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selors may be able to do some lasting good if the situation calls for their intervention. All writing teachers, at one time or another, have had to read or hear about circumstances in a student's life which teachers are simply not trained to deal with. The counselor not only facilitates the exercise used in the writing class, but can also lend support to the student confronting a life-long conflict and the teacher who is fundamentally powerless to do anything about it.

Training Teachers Is a Process Too

John J. Ruszkiewicz, The University of Texas at Austin

For eight years, I taught the course that prepared graduate students to teach freshman English at the University of Texas at Austin. The syllabus I inherited in 1977 was designed to introduce James Kinneavy's *A Theory of Discourse* to new instructors, to explain a freshman English program based largely on that theory, and to supply basic techniques for teaching writing. Despite a heavy emphasis on modes of discourse, the course was more practical than theoretical. Over the years, however, the training element of the class was usurped by an emphasis on research. Reading lists and required course texts proliferated, reflecting an escalating sense of professionalism or, perhaps, a need to convince graduate students of English Literature that the two-thousand-year-old discipline of rhetoric had scholarly respectability.

Research articles went on reserve in the library. Reports were required on various aspects of composition theory. Students read Kinneavy, Britton, D'Angelo, Hirsch, Shaughnessy, and more. Following a national trend, the pass/fail training course evolved into a survey of contemporary rhetoric—in itself, not a bad thing. Suddenly, everything from Chomsky to Vygotsky had become "essential."

But as the course grew in substance, I found myself less satisfied with what I was actually doing—offering novice instructors a smorgasbord of theories, techniques, terms, and names every respectable writing teacher should know. I began to sense that it was possible to be a respectable writing teacher without being a good one. When I taught invention, for example, I outlined all the possibilities—the Aristotelian tropes, classical status theory, Burke's pentad, the journalist's questions, looping, freewriting, the tagmemic matrix. When I taught sentences, I did the same. Although I was a strong advocate of teaching the process, I found myself reluctant to impose that or any other method on my graduate students—aware of how little was settled in our field. But were these instructors able to synthesize all that I was throwing at them? Was I, in fact, making rhetoric—or more accurately, writing—so respectable as to seem unteachable?

As part of the training course, I regularly observed the new instructors. I would sit rather conspicuously in the back of their classrooms with a legal pad taking notes—a figure of threatening authority. And what I saw was a predictable mélange of strengths and weaknesses. The "natural" teachers were doing well; the stiff, formal, shy, or tactless young instructors were making a mess of things, or—more typically—simply boring their charges. Time and again, I found myself telling these instructors in conference that they should spend more time teaching writing. Yet, in my next class, I taught more theories, more techniques, more *stuff*. The graduate students valued the training course more than I thought it deserved, attending the weekly three-hour sessions religiously and penning respectable evaluations at term's end. But, inevitably, I saw their initial enthusiasm droop and fade. Teaching writing was becoming yet another quietly desperate act of survival. My enthusiasm for showing

them "God's plenty" only served to confirm prejudices they harbored about rhetoric—
that the contemporary discipline was a hodge-podge of faddish methods and tech-
niques fueled by a publishing industry that thrived on new editions. I knew such
judgments were wrong. But how was I to convey the satisfaction of a successful writ-
ing class to beginners? The program I outlined to my graduate students was wide-
ranging, eclectic, difficult; good composition instruction, I have come to believe, is
fundamentally simple. Appropriately, the solution to my problem arose from an ele-
mentary observation: if I take a process approach to teaching writing, shouldn't I also
teach "teaching writing" as a process?

What did that mean? It meant approximately what process approaches mean in
composition courses. You act, rather than observe. You write, rather than talk about
writing. You intervene and make decisions, rather than suggest bland alternatives.
You risk failure. You shape a community out of a class, share assignments, edit to-
gether, grade together.

My new policy meant that new instructors would lose some freedom, but also be
responsible for fewer preparations. I would define the structure of their freshman Eng-
lish courses, asserting the process-model as the norm. No one would backslide to a
comfortable "assign a paper/collect it/grade it" routine the first time drafts didn't
work well or peer-editing plodded. We would begin with teaching, not with reading
about teaching. Initially, our materials would be our course texts, our assignments,
our classroom routines and policies. (When, on one occasion, the class devised what,
in my experience, was a particularly bad assignment, I suggested that this paper
might be one we would all do. The topic changed faster than the Texas weather and I
had scored a memorable point about the nature of writing assignments.)

Our freshman course requires a research paper taught in close coordination with
the undergraduate library. In the past, the librarians had come to the English build-
ing to address the new teachers. In the process course, we trooped over to the under-
graduate library so that the instructors would have hands-on experience with the facil-
ity their students typically used. I asked the new teachers to take the same self-guided
library tour and quiz their students did. And, exposing myself to feel what wretches
feel, I spent an hour filling in the blanks on the tour—joined half way by an under-
graduate who wanted to compare answers.

We had an open door policy on visiting each others' courses, so I published the
times and locations of our freshman class meetings. When time came for me to review
the new instructors, I insisted that I become part of their class, which usually meant I
joined an editing group. I was impressed by the vocabulary these freshmen had ac-
quired, the seriousness of their editing, and the enthusiasm they displayed. The
novice instructors did not handle their classes with equal skill: the natural teachers
were as graceful as ever, and the less adept still stumbled a bit. But, polished or
rough-edged, they were instinctively doing the right thing—teaching writing, and
not desperately trying to fill up three hours a week by discussing Addison's prose or
forensic discourse. They had internalized the rhetorician's version of Augustine's rule
of charity: the test of any classroom activity was the contribution it made to improv-
ing writing.

During the first week of the term, I urged my students to read as much of Erika
Lindemann's *A Rhetoric For Writing Teachers* as they thought they needed—most class
members promptly read the whole book. Not until the tenth week of the semester did
we open Richard Graves' anthology *Rhetoric and Composition*. Essays which had been
mere exercises when read early in previous courses now became battlegrounds for in-
structors with limited but real teaching experience. They understood at first hand that
rhetoric and composition was not a mere assortment of theories and techniques.

I don't, however, want to convey the impression that all was sweetness and light in

my process "Teaching Writing" course. We still endured the inevitable mid-term slump; we suffered through a truly dismal set of definition drafts; and some students still made the kind of slow progress that suggested they did indeed learn "more from a three-minute record than they ever did in school." So it was with no feigned trepidation that I decided to close the course with one last process element: I would ask all the teachers in the course to invite two freshman to our last meeting for a round-table session on teaching writing.

It seemed logical. We had been treating our freshmen as apprentice writers all term, reading their drafts as editors might, encouraging them to be inventive, to take risks. Why not now trust them to talk about their experiences, to let us know in a professional situation just how they felt about the course they had virtually completed? The graduate students *kind of* liked the idea, but had legitimate reservations: the students might be too intimidated to speak, or merely parrot what they thought we wanted to hear. I worried, on the other hand, that they might be too honest.

We agreed to risk it, however—to ask some of our more articulate (not necessarily our best) students to attend our final seminar. As I walked to the room about three minutes late, I wondered if any freshmen (mine included) would actually attend. I opened the door to a buzzing table full of teachers and students. It was, I admit, a selective, well-scrubbed group unusually eager to talk. We had prepared a series of questions for them, the first "What did you think Freshman English *would be like? How has it differed from your expectations?*"

With that, they were off and running with what turned out to be the most interesting, most intriguing class I have ever had—bar none. My only regret was that I didn't videotape it. In an hour and a half, the students summed up much of what our professional journals have been struggling to articulate for a decade. They loved the process method, especially the opportunity to prepare drafts and to turn in final versions when they were ready. It removed their fears; it made them more conscious of opportunities to revise. They enjoyed reading each others' papers. They sometimes felt as if they had become better critics of their colleagues' work than of their own. They hated the comments they had gotten on papers in high school, but comments on drafts proved different. Neither hostile nor embarrassing, these remarks came at a sensible time, when an essay could still be improved. Although several of the students confessed to being upset when they learned they had not placed out of the course, they now felt—all of them—that *no one* should skip freshman English.

We expected dark clouds when we mentioned the research paper. After all, critics were constantly assailing library projects as academic drudgery. Our students' reaction? It was their favorite, most profitable assignment.

We hadn't placed much emphasis on grammar, spelling, and other conventions in our courses. Should we? No, the students told us. Their big problems were developing ideas, and mustering examples and illustrations. They had supped full of drills in high school. They learned much more about grammar from editing real papers in class.

The students were wonderfully professional throughout the discussion and, I think, impressed by how seriously we were taking their comments. They were tough on our grading policy sheet ("I don't think any of *you* could write an A paper by those standards" one student complained—and he was probably right) and almost bitter about our placement examination: "it's a grammar and usage exam; it doesn't test anything about writing ability." But their criticisms were in a minor key. The tune coming through loud and clear throughout this session—the one I hadn't gotten right in my earlier teacher training classes—was that students value writing when they understand the point of what they are doing. The process method works because it makes sense to students.

The hour and a half passed too quickly. When time ran out, neither instructors nor students wanted to leave. I offered to treat the students to a beer after the session, but only a few were of legal age. So the students left and I had five minutes with the new instructors before we had to vacate the room. One young teacher just kept saying "that was wonderful" over and over again. The seminar may have been a fluke; the freshmen may have pulled the wool over our eyes—but I doubt it. My instructors had done a good job teaching writing and their students—our students—had let them know it. No need to convince this group of Ph.D. candidates in literature that teaching writing was important. They had learned that on their own.

I discovered that, like writing itself, the training of writing teachers becomes dynamic and challenging again when viewed as a process—a process derived from theory, but emphasizing practice, one that surveys methods, but tests them by experience, one that entails direction and supervision, but not intimidation and authoriy, one that finally and most importantly places writing and students at its core. The only thing I don't understand is why it took me eight years to invite those freshmen to my class.

Proofreading: A Reading/Writing Skill

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Many of our students fail to detect surface errors in their compositions because, as Mina Shaughnessy observed in *Errors and Expectations*, they see what they mean rather than what they write. The reason they do not perceive errors is that they *read* rather than *proofread*. Since reading is a process of anticipation and prediction, readers look only at what is necessary to predict meaning. In order to proofread effectively, however, one must suspend this anticipation. Rather than looking at just a few words on each line, as an efficient reader does, good proofreaders force themselves to attend to the text closely and deliberately—looking specifically at each word and mark of punctuation, carefully noting not only what is there but also what is not there.

Proofreading is thus not only a writing skill, it is also a reading skill. Ironically, it is a reading skill that involves a deliberate effort to counteract the "normal" process of reading. Unless a student understands this necessary modification of her normal reading process, she will continue to read rather than proofread.

In at least two other ways proofreading is related to reading. First, inexperienced writers are almost always inexperienced readers as well—inexperienced to the point that they frequently fail to identify words as they read or to comprehend the meaning of what they read. They are accustomed to a text that is, for them, riddled with omissions and distortions. Using the clues that are available to them—the words they can recognize, the syntax they can deal with—they discern meaning as well as they can. These inexperienced readers are, then, much less distracted by the omissions and distortions that characterize their own writing.

Proofreading is also related to reading in that both are constrained by short-term memory. Cognitive psychologists have found that the number of discrete items that can be held in short-term memory is seven plus or minus two. This limitation is responsible for many of the errors we find in students' writing. For example, if the subject and verb of a sentence are separated by more than seven words, the verb frequently does not agree with the subject because the writer was unable to hold the subject in short-term memory until the verb was written. Basic writers especially find it difficult to hold linguistic features in mind because they are unfamiliar with many of the sentence patterns used in writing (as opposed to speaking). As a result, many of the sentences they write appear to be fractured—to break in the middle as if two dis-