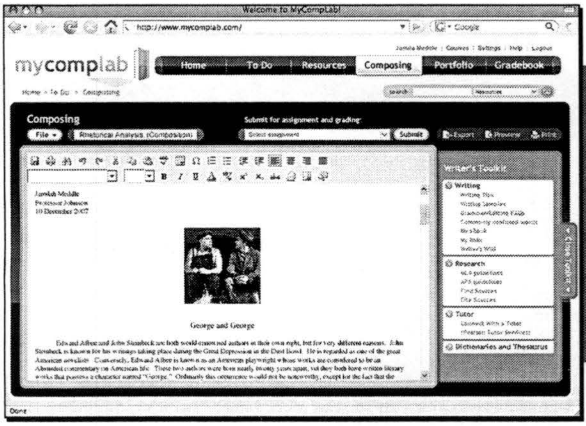
Speck, Bruce W. "Grading Students' Classroom Writing: Issues and Strategies." *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports,* [online 1–52], 27(3), 2000: 1–98.

Straub, Richard. "Teacher Response as Conversation: More than Casual Talk, An Exploration." *Key Works on Teacher Response: An Anthology.* Ed. Richard Straub. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2006. 336–360.

Beth L. Virtanen, *Ph.D., writes about students at risk in higher education, particularly as they experience first-year and other writing courses. Her research interests include Writing Studies and Finnish North American literature and criticism. She has most recently spent four years at the University of Puerto Rico and another as Director of the Centre for Writers at the University of Alberta. In 2008, she will take up the post of Paloheimo Scholar at Finlandia University.*

Save time. Improve results.

mycomplab



Welcome to MyCompLab!
http://www.mycomplab.com/
Google
mycomplab
Home
To Do
Resources
Composing
Portfolio
Gradebook
Composing
File
Rhetorical Analysis (Composition)
Submit for assignment and grading:
Submit
Export
Preview
Print
Writer's Toolkit
Writing
Research
Tutor
Dictionaries and Thesaurus
George and George
Done

"MyCompLab offers an integrated learning environment that places everything students need to compose at their fingertips."

— Bill Endres, University of Arizona

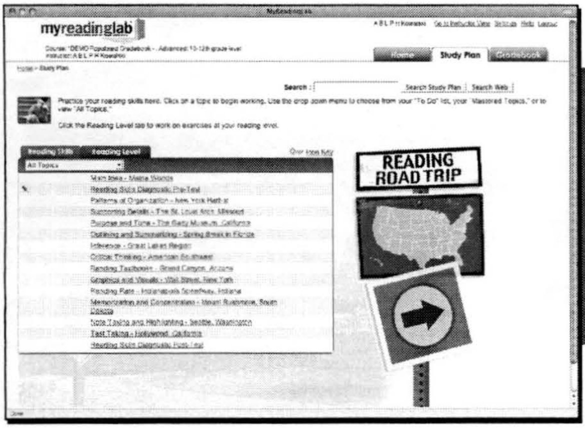
TAKING THE MARKET-LEADING RESOURCES for writing, grammar and research that users have come to identify with the program, the new **MyCompLab** integrates those resources with an online composing space and new assessment tools. The result is a revolutionary application that offers a seamless and flexible teaching and learning environment built specifically for writers. Created after years of extensive research and in partnership with composition faculty and students across the country, the new **MyCompLab** offers: an easy-to-use online composing space; help for writers in the context of their writing; instructor and peer commenting functionality; proven tutorials and exercises for writing, grammar and research; an e-portfolio; an assignment-builder; a gradebook created specifically for writing classes; and more.

To see a video tour and find out more information about the new MyCompLab go to www.mycomplab.com

PEARSON
mycomplab

Better reading skills are within reach

myreadinglab


myreadinglab
Home
Study Plan
Gradebook
Search :
Search Study Plan
Search Web
Reading Skills
Reading Level
All Topics
Main Idea - Maine Woods
Reading Skills Diagnostic Pre-Test
Patterns of Organization - New York Harbor
Supporting Details - The St. Louis Arch, Missouri
Purpose and Tone - The Getty Museum, California
Outlining and Summarizing - Spring Break in Florida
Inference - Great Lakes Region
Critical Thinking - American Southwest
Reading Textbooks - Grand Canyon, Arizona
Graphics and Visuals - Wall Street, New York
Reading Rate - Indianapolis Speedway, Indiana
Memorization and Concentration - Mount Rushmore, South Dakota
Note Taking and Highlighting - Seattle, Washington
Test Taking - Hollywood, California
Reading Skills Diagnostic Post-Test
READING ROAD TRIP

Practice your reading skills here. Click on a topic to begin working. Use the drop down menu to choose from your "To Do" list, your "Mastered Topics," or to view "All Topics."

Click the Reading Level tab to work on exercises at your reading level.

"My students have the opportunity to develop their reading skills on their own time."

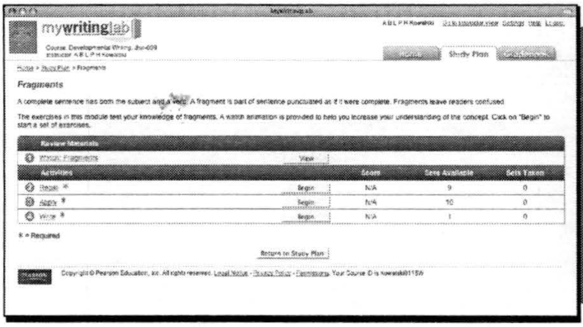
— Sandra Padilla,
El Paso Community College

SPECIFICALLY CREATED for developmental reading students, **MyReadingLab** is the first and only online application that provides systems for diagnosing and improving students' reading skills and reading levels. This remarkable application utilizes diagnostic testing, personalized practice, and gradebook reports to enable instructors to measure student performance and help students gain control over their reading.

Visit www.myreadinglab.com for a tour and more information.

PEARSON
myreadinglab™

Where better practice makes better writers



mywritinglab

A B L P H Kowalski

Course: Developmental Writing, [illegible]
Instructor: A B L P H Kowalski

Home > Study Plan > Fragments

Fragments

A complete sentence has both the subject and a verb. A fragment is part of sentence punctuated as if it were complete. Fragments leave readers confused.

The exercises in this module test your knowledge of fragments. A watch animation is provided to help you increase your understanding of the concept. Click on "Begin" to start a set of exercises.

Review Materials				
Watch: Fragments	View			
Activities		**Score**	**Sets Available**	**Sets Taken**
Recall *	Begin	N/A	9	0
Apply *	Begin	N/A	10	0
Write *	Begin	N/A	1	0

* = Required

Return to Study Plan

Copyright © Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved. Legal Notice - Privacy Policy - Permissions. Your Course ID is [illegible]

"When students do the MyWritingLab work, I see significant improvement in their grammar skills."

— Francie Quaas-Berryman, Cerritos College

MyWritingLab is an online learning system for developmental writers that provides better writing practice through diagnostic assessment and progressive exercises. Moving students from literal comprehension, to critical comprehension, to applying the rules to their own writing, MyWritingLab is a tested and proven application that is sure to help instructors save time while improving their students' writing skills.

Visit www.mywritinglab.com for a tour and more information.

PEARSON
mywritinglab

Longman
Prentice Hall
are imprints of

PEARSON

www.pearsonhighered.com