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Writing relationships: Reading students, reading ourselves

Tobin, Lad, Ph.D.

University of New Hampshire, 1991

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WRITING RELATIONSHIPS: READING STUDENTS, READING OURSELVES

By

LAD TOBIN
B.A. Earlham College, 1975
M.A. University of Chicago, 1977

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
English

May, 1991

This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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4/26/91

Date

DEDICATION

FOR TOBY, LUCY, AND EMMA

For reasons too numerous, too personal,
and too important for me to list here

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My point in this dissertation is that people write most successfully when they enjoy productive relationships with teachers and peers. And so it is particularly fitting that I acknowledge the people whose friendship, support, and advice helped me in my own writing.

I am grateful first to people at the University of New Hampshire—especially Bob Connors, Don Graves, Judy Fueyo, and Bonnie Sunstein—whose advice and support improved this dissertation in little and big ways. Still every writer needs to find readers who are particularly helpful. On this count I am indebted to Don Murray whose articles and books drew me into the field in the first place and who has continued to read my work, meet me for conferences, and offer encouragement and perspective long after he was being paid for his time. But I have to give special credit to Tom Newkirk. From the time I met Tom to discuss the possibility of returning to graduate school through the times I went to him to complain about graduate school requirements through yesterday when I called him with last-minute questions, he has been a terrific teacher, advisor, and friend. He has

given me praise when I needed it and he has given me a shove when I need that ("Just get it done.").

I have also been lucky to have a group of colleagues at Saint Anselm College who have suffered and joked with me through the writing of this dissertation. I want to thank Dan Reagan and Kenn Walker, in particular, for their interest and support. And I want to thank the students in my Freshman Composition classes during the past few years. I hope they have learned and gained as much from their relationship with me as I have from my relationship with them.

I also had a large and supportive reading group of relatives and friends, including my parents, Arnold and Eunice Tobin; my in-laws, Fred and Phyllis Gordon; and my sisters-in-law, Anne Gordon and Beth Tobin. But I want to acknowledge three of those readers who seem to understand my work almost as well as I do: my brother Joe, my brother Dan, and my friend and fellow writing teacher, Randy Albers.

But in the end I relied most often and most heavily on Toby, Lucy, and Emma. From the very beginning this has been a family project which has called for sacifices from all four of us. So in some corny sense I feel like we are all graduating now, all getting our Ph.D. What I feel for each of them, what I owe each of them, so far exceeds anything I could say in this public context that I feel embarrassed to even try.

Still I want people to know how much Toby helped me throughout this entire process: she has offered me encouragement, perspective, commisseration, down-to-earth commonsense, editorial expertise, honesty, and crucially important pep talks. Without all of this, without her patience, humor, love, and support, I couldn't have done it. Of course, without Lucy and Emma, I could have done it much sooner, but then it wouldn't have meant even half as much.

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ABSTRACT

WRITING RELATIONSHIPS: READING STUDENTS, READING OURSELVES

by

LAD TOBIN
University of New Hampshire, May, 1991.

If we want to understand how students learn to write in a college composition course, we need to pay more attention to the context in which that writing and the teacher's reading occurs. What we need is a definition of context broad enough to account for the interactive and dialectical nature of the composing and reading processes, but still narrow enough to tell us what *not* to take into account. My argument in this disseratation is that we can best accomplish this by viewing context in composition as primarily determined by the interpersonal, classroom relationships—between the student and teacher, between the student and other students, and, finally, betweeen the teacher and other teachers—that shape the writing and reading processes.

Traditionally we have considered the quality of the relationships in a writing classroom to be an effect of a student's success or failure as a writer; I think that it is the often the other way around, that writing students

succeed when teachers establish productive relationships with—and between—their students. I am not suggesting that establishing productive classroom relationships is _another_ nice thing to do if we have time; I am arguing that it is the _primary_ thing we need to do if we want to succeed as writing teachers.

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to identify moments of conflict, connection, and tension, moments when authority was being asserted, resisted, and negotiated. In the first section—the teacher-student relationship—I focus on how I read student texts, how we talk about composing in class, and how tension is negotiated in the one-to-one conference; in the second section—the student-student relationship—I examine competition, identification, and collaboration between peers; and in the final section, I examine some implications of teacher-researcher writing.

In order to explore interpersonal relationships, I've tried to develop an approach which reflects the multifaceted, interdisciplinary nature of my topic, one which makes use of a wide range of methods and techniques: narrative, analysis, theory, case study, self-study, and argument.

INTRODUCTION

HOW CLASSROOM RELATIONSHIPS SHAPE READING AND WRITING

Polly walked into my office for her first conference looking nervous. "Am I too early? I am a little early. Should I come back in a few minutes? I can just wait outside." I reassured her that it was fine, but she still seemed tense, in a manic kind of way. "My first essay is really terrible. I don't know if you should even read it. It's terrible. I couldn't think of anything to write about. It's about the day my parents finally agreed to let me get a cat. It was just this summer, right before I started college. That's not a good topic for an essay, is it? Sarah—she's my roommate—she read it and said it was great, but she says everything I do is great, so I don't know. Maybe you should just go ahead and read it." She gave it to me and I started to read. "I'm so embarrassed," she whispered and then theatrically covered her face with her hands. I tried to reassure her: "Oh, come on, I'm sure it's not that bad."

As a matter of fact, the essay was that bad——all sorts of references to how cute and cuddly and adorable the kitten was. It was the sort of essay that I might have (read: would have) sneered at when I first started teaching writing. But I've learned to be more patient with developing writers and their drafts. So I stayed quiet, trying to think of something their drafts. So I stayed quiet, trying to think of something to say that would indicate my displeasure with the essay without hurting her feelings. Apparently she couldn't stand the silence—or the tension: "I know it's really stupid. Think I should switch my topic? I know I should switch. I mean Ben writes about the homelessness problem and Cathy writes about her grandmother's funeral—it's really great, she showed it to me in the dorm—and I write about my kitten."

I tried to get her to relax and to talk about why she had chosen that topic. She said she didn't know but she guessed it was because she thought the kitten was so cute and because she was so surprised that her parents wanted a pet. "They never let me have one when I was little and then right before I leave for college, they finally decide to get me a kitten. It's so weird." It did seem a little weird so I pushed her to speculate about her parents' motives. For awhile she stumbled around, taking guesses that she would then immediately reject. I began to get discouraged but for some reason I began to sense that I—she—was onto something. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, she got it: "I know this is going to sound absolutely crazy, but in some way, do you think that they got the kitten because I was leaving home and they wanted the cat to sort of hold my place for me in the family?"

I told her that it did not seem crazy at all, that in fact it made great sense. Now I was excited; I could see an evolving draft in which the kitten would become a powerful symbol. I launched into a speech about the possibilities of that essay and then, expansively, about why the process of writing is so exciting. I caught myself when I realized that Polly wasn't listening; she was crying. "I mean I never really thought about why they kept making such a big deal about the kitten until now. At the time I was even a little jealous of the kitten. Oh God, this is ridiculous. Now I really am embarrassed. I'm sorry to do this to you. I am so sorry."

But she couldn't compose herself. "I'm so homesick. It's so weird because I was the one of all my friends who couldn't wait to leave for college and all my friends were so nervous about it. I mean, I felt like they were all so immature. And now everyone here seems to be having a great time and I'm the one who is feeling homesick." She was still crying. I told her that everyone had trouble adjusting to college, that I had a terrible case of homesickness when I first moved into a dorm. No response. I felt awkward, clumsy. She seemed mortified with embarrassment. I hoped that Ken Walker, the professor in the next-door office, had his door shut and could not hear her crying or my pitiful attempts at consolation. I worried that my emphasis on personal, even confessional, narrative writing had pushed Polly farther than she wanted to go. I wondered if I should suggest that she might want to talk to someone in the counseling department. Or if I should move the discussion back to textual features of her essay. "Do you think I should change my topic?" I wondered how she wanted me to answer. She saved me by getting up to leave. "Oh, I don't know. Could I keep working on this?" I told her that seemed like a good idea.

The Problem of Context, the Context of the Problem

In many ways this was not a typical conference in my class. Not all of my students choose to work on personal narratives at the beginning of the course. Very few experience epiphanies in the middle of a conference. And, fortunately, even fewer leave my office in tears. In fact, if I were describing a typical conference from one of my classes, the student would bring in a strikingly dispassionate first draft about euthanasia or rock music or, maybe, Bartleby and I would spend the 15 minutes trying to get one of us to work up some energy or emotion. Still, I think that Polly's conference dramatizes and exemplifies many of the fundamental issues facing composition teachers. They are issues that we rarely discuss in faculty lounges or study on research projects and ones that cannot be adequately discussed by focusing primarily on "product" (eg., "Her essay lacks three clear subpoints to support its thesis" or "Her language is ridden with cliches and truisms") or "process" (eg., "She is having trouble with task representation," or "She needs to work harder to find her true voice").

If we want to understand what is happening in Polly's conference and in writing instruction in general we need to pay more attention to the context in which her writing and my reading occurs. Of course, calls for focus on context are not new in composition studies. In fact much recent research (LeFevre, Berlin, Bizzell, etc.) focuses on the social or contextual dimensions of invention. But the issues raised by Polly's conferences are usually not covered by "context" or at least by "what we talk about when we talk about context." It may well be the case that "all meaning is socially constructed" and that Polly "fails to understand the tropes and conventions of the discourse community she is trying to enter," but those general proclamations offer little knowledge or help to the researcher or classroom teacher.

Perhaps as an over-reaction to decades of micro-analysis of the individual writer (Murray's conferences and Flower's protocols are prototypes here), we have leapt to macro-theories about social construction, discourse communities, women's ways of knowing, socio-cognitive theory, and cultural critique. What we need is a definition of context broad enough to account for the interactive and dialectical nature of the composing and reading processes, but---since there are so many political, cultural, academic, and personal factors that shape every writer's work—still narrow enough to tell us what not to take into account. My argument in this dissertation is that we can accomplish this by viewing context in composition as primarily determined by the interpersonal, classroom relationships—between the student and teacher and between the student and other students—that shape the writing and reading processes.

Consider, for example, how this emphasis on classroom relationships changes the way that a teacher or researcher could read Polly's essay and conference. Suppose that instead of focusing on the structural and mechanical flaws in Polly's essay, the faulty process she used to produce the text, or the conventions of academic discourse that she ignored, we first examined factors that are usually considered extraneous or trivial in the teaching of writing: the tension Polly and I both felt during the conference about her weak writing and powerful emotions; my disappointment in the essay that I read, my excitement about the essay that I "misread;" our mutual fear and embarrassment that our respective peers might overhear her crying; her competitive feelings towards the students that she felt wrote on more important topics; my concern that my preoccupation with personal narrative had led to her embarrassment and pain; her sophisticated analysis of her roommate as an unreliable reader; and so on.

I am arguing that these issues are not peripheral or secondary to the writing process or the teaching of writing;

they are central. Or to put it another way: traditionally we have considered the quality of the relationships in a writing classroom to be an effect of a student's success or failure as a writer; I think that it is the often the other way around, that writing students succeed when teachers establish productive relationships with—and between—their students. It makes sense, then, for a writing teacher to focus as much on questions of authority and resistance as on invention heuristics and revision strategies, as much on competition and cooperation as on grammar and usage.

And so throughout this dissertation, I have tried to identify moments of conflict, connection, and tension, moments when authority was being asserted and resisted and negotiated, moments when I or my students were making decisions about reading and writing that had as much or more to do with our relationships with each other as with the words on the page. I have, for example, tried to describe ad analyze the anger I feel when a student aggressively resists my authority (Chapter I); the frustration I feel when a student does not seem capable of understanding my criticism or advice (Chapter III); or the anxiety and envy some students feel when they sense that I like another student's writing better than I like theirs (Chapter IV).

Now I know that this must sound to many readers like I am trying to turn Composition from the teaching and study of writing to pseudo-sociology, amateur psychology, or an extended sensitivity group—but that is not my goal. Instead I am suggesting that we could use these moments of interpersonal conflict, resistance, and negotiation to understand how student essays are actually constructed in social actions and interactions. And I see no way to do this without identifying the often-unconscious forces that shape these interactions between teachers, students, and texts.

But I want to be clear about something: this is not an either or choice. My point is not to focus on relationships _instead_ of focusing on the product or the individual writer's process. Since product, process, and context are inseparably linked, it is all a matter of where a teacher or researcher decides to place the camera and of when he decides to begin filming. My goal in writing about how classroom relationships shape reading and writing—and how reading and writing shape classroom relationships—is to offer an approach which supplements rather than replaces previous research, an approach which begins to fill in the huge gap between studies of student texts that ignore context altogether and studies that define context in theoretical terms that are too general to offer any practical help to a researcher or teacher. Focusing on how specific classroom relationships shape specific texts forces us to look at writing and reading as transactional, interactive, and messy acts. In doing that, we can view texts in context and context in texts.

Now I am not claiming that any of this is entirely new or original. The attempt to put student texts in context has been in the center of composition studies for a number of years. Even before Bizzell, Berlin, LeFevre, et. al. argued that invention must be viewed as a social act, there was tremendous interest in our field in how context shapes composing. Many practitioners, including Peter Elbow, Kenneth Bruffee, and Don Murray (Writer) have long suggested that student writing would improve if teachers played a less authoritarian role in their interactions with students and fostered more supportive student-student relationships. Others, including Robert Brooke and Muriel Harris, have focused on the ways in which teachers and students play various roles within the conference and classroom. And there have even been several studies—most notably ones by Linda Flower and Les Perlman—that purport to deal explicitly with the effect of context on student writing processes.

But though composition specialists have focused on context, the language of this research tends to be either overly general and vague or overly technical, the situations too far removed from actual students and teachers. These examples are unfortunately typical:

> The essential activity in writing instruction is the textual transactions between students. These transactions should be so managed by the network as to encourage a sense of group knowledge, a sense that every transactor influences and is influenced by such group knowledge, and a sense that such group knowledge is properly malleable (responsive to the

> influences of each transactor). The result of textual transactions so managed is a deneutralizing of text itself and a greater emphasis and skill on the part of the transactor in rendering such text (Barker and Kemp 15).

> Context cues cognition in multiple ways. In its least visible role, context affects us in the form of past experience that supplies a wealth of prior knowledge, assumptions, and expectations, many of which can operate without our conscious awareness. These conceptual frameworks may even passively determine what is possible to think or see. However—and I think this 'however' is a strong rebuttal to linguistic determinacy—adults possess an enormous repertoire of conceptual frameworks and, in any given situation, we can not predict which will be activated, which quiescent, or how any given framework will be used. In situated cognition it is not what is known, but the knowledge one uses that matters (Flower "Context" 288).

> For the New Rhetoric, knowledge is simply a static entity available for retrieval. Truth is dynamic and dialectical, the result of a process involving the interaction of opposing elements. It is a relation that is created, not pre-existent and waiting to be discovered. The basic elements of the dialectic are the elements that make up the communication process—writer (speaker), audience, reality, language. Communication is always basic to the epistemology underlying the New Rhetoric because truth is always truth for someone standing in relation to others in a linguistically circumscribed situation" (Berlin 56).

Just as Kate Ronald has criticized Berlin's work on social construction because it is written in a tone and form that do not allow readers to work with him to construct his own text, I am criticizing the work on context which seems eerily and airily de-contextualized. In other words, most of this work is too general or too formulaic to get at the subtle, emotionally charged interactions of composition classes. What

I am attempting to describe, identify, and analyze is the interactive, dialectic nature of context as it manifests itself in classroom writing relationships. In this respect, my decision to focus on the role of dynamic, interpersonal relationships in the construction of written meaning is more directly influenced by theory and technique from other fields than from composition studies.

For example, in my chapters on responding to student texts, I apply the concept from literary theory——specifically from Fish, Rosenblatt, and Ong——that reading and writing are reciprocal or transactional processes, that readers and writers invent meaning, and, to some extent, invent each other. In the chapters on student-student relationships, in fact throughout the entire dissertation, I have been influenced by arguments from feminist theory——most notably from Woolf, Gilligan, and Sherrie Ortner——that traditional research and male perspectives have focused too much on societal constructs and general principles and not enough on personal relationships and specific incidents. And since the key to my research is to see discover what a student and teacher can accomplish together in an interactive relationship and because so much of that interaction is shaped by unconscious associations, I have relied heavily in the teacher-student chapters on therapeutic models, particularly on writing by practitioners in psychotherapy (eg, Freud, Roy Shaffer, Jeffrey Kotler).

Again I don't want to suggest that there is anything new about using research from these three fields—literary criticism, feminism, and psychotherapy—to explain what happens in a composition class. I think of Edward White's work on holistic scoring and deconstruction, of Elizabeth Flynn's essay on composing as a woman, and of Robert Brooke's use of Lacan to explain the effectiveness of one-to-one conferences as typical examples. But in much of this previous research, there has been a kind of squeamishness and reserve, a worry about going too far, about turning Composition into another literature course, about making it too political, about playing therapist rather than teacher, about forgetting our primary obligation.

I can already imagine my critics: "What is all this touchy feely stuff? Is this a writing class or a popularity contest? And what is all this stuff about making sure everyone is getting along with everyone else? Is he talking about a writing class or one of Mrs. Dalloway's dinner parties? We need to remember that we are writing teachers first and foremost." But that only begs the question I am asking in this dissertation, which is: what does it mean to be a writing teacher, anyway? I am not just suggesting that establishing, monitoring, and maintaining productive relationships in the classroom would be *another* nice thing for us to accomplish, if we could just find the time; I am suggesting that it is the primary thing we must do, if we want to be successful as writing teachers.

Productive Relationships in the Classroom

One of the problems with writing about any interactive process—particularly one as complicated as the way students and faculty relate to each other—is that the very act of writing simplifies and dissects that process in an artificial way. As Aaron Copland acknowledges in a book on how we listen to music, in order to talk or write to one another about experience in an intelligible way, we need to resort to a system of division and classification that cannot possibly capture the layered, interanimated aspect of the experience itself. Copland admits that it is necessary to "split up mechanically the three separate planes on which we listen merely for the sake of greater clarity. Actually, we never listen on one or the other of these planes. What we do is to correlate them—listening in all three ways at the same time." (550).

Obviously the same thing is true of reading and writing: we perform a number of different unconscious operations simultaneously. However, for the sake of clarity , I also have mechanically split up my topic into sections and categories. My decision to divide my book into two general sections (the teacher-student relationship and then student-

student relationship) and then to divide those sections into specific classroom activities (reading student essays, talking about composing, and responding to texts in the first section) and peer interactions (competition, collaboration, and identification in the second section) is an attempt to make this study easily usable by teachers. Of course, in the classroom these relationships are not distinct from one another, but rather are overlapping and reciprocal. And, to raise yet another problem, there are certainly other relationships beyond the classroom (such as a student's relationships with her roommate or parents) that shape the way that students write or faculty read. I have limited my study to the following three classroom relationships not only because of the practical limitations I face as a writer (after all, that writer's roommate and parents have relationships of their own with people who have relationships with people who have relationships, and on and on), but also because of the practical demands I anticipate of my readers. In other words, since I see my audience first as teachers and second as researchers, I have consciously decided to limit my study to an attempt to define productive relationships within the shared and familiar territory of the classroom.

In talking to teachers about teaching, I do not pretend neutrality or distance; I am interested instead in using my own experience and perspective to raise questions about current classroom approaches. I have tried to accomplish this by focusing my study on issues that arise from moments of conflict or tension, situations in which meaning and power must be negotiated by two or more people, and approaches to teaching that have created discussion and controversy within our field. I will acknowledge from the beginning that I see this dissertation as a practical and polemical piece of writing. My interest, then, in these issues is always directly related to the extent to which they provide new baselines for researchers and classroom teachers.

In other words, I am interested in the ways that writing teachers can shape these relationships to make the writing and reading processes productive for students and for themselves. My definition of a productive classroom relationship is, I think, simple enough: any relationship which fosters the writing and reading processes is productive; any relationship which inhibits them is not. My own sense is that a student and teacher can relate productively only if a certain amount of tension exists between them, only if—to borrow a model from psychologist Mihali Csikszentmihalyi—they are both somewhere between boredom and anxiety. But I don't mean to imply that there is a single model of a productive writing relationship. Since interpersonal relationships are interactive, dynamic, and dialectical, teachers need to negotiate different productive relationships with different classes and different students. What I am arguing against are prescriptive rules and roles for writing teachers and these are as likely to come from those advocating a "process" or collaborative approach as from supporters of more traditional classroom approaches. In fact, in examining the following classroom relationships, I am most critical of what I take to be the naive optimism of those in my own camp (that is, those who emphasize process, expressive writing, and collaborative work):

The Teacher-Student Relationship

According to the current language of the day, we need to empower our students. But as Susan Hubbuch argues in a recent article, empowering does not happen by simple ordinance. If we are to respond differently in the teacher-student relationship, we need to carefully re-define our role and self-image. Ironically, as much as the teacher's role seems to have changed in the great paradigm shift from product to process, one thing remains the same: we still have written ourselves relatively minor and unfulfilling parts to play in the writing process. In the traditional class the writing teacher played several roles—provider of information, lecturer, upholder of standards, corrector—but each was relatively static, unilateral: the teacher provided the students with rules and models of good writing and then graded them according to how closely the results approximated those rules and models. Not only did this role fail to reflect the complexity and pleasure of the writer, it failed to acknowledge the intelligence, creativity, and interests of the teacher. In fact our role in the traditional classroom seems to me a little like the tyrant's rule in Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant." By denying our students power, we actually limited our own freedom. Although we did most of the talking, although we told the students the rules and gave them them the models, although we believed that we were in control, there was actually very little room for the sort of originality, risk-taking, and inquiry that Cynthia Onore and others have argued is essential if a writing relationship is to be successful (240).

When I say that our role as writing teachers is still dull and one-dimensional, I am not suggesting that there is been no significant change over the last two decades. Nor am I ignoring the fact that there are some current examples of more innovative and interactive teacher-student relationships. It's just that the new role that most process teachers have adopted is in many respects as narrow and rigid as the old one. I'm referring to teachers who describe themselves as "facilitators" (as if they have no agenda of their own, or rather, as if their agenda is not important) or as "just another member of the writing workshop." The concept of the de-centralized writing classroom is based on the following logic (or illogic): 'all we really have to do is get out of our students way and let them write.' I realize that I am creating something of a caricature here of the process teacher and classroom, but I think that there has been an element naiveté in this approach.

Many writing teachers deny their tremendous authority in the classroom because it does not fit with the image they would like to project. Most of us are uncomfortable admitting that we are the center of a "decentered" classroom, that we hold so much power, that we are largely responsible for success and, even worse, for failure. But while there are good reasons for our discomfort—many of us would like for political reasons to think of our classroom as democratic, supportive, and non-hierarchal—there are even better reasons to face the truth: from a student's perspective a writing teacher is an authority figure, even—or especially—in process classrooms. In fact, as Tom Newkirk has argued ("Interview"), the teacher in composition classes in which students are asked to write about their personal feelings and to meet in one-to-one conferences actually holds more authority, because the stakes are higher.

I suspect that the notion of teacher-as-non-authority developed as a necessary stage or antithesis to the thesis offered by traditional classroom teachers. The synthesis or solution, though, is to move beyond either/or thinking—either we have authority or they do; either we own the text or they do; either the meaning is in the writer or in the reader—towards a more dialectical definition. Rather than dichotomizing the teacher and the student's roles, we need to see how they are inseparably related. Just as Janet Emig argued that traditional models of the composing process failed because they ignored the role and uses of the writer's unconscious ("Uses"), most of our current views fail because they ignore the role and uses of the teacher's (or reader's) unconscious. Until we have a clearer and more realistic notion of how we shape and influence student writing and how, in return, that writing shapes and influences us, we will continue to limit our student's potential development.

And to limit our own. One reason many composition teachers dislike teaching composition is that they feel they are supposed to dislike it and then set out to prove it. The teaching of writing should not be fun, they feel, and a writing course certainly should not be tailored to an teacher's individual taste and preference. This sense of composition as a teacher's duty or burden runs deep in our profession and is one of the reasons so many people distrust, resent, and envy those writing teachers who talk about their work in intensely personal and positive terms. I know for a fact that my colleagues are more than a little skeptical when Fulwiler gloats that Freshman Writing is the "Best Course in the University to Teach" or Don Murray muses, "There must be something wrong with a fifty-four-year-old man who is looking forward to his thirty-fifth conference of the day" ("Listening" 232). This kind of enthusiasm for composition does not seem possible to teachers who have scrupulously sought to remove themselves and their own interests from the course.

I'm suggesting that we make those interests a crucial part of the course and of our research. I am also suggesting that we apply some of the lessons we have learned about our students' cognition and development to ourselves. Therefore, to whatever extent I make use in this dissertation of psychotherapeutic models from, say, Freud or Vygotsky, it is as much to understand my own behavior as the behavior of my students. In this sense, my study is highly reflexive and seeks to blur distinctions of object and subject, text and interpretation. While some composition researchers have been willing to discuss their students' transference feelings or zones of proximal development, very few have ventured into counter-transference and or their own educational limits. Vygotsky's argument that the most effective teaching and learning occur within the student's "zone of proximal development" (85)—the notion that we need to pay attention not just to what a student can accomplish working on her own, but also to what she can accomplish with assistance—offers not only a more flexible and dynamic view of learning but also of teaching; if we try to teach within the zone of proximal development, our responsibility goes beyond measuring knowledge to identifying and realizing potential.

But that is just one implication; for if a student has a zone of proximal development, a teacher has one, too. We, also, are able to accomplish a certain amount—this applies to what we can teach and what we can learn—working independently and a very different amount working with others. In other words, we have certain skills, certain strengths, as teachers, but what we can accomplish depends to a great extent how well we can adapt those skills to particular students within particular teacher-student relationships. (If you think I'm overstating this case, just think about the times you have taught the same material the same day with the same general lesson and achieved totally different results.) The problem is that many composition instructors respond to their students and their student essays in a fixed and rigid way which reflects those teachers' own current level of development rather than their level of potential development. Students often fail in this type of course not because they refuse or unable to work within their own zone of proximal development but because we as teachers refuse or are unable to work within theirs.

Throughout the chapters in this section, I will focus on the ways that teachers and students shape texts and each other by focusing on three different scenes in which this negotiation is acted out: the teacher's reading and misreading of student essays (Chapter I), the language that teachers and students use in the classroom to describe the composing process (Chapter II), and the interaction in the one-to-one conference (Chapter III).

The Student-Student Relationship

Clearly one of the major advances of the process movement has been the tremendous attention paid to creating new relationships between students. Many of the landmark texts of the early movement—Elbow's Writing Without Teachers to Macrorie's Writing to Be Read to Murray's A Writer Teaches Writing—focused on teaching students to teach themselves and each other. The 80s may have began as the "process" decade, but it ended with an emphasis on "collaboration" and "social construction." In fact, the rhetoric most of us who teach composition use to describe own own classrooms—we talk about creating "co-learners" and a "community of writers"—suggests that students ought to see their interests and goals as shared and cooperative. In the last several years this approach has received theoretical and political justification with the publication of books such as Bruffee's A Short Course in Writing, Gere's Writing Groups, and LeFevre's Invention as a Social Act.

My own sense is that this new emphasis on creating supportive relationships between writing students has been positive. But just as the teacher-as-facilitator may be a simplistic over-reaction to the authoritarian traditional teacher, the student-as-co-leaner or community member also misses the point. While it may be politically correct to promote collaboration, consensus, and public discourse, the truth is that many peer relationships are shaped at least as much by competition, dissensus, and private interests. The contemporary student-student relationship in the writing class is so often unproductive, I suspect, because it is so often awkwardly defined. In most situations students are neither openly and vigorously competing or openly and vigorously collaborating; instead they are working together in loosely formed small groups ultimately to produce individual and sometimes competing texts. As a result, the roles that students are asked to play are blurred and confusing.

Part of the problem is that we have romanticized and reified the notion of a de-centered, supportive, collaborative writing group without paying enough attention to what sorts of peer relationships inhibit writing and what sorts foster it. For example, throughout the research on collaboration, there has been almost no discussion of the role of competition in the writing class or the writing process. Because our students' competitive urges do not fit our self-image and because those urges make us uncomfortable, we tend to ignore or deny that they even exist. When competition is acknowledged as a factor in the teaching of writing, it is almost always seen as negative because it creates a classroom atmosphere which is "stressful, crippling, and counter-productive" (Romano 173).

My own sense, though, is that competition and cooperation are not mutually exclusive or even necessarily conflictual; people often compete in cooperative situations and cooperate in competitive ones. While it is true that intensely competitive assignments can lead to frustration, even resignation, it is also true that writing students—like writing teachers—sometimes produce their best work as a result of their competitive feelings. Before we can analyze and evaluate the role of competition in writing classes, however, we need more information about where, when, and how it manifests itself in interactions between writing students; how we as teachers create and/or neutralize these competitive interactions; and what role competition actually plays in a student's composing process.

I am not suggesting that we ought to abandon collaborative work. In fact, my suggestion is that we be more honest about what is actually going on in our classrooms and that we be less afraid of more intense student-student relationships on either end of the spectrum. In other words, I think that we should promote open and productive competition (for example, telling students that we will publish the best essays from the class) and real and full collaboration (occasionally asking students to write together in small groups from start to finish, not just peer review or group brainstorming).

But acknowledging that a productive writing community needs both competition and collaboration still begs the question of how we can help to create that productive community in the first place. Some classroom teachers simply announce to their students, "In this course you will become a community of writers," but then do little more to make that happen than telling their students to sit in a circle, encouraging them to learn each other's first names, or asking them to respond to each other's essays in small groups. On the other hand, most researchers—I would include here Bartholomae and Petrosky, Patricia Bizzell, and Mike Rose (Lives) among many others—immediately jump to a larger issue: how to help students to enter the community (or communities) of academic discourse. I am not denying the importance of this issue—in fact, I think that it is crucial that students eventually come to see themselves as part of that larger community—but, first, we need to pay more attention to how the relationships that students establish with their classmates determine their progress (or lack of progress) as writers.

In this section, then, I will look at peer relationships in the writing class by focusing on three specific features of student-student interaction: competition as it manifests itself in the way a writing student responds to her peers and their texts (chapter IV); identification and modeling as the means by which students learn to see each other and then themselves as writers (Chapter V); and collaboration in terms of how we structure classroom assignments and interactions (Chapter VI).

Materials and Methods

In order to explore these relationships, I've tried to develop an approach which reflects the multifaceted, interdisciplinary nature of my topic, one which makes use of a wide range of methods and techniques: narrative, analysis, theory, case study, self-study, and argument. For the sake of unity, I have used the same structure within each chapter: first, I identify an issue or area of interpersonal negotiation or conflict (eg., reading student essays, grading, responding in the one-to-one conference, peer review sessions, etc.) through a narrative about a specific incident in my classroom; next, I locate this issue in terms of previous research and theory; third, I describe the results of an extended case study project of my students and myself; and, finally, I suggest implications for teachers.

A brief explanation may be necessary about these research methods. First, my decision to rely so heavily on narrative or—to use Stephen North's now politically charged word—"lore" may raise troubling questions for quantitative researchers, (not to mention government grant officers and academic deans). But if we want to contextualize context (or at least de-contextualize it as little as possible), then it is necessary to tell stories about our own experiences, our own students, our own perceptions. While I have not relied on narrative to the exclusion of other modes—definition, analysis, argument—I have placed an extended narrative of classroom experience at the center of each chapter because I want to readers to have some sense of personal engagement, recognition, and identification. It is one thing to say, "There is often conflict or tension in the writing conference" and another to dramatize that tension (as I have tried to accomplish, for example, by telling that story about Polly and her family's kitten) in a way that is familiar and evocative.

Second, perhaps the single most distinguishing feature of my research is my persistent emphasis on self-study. Throughout my dissertation, I use students from my Composition class as case study subjects, but, in many respects, I am my own most important subject. Again this is not an either/or choice, not a decision to study my role in the composing process rather than my students' roles; my point is that we can never fully separate one from the other. If we want to understand academic reading and writing, we need to see how these processes are shaped by classroom relationships; and if we to understand these relationships, we need to look much more carefully at how we, as teachers, exert authority—primarily by virtue of the power we hold as evaluators—on the writing, behavior, and responses of our students. For that reason, I have conducted and recorded a kind of ongoing protocol analysis of my own responses to my students and their texts.

Such a highly reflexive form of research raises obvious questions about reliability and objectivity (not to mention narcissism and obsessive compulsion), but those are not the questions that I am trying to answer in the first place. Like all other research approaches, qualitative, reflexive teacher-research involves tradeoffs; in place of charts, graphs, and statistics, it provides access to information and perspective (not to mention dramatic tension) that would be largely unavailable to an "outside" observer. And, as a number of qualitative researchers (Newkirk "Roots" and Bissex) have pointed out, no research approach is neutral or separate from subjectivity, rhetoric, and art. In fact, it is studies of de-contextualized student writers and texts—that is, studies conducted apart from serious considerations of teacher- (or researcher- or author-) influence—that always seem most suspect to me.

But it goes beyond that: there is a certain humility, justice, and practicality in teachers concentrating not just on our students' quirks, unconscious associations, and hidden agendas, but also on our own. This process forces us to look more carefully at our selves and our roles in the classroom. It is not unusual to hear or read references to the ways in which a student's "private" life spills into the classroom. But it is much rarer for us to talk or write about the ways in which our own associations, biases, and values shape our responses to students and their texts. If we are going to understand how authority, resistance, and negotiation shape relationships and student texts, we have to be willing to start with our own behavior and feelings.

CHAPTER I

READING STUDENTS, MISREADING OURSELVES, AND VICE VERSA

At the end of each semester I ask my students to write an essay on writing, to identify and comment on some significant feature of their own writing process. The idea is to help them better understand how they have written in the past so that they will have more control over how they write in the future. Most of my students find this assignment tedious and end up writing a fairly perfunctory self-study, but I keep giving this assignment for two reasons: first, I am really curious about how students view the writing process and, second, when these "process papers" are good, they are remarkably good.

Recently I was telling two of my colleagues about a particularly insightful essay one of my students wrote about the relationship between thought and language. In her essay, Nicki argues that a writer can only think clearly when she is allowed to use a voice and a style that she has mastered. In my course, she felt that she had been able to think through important issues in original ways; however, in her Humanities class, she had trouble developing and organizing her ideas about Homer, Cicero, and the Hebrew prophets. She accounted for the difference not by the difficulty of the material—she took on complicated problems in my course—but rather by the encouragement I gave her to explore ideas that mattered to her in personal and informal language. Her Humanities professor, she complained, had denied her this access by insisting on numerous references to the text and "impeccable English prose."

Her point was not simply that her expression became more awkward in her Humanities papers; instead, she was arguing that in the translation from her own form of expression to the academic language required in that course, her actual ideas were lost or distorted. The irony, she concludes, is that although her Humanities teacher claims to value creativity and logic, he insists that students write in a form which virtually guarantees detachment and confusion. "But what is best about her essay," I told my colleagues, "is that it is so well written. At the end she writes something like, 'The essay I am writing right now proves my point. I am comfortable and I am able to use "I" and "you" which allows me to tell you clearly and directly what I think. But when I try to write 'impeccable English prose,' I lose sight of my audience and I disappear as a writer.'"

They seemed impressed, maybe even won over by the idea of this assignment. But as I walked back to my office, I started worrying that I had overstated the value of the assignment and the quality of Nicki's essay. When I re-read it, I was embarrassed to discover how much I had organized and focused her argument in my re-telling. It is not as if her essay was without thought or skill. In fact, the section that I singled out for its rhetorical sophistication was actually much better in Nicki's paper than in in my memory and re-telling:

> In Humanities, I have to remember a certain format and I have to back up every general statement with specific examples. Oh, and that word "I," I just used. You would never see that word in one of my Humanities papers. Neither would you see "you." It would be marked with red ink and a comment, "You who???" or "To Whom do you think you are referring?"

But in general the writing seemed much flatter and more prosaic that I had remembered it:

> Though it is good to be able to write for different audiences, I do not want to have to change my preference in writing because of some particular "format" I am supposed to follow. There is no law that states that I must write in a certain way. When I write I like to feel as if I have gotten across what I want to say.

But it wasn't just the writing. My discomfort grew as I began to see how much her whole argument echoed my own ideas—I, also, believe that a student should be allowed to write in her own voice, that she should be able to choose topics, that writing is a mode of thinking, and so on—all ideas to which I have a strong ideological and personal commitment. For years I have argued with colleagues who believe that students should not be allowed write in first person or from personal experience, who insist on impeccable prose, correctness, and perfect one-inch margins. So it only makes sense that I would be pleased and excited to see that my student's writing supported and even validated my own positions and, therefore, that I would make her argument more eloquent and sophisticated than it actually was.

But there were other reasons for my misreading. This was not the first essay of Nicki's I had read. All semester I had seen her work and I read this final essay in terms of all of our other interactions. From our conferences, I knew that her parents were first-generation Greek Americans and that she was a first-generation college student from a small, working class town in Massachusetts. From her previous essays, I knew that during her last two years of high school she had been involved with a man in his 20s who cheated on her with other women, who was addicted to cocaine, and who once beat her up at a party. I also knew that throughout that whole relationship her worst fear was that he would break up with her. I knew that she considered herself a "good Catholic" but was shocked and angry at the Church for "never telling her the truth about God."

So when I read Nicki's essay on writing and personal voice, I was also reading Nicki herself and imagining—rightly or wrongly—that this first term of college was a crucial time in her development. I was thinking about how she ended her essay on that self-destructive high-school relationship:

> To this day, I am not sure why I loved someone like that. Why was I drawn to a person who treated me so badly? I guess you could say he was my drug. He was my high and my addiction. It was hard to 'just say no,' but I finally did. I've been clean for almost six months now and I plan to stay that way.

And I was thinking about how upset she was when her Humanities teacher dismissed her argument—she wrote that because God in Exodus and the Book of Job was sometimes "vengeful, jealous, and merciless," he was "more realistic" than the all-loving, perfect God that the nuns had described—as superficial and reductive.

But to make matters still more complicated, I was also reading myself. I had a vested interest in thinking that my teaching and my course had provided Nicki something she did not get in her Humanities class. I had an interest in thinking that my teaching helped her feel confident about her abilities and her potential. By reading Nicki's text in such a way that it reached a self-confident and successful resolution, by making her into a text with a happy ending, I could congratulate myself not only for helping another writer succeed, but also for helping another student establish her identity. And, perhaps most complicated of all, by reading her in a particularly imaginative and integrated way, I could use her (as I am trying to do right now) for my own benefit in my writing and research.

Obviously the specific circumstances of my reading or, more accurately, misreading are unique—and that is part of my point. But I am also suggesting that, in many ways, my misreading illustrates common issues and problems. As teachers, we play a crucial—but generally misunderstood—role in our students' writing process. While we have begun to understand how students compose and to develop a more comprehensive and flexible view of the unconscious forces which shape their composing, we continue to oversimplify the teacher's reading or interpretative processes. Or to put it another way, while we have come to see writing as socially constructed, we have failed to understand the teacher's role in the construction of that meaning. We need to develop a theory of reading student texts which takes into account our reading of the students themselves, of our own unconscious motivations and associations, and, finally, of the interactive and dialectical nature of the teacher-student relationship.

Reading and Misreading Student Essays

The most significant relationship in any writing course is the one between the writer and her text. But if reading and writing are reciprocal or transactional processes

(Rosenblatt), we also need to develop the teacher's relation to a text. The fact that I misread Nicki's essay in certain ways is not significant in itself. After all, most of us in English studies have grown relatively comfortable with the notion that our readings are not simple or literal decodings of texts, that when we read we create and recreate, deconstruct and reconstruct. While this fact seems to cause shock and anguish in old-fashioned New Critics and neo-Aristoteleans, most writing teachers are relatively comfortable with the idea that meaning is found not solely in the text nor solely in the reader but rather in the interaction between the two. In fact, that process is at the very center of our work as writing teachers: we _must_ misread every student text in order to help students say what we think they really mean. It is this sort of generous and deliberate misreading—readings in which we go beyond the words' literal meanings to try to draw out possibilities in a text, to imagine what the text might be trying to become—that is at the basis of Shaughnessy's analysis of error, Elbow's believing game, and Bartholomae and Petrosky's plan to integrate reading and writing.

So far, so good. But the next step causes resistance: few writing teachers want to go so far as to admit that we actually create the meaning of our student's texts, particularly if this creative act is largely the result of our unconscious biases and associations. The problem with admitting our role as co-author is that it violates most of our fundamental beliefs about the objectivity of the teacher, the integrity of the text, the rights of the individual author. And yet that next step seems unavoidable, a fact not lost on those interested in the application of critical theory to the composition classroom: if great literary works are unstable and subject to multiple readings and interpretations, then how unstable is the evolving draft of an inexperienced composition student (Harris 158)? If every reading of Chaucer and Shakespeare is a re-writing, then how can teachers avoid becoming authors of our students' drafts (Eagleton 12)? Or, to put in another way, if a teacher is reading a text that was written specifically for her, with revisions that are a direct result of her suggestions, how can she possibly have any clear sense of where the text stops and her reading begin?

But in spite of these nagging realities, my sense is that in practice most of us still cling to the notion that our readings of student essays are somehow "objective"; that is, in spite of our knowledge of reader response theory and deconstruction, we continue to believe that when we read student essays we are responding to some objective reality in—or noticeably missing from—the text itself rather than to a text we have unconsciously revised or even created. It's not as if we are unaware that we bring to our teaching of writing and our reading of student essays strong beliefs and biases. We know, for example, how we feel about abortion and gun control, how our response to some rhetorical strategies is more favorable than to others, even how we like some students much better than others. But we conveniently forget those issues and pretend that we can willingly suspend those beliefs and disbeliefs. We see ourselves as neutral, objective, open-minded. We give each student an equal chance. We are ready to like essays on any topic in any mode. We just want students to find their own voices, to find themselves.

This paradigm of the teacher-as-objective-reader fails to do justice to the complexity of the reading and writing processes and to our relationship to our students. When we read an essay on abortion or a presidential election, most of us go out of our way to be fair, to try to evaluate the writing for its own sake, if such a thing is even possible. But what happens when we read an essay on a seemingly "unpolitical" issue or topic about which we have powerful (and often unconscious) associations? Consider, for example, this exchange during a discussion I had a few weeks ago with two other writing teachers. First teacher: "If I get one more essay on 'how I won the big high school football game,' I'll scream. I mean these guys describe each play in great detail and then show how they saved the day at the end. Yuck. They are so self-serving and so trivial." Other teacher: "You're missing the point. Those aren't trivial at all. For an adolescent male, those games can be his most significant experiences." In part this is a gender issue: the writers of most of these sports essays and the second teacher are male, while the first teacher is female. In part it is personal: the male teacher went on to explain that he remembers high school sports as perhaps the one "pure thing" in his life, while I went on to admit that because my memories of high school sports include failed expectations—mine and my father's—it is for me one of most impure things in my life.

Of course, it's not true that every reading is equally idiosyncratic and personal or that student texts do not exist until we de- and then reconstruct them. I am not suggesting that all student papers are Rorschach tests or random ink blots on the page. Clearly there is a text in the class and it is even a text for which we can—and have—developed shared criteria for evaluation. Sometimes this "interpretative community" is consciously and deliberately created, such as the training of teachers participating in holistic scoring sessions; more often, though, it is the result of shared unconscious preferences or, as Lester Faigley's study of teacher preferences demonstrates, shared "unstated cultural definitions" (410). There is even a certain type of essay (I will call it the autobiographical narrative of a self-actualizing event) that most of us in this interpretive community prefer. But the fact that we agree a text exists and that we agree about some of the criteria for evaluation should not make us underestimate our own creative and often idiosyncratic role in the process.

My point (and it has much in common with arguments made recently by Louise Phelps, Robert Schwegler, and Bruce Lawson and Susan Sterr Ryan) is that we need to develop a theory of reading student drafts that reflects these issues, that allows us to acknowledge—to our students and to ourselves— that we play a central role in the composing process, not only when we give our students guidelines and heuristics, not only when we suggest changes in conferences, but also when we read the essays themselves. We need a theory of reading that takes into account the "intertextual" nature of our work; that is, a theory that takes into account the fact that we cannot read any student essay without unconsciously and simultaneously reading a number of other texts as well. And, finally, we need a theory that allows us to recognize our limitations, to say first to ourselves, and then directly to a student, "I am not going to be a good reader of an essay on this topic. You should know that going in."

In part, then, this is a process for which we need to use and extend what we have learned about reading and analysis from critical theory. But it is more—and less—than that. The evolving, student draft is not identical to the published literary work and thus requires, as Phelps and others have argued, new theories of reading and response. Our readings of student essays are contextualized in ways that readings of literary texts are not. We know the authors of these texts, we work with them, we suggest changes to them, we have something to gain if they succeed, or—if we dislike the students involved—something to gain if they fail. None of this is static or linear or unilateral, but changes with each teacher and each student. Therefore, in order to develop a more dialectical theory of reading and interpretation we need to consider how readers and writers—teachers and students—interact. We will not come to understand this interaction by de-contextualizing context (as I believe Linda Flower and other experimentalists often do in their research on this subject) but rather by examining our readings within the student-teacher relationship.

The Lure, Lore, and Leery(ness) of Therapeutic Models

So how do we develop this new theory of reading and interpretation? How do write more interesting and satisfying roles for ourselves to play in the writing class? And how do we develop a clearer and more realistic notion of the way that our responses and non-responses shape student writing? My own suggestion—and it is one that may not be particularly popular or politically correct—is that we pay more careful attention to the research and experience of psychotherapists. I am not equating composition and therapy nor am I suggesting that psychotherapeutic relationships are free from the power politics and self-deceptions that I am criticizing in the writing class. I am simply saying that it makes no sense to ignore lessons from the field in which the workings of the unconscious and the subtle dynamics of dyad relationships have been carefully and systematically analyzed. I think that most writing teachers know that therapeutic models can help us explain and explore the teacher-student relationship, but because they find this comparison threatening they publicly deny it. That may also explain why so many composition theorists offer instructive models from and comparisons to psychotherapy which they then immediately disown. Take, for example, this paragraph by James Moffett:

> The processes of psychotherapy and writing both require maximum synthesizing of firsthand and secondhand knowledge into a full, harmonious expression of individual experience. This calls for the removal of spells to which the person has not agreed and of which he is unconscious. Freud asked the patient to start talking about anything that come into his head—in other words, to attempt to verbalize his stream of consciousness or externalize his inner speech. This technique presupposes that from the apparent chaos of all this disjointed rambling will emerge for analyst and patient an order, eventually "betrayed" by motifs, by sequencing, by gradual filling in of personal cosmology. Thus, if successful, the subject's cosmologizing processes, the idiosyncratic ways of structuring and symbolizing experience, stand more clearly revealed and presumably more amenable to deliberate change, if desired. The most important thing a writer needs to know is how she does think and verbalize and how he or she might....Not for a moment do I suggest that the teacher play psychiatrist. The therapeutic benefits from writing are natural fallout and nothing for a school to strive for (100-101).

What I think Moffett is saying here is, "Writing and psychotherapy are similar processes, but composition teachers and therapists have nothing in common." In other words, although he is unquestionably drawn to—and willing to draw from—the experience of psychotherapists, he is determined to distance himself from this model as quickly as possible. In fact, Moffett's statement is only the clearest example of the schizophrenic response that most writing teachers have to the composition-as-therapy metaphor. For example, Thomas Carnicelli, concerned about the kinds of questions and clues that promote self-discovery, suggests first that Rogerian questioning might help, but then quickly offers an artificial distinction: "The teacher's function is to lead students to adopt the teacher's values, the common criteria of good writing shared by the teacher, and the English profession, and, with certain wide variations, educated people in general. The therapist's function is to lead clients to clarify or develop their own individual values" (116). Similarly, Stephen Zelnick, in writing about conferences, admits, "I am afraid that whether we wish it or not, we become role models for our students" and "there is the romantic/sexual vibration. If it is in any way possible, conferences set going a buzz and flutter of fantasies" (49), but then he dismisses the therapeutic model altogether: "Translating student conferences into other, simpler paradigms of efficient, smooth client relations, or psychotherapeutic self-exploration impoverishes education. We can do better than that" (58).

Oddly enough, Don Murray, the writing teacher whose work seems most heavily influenced by psychotherapeutic goals and methods, is perhaps the most outspoken critic of this analogy. While Murray talks again and again about reading "my other self," about "writing to learn," about writing conferences in which the teacher listens and the student speaks, about a process which, in fact, sounds suspiciously similar to making the unconscious conscious, he finds the comparison ludicrous.

> Responsive teaching is often confused with a stereotypical therapeutic role in which the teacher always nods, always encourages, always supports, and never intervenes. That is ridiculous....The conference isn't a psychiatric session. Think of the writer as an apprentice at the workbench with the master workman (Writer 154).

I can't help but wonder why these writing teachers are going so far out of their way to deny a connection that they actually brought up themselves. No one claims that conference teaching equals therapy; but the fact that there are significant differences between teaching writing and doing psychotherapy is hardly the point. Carnicelli, Zelnick, Murray, and others seem to admit that there is role-modeling, sexual tension, even transference, in the teaching of writing and the teacher-student relationship, but because these things make them uncomfortable (which they should) they deny their significance and suggest that we focus on the writing process and product as if it existed in a decontextualized situation and relationship.

Still, these early attempts to link composition and therapy were valuable because they called attention to important aspects of the teacher-student relationship and paved the way for more recent essays which unapologetically take advantage of therapeutic models. I want to mention two of these that focus on the unconscious drives and associations that shape the way our students respond to us as teachers. Robert Brooke, relying heavily on Lacan, suggests that students in "response" classrooms of the type that Murray and Elbow describe improve their writing because they identify with—and want desperately to please—the teacher, the "Subject Who is Supposed to Know" (Brooke "Lacan" 680). The student then projects or transfers emotions and associations from his own early-life relationships, particularly with his parents, onto the teacher. Ann Murphy, relying more heavily on Freud, extends Brooke's argument by demonstrating how transference can also account for our students' occasional resistance to us, to writing, to self-knowledge, to education. Murphy argues:

> Despite their many obvious and important differences, both psychoanalysis and teaching writing involve an intensely personal relationship in which two people painstakingly establish trust beyond the apparent limitations of their institutional roles, in order that both might learn

> and one might achieve a less, marginal, more fully articulated life (181).

While I think these essays go a long way in explaining classroom dynamics, I want to go still further and suggest that counter-transference—our unconscious responses to our students or, more significantly, our unconscious responses to their unconscious responses to us—also shapes the reading and writing processes. Freud's explanation of counter-transference has important implications for writing teachers:

> We have become aware of the 'counter-transference', which arises in [the analyst] as a result of a patient's influence on his unconscious feelings, and we are almost inclined to insist that he shall recognize this counter-transference in himself and overcome it. Now that a considerable number of people are practising psycho-analysis and exchanging their observations with one another, we have noticed that no psycho-analyst goes further than his own complexes and internal resistances permit; and we consequently require that he shall begin his activity with self-analysis and continually carry it deeper while he is making observations on his patients. Anyone who fails to produce results in a self-analysis of this kind may at once give up any idea of being able to treat patients by analysis (145).

As writing teachers, we also can go no further than our own complexes and internal resistances permit, and thus we, too, need to begin with self-analysis. We, too, need to identify the extent to which our responses to our students and their writing are not neutral or objective, the extent to which counter-transference responses interfere with our ability to help students improve their writing.

If writing teachers react negatively to the suggestion that they play therapist, I assume that my recommendations—that we analyze ourselves, that we consider our own neuroses in the reading and teaching processes, that we also play patient—seem even more irrelevant and threatening. Again it's not that writing teachers are unaware that our own unconscious issues often obscure and shape our actions; it's just that we hope if we don't talk about this, it will go away. For instance, Louise Rosenblatt acknowledges that when students read and write personally, they often reveal some of their "conflicts and obsessions" (207), thereby tempting teachers to deal directly with these psychological issues. Although she points out some instances in which students have benefitted from this sort of interaction, she ends up warning teachers against "officious meddling with the emotional life of their students" (207) because teachers cannot be trusted in this sort of relationship:

> Unfortunately, like members of any other group, many teachers are themselves laboring under emotional tensions and frustrations. Given the right to meddle in this way, they would be tempted to find solutions for their own problems by vicariously sharing the student's life. They might also project upon the student their own particular preoccupations and lead him to think that he was actually suffering difficulties and frustrations that were the teacher's. Assuredly even worse than the old indifference to what is happening psychologically to the student is the tampering with personality carried on by well-intentioned but ill-informed adults. The wise teacher does not attempt to be a psychiatrist (208).

Rosenblatt is right to point out that teachers have the power to impose themselves on their students in dangerous ways, but it is not always so easy to distinguish between a teacher who is guilty of projecting his "own particular preoccupations" onto his students and "tampering with personality" from one who is emotionally engaged in his teaching and honestly interested in influencing his students' values and ideas. By attempting to edit feelings, unconscious associations, and personal problems out of a writing course, we are fooling ourselves and shortchanging our students. The teaching of writing is about solving problems, personal and public, and I don't think we can have it both ways: we cannot create intensity and deny tension, celebrate the personal and deny the significance of the personalities involved. In my writing courses, I want to meddle with my students' emotional life and I want their writing to meddle with mine. Transference and counter-transference emotions are threatening because they are so powerful, but they are most destructive and inhibiting in the writing class when we fail to acknowledge and deal with them.

Reading Myself Reading My Students: A Classroom Example

Let me try to illustrate this process of identifying and using counter-transference emotions with an example from my own teaching. Last fall I taught two sections of Freshman

Composition; from the very first week, one section went extremely well, while the other was a nightmare. I had trouble getting the students involved in the discussions or in their own writing, and I grew increasingly irritated during class. I was especially bothered by the four 18-year old male students who sat next to each other, leaning back in their desks against the wall. They usually wore sunglasses; they always wore sneakers with untied laces. Whenever I tried to create drama or intensity, they joked or smirked. Whenever I tried to joke, they acted aggressively bored, rolling their eyes or talking to each other. At first, I tried to ignore them, not to let them get to me. But I found that it was a little like trying not to think about an elephant. I was always aware of them, even when they were not acting out.

After two weeks, I decided that everyone was being distracted by these students, that they were responsible for the unproductive mood of the classroom. But for some reason, I was not able to confront them directly about their aggressive behavior in class or their passive effort outside of class. It was as if in confronting them I would be acknowledging that they were bothering me and I refused to do that, partly because I always prided myself on my relationships with students and the comfortable, relaxed atmosphere in my classrooms. So instead of confronting them directly, I stewed inside and—I am embarrassed to admit—fantasized about revenge: "Be patient," I told myself, "Grading time will come along eventually and then you can get even. You can fail them all."

I suppose the other reason I did not confront them was that when they came for their first individual conferences, they were polite, even a bit deferential. They were emotionally detached, but they answered my questions, accepted most of my suggestions, and, except for one, even seemed somewhat grateful. Still their writing was relatively weak and I made little effort to help them improve. I read their texts looking more for problems than for possibilities. I had essentially written them off: I had decided that these four were just insecure, adolescent boys trying to act tough in class, in front of the other students; that they were not secure enough with their roles, with their masculinity, to be independent, serious, or mature; that if they wanted to get nothing out of this class, then that was fine by me, and, finally, that I would just concentrate on the other students in the class and ignore them.

But that noble plan failed miserably. It seemed that every time I would accommodate their acting out, they would raise the stakes. For example, during small-group peer response times, they would choose to work together and then spend the time talking about football or dorm parties. Even worse, if I assigned groups, they would talk about writing for a few minutes and then call over to each other across groups. I retaliated (note the aggressive language) by indirectly threatening them. I interrupted the class one day to give an angry and sarcastic speech on how anyone who was not taking the class seriously would fail and end up taking it again. I told them how sorry I would feel if that happened but that I had no choice. Although I knew that these four students would not fail—their essays were not that bad—I looked right at them when I made the threat.

Finally, one day, I snapped. I walked into class, saw them together, laughing and leaning against the wall, and in a voice that conveyed much too much anger and disgust I said, "I have never had to do this is ten years of college teaching; in fact, I left high school specifically so I wouldn't have to deal with shit like this, but you guys are completely out of control. I don't want you to sit together any more." There was an awkward silence and then one of the boys said in a mocking voice, "Completely out of control? Fine, I'll move." Another asked, "That's why you left high school?" It was an embarrassing moment because it was clear—to them and to me—that I was the one who felt out of control.

What was going on? I was usually relaxed and comfortable with students. I was reasonable. I was well liked. So the problem had to be with them. They were threatened by me, I told myself, so insecure that they had to stick together and act tough. They saw me as an authority figure and were rebelling, not only against me but against authority figures from their past. And those explanations were partially true. But that still did not explain why my response was so angry. I had allowed myself to get caught up in a macho competition with these students and I was losing. Clearly this had as much or more to do with my insecurities and unconscious responses as it did with theirs.

That's when I realized the significance of my slip about high school. I had meant to say, "That's why I left high school teaching," but I had referred accidently to my own experience as a high school student. I remembered periods when I acted like these students and later periods when they were the type I felt I was competing against. And I realized how much, for whatever reasons, I was still bothered by the group behavior of adolescent males. The realization helped: by recognizing and somehow naming the source of my anger, it dissipated and became more manageable. I'm not saying I suddenly felt comfortable with these students or with their texts, but the situation now seemed within my own realm, somehow within my control.

Although this example may have more to do with my own neuroses than with composition theory, the point is that this knowledge changed the way that I read these students and their texts; it helped me in my teaching and, indirectly, helped these students in their writing. I began to confront them more directly, asking them if they agreed with certain points, inviting them to criticize my readings, giving them room and invitation in conference and class to challenge me in (what I took to be) constructively indirect ways: I encouraged them to freewrite about the course and about me. I asked them to write metaphorically about writing. I told them to push back when they felt I was pushing them too hard in a conference.

Although one of the students continued to write essays that showed little effort or commitment, the other three made significant progress. One wrote a essay in which he used the metaphor of writing as playing the drums to argue against my emphasis on revision: a writer has to revise just as a drummer has to tune his kit, but "sometimes you just have to let me play." Another wrote a satiric essay on "productive procrastination," suggesting not only that I took writing too seriously but also that my view of the process was limited and limiting. He ended his essay by saying,

> If you begin writing too early, the pressure may not be great enough. If you begin too late, your ideas will not have time to take shape. Procrastination is the key because it triggers your unconscious ideas. Oh, by the way, it is now 3:27 a.m. And you probably thought I wouldn't have time to write a good essay.

The fact that these challenges to my authority came in conventional forms that supported my authority neutralized my anger or defensiveness; the fact that I allowed and encouraged these challenges neutralized theirs.

But the third student, Jack, provided the best example of this sort of interaction. From the beginning of the year, he had seemed the angriest and the least cooperative. I was irritated that the first essay he brought into conference, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Biotechnology," was clearly written as a report for high-school class. When I asked him to write something new, he brought in "How to Make a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich." There were attempts at humor ("A true P, B, and J expert takes this science a step further by experimenting with exotic varieties of peanut butters and jellies."), but for the most part it was a flat description of the process.

As I was reading it, he spoke up, "Remember in class what you said? You said that there are no good or bad topics, that someone could write a trivial essay on something profound, like nuclear war, or a profound one on something trivial, like making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. So I tried it." Again I felt irritated, and couldn't quite figure out how to respond, so I asked him the purpose of the essay. "To tell the reader how to make peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Why? Isn't that OK?"

"But doesn't a reader already know that?"

"Yeah. So are you saying that something is missing...but what else can you say about this topic?"

When I asked him if he meant the essay to be funny, he said, "Sort of," so I suggested he try to locate and develop the humor in a revision. After he left, I knew that I had been too aggressive in my responses to him and too passive in my readings of his texts. I was not making any effort to read or rather misread meaning or possibility or potential into his writing because I felt convinced that he was not only trying to get away with something; he was provoking and mocking me. Still I was frustrated with myself: rather than calling him on anything directly, saying "I don't want your dredged up high school essays" or "Why waste your time making fun of the assignment?" I was still operating at a stage in which I did not want Jack or any of the others to know they were getting to me.

It was during the next week that I began to realize why I was so upset by these four students. It was also the time that I realized I had to confront their resistance more directly while at the same time giving them more room to channel it. So when Jack came back with a revision of the peanut butter and jelly sandwich essay, I responded differently. He had made a few minor changes, but nothing striking. When we discussed it, he said he tried to make it funnier by making the instructions "more ridiculous." When I asked him why he was writing a comic essay on making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, he had no idea. I suggested that if the essay were meant to be satiric, he ought to think about who or what was being satirized. He seemed totally confused and asked for an example. I said that the essay could, for example, be making fun of technical writers who complicate simple processes. He looked irritated. "Or, maybe you are making fun of teachers who give foolish assignments." He looked surprised for a second, then laughed. I had not planned to confront him in that way, but as soon as I did I was convinced it was the right move.

"I decided to drop the peanut butter and jelly essay," Jack told me in his next conference. "You kept asking me what I learned from writing it and what I wanted the reader to learn and my answer was always 'I don't know, probably nothing.' So I decided that if I couldn't learn anything from it, the reader can't be expected to either. So I wrote an essay about why this wasn't a good topic." Now it could certainly be argued that Jack had simply quit resisting or that he was now putting me on in a new way, but at the time I only focused on how this new essay was an interesting discussion on the role and difficulty of topic selection in the writing process. His main point was that a "simpler topic is actually harder to work with than a more complicated and in-depth one." He tried to prove that point by comparing his peanut butter and jelly essay to a classmate's essay on the death of his father. He argued that he had struggled to generate ideas because his topic was so simple, while his classmate "had many avenues and moral implications to explore." I encouraged him, pointing out that I thought this essay had more potential than his earlier ones. I raised questions about certain nuances of his argument. And I talked a little about what kind of topics I found easier and harder to write about. In short, I finally tried to misread one of his essays in ways that would open up the topic for him and for me. After Jack revised his essay, we both agreed that it was by far the strongest piece he had written all semester; not coincidentally, it was also the first one in which we both felt an investment.

Until I recognized the fact that my unconscious responses were creating much of the resistance, Jack stalled as a writer. After that recognition, we both were more productive in our respective roles. The essay on the relative difficulty of certain topics may have begun as the same kind of dare as the first peanut butter and jelly paper, but it is clear that in writing that essay, he and I both became interested in the topic, more connected to the text and to each other. In fact, until I could recognize how much my anger and defensiveness were shaping my responses to all of four of these student writers, I was not an effective writing teacher for them or the other students in the class.

The Personal is Pedagogical

Of course, these students may have had difficulty as writers in my class for all sorts of reasons that have nothing to do with my personal hangups or limitations. In fact, I'm certain that there were a combination of explanations for their problems early in the year. But the fact remains that I may have contributed to their problems by responding to them and to their writing in ways that limited our relationship. The same is true in Nicki's case. It's possible that she was able to write effectively in my course partially because of her transference emotions and identification with me. But it is also true that I may have failed to push her as hard as I might have if I were not caught up in feeling proud of myself. Nicki's writing directly and indirectly validated my teaching and, as I result, I was flattered; I read the early drafts and behavior of these four males as threatening and critical and I, in return, was defensive and punishing.

Of course, there is a sexual component in all of this: we cannot ignore gender as a factor in the way students respond to their teachers and the way teachers respond to their students. But beyond the sexual tension—most of which is unconscious—there is simply the problem that I respond more favorably to students—male or female—who make me feel secure than to those who threaten me. And that is what I need to monitor: as soon as I find myself giving up on a student or, on the other hand, feeling tremendous personal pride in a student's work, I need to question my own motives. I need to discover in what ways my biases and assumptions—both conscious and unconscious—are shaping my teaching.

Now I suspect that this concentration on my own feelings and associations seems self-indulgent and misguided to composition specialists who believe in more "scholarly" research. I further suspect that they would advise me to quit thinking so much about myself and to focus instead on the tropes and conventions of academic discourse, or on the problems of task representation, or on new ways to empower student writers. But, as I argued in the introduction, these approaches are not mutually exclusive; in fact, I am not sure how we can understand what our students are doing as writers without paying more attention to what we are doing as readers. If we want to find less constrained and constraining ways of responding as writing teachers, we have to examine our responses within the contexts of the relationships in which they occur. By engaging in ongoing self-analysis, by becoming more self-conscious about the source of our misreadings, by recognizing that our unconscious associations are a significant part of a writing course, we can become more creative readers and more effective teachers. By avoiding this process, we will never know in what ways we are limiting our students, their writing, and ourselves.

CHAPTER II

TALKING ABOUT WRITING:

ANALYZING STUDENT METAPHORS FOR COMPOSING

> Composing by our method is not like plodding down one row and up the next with a mule, and it is certainly not like a tractor tearing along making beautiful, entirely regular patterns. Our method works like a Scottish sheep dog bringing in the sheep: she races back and forth, driving the flock in one direction signaled by the shepherd, but acting in response to the developing occasions, nudging here, circling there; rushing back to round up a stray, dashing back to cut off an advance in the wrong direction. When you compose, you are the shepherd and the sheep dog and it's up to you to decide whether you want the sheep in fold, fank, or field and how to get them there.
> (Ann Berthoff, Forming/Thinking/Writing)

> It's putting on the old boots and shovelling. You have to learn how to sling it. Don't get me wrong: I kind of like writing. It's just that students don't take it as seriously as their professors do.
> (college composition student)

Like most composition teachers, I have always relied on metaphors to get me out of tight spots. Whenever I sensed that my students were confused by or disagreed with a point I was making about writing, I would try to win them over with a comparison to sports, cooking, rock music, travel. My assumption was that these spontaneous metaphors were successful and I would have continued to assume this if a student had not called me on it. I had just finished telling my freshman composition students that they could write their first essay on any topic in any rhetorical mode. I had cited Murray, Elbow and Emig about the power of writing to learn, writing as a journey of discovery. I had quoted Grace Paley ("Write what you don't know about what you know") and Annie Dillard (turn "sight to insight"). But before I could finish, a student interrupted: "Could we write a compare and contrast?"

The question surprised me and the tone of my response was patronizing. "Sure, you _could_ do a compare and contrast. Do you have a particular topic in mind?" Michael shook his head. "Then wouldn't it more make sense to decide on content before deciding on form?" There was still no response so I continued. "You should try to figure out what you want to say and then decide which rhetorical strategy would be the most effective means of saying it."

Now he looked completely confused. "But is it OK for me to write a compare and contrast?"

"Sure, but look: if you are going on a trip, you don't say. 'Here is the suitcase I will take on the vacation. No matter where I am headed--to my best friend's for an overnight or to Alaska for six months--I will take _this_ suitcase. Wouldn't it make more sense to figure out where you want to go first, how long you'll be staying, and what you want to accomplish on the trip, and _then_ choose the suitcase for the trip." I had ended my metaphor in triumph, confident that I had once again explained an abstract rhetorical concept in simple, commonsensical terms.

Suddenly Michael seemed to get what I was driving at. "But what if I only have one suitcase?" By raising that metaphorical question, he forced me to examine the underlying (false) assumptions I was making about students and writing—that students have mastery of (or at least access to) a number of different rhetorical modes, that form should necessarily follow content. Through his initial metaphor and the discussion that followed, Michael responded that he felt most confident in the compare and contrast model he had practiced so often in high school and that choosing a form helped him find a topic. But this discussion did not stop here. My metaphor was based on one more misguided assumption—that writing is always a voluntary and purposeful journey. Several weeks later, Michael responded to that in an in-class essay: "Now that I think about it, I don't really agree with the whole idea of your suitcase metaphor. You are assuming that I want to go on a trip. But sometimes I would rather stay at home. If I wasn't required to take this course, I wouldn't even be writing a paper in the first place. Since I do have to write one, I might as well use a form I am comfortable with."

I learned through this dialogue not only that Michael and I had very different models of composing, but also (and more importantly) that metaphor offers students and teachers a significant (but little used) means of communication. Over the past two decades, composition specialists seeking to understand students' conceptions of and attitudes toward composing have paid increasing attention to "objective" data; that is, to data produced with social and cognitive science research methods. But in spite of all the videotaping and protocol analyses of writers in progress, ethnographic studies of classroom discourse, and carefully scripted interviews of student writers, there is still a disturbing failure of communication about composing—between students and teachers and between students' conscious knowledge and vocabulary and unconscious attitudes and strategies.

That is why an ongoing examination of composing metaphors can play a crucial role in understanding and improving relationships in the writing class. These metaphors not only reveal teacher and student attitudes and beliefs; they also influence and in some cases even determine those attitudes and beliefs. In fact, whether they are aware of it or not, a teacher and students in a writing course collaborate to produce a metaphorical narrative about composing, just as a teacher and students in a literature course co-author a metaphorical narrative about reading. By examining and extending these metaphors, we gain valuable information not only about how students struggle with themselves to create a text but also how they struggle with their teacher over issues of power and authority.

The Power of Metaphorical Communication

Of course, describing written and spoken discourse in terms of other processes is not new: ever since Socrates compared rhetoric to make-up and cooking in the Gorgias, teachers have relied heavily on metaphor to explain abstract aspects of composition. Some of these metaphors have been fully developed, such as Aristotle's presentation of argument as attack and self-defense or Peter Elbow's discussion of writing in terms of cooking and growing, but most have been offered casually, even haphazardly, by handbook authors striving to make their advice meaningful to inexperienced writers. But in spite of our own reliance on metaphor, we have failed to make full use of its pedagogical potential: we rarely encourage students to question, criticize, or develop our metaphors or, more importantly, to develop their own. As a result, most metaphors in the composition classroom are rarely integrated into the course as a whole or into the student's own conception of and experience in composing.

I am not suggesting that generating and analyzing metaphors for composing are replacements for other forms of writing process research; rather they are useful supplements, heuristics. That is why the measure of their effectiveness is not accuracy but usefulness: does a particular metaphor help a writer communicate with herself, with her text, with her teacher, with other writers? In fact, the most valuable accounts may well be those in which student writers interpret rather than describe, accounts in which students reveal not what actually happens when they compose but rather what they are thinking and feeling about what is happening. Since our composing processes and accompanying attitudes are abstract, idiosyncratic, and largely unconscious, we need to find a shared language or images to which we can respond and analyze. Metaphors can often provide that shared access, for it is in our common realms of experience, in the dislocation from the writing scene and from the jargon of academic research, that we can free writers to talk candidly about writing.

It is a metaphor's lack of directness that allows most students to use it effectively. Students may not be capable of describing the process they use to produce texts; if asked, for example, whether their composing strategy is linear or recursive, whether imitation is an important part of their learning, or whether their awareness of audience is different at different stages of drafting, most student writers will draw a blank; but if allowed, even encouraged, these same students can describe writing in terms of concrete experiences for which they have a technical vocabulary and expertise, such as hitting a baseball or making a phone call to a friend. Similarly, many students are reluctant to speak candidly to their teachers (to those who will evaluate them) about the frustration and pessimism that they associate with writing, but in speaking of writing as a trip to the dentist or being trapped in a maze, they indicate strong associations and attitudes.

To use metaphor productively, we not only need to toss aside the belief that only (so-called) objective information on composing is valuable but also to discard our discipline's traditional distrust of metaphor itself.[2] That metaphor is more than mere embellishment—that in fact metaphor is not only a way to represent meaning but also to make meaning—is now well established. That argument has been launched from almost every discipline: cognitive science, psychology, linguistics, philosophy, literary criticism, rhetoric, religion. For example, Wayne Booth, Janet Emig, and David Tracy all write of "root metaphors" that define, reflect, and influence all thinking processes; Ann Berthoff argues that metaphors not only help us establish relationships between ideas but also that they help us acquire those ideas in the first place; and I. A. Richards, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain how we make sense of all new experiences in terms of previous information and domains of experience.[3]

But even if we do not go so far as to argue that all thinking is analogical, we must admit at the very least that metaphorical knowledge is one of the most important ways that we learn new information. Janet Emig points out that there are occasions in which metaphor might not be an alternate means of expression but rather the _only_ available means: "It was suggested earlier for very young children first comprehending and creating metaphor, metaphor may well be a constitutive form of language, an absolutely necessary feature of discourse. Is it not possible that whenever children, whenever we, try to cope with a new concept, metaphor again becomes a necessary feature of discourse? That only after we achieve a certain mastery of a concept—the questions become when is that? and how do we know?—metaphor can become an optional feature of discourse?" (103). Metaphor in this view (and it is a view supported by such disparate thinkers as Chaim Perelman, Berthoff, and Flower and Hayes) is a stage, perhaps a necessary one, that we use when learning something new.

Student Metaphors for Composing

Frustration, Powerlessness, Detachment

It was some time after my interaction with Michael that I began to wonder how much understanding and misunderstanding in the teacher-student relationship depends on whether or not we are using the same metaphors. Or to put it another way: I began to suspect that teachers and students could communicate effectively (in some cases, most effectively) by talking about and with metaphors. From The Paris Review interviews, I was familiar with the kinds of metaphors that poets and novelists use to describe their process and, from years of reading books by composition instructors, I knew the composing metaphors that writing teachers usually use. But I realized that I did not know my students's metaphors for composing. And so I decided to ask them. Between 1986 and 1988, I collected roughly 500 student metaphors for composing from the 120 freshman composition students that I taught during that period. This number represents 3-5 metaphors per student: one in the first week of the course, one in the last week, and at least one more around mid-term. In each case the student was responding in writing to this simple prompt: "Writing is like..."

Because I was interested in student attitudes—toward writing and toward me—I decided to pay particular attention to how metaphors change at different stages of the process and different stages of the course. At the beginning of the course, most of my students use metaphors that are fairly predictable, metaphors that Lakoff and Johnson would suggest are a result of "our interaction with our physical environment." They think of writing in terms of cooking, building, or manipulating objects, but often as the result of these activities rather than the activities themselves; that is, writing as a pie rather than baking, a house rather than designing or constructing. And many emphasize the fragility of the object, such as, "Writing is a souffle: you have to include all the right ingredients so that it is a success and while baking you have to be very careful so it won't sink. If you make any mistake like jumping or running nearby, the souffle will flop and sink."

Even for those who see writing in more active terms, there is often a striking lack of detail and engagement in their descriptions. Writing is "drawing a picture," "throwing a football," "trying on clothes," but these activities are usually described in fuzzy, generalized terms. Still other metaphors express dissatisfaction and frustration by demonstrating a sense of aimlessness, of wasted time or motion, of activity for no reason. Writing in these metaphors is locomotion—running or swimming or riding a bike—but without intention or intensity. Clearly many of these students have been indoctrinated into a "process" or "expressive" approach, but there is this sort of detachment and distance in their descriptions: "I see writing as taking a walk. First, I just walk around and around: freewriting. Then I try to decide where I want to go. That is my topic. Next I decide how I'm going to get there: brainstorming. Finally, I begin to walk in a certain direction to reach my destination; that is my actual writing. I may get lost a little in the way I decide to change routes (create other drafts), but in the end I hope I have reached my final destination (the final copy)."

The idea of writing as a journey, as a means of discovery, is also a dominant metaphor for professional writers and writing teachers, particularly those who accept the premises of Murray, Elbow, Emig, Macrorie. But these student journeys are very different; they are not pleasure trips or pilgrimages, but journeys without end: "Writing is walking with no particular place to go," begins one student. "It is a trip but the destination is completely unknown. It does not have any specific identification. It is merely a point, a place, where you end that particular journey and it is not on the map," writes another. Perhaps this student sums up this position best: "Writing is doing errands when you're not sure why _you_ have to do them and you're not even sure where the stores are."

If there is no apparent reason for the journey, why are students going? Because, the students answer in their metaphors, they have no choice. My beginning students repeatedly refer to writing as an impossible puzzle they must solve, a maze or imprisonment from which they must escape. Writing for one student is "a prison cell with several doors. Most are dead ends but if you find the right door, it is easy to get out," For another, it is "a dim light at the end of a tunnel where you're trapped. This network of pathways has interconnected spots and from every point in the tunnel you can see the point you want to get to but aren't always sure what way to turn to get there. There is no clear way to get to your destination. Some steps you take or revisions you try can actually take you backwards from the end, the best possible draft, the light at the end of the tunnel, your goal." Just as the "writing as journey without end" is a student version of Murray's "writing as journey of discovery," the "writing as maze" is a student version of Flower and Hayes' "writing as problem solving."

It is not surprizing, then, that so many of these student writers complain of being propelled, blown, and carried by forces over which they have little or no control. In some cases these forces are natural, such as a stream running down a mountain, a heavy wind, a powerful wave; in others it is mechanistic, such as a roller coaster, a subway, or a power boat pulling a water skier. Once again there are striking parallels and differences between these metaphors and those of professional writers who yearn for "characters to take over," for the lightning to strike, for some non-conscious, even nonhuman, power to take over the writing.[4] For students, though, this lack of control, like the writing process itself, is not voluntary and many emphasize frustration with their helplessness and lack of power. While poet Madeline DeFrees writes that her task is to protect the organic poem which is growing inside of her, to do nothing but fight off the external forces, these students see the writing itself as external, as separate, as the thing _they_ need to fight off.

Even those students who emphasize their active role and freedom of choice in the process often see writing as superficial, cosmetic, ultimately external. Barbara Tomlinson points out that many professional writers speak of writing as sewing and tailoring clothes ("Tuning"); many of these students write instead of choosing and wearing clothes, of being one step further removed from the writing. They are making choices, but they are choices that usually leave them dissatisfied:

> It is shopping for clothes when you don't have enough money for the whole outfit, only enough for one or two of the things you want....
>
> When picking something to wear, the first thing is the bulk of the outfit--the pants/shirt or the skirt/top or the sweater/shirt. After you have that main part of the outfit, you work from that, maybe adding a scarf or earrings or a belt. Or you can take away these things if they don't work. In writing you first choose a topic, then figure out what you want to say, and then just freewrite (which is like adding things). Then you take a look and you revise (taking away what doesn't work). Sometimes you can choose an outfit that just isn't right for you. If you think of this in terms of writing, there have been many times that I have an idea but when I sit down to write about it, when I try it on, it just doesn't work. That's what I hate about writing.

Authority and Resistance

Perhaps the most revealing examples of student frustration are "the dentist syndrome" metaphors. Again and again incoming freshman writers describe writing as doing something they hated—going to a doctor's check-up, doing household chores, doing homework—because it is good for them:

> Writing is pulling teeth or like going to the dentist. You hate it but once you are there it is not really so bad. He will check your teeth and if there are problems he will take care of them. It's not something you want to do very often but it is for your own good. Once you leave, you usually feel better because you went.
>
> Writing is like going to mass. Sunday morning my father tells me to get ready for church while I sit glued to the T.V. I know I have to get ready but I still procrastinate. When I finally make it to church I actually pay attention to the sermon. I always complain about going. But once I am there I have a better understanding of why I am there in the first place. When I write, I procrastinate a lot. When I am forced to write, I find it very difficult, very hard to get going. At first I don't benefit from my efforts. I am only going through an empty routine. However, when I find an interesting subject, my attention span is longer. It is clearer to me what the purpose of my work is. It is important to realize why you are doing something in the first place.
>
> Writing is a child fighting taking a nap. He fusses and fights until he finally accepts it and goes to sleep. Once he wakes up he knows it was worth it and feels better. But no matter how many times he learns it he will fight it the next time, also. Once I got through with an essay I felt good about myself but that never helps me start again the next time.

Significantly, in each of these metaphors there is an actual or implied authority figure imposing this unpleasant task on the writer. In this view writing, like swallowing bitter medicine, is an activity that parents and teachers force on students for their physical, psychological, and spiritual health.

Of course, much of these student writers' dissatisfaction is with the process itself, the inevitable frustration of trying to translate thoughts into written language, but even more of it seems a result of the scene or situation in which they find themselves—of being forced to write on demand, to write in a way that makes them feel powerless, to write for a grade. The initial metaphors suggest a frustration with the superficiality and artificiality of the process and a fear of making a mistake, a fear of missing the one key which opens up success. In encountering these metaphors, a teacher's temptation is to "correct" them, to offer counter-metaphors that emphasize the pleasure and flexibility and reward of writing.

But do metaphors of that sort work for our students? What happens when the metaphors that we as teachers choose from, say, cooking, sports, computer science, and other academic disciplines, are not ones that students find familiar or effective? What happens when a student and teacher are working from fundamentally different root metaphors, when, for example, a student enters a course believing that writing works like an assembly line, carrying out a clearly designed plan in a linear fashion, while the teacher designs the course around the metaphor of writing as discovery (a recursive, non-linear process)? A number of researchers have studied the significant and deleterious effect that a writer's conception (or misconception) of composing can have on his work (see, for example, Emig, Rose, Tomlinson), but few have asked in what way our careless and unilateral use of metaphor contributes to the problem?

Since the metaphors in the classroom are usually those of professional writers and teachers, they are often based on experiences we find pleasurable, significant, even transcendent. But though writing might be like gardening or mountain climbing or sightseeing or midwifery for a confident, adult writer, it is rarely those things for an inexperienced adolescent. Unfortunately, few students possess the confidence or commitment necessary to challenge the teacher's dominant composing metaphors and end up feeling frustrated and defeated. Once any metaphor becomes dominant in a individual's mind, in a classroom, in a university, or even in a society, it influences, limits, and controls subsequent actions.[5] For that reason the metaphor itself needs to be examined and debated and, ultimately, negotiated, by the group. Metaphors in the composition classroom are valuable to the extent that establish connections for and between writers.

Fortunately, there are some models of teaching which actively seek student analysis of the operative metaphor in the course (Elbow), which use students' own metaphors as a way to help foster discussion (Smith), or which suggest the generative powers of metaphor in the early stages of composing (Peterson). But in too many classrooms, teachers offer their own metaphors for composing as if they were inherently correct, true, accurate, or objective. In fact, metaphors work when (and because) they are incorrect, untrue, inaccurate, and subjective. Metaphors work, according to Walker Percy, precisely because they are wrong. Once again, the key is communication rather than accuracy: "For at the basis of a beautiful metaphor—which one begins to see as neither logically 'right' or 'wrong' but analogous—at the basis of that heightened sensibility of the poetic experience, there is always the hope that this secret apprehension of my own, which I cannot call knowing because I do not even know that I know it, has a chance of being validated by what you said" (138).

We need to help writers develop metaphors that further the conception of composing for the discourse community and for the individual writer. Murray's description of his own writing metaphors is instructive here: "I think in metaphors, with metaphors, delight in metaphors, in part because they are slippery, saying one thing and not quite meaning another, nudging the truth, giving the listener room to make personal meaning." ("Internal," 4). The way to allow the writer room is to measure metaphoric effectiveness not against a scale of accuracy or beauty but against a scale which takes into account her own own goals, methods, and context. We need to recognize that writers may use very different metaphors for different aspects of the process, different kinds of writing, and different kinds of audiences.[6] It makes sense, then, to introduce our metaphors in an interactive, even tentative way and to ask students to examine their metaphors in terms of change from mode to mode and from the beginning to the end of a course.

Indicators of Change

The metaphors that I offer my students are typical of a writing teacher firmly entrenched in the "process" or "expressivist" camp——writing as discovery, as learning, as access to one's unconscious. Given this bias and the structure of the course which emphasizes personal voice, insight, and revision, many of my students' metaphors change as one would expect: their conception of the writing process grows increasingly complex and flexible. One student revised her metaphor of building from "Writing is building with blocks. You have to build a base, a foundation. Otherwise the whole thing will fall apart" to "I still think it is building but not with blocks; it's with legos. In prewriting you are thinking what you might want to build. Your base is your first draft. But during the middle of building from your base you might decide to add more or even take some away. This would be simple because unlike blocks, legos stick so it is possible to add or take away without disturbing the whole building/essay."

In some cases, though, this recognition of complexity and freedom makes the writing even more challenging. For example, one student changed her metaphor from "making a cake from a recipe" to "Writing is like carrying a torn bag of groceries because I have all of these ideas and they spill out onto the page like those falling groceries. I pick up the ones I can and try to hold everything together till I get to a place I can put them down. But it's tough. I believe in those first ideas that get written down during brainstorming. But they are all jumbled and disorganized and falling apart. And by the time I get them down, I've usually dropped a few." Another began with "Writing is going up to the top of a mountain: it is a struggle to get uphill but when you make it you feel great" but ended the course by describing writing as "going down into a valley. I used to think that writing was tough at the beginning but then you were glad when you were done. Now I feel like it is really easy to write a first draft. It is like going downhill. There is a flow. But then comes the tough part. Now you got to work your way back up. Once you see that first draft then the real work starts, the uphill climb. To make sense of what you've seen and written."

Along with this change in conception often comes a change in attitude. Admittedly, there is a certain danger in accepting these claims of improved attitudes. After all, I am still the one who is evaluating their work, calling the shots, and using authority to tell students that they are the authority on their own writing. Given the power that I inevitably hold in that relationship, it is fair to assume that some students are simply telling me what they think I want to hear. Still the metaphorical exchanges allow students to express attitudes that many would or could not express in direct discourse. Most revised metaphors suggest not that writing is easy or fun but rather that the process itself is valuable. For example, one student revised her "writing as a visit to the dentist" to

> Writing is jumping into a freezing lake and slowly coming to the surface. You always feel scared and you always have to push yourself to jump in. If you are ready to jump and you know the water is cold you just close you eyes and go for it. When you first go under you are lost, you don't know where you are. You're not swimming at first, just sinking. Then you slowly come to the surface and start to swim for shore. When you write, you have to get ideas together and you have bring them to the surface. But no one has to get their ideas down on paper so they make perfect sense right away. You have to try to do something and have some idea of your topic but not exactly. You have to build up to a rough draft by taking a risk, just jumping in, and seeing how it comes out. The actual writing is swimming for the shore, and that part is fun, you feel fantastic, but the water is cold and first you've got to get in.

There is still a period of initial fear, unpleasantness in this metaphor. But now the end result is pleasure, personal accomplishment, even exhilaration.

This more positive attitude is also manifested metaphors that imply a new relationship—between writer and text, writer and reader. In early metaphors, like this one, many students complain of being alone:

> Writing is like being stranded on a deserted island by yourself. Everything must come from you when you are writing. Sure, you can get ideas from others but the heart of the paper has to come from the writer. When stranded on a deserted island and when you are writing, you learn to rely on yourself.

But as the year goes on, more and more writers see writing not as a solitary act but rather as a social activity, a relationship between two parties, such as this metaphor of conversation:

> Now I think writing is talking. A personal narrative is essentially telling someone a story. I am a big talker and when I relate a story to someone for the first time the telling often changes greatly by the time I tell it again. After seeing how people react, I often change the emphasis or wording of a story to make it more interesting.

Even more revealing is this student's rejection of her first metaphor—"Writing is like love, something you must feel inside,"—because "it was too general, too vague, and gave no sense of the other person, the reader."

> Now I think writing is more like a relationship. When you begin to write you are really unsure about what direction you are going to go. This is what happens in the beginning of a relationship with a boyfriend: is it going to go at all? You don't know and so you "feel each other out." Each person

> gradually gets to know the other better. Just as you may throw a "bad" topic away, you may end the relationship. Or you may put the topic on a back burner for a while and pick it up later. This is like putting a relationship on hold in order to try other things, to see other people. But then you return later when you've decided to pursue it, to put your priorities in order. Next when you decide to go with a topic, it is like deciding to go with a relationship and you are really interested and excited, just like when you are in the early stages of a promising relationship. This is the stage where the paper and the relationship are made. You can produce something really good, but after that first rush, you still have to work at it. You have to make an effort if you want it to become deeper and more meaningful than that first infatuation. That is a requirement for both. You must truly want to see it get better. You have to give 100%. When you grow disinterested with a topic it is just like growing apart in a relationship. The writer and the lover may begin to look around, to decide to pursue other options. When you do stick with something and work at, you can produce an essay you really care about. The end result of a good relationship is marriage, just as the finished essay is the highest state of the writing process.

This shift—from love to establishing a love relationship—is a shift from process to product, from general to specific. Other students, however, continue to see writing as the same metaphorical activity; it's just the outcome that changes. For instance, Kristine initially suggests

> Writing is combing your hair when it is in tangles. It is difficult, even painful, and even when you comb all the way through it, it still is not perfect. You find out you have a lot of split ends and frizz.

Since she prefaces her year-end metaphor by saying, "I have completely changed the way I see writing," I expect her to describe a very different sort of process. But in fact she simply revises her view of her product:

> I never really thought through the implications of that metaphor. I just focused on the untangling part. It is more like combing your hair when you forget to use conditioner and you have a perm. My writing is more detailed now and when I do untangle my ideas there is more in the writing that I like. I have learned to narrow my topic but at the same time not narrow the possibilities.

Of course, not all of my students' attitudes changed in positive ways. In fact, many use these metaphors as an opportunity to voice frustration with me, with the writing process, and with the exercise itself. Jack, for example, begins the course with confidence and enthusiasm ("Writing is sailing across the sea with a strong wind at your back"), but ends with anger and frustration

> Writing is building sand castles. You work really hard, making tunnels and moats and towers. They keep falling apart. It takes hours. Finally you get it perfect, just how you want it. Then a huge wave comes in (the teacher) and knocks the whole thing down.

Another student complains that the entire exercise of writing metaphorically about writing is contrived and unproductive: "My first metaphor was writing is like football. You try to come up with the best possible game plan but it doesn't always work like you planned. I've said that every time you asked me. I still think it. What's the point?"

Composing Metaphors and the Teacher-Student Relationship

Actually the point is that we can learn through metaphors of frustration and stasis just as we can learn through metaphors of satisfaction and dynamism. What these writers are telling me about their past and present writing experiences is significant and, I would guess, accurate. The key is to contextualize rather than simply categorize or evaluate these metaphors. What is the metaphor telling us about the student's conception of and attitude towards the process (as well as the student's conception of and attitude towards the teacher's role in that process)? And what are we doing to contribute, positively or negatively, to that conception and attitude? Student metaphors often provide a starting point for dialogue about these issues and thus give us as a way to resolve misunderstanding and conflict. But we will only be able to understand their metaphors and to respond effectively to them if we are also willing to examine our own.

Let me offer one final example: last year I taught a student who resented my emphasis on revision and, after a while, I began to resent his resentment. Ron is a competent first-draft writer who, I suspect, succeeded in high school on linguistic talent and self-confidence. At first he was bitter about my suggestions, claiming that we just saw writing in completely different ways, that I was imposing arbitrary standards and taste on his writing. I acknowledged that all standards were somewhat subjective but still argued that he and his essays would benefit from revision. It was not until he came up with his first metaphor—writing as lasagna—that we were able to break the stalemate.

> You see, that's the whole problem. Writing is a lasagna to me. There are layers and you have to put them together carefully and then you are done. But you keep saying that I have to narrow my focus. You are trying to turn my lasagna into a meat loaf and I don't like meat loaf.

I will admit that I felt a little silly arguing about recipes but I pushed on, suggesting that if he wanted to make lasagna, fine, but if I thought he could make a better lasagna, shouldn't I tell him? Later in the semester, he answered my question:

> Writing is playing a set of drums. Not just one. A whole precisely tuned set. You must constantly hit the drums over and over to make sure that they are in tune (from high sound to low sound). Finally you find the sound that you're looking for, but it takes revising, tuning. Writing, especially revising, is the exact same. You begin with a rough draft

> (untuned set). A revision is made (drummer begins to tune). Then a second revision (a sound check). At this point endless revisions could still be made in a paper, just like a good drummer is endlessly tuning his set. But at some point the drummer should say, "That is the sound I was looking for, dude. Let's play." At some point, the writer will find the sound he is looking for—what he wants to say—and then he should stop revising. Otherwise he will just keep revising and revising for eternity. And I do believe that that is worthless. At some point the paper must be stopped; otherwise it is worthless. This is not an attack on all revision; it is an attack on writing a single paper 50 times. The process of writing has changed for me. I now revise my writing, just like I always tune my drums before a show. I'll admit that now. But at some point you just have to let me play.

There is here a different dynamic than usually exists between writer and teacher, a neutralization of some of the typical tensions and hierarchies associated with writing instruction. In most cases we make students play on our turf; in many of these cases, I was playing on theirs. A basketball player may feel empowered to speak up about my use of a basketball metaphor or may simply be happy to see part of her world represented in the classroom. If allowed, students are capable of raising insightful questions about a teacher's metaphor, of extending it, even of offering one more appropriate for their own composing experience. My point, finally, is not that we need to organize composition courses around discussions of suitcases and drum sets, but rather that we can recognize our areas of failed communication and improve the teacher-student relationship by occasionally stepping back from direct discourse about writing, by validating students' initial metaphors in the same way that Mina Shaughnessy validated the language of basic writers. If we do that, metaphors can help us learn what we need to teach.

Chapter Notes

1. That most student conceptions of their own composing process have been overlooked is not surprising: there exists a deep-rooted distrust of all retrospective student accounts. See, for example, Barbara Tomlinson,"Talking About the Composing Process: The Limitations of Retrospective Accounts," Written Communication 1 (Oct 1984): 429-45; Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, "Images, Plans, and Prose: The Representation of Meaning in Writing." Written Communication (Jan 1984): 120-160; and Lois Rubin, "Uneven Performance: What Students Do and Don't Know About Their Own Writing," Writing Instructor 4 (Summer 1985): 157-68. The basic argument in each case is that student writers lack the experience, perspective, metacognitive sophistication, and technical language to describe accurately and fully their own composing processes. However, although all of these authors warn against uncritical acceptance of student retrospective accounts, they also admit that such accounts can be valuable in certain ways for student and teacher. Rubin's comment is typical: "This is not to say that the self-knowledge (metacognitive knowledge) students have is developed to its fullest potential; there is much to be done in the classroom towards improving it—making students aware of their strategies, introducing new strategies that will make their processes work better...However, what is notable is that a good deal of this knowledge is there, that it is there without instruction."

2. Richard Weaver offers one of the clearest summaries of this distrust, even disparagement, of metaphor in his Ethics of Rhetoric. As Weaver points out, there have been two commonly held views of metaphor which have hurt its reputation. First and most damaging is the view that metaphor is mere ornamentation, decoration, "like the colored lights and gewgaws one hangs on a Christmas tree" (202). This theory, which not surprisingly was advanced most forcefully by eighteenth century rhetoricians, is an implicit criticism of all metaphorical discourse for it reduces metaphor to a fancy or embellished way to say something which could be said more economically in direct language. "A second theory,"

according to Weaver, "holds that metaphor is a useful concession to our feeble imagination...We are all children of Adam to the extent that we crave material embodiments (203)." But noting that neither of those theories does justice to the power and range of rhetoric, Weaver suggests a third: "There is yet another theory, now receiving serious attention, that metaphor is itself a means of discovery. Of course, metaphor is intended here in the broadest sense, requiring only some form of parallelism. But when its essential nature is understood, it is hard to resist the thought that metaphor is one of the most important heuristic devices, leading us from a known to an unknown, but subsequently verifiable, fact of principle" (203).

3. In The Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff and Johnson argue, "We have found that metaphors allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another. This suggests that understanding takes place in terms of entire domains of experience and not in terms of isolated concepts." They identify these domains of experience as as "natural kinds of experience," specifically as experiences which are "a product of our bodies (perceptual and motor apparatus, mental capacities, emotional makeup, etc), our interaction with our physical environment (moving, manipulating objects, eating, etc.), our interactions with other people within our culture (in terms of social, political, economic, and religious institutions)" (117).

4. This phenomenon has been discussed in some detail by Don Murray in "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery," Learning By Teaching: Selected Articles on Writing and Teaching, Montclair NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1982, and by Barbara Tomlinson in "Characters Are Coauthors: Segmenting the Self, Integrating the Composing Process," Written Communication (Oct 1986): 421-48 and "Tuning, Tying, and Training Texts: Metaphors for Revision," Written Communication 5 (Jan 1988): 58-80.

5. Flower and Hayes have examined this in terms of problem solving in writing in "Images, Plans, and Prose: The Representation of Meaning in Writing," Written Communication (Jan 1984); Emig in terms of an overall educational model in The Web of Meaning; and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule in terms of gender-related writing metaphors in Women's Ways of Knowing.

6. For example, Plato used the metaphors of cooking and make-up in the Gorgias because he wanted to attack the sophists for practicing a shallow and self-serving form of rhetoric; he used the metaphors of erotic love and husbandry in the Phaedrus because he wanted to establish criteria for an idealized form of rhetoric. Similarly, in "How the Text

Instructs," Murray writes, "As I prepare to write, the text is the smell of baking bread from a neighbor's kitchen; a cloud, a ship., no, an island at the edge of the ocean horizon; a conversation in an office down the hall, heard but not yet made out...I play with language as a child constructs towers of blocks to teeter totter and fall down. I twist the dial of the shortwave radio listening for crackles of sound that promise a message if tuned in." I am not suggesting here that teachers constantly change their conceptions of composing; actually I would argue that Plato and Murray work from fairly consistent root metaphors for the process; rather I am suggesting that effective teachers recognize that specific problems and specific aspects of the process must be addressed in specific ways.

CHAPTER III

RESPONDING TO WRITING:
PRODUCTIVE TENSION IN THE WRITING CONFERENCE

It is Micki's third conference and she looks pleased. "I brought in a revision of that essay about my job at the grocery store. I think I'm about done with it. I think it's better than the last draft. I still might change a few things. I'm not really happy with some of the words I used and stuff. But basically I think it's done. I think I'm going to start on my second essay this week." I read the introduction in silence.

> During the summer I worked in a grocery store as a cashier. This is a great opportunity for anyone who enjoys observing the behavior of people.

Already I feel uncomfortable. This is exactly how her last draft started. Is the point of her "about done" essay that she has observed people shopping?

> In my observations I noticed how many shoppers decide to shop at the same time and at the most awkward hours. The strangest hours are usually the busiest. What is frustrating is that while you are ready to leave for home there is a mad rush for last minute groceries. And customers can become very irritating at times, too.

Now my fears are almost confirmed: this is not the revision that I hinted at last week, that I thought we had agreed she would try to write. How can she feel the essay is done? I glance down the page to her conclusion.

> Most customers enjoy a cheerful greeting from a cashier, but when a cashier has been dealing with difficult people all day it is hard to be polite. Working in a grocery store has opened my eyes to the fact that there is not much emphasis on person to person dealings in the business world.

That paragraph sounds vaguely familiar and I remember why: in her last conference, Micki had brought in a draft organized loosely around her personal observations of shoppers. She had started that conference in a very different way: "I know this isn't really a good topic but I can't think of anything to write about. I never really did this kind of writing in high school." She went on to say that her high school teacher gave her "rules and examples" to follow and that in a way she liked that better. "At least you knew what you had to do." Because she seemed discouraged, self-defeating, and anxious, I tried to build up her confidence, to make her feel that she did have something to write about and the authority to write about it. I asked her why she didn't like her job and she told me about rude customers. I asked her why she thought they behaved that way. She didn't know. I asked her if she was especially sympathetic to cashiers when *she* shopped in grocery stores and she laughed, "No. I'm kind of like the people who come into the store where I work." And so I encouraged her: "You do have things to write about. You're an expert on this subject; you've seen it from both sides. And since everyone has had some of the experiences you describe, readers will recognize your expertise and will want to understand what really goes on. Now what interests *you* about that relationship? What do *you* want to know more about?"

And so in that way I had led Micki to this decision to look at "person to person relations," to this attempt to find meaning in her observations. But I had hoped for much more than this. "Let me just look at your introduction again, " I mumble, stalling for time, looking at the words on the page but thinking about what I should say. Now how should I respond to this draft? Certainly Micki seems to feel better about her writing (and better about herself) in this conference. But *I* am feeling worse. I am feeling anxious. I see potential here but it is still basically unrealized and I am not comfortable with her confidence in the essay, with her decision to move on to another draft.

I am tempted just to tell her what is wrong, but I hesitate. I am aware that Micki and I are not the only ones in this writing conference. Don Murray is there, too, reminding me that writers need the time and the encouragement to find their voices and their meaning (157). I hear Brannon and Knoblauch's argument about students' rights to their own texts. And I can't stop thinking about Ferguson McKay's case studies which clearly demonstrate his thesis that "confidence is a writer's central need" (100). But there are other voices in the room as well: Thomas Carnicelli insists that I must accept my "professional obligation" (116) to give my opinion of each student essay; Pamela Richards argues that writers need to hear the truth because "the feeling that someone is humoring me {as a writer} is more damaging to my sense of self than outright attack" (118); and my colleagues, chairperson, dean, former teachers, and conscience all tell me that standards are important, that this draft needs to be revised, that Micki has not pushed herself hard enough.

I finally speak: "So you are happier with this draft?" A non-question. I am still stalling. She has already told me that she is. But I want some time to think and I have learned that getting students to do the talking in these situations is essential. Often, when pushed just a little, students who claim to be finished with a draft will admit that the draft still needs work, that they still have questions and doubts, and sometimes, that they even know what is wrong and how to fix it. But I have no such luck today.

"Yeah, I am." I wait to see if she will give up anything at all. Finally she asks directly, "Is it OK?" Here tone has changed now; she is sounding much less confident, aware that I am not satisfied.

"Well...I definitely see progress from your last one...I am interested in the point about the impersonal environment of the store. Could you tell me more about that?"

She doesn't answer; instead she picks up her essay and begins reading as if she hasn't seen it before.

"I mean, is that really your central point, that the atmosphere in the store makes people behave in a certain way?"

Damn. Why can't I ever let long silences remain? As soon as I answer one of my own questions, I always remember Graves' point about the value of silence and patience in writing conferences (99), but with a struggling student sitting there I often can't take it. I just keep thinking I have got to get them, get us, over these uncomfortable moments. But that's the problem. Am I helping _them_ by talking or helping _me_?

"I guess I could try to focus more on my point about how the atmosphere of the store makes people—the customers and the cashiers—act a certain way and they don't even realize it."

"Fine. Why don't you try that? "

As Micki gets up to leave, I worry once again about whether I talked too much, too little, or some of each.

Productive Tension in the Writing and Reading Process

I do not present Micki's conference as a model for teacher training. In fact I would argue that there is no such thing as a model or typical conference. Like writing itself, the writing conference is a process—not static, not a noun, not a thing, but rather active, dynamic, organic. It changes with each student and each teacher and each second, and although there is value (even necessity, I think) in developing a logical theory and approach, we need to learn to work with students to "write" the conference as well as the essay, to learn when our response should dictate the process and when the process should dictate our response.

But while the specifics of Micki's conference may not be typical, the issues her conference raises _are_. When and how should we respond to a student's writing? And how should we deal with the tension that writers _and_ teachers often feel in writing conferences? In many "first generation" writing conferences (Roger Garrison's early conferences would be an example), teachers answered these questions with a set agenda and direct instruction. They used conference time to solve problems. "Here is what is wrong; here is how you can fix it." But as process replaced product in the classroom, so it did in the conference and "second generation" conference teachers (following Murray's lead) focused more on questions than on answers, more on structural issues than superficial problems. Still, however, this process approach to conference teaching became ritualized in its own ways—"Always start by offering encouragement," "Focus on only or two things in each conference," "Do as little of the talking as possible," and "Never take over a student's essay."

If we want to understand how writing conferences work (and why some fail) we need to move beyond a set of rigid rules for writing conference teachers to an approach that takes into account the dynamic aspects of each writing conference: the student's relationship to the text, the teacher's relationship to the text, and the student and teacher's relationship to each other. To be effective, conference teachers must monitor the tension created within and between these relationships and strive to keep that tension at a productive level—for their students and for themselves.

In this context, the level of tension is "productive" only if it keeps the writing and reading processes alive. When the tension level is too high, writers freeze, panic, resist, retreat, (telling themselves either "I really don't have anything to say," or "I have a lot to say but I can't get it down on paper."); when the level is too low, they lack the interest, curiosity, desire, even pain, that compels someone to keep writing effectively. But the student's tension is only half of the picture: when the tension level is too high (that is, when they fear that that their students are not making progress or lack the skills to produce a successful essay), teachers also panic and retreat (that is, they revert to "objective" assignments, frequent grading, direct instruction); when the level is too low, they lack the curiosity and desire that compels someone to keep reading and responding effectively. For the writing conference to work, the teacher must establish a level of tension that is productive not only for the student but also for herself.

I do not mean to suggest here that tension is an end in itself; rather I am suggesting that we we focus on tension—our students' and our own—because it will help us to make practical decisions about when and how to intervene in any individual conference. Guided by valuable research (such as Mike Rose's study of writer's block or Susan McLeod's examination of the significance of affective factors in a student's writing process), most conference teachers already consider a student's attitude when making those decisions. When a student seems tense, stuck, frustrated, we encourage, support, and question; when a student seems self-satisfied, refusing to go beyond his first superficial responses to a complex topic (which probably is because he is also tense, stuck, frustrated), we push, provoke, and question. But what about when _we_ are feeling self-satisfied or stuck or tense? Whether we are aware of it or not, our expectations, frustrations, and associations, our responses and non-responses, also shape the student's level of tension, the dynamics of the conference, and the direction of the subsequent revision.

But these two levels of tension—the student's and the teacher's—are inter-related not only because they each change in response to the other, but also because the frustration and tension that a writing conference teacher experiences is similar to the frustration and tension that a writer experiences. There are no clear right and wrong answers for writers or for conference teachers and each must learn the same lessons: to experiment, to take risks, to follow seemingly random associations, and to be suspicious of quick fixes. Neither writers nor writing teachers know exactly how much tension they need or can tolerate at any one time; what counts is that a student and teacher have enough confidence in each other and in themselves to keep the process going. The trick then is in negotiating the tension so that the student and teacher believe not only that the student has the potential to achieve her goals in the essay but also that those goals are worth achieving.

Unfortunately, teachers in both the product and the process camps seem to fear tension and often try hard to reduce or eliminate it. These teachers have good intentions: they know that many students have been traumatized by writing and writing teachers and they also know (as Rose's research has demonstrated) that too much tension is debilitating, even paralyzing for a writer. But while we can decrease tension in certain areas of the process, we cannot (and should not try to) make writing or teaching writing entirely painless. We should not strive to make everyone in the writing class "as comfortable as possible," a goal appropriate for terminally ill patients, but not for teachers and writers. Rather than wasting time trying to dissipate tension, we need to expend more energy finding ways to use that tension in productive ways. And in the final analysis, we can do that only by carefully studying our students and ourselves.

In the following case studies, I have tried to look carefully at the role tension played in my students' draft writing and my conference teaching and to understand how that tension shaped our relationship and each subsequent revision. These case studies reveal at least as much about me as a conference teacher as they reveal about each of these student writers. They reveal, for example, my tendencies to offer editorial (and sometimes extremely directive) comments as if they were questions, to push students to write introspective, almost confessional essays, and, most of all, to try to sustain a relatively high level of tension in each conference.

One way I try to control the tension is to keep things—issues, essays, ideas—relatively unresolved. I ask students to "finish" only three essays in fifteen weeks. No topics are assigned. No drafts are graded. The guidelines are intentionally open-ended: students are asked to write one personal narrative, one argument or analysis of a written work, and one essay analyzing some aspect of their own writing process. During the semester each student has a weekly conference in which he or she was expected to bring an essay to discuss (either a new draft or a revision). Generally students worked for five or six weeks on a draft and then moved on to another.

In the following case- (or self-) studies, I recorded my immediate response to the conferences (labeled below as "Post-Conference Response"). In these responses (which are similar in method and purpose to a writer's protocol analysis), I tried to show what I was thinking and feeling during and immediately after the conferences. The "analysis" sections were written after the semester ended.

Tension in the One-to-One Conference: Two Case Studies

Case Study #1: Denise

Conference 1.

I read Denise's draft while she sits quietly. Her thesis: "I never knew that there were so many preparations that go into getting ready for a wedding. But now that my sister is getting married next month I am getting a chance to see how much work is really involved." From there she went on to list everything--ordering flowers, sending out invitations, etc. I am struck by one section of the paper: "I am not sure why, but I am not really that excited about the wedding yet. I keep getting this kind of empty feeling. I am sure I will be excited, though, when the event comes." But she then returns to a list of the preparations. She ends the draft by stating that in spite of all the work involved she still believes in marriage.

In the middle of the conference, she said that she was "sort of happy" with the essay but that she "felt stuck" about how to revise it.

"Well, what interests you most in this essay?"

"I don't know. "

"Did anything surprise you in writing this?"

"Not really."

"Did you learn anything new about weddings or about how you feel about this one?"

"Not really. What do you mean?

"Well what about this paragraph about the empty feeling?"Long pause. "It seems different to me. Does it to you?"

"Well it is about feelings and the rest is just a list of facts."

"Yes. Do you want to write more about that?"

"I guess so. It's just that there is so much to do for a wedding. There's like ten showers and when I was home last week I had to spend almost an entire day doing stuff for the shower we're giving. I didn't really mind but I was just home for two days."

"So will you write more on this?"

"I don't know. What interests you most?"

"That paragraph because it is different, like you said. There is more tension there, more unanswered questions, don't you think?"

"So maybe I should write more about that?"

"I think so, but I don't want to be pushy. It is your essay, not mine."

"No. I need the help, the advice. In high school I never had to write this kind of paper before. We also got assigned topics about books and we always wrote 5-paragraph essays. I don't know how to do this."

Post-Conference Response 1.

As usual I feel good about some parts, bad about others. Again I see an essay here before she does and it is better than what she has and I can tell that she does not see it herself. So I directed her attention to it. But that's all. I didn't interpret it, though I do have an interpretation: she is jealous of her sister and all of the attention she is getting. That is what I think she really feels. And I am thinking that she could write a great essay about how weddings and other big events are supposed to make us feel good but often they don't because we all bring our own emotional baggage, "Did you ever wonder why so many people cry at weddings?" That is how I would start it. But it isn't my essay. I knew she needs to get the details down on paper, write her way through that phase before she can or dares to shape it, to interpret it. Experience with students writing about—painful experiences like the death of a family member, breakup of a friendship essay—have taught me that. Give her time to find her point. Am I directing too much already? I need to be patient. I need to shut up. But I also need to reassure her (and me) that teaching and learning are going on here.

Conference 2.

In her next draft, she explores her feelings of ambivalence. She does raise the question of jealousy over all of the attention her sister is receiving. But, she says, her "empty feeling" isn't caused by jealousy: "I will get my turn to have a big wedding someday." Then she raises the question of worry for her sister, but she says it couldn't be that either because "I like my sister's fiance. I know he will be good for her." She concludes that her emptiness is probably nothing significant. "I can't wait till it is over,though, so we can get back to normal."

In the conference she expresses frustration again with the revision process. I keep pushing her hoping that she will decide to take up the problem of her ambivalence. Finally, I ask directly about her negative feelings. "I don't know. I'm not sure what it is. I mean I am excited about the wedding but there is something..." I hesitate. She says nothing. The she shrugs and laughs nervously. "I really don't know."

I hesitate again. Finally I speak up: "Maybe before you revise it next time you should just write down ideas and feelings you associate with the empty feeling. You know just list anything that comes to mind. Want to try that?"

Post-Conference Response 2.

God, I am feeling lousy about this. She just doesn't seem to get this "sight to insight" idea (Annie Dillard's description of writing) and maybe I just need to show her what I mean. There is a good paper here about jealousy, about feeling lousy when you are supposed to feel happy. But if I tell her that is the paper then she is not writing the paper in the sense that writing is thinking and seeing. I am making the breakthrough. Again I have to remember Murray's advice about patience and faith. Faith that the student on her own will find her own meaning and that that meaning will be worth finding. And I don't know if she is capable of it.

Conference 3.

In the next conference she brings in her revision in which she again runs through all of the stuff that it can't be and then says "First there was my parents' divorce two years ago and then I went away to college and now my sister won't even have the same last name. Sometimes I wish that I could be back in the middle school when our whole family was living together under one roof." So, she suggests, "Maybe my sadness is because the wedding is the last step in my nuclear family splitting apart." Still she concludes by stating, "I still am excited for my sister and still look forward to the day that I am walking down the aisle."

I am immediately struck by how much stronger this draft is. In fact, when I read that paragraph about her family's disintegrations and how that made her feel, I experienced as a reader the kind of "felt sense" that Sondra Perl associates with writers when they discover their meaning and voice and purpose. Denise seems to feel better about it but she is not sure why or what to do next. I want her to keep working on this draft, to focus and organize her ideas more effectively, but I also want her to leave knowing what she has accomplished. And so after some discussion of specific aspects of her revision, I ask her: "This is a much stronger draft, don't you think?"

"Yeah. I do."

"Do you see how this thesis—about why you have that empty feeling—is a different kind of thesis than your other ones?"

"Yeah. It's more about why I feel that way. Before I just had a lot of facts. Now I think I have more of a point."

Post-Conference Response 3.

That was a great conference. Or a great essay. Or both. I was so sure about the jealousy issue and so smug about that. And worried that I would have to tell her in the end. "Look. Write this." And then she comes in and writes this essay which is so much better, that really goes much further with the topic in a way that shows her thinking, not mine. Well maybe it shows my way of thinking, my bias towards introspective, epiphany essays. But the epiphany itself came from her, not from me.

Conference 4.

She brings in a revision with a few minor editing changes, no substantial changes. I ask her if she plans to keep working on this essay and she says, "No, I want to start on my second one." So we discuss her ideas for her new essay.

Post-Conference Response 4.

In some ways I am a little disappointed. The essay took such a leap last week I hoped that it would just keep getting deeper and deeper and better and better. Also, I hoped that she would pick up on that stuff about her own fear of marriage. I figured I had it all figured out. She put that part in about her own marriage even before she knew why because unconsciously her fear is that her own marriage could never work out because her parents' marriage did not. She did not pursue she said because her paper is now not about that topic. And she is right. I have to quit writing another paper in my head. No that is not right. I have to write many different papers. I have to make connections and I have to ask students, carefully, non-dramatically if my connections make sense to them. Of course this essay could go further but I don't think she can right now. And I have to be grateful for what she has gotten out of this material, not regretful about what she has missed.

Analysis.

This study demonstrates my belief that the associations of writing teachers have to play a crucial role in the writing conference. When I read Denise's line about the empty feeling, I sensed that it was the real center of her essay.

Now I had several options: I could have kept my sense to myself, letting her find her own focus and question; conversely, I could have told her directly that I wanted her to write her essay on that sentence and then offered my own interpretation of her feelings; or I could have taken a middle path, asking questions in which I was truly interested but trusting her to find her own meaning. Of course, in retrospect I am glad I took that middle path. By finding the sentence that contained the most (the only?) real tension in her essay, I played a role in the process. But in that role I was never trying to take over the essay; I was just trying to keep the ball in her court.

And in this case that "worked." But I have participated in enough writing conferences to know this rarely happens so neatly. Since the path leading from a teacher's unconscious association to a student's essay is long, windy, and unclearly marked, most of these associations fail to find their way into print. In fact in the same semester that Denise wrote this essay, many of my other students rejected, failed to recognize, or radically transformed my associations and clues. Is this a good thing or a bad one? It is impossible to say, since we have no way of knowing what sort of essay a student would have written without listening to a teacher's suggestions or associations or what part of the credit for a successful draft is due to a teacher's suggestions. It makes sense, I think, to follow the (paraphrased) advice of Hawthorne's famous narrator: 'Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to your students if not your worst fear (and your greatest hope) for their writing, yet some trait whereby the worst (and best) may be inferred!' That way we give students enough help to keep them going, but not so much that we cut off their options.

Case Study #2: Evan

Conference 1.

His essay is about a fight he had with his best friend in high school. The fight began with a practical joke his friend had played on him. He had hidden his car keys and would not tell Evan where they were. Evan "got back at the friend" the next day by placing several fire crackers in his friend's car. They created "a lot of noise and smoke but no damage or anything." The friend retaliated immediately by ripping the side mirror off of Evan's car. The paper had no conclusion or analysis.

"I'm not really happy with this draft." That is how he starts the conference.

"Why not?"

"It has too many details...don't you think? And I didn't stick to my topic. My title is too general, too."

"You describe this fight clearly."

"Yeah I think that's the strongest part."

"I do too. Do you think you will keep working on this one?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"It's too personal."

"Would writing help you gain perspective on it, understand it better?"

"I have perspective on it already. It's just personal."

"OK. That's fine. It is up to you to decide which essays you want to revise."

We then discuss some of his other other paper ideas.

Post-Conference Response 1.

I'm frustrated in some ways. His essay is ragged—all of the problems with mechanics—but it has potential. He seems very upset, clearly resistant to pursuing this topic. Which naturally makes me more interested in it. I see the potential because I like essays that start with conflict, confusion, questions. No, that's not true; I like essays that start with order, a superficial order, and then unravel into conflict, confusion, questions, and then get put back together again in a new, better order. Evan cares about this fight but (or so) he cannot yet make sense of it. It is too painful for him to purse. I felt dumb, embarrassed, asking him about gaining perspective through writing. He says he has it (I don't think he does) and that made me feel as if I were prying into his private life, made me feel a bit like a voyeur. Anyway, I think there is a paper in this experience but unless he thinks there is paper there, I have to let it go.

Conferences 2-5.

Evan spends the nest three conferences and drafts on another essay on volunteer firefighters. The essay has no real focus, no real voice. I question him. "Are you saying..?" "Do you want to look at...?" The drafts change a little but still no real focus emerges.

Post-Conference Responses 2-5.

All of these comments indicate that I am worried that we are both growing frustrated and and will soon lose all confidence in each other's abilities. In two of the comments I express disappointment that Evan chose to pursue this essay rather than the one about the fight. In my fifth comment I concluded, "All I know now is that he needs some success soon or he will give up on himself and (I hate to admit this) I will give up on him."

Conference 6.

To my great surprise, Evan brings in a revision of the essay about his friend. "Remember that paper I wrote about my fight with my friend. I decided to write another draft about it. I changed it a lot."" He has almost dropped the entire narrative section about the details of the fight, leaving only a few sentences form the first essay. Now he starts with a question: "Would a real friend do something terrible to another friend?" He goes on to argue that a real friend would not have torn off his car mirror. He explains again that the firecrackers were harmless. But then he says that the funny part is that when his parents asked him what happened to the car, he said, "It was vandalized." Even concluded the draft this way: "I was still protecting my friend. I think inside he knows what he did was wrong."

"You have cut out a lot of details about the fight itself, haven't you?"

"Yeah I didn't really need them. I wanted to explain more about how I feel."

"Are you happier with this one?"

"Yeah. It's more what I want to say, I think."

"How so?"

"I mean I explained about how I protected him. I told my parents the car was vandalized. That's weird in a way."

"But you say at the end your relationship will never be the same."

"Yeah. I can't forget about it."

"So it's forgive but not forget?"

"Yeah I guess."

"Is that your central point?"

"I'm not sure."

"Isn't that it? You are going beyond the cliche--Forgive and forget--to make an important distinction—that it is possible to forgive someone, at least to stop actively fighting with the person, without forgetting the pain of the experience."

(No response for about 20 seconds. We both stare at the essay.)

"Actually you have already made this distinction. Look at this first page. It is all about forgiving him, about not telling your parents, about feeling bad about what happened. But then the second page is about how your friendship was never the same after that."

"Uh uh."

(No response for about 15 seconds)

"Could you start with the cliche, then introduce this idea--that the cliche does not really explain what often happens after an upsetting fight with a friend-- and then make your point by explaining how forgiving and forgetting are two very different kind of actions?"

"Uh, yeah."

"And then what?"

There is a slight hesitation, and then I speak again: "Do you think you could revise it in that way? How does that sound?"

Post-Conference Response 6.

All in all I think that was a good conference. I know I talked too much. I know I took over towards the end, but what choice did I have at this point? At least he tried this topic again. The fact that it took him so long to come back to it and the fact that he is still clearly upset about this fight prove that he has finally found a topic that means something to him. And I am glad he moved away from straight narrative to some attempt at analysis, even if he doesn't know yet what he thinks about this stuff. I like the fact that he got into this forgive and forget stuff. That is qualitatively better than anything else he has come up with so far. It is about discrimination, questioning, not just describing. But I am afraid I am making it my essay. He seemed not able to recognize his own thesis, his own idea. To him, it was an offhand remark. He offered it almost metaphorically, "You know how people say, 'forgive and forget.' it's kind of like that, except I can forgive him but I can't really forget about it." So I jump on it and ask him about it and still he doesn't quite get it so I keep questioning him and finally I have to almost tell him, "Here is your main point." Could he have reached a different thesis— a better one—without my taking over? I think I made the right decision.

Conference 7.

In this one he has "incorporated" the forgive and forget point by stapling a brief handwritten introduction and conclusion to his previous typed draft. Then he has indicated with arrows and numbers on his typed page that I should refer to that handwritten sections. "In the case of my friendship with my former best friend, the friendship had the quality to forgive but not to forget. Does that change a friendship? In this case it has." To the conclusion, he added: "People always say to forgive and forget is the best thing to retain a friendship. The forgiving part seems to be the easy part. It is the forgetting that's always the hardest. How can I look at him every time and not remember what he did to my car? I'll always remember. I think he knows as well as I do who was in the wrong."

At the end of the conference, Evan commented, "I think I am getting the hang of things now. The conferences help. I get to see what you want, what you think, and the I can make the changes. I am getting to know what you like."

"Is it what I like? Are you happy with the revision?"

"Oh, yeah. Definitely."

Post-Conference Response 7:

I am not happy with the revisions. The fact that they are just tacked on (literally) to the essay is an indication that they have not made an impression on Evan's thinking. But he is happy. He sensed correctly that I liked the forgive and forget idea and now that he has added them he feels batter and he is feeling confident. I feel conflicted. I am glad he is finally feeling good about something in his writing, but he is feeling good about something I wrote. It is as if I lent something valuable to him and he is grateful and proud about it. And at first I feel good, too, that I have made him feel better and that I have helped our relationship. But now there is a problem: I was just lending him something to try out, to see if he wanted to get one of his own, but he has mistaken it for a gift. So now what do I do? Ask for it back? Give him credit for it? What the hell do I do now?

Conference 8.

In Evan's next conference he brings in essentially the same essay, still not effectively integrating his ideas and mine.

His attitude is even more positive. "I am feeling much better about my writing now. I have a lot more ideas about how to organize stuff. I don't just throw it down on paper. At the beginning of the year I really didn't know what you kind of writing you liked."

Post-Conference Response 8.

Now I know I went too far by suggesting that forgive and forget thesis. He never made that point purely his own, but he believes that his writing is better and that has certain advantages. I have tried to encourage him but also to push him to try to write and think on his own. The fact that he still keeps talking about what I want is discouraging and I have contributed to it by telling him too much, by losing confidence in his ability. But again, what was my alternative?

Analysis.

Perhaps the most interesting issue here is the role my tension played first in the conference itself and then in my post-conference comments. Although I admitted in my post-conference response that I "took over" Evan's conference "towards the end," I was not aware (until listening to tapes) that I distorted the conferences in my responses so that I could let myself believe I was not in *complete* control of Evan's essay. In retrospect I understand my motivation: I had seen several drafts and had several conferences with Evan and I was growing increasingly worried that the "writing to learn" model was not well suited to his particular skills and needs, that he needed help that I was not providing, and that without intervention his essay would stagnate and and our relationship would deteriorate. Given these fears, I began to worry that Evan would be unable to flourish within this approach and that I could at least give him some survival skills and some organizational strategies. It was as if I were saying, "Let's forget this meaning and voice stuff. Here is how you write a competent essay."

My perception that Evan was not making progress and that we were both ready to give up dictated my aggressive response. When I listened to the tapes, I found out that the first statement of the forgive and forget idea actually came from me and not from Evan (as I reported in my response). I made myself think that *he* suggested it because that helped me feel less anxious about taking over his essay. For me the key is what I wrote after his second conference: *He needs some success soon or he will give up on himself and (I hate to admit this) I will give up on him*. To keep the process going, I needed to provide a great deal of structure, so much that I no longer viewed the draft as his. Once I felt compelled to offer Evan such direct advice about the thesis and organization of the essay, I was admitting unconsciously that the process had broken down. I was unwilling to let him (or me) continue to struggle and so I tried to cut my losses by giving Evan some sense of accomplishment and confidence in the hope that we would both do better on his next draft. The fact that I did not fully admit this to myself makes sense to me in retrospect: I was trying to control my own tension; I was trying to find a way to help both of us stay with the process.

Beyond Good Conference Teacher/Bad Conference Teacher

I hope that these cases reflect some of the tension of real writing conferences and suggest the need for a decision-making process that goes beyond prescriptive rules to an emphasis on interpersonal relationships. While it is convenient to identify a particular style of conference teaching as either "student based" or "teacher based," such neat categories fail to reflect the messily collaborative nature of conference teaching.

I felt frustrated by the inadequacy of this either-or approach as soon as I started using conferences to teach writing, but I did not know that others felt the same frustration until I participated in a workshop a few years ago on the teacher's role in writing conferences. To demonstrate the different styles and strategies available to teachers, the workshop leaders gave us two packs of handouts. They were each transcripts of writing conferences. In the first ones, the teachers interrupted, badgered, lectured, and trampled over their students, ending conferences by telling the student what to write for the next draft and how to write it. The second groups of teachers asked questions, murmured "mm,mm" and "Yes, I see" at appropriate times, and encouraged enthusiastic students' plans for revision. The leaders then analyzed this good teacher/bad teacher exercise: "We can believe in freedom or authority; we can let our students write their own papers or we can take over their essays and make them our own."

But in the question and answer period, a teacher, looking and sounding exasperated, spoke up. "Of course, I wouldn't treat my students like those first teachers did, but my conferences hardly ever turn out like the second ones either. For me the question is what I can do to help my students learn to write. I have a student who is taking comp for the third time because he keeps failing our college's proficiency exam and he comes to conferences trying to improve and I try to let him lead the way, to let him control our conferences. I keep waiting for him to figure out how to improve his own writing. But it is not happening. And when he is struggling with the organization of one of his essays, I can hardly stand it any longer. It takes all of my energy to keep myself from grabbing his pen and his paper out of his hand, writing down an outline, and yelling, 'Look, it goes _this_ way! I want to know how to deal with _that_."

Now there must be teachers like those ones in the handouts, but I don't feel I have much in common with them. It is the teacher who spoke up who stays with me in writing conferences and in my research. I know what he is feeling. After all, I've been there myself.

CHAPTER IV

COMPETITION IN COMPOSITION:
BEYOND THE RHETORIC OF COMMUNITY

As I began reading Maura's essay, I thought that it was just another "how I won the big high school game" narrative:

> As I walked onto the field, I kept thinking about last week's game. The game against Ewing High. They are a pretty rough team to beat and we had beaten them again. But the team we were playing this time, Hunderton High, is an even larger school and their field hockey team was even better. I looked over at the girls from their team. They were very big and tough looking. The kind of girls you stayed away from. Then I looked at our team. In our whole starting line-up there were only about three girls over the height of 5′ 2″ and over the weight of 110. Sure, this was going to be a fun game.

If you teach Freshman Comp, you're familiar with the genre. Unlike the "how I wrecked the family car" essay in which the narrator's cockiness leads to disaster, the pattern in the sports essay is reversed: through amazing courage and determination a humble narrator triumphs over overwhelming, Rocky-like odds. But there was something different this time. It wasn't the fact that it was written by a female—the day is long gone when all of the jocks were boys—but that her main rival is one of her own teammates:

> As I walked onto that field this time, I wasn't thinking about our opponents. I was thinking about how I had been benched in that last game. Alright I'll admit it: I had deserved it but being benched for a Freshman! Needless to say this was humiliating for a senior, but when the freshman scored, that was the end to a "perfect day." I couldn't let that happen again. NO WAY. I had worked hard at my game for four years, I had won the respect of the coach, and I wasn't going to let an underclassman ruin it, especially not a freshman that I taught to play earlier in the season.

By now it is clear that Maura is telling two different stories here: one is about her team's attempt to defeat their heavily favored opponents and the other is about her own battle to outplay her freshman teammate. Throughout the essay Maura and the reader struggle to keep these two themes separate. The turning point comes early in the second half of the game and essay:

> The next penalty corner I rushed the goalie and Nancy hit the shot. I saw a white blur from the corner of my eye and tried to get my stick on it, but it was going too fast and the goalie was able to block it with her enormous pads before I could get it. But I was somehow able to get the rebound and deflect it in. Yes! I had scored and put us ahead. Rub that in your face, freshman!

Although Maura is overjoyed that her goal put her team ahead, it is her struggle with her teammate that dominates her thoughts and that pushes her to score two more goals:

> The game had turned out great. I did not even mind that the freshman was put in the game at the end, because thank God, she wasn't subbing for me this

> time. So I decided that I would satisfy my ego even more and help the little freshman out. By the end of the game we were ahead 5-1 and I was telling her what to do and what not to do, as if I had some kind of authority over her. When the final whistle blew I was ecstatic. I never felt so alive in my life! Everyone was congratulating me. After talking to a reporter, Coach Edmunds called me over, put her arm around me approvingly and said, "I know why you played so well; it was because you did not want to be showed up by the freshman again, wasn't it? Wasn't it?" I just walked away feeling as if I was up in the sky. I had evened the score with the freshman and myself. Now I could go back to playing the normal field hockey that I had always played.

What struck me about the essay was how much more focused, intense, and competitive Maura seemed as a field hockey player than she did as a writer. Of course, field sports and writing are different sorts of processes, but I kept thinking that there was something for me to learn here—about how much it meant for to her to do well and to outplay the freshman about how her competitive feelings had driven her to terrific accomplishments. I thought about how the coach was keenly aware of Maura's desire to outplay her teammate, about how she may even have used that to motivate her, about how she could not relax and just play the game until she had somehow resolved her fierce competitive feelings about the freshman, and about how she never felt so alive in her life when she succeeded.

Mostly, though, I wondered what part of Maura's experience as an athlete could be transferred to her experience as a writer. Although I had not thought about it much before, I realized that my students often write about intense competition urges and situations—sometimes, like Maura, about competitive successes but often about failures such as wrecking the family car as a result of a dare from a friend or rival. The writers of these essays care intensely about their performance and how that performance is being evaluated by authority figures and by their peers. Suddenly I had all sorts of questions: did they care in the same way about their essays and how others saw them? When students compete as writers, do they choose a particular rival (as Maura had done)? Are their competitive feelings directly related to the way that I treat them? Do males and females respond in identifiably different ways to competition?

Why There is So Little Literature to Review

When I first tried to answer these questions, I realized how little we talk about these issues—in journals articles, conference presentations, or even faculty lounges. My guess is that most composition teachers have decided long ago that competition is antithetical to the writing process and to the teaching of writing. At some point, we designated competition a "Devil term" and collaboration a "God term," without worrying about the fact that people sometimes collaborate to do terrible things or compete to do good. In this era of process and collaboration, the rhetoric most writing teachers use to describe our own classrooms—we talk about creating "co-learners" and a "community of writers"—suggests that students ought to see their interests and goals as shared and cooperative. But on what basis have we decided that collaboration and competition are mutually exclusive terms or that competition is necessarily bad for composition?

What may be most striking about the research on competition in writing classes is how little of it exists. In fact, I have not come across a single referenced study specifically on competition and composition. Because there is extensive research on related issues such as writing apprehension, assessment, collaborative writing, even student "underlife" in the writing classroom, this failure to examine competitive interaction seems particularly odd. And because so many decisions about pedagogy (such as the use of peer review or group brainstorming) are based on the unproven assumption that students in "non-competitive" classrooms are more productive than students in competitive ones, the need for research in this area seems compelling.

In the few instances in which competition is directly discussed by process writing teachers, it is always treated as a negative force, as a factor to be reduced or eliminated. For example, in Writing Without Teachers (1973), Peter Elbow identifies "competitive," along with words like "rigid," "stubborn," and "aggressive," as part of the "doubting game," the process by which we look for errors or faults in someone else's writing. Although Elbow acknowledges that there is some value in this sort of competitive classroom interaction, he argues that we need more often to play the "believing game." That is, we need to teach writing in ways that are more "cooperative," "flexible," and "nonaggressive."

Similarly, in Clearing the Way (1987), Tom Romano acknowledges the creative energy that can result when students read and respond in writing to each other's work. "But I must issue a caution: If the sharing and the pacing among students devolve into vicious competition, then the creative atmosphere can turn stressful, crippling, and counterproductive. The pressure on students to compete with and beat each other will inhibit creativity, will risk making anything too dangerous" (173). Perhaps most interesting, Romano suggests without explanation that there is something unique about composition that precludes the value of competition: "In many content-area disciplines, of course, competition is the norm. And some students are naturally competitive in any situation. I discourage competition as much as possible, try to value the vision and developing language skill of all of my students" (174).

Perhaps the strongest indictment of competition by a process writing teacher is the research of Anna Shannon Elfenbein. In "Competition: The Worm in the Bud in a Collaborative Seminar," (1990), Elfenbein describes a graduate seminar she taught in which several of her students vehemently resisted her efforts to get them to help one another with their writing assignments. Based on her observations of this class, Elfenbein argues that competition leads to "monstrous results," that competition has the "terrible power to cannibalize efforts to promote collaborative learning," and that students who cling to individual "ownership" of essays or ideas destroy the atmosphere of a writing class.

There is, of course, merit to warnings and criticisms about the potentially destructive power of competition in a writing class. We have all watched or worse participated in competitive classroom incidents in which students were pitted directly against each other in destructive and unnecessary ways, in which students were pigeon-holed as eagles, bluebirds, and, well, pigeons. The point is that none of us who make our living as academics needs to be reminded of the tremendous potential for embarrassment, pain, and loss of self-esteem that attends every competitive interaction.

The real question then is not whether there are potentially negative aspects in competitive situations (of course, there are), but rather why competition resonates so negatively for so many of us that we have refused even to acknowledge it, much less to examine it, in our classrooms or in ourselves? My own theory is that competition just does not fit neatly or comfortably into the image we have written for ourselves as process writing teachers. We want to believe that our classrooms are a humane and nurturing alternative to the rest of the university and the rest of American culture; rather than reproduce the competitive model in the larger culture, we want to resist it. All of this makes it particularly difficult to acknowledge that even in our classrooms, even in a context where collaboration and support and nurturing are advocated and practiced, we and our students are still sometimes motivated by competitive urges.

Because competition is threatening to most of us—politically and psychologically—we have established simple and, I think, naive binary oppositions between social construction and individual voice, collaboration and competition. As a result, most theorists who favor collaboration in writing courses ignore competition altogether, instead focusing their criticism on the notion of individual invention and voice. In the research of Kenneth Bruffee, Karen Burke Lefevre, and James Berlin, for example, the model of social construction of knowledge is presented as a clear political, philosophical, and mutually exclusive alternative to the invention of truth by an individual writer. Patricia Bizzell summarizes this split by arguing that all composition research is either "inner-directed" or "outer-directed" (215). Like Bruffee, Lefevre, and Berlin, she argues that we must begin to pay more attention to how social relations shape our students' writing and how knowledge is socially constructed in the composition classroom.

But for this to happen, we need to see competition as one of those social relations and to understand the role it plays in our classrooms. Unfortunately when competition is mentioned at all, it is usually used not to examine our teaching and students but rather to describe what goes on in the socially and politically incorrect classrooms of other disciplines. For example, Susan Miller worries that although she values "student participation in shared creations and validations of knowledge" ("Cross-Curricular Underlife,"28), there are teachers across the curriculum "who do not imagine their courses as settings where students compete against themselves in relation to negotiated standards of achievement." (29). The assumption is that students might find our classrooms to be collaborative and non-competitive but in their other courses they will be forced to face a more individualistic and competitive curriculum. But is there any real evidence that our students feel non-competitive in our classrooms or even that writers perform better in non-competitive environments?

The Nature of Competition in One Process Classroom: A Study

In order to take a step towards understanding the nature of competition in composition, we need to begin by examining our students and ourselves. The problem, of course, is that competitive actions and feelings are difficult to measure or even to identify. Clearly a student who says that she feels a need or desire to write a better essay than her classmates' essays is acting competitively, but it is often difficult to establish boundaries that clearly distinguish competitive from non-competitive urges and behavior. The very same action, say, spending many hours revising an essay, could be competitive or non-competitive depending on the particular writer's motivation. And since most of us are often unaware of—or embarrassed by—competitive urges, it is difficult to rely on student's retrospective accounts. For example, when I told Maura that I was thinking of studying competition in my course, she said, "It's funny that I wrote about that field hockey stuff because I'm not a competitive person."

My own approach was fairly simple and straightforward: I interviewed my students. Do you feel competitive with other students in this course? With anyone in particular? What is happening when you are feeling this way? Does my behavior contribute to your competitive feelings in any way? Do you feel competitive in the same ways in your other classes? For the purpose of this study, I focused only on those moments when a student's actions or emotions—anxiety, ambition, anger, satisfaction—could be identified as a direct result of comparing herself to her peers. In other words, since a student might feel tense, anxious, or ambitious for a number of reasons unrelated to competition, I did not automatically identify all examples of writing apprehension or all evidence of academic ambition as competitive behavior. Also, since the focus of the study is peer competition, I did not include instances in which a student saw herself competing against some abstract standard, against a teacher, or even in some sense against herself. What interested me were those cases in which a student perceived other students as rivals.

Although I was primarily interested in how students interacted with each other around this issue, I felt that some sort of self-study was essential. I order to determine what role I played in this process, I kept a journal in which I identified classroom situations when I was aware of acting either to provoke competitive feelings and motivation in the students (for example, lavishly praising a hardworking student in front of a less diligent student or announcing that I would publish a limited collection of student essays to be used as a text for my next year's class) or to neutralize them (for example, telling students that the primary purpose of writing is discovery and self-knowledge or consciously deciding not to praise a student in public because it might make other students anxious).

Of course, like all self-respecting, process-oriented, non-authoritarian composition teachers, I began this study believing that the atmosphere in my classroom was supportive, even nurturing. After all, I use procedures that are designed, at least in part, to neutralize direct competition between students: I emphasize personal voice, experimentation, and revision; I delay evaluation until the end of the course, usually responding their writing in individual conferences; although I occasionally require students to try to write on a particular topic or in a particular mode, I generally give them the freedom to work on their own topics at their own pace. Much class time is devoted to small-group discussions of drafts in progress and students may choose to do some of their write collaboratively. At the end of the semester each student has to assemble a portfolio which she feels demonstrated the quality, quantity, and range of writing she had produced and she had to identify her three best pieces of writing.

But, at the same time, I also believed—and in this way, too, I was like all self-respecting process teachers—that this “non-competitive” atmosphere made my course unique. In other words, I often reminded myself that my course exists within a college which uses traditional teaching and evaluation techniques, ones that typically emphasize competition: for example, the administration pressures the faculty to resist grade inflation by strongly recommending that classes be evaluated according to a rigid “curve;” there is a reliance in most classes on frequent "objective" quizzes and exams; and the registrar regularly distributes information on G.P.A. and class rank. But that is not the only reason that I congratulated myself on bucking the system. Or, to put it another way, that is not the only system I thought I was bucking: after all, the college exists within a political, economic, and cultural system that generally accepts the notion that individuals must compete for scarce and limited resources.

Results

So what is the nature of competition in a process writing course? In one sense it's fairly straightforward:

> Walt: In every course students want good grades and there are always a limited number of good grades. We all know that. There is no doubt in my mind that you are not going to give 20 A's. There is not doubt in my mind that you are not going to give 10 A's and 10 B's. It's just not going to happen. Almost everyone comes to college thinking he is a B or better, but the professors have to give a certain number of C's. So if you want a good grade—in any course—you have to do better than most of the other students in the class.

This perception—that good grades are a limited resource which are allocated not on need but on relative performance—seems to exist across the curriculum. But that may be where the similarity between competition in process writing courses and competition in more traditional courses courses ends. What I learned is that our efforts to neutralize competition between writing students do not eliminate that competition but rather complicate it. In fact the most intense competition occurs around three of the fundamental methods of most process writing teaching: (1) the development of an individualized curriculum; (2) the use of untraditional or qualitative assessment measures; and, (3) the use of peer workshop methods.

Competition and the Individualized Curriculum.

Every single student I interviewed pointed out immediately one way in which competition in my class was different from competition in their other courses. In a traditional course, they explained, it was relatively easy to tell how the competition worked and who they were competing against.

> Polly: Whenever you have the same assignment as everyone else, it puts more pressure on you because you feel like you're being compared to each other. So if I take an exam in Bio, it almost feels like an IQ test because we are all being graded on the exact same thing. Or when I hand in a paper in Sociology I think, "I hope mine is on the top so she won't be sick of reading about this" or "I hope mine is on the bottom so she sees how it's better than the others." Because we all have to write on the same thing and I want mine to stand out. But in your class the papers are usually totally different from each other. Sometimes it's almost like you're taking a different course.

Of course, this isn't surprising. Perhaps the trademark of any process writing course is the tremendous degree of freedom and responsibility it gives its students to develop their own materials and methods (see, for example, William Clark's "How to Completely Individualize a Writing Program").

The idea is to treat each student writer as unique, as an individual. Therefore, students are free to choose their own topics, even to write in a particular genre or mode of discourse. In my course, this sense of choice and individuation is particularly intense because I almost never read a batch of essays at once, preferring instead to respond to each essay when the student brings it in to a one-to-one conference. The illusion, then, is that each student is competing only against herself, that is, against her own standards, or perhaps against what the student takes to be her teacher's standards. Or put another way: since each student is in some sense constructing her own curriculum, she does not need to worry excessively about how her work compares with her classmates.'

But while almost every student noted this relative lack of standardization, their response to it varied widely. Although a number of students commented that they resented the competition in courses with standardized assignments, many complained at the same time that they suffered from the lack of comparison in my class:

> Nick: In a writing course it is very hard to know where you stand. You have different topics and sometimes even different time allotments. That makes it hard. I think the more you can see what you're up against, what other people are doing, the more you try to improve yourself. It is hard to try to compare yourself with yourself. So you have to find people doing something sort of like you're doing and compare yourself with them.

A number of students tied their degion in a course directly to the degree of conif these students could not identify a clear irison or a clear competitor, many found that thlly suffered:

> Polly: In one way you writeology because you're not free to iat you want to write about. But I thinkrite better because you know everyone it the same thing so you want to make ys it can be. But if you're writing ationship with your father, yours is hat he'll read, so you probably won't as hard.

Other students pointed out to surse they need to choose a designated rival, aa marathoner might choose to run on thestablished runner. But in a process writing couough to do:

> Walt: Take biology, this sechem. Like with my lab partner. She's terson in class and so I gauge my perst hers. She got a 98 on the midtermThat's the person that I'm in competitil be doing a lab together and she'll pibrs, I'll pick out her errors, and we've the rest of the class that you just he knows that I'm...there, just behinow that she's still doing better thap trying to catch up and that really. Now I think everyone in your class scope out the so-called brain, the sma to know what you want and also how t own performance against the braiur class scoping out who is the brainossible.

To some extent, these students seemed surprised when they suddenly realized that the course was competitive after all, almost as if they had been lulled by the individualized curriculum into thinking that they would not be compared with their classmates. Walt said that he did not think about being in direct competition with his peers until the due date for the portfolio approached. Maura said she became aware that they were all being compared whenever a student volunteered to read a draft of an essay to the whole class ("When Paul read his the other day and I heard the way it was written, especially the vocabulary, I thought, 'Oh, oh, I'm in trouble"). Polly, on the other hand, felt competitive whenever she heard other students' topics. If a classmate was writing on the same topic that she had chosen, she panicked because she "felt like the other person would probably have a better grip on it," but if a classmate was working on a different topic, she panicked even more. ("I mean I'm writing about problems with my roommate; Walt is writing about de-fusing a bomb that could have blown up a whole air force base. Which one is going to get a better grade?")

While these students seemed surprised by these competitive moments, they were not resentful. In fact, most suggested that they needed less competition and moments of comparison than they found in traditional courses but more than they found in my class:

> Maura: It's good that we are not being compared in here all the time. Then people just say, "Forget it. I don't even want to deal with it." That's how I get in Humanities and also in Psychology. You get this feeling that you're being judged and watched and sometimes you can't take it. You get sick of being compared every second. So I sometimes just blow it off. I think, "I just don't care at all anymore." But in here? I would say there should be more situations where people have to compare themselves with the rest of the class, to try to do better. It helps you focus.

But how much comparison is too much? Or, perhaps, put in another way: at what point in the process does comparison inhibit the writer and at what point does it motivate her?

> Nick: I think competition is very bad at the beginning of the writing process because it cuts off my creativity, especially during brainstorming. If I get competitive at the beginning I get worried about what I should write for you rather than what I should write for myself, so I try not to think about what other people are doing. But as it gets towards the end, I think it's really good if you're pushing yourself to be the best. It keeps me editing and getting on with the work.

In the end, though, I realized is that it is not just the curriculum which is highly individualized; it is also the students, each of whom brings a different set of goals and strategies to competitive situations:

> Maura: It guess it would help if I could compare myself with someone in this class. But I don't think I really need to. The reason I am trying so hard, writing so many drafts, is because I have to do better than my brother. He's at another college and is just one year ahead of me. We both have always done well in school and we always put our grades up on the refrigerator. Well, he got a 3.7. GPA. I think I did pretty well for the first semester, a

> 3.3 here is really good. But there is absolutely no way that I am going to have the lower grades on the refrigerator next time. So I just keep writing.

Competition and Untraditional Assessment Measures.

Most process teachers try to de-emphasize grades—by not grading rough drafts, by taking the entire writing process into account during evaluation, by giving students some role in choosing what work should be graded, and by telling students that a writing course is as much about process as product. But we should not kid ourselves: although we talk about de-centering authority and we work at de-mystifying grades, our students are competing in a larger culture which emphasizes—even depends on—hierarchal evaluation. What is different in a process writing course, however, is the extent to which the students' desire for a good grade makes them feel dependent on gaining the teacher's approval. Because our assessment methods seem more qualitative than those used in most other courses and because students are often dealing with highly personal topics, some students view grades and the teacher's approval in a process writing course as identical:

> Polly: I think students worry all the time what a teacher thinks, about a teacher's approval, but it's really because we want the grade. It's like a dog race around here to get grades in most classes. In most courses, no one cares about the learning, just getting the higher grade. So trying to get on a teacher's good side is really important. But it's especially important in a writing class. In a Bio or

> Pscyh course you answer the questions on the exam; they are right or wrong and you get that grade. What the teacher thinks about you isn't as important. But as far as writing a paper, how the teacher approaches it and how you write it are going to determine your grade, and that is less objective. Honestly, if you think the teacher hates you, it is really hard to write.

No matter how much we want to claim that our evaluation of their essays is somehow objective or unbiased, most students seem to understand and accept our subjectivity as a given. And so it becomes extremely important to them that we approve of what they are doing or, perhaps more to the point, that we approve of what they are doing at least as much as we approve of their classmates' efforts. That's why so many students spend a great deal of time and energy comparing their own relationship with the teacher with the relationship that the teacher has with their classmates:

> Polly: I admit that I feel really competitive with people in the class, especially Ben. And I'm not the only one. I've talked with Maura about this because we live on the same floor. I also think that the guys in the class feel the exact same way. It is almost as if he has an edge in the class because he's older and so he can relate to you better. It's like everything he writes, we all think we could never write as well because we don't have all that experience so we could never talk about the same things in our essays or in class with you.

Polly not only resents Ben's cocky attitude ("I felt this from the first day, from the first time I heard him talk, from the times when he would argue with the guys in the class,"); she also resents the relationship that she perceives he has with me ("I almost had the feeling that he thinks that no one in the class has the intelligence to keep up with you, like we'd have nothing to say to you if we bumped into you at the coffee shop or post office"). Polly, like most of the others I interviewed, seemed to be keeping close tabs on the student-teacher relationships in each of her classes, particularly the ones with essays to be graded. To a certain extent students seem to blame teachers for creating these competitive feelings, for making students feel dependent on our approval.

> Rachel: Like when you told Tina that she did a really great job on that in-class assignment where you asked us to write about the same experience in three different ways. Some people might say, "Good, I can go see Tina. She knows what's going on in here." Or some people might say, "Tina—what a jerk!" Someone in the class will go read Tina's paper and say, "Now finally I get it." But the others would say, "Forget it. I won't even try. I can never be like her and he obviously really likes her. I can never be like her, so why bother?"

As much as my students might resent a teacher for having pets or for playing one student off against each other, they resent even more strongly classmates who compete unfairly for a teacher's approval. Clearly this competition is governed by peer values and unwritten rules. To violate these rules—to compete too aggressively or obsequiously—for a teacher's approval is to risk alienating classmates, is to risk being labeled a "brownnoser" or "kiss-up." Or to put it another way: while students are competing for teacher approval, they are also competing for peer respect and these two competitive endeavors are often in conflict. For example, Polly felt that Ben, a non-traditional student, was being "completely unfair" in his attempt to win my good favor by constantly bringing up things he shared with me—by virtue of his age and experience—that the others could not possibly share. As she pointed out, she wasn't the only one who felt that way: it was reasonable, she said, for students to compete for my approval and attention, but "they shouldn't be doing it at the other students' expense."

What else was seen as unfair competition? Some students complained about classmates who sought and received what they considered too much extra help with essays:

> Rachel: We all want to do well and to be on good terms with the teacher but there is almost a group consensus in a way as to what is fair and what isn't. Like a student going to talk to a professor ten times about a paper or talking to ten different professors about a paper. That's unfair. That person has stepped out and gone over and above the assignment. It would be different at a school like Cornell where the competition is to do as well as you can but here the competition is to get by with the least effort possible. I bet at Cornell if you heard that someone went to 12 teachers it would be really "up there," respected, and you would think, 'Then I'm going to 13.' But here we all snicker and think that the person who does it is horrible.

By definition, competition is directly related to scarcity, to the effort to win a limited resource. But I pointed out to Rachel that I had never told students that there was a limit to how many times they could see me for help with a particular essay.

> Rachel: Yeah, but the thing that's unfair about running to ten different teachers or to the same teacher ten times is that if every single person did that, then no one could do it because it's not as if the professors have time to see every paper 12 times. Professors don't have unlimited time to meet with students.

Many students seem to have a fairly clear idea of what is fair and unfair. If a classmate violates the code, he or she might be criticized, even ostracized. Many students were critical of classmates who tried too aggressively to please a teacher by hoarding class time:

> Rachel: I've been in classes where we are being graded on class discussion and two or three people just take over the class and then what do you do? You're not going to interrupt. Those students weren't very popular, I'll tell you that. And those are probably the same people who go to ten professors, who just push themselves up to the top. In a lot of cases it isn't quality of participation that counts with a teacher and it's too bad because there are always people who have good things to say who can't get a word in edgewise. I blame the teacher for not controlling the class in a fair way but also I blame the students who are doing that.

Many of these students put themselves in a nearly impossible competitive situation. Since they want their teacher to be a fair and sympathetic evaluator of their essays, they need to compete for his or her attention and approval; but if they compete too aggressively, they feel embarrassed in front of their peers. (More on that in the next chapter.) And so these students spend much of their time in the writing class consciously holding back and, at the same time, glancing over their shoulders to make sure that everyone else is holding back, too.

Of course, some students, just like some universities, are less ambivalently competitive than others. Walt, a non-traditional student, told me that he was less influenced by peer pressure than the traditional undergraduates:

> I find myself in more competition in some ways and in less in other ways because I've come back to school after a number of years rather than coming straight to a composition class as a 18-year old high school kid. I know some of the other students might think I'm a brownnoser or something but to tell you the truth, I don't care. Freshmen don't really know what it's like outside, so they're just going along trying to get by, trying to fit in. But I've worked real jobs, I was in the Air Force for three years and I was a Saab mechanic for four more—so I know what it's like out there and I want to do a lot more than just get by.

Of course, none of these issues are unique to process courses or even to composition. Students must always negotiate the perilous border between the teacher's approval, peer respect, and sense of self. But process courses seem to bring these issues to the front in a particularly intense way:

> Rachel: The whole thing is really complicated in a writing course. And when you are competing with your friends there is emotion involved. It's much more complicated. You don't want to jeopardize the

> friendship, so you don't want to do worse of better than they do. It just seems like there a lot of really subtle rules about competition and it's hard to figure them out. I think the rules really depend on the class, though. If you're in a big class and you don't know anyone and it is all based on test grades, not on what the teacher thinks, then you just do the best you can do. I think I do best when there is no direct competition, stuff with your friends. Then I can try my hardest without worrying about other people's feelings.

So while these issues do exist in all courses, we raise the stakes, first, by asking students to write about what they really feel and think and, second, by using assessment measures that are not "objective," measures that make students believe that our approval is a significant, perhaps crucial, part of evaluation. Given those factors, it's not surprising that competition in composition makes students examine their own basic values:

> Rachel: The people I feel competitive with in your class are the students that I was talking about who go to ten different professors. They're the ones who break the competition rules in my opinion. Are they such good students because they get so much extra help? Or do they go find extra help because they are good students? I'm sure that most people think they get good grades in writing because they do that sort of thing and they are not the most popular people. But whenever you see something like this in the movies, you see ten years later and they're the ones who end up to be the presidents of the companies and the rest of us who spent our time trying to be friends end up pumping gas. They always win by doing that, but still people don't want to do it.

Competition and the Peer Workshop.

At the center of most process classes is some form of peer response or workshop. The idea is to neutralize the teacher's authority as critic and evaluator, to give students some sense of a wider audience, and to create a small community of writers. Once again we would be tempted to assume that peer response groups reduce the usual competitive relationships in classes by linking students in cooperative activities. But since process courses provide students with relatively few chances to compare themselves with their classmates besides peer workshops, these interactions can become a highly charged source of competition. In fact, many of my students pointed out that just reading or listening to another student's essay often triggered strong competitive feelings:

> Maura: For me the first time I personally felt competitive towards the other students was probably when we had to read our first papers out loud. I felt like my paper had to up to par with the other students. I think in a way this helped my paper. I didn't want to sound like a total idiot in front of everyone, so I took time, revised my paper, and finally came up with something that I could be proud of. So it actually helped.

But it is not just reading their own writing in workshop that creates feelings of competition; it is also listening and reading essays by other students. Almost every student I interviewed acknowledged a degree of anxiety and envy when they heard or read an outstanding essay by a classmate. But it it significant, I think,that most of these students found these competitive moments helped rather than hindered their own writing by giving them incentive, ideas, even strategies, for their own essays.

The corollary, of course, is that many students feel a certain relief, even satisfaction, when they came across a relatively weak peer essay:

> Polly: I guess I feel relieved in a way when I read a bad essay [by one of my classmates]. But I'd only hope the other papers would be bad if I'm having a really hard time myself. Especially when the other people are my friends. If I hear a paper that is awful, then I feel bad for the student. But if someone reads a really good one, and you knew that yours was going to be read by that same teacher, it adds a lot of pressure. I wouldn't hope that people I knew would fail, ever. But if I don't like the people very much, then I do feel differently and hope they would do poorly so it would help me.

Given the commitment that most process teachers have to creating a supportive community of writers, this may seem disheartening news. But most students see a certain logic and justification to their response:

> Walt: I do feel better to hear papers that aren't so great. I feel that way with some people more than others. You've been stressing that we have a lot of responsibility and freedom in the course...well, a lot of people don't always show up for class on a regular basis or work very hard on their drafts for workshop. So I don't feel bad if they write a bad essay; in fact I feel good. If they don't want to put in the time or effort or they don't even remember to bring in drafts when we are reading each others paper, then they deserve to do poorly.

Of course, the real issue here is not so much how a student feels in a peer response group when listening to a weak essay but rather how she acts in this situation. A number of students admitted that they feel terribly conflicted in these situations:

> Polly: I’m not sure if I would want to help someone. It depends. This sounds horrible, I know. But I’m not sure; it depends if it was a friend. And I don’t know if it is even my place to tell them. I think every case is different. I don't know.

Others, however, do know how they behave when they were working in a group with a weak writer: they hold back in their comments. In fact, most have given the matter enough thought to tell me the extent to which they hold back:

> Nick: I'm probably selfish but I wouldn't want to bring someone up to a A. Maybe a B but definitely not up to an A—if I thought I might be able to get an A. I don't know if it's selfish or if it's just that I think people should do their own work. But I wouldn't help too much.

> Walt: If I noticed a problem with someone's essay, I'd probably tell them what I thought they ought to change to make it better. But the real question is: would a student ever give another student enough help to bring it up to his speed? I don't think I'd do that. You might say to the person, "You're going about it wrong and here's a way to go about it." But to go farther than that in the process, no, I wouldn't do that. The student would then be judged and graded, based on what you thought, not what he thought. You help a little bit and you never try to mess up someone's essay, but more often than not you don't want to help them too much because you don't want to bring someone else's paper up to your pace.

> Polly: I am sort of moody so it depends on how I feel I did. If I feel like I have done a really good job on my paper, then reading someone else's paper won't bother me. In fact I'll try to help them. But if I feel insecure about the job I did then reading someone else's will just get me nervous. And I won't help them. I mean if their's is better I'll probably be looking for them to help me with mine.

I have often heard colleagues say that peer reviewers hold back because they lack confidence or because they don't want to hurt their classmates' feelings—and that certainly happens—but I now realize than many hold back to protect their own interests. Before you judge any them too harshly, listen to the question Walt posed for me:

> I would not want to give other students anything they couldn't do on their own. If you help someone more than they could help themselves, then it's like plagiarism. You're giving them their ideas, your ideas and you're imposing yourself on their paper and their grade. You also don't want to help then more than you can help yourself either. I know how that sounds but, I mean, think about it. Let's say you were writing a grant and someone else was too, trying for the exact same grant. Sure, you might help him, but would you help him so much that it might end up better than yours?

Implications

So what does all of this mean for composition teachers? First, it means that we need to move beyond the simplistic notion that collaborative or process classrooms are not competitive. These are not either/or choices: people often compete in cooperative situations and cooperate in competitive ones. Just because we say that we are engaged in "collaborative learning" does not mean that our students are always behaving collaboratively. In fact, these preliminary results suggest an ironic possibility about process classrooms: because process teachers rely on untraditional assessment measures, because they ask students to write on subjects in which they have an great personal investment, and, most of all, because they drive competition underground, students may actually be most competitive in process writing classes.

The point is that process classrooms exist within competitive environments, are taken by competitive students, and, believe it or not, are often taught by competitive teachers. All of which means that we need to move beyond a second simplistic notion: that competition is always a negative force for writers. The students I interviewed had all sorts of reasons for supporting competition in a writing course—"It helps me focus." "It makes me try harder." "It gives me something to shoot for." At the same time, they all felt that at certain moments competitive feelings and behavior hurt their writing and made them want to give up in frustration or even fear. So while it seems wrong to encourage or allow cut-throat competition in our classes, it also seems a mistake to try to eliminate what seems to be healthy or productive competition. My hypothesis—and I will admit that this is based as much on my own experience and on conversations with colleagues as it is on my discussions with students—is that writers work best when they can establish a productive level of competition; by productive, I mean not so high that writers give up in frustration but not so low that they ignore it as an incentive.

Third, we need to ask what role do we play in establishing or modulating this level? A significant one, I think. Again and again students pointed out to me ways in which I was contributing to their competitive struggles. Some of these ways were systematic—I individualized the curriculum, eschewed "objective" testing, and required peer workshops—but others were quirky and seemingly random: I called on Lisa to read more times than I called on Denise; I let Ken schedule so many individual conferences, I laughed harder at Emily's satiric piece about the uselessness of physics than I did at Ray's modest proposal for solving the problem of homelessness, and who knows what else? Clearly we can't eliminate competition, but we can pay more attention to how our actions and inactions might affect our students and then adjust in ways that are productive for them as writers and as people.

Fourth, and this is an issue that is lurking behind this entire study, we need to ask in what ways gender shapes competition. The assumption of many people on composition studies is that competition is primarily negative and primarily male. (See, for example, Charles Schuster's or

Susan Miller's comments on this in The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary). Since I am limited by my own male perspective and since I have looked at such a small sample size, I obviously can't make any conclusive statements about gender and competition in Composition. Still, for what it is worth, let me offer one speculative conclusion: while it is true that the females I interviewed seemed more uncomfortable, more ambivalent, about their competitive feelings than the males seemed about theirs, the intensity and frequency of those feelings were just as strong.

And, here, I think process teachers and feminist theorists share a common perspective and concern: just as most process teachers are tempted to deny or reject competition out of hand, most academic feminists seek to replace the hegemonic dependency on competition with a more supportive and equitable system, a "sisterhood" or a "web." Fortunately, however, that desire has not kept some feminist writers from discussing and facing fundamental problems in this area: are women naturally less competitive than men? Do women compete differently against men than they do against other women? How can women deal with the fact that our society and educational system is basically competitive?

While most feminists do posit alternate models to the competitive, hierarchal educational system (see, for example, Women's Ways of Knowing, Belenky et al., 1987), others point out at the same time that whether women would behave competitively if men did not exist or if resources were not scarce are mute questions. As Evelyn Keller and Helene Moglen argue, academic women are competitive because our classrooms exist within a society in which there are limited resources and hierarchal structures. Of course, this is true for everyone in the academy, but competition creates special problems for feminists—and for process writing teachers—because it runs counter to images these groups have of themselves and their mission. Valerie Miner, a feminist novelist, raises the crucial questions about these issues:

> Why do I sometimes feel a twinge when another women succeeds? Why do I occasionally become livid? Shouldn't I feel gratified when any of my sisters does well? Isn't feminism antithetical to competition? (183)

While Miner is clearly bothered by cut-throat competition, she argues that for several reasons women need to acknowledge the inevitable and even positive aspects of competition: the division of scarce resources always depends to some extent on competition; competitive urges sometimes lead to creative breakthroughs; and "cooperative competition...can provoke us to go deeper emotionally, to play more boldly with forms" (193).

Miner's point—that the issue is not whether we _feel_ competitive urges but rather what we _do_ with those urges—is crucial because it moves beyond the simplistic identification of competition as inherently negative. This move may be as difficult for process writing teachers as it has been for feminists—and for many of the same reasons: we, too, like to believe that we are providing an alternative to hegemonic politics, values, and discourse. By emphasizing process, collaboration, and social construction, we, too, like to think that we have successfully moved beyond rigid guidelines and hierarchies. But we have come to this position without paying any attention to how competition actually functions in process classrooms. And it is here that Miner's work as a feminist provides direction for those of us who teach writing:

> The first step toward understanding is to acknowledge the existence of competition in our family lives and in our public spheres. It is painful to admit the deep rivalries we have had with sisters and mothers, just as it is embarrassing to point to our competition with other women in workplaces, neighborhoods, and political groups. If we could stop feeling defensive and fearful long enough to consider how we compete not only for money but also for attention and affection and righteousness, we might be better able to eliminate the negative elements of competitiveness from our lives (1-2).

Finally, if there are directions for future research here, I hope that they will include studying ourselves as well as our students. In other words, if we really want to understand how competition functions in our classrooms, we need to de-mystify it—for them and for ourselves. And that means that we have to look at our own competitive urges. That is never easy, so let me try to get the ball rolling: a few summers ago, I took a course at the University of New Hampshire called "Writing for Teachers." Don Murray, one of the founders of the writing process movement, was the teacher and he went out of his way to make us comfortable. He told us the first day, "We will learn together. This will be fun." And this: "As far as I'm concerned, you all have A's in this course and you'd have to do a lot to convince me otherwise." Most of the teachers in the course were not even taking it for graduate credit and so the grade should not have mattered a lot.

But although Murray did all the right things to make us feel comfortable, I wasn't comfortable. I was intense; anxious, obsessed not only with the writing but also with everyone else's writing, with Murray's responses to my writing and with his responses to my classmates' writing. The other day, I went back and read my journal during that period. In one entry I am complaining about my fellow students who were having an easier time writing than I was:

> July 7: I'm having a hard time figuring out what to go next with my story. I keep trying to plot it out, to figure out what should happen, but the people in my small group keep telling me to relax, to do what they are doing—letting the story develop itself. Now I was suspicious enough when I read all those quotes by Fitzgerald and Faulkner like 'I don't know where my characters are taking me. I follow them around with a notebook and jot down what they are saying,' but I am doubly suspicious when people in this class claim that that is what their process is like, who say."I can't wait to get back to my desk to find out what my characters are doing now." Come on. Maybe it's I'm jealous, but I just don't believe all this stuff. Writing is hard work, deliberate

> work. This all seems to me like the Emperor's New Clothes.

In another entry I am admitting that I am jealous of the attention and approval Murray was giving my classmates:

> August 5: I believe in this process approach. I believe in peer response groups. And I believe that in some ways we have become a community of writers this summer, but I'm starting to go nuts during the workshop time in class: I often wait for my turn like a three-year old (what about me? I've talked enough about my story. What do you think of my story?). And that's not all: when Don tells Gail that her writing on the sawmill is just right, like a first draft, but beautifully written, and he tells Sharon that he can't wait to see her next draft and and tells Esther how well her revision works and tells Rich that his story ought to be published and tells Tom that he has one of the strongest voices he has ever read, all I can think about is, "What does he think about my story? Is my story good?"

So what was going on? First, I think it's clear that I wanted desperately for Don Murray to like me and to like my writing. That part makes sense: I had first become attracted to process teaching through Murray's A Writer Teaches Writing and had several times used Write to Learn as a textbook. But the surprising and embarrassing part is that I wanted Murray to like me and my writing as much or more than he liked my classmates and their work.

Now if you are one of those people who really don't feel competitive in this way, I envy you. I'll even admit that I'm competitive with you about that. And it may be that the reasons for my own intense competitive feelings are hidden in places where only my therapist can help me get. But after listening to student after student talk about competition, my suspicion is that I what I was feeling that summer was not all that different from what most of them feel in process writing courses. This does not mean that we should let competition run wild in our classes or that we should give up on collaboration, peer workshops, or untraditional assessment. But if we want to understand and establish productive writing relationships, maybe it is time to give up something: talking about these issues in such idealistic and, even worse, moralistic language that we fail to recognize our students or ourselves.

CHAPTER V

PEER MODELING IN THE COMPOSITION CLASS: THE POWER OF IDENTIFICATION AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF POWER

Stan was struggling in my class. Or at least I was struggling with him. He wrote his first essay on reverse discrimination focusing on "the unfair advantages that blacks receive when they apply to college," "the drain on society caused by all the blacks on welfare," and the fact that "we would never even be considering a national holiday for someone like Martin Luther King if he had not been black." I wasn't sure if the essay was as poorly written and organized as it seemed, or if I just was focusing on the problems because the ideas were repugnant to me. In conference, I pushed him to challenge his own assumptions; I suggested that his tone might turn off some readers; I asked him if he thought he needed some research. He passively resisted everything I tried: clearly these were ideas that he had thought about and talked about before. He was confident about his evidence ("Martin Luther King had affairs, plagiarized his law school papers, and told blacks to break the law. Why should we honor someone like that?") and he was suspicious of my political stance ("So you don't agree with any of this, do you?"). Finally, out of frustration, I said, "Maybe I'm being overly critical. Why don't you read this one in class today and see what other people think?"

As soon as I said this, I knew the risk. In the best-case scenario, the other students would raise the ethical, political, and rhetorical questions about Stan's arguments that I wanted to them to raise. And, of course, it would be much more effective if his discriminatory positions were exposed and challenged by his own peers rather than by me. But I've taught long enough to know that what I hope students will say, what I want them to say, is not necessarily what gets said. In some classes this has been a real problem for me; I once taught an advanced composition course in which the small-group and whole class peer review sessions not only failed to support my suggestions; they aggressively contradicted them. 'What if you tried so and so?' I would cautiously suggest to a student. 'I wouldn't change a thing,' someone else would counter, "It would ruin the whole effect you're trying for. Your piece is perfect the way it is.' I'd look around the room at the nodding faces and mumble a conciliatory statement that belied the anger I felt.

And, in fact, the day that Stan read his essay turned out to be a difficult one for me. I said nothing at first, hoping for the resistance, the cultural critique, to emerge. Although several students disagreed with his assessment of King and a few raised questions about specific aspects of his argument, they were not aggressive or confident in their criticism. In fact, most of the students in my all-white, almost all middle-class, class either supported Stan's argument or stayed quiet. I suspected that many must have disagreed with some of Stan's arguments, but were intimidated by his aggressive positions and affect. "You said it's good to take a strong position in an essay, didn't you?" he said to me during the discussion, "Isn't that what I'm doing in this essay?"

Still I held back, waiting and hoping that one of his classmates would tell him that strong positions were one thing and that racism was another, that the fact that we would not be honoring King if we were not black was actually the point, and that his welfare-bashing played on dangerous stereotypes. But all along I knew that it unfair to put them directly on the spot by asking them to say what I wanted said. So, since no one had offered a strong counter-statement and since I worried that my own silence might be interpreted as agreement or indifference, I finally launched an impromptu, free-form, much too long and angry, lecture about racism, bigotry, and middle class indifference in America.

Actually the idea that a productive peer critique or dialectic should or will develop in writing workshops is based on all sorts of questionable assumptions—that a true diversity of opinion, knowledge, and perspective exists in our classes; that students are willing to challenge each other's political opinions and to critique each other's rhetorical ability; that, in short, students have the ability to teach other through direct debate and instruction. Now, of course, these assumptions sometimes turn out to be true: there are certain topics and classes that prove that students can teach other to write and think better. And I have occasionally had lively political debates in my classes.

But these lively debates are rarely focused on the writing of one of their classmates; and the problem of students not challenging each other, of not saying what we hope they will say about another student's paper, is not limited to political or controversial topics. In fact, in many ways the problem of passivity and detachment is even more common with rhetorical questions. The simple fact is that peer editors often do not suggest what we think is needed. This may be because they do not want to violate an unwritten pact that makes them allies united against us as the common enemy or—as Tom Newkirk has suggested in his study of peer response groups ("Direction")—it may be because students have different values, tastes, and criteria for assessment than we do.

Still, as we all know from watching adolescents in general and our own students in particular, they influence and teach other in all sorts of ways and situations. The real question that concerns me here is not whether students can and do teach other, but rather what they teach and how they teach it.

Identification

It is truism of psychotherapy to say that people learn new things in three fundamental ways—through direct instruction or suggestion, through identification or modeling, and through insight or realization. It seems to me that the same thing is true of writing instruction; it also seems to me that most of us pay a lot of attention to direct teaching, that is, to suggesting specific strategies, heuristics, or editorial changes to a student writer, and to insight, that is, to moments when a student suddenly "gets it" and realizes on her own how two ideas or images or facts are related. But we have not carefully studied what happens in between: the power of modeling or identification.

Or perhaps I should say that we haven't carefully studied these terms in the way I am using them here. Of course, modeling and identification are both familiar terms and age-old research topics for Rhetoricians. Quintilian and others urged the use of imitation to teach writing and Composition specialists have long hoped that students can gain a certain fluency and rhetorical sophistication by being exposed to essays such as Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" or E. B. White's "Once More to the Lake." And it could be argued that "identification"—as the term is used by writers such as Kenneth Burke and Chaim Perelman—is the key to the New Rhetoric.

But since my focus in this study is on interpersonal, classroom relationships, I am less interested here in the rhetorical implications of these terms than I am in their social and psychological dimensions. In other words, I am less interested in this chapter in how a student may imitate a particular rhetorical convention or learn to persuade an audience than I am in how this student will come to see herself as a writer in the first place. Robert Brooke, in his study "Modeling a Writer's Identity," explains this use of "identification":

> When a student (or any writer) successfully learns something about writing by imitation, it is by imitating another _person_, and not a text or a process. Writers learn to write by imitating other writers, by trying to act like writers they respect. The forms, the processes, the texts are in themselves less important as models to be imitated than the personalities or identities, of the writers who produce them (Modeling 23).

Brooke, relying heavily on the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman and the psychologist Erik Erikson, goes on to show how students accept or resist the particular model of a writer that their teacher provides for them. A student's behavior around this issue of modeling, he argues, is part of a larger process of "identity negotiations":

> What's at stake, it seems, is a part of their 'identity'—we would like them to think of themselves as writers rather than as students. We would hope they see purposes for writing beyond the single purpose of getting us to give them good grades. We would like them to take the initiative to communicate with readers, to use writing to help better their world, to use writing to help them understand their world. Instead, we worry that they may see themselves only as game-players, as individuals forced to play the student role and who consequently distance themselves from that role as anyone working in an organization does. As writing teachers, we want them to own their writing, rather than attributing it only to the classroom—rather than claiming it's only a game we play in class ("Underlife" 150).

This goal—getting students to see themselves as real writers writing for real audiences—is a the root of most process classrooms; but how can we accomplish this? The first step—and it is one that was offered in early process manifestos like Donald Graves' Writing: Teachers & Children at Work and Donald Murray's A Writer Teaches Writing—is amazingly simple and surprisingly effective: treat students like writers and they will act like writers. A second step—and it is at the center of Robert Brooke's work—is to recognize that we as teacher must provide a positive model of a practicing reader and writer for our students to observe and emulate.

Still our behavior and advice is only part of the process; a student may resist seeing herself as a writer and modeling our approach to writing because of values and goals that she brings to the class or because of pressure she feels from her classmates. From our point of view this identification is often problematic because many students identify with peer products and processes that we see as negative or counter-productive; I am not referring here to ineffective composing strategies or incorrect rules of usage, but rather to counter-productive attitudes about us as teachers or about writing in general.

With the exception of Brooke's study on "underlife" in the writing class, however, there is very little information about the informal and sometimes subversive (at least from our point of view) ways that students teach one another in writing courses. When we try to assess learning, our tendency is to focus on the teacher-student relationship or on the aspects of the student-student relationship that we have set up ourselves. In other words, if we consider peer relationships at all, we look at official or formal peer response groups rather than at informal peer interactions. But if we stop and think about our classrooms, we know that we what we have set up, what we hope for, is never all that is really going on.

In fact, in a different study, Brooke and co-author Robert Hendricks point out that the identities that "we ask students to take on" may be very different from the identities that they want to project in front of their peers.

> Stereotypically, compliance with the teacher's demands results in being assigned a 'good student' role by the teacher, a 'smart person' role by those student who also comply, and a 'teacher's pet' or 'nerd' or 'earhole' role by those students who

> resist compliance. At the same time, other aspects of a student's behavior—for example, a male student's ability to make occasional wisecracks that other students can hear but the teacher cannot-will help assign the individual a role in peer interaction (for example, a 'bad ass' role by other males or perhaps a 'cute guy' role from some females). Any classroom is filled with such diverse and competing ways of assigning roles to individuals, and any individual thus negotiates her own position within the classroom by acting in ways that show the stances she takes toward each of these roles (Audience 31-32).

According to Brooke, the conflict between the organizational role we ask a student to play in a writing class and the resistant or "underlife" role he or she actually chooses helps to establish that student's identity ("Underlife"). Or to put it another way: a student's identity as a writer is shaped by the extent to which she complies with and/or reacts against the institutional expectations established by the teacher for the class. In process classrooms this interaction is especially complicated because, as Brooke points out, many writing teachers often encourage, even demand, some sort of resistance from their students. For example, by asking students to accept the notion that the classroom is a supportive, non-competitive community, we are asking them to resist ideas and models that are dominant in the rest of the university, in fact in the rest of the culture. Or we may tell them that to do well in the course they must write original and provocative essays, essays that defy conventional rules and expectations. But this process becomes particularly difficult because many students feel that by giving us what we want—a critique of the university or the dominant culture—they are actually acquiescing rather than resisting.

Once again, then, I am struck by the overwhelming complexity that a student in a process classroom faces. Should she identify with the model of writer provided by her teacher? Or the very different one provided by her peers? Brooke points out that many students choose to resist the identity and stance of the writer we as teachers model for them. But his explanation has more to do with "how their past identity influenced their interpretation and negotiation" ("Modeling 30) than with how their current peers may be influencing them now. What I found was that while I was telling a student that writing is a deeply personal and exhilarating journey, that I wanted them to become obsessed with their topics, that I valued commitment and process as much as achievement and product, their classmates were telling her that it was just not too cool to try too hard or to care too much.

In fact, in an odd twist, the competition not to be—or at least not to appear—competitive may be fiercer and more difficult than the competition to win a good grade or the teacher's approval:

> Rachel: The competition to not try is huge actually. I think it's not cool to try too hard. There is also competition to see who can do the least amount of work and still get by like "I only spent two hours on my essay." "So what? I only spent one hour." And

> also who can do your work, your essays, at the very last minute. That is a very big deal. The person who puts it off the most and sleeps the least wins. The reason you didn't sleep is not that you work so hard; it's the opposite. The reason you didn't sleep is that the assignment didn't even touch you all these weeks so now you had to do it in just one night.

One of the things that students learn from each other is how not to try, how not to think of themselves as writers. From what I gathered in my interviews on competition, peer pressure is such a powerful force that it is almost always present in a student's mind. At the same time it is often difficult to read, particularly because many students say one thing and do another.

> Polly: As strange as it seems to complain about students who always come in for extra help, I kind of feel that way myself. It's unfair because we should be able to do our work without running to the teacher every day. But for me if I heard someone else in our class was doing it, it might make me come see you that much, too. Because if I heard that someone in our class came to see you ten times then I would think, "I better get moving. Maybe I should write another draft. I better have him look at my essay again." It's not like I would want to but if others were getting ahead then it's more like I'd feel like I had to. But I would be embarrassed. I would hate that, you know, if people thought I was trying to get ahead by having someone else to do my work for me.

Students are aware of performing for two audiences—teachers and peers—whose values are sometimes not only different but contradictory. A few students found it relatively easy to resolve this conflict. For example, Nick told me that writing had never been his best course, that he did not expect to be one of the top students, and that if "other people want to kiss up to a teacher, that's their problem." But most sounded more like Rachel:

> As a student you feel envious of a student who is close to the teacher and who wants the teacher to know how hard she is trying but you usually look on that person in a negative way. The kind of person who is always talking up in class, trying to give the teacher the answers he wants, telling the teacher how hard he is working. You want the teacher to like you and to know you are trying but you also want to set yourself apart from those people because they look so bad to everyone.

My point here is that identification plays a huge role in a writing class but it is a complicated one. Students may be asked implicitly to identify with the role of writer as it described and modeled by their classroom teacher or they may feel pressured (or eager) to identify with the very different role of writer as it defined by their peers. My sense is that a combination of these different models influences the stance and performance of most of our students. The question I want to address now is: how can we get students to identify with what we take to be positive models of the student as writer? And, by extension, how can we get students to teach each other what we want them to learn?

Again part of the answer—as I've tried to point out in the first three chapters—is to revise our relationship to them, but we need also to help them revise their relationships to each other. Vygotsky's often-quoted argument about the zone of proximal development (often quoted partially because it is one of the few things he wrote that most of understand and partially because it makes so much sense) applies here. The key to teaching and learning, he argues, is not to discover what a student can accomplish alone but to discover what she can accomplish with the assistance of a more talented peer. But for this positive student-student interaction to occur, we need to establish conditions that foster it. Part of our job, then, is to set up our classroom and course in such a way that students identify with their more capable peers.

Although this is a chapter on peer relationships, I feel compelled (once again) to point out the crucial role the teacher plays in these interactions. I am not suggesting that all peer relationships are or should be controlled or influenced by the classroom teacher. In fact, many interpersonal relationships are forged simply on the basis of a mutual resistance to the teacher's authority. In other words, like siblings, students in a class have a common enemy and thus shared experience and interests. But if we want to develop strong, positive, and, most of all, productive peer relationships, it is necessary to monitor peer interactions and to try to help students to build coalitions, to help each student connect with other students who can offer advice or a positive example.

Student-Authored Textbooks

I suspect that there are a few ways to succeed at this, but I know that there are a great number of ways to fail at it. One of the sure-fire ways to fail is to ask students to read E. B. White or Tom Wolfe or Virginia Woolf and then tell them, "Write something like this." Another doomed approach is to tell students, "Work in small groups," and then to sit back and wait for learning and teaching to take off (much more on that in the next chapter). In the rest of this chapter I want to focus primarily on one method—the publication of student writing—that offers more chance for success by helping students to identify each other and themselves as writer.

There are, of course, a number of techniques that help students to see their classmates as writers; for example, I often ask students to read aloud a particularly strong draft to the entire class, not so much to give them suggestions for revision but more to give them recognition for their accomplishment. Also, whenever a student essay reminds me of a published writer's essay with a similar theme, topic, rhetorical approach, I photocopy and distribute both and then try to point out those similarities. But by the most success I have had has been using student-authored essays as a textbook in the next year's class.

The theoretical arguments that have fueled the literature/composition split——and the resulting hierarchy which places student writing at the very bottom——have been effectively exposed and deconstructed by Janet Emig and Robert Scholes, among others. And, at this point, one of the trademarks of most process classrooms is the emphasis on and respect for student writing. This respect is manifested in large part through the use of student writing as the primary or, in some rare cases, the only text in the course. The hope is that if student essays are photocopied and distributed, students will come to see their own and their classmates work as significant; they will, in short, come to see themselves as writers.

But while using writing from the class as basis for discussion is enormously useful, it alone is not enough to make students see themselves or their peers as writers. One problem is that this technique, like freewriting, journal writing, and many other process methods, has become so familiar in writing courses that some students fail to see the distribution of their own work as especially significant. Second, as I learned in my research on competition, students are often too threatened by their classmates (who they see as their immediate rivals) to relax and learn very much from them. In an interview on competition, Rachel told me that when I distributed an essay from the class as an example, it created a certain amount of tension and resentment:

> But I think it is a big difference if the teacher brings in the paper as an example for everyone and shows it and explains how it can help than if he just says, "Tina wrote the best paper. What's wrong with the rest of you?" I think then you just feel angry and you want to give up.

A better alternative, I think, is to publish essays from the course and then to use them as the primary text in the next semester's class. This sort of classroom publishing goes further and carries more cultural and psychological currency than a simple exchange of papers in a workshop; the student is writing for a less immediate and thus less de-mystified audience, which ironically inspires students to try harder. There is, I think, a significant difference to write for the student sitting at the next desk than to write for the student who will sit there next year. In order to increase this sense of significance and purpose, I encourage students to write essays that provide insight and guidance that they think future students might need. I also print the essays in an attractive format and sell it at the college bookstore with other required texts.

But beyond what trying to get published does for the writer, reading this text is the best way I know to make students see their peers and then themselves as writers. In other words, it is the site of the most positive peer identifications. I have long suspected this but I decided to test it recently in an informal survey of two classes of my students. As the final question on their final exam I asked them simply, "What essay that you read in this course taught you the most about writing. You may pick an essay from the professional or student section of the Bedford Reader, or an essay from the Student Voices (the collection of essays from last semester's students), or an essay that was written by someone in this class."

Of the forty students who responded, 30 chose an essay from Student Voices; five chose a professional Bedford essay; four chose an essay from a current classmate; and one chose a student Bedford writer. Why? Again I think this has more to do with pressure of classroom dynamics and the nuances of interpersonal relationships than with rhetorical features of the writing involved. Perhaps the professional and even the Bedford students seemed too distant and too accomplished to really teach them what they felt they needed to learn. Perhaps their classmates seemed too close, too much like them, while the students in the previous semester's collection—the students who sat in their classroom just one semester before, the student who survived and even flourished in the difficult circumstances they now faced—seemed to represent the more accomplished peer that Vygotsky identified.

So what did they learn from these more accomplished peers? What, in other words, did they choose to identify with? Since some of the students in the reader wrote about how to write successfully in my course, many learned new strategies and heuristics. For example:

> Ann: The essay that I read that taught me the most was probably "Constructive Procrastination" from Student Voices. I think it was interesting and well written. I'm not saying that it taught me to procrastinate. It taught me about the thinking process one must go through before actually writing a paper. That time period is important for me, just like it is for Kevin. I do not totally agree with Kevin about why you should wait until the last day to finally type it up or put your final thoughts on paper. However, I think he was exaggerating a little for effect and humor. But he is right that most good ideas take time to develop. His point about the thought process was great and I never really thought about it before. So, hopefully, I can start thinking like he does---as soon as I get an assignment and not wait to start thinking till the end.

Other students, such as Kim, came right and said that the best essay she read was the one that by the writer whose experience as a writer most mirrored her own:

> The essay that taught me the most was "A Long Hard Journey" by Jack Zesko for a couple of reasons. First, I always have a hard time figuring out what I want to say on a paper or actually how I wanted to say it. Sometimes I would ponder over things and other times it would just come to me. The reason why I liked and learned a lot through this essay was because I realized that I wasn't alone, that a lot of people have hard times too and still come out with a great paper.Second, I have always wanted to be creative and mechanical in my writing at the same time, but I never knew how. Jack's essay was very informative because it is exactly the type I have been trying to write all year.

Other students seemed to learn new information about various aspects of the composing process—such as point of view and organization—through their admiration for and identification with the authors of these essays:

> Anna: "To MD or Not to MD," that one about the mother who came back to school as a pre-med student, taught me a lot about writing. I not only enjoyed the essay but it showed me a whole new way of writing. Throughout the essay the author was struggling over the idea of going to school while she had children at home. There was a sense of confusion in the author that was brought into the piece in an instructive and controlled way. The piece itself was not confusing at all but as a reader I was able to sense and feel the confusion in the author's household and in her mind. This made me feel like I was part of the piece. The author showed this by going through her hectic day how confusing her life was. As she went through her hectic schedule and the thoughts in her head, I could also just feel the confusion. This is a great way to write! It brings the reader inside the essay which helps in the understanding of the paper. It makes the reader more understanding of the confusion the author feels if they feel like they are experiencing and not just hearing about the confusion. That's what I was trying to do in the essay about the car wreck but I don't think it worked as well as this one.

> Wanda: The essay I read that taught me the most about writing was "My Addiction" by Nicki Giankaris in the Student Voices. It taught me that you actually can write a successful piece about a personal experience using compare and contrast. After high school I thought I'd never want to read or write another compare and contrast in my life. The author of "My Addiction" compared being in love with an addiction to drugs. I knew a lot of people in high school who had relationships like that but I never thought of it that way. I think that the author presented the story very well by explaining how it was like she was addicted to her boyfriend even though he humiliated her, stood her up, and cheated on her. No matter what he did it was hard for her to let him go. She could not help her addiction to love, just as her boyfriend could not quit his addiction to cocaine. I especially liked the ending. It was an original way to end the piece. She said that she has been straight for six months

> now. By this she means that she realized that her boyfriend was not worth it and that she is no longer going out with him. I wish I wrote that essay.

Sometimes students claimed they learned lessons—even something as simple or as obvious that it is alright to use "I" or in an essay—that I had tried (unsuccessfully) to teach on my own. But somehow coming from a peer the lesson made sense. Louise's comment is typical of this:

> Louise: The essay I like best in the whole course was Marisa Kathanis' "Goodbye" In it I learned what I could do with a strong opinion. I never knew you could put your own personal opinions in an essay. Marisa not only expressed her opinion, she showed it. She spoke very articulately, she backed up what she stated, and there was logic and order expressed in her paper. After reading this short essay, it made me think and I believe if a reader reads a work and the reader ponders upon any question relating directly to the work, the writer has done a great job. I felt inspired after reading "Goodbye." It made me think about an opinion I strongly had too and it made me want to write about my experience.

Because students identified so closely with the authors of these essays, many commented that they could for the first time see their own mistakes in their writing of these peer authors. In other words, they learned what not to do in an essay, as these next two comments indicate:

> Allison: I found myself responding to Julie Cioici's piece "The Girls in the Mall." I think this piece taught me the most about writing: how to lose an audience and effectiveness of a paper. I thought that Senna's piece was filled with bitter generalizations, hypocritical statements, and overall irrational accusations. Throughout the essay, Cioici assumes that all girls who "hang out"

> in the mall are degenerates--kids who have nothing better to do than to act "prostitute-like." She continues her piece calling the girls nasty names. She then says she will try to understand and be sympathetic, but then says more harsh things about the girls. I didn't think that this was good writing at all. I have always thought that it was good to have as as strong a tone as possible to get your reader's attention but she showed me how to turn a reader off by using such a bitter tone. Reading this taught me that although a writer most wants to attract a reader's attention--possibly by making him angry or defensive--a piece that is filled with a bitter tone, false accusations, and overgeneralizations will only detract from the writing.I know I've made these mistakes in the past but after reading this essay I really tried not to make them in my papers in this course.

> Michelle: I would choose "Goodbye: Leaving the Church" by Marisa Kathanis. Marisa's paper deals with some harsh feelings. She brings her feelings into the text, which is fine, but these feelings go against the validity of her point. I also learned about how important timing is in a paper. Sometimes when you write a paper too soon after an incident your feelings are still high and you can miss some major objective points that could be helpful to your paper. I think that is what happened on the paper I wrote about the homeless center.

I think, in part, it was this same ability to identify with—and then distance oneself from—a classmate's essay that helped Stan revise his essay on reverse discrimination. Although he never backed away from his central point, he did acknowledge after our discussion of other student essays in which the author took an aggressive stance that maybe his tone, too, was going to "turn off some readers."

But what really struck me was Stan's final essay. He had been struggling for weeks with an project on teenage alcoholism. He had done a fair amount of research but his essay, by his own acknowledgment, was "a complete mess." It was a catalogue of facts and statistics with no clear focus or purpose. Then one day he came to class volunteering to read his latest revision:

> You met your best friend one day back in high school. You had seen him before hanging around with other kids and you never were really interested in meeting him yourself, never mind becoming best friends with him. You just didn't think that you'd get along that well.
>
> Your parents did not like him from the beginning and even tell you that you are now allowed to hang around with him. Your "old" friends tell you that your new best friend will only bring trouble and stop hanging around with him before it's too late. But you don't listen to these people. You listen instead to your football buddies who tell you that your best friend is cool and that they're friends with him also. You realize that this your chance to get into the "cool crowd".
>
> You are naturally a little shy but when you're with your best friend, you get more relaxed, even loud and obnoxious. You think that you are having a great time with this new friend. He always thinks up great tricks to play on other people and parties to go to.
>
> The only problem is that whenever you are around him you get into trouble. You start getting headaches when you're with him and sometimes sick to your stomach. And since you've been friends, your grades start to go down...

As I listened I was fairly sure that I knew what had happened. One of the strongest essays in the Reader was a piece by a student on her anorexia. Here is how that essay started:

> You don't want to think that you're fat, you just do. Actually, you'd love it if you could accept yourself for who you are. You stop eating, no one notices until you start to lose a lot of weight. Everyday you go to lunch and eat crackers

and drink skim milk. Your friends ask you, "Is that all you are going to eat?" You answer them with the obvious lie, "I'm not very hungry today." Even though your stomach has a huge knot in it, and you're so hungry that you feel nauseous. You know that you haven't eaten since lunch the day before, but no one else knows this. This whole process seems so simple to you. All you'll eat for lunch everyday is crackers, and you won't eat any other meals.

After school, you go to track practice, weak and tired. Anticipating a tough day, your eyes fill with tears, and it takes all the courage you have to keep from crying. Your coach tells you to run six miles but you don't even feel capable of running one simple little mile. You struggle through your run, trying your best to keep up with your friends. This whole time you realize that you should have eaten more for lunch, then this run wouldn't be all that bad, but you have to lose weight and that's most important. You strain yourself day after day, feeling proud if you've avoided food completely. Your nights are simple, you take a bath and then lock yourself in your bedroom, so you won't be tempted to eat anything. When your parents ask you why you aren't eating dinner, you answer them with another lie, "I had a big lunch." The next day you go through the same routine, struggling and lying just to make it through the day.

As the weeks go by, you become more and more proud of yourself. Your clothes become larger and larger, and you never admit to yourself that you're the one getting smaller. In your eyes, rather in your mind, you are still fat. All your friends and family continually question you about your eating habits. You always give them the same answer, "I'd eat if I was hungry." All these people think you are trying to starve yourself, but you don't care what they think. When your friends say you look anorexic or sick, you just think they are jealous of you. You think they want to look like you, but that they can't stop eating, like you did. You never realize how sick you are or how much these people worry about you.

Then your body starts to talk to you. You pass out in class, if you're lucky enough to make it to school. Your seat being empty in a classroom isn't that uncommon. You are constantly sick, but you are never willing to make the connection between your health and your eating. Your fainting spells become more and more common too, like when you blacked out in computer class and fell on the

> computers, and then had to be rushed to the hospital...

I did not want to put Stan on the spot by asking him how directly he had borrowed from Denise's essay but his answer was on his final exam:

> I can't really say that there was one specific essay that I read this semester that taught me the most about writing. But I can say that the thing that made the biggest impression on me as a writer was reading that collection of essays you published by students who took the course last year. There were a lot of pieces in that book that I modeled my writing after, like Kevin Kacin's essay on how procrastinating can actually help someone's writing and Marisa Kathanis' essay about why she thought her priest was a hypocrite. But Linda Denny's essay "You Don't Want to Think You're Fat, You Just Do," the one about anorexia, was the first piece that inspired me and it actually inspired my last essay. I had been thinking about teenage alcoholism all semester, but I didn't know how to write a paper on that. Then I read Linda's Denny's piece and ideas just started coming to me. I wanted my piece to be as strong as hers was. Also, her piece gave me the idea of using "You" instead of "I" or "he." I like the way she started the piece; she drew the reader in by using "you." It made it seem like the paper was about each reader instead of just being about her own experience. I figured if she could make me feel what it feels like to be anorexic, then I could to that in my piece about alcoholism. But don't get the wrong idea; I did not plagiarize anything! Her essay just gave me that little push that I sometimes need, but don't always get.

CHAPTER VI

COLLABORATIVE COMPOSING:
THE CASE FOR CO-AUTHORED, DIALOGIC, NON-LINEAR TEXTS

I remember the day it hit me. There I was during peer editing time, frozen in my chair, uninterested in joining any of the small groups scattered around the classroom, and I was thinking, "What am I doing? Why am I sitting here watching my students waste time?" I looked around: one group was sitting in total silence, each one staring off into space; in another group, all three members were very deliberately gathering up their coats and books and staring up at the clock in preparation for a dash out the door when the class officially ended; and three other students were hunched over an essay, waiting for the slowest reader to catch up with the others who had already finished the page. But then some hope: I saw a group of students in the corner talking animatedly, gesturing, all three leaning in to listen. I moved a few steps closer, hoping to catch these peer reviewers hard at exciting work, "...he had been trying to scoop her all night, all semester really, but they were both so blitzed, I don't think she even recognized him..." "NO. You're kidding! I thought he was still with Susan..."

Since there were still five minutes left, I decided to make one last effort. I dropped into a seat in the group who were still are staring at the final page of an essay: "How's it going?" I asked, trying to sound curious but casual. "Not so great," one of them answered. "We're trying to help Jim figure out how to revise his paper. He said that you told him in his conference that it needed something, but we can't think of anything to add that wouldn't ruin the point he is trying to make." I felt them all glaring at me. I looked up at the clock, waiting for it move.

How had it come to this? Why was this part of my class such a flop? Didn't these students know anything about the power of peer review? Didn't they know that when I divided them into groups of three, when I invited them to collaborate, to socially construct knowledge, to brainstorm together, when I told them that we would learn from each other in this class, that I expected them to do it? Hadn't they read Ken Bruffee? Didn't they know about the Feschrift honoring Ann Berthoff? Didn't they want to become a community of writers?

Of course, blaming students for unproductive writing relationships is always an easy place to start, but never a good place to stop. Still I was baffled and frustrated. After all, with the exception of a few thoughtful critiques (eg; George; Gere; Newkirk "Direction"), almost everything I have ever read and heard about group work has been glowingly positive. But too often my own experience with small group work has been like the time I bought a gas grill from a store that was going out of business; it looked and worked great when I saw it on display in a store, but when I got it home, I found out that the whole thing came unassembled in a large flat box with bags and bags of tiny bolts, nuts, and screws.

Now I know that I am overstating this: not all of my peer review sessions have been failures and there are many teachers who have found ways to make small-group work effective in their writing classes. There is even a great deal of research which explains how and why writing groups work (Bruffee; Brooke; and Gere). Still it seems to me that over the past few years we have come dangerously close to reifying almost any classroom activity that requires students to work together in small groups—group brainstorming, peer editing, peer review—simply because most teachers in the process camp have agreed that collaboration, unlike competition, is an inherently good thing.

While I am convinced that collaborative writing makes sense politically and pedagogically, I am not convinced that we have paid enough attention to how or why it works. Then again maybe I am just defensive because when I first confessed my problems and failures with small-group work to strong advocates of peer editing, they insisted that the problem was not with the method but with me:

> "You can't just ask students to work in small groups. You have to show them how to work together."
>
> "You can't use group work every once in a while. It takes weeks and weeks for students to learn to trust each other. You need to stick with it for a whole semester."
>
> "You have constantly to monitor every group in the room to make sure that they are on-task. You have to work harder in the peer workshop classroom than in the traditional one."
>
> "Don't allow any negative comments. Negative comments can cripple a whole group."

Now all of this made sense, but it all seemed so labor-intensive and so rigidly scripted that I began to have real doubts: if I had to work so hard at making my students feel like a real group, maybe they were not a real group; if I had to spend so much time telling them how to collaborate in the way that I wanted them to, wouldn't that defeat at least part of the purpose of peer group work, that is, of making them less dependent on me? And, if what my students told me about competition is true, then perhaps peer editing forces students into awkward, even hypocritical, positions. In short, I worried if peer editing places students in unproductive relationships with me as the teacher and with one another as writers.

But I want to be clear here: I am certainly not suggesting that we return to traditional methods of composition instruction which isolated students and teachers, which ignored the potential power of collaboration in the classroom, and which lead to small-group work in the first place. Nor am I suggesting that we return to a mindset that equates collaboration with plagiarism and cheating. (In my early days of teaching whenever I came across students who I suspected of having worked together on their essays, I would question them separately under hot lights until I extracted a confession: "Yes, I'll admit it. We're guilty; we did help each other, but we didn't mean to.")

So in that moment when I asked myself, "What am I doing here?" How did it come to this?" on some level I already knew the answer: I had turned to peer review and collaborative projects after realizing the frustrating and debilitating isolation that my students felt in my classes.In fact, like most teachers in the process camp, I have long accepted and even parroted the theoretical arguments of the social constructivists—Bruffee, Berthoff, LeFevre, and others—that the image of the writer struggling alone for inspiration and meaning is unrealistic and inhibiting; that students can learn new strategies, heuristics, and information from their peers; and that almost all "real world" writing is in some way collaborative.

But after scores of journal articles, hundreds of conference presentations, and thousands of writing workshops classes, "collaborative writing" has come to mean many different things to people in our field. Unfortunately, given the "god term" status that collaboration currently enjoys in our field, we have done very little to separate the chaff from the wheat (or, as teachers often worry when they assign collaborative projects, the waif from the cheat). In other words, by lumping together under the heading "collaborative writing" every classroom technique that in an any way requires or allows group work, we have confused each other and ourselves.

As a matter of fact, rather than argue for a step back to pre-collaborative days, what I am arguing in this chapter is that most of what we call "collaborative writing" does not go far enough. Group brainstorming and peer editing do relatively little to challenge and break down the traditional relationships between students. In most writing workshops, the finished text still belongs only to one writer and, in most cases, the evaluation that counts still belongs only to the teacher. As a result, many students still feel detached and disconnected from their peers' texts.

In some ways it was my own detachment that led me to doubt the effectiveness of frequent small group work. And, in all probability, it was my own frustration that made these doubts self-fulfilling. But whether my negative attitude about peer editing was an effect or a cause of the problem ceased to matter very much. The fact is the method did not work well in my class.It got to the point that every time I asked students to work in small groups I would suddenly remember the old joke, the one where the traditional principal stops into a process classroom and sees students working in groups and the teacher just sitting there watching and says, "I was going to observe your class; I'll come back when you're really teaching." I had always smiled when someone told me that, pretending that the joke was on the principal, but suddenly it didn't seem that funny. I did not feel like I was teaching or that my students were learning all that much.

Collaborative Composing: Beyond Peer Review

If we want to create new kinds of relationships in the writing class we need to do more than tack on some student-student discussion before or after the composing occurs. In some ways, the half-hearted collaboration created by peer review seems to me the worst of both worlds——lacking the energy and honesty of intense and direct peer competition but also the intimacy and exhilaration of intense and total peer collaboration. What we often have instead of competition and collaboration is a weird no-man's and -woman's land where students feign collaboration. It is a land that looks right—from a distance. Students are huddled together in small groups, talking about each other's groups. But to what extent are these students productively collaborating? As I argued in the chapter on competition, students in these sessions often hold back, consciously and unconsciously, in their advice to their peers. To what extent is it fair or reasonable to ask students to help each other when they still feel as if they are competing against each other in some sense? And I have began to wonder if students are best served by a peer editing task that often takes their attention away from the intellectual and rhetorical problems they are working on in their own writing.

If we really want to disrupt expectations and typical peer relationships, we need to go well beyond peer review; we need to move to actual co-authorship, that is, to asking students to share responsibility for a text from topic selection through final edit. The point here is that all co-authored compositions require some peer review, but not all peer review leads to co-authoring; co-authoring goes beyond peer review or peer editing, in which students read and respond to one another's writing, by requiring a group of students to write an essay together, from prewriting through final revision. By asking the students to share equal responsibility for a final product and to create an essay which requires consensus on a number of different issues, a co-authored assignment fundamentally challenges and changes the usual student-student relationship; in seeking to resolve shared problems, group members must consider more carefully alternative ideas and approaches and must learn to articulate more clearly their own presuppositions, goals, and strategies.

The main objection I hear from some of my colleagues outside the process movement to the idea of co-authoring goes something like, "Since writing is meant to be a solitary process, students should write alone." But while there is certainly value and reward in independent thinking and in developing an individual writing style, it is not true that we can gain those skills only by working alone. In fact, it is often in co-authoring that students first realize that they have their own distinctive way of thinking and writing; in fact, many of my students point to that--"the realization," as one student wrote,"that there could be two or three or even twenty different ways to write a sentence or a paragraph"--as the greatest benefit of the co-authoring. Certainly the experience of observing and practicing a different writing process has value for most students.

Of course, not all students make immediate, dramatic, or even conscious decisions to change their own writing process because of these observations, but some students pick up a specific technique--outlining, freewriting, organizing by comparison and contrast, for example--only after another student shows them a way to make it work with their own writing. Others, as a direct result of negotiating in a co-authored project, finally come to understand the concept of audience, that written words have a purpose and an effect, and that writing exists outside of the student-teacher, one-to-one relationship. This is not teaching that contradicts what I have told these same students (often more than once); the difference is that peer co-authors can sometimes teach the same thing more effectively.

Also, although I am proposing co-authoring primarily as an alternative to peer review, co-authoring can lead to an increase in the quantity and quality of peer editing that goes on in the class. Many students have trouble honestly criticizing another student's writing and many students have trouble being honestly criticized. But the whole dynamic changes changes in a co-authored project. If a class is asked to respond to an essay written by three students, they do not worry so much about hurting anyone's feelings and no single writer feels devastated or bitter. In fact, these discussions often lead to a sort of friendly rivalry between groups (the sort of productive hybrid of competition and collaboration that I suggested was possible in the previous chapter) and, more importantly, a shared support among co-authors. In subsequent peer editing projects many students feel freer to speak honestly and to listen openly; having been through an aggressive oral defense in the less threatening environment of the co-authored text, some students are now ready to engage in the same type of discussion one-on-one.

Finally, as a result of the close interaction with peers, students in co-authoring projects usually feel better about the writing process. A common complaint of freshmen composition students is, "I just sit in my dorm room, staring at the paper, trying to come up with a topic." As I argued in Chapter IV, a certain amount of tension or frustration is inherent and even useful in the writing process, but at the point at which a student loses confidence and dreads every assignment, it becomes counter-productive. Co-authoring projects allow students to work together and to support one another; they do not give them the false sense that writing is easy, but rather that they are not alone in finding it hard. But perhaps even more important, co-authoring allows, even forces, students to develop interpersonal relationships with their peers that extend beyond the walls of the classroom and the hours of the class meetings.

Co-authoring in One Freshman Composition Class

I wanted to find out what happens to the student-student relationship during co-authoring and so (with the assistance of a generous grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) I studied the attitudes towards and the results of students who wrote two co-authored, non-linear texts. Let me explain what this means: students worked together from topic selection through final edit in groups of three. The essays were entered, shaped, revised, negotiated on a local area computer network over a period of several weeks. And, finally, all three co-authors and I had access to a word processing feature that allowed us to comment between the lines of the evolving text. These comments (which could be questions, annotations, minority reports, messages, suggestions, complaints, but were usually comments about the process of writing) could be visible or invisible on any particular reading, giving the reader the choice of reading the evolving text from start to finish or of reading deconstructively, that is, of following the non-linear, digressive trialogue that appears in the gaps.

Now I know that I have suddenly introduced several new variables that may upset those looking for hard evidence about co-authoring. But if we want to see how co-authorship alters traditional classroom relationships, this kind of structure makes sense for several reasons. First, co-authoring, soft-copied text (text created on the computer screen), and non-linear reading are naturally related because they all challenge the notion of a fixed single-authored text and a unilateral teacher-student dialogue. Second, if we want to change writing relationships, we have got to do something very different---not just say "why don't you students talk in groups about your writing?" I wanted students and myself to notice and feel the difference, to be surprised, to be thrown off balance a little, to see writing as a new thing with new possibilities. So in order to establish new relationships between students and texts, between students and myself, and, most of all, between teachers and their peers, I needed to change a lot of things at once.

Third, the decision to use embedded, non-linear dialogue was not a fad or glitzy add-on; it was an attempt to respond to some of the problems created by co-authoring. As Greg Meyers and Donald Stewart, among others, have argued, consensus sometimes leaves little room for dissensus, not to mention, individuality. In other words, in collaborative projects there is often little room for personal voice, style, and initiative (qualities that I stress in all other writing assignments). So I wanted to develop a project that answered the problems of co-authoring, a project in which students could write against their own text, that is, against their own group's text as it was being written. This embedded text in which students could annotate, digress, argue, complain, ask for help gave students access to individual voice and gave me as the teacher access to the contribution of each student.

Finally, in order to implement such a complicated process, I needed to ask students to work on a local area computer network. I suppose it would be possible for students to create non-linear co-authored essays without a computer, but it would require a phenomenal amount and waste of paper, paste, and patience. In my class, co-authors could talk on-line or leave me and each other text to read later in the day or later in the semester. I read and responded to the essays on-line every week or so.

The Results: Writing Between the Lines

In many ways the negotiated, linear text of these essays did not look much different from most other student essays I've read, though there was generally a narrower range in quality than in a typical batch of individual essays. I did not receive a co-authored that was as weak as the poorest individually composed essay. Every sloppy idea and creatively spelled word had to get by two interested critics and, as a result, there were fewer basic errors in mechanics or logic. And, because there were always two skeptics for each general assertion, there was much more evidence and support. At the same time, though, the co-authored essays were not as good as the very best individual essays. What was missing, I think, was the distinctive voice and style that stand out in first-rate essays.

Still I was less concerned about the quality of the finished co-authored essay than I was about the quality of the conversation and editing that produced it. My primary goal for the co-authored assignments was to get students to talk and think seriously about writing and writers' decisions and to challenge the typical student-student relationship. In some cases the hidden text—the writing between the lines—

turned into extended digressions which were more interesting and thoughtful than the "primary" text. For example, these students are writing an essay examining the obligation that Saint Anselm College, a Catholic institution, has to its non-Catholic students:

> The next line is one of the most important in the college handbook: "It is the purpose of Saint Anselm to offer its students access to an education process which will encourage them to lead lives that are both creative and generous." Though it may not be directly stated, the non-Catholic could interpret this to mean that only those who pursue an education that is liberal in the Benedictine Catholic tradition will lead a life that is creative and generous. That is insulting to students of another faith.
>
> > **Angie: But do you guys think that this is what they are trying to say?**
> >
> > Stu: I do not really think that this is what they are trying to say, but if someone who is not familiar with what it means to be a Benedictine reads this statement, it is sure to raise some questions. The college most likely didn't mean to give the opinion that only their education is a worthy one.
> >
> > Jeremy: Stu, It is a good point you raise about it being insulting if you interpreted the quote from a certain standpoint. I think that what the quote may be saying is that it is to attempt to provide this type of education- although it is possible that a non-Catholic "could" interpret this quote that way. The problem with that interpretation is that the key word is "encourage".
> >
> > **Angie: Jeremy, I never thought I'd be saying this but you, as well as the others, are trying to tear the sentence apart like it was a short story. I'm sure umpteen other colleges have the same exact line. You have to consider an author's intention, not just the exact words.**

Another group wrote a researched essay about the lack of adequate facilities at the school for handicapped students. After three drafts, they decided that their dispassionate, third-person tone was not working, that their readers "just wouldn't feel the frustration and pain that a student in a wheelchair would feel if he couldn't get into some of the buildings at the school" So with three days left until the due date and with a finished (though unsatisfying) essay in hand, they agreed to start over with a first-person account of the school grounds from the perspective of a fictional character, a student in a wheelchair.

Although this may have been overly ambitious—in fact, these three writers were unable to sustain a consistent tone and style throughout the narrative—it was a decision that showed a sophisticated awareness of audience, point of view, and the revision process; given the tremendous amount of time and effort this revision required, it also showed an impressive commitment to the project and to each other.

This attitude was fairly common among the students who used non-linear co-authoring: a reluctant pride in the process and product. I think that a large part of the project's success was due to the hidden text option which allowed individual group members a chance to express ideas, emotions, and concerns that for one reason or another do not fit into the co-authored essay. For example, in the following co-authored paragraph on the Joyce Carol Oates story, "Where

Are You Going, Where Have You Been?," one of the students used the hidden text to describe an extremely personal response:

> At this point the reader can feel trauma building as Connie no longer only dreams of boys, but thinks about this one particular man she met the previous evening. Of course, Connie wanted to sexually attract this man. She did and he arrived at her house ready for her.
>
>> **Sharon: It is at this point that I feel the most for Connie. The time when you think everything is great and you've got it all under control. The shock that will hit her has hit me many times. As I read this piece of the story my stomach began to quiver and in my mind I was shouting at her "Get out of there now!!!!!!!"**
>
> Their whole encounter is sexual, and the author wants it to be that way. It is a sexual experience for Connie, making her realize that sex is not all physical, and not everything is as it appears. Arnold Friend learns that he can manipulate this fifteen year-old girl. When he comes to Connie's house, he thinks that he can, but when he leaves, he knows it.

Clearly, Sharon's statements are written in a very different voice than is the co-authored text to which she also contributed. That difference became the focus of productive discussions within the group not only about the purpose, tone, and point of view of both the co-authored essay and the Oates story, but also about the experiences, assumptions, and interpretive strategies each reader brings to a text.

There is, I think, a different dynamic and character in most of the hidden text exchanges than we usually hear in peer review sessions. There is a seriousness of thought and purpose about the project but at the same time the exchanges have a relaxed, casual tone (as this embedded conversation indicates):

> **Guys- I read another article about how Marx wrote The Communist Manifesto and I added some stuff to the end.. See if you like it. Feel free to trash anything or to put in some more stuff if you think it needs it.---Liz**
>
> *Mike and Liz, we need more input on why studying politics is important. What do you think of the stuff so far? It's very rough. Try to elaborate on anything you feel needs to be stretched. --Jean*
>
> This seems really good so far. I'll go through it again and try to add some more.-- Mike
>
> **Mike, we like what you changed, but don't you think that grammatically it needs work? Do you like the parts that Liz and I put in about the nature of politics in relation to Marx and a liberal arts education? --Liz and Jean**
>
> Liz and Jean: I like it a lot. Thanks. I'll make sure to use the spell check and try to fix any little mistakes before we hand it in. --Mike

I do not mean to suggest, though, that every interaction was as supportive and as gracious as these examples might indicate. There were a number of conflicts and breakdowns within certain groups. But often than those conflicts were played out in the hidden text in a way that demonstrated a mutual understanding and comfort in the relationship. This group is negotiating a text about the role of science in a liberal arts curriculum:

> Beth: HI GUYS . I WAS ALWAYS TOLD THAT SCIENCE INCREASED YOUR CURIOUSITY OF THE WORLD AROUND YOU. IT IS SUPPOSED TO INCREASE YOUR POWER OF INVESTIGATION. I THINK THE REASON THAT SCIENCE IS

TAUGHT AT A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE BECAUSE I THINK IT IS NECESSARY TO HAVE AT LEAST A GENERAL IDEA ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY AND HOW IT WORKS. I THINK IT IS NECESSARY BECAUSE WE ARE ALL HUMAN AND EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US IS COMPOSED OF THE SAME BASIC UNIT. I THINK IT IS INTERESTING TO KNOW THAT ALL CREATURES, AT LEAST MAMMALS ALL RUN BASICALLY THE SAME WAY AND HAVE SIMILAR BODY SYSTEMS (NERVOUS, DIGESTIVE, CIRCULATORY,ETC.)

NOW, KAITLIN , DON'T SAY THAT I'M GETTING ALL EXCITED OVER THIS JUST BECAUSE IT IS MY MAJOR. DIDN'T YOU ENJOY YOUR GENERAL BIOLOGY COURSE? DON'T SAY YOU DIDN'T BECAUSE I KNOW YOU DID. WELL GUYS. THIS IS JUST A LITTLE TIDBIT OF INFORMATION. I AM CURIOUS TO FIND OUT WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT SCIENCE, FROM A NON-MAJOR'S POINT OF VIEW? WHY DO YOU THINK YOU HAD TO HAVE A YEAR OF SCIENCE? I"LL TALK TO YOU LATER.

Jim: well peoples--as usual I'll tie God into this somehow--science can also be viewed as an extension of God. If God is in fact part of all things then he would also be part of science and one could find something about the nature of God by studying his creations.

BETH AND KAITLIN:

TORBORG, WE HATE YOU!!!!!!!!

O.K. TORBORG YOU TELL US WHAT YOU WANT AND WE WILL TRY TO SEE IT YOUR WAY . YOU HAVE TOTALLY CONFUSED US NOW THANK YOU. ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT JUST CATHOLIC LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES OR LIBERAL

ARTS COLLEGES IN GENERAL. I'M TALKING IN GENERAL BECAUSE I REALLY DON'T THINK THAT THE NON-CATHOLIC ONES CARE ABOUT THE NATURE OF GOD WHEN THEY ARE STUDYING SCIENCE.

THE QUESTION IS WHY HAVE SCIENCE IN THE REQUIRED CURRICULUM OF A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE, NOT WHAT THE CONNECTION IS BETWEEN GOD AND SCIENCE. THIS COLLABORATIVE STUFF REALLY FRUSTRATES US AND WE CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE OF IT AT THE PRESENT TIME. WE WILL BE BACK LATER AFTER WE CALM DOWN. OUR INTENTIONS WERE GOOD. OH, BY THE WAY JIM, WE USED TO LIKE YOU BEFORE WE TOOK ON THIS COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP. MAYBE WE THREE SHOULD GO FOR SOME COUNSELING TO DEAL WITH THIS TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE THAT HAS EFFECTED OUR LIVES PERMANENTLY. THE SIGHT OF YOU SCARES US!!!!!!! WITH DEEPEST CONCERN, YOUR CO-AUTHORS.

Jim: Well, Beth and Kaitlin, this definitely sounds like a personal problem to me but we should try to make due since we do have a grade riding on this: if you two would like to stick to strictly a general everyday liberal arts college I suppose we can do that except that I believe there must be more of a reason to include science than just the fact that we should know something about our bodies.
P.S.--BY THE WAY, THANKS FOR YOUR LOVELY NOTE

Another group spent several pages arguing about whether Lotte and Werther's relationship in the Goethe's Sorrows of Young Werther was healthy or unhealthy. Finally, the group members decided that they could not decide that until they first established some criteria for a healthy relationship.

A happy, healthy relationship compared to the relationship in question involves all the qualities that Werther and Lotte lacked. Communication, an important asset to any relationship, was the deficiency that cost a life. Werther acted on feelings and erratic emotions. He felt that Lotte would come to him and unfortunately his desires controlled his actions. A good

> relationship involves two people who have mutual feelings, are well-balanced, respect and trust each other. In the case of Werther and Lotte there wasn't mutuality and, due to the lack of communication and honesty, this was not clearly stated, causing Werther to misconstrue the true feelings Lotte had for him. Therefore, it is obvious that Werther had an unhealthy relationship based on obsession and unrealistic goals. If the relationship possessed positive qualities such as clear, concise communication and mutuality, perhaps Werther would not have sought suicide as a solution.
>
> > **Craig: At first we couldn't agree about what was a healthy relationship, but that was because we had two males and one female in the group and we realized that men and women look at relationships differently. Once we talked that out we figured out what we wanted to say. We never could have written this paper individually because we would have had a biased male or biased female viewpoint.**

The exchanges between these students seem to me halfway between casual spoken comments and more formal written responses. Perhaps most important these seem to me the comments of one writer to another writer.And of one reader to another reader.In fact, these students are coming to see the reading process in new ways. By developing more productive relationships with each other, they are also developing more productive relationships with written texts. Too many beginning students think of written texts only as stable, finished products. By working with other writers to create a layered, dynamic text, students realize that writing is an organic and dialogic process. Because the hidden text can be embedded into a page, paragraph, or sentence and appears on the screen exactly where it is inserted, students are given the chance to reconsider their evolving text as it is constructed and—literally—deconstructed. Students then realize that there is not just one "correct" way to write a particular paragraph or essay. For some, this realization leads to a sense of liberation, even playfulness, not only in their writing but also in their reading of literary texts as well.

When the project was completed, I asked these students if it was worth it. One of the students in this group offered what I take to be the definitive back-handed compliment:

> I don't know. It was too much work. First, we had to choose a topic, then a point of view, and then we had to figure out how to divide up the work. And we had to set up some meetings after class to go over everything and to talk everything out. And then when we were almost done, we realized that our point of view wasn't working for the audience. So we had to figure out how to make an audience see our argument the way we wanted them to see it. By the end we must have put in about ten hours each, which is thirty hours altogether. I mean I never could have written something like this by myself; it turned out to be a good paper and I am prouder of this essay than all the rest I've written in this class. But I don't know...when I write an essay by myself the whole thing never takes me more than 30 minutes.

CONCLUSION:

THE PROCESS MOVEMENT AND OTHER FAIRY TALES

When my first daughter was about five, she had a friend named Leah who used to come over to play. One day Leah brought a book with her--Snow White--which the girls asked me to read. The story went pretty much as I remembered and expected until I got to the part about the evil stepmother sending her hunter into the woods with Snow White to kill her. The words describing this scene were crossed out and someone--it turned out to be Leah's mother--had written a kinder, gentler version. Something like: "Take Snow White out into the woods for a walk." Throughout the rest of the book, Leah's mother struggled valiantly——against the pictures——to tell her daughter an untraumatic and undramatic story.

That night my wife and I weighed the pros and prose of this revisionary version; while we could certainly understand and relate to this mother's desire to protect her daughter from the sad and scary truth of the world, it seemed so silly and so obviously doomed (and not just because we had to keep shushing our own street-wise five-year-old who wanted to tell Leah the "real story."). I suspect that on some level Leah already knew the real story; like everyone else, she already had fears and fantasies that were a least as sad and as scary as the ones in Snow White. And I wondered if the G-rated re-telling had more to do with the mother's discomfort than the daughter's fragile psyche.

I've been wondering about some of the same issues in this dissertation, for I am convinced that we in the process movement have written our own G-rated story of our classrooms. It is a story in which the problems we face are manageable, if not harmless, and the solutions we offer are effective, if not brilliant. Like Leah's mother, process teachers have written a text about peer review, one-to-one conferences, invention strategies, and collaboration that is safe and clean and friendly. The enemy is traditional teaching and teachers; the heroes are—us. The only problem is that, like Leah's mother, we face a nagging problem: this happy talk does not match the pictures and does not reflect much of what happens in our classrooms or the way we actually feel about our day-to-day teaching.

There are, of course, good reasons for focusing on the positive, not the least of which is that we need to convince traditional teachers, administrators, and ourselves, that what we are doing makes sense. And there is the fact that the writing process movement has been a kind of fairy tale—a story of teachers and students who have achieved a measure of self-actualization, even transformation, through confronting and, often, overcoming serious obstacles. But there are also good reasons to focus on the problematic aspects of this approach. What I have tried to do in this dissertation, then, is to tell the other story, to admit my fears, worries, mistakes, and biases and, by doing that, to raise questions about the assumptions and claims of the process movement. My goal is not abandon the fairy tale or even to change the happy ending—I believe in the general philosophy and methodology of process teaching—but rather to bring out in the open some of the difficulties, particularly in terms of interpersonal relationships, we face along the way.

This is not easy to do, especially because the philosophy and rhetoric of most process teaching simply assumes that process teaching naturally fosters positive, supportive relationships. As opposed to traditional classrooms where students are isolated and mistreated, we see ourselves as protectors and saviors, offering support, compassion, comraderie. What I have tried to say in this dissertation is: "Sometimes it works that way but teaching writing is a messy and complicated job. And, sometimes, the relationships in the classroom are frustrating for the students and for the teacher."

In part, I am arguing that we need to learn to talk as much about failure as success. Still my hope is that this dissertation is more than an extended failure story; it is also an effort to move forward, an attempt to say, "Let's stop deluding ourselves and our colleagues and our students." (Maybe I should have started this chapter with "The Emperor's New Clothes.") In other words, let's stop pretending that we are objective readers of student texts; that writing is always a journey of discovery; that peer review is always positive and helpful; that writing workshops create non-competitive communities; that teachers can de-centralize authority in their classrooms by simple decree.

As soon as we stop talking about idealized classrooms and start talking about our students and ourselves, we are forced to confront the tension, competition, misunderstanding, frustration, resistance, and disappointment that are inevitable aspects not only of the writing process itself but also of the relationships that are established within the writing class. Acknowledging the powerful and, sometimes, negative feelings that are produced in our classrooms is a step not necessarily or always forward, but it is one we must take if the process movement is to survive. I have tried in his dissertation to "problematize" the process paradigm, not because I reject it but because I accept it and because I think it needs more depth, more honesty, more sophistication, than we, its advocates, have so far provided.

But in order to accomplish this, we will, necessarily, be forced to take ourselves—our strengths and weaknesses—into account in a way that is more honest and thorough than we have done before. And we will need to establish a new model not only for teacher-student and student-student relationships but also for the teacher-teacher relationship. While our peers are not literally in our classrooms, they are constantly present in thoughts, assumptions, and anxieties. While it is by now a commonplace of composition theory to say that many student writers fail because they feel isolated in their classroom and confused by the conventions of the discourse community they are trying to enter, there is relatively little work about the extent to which writing teachers feel isolated and confused and even less about how these negative feelings manifest themselves in the classroom. I can't help but wonder how writing teachers' relationships (or lack of relationships) with colleagues shape their interactions with students.

My sense is that many teachers have trouble dealing with students, trouble staying motivated, trouble locating their audience, because they lack productive peer relationships in their department and in their field. Again my research here is largely autobiographical. For a number of years I taught in a composition program that provided me with very little guidance, moral support, prestige, or pay and I am absolutely convinced that much of the alienation from—and frustration with—my students that I felt during that period was directly related to my lack of productive peer relationships.

In fact, when I started teaching, most of my peer interactions were contentious. I was aware that many of my colleagues disapproved of my classroom approach; they expected me to make different sorts of writing and reading assignments than I was making and to emphasize different aspects of the writing in my grading of student essays. And so, in a complicated way, I was often talking to—arguing against—these colleagues through my students. For example, if a student questioned one of my assignments, I would often respond defensively or belligerently at least in part because I was continuing an ongoing argument with a colleague.

My attitude and behavior in my own classroom began to change when I began to talk with other composition teachers in my department, to attend national conferences, and to read widely in the field. It was only when I began to see myself as part of a supportive community that I had the confidence to acknowledge my weaknesses and to try new approaches in the classroom. But in my case, the real transformation in my relationships with students came as a result of my own research and writing in the field. A number of edited collections (Goswami and Stillman, Bissex and Bullock, Daiker and Morenberg) have all focused on how teacher-research provides information we do not get from other approaches and how it changes a teacher's self-image, but none have looked carefully enough at how this in turn changes classroom relationships and teaching.

My point here is simply that becoming a teacher-researcher is bound to change a teacher's relationships with students in fundamental ways. In some sense, the student becomes a subject first and a student (or person) second. As cold as that sounds, the irony is that I have been more engaged, more attentive, more sensitive, when I was dealing with students who were my research subjects for this dissertation. But this engagement is complicated. On the one hand, there is the danger that we will exploit and manipulate our case study subjects, to teach and respond to them in ways that further our own research and theory. But at the same time, our dependence on their involvement and openness in our project, makes us indebted to them and vulnerable to some extent to their manipulation.

Once again I am less interested in proscribing certain policies to govern teacher-teacher relationships than I am in raising questions about productivity in the writing class. Teachers, like students, need to define a role for themselves between boredom and anxiety and our own peer relationships also play a major (and largely ignored) role in that definition.

Now I know that the thought of trying to keep track of all of this and to teach writing at the same time can seem mind-boggling, but my point is that keeping track of all this *is* teaching writing. It's just that we have told each other and ourselves stories about the teaching of writing that do not allow enough room for mind-boggling complexity or ambivalent feelings, let alone our own fantasies about the witches and hunters who wait for us in the dark woods. I am not saying that it is time to stop telling each other fairy tales; I am well aware of the remarkable progress we have made as teachers and our students have made as a writers as a result of this approach. What I am saying is that it is time to move beyond the edited fairy tale, the basalized version of our own teaching experience. Like any good narrative, this new story will be a bit unsettling, maybe even threatening. But that's alright: I think we're strong enough now to take it.

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