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JAEPL

The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

JAEPL

The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (AEPL), an official assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, is open to all those interested in extending the frontiers of teaching and learning beyond the traditional disciplines and methodologies.

The purposes of AEPL are to provide a common ground for theorists, researchers, and practitioners to explore ideas; to participate in relevant programs and projects; to integrate these efforts with others in related disciplines; to keep abreast of activities along these lines of inquiry; and to promote scholarship on and publication of these activities.

The *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning, JAEPL*, also provides a forum to encourage research, theory, and classroom practices involving expanded concepts of language. It contributes to a sense of community in which scholars and educators from pre-school through the university exchange points of view and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. *JAEPL* is especially interested in helping those teachers who experiment with new strategies for learning to share their practices and confirm their validity through publication in professional journals.

Topics of interest include but are not limited to:

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Laurence Musgrove's intrepid Tex offers us useful advice. But following a national election that has jolted us from a President who focused on the audacity of hope to a real-estate magnate-cum-politico who threatens to obliterate it, we may wonder *how* to "make hope." One way is to ask why an estimated 4 to 5 million American protesters emerged nationwide during the post-Inauguration Women's March—accompanied by as many as 350,000 supporters around the globe.[1] Even if you didn't participate, you know this action declared and demanded to protect the values that sustain a more humane society.

JAEPL asserts those values in every volume, showing our readers how to infuse hope through the teaching and learning that we do every day. This volume continues that work, and here, we reassert them.

We begin *JAEPL, Vol. 22* with a special section on deep reading, which was the theme of our summer 2016 conference.

We value the power of literacy. Jane Thomkins, one of our keynote speakers from AEPL 2016, describes how literacy invokes and nourishes that best part of ourselves, our soul. Her personal, spiritually compelling experience of this value enriches what we must know about deep reading.

We value pedagogies that help students from all backgrounds and cultures to learn, despite the inequities our imperfect society imposes upon them. Vajra Watson—another 2016 keynoter—accounts how the Sacramento Area Youth Speaks Project has enabled at-risk kids to connect their lives to a curriculum that has traditionally excluded them. This approach to deep reading liberates.

We value teaching history from a perspective that does not perpetuate injustice. Tisha Ulmer describes how to engage students in a personal transaction with the past so they can understand the words and deeds of those who struggled to deal with slavery's perversities. This kind of deep reading fosters compassion.

We value practices that prompt students to reflect on their own words and deeds. Grace Wetzel helps students revise, using contemplation as a means of readying them to reconsider the implications of their written work so they can craft it with a heightened understanding of its impact on others. This kind of deep reading leads to responsible citizenship.

As you move from this issue's special section on deep reading strategies to other, closely related scholarship on teaching and learning, we hope you will agree that our contributors are all participating in an important conversation for these troublesome times.

1. Statistics taken from Jeremy Pressman's and Erica Chenoweth's spreadsheet analyzing the breadth of the Women's March at: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1xa0iLqYKz8x9Yc_ rfhtmSOJQ2EGgeUVjvV4A8 LsIaxY/ htmlview?sle=true#gid=0

We value research that explores and validates non-traditional approaches to learning. Kate Chaterdon's literature review of contemplative neuroscience focuses on the ways that contemplation and mindfulness stimulate the brain's plasticity and change it. Such activities may ultimately mitigate the intellectual entrenchment to which our polarized public rhetoric exposes our students. This research indicates how and why alternative teaching methods can open minds.

We value thoughtful classroom resistance to oppressive policies. Ondine Gage's linguistic study breaks ground with its evaluation of one teacher's non-coercive and well-conceived efforts to work around the disadvantages that state and federal policies compound for English language learners in her school. This case study reveals how conscientious teachers can always find ways to put students' needs above political agenda.

We value seeking common ground in public discourse. J. Michael Rifenburg's examination of how one comedian consistently revises his routines provides us with fresh insights about the classical notions of audience analysis. He emphasizes the impact of performance on written material. This ethnography alerts us to the importance of teaching our students to seek common ground—a better method than attacking people who are indifferent or even hostile to what our students say, experience, and believe.

We value experiences that help us understand our students. Rosanne Carlos's comparison between making pottery and teaching writing demonstrates that fundamental, well-rehearsed techniques inform both—and that we all need to fail before we become more proficient. This meditation suggests that we must sometimes let go of what we know, so we can rediscover what we have forgotten.

We value the transformations that our work can accomplish. Robbie Pinter's deep reading of Wendell Berry's "Timbered Choir" becomes the touchstone of her career as she tallies the transformations that her student-centered philosophy has brought to light for her as well as her students. This personal reflection articulates a credo that can help us weather the doubts that whisper to us at the end of a difficult day—or semester.

We value our opportunities to partner with each other and change the status quo. Pam Childers's contribution to *JAEPL's* "Outbox" celebrates how she and her colleagues have rattled the cages that damaging attitudes and policies have built to contain students who can't conform. Her persistent spirit of reform has shaped writing centers and writing across the curriculum programs throughout the nation. These recollections sum up why a scholarship of pragmatic reform must make our work known, so those who follow us can carry it forward.

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We conclude our introduction to this volume of *JAEPL* by encouraging you to read the scholarly recommendations and the professional tales that Julie Nichols and Christy Wenger have collected in our "Book Reviews" and "Connecting" sections.

We also urge you to check the information about our upcoming summer conference, which Nate Michelson of Guttman Community College has been coordinating. The conference theme, "Writing as a Way of Being Human," promises excellent addresses by our keynote speakers Robert Yagelski, Doug Hesse, and Kurt Spellmeyer. You'll also have the opportunity to meet with friends and attend (or present at) the highly interactive sessions

and workshops you've come to value so much. Please join us as we gather once again at the beautiful YMCA of the Rockies, outside Estes Park, CO. It's a place where we can share what's important—and reconfirm what we value.

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Deep Reading

Jane Thompkins

This essay is the last chapter of a book I recently completed, Reading through the Night, *that describes my discovery that reading can become a path to self-knowledge. Someone I hardly knew gave me Paul Theroux's memoir of his 30-year friendship with V.S.Naipaul,* Sir Vidia's Shadow, *a book that so captivated me that I embarked on a long course of reading in order to understand my attraction to it. The reading included mainly books by Naipaul and Theroux, but other books as well. As an English professor, I had read all my life, and after coming down with a chronic illness, I read to entertain myself and to make time go by. This time what I was looking for was neither entertainment nor, primarily, knowledge about the text, but rather the answer to a question about myself. The book records the discoveries I made about myself in looking for that answer, and the following remarks form a conclusion to the journey.*

I was at the eye doctor's having my corneas photographed. I'd had a thin layer of cells removed from each cornea and replaced by a layer of cells from someone else's cornea; the operations had taken place a year apart. Together, the operations had restored my eyesight, which had deteriorated to the point where I could no longer read the newspaper, many of the books I opened, street signs, the instructions on medicine bottles, or restaurant menus. Twice a year I'd go to have the results of these operations checked by a specialist at the Weill Cornell Medical Center in Manhattan. That day I'd been seen by a technician named Dennis, who did the same tests every time: the barn at the end of the road, the rows of letters I had so much trouble making out—the letters getting smaller and smaller until I couldn't see them anymore; it was like taking a test over and over until you failed. Then the eye-drops to dilate my eyes—three drops in each eye—then the waiting area for ten or fifteen minutes, then the photographs.

The photographs were taken by a technician named Susan whose hair had been died red with a touch of magenta. Long and long she looked into my eyes, adjusting the lenses through which she gazed, moving them forward and back, turning knobs, turning her attention now and then to an image of one of my eyes on a screen, then back to the real thing. Deeper and deeper she gazed until finally I felt something move out of me on either side and behind me, a presence, a faint feeling in the air; a door had opened on the inside and this presence had issued forth. It came to me then: the eyes are the windows of the soul. So it was in this tiny, dark room, its door open to the hall, with Susan staring into my pupils, adjusting her lenses over and over to get the right distance, the right exposure, that I felt the existence of my soul for the first time as something palpable and real; its hour had come, the door had opened, it was there. Susan had looked so deeply that the soul had had to step forward and be acknowledged, had had to spread out behind me and on either side, alive, and in attendance.

Back to the waiting area. Time to see the specialist herself, Dr. S. I think of Dr. S. as "the princess" because her manner is so refined and because everything about her is beautiful--her facial features, blond hair, legs encased in sheer black stockings and her feet in black high heels. Poised, imperial, and demure, each time *she* would look through the lenses at my corneas, first one, then the other, she would pronounce, with her princess's elocution, the word "beautiful," her intonation implying that she had looked on something entirely out of the ordinary, almost holy. In fact, she was commenting on the skill of the surgeon

who had performed the transplant.

On this occasion, having felt the existence of my soul for the first time, I decided, while waiting for my audience with Dr. S., to mention my epiphany in the form of a question: had she ever, while gazing into someone's eyes, seen their soul? I reasoned that, even if, as was likely, she wouldn't know what I was talking about, the idea might plant a seed in her mind and one day, looking into a patient's eyes, suddenly she would get goose bumps and . . . there it would be—a soul. I took my chance, and sure enough, she exchanged smiles with her Fellow, Dr. H., a budding corneal specialist there to learn at Dr. S's side; they looked knowingly at one another then back at me, indulgently, as one would look at a child who had said something extremely naive—but forgivable. Patiently, Dr. S. explained that the cornea was the only place in the human body where one could actually see blood vessels, that the spectacle was highly complex, and that to see everything that was going on required all one's attention. The other, she said, meaning the soul, could be inferred from indicators such as body language, a person's manner . . . she let her voice trail off. So that was that. I could feel she wanted to leave. But still, I was content. I had my soul, after all.

What does this story have to do with anything, you may wonder. Specifically, what is the connection between my experience of feeling my soul come out and announce itself on the ophthalmology floor at Weill and the experiences I've had while reading, especially experiences of seeing myself in books I've read and, as a result, learning things I otherwise would not have known? Well, the experiences feel similar, for one thing. The shock of recognition when I saw myself in Theroux for the first time had some of the same quality as the way I felt when my soul emerged from my body. In both cases, it was like seeing a ghost, not that I've ever seen one, but there was the realization that a strange new thing had appeared, something I'd never seen before but which I recognized on sight. And then there was the suddenness of the apparition, the startling awareness that something not visible in the ordinary sense had come to visit me. And, there was the metaphor of looking deeply, the idea that, if one looks deeply enough into something, things will come to the surface that would normally have remained hidden, and the conviction that, on these occasions, the things that come will inevitably, in some way, have to do with oneself. And will also be important. What one sees as a result of looking deeply is not just any old thing; what one sees comes with a flag hanging over it, a banner that reads: "Pay attention! This message is for you! "

Reading in this way, reading so that the ghost rises from the text, pulls at your sleeve and refuses to go away, is not something that happens very often. At least, it didn't used to happen very often to me, though recently I've found out that if I pay a certain kind of attention when I read it's more likely to occur. This kind of deep reading, however, bears very little relation to standard ways of reading, especially highly focused academic ways. Close reading, for example, the method of putting pressure on a line of poetry or a paragraph in a novel so as to force every drop of meaning from it, this kind of reading deeply can be learned, and taught. It is a good way to read and should be a regular part of high school and college English courses. If you don't learn to read like that, you miss too much of what makes literature art. But close reading, as opposed to deep reading, won't necessarily let you see the ghost. In fact, it almost guarantees that you will not,

because it trains the attention on the formal features of the text, and their relation to its meaning, and does not ask how its meaning relates to you.

Deep reading, in the way that I've experienced it lately, doesn't even ask the question—how does this relate to my experience? Rather, the depth is something that arises of its own accord. All at once, you feel gripped, drawn in, as I was by *Sir Vidia's Shadow*, entangled, implicated. The book comes after you and not the other way around. Not that you can't arrive at useful knowledge about yourself, and it, by asking a series of questions, like the questions for discussion that appear at the backs of novels used in reading groups, or the questions an English teacher might ask. If you had been reading *Sir Vidia's Shadow*, for example, the questions would go something like this: have you ever been in a situation like the one Theroux describes when he had lunch with Naipaul at the Connaught? If so, how did it feel? Was your reaction the same as Theroux's or did you refuse to let yourself be treated badly? Why do you think you reacted as you did? My heart always sinks when I come across questions such as these. No doubt one can learn something about oneself by making such conscious comparisons, but the answers may or may not touch on matters of any consequence, because the questions come from without not from within. The kind of reading I'm speaking of here is different. It has an involuntary aspect to it. The sure sign that a piece of writing or a character is speaking to you in a deep way is that you feel something in your body. It's not something you asked yourself a question about, it's not a deduction or an inference, it's a sensation that's simply there; it comes to you, and you either register it or you don't. If you register it, you have a choice whether to pursue it and see where it leads, or to let it go--which can be the wiser choice, since sometimes we're just not ready to go down certain roads. The crucial thing, though, is that you didn't cause the feeling to occur, it simply happened. That's how you know it's important.

If you pick up the option and have the courage to go where you're led, it, the feeling, can show you whole territories in your life that you never knew existed, clear up doubts that have been hanging in your mind for years, lift burdens you've been carrying a long time, let you finally realize why you made that terrible mistake. You become you own therapist. Instead of cinematherapy, bibliotherapy, only not the kind of therapy that makes you feel better right away like the movies on that Women's Entertainment channel program whose logo was a woman in a bathtub with bubbles floating upwards. The kind of reading or viewing that will make you feel good because it's what you need at the moment is fine, but it's more of a short term measure that can work in a pinch than it is like real therapy. Real therapy, the kind I'm speaking about, is the just the opposite: letting a book take you down a path you're afraid to go down because you suspect that what lies at the end is something you don't want to see.

This was how I felt when I began to realize I was taking Theroux's part in those lunches he had with Naipaul, when it dawned on me that, just like him, I had let myself be treated badly and not said anything, that I carried the same shame and resentment he did, and that I had been part of a master-shadow relationship from early on that needed looking into. That is why you need to go down the path. Because, unpleasant as it is, once you've looked the thing in the face, you can begin to deal with it—unravel the knot, heal the wound. If I'm willing to take myself down such a path, I've found, help will often arrive unasked for: someone will say something in passing that sheds light on

my problem, a title will jump out at me in a bookstore, I'll have a conversation with a friend that lets me see my situation in a new way, and it will begin to re-form itself, take on different contours, become explicable, analyzable, dealable with. Eventually, whatever the trouble is will lose its mystery and hence its power. It will become just another facet of your make-up that you recognize, understand, and are no longer scared or controlled by, at least not most of the time. There are no monsters down there, after all. But one has to go there to find that out. Otherwise, they're there, and they're powerful. And you're right, going after them isn't fun, but the benefits are worth it.

Should you want to go, though, how to begin? You can't really do it, as I've said, by asking the right questions, but there is way to get started. What matters is your perceptual apparatus, your ability to notice what's going on inside you when you read. This kind of reading doesn't require any knowledge of literature—a person who didn't go to college can be a lot better at it than a graduate student in English. What it requires is an acquaintance with yourself. It may be that you're not very well acquainted with yourself; it may be that you know more about the NBA play-offs or craft beers or growing orchids than you do about your feelings. It doesn't matter. The standard joke about therapists is, they're always asking how you *feel* about this or that. You tell them something and they say, how did that make you *feel*? When I first went to a therapist I couldn't answer the question. Feel? I didn't really *feel* anything about whatever it was he was asking about. But you can learn to notice how you feel. As the late Yogi Berra is supposed to have said, "You can observe a lot, just by watching." You just have to be willing to pay attention to what comes up, to stay with it, let it be there, and go where it leads. It's a matter of training your attention.

What you notice when you're paying attention depends upon your experience. Everyone knows that after you learn a new word, you start seeing and hearing it everywhere. It was there before, but you didn't notice it because you weren't equipped. Life has to move you into position before you can notice something. You have to be primed. Life moves you through a series of events, situations, experiences such that you start to notice things you couldn't have noticed before. One of Elizabeth Berg's novels has a great epigraph from the movie *Little Miss Sunshine* that goes: "High school, those are your prime suffering years. You don't get better suffering than that." High school, graduate school, marriage, divorce, illness—life changes your perceptual DNA so that you can see things that you couldn't have seen before, not because you're trying to see them but because, after what you've been through, things look different. The level at which you read comes from your life, from what life has done to you, and from how you've responded to that. So, you don't have to worry about whether or not you're reading deeply. If you can, you will. You will read at whatever level you've been permitted to read by your experience. The thing is to take advantage of your position, whatever it happens to be. You're probably positioned a lot better than you think to learn about yourself from your reading. You just have to be willing to notice what a text does to you at the level of sensation and emotion, and then be willing to investigate that. The readiness is all, as Shakespeare said, but you also have to be willing. The willingness usually comes from suffering. The more you suffer, the more willing you will be to look into what might be causing it.

But reading that leads to self-knowledge need not involve suffering. Spiritual or sacred reading offers the possibility of seeing new things about ourselves without the

slightest discomfort. Most of the time it makes me feel light and clear-headed, sometimes joyful, sometimes loved and understood. It only works in small doses, two pages today, a paragraph tomorrow, because it takes time to digest. This kind of reading was a regular part of my life for years before I got sick and for all the years after. Without it, I don't know if I could have survived. Strangely, though, it's not this kind of reading I've needed to write about. It has an impact, but not the kind I feel the need to think through on paper. If I were to write about it at all, it would be part of a different book.

Riding home in the taxi from Weill Cornell on my way down Second Avenue, I was happy. With its Irish bars, the big Catholic church as you get down near 14th Street, the slightly dilapidated, slightly seedy neighborhood seemed soft and receptive to me as I rode by, no longer quite alone. It had been a good day so far. I'd met my soul, my eyes were okay, and I was going home to rest.

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Life as Primary Text: English Classrooms as Sites for Soulful Learning

Vajra M. Watson

In *Decolonizing Educational Research*, Leigh Patel challenges us to consider "whether an entity borne of and beholden to coloniality could somehow wrest itself free of this genealogy" (4). In other words, how is education—or more specifically, the school site—both the doorway into social control as well as the window out of it? To answer this question, my work focuses on the pedagogical seeds that nurture radical classroom spaces (Watson *Learning,* "Censoring," *"Literacy"*). To put it another way, I am deeply curious about how to co-create classrooms that engage, educate, and empower both students and teachers in liberatory transformational practices. Building on this theme in my own research, I am going to share some examples from the curriculum of a spoken-word performance poetry program called Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS), so I may demonstrate the ways it fosters rigorous social justice instruction.

My research is grounded in theories of social reproduction and resistance wherein I analyze the purpose(s) of school (Apple, "Rhetoric," "Power"; Angus & Mirel; Bowles & Gintis; Dance; Kozol; MacLeod; Oakes). There are two recent incidents that I would like to bring to your attention as a way to contextualize this essay. The first is a graphically abusive incident that took place at Springfield High School in South Carolina. A fellow classmate secretly videotaped a white school resource officer, Senior Deputy Ben Fields, ripping a female African-American student out of her seat, flipping her over, slamming her to the ground, and forcing her hands behind her back. On camera, he pins her down and threatens to arrest her for resting her head on her desk during math class.[1] The second incident involves a school that SAYS has been working with for nearly a decade. A Grant Union High School student in Sacramento, California, was shot while getting food off campus before a home football game. After being caught in the crossfire of bullets, Jaulon Clavo (JJ) and his injured friends headed back to Grant High in order to get help. This particular school has a longstanding reputation as the most stable institution in the neighborhood. It is not shocking that in his moment of desperation JJ did not drive towards a hospital or police station, but rushed back to campus.[2]

These two incidents—although violent in very different ways—paint a paradoxical picture of the 21st century schoolhouse. On the one hand, school has the potential serve as a beacon of safety, community, and pride as demonstrated in the case of Grant High. But it can also be a site of control, suffering, and shame as was painfully caught on camera

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1. For further details and to view the video: http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/sc-high-school-officer-beats-student-arrest-article-1.2412147

2. A local news article on JJ's shooting: http://www.sacbee.com/news/local/crime/article44816292.html

at Springfield High.

School is a site of a longstanding ideological tension between democracy and capitalism. Often, schools are simultaneously hegemonic *and* holistic, hierarchical *and* equitable. A lot of juxtapositions exist when we ponder the purpose of school and our role as educators. Like many of my colleagues, I became a teacher because I wanted to change the world. My ideals and romantic notions of school as the great equalizer were challenged, almost immediately when I stepped inside my classroom.

When I started teaching, my students pushed me to think in new ways. I sought to welcome all aspects of who they were and the worldviews that they came to school with. I allowed their views to change me and influence my pedagogy. Together, we investigated issues, debated, wrote, and learned from the text and from one another. But I felt pushed out of the teaching profession. More often than not, I would leave school with tears in my eyes. I would go home feeling defeated.

While my students served as a source of inspiration, other ailments inside the schoolhouse were depleting my joy. As an example, I was standing in line to make copies, and my colleagues were talking—quite horrifically—about one of my students. They were speaking about how this little thug would never graduate and they couldn't wait until he got caught up, expelled, or just dropped out. I could hardly believe one of my brightest kids was being viewed and treated like a villain. I argued with my colleagues who disregarded my ideals as naive. I was told I might reach a few kids but that in a couple of years reality would set in, and I'd learn—one way or another—that (and I quote) "it's us versus them" and I'd have to choose a side.

In retrospect, when I think about my beginning years as a classroom teacher, I was being told in so many ways not to be on the side of students, especially those that were rough, tough, and misled. And why? Because of their demeanor? Their zip code? Their swag? Where is the research that says a person's demographics determines their destiny? We know that a person's birthplace is not the basis of their brilliance. Nevertheless, our implicit and explicit biases shape the culture of our classrooms and the achievement levels inside schools. Moreover, there was a pervasive belief and power structure that suggested being on the side of the kids would disrupt the hierarchy of the institution. How could schools function if students were empowered? I began to ask myself how I could serve an educational system that further marginalized, silenced, and oppressed those it was built to serve.

I hope I am not sounding overly cynical or apocalyptic. I am actually an optimist and a lover of learning, but I recognize that my passion for education exists within a milieu of injustice. Moreover, my research is in response and reaction to schooling practices that continue to be inhumane for not just young people but teachers and administrators as well. Understanding this context is crucial; without a prudent analysis of the institution of schooling, the notion of using literacy practices to disrupt subjugation will remain shortsighted and ill-informed.

I have spent the last two decades trying to transform educational spaces. As my findings will demonstrate, school remains an institution with the potential and power to illuminate the heart, engage the mind, and foster civic engagement. But for these ideals to take root, we—as educators—have to come to terms with both the perils and promise of today's educational system.

Literacies That Liberate

It is worthwhile to acknowledge that English instruction is not neutral; often, it is a gatekeeper by which assimilation and conformity are measured. bell hooks states that Standard English, far from being an impartial tool of communication, "has the potential to disempower those of us who are just learning to speak, who are just learning to claim language as a place where we make ourselves subject" (168). This is an important point. hooks continues, "It is not the English language that hurt me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize" (168). In learning the "oppressor's language," Macedo agrees: "We are often forced to experience subordination and conformity" (Freire & Macedo, 23). These scholars describe a complex duplicity of expression, reminiscent of Du Bois' 1903 concept of double consciousness.

Building on this point, the identity and cultural gaps between some students and the schoolhouse are vast and detrimental, even dangerous. College is a dream deferred when you start planning your funeral at age ten. Dance is adamant: "These students live in their neighborhoods and not in their schools," so "they must make surviving the streets a priority" (67). Unless we develop effective models to bridge students' upbringing to their uprising, we will lose to the drop-out crisis more students than we win to college and careers. Young people should not be forced to choose between home or school, the block or class, swag or squaredom—for these choices will, overwhelmingly, not weigh in our favor. At best, we will help a few escape their circumstances. At worst, we will perpetrate the miseducation of a generation.

If your education teaches you to internalize your own oppression, it is harmful. At the classroom level, scholars continue to document the role all teachers can play to disrupt patterns of inequity. Often called "critical pedagogy," this approach argues that education must be multicultural, emancipatory, and relevant to the needs of students (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell; Ladson-Billings, *Dreamkeepers,* "Good Teaching"). Yet even the best multicultural lessons can sometimes embrace middle-class values in ways that fail to address the particularly disturbing inner-city problems of poverty, crime, drugs, gangs, and other ills. For many urban youth, an effective student-centered pedagogy must acknowledge—rather than deny or demonize—street life (Dance, Duncan-Andrade, Ginwright, et al.). However, many teachers enter the urban environment without any real understanding of their students' lives outside of school.

Educators need strategies that authentically bring student's lives into classrooms. For this idea to take root and blossom, news modes of English Language Arts classrooms need to be explored. Fascinated with the tensions of teaching English, I designed a critical literacy intervention that placed community-based poet-mentor educators into middle and high school English classrooms.[3] My study examined rigorous social justice instructional models that utilize spoken word performance poetry to create community and unlock learning.

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3. For further information on Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS), please visit http//:www.says.ucdavis.edu.

Phase 1: Understanding the Context

To begin my journey to better understand the teaching of literacy, I partnered with an urban school district in Northern California. In this particular school district, students and their families speak over 42 languages and 82% of the population is socio-economically disadvantaged. Nearly all students are eligible for free or reduced-fee meals. In 2008, over 70% of middle and high school students were not scoring proficient in English Language Arts and only 63% of 10th grade students passed the CAHSEE.[4] In 2009, the CAHSEE passage rate dropped to 61%. In response to this crisis, Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS), a spoken word literary arts program at UC Davis, was brought into the district to conduct intensive writing workshops in classes where the majority of students were struggling academically. This aspect of the SAYS program pairs a poet-mentor educator with a classroom teacher to implement culturally relevant literacy activities on a weekly basis for an entire school year. Altogether, thirty teachers volunteered to participate and were eager for new approaches. We asked them to choose their hardest-to-reach classes; in many of these classrooms, over half of the students were receiving a D/F.

Phase 2: Seeding Solutions

The SAYS premise is simple and straightforward. Since literacy is alive in the students we teach; if we want to teach them, we have to first reach them in their own languages on their own cultural terms. Building on this understanding, the SAYS Pedagogy is student-centered; in other words, the curriculum is based upon the lived experiences of all of the individuals in the classroom—there is no one outside the circle. Because instruction is based upon real people that are constantly growing and changing, the lessons are dynamic. Given this generative process of literacy instruction, SAYS workshops are highly interactive and help educators 1) get to know their students; 2) excavate literacy practices that students use every day to navigate through life; and 3) foster a critical bridge between creative writing and other genres of text.

Phase 3: Democratic Sanctuaries

During the course of the critical literacy intervention (2010-2014), I observed ELA classes with and without a poet-mentor educator (PME). I was visiting the same teacher, but looking at classroom curriculum and dynamics in both treatment (classes with PMEs) and non-treatment classes (same teacher, but no PME). During the first year of implementation, I spent over 100 hours at these sites to record the ways in which English was being taught and what opportunities students had to read, write and speak. Throughout the initial, first year of investigation, I wrestled with the ways English acquisition was being utilized as a gatekeeper, frequently regulating student self-expression in the non-treatment classes. Far too often, I documented instances in which students were shamed into learning grammar or penalized for writing the way they spoke (e.g., un/consciously using Ebonics). Although the intervention was directed towards the students, it was equally critical to understand the impact it was having on the teachers

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4. The California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), formerly a graduation requirement for students in California public schools.

(Watson "Censoring," "Literacy"). And, to take it a step farther, I wanted to understand the shift in classroom culture. How did a rigorous social justice curriculum change the dynamics of classroom life and learning?

Deep Learning Through Literacy

As I examined each SAYS classroom residency with my research questions in mind, I documented a pattern. The level of intimate, unabashed communication between young people and their poet-mentor educators was striking. Throughout their creative writing process, there was no need to code-switch. "I feel at home," a high school student acknowledged. A pedagogy that uses spoken-word performance poetry allows multiple literacies to literally and figuratively become center stage. Instead of educating students to read and use literacy as a form of escaping their environment, spoken-word performance poetry reinforces neighborhood knowledge because it is rooted in the cultural practices, needs, lexicon, and realities of a particular context. For many students, their lives are filled with complex juxtapositions: they are simultaneously insecure and resilient, poor and powerful, traumatized while also healing. My findings suggest that the SAYS literary-arts process reconfigures the classroom culture wherein learning becomes a transformative act.

Irrespective of teacher or school site or type of class (standard, continuation, or remedial), each community-based poet-mentor educator sought to nurture an educational experience for students based upon love and respect. Although SAYS has other guidelines, it was love and respect that foreshadowed all other rules. This love and respect was demonstrated in classroom management styles, including a common reference that the PME knows matter-of-factly that "you kids don't be actin up like this at home so don't get to thinkin you about to do it in here." Borrowing from Delpit, these were not "other people's children." On the contrary, from interviews with the poet-mentor educators, it was evident that they saw aspects of themselves in their students; I was repeatedly told: "these students are just me when I was younger."

Poet-mentor educator and SAYS coordinator, Patrice Hill, goes into detail to codify the role of SAYS in the lives of students. She shares these observations:

> Some of us are facilitating workshops at the same schools that expelled us. These experiences have allowed for an intense understanding of the traditional urban classroom and a deep understanding of the way students are often disengaged in the classroom. At SAYS, we possess a diverse and growing group of educators that are reaching and teaching the very students we once were. We are these young people! We sat in the same classrooms, went through the same experiences! Some of us have experienced the same disconnect with school and educators that has transitioned into an intense connection and deep understanding of urban youth, especially youth of color. It's a lifelong commitment to the uplifting and empowerment of our babies. This calling is indeed the pedagogy of our lives.

When devising the SAYS curriculum, poet-mentor educators are cognizant that they want the classroom to serve as an extension of the neighborhood. For instance, fights on campus are recurring and the surrounding area is often in the news for gang violence. It is not surprising that students' social-emotional needs and trauma are part of their

narratives. SAYS does not avoid such topics but rather uses literacy to situate learning in the local context of their communities.

Literacy Is Alive

Let me illustrate the SAYS approach by recreating this scenario: today, all desks are assembled in a circle and the SAYS guidelines are on the board. Students sluggishly enter class after lunch. They are met by Mama Laura (as the students call her), a poet-mentor educator, who smiles wide as she shakes hands, gives fist bumps, and even offers a few hugs to each sixth grader. Without direction, the students go to the SAYS box and collect their journals. A few anxiously check inside their notebooks to see if there is a personalized note of response from Mama Laura. With their notebooks and pencils in place, the students take a seat. Mama Laura kindly reminds me as well as the classroom teacher to join the group.

After a momentary check-in, Mama Laura begins the writing workshop in a soothing monotone. She speaks rather slowly. "Write what I am about to tell you in your journal and then keep on writing." She provides the writing prompt: "When I look in the mirror…"

During the next five-minutes, we all sit writing intently in our journals. It is so quiet that the only sound is of pens and pencils in motion. Next, Mama Laura asks "her babies" to share. Hands raise. Within minutes, the classroom is filled with young people's raw testimonies about what they see when they look in the mirror.

Kajal reads to us out loud:

> When I look in the mirror, I cry because a side of me is dead inside.
> When I look in the mirror, I hate what I see. I'm not the girl I used to be.
> When I look in the mirror, I see a black shadow hovering.
> But when I look again that black shadow is me.
> When I look in the mirror, I want to break it, but I can't so I sit there looking at the girl that was taken.
> When I look in the mirror, I stare at it hoping this reflection would go away so I turn off the light and walk away.
> When I look in the mirror, what do I see
> Is this girl I wish wasn't me.

Alberto also shares,

> When I look in the mirror, I see struggle
> Because I'm struggling in school
> And I'm failing my classes
> But I'm trying to get good grades
> And I'm trying to stay out of trouble.

The mirror exercise provides an important window into the students' self-perceptions, which inevitably shapes their aspirations. There are no put-downs or laughs. Rather, a sacred solemnness fills the air and the only thing to do is stay present and hold space for one another as each voice takes center stage. These acts of vulnerability are cathartic for the speaker and also create camaraderie amongst the class.

Introspection is not the only medium of self-expression. Poverty is a tableau of inquiry in SAYS, especially because it weighs so heavily on students' lives. In high school, Denise was getting into fights or not coming to school altogether. She landed in special education for being emotionally disturbed.[5] When SAYS entered Denise's remedial English class, she was completely disengaged, including never having submitted an assignment to her teacher. In preliminary conversations, I was told that this particular student might not even know how to spell her name. Over the course of the school year, we discovered that Denise was highly intelligent but did not care about school whatsoever. "Why should I care about school?" she told me one day. "When has school ever cared about me?"

During the SAYS residency, it became evident that Denise was actually a prolific writer. SAYS offered Denise many things, and her attendance and grades improved significantly. But perhaps most importantly, she discovered a healthy outlet for her pent up aggression. Instead of fighting with her fists, she started channeling her anger into words. The harsh despair that Denise expresses in the piece below is directed towards poverty. The poem illuminates Denise's personal analysis of her own life and the constant communal strife and stress of survival:

> I am from a large crowd that is not all the same.
> I am from the thud of a body drop after a bullet hits through a little black boy's brain.
> I am from whips, chains and physical strains that my ancestors had to go through so that my people could remain.
> I am from D.P.H
> The deepest part of hell and the name reminds me of the closing doors of a cell
> I am from the thug life looking for a savior
> The demons on my block because the devil is my neighbor
> I am from the quarter that drops into a hobo's cup or the greedy eyes that look at them like they're shit out of luck.
> I am from the long, long lines of soup kitchen where people fights just to eat.
> I am from scattered tears on abused child feet.
> I am from a song by R Kelly called I wish I wish I wish and I hope the lyrics come true as I wish myself out of this pit.
> I am from a place where fear and hate conquers our dreams
> There you will find what poverty truly means.
> I am from a place with lost love where everybody seems to lose faith in you, even the God above.
> I am from a place where the words 'hope' and 'pray' are only used when you have to go to court trial the next day.
> I wish that I could have made this poem a little sweeter before I begun.
> But sadly it's just not sugar coated where I'm from.

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5. Subjective Disabilities include intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, and emotional/behavioral disorders. There is a disproportionate identification of disabilities among particular ethnic/racial groups. For instance, Native Americans are 24% more likely than their peers to receive a learning disability label and African Americans are 59% more likely than their counterparts to be identified with emotional/behavioral disorders (Artiles).

From Life as a Primary Text to the Canon

In a traditional "banking concept" of schooling, students are the consumers of knowledge and information (see Freire). Whatever is deemed the "canon" is deposited into them, and they are required to regurgitate the facts in a particular manner and form. As Palmer finds, "The teacher-centered instructional model centers on a teacher who does little more than deliver prescribed conclusions to students (118-119).

In a SAYS classroom space, learning is democratic—and writing, in particular, is viewed as a personal and collective act. Students and the teacher are viewed as active and valuable participants in the cultivation of creativity and knowledge in a process of personal and collective discovery.

The first diagram below provides a simple snapshot of the ways literature is often taught in schools; it is mandated, decontextualized, and then evaluated. This process of regurgitation rarely focuses on deep reading and impactful learning.

Canon + Teacher → Student outcomes
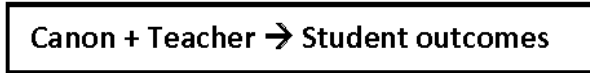
Figure 1: Traditional Approach to Literature

In juxtaposition, SAYS creates a culture of literacy that is participatory, as the diagram below illustrates:

Canon
+
Teacher
+
Student

Learning as a process of interaction & discovery
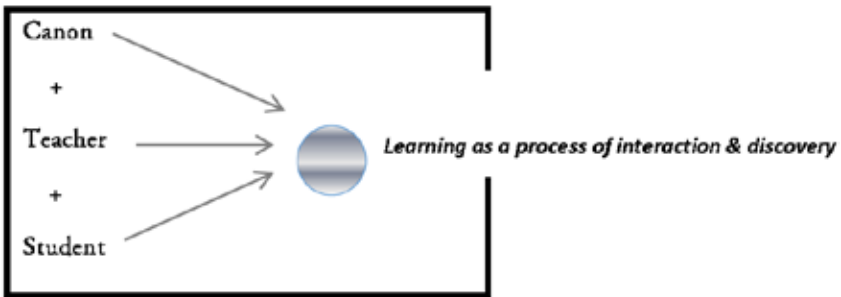
Figure 2: Participatory Approach to Literature

While this pedagogy aligns with spoken word performance poetry activities, how can it connect students to other genres of writing? To provide an example, I will briefly discuss how this pedagogy was applied to the teaching of Nathaniel Hawthorn's *Scarlet Letter*. Students in the SAYS treatment classes were mandated to read *The Scarlett Letter*, which was written in 1850. For the youth, this is not a text they are particularly excited about or find relevant to their daily reality. Nevertheless, we proceeded.

Before *The Scarlet Letter* was even introduced, the students were asked to write about revenge, which is a central theme of the story. It's important to reiterate this point:

Students examined revenge prior to ever seeing or being introduced to *The Scarlet Letter*. The students analyzed the concept of revenge from multiple vantage points through a variety of writing workshops that developed the student's multidimensional analysis of revenge. For instance, as in Figure 3 below, writing sprints and activities focused on moments they experienced revenge personally (self), examples of revenge at school and home (community), historical cases of revenge (past), and contemporary, political instances of revenge inter/nationally (present). As a class, we debated, deconstructed, and wrote extensively on revenge. Through this cycle of inquiry, the class investigated and came to discover their own as well as each other's analysis of revenge. The students reached an important insight when one student argued, "The moment revenge turns into rage you will lose control of yourself and this will impact your actions towards others."
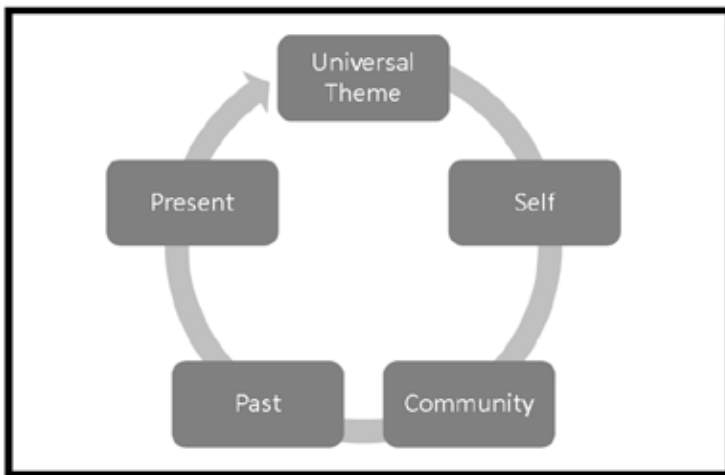
Figure 3: Life as Primary Text: The SAYS Cycle of Deep Learning

Significantly, the shift in power dynamics occurs through the instructional process because students' lives and perspectives serve as the primary text from which they interact with the canon. When everyone had something to say—and their notebooks were full with free-writes, antidotes, and thesis statements about revenge—it was then that *The Scarlet Letter* was introduced to the class. When Hawthorne finally came into play, so to speak, the students were already experts on the destructive nature of revenge and could enter into a dialectical and dialogical relationship with the text. They could discuss why they thought Hester Prynne chose to accept the scarlet letter rather than seek revenge against the father of her child or revenge against the society that branded her as an adulteress. Inevitably, the essays the students produced were of a higher caliber because their interrogation had taken on new meaning about themselves, their world, and the literature. Essentially, this is an example of deep learning.

When life is the primary text, education takes on new meaning. Darder urges teachers to consider such an approach as a "powerful dialogical force for political transformation and as a decolonizing epistemology—a dialectical framework from which we could break through the oppressive structures and practices of hegemonic schooling and society." In SAYS, the classroom is no longer an extension of colonialism, but an emancipatory window into *democratic sanctuaries*.

Final Thoughts

Something sacred transpires when students, teachers, and community-based poet mentor educators unapologetically and courageously bring their whole selves into the schoolhouse. These classrooms transformed into places where answers were confronted and complicated instead of memorized and revealed. I have wrestled with how to describe and codify the type of learning that is liberatory. In earlier work (Watson *Learning*), I focused on bringing together art and science, arguing that "while teachers are often trained in content expertise (the science of our profession), we are rarely equipped with tools in *communication*, *community building*, *compassion,* and *commitment,* yet these are some of the characteristics that define the art of our craft" (x). These were some of the lessons I gleaned from my qualitative study of community-based educators; I reveled in the art of human connection exhibited between the nontraditional educators and the young people they worked with. Building on this research, I began experiencing something new in the SAYS classes that was not encapsulated in my earlier arguments for the intersections of art and science. I started digging through years of information and layers of discoveries, I revisited SAYS classrooms, and took meticulous notes in a range of SAYS spaces, trying to pinpoint and authentically understand what I was witnessing.

In my final depiction below (Figure 4), I delineate how the art and the science of teaching are only two elements of the pedagogy that takes place in SAYS classrooms. There is a third element that enables students to *transcend* the limits of traditional teaching. The word "transcend" comes from the Latin prefix "trans" meaning "beyond," and the Latin verb *ascendere* meaning "to climb." To become transcendent is to go beyond the material structures of a traditional pedagogy that divide, categorize, and conquer. A pedagogy that transcends can actually help us climb toward unity within ourselves and within our communities. I discovered that the critical, missing element in my earlier interpretations of the pedagogy in SAYS classrooms was "soul." Combined with the art and science of teaching, a pedagogy with soul can lead to the kind of transformative learning that enables students to unite, and in that unity, to yearn for and seek social justice.
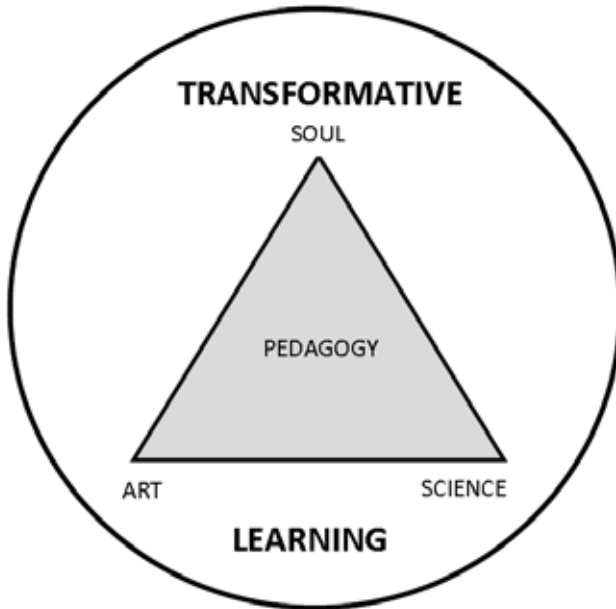
Figure 4: Pedagogical Structure of Transformative Learning

In *Education and the Aim of Human Life*, Pavitra observes, "You must find, in the depths of your being, that which carries in it the seed of universality, limitless expansion, timeless continuity. Then you decentralize, spread out, [and] enlarge yourself; you begin to live in everything and in all beings; the barriers separating individuals from each other break down" (74). In Mayan culture, the law of *In Lak'ech Ala K'in* means "I am you, and you are me." Chicano playwright Luis Valdes adopted this concept and put it into a poem. An excerpt from this poem was recited by students in Arizona schools until it was outlawed by the state legislature in 2010 for "politicizing students and breeding resentment against whites."[6]

> In Lak'ech
> Tú eres mi otro yo.
> You are my other me.
> Si te hago daño a ti,
> If I do harm to you,
> Me hago daño a mi mismo.
> I do harm to myself.
> Si te amo y respeto,
> If I love and respect you,
> Me amo y respeto yo.
> I love and respect myself.

6. Go to: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/13/in-laketch_n_6464604.html. It is unfortunate that the head of the Arizona state education department and the Arizona state legislature found the poem so threatening.

When the art, science, and soul of our pedagogical practices are aligned, we begin to see ourselves and our students with renewed capabilities. As Buddhist philosopher, Daisaku Ikeda teaches, an echo within the heart allows human beings to transcend the barriers of generations and genealogies. Applying these concepts to the classroom is relatively new, yet teaching demands something more if we are to decolonize and revolutionize the ways we learn. We need classrooms that are both analytical and emotional; scientific and spiritual; theoretical and practical. May we use classrooms as critical participatory spaces of intellectual discovery. May we open our textbooks, our notebooks, and ourselves—alongside our students—with renewed sensibilities, courageous capabilities, and dare to do education differently.

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Using Pre-reading Strategies to Provide Historical Context in a Literature Course

Tisha Ulmer

Reflecting on an Initial Teaching Experience

"Boy, talk about a sellout," a student exhaled after we read Phillis Wheatley's "On Being Brought from Africa to America" for the first time. This class was hardly shy about voicing their opinions, and other students chuckled and agreed. This was my first semester teaching African-American Literature I, a survey course. We began with colonial era writers such as Phillis Wheatley and Lucy Terry, read the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs and ended with the post-Reconstruction debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois regarding approaches to African-American equality. The class's initial response to Wheatley reflected one of the biggest challenges I encountered throughout the semester: helping students to appreciate the historical context for the literature we were studying.

This article explores pre-reading strategies I implemented that successfully moved students towards addressing the literature's historical context in their essay assignments. In particular, students engaged in writing activities designed to help them identify with the life experiences that influenced Wheatley's poetry. Towards the end of the semester the students engaged in a writing activity that gave them an opportunity to identify with the experiences of students at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute to elucidate why his ideas about African-American education and equality were so controversial. The goal was for students to have more nuanced reactions to the literature the first time they read it. The historical context would be a part of their critical thinking about the literature. I also hoped that they would be more likely to contextualize the literature in their formal writing assignments.

I teach at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York, which has an enrollment of about 17,000 students. 35% of the students are white, 32% are black, 19% are Hispanic, and 14% are Asian. About 75% of the students in my African-American literature course are black, with the rest comprised of white, Hispanic and Asian students. Most of the black students in my course are from the Caribbean, with a smaller percentage from Africa, and a few who trace their roots to the American South. Many of the white students at the college and in my course are from the former Soviet Union, and the Hispanic students hail from countries such as the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. Finally, most of the Asian students are from China or Pakistan. Generally speaking, the students come from working class, immigrant families with over 80% of the students' household incomes below $50,000 a year. 55% of the students at the college are female and 45% are male, and these statistics reflect the typical gender composition of my course (Kingsborough Community College Institutional Profile).

Our first work, "Bars Fight," a ballad by Lucy Terry, was the earliest known work of literature by an African-American. It recounts a Native American attack on two white families in a meadow in Deerfield, Massachusetts in 1746:

> August 'twas the twenty-fifth,
> Seventeen hundred forty-six;
> The Indians did in ambush lay,
> Some very valiant men to slay,
> The names of whom I'll not leave out.
> Samuel Allen like a hero fout,
> And though he was so brave and bold,
> His face no more shalt we behold
> Eleazer Hawks was killed outright,
> Before he had time to fight,
> Before he did the Indians see,
> Was shot and killed immediately.
> Oliver Amsden he was slain,
> Which caused his friends much grief and pain.
> Simeon Amsden they found dead,
> Not many rods distant from his head.
> Adonijah Gillett we do hear
> Did lose his life which was so dear.
> John Sadler fled across the water,
> And thus escaped the dreadful slaughter.
> Eunice Allen see the Indians coming,
> And hopes to save herself by running,
> And had not her petticoats stopped her,
> The awful creatures had not catched her,
> Nor tommy hawked her on the head,
> And left her on the ground for dead.
> Young Samuel Allen, Oh lack-a-day!
> Was taken and carried to Canada.

Since I was concerned that the students might transpose images of Southern slavery reminiscent of films such as *Roots* or *Gone with the Wind* onto the Northern landscape, we reviewed a document that gives an account of all of the slaves in Deerfield in the 1700s before we read "Bars Fight" ("18ᵗʰ Century Slaves in Deerfield"). For example, they learned that most of the white families owned only one or two slaves; many of these slaves attended church with their masters, and some even had store accounts. In this way the students noted the differences between Southern plantation slavery and Northern slavery, where the slaves were almost members of the family who were often taught to read and write and usually slept in the same house as their masters. We also reviewed historical documents about the attack, including the recollection of one of the survivors ("The Background of the Fight at the Bars"). Finally, we read about Terry's life which, after gaining her freedom through purchase by her husband, included acts of resistance such as arguing her case before the Supreme Court in a land dispute with a neighbor and delivering a three hour address before the Board of Trustees at Williams College

regarding why her son should be admitted. Successful in the first instance though not in the latter, she was widely praised for her oratorical skills.

When we read "Bars Fight," the students, as many of Terry's critics, observed that Terry seems to sympathize with the white settlers. Yet in light of the historical documents, they also noted that in some sections she can be seen as subtly criticizing her captors. For example, Terry uses words such as "valiant" and "brave" to praise the colonists, yet she notes that "John Sadler fled across the water/And thus escaped the dreadful slaughter." In the historical documents the students learned that John Sadler was in fact a soldier who was supposed to protect the colonists from such an attack. Some students also observed that Terry distanced herself from the colonists, with the lines, "Oliver Amsden he was slain/ Which caused *his* friends much grief and pain." In these ways, they brought their knowledge of the historical context to bear on their interpretations of the poem.

I transitioned to our second colonial writer, Phillis Wheatley, by giving a brief overview of Wheatley's biography, noting that a wealthy tailor, John Wheatley, purchased her to be a companion to his wife, Susanna Wheatley. When Susanna recognized Phillis' intelligence, she encouraged her to study the Bible as well as English and Latin literature. I also noted that Wheatley wrote in the context of the burgeoning American Revolution, and we reviewed the causes of the Revolution. Despite this brief background, the historical framework we had erected around "Bars Fight" collapsed when the students encountered Wheatley's controversial poem, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" for the first time. They seemed to view it solely through a 21st century lens and categorically considered her a sellout.

John Bean describes this dilemma:

> Inexperienced readers often do not see what conversation a text belongs to—what exigency sparked the piece of writing, what question the writer was pondering, what points of view the writer was pushing against, what audience the writer was imagining, what change the writer hoped to bring about in the audience's beliefs or actions—why in short, the writer put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. They have difficulty perceiving a real author writing for a real reason out of a real historical moment. (165)

Similarly, in the anthology *Teaching African-American Literature: Theory and Practice*, several contributors stress the importance of contextualizing African-American literature. For example, two contributors assert that without this context, students will view black literature through the lens of stereotypes. Jane Skelton states that while authors such as Langston Hughes are widely anthologized; they are rarely presented "*in context*" [emphasis Skelton] (54). She laments that after showing her class, primarily composed of black and Latino students, a documentary about the life of Langston Hughes for a unit on the Harlem Renaissance, one student blurted out "I didn't know black people lived that way back then" (54). The documentary's depiction of well-educated, well-travelled, middle-class Harlem blacks challenged their historical notions of black life as characterized by slavery and oppression, as well contemporary stereotypes about black life such as the entertainer, the athlete, and the single mother (55). In this way, Skelton aims to provide her students of color with multiple, positive models of black life.

Meanwhile, contributor Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg aims to reattach "cultural and academic texts to their historical and political origins" to develop self-reflexivity in her

predominately white classes, to help students "become more aware of themselves and their positions within culture" (172). She hopes that this critical consciousness will prevent students from falling into the net of viewing a character such as *Native Son*'s Bigger Thomas, who kills his black girlfriend and his white female employer, through the lens of "culturally perpetuated stereotypes of black men as sexually excessive and likely to engage in criminal activity, a net supported by widely disseminated media images" (161). She notes that, "falling into the net remains frightfully easy for students (across race, class and gender lines), even if they never proclaim it as such" (161).

Falling into the net of stereotypes or pre-conceived notions about the past can happen to students of all backgrounds in any literature course. Moreover, as Goldberg articulates it, students of all backgrounds can see literature solely "from their own position within the culture" (172). For instance, to what extent were my students' negative perceptions of Phillis Wheatley shaped by their engagement with the activism of Black Lives Matter, their generation's campaign to end police violence against African-Americans? To what extent were their perceptions shaped by contemporary conversations about light-skin versus dark-skin blacks—notions that seem to be rooted in their generation's understanding of house slaves versus field slaves? To what extent were their responses to the literature shaped by their experiences as first or second generation immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa? All of these perspectives came up in the classroom and may explain their views on Wheatley's poem and the other texts we studied.

Therefore, I think it is important for students of all backgrounds to reflect on their position and how it may shape their view of the past. Indeed, I find the suggestion of Thein, et al. particularly useful when they observe:

> Teachers who have earnestly tried to teach multicultural literature in a manner that fosters change often find that when they push students to see differences between their experiences and the kinds of racism and oppression depicted in multicultural texts, students push back and resist our efforts, often because they do not want to be implicated in institutional or systemic racism. (54)

They accordingly discuss approaches that allow white students "to increase their understandings of *how* their beliefs and values are formed and *why* other people think differently" (55). For example, students can take on the perspective of characters in a novel by creating monologues. They can search the text to find "beliefs, thoughts, actions and social contexts" of the characters and begin their monologues with the words, "You think you know me, but you don't!"(58). The authors also have students take on the perspective of characters by placing the characters in contemporary situations. For instance, when the class read Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, students took on the roles of Janie, her grandmother, and her three husbands and one student performed the role of counselor to ask questions about their perspectives and actions. Before this activity, some students were critical of the fact that Janie's grandmother forced her to marry a man she didn't love. But in role-playing Janie's grandmother, a student explained her experiences of "slavery, sexual abuse, and poverty" that led her to seek security for her granddaughter (58). The authors report: "Students explained that while they had read those details in the text, those role play meetings encouraged them to frame the details in terms of characters'

internal motivations for their actions" (58). Thein, et al. acknowledge that while they may not see significant change in a student's beliefs and attitudes during the course, "a different and no less powerful kind of change can be imagined when students read, discuss and write about multicultural literature—a willingness to 'try on' different perspectives" (55).

Applying Lessons Learned

In response to the foregoing teaching experience and research, I thought it might be useful to have my students engage in a pre-reading activity in which they "tried on" the position of the historical other. I'd already seen how low stakes pre-reading activities "immerse students in complexity without being threatening," so I designed a pre-reading activity in which the students would try on the perspective of the historical other before reading Wheatley's poetry (Bean 121). In other words, I wanted them to engage in a personal transaction with the past.

The next semester I gave the students Wheatley's biography. I then asked them to imagine what they might write about if this was their life story. I gave them a few minutes to respond to this question in writing. The biography and free-writing question are below:

> You were purchased by Peter Gwinn as part of a cargo of slaves in a region his employer describes as 'Sinagall,' most likely today's Senegal. Your age was unknown when you were brought to Boston, but you were around seven years old. Diminutive and sickly, you were purchased at the slave market of John Avery by a Mrs. Susanna Wheatley.
>
> You came to the colonies speaking no English, but quickly learned to read and write Latin and English. You learn to read the Bible fluently in sixteen months. Susanna Wheatley and her daughter Mary do not have a scholarly interest themselves but foster your interest in Alexander Pope, Milton, and Homer. You join the Old South Meeting House in 1771, solidifying your Puritan faith. The Wheatley family takes pride in their "experiment" and show you off to other prominent families in the Boston area.
>
> Your role as a young person in the family is complex. You have few domestic tasks, but are still the property of the Wheatleys. You have privileges that most other slaves don't have, such as a lighted and heated room. You dine modestly apart from the rest of the company...where you cannot give or receive offense. Your role is unclear in the family and in society in general: You inhabit a strange, ambiguous twilight zone between black society and white society, cut off from any normal contact with either, denied the sustenance of group identity.
>
> The year is 1765, you are now 18 and you have a desire to write poetry. Given your life circumstances and what is happening in the colonies, what do you want to write about? ("Phillis Wheatley Biography")

This low-stakes assignment challenged students to take on the position of the historical other (considering race and gender, in particular) and express their opinion from that perspective. Since Wheatley's birth year is unknown, I settled on age 18 as the year she began writing poetry as I felt many of the students would be able to relate to that age. Sixty percent of the students at the college are under age 22, and this age is generally representative of students taking my course.

We discussed what they might write about, and I put their responses on the board. Then we read, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," a poem that made her "a pariah in black political and critical circles" (Gates 74) because Wheatley seems to express

gratitude for her experience as an American slave:

> 'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,
> Taught my benighted soul to understand
> That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:
> Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
> Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
> 'Their colour is a diabolic die.'
> Remember, *Christians*, *Negros*, black as *Cain*,
> May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train. (143-144)

We began by attending to the poem's diction, using the Smart Board to define words such as "mercy," "pagan," "benighted," "redemption," "sable," "scornful," "diabolic," and "refined." We also reviewed the footnote regarding the biblical reference to Cain and Abel, in which the editors of the *Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* note that, "Because he murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-5), Cain is said to have been 'marked' by God. Some readers of the Bible thought that Cain thereby became the first black man" (144). Following this I asked the students to free write in response to the question, "Did she write about what you thought she would write about?" We discussed the answer to this question as well as their reactions to the poem. The first semester that I did this pre-reading assignment I found that the students had mixed responses to the poem. While some of the students certainly considered Wheatley "brainwashed," other students used words like "sarcasm" when we discussed the poem. For instance, during the Spring 2014 semester, while most of the students argued that, "her owners brainwashed her," that "they used religion to mess with her head," that she was a "show trophy" and "exploited," other students noted her "sarcastic undertone" or argued that the poem can be seen as, "giving the slaves hope." Indeed, as evidenced in their free writing and class discussions, engaging in a personal transaction with the past, taking on the position of the historical other, led the classes to have more nuanced reactions to Wheatley's controversial poem the first time they encountered it.

But would the students account for Wheatley's historical context in their graded essay? For the formal assignment I provide the students with quotes from four of Wheatley's critics from the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. For example, Seymour Gross wrote, "This Negro poetess so well fits the Uncle Tom syndrome . . . . She is pious, grateful, retiring and civil" (Gates 76). Meanwhile, Amiri Baraka proclaimed that Wheatley's "pleasant imitations of 18th century English poetry are far, and finally, ludicrous departures from the huge black voices that splintered southern nights with their hollers, chants, arwhoolies, and ballits" (76). The students responded to the question, "Do you agree with these critics? Why or why not?"

When I began teaching the course, very few students addressed the history of the period in their initial drafts. I have found that since I introduced the pre-reading activity in which they take on the position of the historical other, many more students consider Wheatley's historical context in their first drafts. Indeed, 75% of the students did so during the spring 2014 semester. This was also the case during the spring 2015 semester.

Below are three examples of students' writing from the pre-reading activity to the first draft of the formal essay. All student names are pseudonyms, and I have only altered the

students' language to make it clearer.

After reading Wheatley's biography, one student, Camila, said that if this were her life story she would write about her migration experience, growing up with the Wheatleys, gaining literacy, and her place in society. She began: "I would like to write about my experience from being brought to the United States as a slave, also being able to learn how to speak English, read and write and what it was like growing up with the Wheatleys. Where I see myself socially."

After she read "On Being Brought from Africa to America," Camila was disappointed by Wheatley's passive tone, and she did not see the poem as containing any autobiographical elements. She wrote: "She did not write about what I thought she would. This is more like having a little anger towards the whites. However, she does [say] that she learned something from her owners through this literature. I was kind of shocked at this poem because I thought she would [have] written about her life."

Consistent with her informal writing, in her formal essay Camila agrees with the critics who claim that Wheatley was submissive: "Based on all of Wheatley's works the critics are right; she accepts the wrongs that were done to blacks. When reading her poems you don't get the feeling of someone who is standing up for her people; you see a woman who doesn't really think of herself as a black slave." Camila supports her thesis by asserting that Wheatley belittles her origins in "On Being Brought from Africa to America," as "she thinks little of the religion in her homeland and she accepts the Christian religion." She also discusses Wheatley's passive tone in "To His Excellency, George Washington," in which she "never mentions that Washington is contradicting himself being that he was an owner of slaves; yet he was fighting for freedom." In her conclusion, however, she contextualizes her thesis by accounting for the difference between slavery in the North and the South and even makes a concession:

> What people must understand is that Phillis Wheatley did not experience working in a cotton field and being beaten by her masters. She cannot write about what she did not endure. We have to keep in mind that she was also in the North where the slaves had more rights than the ones in the South. Even though reading her poetry doesn't make you feel any of the struggles that black slaves in the south went through, we must give Phillis Wheatley credit because she is a part of the foundation of African American literature.

After reading Wheatley's biography, another student, Andrew, said that he would write about his perplexing position in society and his life story, focusing on key incidents in his life.

- My confusion of my life with society
- My life thus far
- Experiences/defining moments

Unlike Camila, Andrew felt that Wheatley's content was what he predicted in that she wrote about key moments in her life: "She did write about what I spoke of. She described defining moments. Such moments, being 'saved' from sin, her pagan land, and being educated. I find it interesting she talks down to her old self, and praises her new identity."

In his graded essay, Andrew made Wheatley's historical period central to his thesis, in which he disagreed with the critics. In fact, he as well as other students highlighted the 1960s in their analysis. Andrew wrote:

> As the critics were from the 1960s, time of the civil rights movements, they were looking for poetry from the first black African American. Expecting it to be about the struggles of the harsh life they lived. The critics obtained something completely different than what they expected. Assuming they wanted something inspirational, so they can use it in their speeches and marches. Instead they found works that were more along the lines of a 'white persons' life. One's life style and experiences generally determine a story they would tell of their own life. This is true for Phillis Wheatley . . . . She was brought to the Northern part of the colonies where slavery was 'nicer.' She fortunately had a way better life style than those slaves of the south . . . . It's obvious that [Amiri Baraka] didn't take into account the life style she had growing up in the north, and the family that 'took her in.'

In this excerpt from his formal essay, we see that Andrew confidently argues that Amiri Baraka was so focused on the exigencies of his historical era that he failed to fully or fairly consider Wheatley's context. Moreover, by placing terms such as "nicer" and "took her in" in quotation marks, Andrew highlights the complex nature of Northern slavery and Wheatley's relationship with the family that purchased her.

These responses reflect how engaging in an informal writing assignment in which the students have a personal transaction with the past before reading the primary text can help them better comprehend the primary text and have more nuanced interpretations of it from the first time they encounter it.

Extending Students' Personal Transaction with the Past

Encouraged by how the activity of personally transacting with the past worked with Phillis Wheatley, I decided to try it again at the end of the semester before the students read Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. When I began teaching the course, I was struck by the fact that most of the students sided with Booker T. Washington's notion that it was best for blacks to eschew direct protest against the critical challenges they faced during the post-Reconstruction era—disenfranchisement, lynching and segregation—and instead engage in manual labor to build a strong economic base, which would eventually lead to political and social equality. As he expressed it in his famous "Atlanta Exposition Address" of 1895:

> Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life . . . .
> The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing. (574)

During my first time teaching African American Literature I—to place Washington and Du Bois in their historical context as it relates to topics such as minstrelsy, Jim Crow, lynching, the rise of black politicians during the Reconstruction Era, and the Industrial Revolution—the students did group presentations on a selection of these topics for extra credit. This pre-reading activity may have reflected my own proclivities as a child of the Civil Rights movement because I wanted the students to appreciate why Booker T. Washington's gradualist gospel was so controversial in the context of the adversities that blacks faced in the post-Reconstruction era.

The second time I taught Washington's essay in the course, I announced that a group of buildings on campus, trailer-like structures known as the T-Buildings or Temporary-Buildings, were going to be torn down and replaced with a new, state of the art facility. I told the class that the president of our college had put forth a proposal in which students would assist in constructing the new building. In this way, students would have an opportunity to learn a trade such as plumbing, electricity, masonry, and so forth and receive credits towards their degree. In brief, future students would graduate with a trade as well as an academic degree. I informed the class that the president wanted student feedback on this proposal, and our class was one of five chosen to do so in the form of an anonymous letter. After they wrote their letters to the president, we discussed the pros and cons of the proposal. I put their responses on the board. The discussion became quite heated as some students were vehemently against the proposal, while others could see the value of it. Excerpts from letters written by four students are below:

> It's been an honor to attend Kingsborough Community College in the time that I've been here. Coming to Kingsborough gave me the college experience I needed right at home. Although there are some things I believe the new president should bring to this school. I do like the idea of having the students help rebuild the "T" buildings up in exchange for 12 credits. Not only is this a great idea it allows more hands on educational experience, which I think many students can gain from so I say go on with this!!

> I believe this proposal is a good idea. Though Kingsborough is not a trade school, the skill one would learn can be taken outside the construction zone and taken home for similar problems in the household. My only concern is the re-allocation of the classes in those buildings that use various equipment, such as music. I'm a musician and I know music isn't high up on the list for saving. But I don't want the small music program gone because of the construction . . . . But the number of credits for this one class is wonderful for people who don't want to take 'boring' electives. And for the community, I think it's wonderful, having students coming together and rebuilding. Overall it's a good idea, just some fine tuning.

In these letters the students emphasize how the proposal can: 1) expand employment opportunities, 2) create even greater economic independence, as graduates will be able to use the skills they learn in the home, and 3) unify the campus through community service. All of these points mirror Washington's argument for teaching blue collar skills such as brickmaking, farming and domestic service in addition to the liberal arts at the college he founded, the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The second student, however, alludes to the tension between a vocational education and a liberal arts education, which the following students engaged explicitly and emphatically:

I've heard about the proposal and in my opinion I don't think it's such a great idea. Kingsborough is about getting an education. If students wanted to be construction workers, etc. then they should have gone to trade school.

Building the school has absolutely nothing to do with my major. I care very little for the building to come up from the ground. The number one reason being that I had to take classes in the T building, which did not bother me to do so. And now I have to contribute to the comfort of others. Number two we are not all [students] who want to participate in vocational school. My major is Criminal Justice and [I am] transferring to John Jay for forensic science. Construction work does not benefit [me in any] way . . . . So don't waste your time or students' time trying to force us to do construction work.

These students are clear in their intention to pursue a liberal arts education and become professionals. They seem to downgrade blue-collar employment. The letters also reflect that our college is primarily a liberal arts institution: over half of the student body majors in Liberal Arts, followed by Criminal Justice, Business Administration and Biology—and over one-third of the students plan to transfer to a four-year college (Kingsborough Community College Institutional Profile). In addition to reflecting the focus of the college, these objections may also be underscored by the fact that most of the students at Kingsborough Community College are first-generation college students. As the students at Tuskegee over a century ago, our students are trying to achieve a foothold on the American dream. While some of the students see the value of learning a trade to achieve this, others are certain that a traditional college education is the only way to do so.

When we concluded the discussion, I informed the students that the proposal was not real. They were shocked and amused to discover that I had been acting, and once the class settled I gave them a brief introduction to Booker T. Washington's ideas and his approach to education. We concluded the day's class session by reading an excerpt from his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, in which the class saw that students at Tuskegee had similar responses to his emphasis on manual labor as they struggled to make bricks to put up a campus building. Washington recalls:

About the time that we succeeded in burning our first kiln of bricks we began facing in an emphasized form the objection of the students to being taught to work. By this time it had gotten to be pretty well advertised throughout the state that every student who came to Tuskegee, no matter what his financial ability might be, must learn some industry. Quite a number of letters came from parents protesting against their children engaging in labour while they were in the school. Other parents came to the school to protest in person. Most of the new students brought a written or a verbal request from their parents to the effect that they wanted their children taught nothing but books. The more books, the larger they were, and the longer the titles printed upon them, the better pleased the students and their parents seemed to be. (72)

The class readily saw that students and parents at Tuskegee had similar objections to an industrial education. Additionally, the final sentence of this passage is a touchstone for the controversial aspect of Washington's rhetorical strategies, as he intimates that the intellectual pursuits of African Americans were not only impractical but also superficial. This mirrors an earlier section of his essay when Washington asserts that one of the saddest

things he saw during his travels through the South, "was a young man, who attended some high school, sitting down in a one room cabin, with grease on his clothing, filth all around him, and weeds in the garden, engaged in studying a French grammar" (58). Did Washington engage in a form of minstrelsy in his writing and speeches? In the *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B Du Bois responds to this passage directly, reflecting on how Booker T. Washington's rhetoric and work reflected the zeitgeist. He writes:

> Next to this achievement comes Mr. Washington's work in gaining place and consideration in the North. Others less shrewd and tactful had formerly essayed to sit on these two stools and had fallen between them; but as Mr. Washington knew the heart of the South from birth and training, so by singular insight he intuitively grasped the spirit of the age which was dominating the North. And so thoroughly did he learn the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of material prosperity that the picture of a lone black boy poring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home soon seemed to him the acme of absurdities. One wonders what Socrates and St. Francis of Assisi would say to this. (695)

In these ways, I hoped that this low stakes assignment in which the students engaged in a personal transaction with the past—pursuing manual labor in addition to the liberal arts—would be an opportunity to consider the controversial nature of Booker T. Washington's work and words. But would the students account for Washington and Du Bois's historical context in their graded essay, integrating realities such as minstrelsy, Jim Crow, and lynching into their analysis? For the formal assignment the students had three choices. They could: (1) come up with a thesis for an essay about Washington and Du Bois, (2) write a letter to Washington or Du Bois, or (3) imagine that the year was 1905 and write journal entries in which they decided between attending Washington's Tuskegee Institute or Du Bois's alma mater, Fisk University, where they would receive a traditional college education.

During the spring 2014 semester, I found that 93% of the students integrated the historical context into their analysis in their first drafts. Fifteen students submitted draft one for analysis. During the spring 2015 semester, 82% of the students made references to the historical period in their first drafts.

One student began her letter to Booker T. Washington by making a personal connection between the slavery and post-slavery eras:

> My name is Andrew Lineman and I am a part of the Negro race. I am a practicing Physician in a prominently black area and I make a living; a good honest living amongst my black people and I am a good Doctor. I obtained my education at Fisk University just as Mr. W.E.B. Du Bois has. I, however, had the unfortunate experience of hearing your speech the other day, and I was deeply saddened. My poor grandmother who was born a slave turned in the dirt upon hearing each of your belittling words.

She then couches her criticism of Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address" in the context of Jim Crow:

> Why must I or any other free man, who can fetch my own water, beg to another vessel? This is the cowardice I speak of Mr. Washington; I will not beg or ask the white

man for anything. Just as he will not ask me for anything; as I am sure Sir, if a white man was dying of thirst and was surrounded by 'BLACKS ONLY' water fountains, he would rather die of thirst than drink.

 As I get the feeling you are an accommodating man and make the best of every situation, I can understand why you feel blacks can live among whites under Jim Crow laws. The exception being that blacks be afforded the opportunity to work and make money just as any white man for the benefit of themselves and their country . . . these plans sound like paid slavery. I agree that the world needs tradesmen, but the world also needs brain and skill in other areas than using hoes, plows and hammers.

Another student argued that Washington had the best interest of African-Americans at heart, and as other students she explores how his experience with slavery shaped his views. Indeed, in analyzing their ideas, several students contrasted his upbringing with Du Bois's, who was raised in the North. She then challenges his accommodationist stance in response to the harsh realities that African-Americans faced during the post-Reconstruction era:

Washington, who has close connections to that harsh reality of slavery probably wanted black people as a whole to lay low out of fear of retaliation. I don't think he was inherently against integration or abolishing Jim Crow laws, but that he felt if they were to focus on that now, resistance would be too strong. I think he wanted to play it safe and didn't worry because he knew later generations would continue the legacy and create higher goals. And while I understand his point of view, the militant abuse occurring at the time towards black people needed to be addressed. Lynchings were a daily occurrence in some places, and Jim Crow laws were terrorizing the south. Freedom wasn't peaceful; with no education and limited resources, many people were angry and rightfully so. Sharecropping, while somewhat helpful to recently freed slaves, was very akin to slavery. They worked in the fields and were promised a small portion of the money made, but the land owners got most of the profits and little to none of the work. It was as if slavery had never truly ended.

Later, she alludes to the possibility that Washington was wearing a minstrel mask as she makes an intertextual connection to a reading from another literature course she was taking that semester:

Washington's ideals are a great stepping stone for Du Bois' ideals. In my Intro to Lit class we read a short story called *Battle Royal*. In the beginning, the narrator's grandfather dies, but reminds the boy to always remember to kill them with kindness. Say one thing, but never forget who you are and who they are. This reminds me greatly of Washington. He advised us not to complain and to abide by the rules, no matter how dehumanizing they seemed, but I believed deep down, he was waiting for what felt like the right time to strike. To gain the trust of the oppressor before destroying the walls they built to keep us out.

These are two examples of how students incorporated historical realities such as Jim Crow, lynching and sharecropping into their formal essays about Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Since I began using this strategy, students have been much more likely to consider the historical context in their formal essays. Indeed, in her formal

essay, one student disagreed with Washington's arguments but was still inspired by the challenges he overcame. She wrote, "You inspired me to finish off this semester stronger than ever before. I say this because of the pressures of being a first generation graduate from college. People tend to forget that you are not perfect . . . . I thank you for all of the hard work and inspiring many people to keep moving forward when obstacles appear to be impossible."

One of the primary challenges we face in the literature classroom is having students integrate the historical context into their analysis of the literature. Pre-reading strategies in which students engage in "trying on" the position of the historical other can be a key tool in addressing this challenge—a way to help them "keep moving forward" in their appreciation of history and its impact on literature.

✦

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"The most peaceful I ever felt writing": A Contemplative Approach to Essay Revision

Grace Wetzel

"Revision is not the end of the writing process but the beginning."

— Donald Murray, *The Craft of Revision*

"My first draft usually has only a few elements worth keeping. I have to find what those are and build from them and throw out what doesn't work, or what simply is not alive."

— Susan Sontag, *Conversations with American Writers* by Charles Ruas

Revision is central to writing. Yet it remains a persistently challenging process to teach. Particularly in first-year writing courses, students often see revision as tedious, onerous, or even overwhelming. Final drafts do not therefore always reflect "deep revision" but oftentimes "surface editing" instead (Breidenbach 202). This is not especially surprising. In our hyper-digital world of constant distraction, it can be difficult enough summoning the motivation to begin revision—let alone cultivating the type of focused attention and patient re-seeing required for doing it well. This essay proposes that contemplative practices including yoga, freewriting, and meditation can not only enhance student motivation to revise, but more important, foster specific habits of mind beneficial to revision.[1]

Today in higher education, contemplative pedagogy is blossoming across an array of disciplines. Affording benefits such as sharpened focus, stress reduction, and newfound insight, contemplative practices encourage students to pay close attention and "live fully into the content at hand" (Gunnlaugson et al. 1-2; Barbezat and Bush 206). This pedagogy provides a valuable frame of mind for conducting acts of revision. To begin to explore the links between contemplative practices and revision, I share a qualitative analysis of student writing and oral reflections from two First-Year English classes[2] to

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1. My own contemplative practices include regular Vinyasa yoga and (more recently) meditation. I presented a poster session of this project at the 2015 Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education Conference.

2. I draw from one composition course and one literature-based writing course—both required components of the First-Year sequence at my university. Although my data derives from two different courses, I focus on students' revision of the same type of assignment: rhetorical analysis. The literature-based writing class conducted a rhetorical analysis of a nineteenth-century woman's rights text. In this course, I assigned both literary and rhetorical analyses. The composition class conducted a rhetorical analysis of a recent op-ed and an intertextual rhetorical analysis of a written and audio-visual text.

illustrate how contemplative exercises yield motivated, meaningful essay revision. Specifically, meditation-based contemplative pedagogy: (1) improves students' attitudes toward revision; and (2) generates important habits of mind useful to strong revision, such as openness; focused attention; visualization of rhetorical context; and invention of vivid, sensory detail.

First, contemplative methods offer a powerful means of investing students in revision. Since "attitude motivates the learning of skills," it is worth attending to ways of alleviating student resistance to revision—that is, ways of helping students approach this stage of the writing process with invigorated minds (Murray xiv). Contemplative practices enhance student motivation to revise by enabling a powerful "re-seeing" of revision itself. Second, these methods foster several valuable habits of mind for revision:

- *Openness*: Openness—"the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking"—is central to success in college writing and a byproduct of mindfulness ("Framework" 1). Because "[m]indfulness opens the mind and gives space for new understanding," it can facilitate essay revision (Barbezat and Bush 98). Specifically, an orientation to the unfinished nature of writing yields receptivity to "deep revision" and fresh perspectives on course texts.

- *Focused Attention*: Contemplative practices strip away internal and external clutter (including stress, preoccupation, and distraction)—cultivating powerful presence. With a deeply focused mind, students can conduct more sophisticated close readings through "deep listening" to key words and mindful attention to visual details (Barbezat and Bush 137).

- *Visualization of Rhetorical Context*: Visualization of rhetorical context aids students in both analyzing and revising texts. This entails using the mind's eye to picture rhetors deeply engaged in the act of speaking, performing, or composing—driven by a clear purpose for a particular audience. Such attention also helps students better imagine their own rhetorical contexts, yielding enhanced style and development.

- *Invention of Vivid, Sensory Detail*: Contemplative practices build focused and creative attention to the power of language. Students not only notice compelling words in course texts; they also learn to breathe life into their own writing through the invention of vivid, sensory detail able to engage readers.

As these descriptions suggest, the four habits of mind identified here are not discrete. Rather, when cultivated together, these capacities interweave and strengthen one another. The remainder of this essay will examine in greater detail how contemplative practices can powerfully animate essay revision through these important habits of mind.

I begin by situating this study within relevant scholarship on student motivation and engagement, contemplative pedagogy, and revision. The second section explores my implementation of contemplative methods in the first-year literature-based writing class following a student's suggestion that we meditate. In response, I planned a contempla-

tive writing workshop targeting students' revision needs that incorporated yoga, meditation, and freewriting. The results were encouraging—paving the way for a second and more systematically designed workshop held in a first-year composition class the following semester. After analyzing student writing and testimonials from this second contemplative revision workshop, I conclude by addressing future possibilities for this approach to revision. Ultimately, I hope to show that contemplative pedagogy not only enlivens student attitudes toward revision, but also yields more sophisticated close reading, vivid writing, and attentive rhetorical analysis.

Student Motivation and Engagement, Contemplative Pedagogy, and Revision

In their preface to *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education* (2014), Daniel P. Barbezat and Mirabai Bush describe an industrial educational climate in our universities and colleges, giving rise to student indifference. If courses are merely commodities," they ask, "then why should students hold them as special?" (xv). Others have also made relevant observations about student motivation and engagement today. Thomas Deans, summarizing work by Tim Clydesdale and Rebekah Nathan on the subject, observes that "[f]reshman year is, for most, not a season of intellectual awakening" (Clydesdale W493). Many first-year students are instead becoming "practical credentialists" who "focus on what counts toward the grade and what will serve their careers. Not many come to value the liberal arts…and few expand their political consciousness" (Clydesdale 166; Deans W493). At the private liberal arts university where I teach, these patterns tend to hold true. While there are certainly exceptions, many students quickly gravitate toward seemingly practical majors, balk at grades lower than Bs, and approach general education courses as boxes to check.

This pragmatic orientation often extends to first-year writing. As Michael Bunn notes, "[M]any college students see writing courses as a chore—a hurdle on the track toward graduation. At the same time, many of these students recognize the value of writing and learning to write" (496). The challenge, then, is to invest students in their own development as writers not solely as a pragmatic, marketable skill set, but as a meaningful process of discovery. This can prove difficult in our hyper-technological, media-saturated world. Jessica Jones describes it well when she notes that contemporary educators "are forced to grapple with a clamorous, headlong world. The nightly news parades through our living rooms with the echo of bombs and one-dollar cheeseburgers. Our students come to class with smartphones and iPods. Words flood onto their papers without much thought" (87 Contemplative pedagogy offers one important remedy for this problem.

Barbezat and Bush have to this end shown how a wide range of contemplative practices—including stillness (e.g., meditation; silence), creative exercises (e.g., freewriting; journaling), and movement (e.g., yoga, aikido)—can deepen student engagement and learning (10). When approached with a contemplative mind, course material ceases to be "a set of intellectual hoops…to jump through" but rather "an active opportunity for [students] to find meaning and develop intellectually" (Barbezat and Bush 3). This type of transformation can be powerful for student writers. Composition scholars such as James Moffett, Barry M. Kroll, Christy I. Wenger, Ryan Crawford and Andreas Willhoff have accordingly highlighted a link between contemplative pedagogy and meaningful student

writing—revealing how meditation (among other contemplative practices) fosters more insightful, creative, and focused writing. Building on this work, I propose that meditation-based contemplative pedagogy cultivates transformations of mind capable of inspiring purposeful, attentive, and creative essay revision.

Meditation undoubtedly supports learning in compelling ways. As Tobin Hart summarizes, meditation triggers immediate "physiological relaxation and slowed metabolism, a heightened self-awareness, and feelings of calm" (31). Over time, it enables "improved concentration, empathy, perceptual acuity, a drop in anxiety and stress symptoms, and more effective performance in a broad range of domains" (31). Crawford and Willhoff similarly affirm in the pages of this journal that "Meditation has been proven useful not only in increasing the overall well-being of participants but also in leading to greater insight" (80). My students' receptiveness to meditation preceding revision is not then surprising. Indeed, students may be yearning for opportunities to embrace revision as a contemplative process.

A contemplative approach to revision is therefore valuable because revision is often perceived as an onerous task. As Catherine Haar acknowledges in *Revision: History, Theory, and Practice*, "There's perhaps no natural appetite for acts of revision in writing . . . . Even at the college level, students may resist revising, dislike it, or do it in perfunctory or desultory ways" (24). This can often entail a focus on error correction rather than "deep revision"—which requires students to "rethink their essay" (Binkley 238). Contemplative pedagogy can open up students to the prospect of "deep revision" because it breathes new and vibrant life into the process. "If more writers regarded revision as creative work," Cathleen Breidenbach maintains, "they'd approach revision with less dread and more anticipation. To be creative, however, revision needs time and freedom from excessive constraint and regimentation. It needs to remain open and loose and walk on the edge of possibilities" (200).[3] Instructors can thus mitigate resistant or mechanical attitudes toward revision by presenting it as an "open," "loose," and peacefully reinvigorating process. Doing so will help teach students "that good writing does not need to be the product of stress and duress" (Wilson 176). Yoga, meditation, and freewriting instead relieve stress and afford freedom from "excessive constraint" by cultivating openness of body, mind, and pen.

For these reasons, revision and contemplative pedagogy are natural allies—a pairing that harmonizes with several key concepts in revision scholarship: movement, openness, and depth. "Revision means movement," Haar underscores in her survey of scholarly definitions of revision. It entails "drafting both up and down, out and in; heeding interior and exterior voices. These images of movement witness to the active, fluid thinking of revision" (Haar 14). This summary recalls Breidenbach's claim that revision must "remain open and loose" and further echoes Murray's *Craft of Revision*, which encourages writers to "revise to discover new meanings" and strive for "depth that goes below the surface" (Breidenbach 200; Murray xiv, 168). Yoga and freewriting promote the type of deep, open, and "fluid thinking" that yields effective revision. In cultivating attention and insight, meditation meanwhile teaches students that there is movement in stillness and active intellectual engagement in moments of peace.

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3. Breidenbach here builds on work by Donald Murray. See her chapter "Practical Guidelines for Writers and Teachers" in *Revision: History, Theory, and Practice*.

Contemplative Revision: Re-Seeing Nineteenth-Century Woman's Rights Texts

The idea for a contemplative revision workshop emerged in a first-year literature-based writing class shortly after spring break, when my students appeared drained of energy. I asked how they were doing. One student replied in a surprising way: he shared the story of a Friday high school meditation practice and asked if we, too, could integrate meditation into our classroom. Sensing an opportunity to merge contemplative practices with class writing needs, I planned a workshop integrating yoga, meditation, freewriting, and revision. We focused on students' rhetorical analyses of texts from the nineteenth-century woman's rights movement, including Sarah Grimke's "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes" (1837), Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's "We Are All Bound Up Together" (1866), *The U.S.A. v. Susan B. Anthony* (1873), and a selection from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1898). The workshop assumed this sequence: (1) an opening series of yoga postures and movements; (2) a personal meditation; (3) a freewrite; (4) a second, essay-related meditation; and (5) essay revision.

To begin, we pushed the desks to the side and covered the floor in blankets.[4] We lit candles, played relaxing music, and then joined together in a series of gentle yoga postures and movements beginning with the "mountain pose." I invited my students to stand solidly but calmly on the blankets—feeling their feet grounding into the earth and the earth rising to meet them. I encouraged them to detach from the strain of the day and embrace a moment of peace within their busy, academic lives. With a focus on the breath, we then joined together in several half-sun salutations, followed by seated twists. These practices were chosen to both open the body and mind and also put students at ease with the writing process. Wenger has appropriately characterized student writers "as body-heart-minds who use their physical beings as writing laboratories" (29). Cultivating both "openness (being unfinished)" and "flexibility (in mind and body)" through yoga preserves this characterization while reinforcing core aspects of the writing process (qtd. in Hyde 115).

Afterwards, students sat comfortably on the blankets. At this point, I asked them to meditate on a personal moment when they felt truly happy and peaceful: a moment from a vacation, for instance (such as sitting on the beach); a big moment (e.g., graduating high school); a small but memorable one (e.g., playing with a sibling in the backyard). "Envision it as vividly and intimately as possible," I said. "What do you see? What smells are in the air? How do you feel? Are you touching anything or is anything touching you? What do you hear? Can you taste anything?" This meditation was designed to calm and redirect students' minds from the demands of academic life to a single personal moment imbued with peaceful emotions. By assuaging "the stresses of being a first-year college student," I hoped to in other words "shift the habitual chatter of the mind to cultivate a capacity for deepened awareness, concentration, and insight" (Kroll 120; Hart 29).

After the meditation, we transcribed sensory details from the mind to the page through a freewrite. "Describe this moment in writing," I said. "Be as vivid and precise

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4. Editors' note: The description of contemplative practices that follows provides details that are relevant to Catherine Chaterdon's essay, "Contemplative Neuroscience and the Teaching of Writing," this volume of *JAEPL.*

as possible." Sitting and lying on the blankets, students appeared deeply focused in our candle-lit classroom. Afterwards, two volunteers read their writing to the class. A second meditation followed—this one centered on students' essays. I asked them to envision the female rhetor they had chosen and the rhetorical context in which she wrote or spoke, imagining sensory details. Perhaps this involved a podium in front of a large crowd. Perhaps it involved the feel of a pen, the creek of a desk, or the stare of a judge in a courtroom. We are typically invested in the experiences of our *own* lives, I said to students, but perhaps might challenge ourselves to more fully engage with the lives and experiences of others. Through this meditation, I hoped students would in other words invest themselves more deeply in the rich words, rhetorical strategies, and exigences of nineteenth-century women rhetors (bearing in mind ways they had invested themselves in their own meaningful moments).

Personal writing was key to this effort. Elizabeth Kimball, Emily Schnee, and Liesl Schwabe advocate for preserving the personal in the face of the learning outcomes assessment movement. Their argument serves as a reminder that personal writing "effectively engages students in the writing process" while simultaneously building essential critical thinking skills (Kimball et al. 113). In our case, personal writing did trigger students' investment in the writing process—as importantly, it functioned as a gateway to deeper "critical engagement" with nineteenth-century woman's rights rhetoric (Kimball et al. 129). By linking personal meditation and freewriting with visualization of rhetorical context, I hoped students "adept at playing the game of college" would practice more mindful textual engagement—thereby embarking on revision with newfound focus, motivation, and close attention to language (Clydesdale 180).

Students were offered a choice of two revision exercises: (1) the option to strengthen analysis through vivid, attentive, and life-filled prose; or (2) the option to improve their introduction or conclusion to more strongly interest readers. The first exercise asked students to "look for ways to inject more life, vividness, and precision into your writing" by revising three weak supporting points. I particularly encouraged students to breathe life into vague or general writing—writing that lacked investment. To this end, I asked students to recall their vivid personal freewrites and cultivate a similar stance of deep attention and focus. The second exercise asked students to revise their introduction in order to more fully engage readers—enticing them to read on. Or, they could revise the conclusion to leave a lasting impression on readers. To illustrate these options, I offered examples such as a compelling introductory question, a vivid opening anecdote, or a concrete concluding takeaway. The writing samples that follow illustrate meaningful work completed by students who voluntarily shared aspects of their revision process.[5]

To begin, the writing and oral reflections of two students reveal how a contemplative approach can spark motivation to engage closely and empathetically with course texts.

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5. During the first semester in which I integrated contemplative revision, I did not require students to share changes made or planned during the workshop. I therefore draw on voluntarily shared student writing and oral reflections. The following semester, in an effort to capture a wider sample of student revisions, I collected changes made by all students. IRB approval was obtained for both classes. I quote only those students who agreed in writing to the protected use of their data. All student names have been changed to pseudonyms as requested by the Saint Joseph's University IRB.

The first student, Pierce, used the workshop to listen more deeply to Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's "We Are All Bound Up Together" (1866). Specifically, he developed his rhetorical analysis by unpacking a quote in which Harper describes an administrator who "swept the very milk-crocks and wash tubs from my hands" following the death of her husband (Harper). Pierce attended closely to the word "swept," which—as he told us during the workshop—"implies they were overpowering Watkins . . . .They didn't drudge through or anything else . . . they swept. Swept is a task you don't think twice about—she has no power and worth to them." His critical thinking here reflects a focused attention to language that is likely attributable to contemplative pedagogy. As Gunnlaugson et al. argue, "contemplative practices help focus the mind"; Kroll similarly notes that mindfulness "helps one to listen well" (Gunnlaugson et al. 2; Kroll 16). More specifically, Pierce practices what Barbezat and Bush term "deep listening"—"a way of hearing in which we are fully present with what is happening in the moment" (137). Relevant not only to sounds but also to written words, deep listening offsets the tendency to "race" through a text. It instead involves more attentive and respectful reading (137).

For Pierce, our contemplative workshop enabled him to listen carefully to the word "swept" and contemplate its meaning within the context of Harper's speech. Ultimately, this inspired Pierce's writing process as it continued beyond the workshop. The following passages (first draft versus final portfolio version) reveal the substantial development in this student's close reading:

> *Before*: [Harper] talks about how the 'administrator swept' through her home taking all she owned leaving her in a more fragile state than she and her family were three months prior.

> *After*: [Harper] talks about how the 'administrator swept' through her home taking all she owned leaving her in a more fragile state than she and her family were three months prior. The administration symbolizes that she is still under a group of people, and that she cannot live a free life. The administration 'swept' as if her home were just a piece of garbage needing to be taken care of and thrown away . . . [T]he administrators . . . feel as if taking away lives and well-beings is as easy as sweeping the floor.

Here, Pierce uses a vivid simile and an attentive eye to describe the "sweeping" actions of the administrator. This effective revision attests to the complementary relationship between contemplative practices and close reading, which requires the type of deep focus that mindfulness cultivates.

A second student, Kingston, revised his analysis of *The U.S.A. v. Susan B. Anthony* (1873) in ways that echo those of Pierce. This student concentrated on the word "prisoner," explaining to us during the workshop that "Susan B. Anthony was called a prisoner, but she wanted to be a human being. I'll write more about her desire to be a human being, a person who lives on this planet." This statement reflects not only Kingston's focus on a key word, but also the possibility that visualization helped him see Anthony (and her purpose) more globally. His final draft—which I quote at length—reveals how the workshop planted crucial seeds for revision. This is evident in a revised paragraph that

begins almost identically to the first draft before diverging:[6] "As the court case begins, we automatically feel a loss for Anthony coming," writes Kingston, "This is the beginning point where pathos is used to help emotionally attach the reader. From the very beginning of the discussion between the judge and Anthony he refers to her as 'prisoner.'" Here, Kingston's first and final drafts begin to differ significantly:

> *Before*: Anthony begins with 'I am degraded from the status of a citizen to that of a subject; and not only myself individually, but all of my sex, are, by your honor's verdict, doomed to political subjection under this so-called Republican government.' Only for the judge to reply 'The Court cannot listen to a rehearsal of arguments the prisoner's counsel has already consumed three hours in presenting.' It makes us question the entire court case, how can you not listen to someone who is fighting for their right, but for the rights of so many others?

> *After*: Prisoner reflects not only how Anthony feels, but also how she is treated. It can be said that she is a 'prisoner' of her own body. The judge's opening remarks towards Anthony are 'Has the prisoner have [sic] anything to say?' and never once stating her name. We start to understand that Anthony is a prisoner to her own sex, nothing more than a person who is alive, but not living. Anthony begins with 'I am degraded from the status of a citizen to that of a subject; and not only myself individually, but all of my sex, are, by your honor's verdict, doomed to political subjection under this so-called Republican government.' Only for the judge to reply 'The Court cannot listen to a rehearsal of arguments the prisoner's counsel has already consumed three hours in presenting.' When Anthony talks about being degraded from a citizen, we see that it directly underlies the meaning of 'prisoner.' This particular statement lets the audience understand what type of treatment Anthony [sic] receives, because although she technically is free she is not. She makes us question the entire court case. How can you not listen to someone who is fighting for not only her rights, but for the rights of so many others?

While the first passage contains relevant quotations, the revision unpacks these quotations in deeper relation to issues of social justice. To this end, Kingston also adds a second quotation spotlighting the judge's dehumanization of Anthony. Kingston's claim that "Anthony is a prisoner to her own sex, nothing more than a person who is alive, but not living" is particularly meaningful. By reinscribing the word "prisoner," Kingston characterizes Anthony not as a true court offender but as a political prisoner whose liberties and self-respect have been stripped. The phrase "nothing more than a person who is alive, but not living"—reminiscent of Pierce's claim that Harper "cannot live a free life"—is further notable in revealing more compassionate and pronounced attention to civil rights violations. Ultimately, Kingston fulfills his intention to "write more about [Anthony's] desire to be a human being, a person who lives on this planet."

These two examples demonstrate how contemplative methods nurture attention and deeply connect students with course material (Hart 32). Both Pierce and Kingston offer focused close readings that reflect rhetorical awareness, rich attention to language,

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6. I say "almost identically" due to slight differences in the versions. The first draft reads, "As the court case begins we automatically feel a loss for Anthony coming, this is a crucial point where *pathos* is used to help emotionally attach the reader. From the very beginning of the discussion between the judge and Anthony he refers to her as 'prisoner' never once stating her name."

and openness to new insights. These are crucial skills in First-Year English. As Gesa Kirsch similarly contends, contemplative practices "can enhance creativity, listening, and expression of meaning—key goals of most writing courses. They do so by inviting students . . . to practice mindfulness, to become introspective, to listen to the voices of others" (W2). In this case, Pierce and Kingston carefully considered how Harper and Anthony protested oppressive constraints. They approached these nineteenth-century texts as powerfully present—reflecting their motivated, mindful engagement with the words of others.

This contemplative workshop also indicated students' heightened ability to use language vividly in their own writing. One student, Meghan, completed the introduction/ conclusion exercise to improve her essay on *The U.S.A. v. Susan B. Anthony*. Her revised introduction—written in class during the workshop—introduces this text using a vivid reporting style: "November 5, 1872. Rochester, New York. Susan B. Anthony was arrested and put on trial for illegally casting a vote in the Election." These crisp opening sentences capture readers' attention like a well-crafted news story. They mark a shift from the first draft's opening, which lacked a sense of immediacy: "Susan B. Anthony was one of the most influential and dominant figures during a time when women were fighting for their own natural, civil, and political rights." Meghan explained that she "changed [the introduction] by setting the scene," shifting from a general to specific orientation. Her revision indicates how contemplative methods promote vividness and concrete detail— important means of engaging readers.

Revision work by Pierce, Kingston, and Meghan overall points to important ways in which contemplative practices can inspire concentrated close reading, vivid writing, and stronger investment in the writing process when such practices precede revision. These are highly valuable outcomes for students who are tasked with revising analysis essays. Ultimately, this initial workshop indicates the potential of contemplative practices to both invigorate minds and produce skills conducive to strong essay revision.

Building Habits of Mind: Contemplative Revision
of Rhetorical and Intertextual Analyses

With a burgeoning awareness of the valuable capacities fostered by contemplative revision, I planned a second and more systematically designed workshop prioritizing key habits of mind that had surfaced the previous semester: openness, focused attention, visualization of rhetorical context, and invention of vivid, sensory detail. This second workshop was conducted in a first-year composition class and followed this sequence: (1) gentle yoga; (2) personal meditation; (3) freewriting; (4) revision (focused on close reading); (5) essay-related meditation; and (6) revision (focused on introductions/con-

clusions). Students were asked to revise their rhetorical analyses of a current op-ed and/ or their intertextual analyses which compared a written and visual or audio-visual text.[7]

My planning followed this rationale: I emphasized openness by retaining an initial gentle yoga series prefaced by classroom transformations such as a blanket-covered floor, candles, and serene music. The first workshop had suggested how yoga "clears the mind, leaving openness to new and creative ideas" (Barbezat and Bush 168). Combined with a relaxing classroom environment, this use of yoga likely facilitated both Pierce and Kingston's new textual understandings and Meghan's creative rewriting of her introduction—as well as all three students' willingness to perform "deep" versus surface revision. These examples suggested to me the profound value of mind-body-breath connections, which can initiate students into a deep awareness anchored in openness (Barbezat and Bush 168).

Next, I again followed with a personal meditation and freewrite as a means of cultivating focused attention in preparation for close reading and vivid, rhetorically effective writing. Students meditated on a moment when they felt truly happy and content as I encouraged them to "envision it as vividly and intimately as possible, as if you're there." Once more, I invited them to see, smell, feel, hear, and taste all the applicable dimensions of the scene— in this way striving to promote concentration on sensory detail. The ability of personal meditation and freewriting to focus attention and inspire creativity is evident in students' work. "I sit in a chair on the beach with my toes buried deep in the sand, the most natural version of warm socks," one freewrite begins. "I smell the salt of the ocean, reminding me of the days my family lay on the beach together." Another freewrite describes a different scene with equally sensory details: "The air was heavy after fallen rain, the sky was dark but we were surrounded by light . . . the explosion of fireworks turning night into day. A rainbow of colors and shapes that dazzled the imagination." Samples of student writing such as these indicate the value of preceding essay revision with personal meditation and freewriting. Indeed, focusing the mind and pen on intimate details infused with personal meaning can set the stage for more attentive close reading. As one student confirmed, "Thinking deeply about a personal feeling and moment definitely helped me to unpack and understand how to analyze the work's moment in detail."

Focused attention—a byproduct of students' personal mediation and freewriting—in other words drives effective close reading. With this in mind, I underscored links between the personal freewrite and focused, engaged essay revision. "You just described a moment in very close detail. You paid attention to all the dimensions of that moment. Now, select one moment in any of your three texts," I told students, "and try to inject some of the same life into your essay writing. Try to think about this moment in the same vivid, close detail." To optimize students' focused attention to the textual moment, I offered a catalog

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7. Some text options for the rhetorical analysis included: "Why Scandinavian Prisons are Superior" (*The Atlantic*); "From Prison to Paycheck" (*Wall Street Journal*); "We Must Demilitarize the Police" (*TIME*); and "Graying Prisoners" (*New York Times*). Some text options for the intertextual analysis included: Martin O'Malley's "Repealing Capital Punishment in MD"; Ani DiFranco's "Crime for Crime"; Bruce Springsteen's "Dead Man Walking"; selected photographs from Ken Light's *Texas Death Row*; Michelle Obama's "Remarks by the First Lady at the 2014 National Alliance to End Homelessness Annual Conference"; George Carlin's "Homelessness and Golf"; and Andres Serrano's "Residents of New York" photograph series.

of guiding questions: "What do you think or feel in this moment?" I asked. "What grabs you? Why?" My guiding questions also addressed specific components of written and visual/audio-visual texts:

- *Written Texts*: How does each word matter? What are the strongest words, the most powerful words, the words that evoke the most feeling? What associations come to mind when you read these words? What is the tone with which they're delivered? Why is this important?

- *Photographs and Audio-Visual Texts*: How does each detail matter? How does facial expression and body language matter? What mood is set? How? What emotions are heightened? How? For songs, does the voice waver? Does the voice escalate—grow more passionate?

These questions aimed to encourage students to analyze the moment as deeply, vividly, and precisely as possible—recalling the stance they adopted during their rich, intimate descriptions of personal memories. Students were asked to strengthen a close reading already present in their first draft or otherwise choose a new moment to analyze. The following revision examples illustrate how students mindfully pursued both options.

First, students revised close readings lacking depth and precision in their first drafts. I will highlight the revision work of one student, Caryn, who analyzed a photograph from Andres Serrano's 2014 "Residents of New York" series documenting homelessness in the five boroughs. This example showcases meaningful revisions that Caryn completed in class during the workshop.

> *Before*: Because of the sign that he is holding, we know that this was a man who served in the Vietnam War, fighting for the safety of our country, and yet now is left alone to fend for himself and his family. Serrano specifically captured the portrait of this man to provoke sympathy towards veterans who have no place to go and are in need of help.

> *After*: The dog tag and key are directly in the center of the picture drawing obvious attention to it…The dog tag and key play a large role in the message that this picture is trying to convey . . . . The fact that he is a veteran shows that he is a hard working, strong, dedicated person. I think this detail of the picture is so important and meaningful because it is trying to make a point to the audience that this man is homeless through no fault of his own. I feel as if a misconception that is held by many people is that the homeless became homeless because of something they did. However, for many, by mere circumstance this came about. The dog tag illustrates that this solder veteran has character and dignity and deserves to be helped; after all he did sacrifice his own safety to protect our country.

Here, Caryn analyzes important symbols. She unpacks the significance of the dog tag in the context of the picture's overarching argument, which debunks the myth of personal responsibility. The revision thus reflects Caryn's growing social consciousness and attention to structural causes of homelessness. Notably, Caryn credits the meditative workshop for promoting focused thinking: "I never had a writing experience like this before but I definitely liked it," she explains. "I think I was able to think better and more

clearly when I was in this relaxed setting." This comment reinforces the link between calmness and concentrated analysis when essay revision is conducted in a contemplative frame of mind.

Caryn's final draft reflects even further progression. She devotes an entire paragraph to the dog tag and key—attending mindfully to visual details such as the striking placement of the tag and key over the sign:

> Wrapped around his neck are the veteran's dog tags and key. These items are located in the center of the photograph and are one of the first things that you notice. They strategically hang over the sign, not tucked inside his jacket, because they play a part in telling the veteran's story. The dog tag represent [sic] the pride which the veteran had in serving his country . . . . Seeing the dog tag forces the viewer to acknowledge the strength and courage this man had to risk his life for our own. This recognition helps us to sympathize with the man and encourage the audience to take action to put an end to veteran homelessness. The house key suggests that the man once owned a home where he supported his family, but perhaps lost it because of financial reasons . . . . Serrano specifically captured the portrait of this man to provoke sympathy towards veterans who have no place to go and are in need of help.

This final draft showcases crisp prose and an attentive eye. The seeds planted during the revision workshop are more fully developed here—evident in deeper attention to the dogtag and new examination of the house key, which Caryn identified during her workshop revision but did not analyze until this point. These changes indicate how contemplative methods generated focused attention beneficial to Caryn's writing process.

Second, students closely analyzed moments they did not consider in their first drafts. One new close reading by Kim (also conducted on Serrano's "Residents of New York" series) uses vivid similes and metaphors to closely unpack the photograph. "The man's face sits tilted like a time clock as though everything is just ticking," she writes. "His wrinkles drip down his face like showing the pain and suffering he experiences daily." Here, the clock simile and alliterative metaphor ("wrinkles drip down") reflect creative concentration. Indeed, contemplative revision has the potential to simultaneously build focus and vividness. Kim noted during the reflection that "I liked [the workshop] because it was different than what I was used to. I like change so it made me more focused." It is possible this difference inspired not only deeper focus, but a writing style open to creative experimentation. Breidenbach argues that a central challenge is finding ways "to keep the spark of creativity alive in revision" (200). Contemplative pedagogy offers one vibrant catalyst for the type of focused attention that is alive with creativity.

The next phase of the workshop introduced visualization of rhetorical context. This essay-based meditation asked students to imagine themselves as the author, photographer, comedian or musician of their chosen op-ed, speech, photograph, comedic skit, or music video. Afterwards, students revised their introduction or conclusion. My rationale for this sequence centered on motivating students to write in rhetorically powerful ways. To this end, I asked students to close their eyes and imagine themselves "invested in this issue; deep in the process of writing, photographing, speaking, or singing." As students opened their eyes, I emphasized that these authors (in most cases) were highly motivated individuals concerned about the social issues in question. This may have resonated with

students' existing knowledge of rhetorical situations, as we had previously defined an arguer as "a person who is motivated to initiate the argument, to take a position on the issue . . . and to communicate a position to others" (Wood 12).[8]

 I asked students: how can you make *your* readers care too? How can your introduction better engage readers? Entice them with life-filled words? How can your conclusion leave a lasting impression rather than simply restate points in a dull, rote manner? What resulted were students' heightened efforts to engage their readers with enhanced style—especially vivid, sensory detail. Beyond this, one student's revised conclusion reveals how this essay-based meditation prompted nuanced attention to a text's purpose.

First, one revised introduction emblematizes an engaging, sensory style. This student, Mark, wrote: "In the midst of winter while families gather around the fire in their nice heated homes and enjoy life, the streets are anything but joyful. Families huddle . . . and try to share their warmth. As snowflakes begin to fall, families rapidly seek some sort of shelter and pray that they will make it through the night." Mark's rich imagery—penned in class during the workshop—resonates with the workshop's overall emphasis on vivid, life-filled language. It marks a significant improvement from his previous opening, which stated that "[h]omelessness has become a significant and unfortunate problem in the United States."[9] Notably, Mark sustains vivid imagery in his final draft:

> In the midst of a bitter winter, households find comfort as they gather around the fire and share the joy of the holidays with their loved ones. The holidays are a time for joy and giving thanks, but outside it is anything but joyous. Outside in the bitter cold, hundreds of thousands of Americans struggle to find warmth. People huddle together in an attempt to share warmth and make it through the night. Every day is a struggle and a fight for survival, yet they garner little sympathy from the American public and government.

 This final revision uses holiday associations to establish common ground with readers before juxtaposing these associations with the reality of homelessness. Overall, Mark's revision work suggests a link between contemplative exercises and students' improved capacity to engage readers with vivid, sensory detail.

Students also revised their conclusions in rhetorically effective ways. Tom, for instance, worked to stimulate reader action through crisply structured sentences and imagery. Substantial growth is evident in this revision of his intertextual analysis on Michelle Obama's "National Alliance to End Homelessness" Conference Speech and a photograph from Serrano's series:

> *Before*: Homelessness is a horrible growing predicament in the United States today. Every day more and more people are becoming homeless. So what do we do now? Like Michelle Obama said, the problem is slowly decreasing, but it is still happening today. We know homelessness is bad, we can see it in Serrano's photos. What we have to do is have more and more people step up and help fight against this problem. With more and more

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8. Here, I reference our course textbook, Nancy V. Wood's *Essentials of Argument*.

9. Aside from a statistic reporting the number of people experiencing homelessness on a given night in 2013, the original opening overall contained little to grip readers. Mark's final draft folds this statistic into the descriptive image ("Outside in the bitter cold, hundreds of thousands of Americans struggle to find warmth").

support I believe that this problem can be resolved.

After: Homelessness is a horrible growing predicament in the United States today. It demoralizes the human suffering through it. Sadly, even though we are aware of homelessness, the general public does nothing about it. Imagine yourself in their shoes. Tired, worn out, cold, and sick. It is time for America to wake up and do something about this crisis.

The first draft, while concluding with a proposal claim ("have more and more people step up"), does not clarify precisely who these "people" are and oversimplifies the solution with a vague remedy ("With more and more support I believe that this problem can be resolved"). The in-class revision bolsters the call to action by challenging readers to practice empathy toward other human beings. Tom's terse catalog of vivid adjectives heightens the stakes—an effective segue into the concluding appeal.

Another student revised her conclusion in ways that demonstrate sophisticated thinking about rhetorical impact and purpose. This student, Sarah, strengthened her rhetorical analysis of Doran Larson's *Atlantic* article, "Why Scandinavian Prisons Are Superior" (2013). In her first draft, Sarah concluded that "Larson is able to convince any type of reader that American prisons need very serious help." In her workshop revision, she reflects more carefully on the function of this op-ed, while also heightening the rhetorical impact of her own conclusion. "If one nation can make this change for the better," she writes, "what is to stop another from doing the same. Although Larson's argument does not give us a plan of action, it gives us something nearly as important—a conversation topic." Here, Sarah nuances Larson's purpose, foregrounds a strong analogy ("If one nation can make this change…"), and inserts her own readers into the "conversation." She asserts that "Human kind is distinguished by its gift of conversation and innovation and change can happen. However for it to happen, it has to start with the conversation." Sarah invites readers to participate in a conversation that can spark change, concluding her own paper but shifting responsibility into their hands.

Her final draft accomplishes this shift in a new and more explicit way. She argues that Larson "leaves any persuaded reader with the responsibility to see out [his] dreams" and lists concrete steps various types of readers (from citizens to policy makers) might take, including voting, advocacy, or "investing in an open prison prototype." Sarah's revisions suggest ways in which meditative visualization can aid students in both rhetorically analyzing and revising texts. Overall, work by Mark, Tom, and Sarah supports links between contemplative practices and more rhetorically powerful prose. Revisions by Mark and Tom additionally indicate how such practices can drive the invention of vivid, sensory detail. This habit of mind—initially fostered by personal meditation and freewriting—is maintained by essay-based meditation on rhetorical considerations such as an author's purpose and audience engagement.

Student testimonials from this workshop support the rich potential of contemplative practices to build all four habits of mind: openness; focused attention; visualization of rhetorical context; and invention of vivid, sensory detail. To begin, one student wrote that the workshop "helped me open up and really made me be able to put my voice into my writing." A second announced, "I enjoyed this workshop! . . . . I think the meditation and yoga gave a different meaning to essay revising. It shows that the tra-

ditional classroom setting is not always necessary. I enjoy other avenues to learn." Both of these testimonials underscore the value of openness. While the first comment links openness with the application of personal voice, the second suggests that contemplative pedagogy can help students "re-see" essay revision—or as this student puts it, embrace new "avenues to learn." For both of these students, openness is also a conduit for more motivated revision. The second testimonial uses the verb "enjoy" twice; meanwhile, the first anticipates proactively using contemplative methods in the future: "I plan on using similar techniques from now on when I write. I hope to be able to use this exercise and these techniques to improve my writing in the future. Maybe this will help my writing for the rest of my college career." It is encouraging to see such openness to writing and revision result from contemplative methods.

Testimonials also uphold the link between contemplative practices and focused attention needed for stronger analysis and revision. "I think this particular workshop made me focus more and helped me analyze the text better," one student said. "I didn't have as many distractions and wasn't thinking about anything that took my attention away from my paper." Another student described her focus as "much better than a normal ICW," while a third echoed that "it helped me clear my mind…I would like to do this again in the future." These student comments reinforce the interrelations of motivation, focus, and relaxation. As Wenger attests, "The greater [students'] powers of attention, the more likely they will be motivated to continue writing, and the less likely they will be blocked by stress or anxiety" (34). This was an especially powerful realization for a fourth student who reflected, "For the first time I feel like I have found my peaceful place to go to with writing."[10] His comment reminds us that teaching writing—and meaningful revision—requires extending students opportunities to cultivate peace as a starting point.

Other testimonials remark on rhetorical awareness and the invention of vivid detail. First, one student asserted "the workshop was a success. It helped to open my mind and allowed to view writing these essays in different ways. Instead of just presenting the facts and explain them, I can also use more analysis and emotion to get my points across." This comment not only reinforces the value of openness, but also implies ways in which visualization may have stimulated greater rhetorical awareness (particularly, through a reexamination of the artistic proofs used "to get my points across"). At the very least, contemplative methods appear to have awakened this student to new rhetorical possibilities—a valuable mindset for revision. A final and equally valuable capacity is the invention of vivid detail. Aside from students' freewrites and essay revisions, evidence of this is present in a testimonial noting explicitly that the workshop "helped me being more descriptive." Considered together, these reflections affirm that contemplative practices foster valuable habits of mind with clear benefits for revision.

Looking Ahead: Future Expansion and Further Research

This exploratory project has suggested that contemplative pedagogy builds essential capacities for revision, sparking student motivation along the way. As indicated by student writing and oral reflections from these two workshops, a contemplative approach to revision can inspire open-minded thinking, concentrated attention to course texts,

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10. This student also said to me after class, "It was the most peaceful I ever felt writing."

new rhetorical insights, and vivid style. Moving forward, I will seek to sustain students' contemplative mindset across the entire semester—both within and beyond the classroom. This is particularly important given one shortcoming that emerged upon reviewing some students' end-of-semester portfolios. While many final drafts (including those by Pierce, Kingston, Caryn, and Mark) preserve and often advance observations and revisions made during the workshops, others do not reflect the same mindful attention to language and rhetorical context. Two examples illustrate this point.

First, Kim's final draft on Serrano's "Residents of New York" series did not contain the vivid figurative language penned in class during the contemplative workshop ("The man's face sits tilted like a time clock" / "His wrinkles drip down"). Instead, she writes that the man "appears to be rather young but his face shows wrinkles and distress on his forehead and chin. These wrinkles are symbolic because it shows that homelessness can take a huge toll on people." Although this close reading is fairly attentive, her language takes less creative risks and her analysis lacks intimacy. One explanation is that she simply lost the loose leaf on which the changes were recorded. It is also possible that Kim reverted back to ingrained, perceived habits for academic writing.[11] A second example is the conclusion to Tom's intertextual analysis. His final draft—which tasks "the youth of America" to lead the fight against homelessness—notably lacks the powerful phrase "Tired, worn out, cold, and sick," along with the corresponding call for empathy.

To ameliorate this, I will hold two to three contemplative workshops per semester moving forward to ensure students do not lose sight of their vivid, sensory writing. I will also consider ways to better bridge in-class contemplative revision with revision done outside of class. Possibilities include at-home contemplative exercises and readings accompanied by follow-up class discussion. Students might also keep journals that record and reflect on their contemplative revision practices throughout a semester. Finally, a more comprehensive incorporation of mindfulness into the writing process (beginning with pre-writing and moving through drafting into revision) may most fully support first-year students' growth as writers.

Contemplative pedagogy has enormous potential to positively transform essay revision. This exploration has suggested that yoga, freewriting, and meditation can significantly enrich revision by inspiring more motivated, focused, rhetorically aware, and vibrant writing. Composition instructors would benefit now from research that more closely investigates links between revision and contemplative practices. If these practices support revision as relevantly as they appear to, it follows that more First-Year English courses (as well as writing courses of all kinds) might embrace the role of contemplative pedagogy in generating these valuable habits of mind.

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11. I thank my colleague, Rachel N. Spear, for this suggestion.

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TEACHING & LEARNING

Contemplative Neuroscience and the Teaching of Writing: Mindfulness as Mental Training

Kate Chaterdon

Introduction

The term "contemplative science" is relatively new, most commonly credited to Allan Wallace and his 2007 book *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge*, but perhaps better explained by Robert Roeser and Philip Zelazo in their 2012 article:

> Contemplative science is a transdisciplinary project aimed at understanding the effects of various kinds of mental and physical training (such as mindfulness meditation and tai chi) on the body, brain, and mind at different stages of the lifespan. As such, the goals of contemplative science are to create new knowledge regarding human plasticity and to generate new forms of human services that optimize development.[1]

Contemplative *neuro*science, then, is the subset of studies that deal specifically with the effects of contemplative practice on the brain and cognition. Although the term contemplative neuroscience is fairly new, the neuroscientific study of contemplative practices—as noted by Cahn and Polich—has been conducted for almost fifty years (180). Of course, the methods of data collection in these studies have changed over time, as the technology itself has advanced. While electroencephalograms (EEG) were the *modus operandi* during the 50s-80s, since the 90s, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has become increasingly popular in contemplative neuroscience studies.

Even though some EEG studies of contemplative neuroscience date back to the 50s, up until recently, most of the studies conducted on meditation have investigated the clinical benefits of meditative practices, as opposed to the effects on cognitive functions. For example, a number of clinical trials have proven that meditation can help alleviate symptoms associated with cardiovascular health problems, cancer, chronic pain disorders, sleep disorders, anxiety disorders, substance abuse problems, and psychological trauma, just to name a few (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, Horowitz). In addition to helping people with illnesses, a large number of studies have also linked meditation to stress management. In fact, due to the work of Kabat-Zinn and the development of his Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, stress management is one of the most well-known benefits

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1. See article abstract at https://experts.umn.edu/en/publications/contemplative-science-education-and-child-development-introductio

of meditation. However, over time, researchers have become increasingly interested in the cognitive correlates of meditation. In particular, many researchers have explored the ways in which various forms of meditation affect executive function or cognitive control, self-regulation, attention, and working memory. In addition to noting changes in behavior and performance due to the practice of meditation, these researchers have also noted that meditation can actually change the structure of the brain (Lazar et al., Pagnoni and Cekic, Vestergaard-Poulsen et al.). For example, Lazar et al. found that "the brain regions associated with attention, interoceptive and somatosensory processing are thicker in meditators compared with controls and also that the regular practice of meditation may slow age-related cortical thinning" (Guleria 462). Other studies have also shown that contemplative practice—specifically Buddhist Insight meditation—can result in increased gray matter density in the brain stem of long-term meditators (Lazar et al.).

Although all of this research falls under the umbrella of contemplative neuroscience, what I will review in this article will be specific to the studies that explore the effects of contemplative practice—specifically mindfulness practices—on the cognitive processes involved in the production of text. One caveat to this research is that it is still very new and that these studies have some limitations. The most notable of these limitations is that there may often be subtle differences between the control and experimental groups that take part in these studies, which could influence the data. In other words, no sure way can rule out the possibility that people who choose to engage in meditation don't also have a greater ability to attend, or a greater working memory capacity, than those who choose not to engage in meditation. Some researchers have found a way around this conundrum by opting not to use experienced meditators in their experimental group, and instead, briefly train their experimental group in a particular meditative practice directly prior to conducting their experiment. Even though this research is very new and has some inherent limitations, the data mined from these experiments has provided some significant and valuable insights into how cognitive processes function within the brain, and on the brain's ability to change—at the neuronal level—as a result of external stimuli. This quickly growing body of research should not be neglected by educators because of its "newness," but embraced because of the great potential it holds to inform the practice of teaching.

Cognitive Neuroscience, Plasticity, and Mental Training Research in Education

The research on contemplative neuroscience and education is not the only body of research to suggest that the brain can be changed as a result of external stimuli. In fact, since the 70s and 80s, the field of cognitive science has come to fully embrace the idea that neuroplasticity is a fundamental property of the brain, replacing the earlier conception of the brain as largely static and immutable. Neuroplasticity is the "capacity of neurons and neural networks in the brain to change their connections and behavior in response to new information, sensory stimulation, development, damage, or dysfunction" ("Neuroplasticity"). Recently, educational researchers have begun to apply neuroscientific findings, such as the property of neuroplasticity, to their research on learning and teaching. In short, what this research generally attempts to prove is that 1) the brain can be trained, and 2) educational researchers can use this knowledge to inform their

research and discover more effective ways of teaching. Before I conduct a review of the research on the cognitive processes involved in the production of text, I will first review some of the research that supports the practice of using neuroscience to inform education, more broadly speaking. By doing so, I will begin to establish a rationale for the use of contemplative practice as a form of cognitive training, in the next section.

The idea of neuroplasticity has quickly developed traction with a broad audience. For example—although their effectiveness is in dispute—brain-training programs like Lumosity and Happify claim to be able to "allow anyone to train core cognitive abilities" by participating in their online games and activities ("About Lumosity"). In addition to these mass-market applications, educational researchers have—on a much smaller scale—explored the ways in which the brain can be trained, as well as the benefits cognitive training can provide in comparison to traditional instructional methods. For example, Green and Bavelier lament the fact that "learning tends to be quite specific to the trained regimen and does not transfer to even qualitatively similar tasks" (692). Instead of perpetuating this learning paradigm, Green and Bavelier suggest that educators (although they are specifically talking about the education of adult learners) should adopt a "training-induced learning" model. They argue, that educators need to explore training-induced learning because: "Although myriad examples of highly specific learning exist, only a handful of training paradigms have been established where learning seems more general. These learning paradigms are typically more complex than laboratory manipulations and correspond to real-life experiences, such as action video game training, musical training, or athletic training" (693). Green and Bavelier surmise that the primary difference between these "natural training regimens" and other less authentic methods of training (e.g., some of the regimens that have been specifically designed for the purpose of brain training) is that the natural training regimens are "exceedingly complex and tap many systems in parallel" (696). Therefore, Green and Bavelier suggest that educators develop training models that are based on the principles that govern video game experience, musical training, and athletic training (i.e., training that seeks to activate a number of cognitive systems like memory, attention, motor skills, etc.). These more complex training regimens, they posit, yield more generalizable and transferrable knowledge than training models that are overly task specific.

In general, there has been an influx of research over the past fifteen years that argues for more cross-talk between the fields of neuroscience and education. For example, Katzir and Pare-Blagoev note that "cognitive neuroscience provides a window in real time to the brain's structures and functions. Understanding the relationship between different brain structures and their functions can help scientists understand how these relate to learning and development" (54). Some educational researchers have even made explicit connections between the cognitive processes involved in the production of text and recent findings in cognitive neuroscience. For example, Berninger and Richards argue that by drawing upon "available brain imaging and developmental research," it is possible "to propose how a writing brain might be constructed from other brain systems," and in general, gain useful information about what happens in the brain when we write (168).

Although, up till now, brain training—within an educational context—has largely been conceptualized around a computer game model, there is no reason why it could not also be conceptualized around a contemplative practice model. In the next section, I will

review research that shows how contemplative practice does change the brain at a neural and functional level and can be understood as a form of brain training. Since "transfer of knowledge" is a concept that seems to be of great concern within composition instruction right now, the fact that brain training can lead to greater knowledge generalizability and transferability may be reason enough for writing instructors to consider implementing a cognitive training approach in their classrooms.

Contemplative Practice as a Means of Cognitive Training

In addition to the research that connects neuroscience and education, a growing amount of research connects *contemplative* neuroscience and education (Hart, Roeser and Zelazo, Waters, et al.). The primary argument made in much of this scholarship is that contemplative practice works as a form of cognitive and affective training, and the skills or traits that it enhances directly facilitate the learning process. Moreover, Davidson, et al. identify:

> . . . a set of mental skills and socioemotional dispositions that are central to the aims of education in the 21st century. These include self-regulatory skills associated with emotion and attention, self-representations, and prosocial dispositions such as empathy and compassion. It should be possible to strengthen these positive qualities and dispositions through systematic contemplative practices, which induce plastic changes in brain function and structure, supporting prosocial behavior and academic success in young people. (146)

At the same time, "contemplative practice" is a broad umbrella term, under which the terms *mindfulness meditation* and *meditation* reside. In other words, although mindfulness meditation and meditation are both contemplative practices, the two terms do not have the same meaning. Whitebird, et al. explain:

> Meditation is broadly defined as the intentional self-regulation of attention, with practices generally falling into two categories: those emphasizing concentration and those emphasizing mindfulness. An example of a concentrative practice is Transcendental Meditation, which includes the use of mantras (sounds or phrases used repetitively) to concentrate attention. Mindfulness practices, in contrast, focus on cultivating a nonjudgmental present moment awareness of the inner and outer world.
>
> Both types of meditation are often associated with relaxation techniques; meditation, however, is fundamentally different in both its method and objective. Rather than seeking a state similar to deep relaxation in which bodily tension is released, the overall orientation of meditation is one of nonstriving and nondoing. (227)

While mindfulness meditation and meditation overlap in a number of ways, their primary difference resides in their distinct goals: nonjudgmental presence vs. concentrated attention. Due to the fact that the research on contemplative neuroscience and education is still relatively new, I will include studies in this section that explore the integration of both meditation and mindfulness meditation in order to illustrate the broader conversation that is taking place.

Aside from the more general research on contemplative neuroscience, which aims to

prove that contemplative practices can be used as a form of mental training within schools and education programs, another body of research explores the relationship between contemplative practice and specific cognitive processes. In order to support my claim that contemplative practices can be used as a form of mental training during the *writing process*, I will focus the rest of this section on exploring the literature that directly links contemplative practice to executive function and self-regulation, attention, and working memory—cognitive processes that have already been identified as essential to the writing process (see Baddeley, Kellogg, Hayes, Chenoweth and Hayes, Torrance and Galbraith, Quinlan, et al.). When discussing how the brain functions at a cognitive level, separations between the various cognitive processes are not always clear-cut or precisely defined.

Executive Function and Self-Regulation

Although executive function (EF) is frequently used as an umbrella term that encompasses all of the other cognitive processes—indeed, it does play a role in many of these processes—the defining characteristic of EF is its function as a monitoring and management system—in other words, cognitive control. Because EF has such a large responsibility, it is not surprising that researchers have noted that EF skills "degrade easily and are depletable" (e.g., Davidson, et al. 149). Furthermore, as Yi-Yuan Tang, et al. explain, deficits in components of EF can have "a host of negative outcomes across the lifespan, including behavior problems, aggression, antisocial behavior, inattention, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), problems with peers, school failure, depression, and substance abuse during childhood and adolescence" ("Improving Executive Function," 361). On the other hand, "higher levels of these EF components have been associated with positive developmental outcomes, including improved 'on-task' behavior, better perspective-taking skills, and greater self-efficacy, mastery, self-esteem, professional attainment, and relationship success, as well as positive social, emotional, behavioral, economic, and physical health outcomes" (362). Fortunately, many researchers in contemplative neuroscience have been able to discover positive correlates between meditative practices and EF that can serve educators, especially instructors of writing. Tang et al. review research which indicates that the practice of Integrative Body-Mind Training (IBMT—a mindfulness-based rather than traditional meditation) is associated with improvements in EF ("Improving"). A number of studies corroborate Tang et al.'s findings (e.g., Wenk-Sormaz, Bowen, et al., Moore and Malinowski, Chiesa and Malinowski).

Also referred to as "self-control," this cornerstone ability is essential for things like intellectual performance (Schmeichel et al.), impression management (Vohs et al.), and even emotion regulation (Compton et al.)." Although self-control is important in its own right, it is also a key component of self-regulated learning, which is connected to motivation. Likewise, some studies show a correlation between contemplative practice and self-regulated learning and motivation. For example, Robert Roeser and Stephen Peck argue that the skills fostered by contemplative practice are:

> . . . relevant to motivation and self-regulated learning because of the functions they
> serve, including (a) the conscious inhibition of undesirable but dominant (and activation

of desirable but nondominant) response tendencies, (b) the conscious monitoring and updating of information during goal pursuit and learning, and (c) the conscious reflection on existing, and reconstruction and encoding of new, representational content. (128)

In general, there are a number of studies that support the claim that contemplative practice aids EF/self-control—be it through increasing self-awareness or fostering motivation—and that EF is very important in the learning process.

Attention

Before discussing the connections between attention and contemplative practice at length, it is important to understand that almost all meditative practices can be categorized as either focused attention or open monitoring meditation. Kozasa, et al. explain the difference between the two categories as:

> . . . focused attention meditation (FA), which entails the voluntary focusing of attention on a chosen object, such as mindfulness of breathing and mantra meditation; and, open monitoring meditation (OM), which involves non-reactive monitoring of the content of experience from moment to moment such as "zazen," the Zen traditional sitting meditation. FA and OM are often combined, whether within a single session or over the course of a practitioner's training (Lutz et al., 2008). Regular meditators usually have different levels of expertise in both categories. (746)

In this sense, meditation is *always* an activity that trains attention. This constant is undoubtedly why there is so much research that discusses the effects of meditation on attention. I will discuss just a few of these studies in order to provide an overview of some of the more significant findings.

One of the most salient findings of recent research which has been substantiated by a number of studies is that experienced meditators not only tend to develop a greater ability to focus and maintain attention, but that they also activate fewer of the brain regions associated with attention when engaged in an attentional task, as compared to non-meditators (Brefczynski-Lewis et al., Jha, Jha, et al. "Mindfulness," Lutz et al., MacLean). Lutz et al., explain this phenomena by saying that, initially, the meditator's brain must engage a number of different neural systems associated with attention to maintain attention on a given task, such as noticing the breath (Lutz, et al., "Attention Regulation"). However, over time, as the meditator becomes more practiced at her art, she requires less cognitive effort to focus and sustain attention, "resulting in a form of effortless concentration" ("Attention Regulation" 164). Other researchers, such as Kozasa et al., have conducted similar studies which corroborate and expand on these findings. In addition to linking experience in meditation with decreased effort in focusing attention, Kozasa, et al.'s research indicates "that this ability can also be generalized for attention tasks outside formal meditation practice. If this is the case, meditation can have sustainable effects in brain circuitry and behaviour related to attention abilities" (749). In other words, Kozasa, et al.'s findings indicate that practicing meditation can, over time, change the neural substrates of the brain and allow for more ease in focusing and maintaining

attention in general.

One important thing to note in this body of research is that most of these studies were conducted with "experienced" meditators—that is, meditators who have practiced for years or months, not novice meditators. A growing body of research, though, does study the effects of short-term meditation practice on cognitive processes such as attention (Zeidan et al.). For example, Tang, et al. found that "a group randomly assigned to 5 days of meditation practice with the integrative body–mind training method show[ed] significantly better attention and control of stress than a similarly chosen control group given relaxation training" ("Short-term," 17152). This study implies that even short-term experience with meditation could change neural networks, thereby having a lasting effect on one's ability to attend. Other studies corroborate this claim by showing that practicing meditation can actually alter the "baseline" or "default" mode of brain functioning (Lutz et al. "Mental," Hasenkamp et al.).

Hodgins, et al. provide another interesting study on attention connecting one's ability to visually perceive stimuli with meditation experiences. They first reviewed previous studies and data to show that 1) certain cognitive factors—like self-related beliefs or constructs—can directly affect how we perceive visual stimuli, and 2) meditation contributes to the "gradual de-construction" of self-related beliefs, which may affect perceptual bias. Their hypothesis, then, was that "meditation is associated with superior visual perception" (873). In order to test this hypothesis, the researchers used five separate measures of "perceptual attentional processing in adults who were regular meditators and in age-matched non-meditators," including "change blindness, sustained inattentional blindness, visual concentration, perspective-shifting, and selective attention" (873-4). Their results showed "substantial support" for this hypothesis. Additionally, this study was unique because—unlike some other studies, which tested participants while they were meditating or immediately afterward—this study tested participants outside of the context of meditation, thereby "demonstrating that meditators' better attentional processing [was] stable enough to manifest itself beyond the immediate practice context, or in other words, 'off the cushion'" (877). Thus, this study and the others reviewed in this section illustrate that meditation—even short-term meditation—can have positive, lasting effects on the brains ability to attend, and these beneficial effects can transfer to other contexts in which a person needs to focus and maintain attention.

Working Memory

Although up till now, attention has been the primary focus of much of the research on the effects of contemplative practice on the brain, researchers are increasingly turning their sights toward working memory. This turn may in part be due to the fact that researchers have begun to better understand the interrelationship between attention and working memory (Awh et al., "Interactions"), and specifically between visuospatial attentional processing and spatial working memory (Awh and Jonides, "Overlapping"; Jha, "Tracking"; Smith and Ratcliffe). What these researchers have found is that visuospatial processing is intrinsically linked to working memory. As Jha explains, "Spatial working memory is a cognitive brain mechanism that enables the temporary maintenance and manipulation of spatial information. Recent neuroimaging and behavioral

studies have led to the proposal that directed spatial attention is the mechanism by which location information is maintained in spatial working memory" ("Tracking" 61). Visuospatial processing accordingly links attentional processes to working memory. Therefore, many of these studies suggest that improving one's ability to attend may also improve their capacity for working memory. Smith and Ratcliffe note that "attention increases the efficiency of VSTM [visual short-term memory] encoding, either by increasing the rate of trace formation or by reducing the delay before trace formation begins" (283). Contemplative neuroscience research has also made connections between visuospatial processing and working memory. Kozhevnikov, et al. discuss the results of their study, which indicate that: "Deity Yoga practitioners demonstrated a dramatic increase in performance on imagery tasks compared with the other groups. The results suggest that Deity meditation specifically trains one's capacity to access heightened visuospatial processing resources, rather than generally improving visuospatial imagery abilities" (645).

Findings like these may have significance for instructors who are interested in developing their students' working memory capacity through the use of contemplative visualization practices.

In addition to the research that brings together visuospatial processing and working memory, a number of other studies have been conducted that also discuss the effects of contemplative practice on working memory, more broadly speaking. Chambers, et al. conducted a study in which twenty novice-meditators participated in a ten-day intensive mindfulness meditation retreat. At the end of this retreat, "the mindfulness training group's working memory capacity was significantly enhanced," a finding which "suggests that mindfulness practice may increase working memory capacity" (315). A number of other studies have had similar findings, including the study conducted by Mrazek, et al., who showed that "Mindfulness training improved both GRE reading-comprehension scores and working memory capacity while simultaneously reducing the occurrence of distracting thoughts during completion of the GRE and the measure of working memory" (776). In other words, improvements in the performance of these tasks seem to correlate with improvements in working memory capacity. This is a significant finding because it highlights the fact that "training studies frequently target a single ability" (e.g., see Klingberg 317), yet performance might be enhanced more generally by interventions that target a cognitive process underlying performance in a variety of contexts" (Slagter, Davidson, & Lutz 776).

Other studies have addressed different aspects of the relationship between contemplative practice and working memory (e.g., van Vugt and Jha). Instead of just determining whether or not mindfulness training would have an impact on working memory, they also wanted to know *why* meditation appeared to have an effect on working memory. Their findings suggested that meditation improves working memory capacity because "MT [mindfulness training] leads to improved information quality and reduced response conservativeness" (344). In other words, MT positively impacts the way that information is perceived and stored, as well as the time it takes a person to respond to a question, hit a button, etc. These improvements in perception, storage, and response time (RT) are widely believed to be a result of the improved attentional orientation that correlates to MT. Another study, conducted by Jha and Stanley, indicates that MT

can have a "protective" effect on working memory capacity. Jha and Stanley, who were interested in the effects of MT on people operating under great stress, conducted this study with pre-deployment military service members. Their findings suggest that:

> MT practice might serve as a way to cultivate a WMC 'reserve' that could be used in demanding contexts to protect against such functional impairments [as cognitive failures and emotional disturbances]…In sum, the current study suggests that WMC may be bolstered by MT practice and that MT practice-related improvements in WMC may mitigate negative affect (62).

Although the college composition classroom does not necessarily constitute a high-stress environment, undoubtedly some stress is inherent in composing at the college level. The findings of this study may be useful to writing instructors seeking to ameliorate some of this stress while improving working memory capacity.

Contemplative Practice in the Writing Class

As stated earlier, the correlations that can be made between contemplative neuroscience and the writing process are—at this point in time—primarily speculative because we still don't have enough empirical research that explicitly tests and measures the links between the two. This is one area of composition research that is in dire need of attention. Despite the lack of empirical support, interest is growing among writing instructors to implement contemplative practices in the writing class. The increasing number of panels on contemplative practice and writing at the College Conference on Composition and Communication over the past few years bears witness to the interest, as well as the development of a new Contemplative Practice and Writing Special Interest Group at this national conference.

In the following section, I will share some writing-class activities I have created that implement contemplative practice at least to the degree that I believe they engage students in forms of cognitive training. Until we collect empirical evidence on the potential for these practices to foster specific cognitive processes—and in turn facilitate the writing process—I will remain speculative about their effects. Specifically, I will share three assignments: an observation essay, an essay that explores a metaphor, and a reflective research journal.

The "Mindfully Observing Your World" Essay

The first assignment I will discuss is a creative non-fiction assignment I adapted for a fall 2014 upper division composition course titled "Writing into Awareness"—which could be easily modified for a first-year composition course as well.[2] Essentially, the assignment asks students to do one of two things. Option one requires students to immerse themselves in a familiar, everyday routine (e.g., going to the gym or walking the dog), but instead of going about that routine on auto-pilot, students must observe

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2. This assignment is an adaptation of an assignment developed by Tammie M. Kennedy at the University of Arizona for use in her English 306 course

the routine with contemplative awareness. Option two allows students to observe an intriguing person, place or event, (e.g., a trip to the zoo) through mindful eyes. Both options culminate in the writing of a descriptive essay about this experience, including anything they learned about themselves or their subject during the process of observation. Figure 1 abbreviates the assignment sheet I developed for this essay.

Choose one of the following:

1. Immerse yourself in a familiar, everyday routine. Be truly mindful of your actions and the world around you.

2. With complete awareness and mindfulness, pay attention to an intriguing person, place, object, or event.

Whichever you choose, observe fully. Write an essay describing the experience of being fully present. What did you see, smell, taste, hear, feel? Then reflect. How was observing your subject different from other times you've observed/ engaged? What new perspectives did you gain? What did you discover about yourself or the world? What new insights did you gain? What was it like to live truly in the moment?

Figure 1: Basic Instructions for "Mindfully Observing Your World" Essay

This assignment is useful for a number of reasons. First of all, it provides students with the opportunity to hone their powers of observation, a necessary skill for both effective thinking *and* writing. Although this assignment requires students to "make sense" of their observations by becoming mindful of their significance, it first requires students to simply observe their subject *without* judgement. This practice of suspending judgement is a kind of mindfulness meditation that may foster all of the cognitive processes discussed in the previous chapter, but perhaps especially attention (see Kozasa, et al.). While the development of attention is important for learning in general, research has indicated that it is especially important for the writing process (Altemeier, et al., Quinlan, et al.). Additionally, this assignment allows students the opportunity to cultivate their descriptive writing skills, and practice writing in the often under-utilized genre of creative non-fiction.

The class activity I designed to help students begin drafting their "Mindfully Observing Your World" essays is an invention activity I call "Guided Visualizations for Descriptive Writing." In this activity, as the name implies, I lead students through a series of guided visualizations. For each visualization (five in total) I ask students to close their eyes, create a mental image of the topic they have chosen to write about for their essay, and then mentally observe and gather any data they can on the sight, feel, sound, smell, and taste of their topic. After each visualization, the students have two minutes to free-write on whatever it was that they "observed." From a cognitive standpoint, this contemplative activity may be helpful to students by engaging their visuospatial faculties. As noted previously, visuo-spatial processing is closely linked to the cognitive processes of working

memory and attention. In fact, Kozhevnikov et al.'s study on Buddhist deity meditation suggests that engaging in visualization practices may improve working memory because of the extremely interconnected relationships among visualization, attention, and memory. Additionally, this activity enables students to get writing down on paper that they may be able to use in the first draft of their essay.

The "Metaphors We Write By" Essay

The next assignment I will discuss is what I call the "Metaphors We Write By" essay. This assignment asks students to contemplate upon what metaphor best describes their writing process. They then write an essay which both describes this metaphor and explains how it represents their writing processes. As an introduction to this assignment, I have students read the first chapter of Lakoff and Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By*, and we discuss how metaphors are much more than simply literary devices; they also shape the way we think about ourselves and our worlds. Figure 2 summarizes the assignment sheet I developed for this essay.

"…we seek out *personal metaphors* to highlight and make coherent our own pasts, our present activities, and our dreams, hopes, and goals as well. A large part of our self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives." –from *Metaphors We Live By*

1. Mindfully discuss what metaphor could best describe your writing process in the past and present. What is this metaphor? Give examples of how this metaphor helps explain the writing you've done.

2. Deeply reflect on this metaphor. How could it help you understand the choices you've made as a writer? How could it inform or influence your thinking about your writing, about your life as a writer, and about how you could continue to improve?

We will discuss how to answer these questions more fully in class.

Figure 2: Basic instructions for the "Metaphors We Write By" Essay

This assignment was created as an alternative to the "standard" essay given at the end of the first-year writing class, asking students to reflect on what they have learned over the course of the semester. The difficulty with such an assignment is that (at least for some students) it seems to encourage disingenuous or inauthentic responses, which are not very useful to the students. On the other hand, I have found the "Metaphors We Write By" essay to be more successful in helping students engage in the degree of contemplation that the end-of-the-semester essay genre strives for. Not only is the ability to engage in contemplation on a "metaphor to write by" important on a personal level, but it is also important in terms of developing as a writer. The research that most closely informs this assignment is the research on executive function and self-regulation. Executive function and self-regulation appear to be the cognitive processes governing what Flower and Hayes have called "the monitor." In other words, Flower and Hayes and others suggest that one

of the key cognitive functions responsible for the production of text is the mind's capacity to oversee, delegate, and self-correct, as needed. This assignment fosters that capacity by providing students with the opportunity to contemplate upon and make sense of their writing process—and hopefully—to identify places where their writing and writing process can continue to improve.

The Reflective Research Journal

The last assignment I want to discuss—the Reflective Research Journal—is an academic research project I created for the second semester sequence of a first-year writing course. This project is devised to help students approach the *entire* research project from a mindful perspective. This assignment comes prior to a concluding dialogue they write that includes different stakeholders in a controversy that emerges from their research topic (when students have become more heavily involved in the research process). The journal lasts for the duration of the research process. Basically, this assignment entails students answering a set of questions periodically, throughout the research process, in the form of journal responses that can be posted directly to a learning management system like D2L or Blackboard. Figure 3 provides some of the questions I have frequently asked.

Questions for your Reflective Research Journal:

- What stage of the research process are you in at this moment?
- What are you discovering about your controversy at this point?
- How do you feel at this moment in the research process? (frustrated, excited, bored, capable, challenged, etc.)
- Why do you think you feel this way?
- How do you think you will use the information you have gathered to inform the writing of your Controversy Analysis paper?
- What other ways could you conduct research at this point that might prove to be more fruitful and helpful to you?

Figure 3: Instructions for the Reflective Research Journal

As the other assignments I have developed, this assignment is informed by research on the benefits of engaging in activities intended to foster attention and self-awareness. Specifically, I have found that this assignment encourages students to be more mindful of their research process than they would have been otherwise, and that, in general, it encourages mindful engagement with their topic.

Conclusion

I make two primary arguments in this essay. One, composition studies should pay attention to contemplative neuroscience because of the potential benefits provided to writing instruction by bringing these two fields into communication with each other. Recent findings from contemplative neuroscience indicate that contemplative practice supports

and facilitates cognitive functioning. Yi-Yuan Tang and other researchers suggest that engaging in mindfulness meditation can improve executive function because—among other reasons—it can help subjects become more self-aware and better able to attend to their emotions. This, in turn—as Robert Roeser and Stephen Peck point out—can also help to increase motivation, a key factor in self-regulated learning. A number of researchers (e.g., Kozasa, Lutz, Tang, and Hodgins) have also found that mindfulness meditation can develop a person's ability to attend. Other studies by researchers such as Chambers, et al. and Mrazek, et al. conclude that mindfulness meditation can also improve a person's working memory capacity. Each of these cognitive processes—executive function, motivation, self-regulation, attention, and working memory—are highly instrumental to the writing process. Furthermore, they are all placed under a great deal of strain, and are easily depleted, by the writing process. These studies indicate that implementing contemplative practice in the writing classroom may help to ameliorate some of the cognitive and affective stress caused by the writing process.

The second argument I make in this article is that cognitive training (in general) may prove superior to other forms of instruction because studies show that brain training is more effective at training the underlying processes responsible for learning across contexts—or in other words, for transferring knowledge. Research from contemplative neuroscience that talks about motivation and self-regulated learning may be able to shed some new light on this discussion and provide writing instructors with new means of fostering motivation in students. Furthermore, in a discipline such as composition studies—where teachers and writing program directors are frequently asked to justify their courses' validity within the larger institutional context—the ability to connect our instruction and research to training in cognitive processes will prove substantially valuable.

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Resisting a Restrictive Discourse Policy

Ondine Gage

What happens when policies counter the lived reality of the communities in which classrooms serve? Reporting on one strand of a larger doctoral study, this essay examines how a teacher and her students resisted a restrictive discourse policy. As a doctoral student, my advisor had suggested I begin data collection by simply sitting in a classroom context and observing. Drawing on ethnographic tools and inspired by an ecological approach to language study, my aim was to capture language and learning in a Transitional English Language Arts classroom within a Program Improvement School in the context of the No Child Left Behind policy. The teacher in whose eighth-grade class I chose to sit said to me, "You have a perspective which I don't." From the privileged vantage point of a participant-observer, I listened. I recorded what the teacher said and what the language the students displayed—for both the teacher and me. More important, I heard the students' murmurings, their faintly audible linguistic shifts into non-dominant language forms, which composed their multilingual language identities within this rural California community. This essay draws on qualitative data to examine how this teacher and her students resisted an English-only restriction.

Background: Policy and Language Ecologies

The languages, which we use in society, in the classroom, and in our homes, contribute to the linguistic ecologies within which children evolve (van Lier). Policies on language use may aim to shape the practices in the classroom, but the living language communities which classrooms serve may be very different from classroom language policies. I will report on a subset of data collected for a doctoral study during a period referred to as "the perfect storm" (Gándara and Baca). The perfect storm was the convergence of policy initiatives by Federal and California governance, forbidding Spanish or other languages.

In California, given that these policies are enacted within communities that are largely multilingual, I posed these research questions:

- How do children make meaning with language when classroom language use is constrained?
- What impact do these constraints have on children's conceptions of English and their heritage language?
- How does a multilingual teacher contend with the effects of the classroom climate created by restrictive discourse policies both on her teaching practice and her students' identities as learners?

This essay thus explores the contexts of the state and federal policies at the time of the study and considers how these policies impacted the classroom language-learning context. The data collected include survey data which explored students' perceptions of "academic language," interviews with the instructor, and an analysis of the classroom language-and-learning discourse. Drawing from these data sources, I consider how students and their teacher make meaning with language in spite of a restrictive policy context.

Taking an Ecological Perspective

Van Lier argued that the study of classroom language and learning cannot be understood by isolating variables. Building upon Bronnfenbrenner's theory of human development, van Lier proposed that language and learning are enacted through the interaction of language ecologies. In order to understand classroom language and learning, the researcher must consider the language ecologies, which impact both directly and indirectly classroom language choices. For this reason, van Lier proposed drawing upon the tools of the ethnographer to consider not only the micro-level language use in the classroom, but also to consider the larger macro -policy contexts which may indirectly impact language and learning in the classroom.

An Ecological Lens on Academic Language

Scholars of second language acquisition have attempted to explain why students may quickly develop oral "every day" language but lack the language needed to progress in school. Cummins proposed the terms Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) as a theoretical construct to explain these differences.

However, these constructs taken from a monolingual perspective provide a skewed portrait of BICS building into the more complex CALP as students gain in academic abilities. What a monolingual perspective neglects is that multilingual students have additional tools at their disposal for building conceptual knowledge. In fact, a growing area of scholarly work has begun to consider the notion of *translanguaging*, which involves the use of multilingual conduits for building conceptual understanding (Garcia). When students may draw on their full range of expression, they are allowed additional tools for working through conceptual understanding (Sayer). However, a monolingual policy environment reinforces language hierarchies which may impact students' views of themselves and confidence in their multilingual and academic abilities (Bartolome).

Context and Methods of Data Collection

The context of the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom where I sat in 2010 reflects growing linguistic and economic segregation across many California communities. In the community that the school serves, 80% of the population identifies as non-White, and 44% speaks a language other than English at home (United States Census Bureau, 2010). In addition, a relative indication of poverty in a school is the number of

students receiving Free/Reduced Priced Meals. In this case, 80% qualified for government supplemented meals.[1] Beyond the relative economic segregation, the representation of language diversity within the eighth-grade classroom included 25 students who spoke Spanish in the home, two Tagalog speakers, and one Hindi speaker. Of the 30 children, 22 were still designated English language learners (ELL) according to California's English Language Development Test (CELDT). Only two were monolingual English speakers, while two others were determined upon entering school to be proficient bilingual speakers of English, and two others had been redesignated as proficient in English. Despite a policy which focuses narrowly on children's English language proficiency, children growing up in linguistically diverse communities gain experience in life narrated, as Applied Linguist Lilia Bartolome has observed, through sometimes many and varied dialects, languages, and the language of schooling.

Although these eighth-graders clearly lived in a linguistically diverse community, their cumulative school experience occurred during the converging policies of the Federal, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and California's Proposition 227, which enforced a monolingual educational climate in California (Gándara and Baca). With the introduction of NCLB, changes in federal policy drew on the Bush administration's ideological orientation towards language and learning, which conceived of bilingual education and bilingualism as a problem (Evans and Hornberger). Following the implementation of NCLB in 2001, the term *bilingual* was expunged from the records of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, Crawford). All official language acknowledging the role of the native language in facilitating a child's learning and strengthening academic development in English vanished as well from the new administration's reauthorization of ESEA. Moreover, Title VII of ESEA, the Bilingual Education Act was tacitly revoked (Evans and Hornberger). Eliminating bilingual education, NCLB's provisions for English Language Development were now provided under Title I for disadvantaged students. Furthermore, English as a Second Language (ESL) was not recognized as a core subject under NCLB. Therefore, providing students access to teachers with expertise in teaching emerging language learners was not a priority. Instead, classes often became structured by reading level where special needs students and English language learners were combined, as was the case in the district at the site of this study (Harper, de Jong, and Platt).

Furthermore, funding for Program Improvement Schools receiving Title I money under NCLB (such as the one in this study) was connected to Reading First, which relied on pre-packaged, "scientifically-based" reading programs designed for monolingual native speakers (Pease-Alvarez, Davies Samway, and Cifka-Herrera). Moreover, federal NCLB policy had been preceded in 1998 by the passage of Proposition 227 (Prop 227), which 61% of California voters approved. Prop 227 restricted bilingual education in favor of Structured English Immersion (SEI, Wright). Proponents of SEI, driven by an English-only ideological orientation (Gándara and Baca), claimed that offering instruction overwhelmingly in English applied the methods that Canadian immersion programs had successfully implemented (Baker). This converging storm of policy efforts aimed to force a monolingual educational climate on bilingual students. However, lin-

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1. http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html

guistic diversity has blossomed in California as families continue to nurture their children in their mother tongue (Hill).

Resulting Data from the Student Survey, Teacher Interview, and Classroom Language-Awareness Study

Having discussed the policies context of this study, I now turn to the results of the data collection. First, I discuss the surveys I gave to gain the student perspective. Then I describe the instructor, whose philosophy of teaching and language learning resided at the heart of her classroom instruction. Next, I present a brief discussion of the classroom language data findings. In total, this data provides a montage of the classroom language ecology.

Student Survey.

Given that these implicitly monolingual policies were enacted within largely multilingual communities, I wondered how children perceived the language they had to speak in school in relation to the heritage languages audible in their classroom whispers. My field notes documented the use of the term "academic language" in the textbook, in daily vocabulary exercises given by the instructor, and on laminated signs in the classrooms and the office that read, "All teachers are teachers of Academic Language." I wondered how students interpreted these messages. In collecting background data for the larger study, I administered a survey with the following questions:

1) Have you heard of "academic language"?
2) What does "academic language" mean to you?
3) Where have you seen or heard the words "academic language "?
4) Why do you study academic language?
5) How is academic language the same or different from other language?

Table 1 represents a summary of responses to the survey given to 28 of the students. All 28 students reported hearing about academic language. Of the total, eight students specifically attributed learning academic language to learning the English language. While 26 students indicated that the term "academic language" was used at school, two others wrote that it is used at work and in writing respectively. Moreover, nine students reported that the reason for studying academic language was to be better in the English language. Finally, no students attributed academic language to their heritage languages.

The survey data provided qualitative information about how the students conceived of academic language. Two clear themes are noted in the student qualitative responses: *Academic language was a form of English practiced in school which held prestige*, and *Academic language is English as opposed to Spanish.* In students' own words, "to me academic language means using English vocabulary when you are talking" and "learning about the English language." Moreover, one student specifically stated, "Academic language means to me a bunch of students struggling in English." Student responses also revealed that they associated greater prestige with academic language when compared with other varieties. "It sounds better"; "It is different from Spanish because it's English"; "I think

Academic language is a higher level"; and "Academic Language is appropriate for school and the other words are not"; and "Academic language is a more advanced language and other languages are different because they aren't academic." These responses reflect the instructor's concern that students did not see their home languages (Spanish and other languages) as academic, which in her opinion would affect their confidence in using English.

Table 1: Data in Response to Questions about "Academic Language" (Data source: Gage-Serio, 247)

Have you ever heard of "academic language"?		
Yes		No
28		0
What does "academic language" mean?		
Attributed to English	Not Attributed to English	Students' Comments
8	20	• It means learning about the English language. • To me academic language means using English vocabulary when you're talking. • Academic language means to me a bunch of students struggling in English.
Where have you seen or heard the words "academic language"?		
At school	At work	In writing
26	1	1
Why do you study academic language?		
Become better in English		Other reasons
9		19
How is academic language the same or different from other language?		
• It sounds better. • It is different from Spanish because it's English. • I think academic language is a higher level • Academic language is appropriate for school and the other words are not. • Academic language is a more advanced language, and other languages are different because they aren't academic.		

Interviews with the Instructor

Interview data with the instructor showed her alarm about the students' academic confidence on many occasions. The results of the student responses to my survey were not surprising to her. As she put it,

> I'm constantly campaigning for 'building their bilingual biceps.' The students I work with are at varying levels [of Spanish and other languages]. Some came here in the third, fourth, or fifth grades. Some were born and raised here. Few honor it [their language ability]. I don't get the sense that kids have a lot of academic Spanish. I wouldn't say they speak only kitchen Spanish, but most do not read in Spanish, and they aren't as aware of using Spanish as a tool. Spanish is a social thing for them. Yes, a solidarity tool. It is a language of comfort; it is easy. But I'm trying to sell it as academic. I sell

bilingualism as a tool. I value the same thing. I want them to see the legitimacy of bilingualism as a tool. (Gage-Serio 60)

The instructor's decision for me to study her classroom was due, in part, to the concern that students view their linguistic identities through the divided lens of these segregated communities—English-only at school, Spanish or other lannguages in their communities.

Possessing a Masters degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and having originally been hired to teach ESL, the teacher requested reassignment to English Language Arts when the district adopted the scripted Reading First packages for the below basic-level students. While she agonized over leaving the ESL students, as the below-basic classes were often given to inexperienced new teachers without formal TESOL training, she opted for classes that allowed her the dignity to practice her profession. Having completed a single subject credential in English Language Arts, she elected to teach the Transitional English Language Arts classes. During her nine years at this school, she had learned Spanish as well, initially studying Spanish abroad during her vacations. She discovered that her expert linguistic skills could enrich the classroom experience for students who must be able to transition into Core English Language Arts by high school or risk missing requirements needed to attend college. By the time of this study, she was quite proficient. She conducted many of her parent-teacher meetings in Spanish and was often called upon to translate for the principal and other teachers. Her efforts to mediate the linguistic chasm had afforded her a certain level of in-group status among the students.

When we spoke of how she used her multilingual abilities in the classroom under NCLB, she indicated, she was not really aware of using Spanish as an instructional practice except to stop and elicit students' awareness of cognate relationships. However, she strives to be a model for her students through her own practice and puts a premium on the value of multilingualism especially for teachers. She argues that "knowledge of another language informs your teaching . . . . It is really important to try sitting through, learning languages, constantly being put in your students' shoes." At the beginning of the year, I noted that she used a lot less Spanish in the classroom than when I had observed her classes two years earlier. When we discussed this, she expressed some hesitancy about using Spanish because the classes had been restructured by reading level. Therefore, a few students spoke only English. She was concerned that students who did not speak Spanish would be upset by the use of Spanish in the classroom. As the year progressed, she decided that linking Spanish to French and Latin etymology within English for the purpose of building morphological knowledge was a justifiable practice according to the California Standards for Grade 8.

Classroom Language Data

In my analysis of the classroom language data, I isolated Language Awareness Related Episodes, influenced by Swain's and Lapkin's Language Related Episodes (LRE). Departing from Swain and Lapkin's experimental construct, my unit of analysis is defined as "episodes of language exchange containing ideas contributing to awareness in the construction of

meaning" (Gage-Serio 75). These episodes contributed to opportunities ("affordances") for language awareness, defined by van Lier as the situation in which learners perceive, interact, and think about the language. As I coded my data, I saw four themes emerge:

1) Opportunities for metalinguistic awareness,
2) Opportunities for analeptic awareness;
3) Opportunities for proleptic awareness; and
4) Opportunities for awareness of register shift

These themes revealed exchanges among students and between students and the instructor—and the exchanged proved to be bidirectional. In other words, *opportunities* for language awareness are opportunities for activity between interlocutors, where in many cases the teacher *listened* to how students constructed meaning in order to arrive at a shared understanding. Examples of the coding themes help to illustrate how coming to an awareness of shared understanding is a bidirectional act where the instructor's *listening* to her students is an integral element in expanding the discourse.

Metalinguistic Awareness. The coding the theme of *opportunities for metalinguistic awareness* occurred in verbal exchanges examining meaningful parts of language as an object. For example, Language Awareness Related Episodes (LAREs) might relate to polysemy, morphology, synonymy, and cross-linguistic comparisons. In one instance, while the instructor was explaining that the *guidance counselor* would help students determine their high school classes, one student asked, "I thought a counselor was like someone who helps you with your problems?" The instructor answered, "Your social problems? Yes, [but] a guidance counselor is a little different. . . . someone in school who helps you with your career." The polysemy within the use of the word *counselor* was a source of confusion for this student. In fact, Boers explains that the range of polysemy usage is quite complicated and may be very confusing for students. He recommends that teachers examine polysemy in text with sensitivity, reflecting that polysemy and connotative meaning may be novel or culturally unfamiliar to students. Other examples, include ways in which the instructor sought opportunities to draw on cross linguistic examples, as in the following, when she began to explain a vocabulary word: "So *vivid* sounds like a Latin word. What is it?" One student responded, "*Vivir*," to which she replied, "*Vivir*—living. So it if is alive, it must be very (pause) colorful? Very lively." *Opportunities for metalinguistic awareness* in which connections are made between linguistic systems appeared to prompt some students to engage in the discussion.

Analeptic Awareness. The coding theme of *opportunities for analeptic awareness* were verbal exchanges in which interlocutors referenced shared experiences and/or knowledge to create a common schema for clarifying meaning. For example, LAREs drawing on *affordances for analeptic awareness* established prior or shared knowledge base, on which to scaffold additional knowledge. One such example in the data included the discussion of the notion "to stand up for something." In this exchange, the instructor began with a shared understanding, using examples the students were familiar with, such as standing up for the pledge of allegiance to the flag, or standing up for your rights. The

students then added examples of people who had stood up for their rights, such as "Martin Luther King", "Rosa Parks." The instructor countered, "What about Rosa Parks? She sat down on the bus. She wasn't standing up." Then the instructor added, "So we have a belief, and it has something to do with your opinion." In this case, the instructor's knowledge of the students and the students' co-construction of concepts in tandem through analepsis provided opportunities for language awareness.

Proleptic Awareness. Another coding theme was *opportunities for proleptic awareness*. These were verbal exchanges exploring inferences or opportunities to step into shared space and assume the direction of the discourse. For example, opportunities for proleptic awareness were situations in which students finished instructor's sentences, or connected hints provided by *wh-* or echo questions, which reflected students deducing the implied or inferred information. These examples were particularly salient when the students did not initially see the connection between linguistic systems, as in the following example. The instructor began, "So 'primordial' has to do with something which has been around since the earliest times. You know? You can use the first part. You Spanish speakers, you have an advantage. Use those bilingual biceps. What is the Latin root?" One student answered, "Ohhh…*primo*!" The instructor answered, "Oh, yes. *Primo* sounds like you got it. *Primero . . . .* So what does that mean? Several students chimed in: "One." The instructor continued prompting: "So one, or the first. . . . What folks? The first . . . ? Sounds familiar, huh? Okay. So even if the second part of the word is not familiar, the first part has something to do with 'first,' since the beginning of time . . . ." Responding, one student answered, "primo . . . . The first day!"

Students appeared to need the prompting of the instructor to notice the relationships among Latin roots and derived terms. Moreover, through stepping into the shared proleptic space, following the thought process of the instructor who presented the information as a kind of puzzle, students were offered the dignity of reaching and noticing the relationships themselves.

Awareness of Register Shift. The last coding theme is *opportunities for awareness of register shift*. These verbal exchanges reflected students' awareness of register shifts, which achieve different norms of language use for different audiences and purposes. For example, register involves LAREs in which students chose language purposely to establish or signal specific social norms for a specific audience. While opportunities for awareness of register shift were less frequent, some occurred with students who had been with this instructor for more than one year. Perhaps the students' familiarity with the instructor or her phrasing may have facilitated the display of more formal register shifts, as in the following example offered by one student who explained his use of a historical term in his written work this way: "I put a more advanced word . . . the Underground Railroad wasn't actually a *railroad.*" (He said this with a lowered, exaggerated adult intonation). In this episode, the student tried on the language of his instructor to show what he knew about academic language. In return, she offered him a class token given for special answers.

Findings and Discussion

Taken together, the policy under NCLB and California's Prop 227 had created a restrictive discourse environment in the classroom I observed. Although my survey data had revealed the strain on the children's conceptions of their English and heritage languages, in this particular language ecology, students and their teacher engaged in making connections between languages. In fact, the classroom language data clearly illustrated several ways how the classroom could be a space for making connections and shared understanding. These connections with language were a means of resistance to the dominant discourse of federal and state policies, which were achieved through a teacher's willingness to mediate the linguistic chasm. By empowering her students with the knowledge that their teacher was an ally in their struggle, the teacher's actions become a political form of resistance to restrictive discourse policies. Policies on language use do not stamp out the living language communities, which classrooms serve. A teacher's respect for multilingualism gives status to students' multilingual identities. In other words, for some students, drawing on their knowledge of their home language may provide them with the option to add their own, alternative discourse practices to the discussion. Moreover, a teacher's empathy towards the students' lack of academic confidence, and a teacher's drive to help students bridge their multilingual and developing academic identities can have a powerful impact. Finally, a teacher's willingness to listen to her students in order to arrive at shared understanding can foster a classroom climate of mutual respect. Languages viewed as a resource not only provide children with connections between their homes and the classroom, but honor their multiple linguistic identities and help them see "the legitimacy of bilingualism as a tool."

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The Performance of Literate Practices: Rhetoric, Writing, and Stand-up Comedy

J. Michael Rifenburg

Comedian John Crist and I are standing in the middle of the student center at the University of North Georgia's Gainesville campus. It's noon on a Tuesday in mid-April. Two weeks are left in the semester, and the campus activity board brought in John, a comedian for the past five years, for stress relief. Next week is ice cream and pet therapy.

All around, students, faculty, and staff sit at circle tables, eating, texting, talking, and gaming. Most are electronically plugged into something. The steady din of the ice machine, the cash register, and conversation fill the space. The food court is in one corner, opposite the welcome booth. Card services sits next to the cyber café. Flags from different nations line the ceiling, and white holiday lights are snaked through the rafters. A walkway is in the middle of the space. People move from one end of the student center to the other, balancing trays of pizza, nachos, ice cream, and drinks. "This space is a comic's nightmare," John says to me with a laugh. He runs his hand through his dark hair and rocks back on his heels. "A noon show in a food court."

John is tall, thin, and tan. His hair sticks straight up, and he grabs at it while on stage. He is wearing a red Atlanta Hawks t-shirt, dark blue jeans, and Adidas shoes. John points to a group of students decked out in soccer jerseys. The students are playing cards and talking animatedly. "These guys aren't going to stop playing," John sighs. He shrugs his shoulders and laughs again giving off the sound of one walking knowingly but insouciantly into a potential disaster. "What town can I make fun of?" he suddenly asks me.

We have known each other for over ten years. We went to a small, private high school together, and John was one grade-level behind me. He played on the tennis team with one of my close friends. John's parents and seven brothers and sisters lived in a large house a few miles from the school, which became a popular hang-out spot. John and I lost touch when we both went off to college. Several years ago, I was idly scrolling through Facebook and came across video clips of John's stand-up. I "liked" the video, connected with him via Twitter, and began following his career. Now we are standing in the food court shaking hands for the first time in a decade.

"Dawsonsville," I reply hesitatingly. John grabs my blue pen from the table and writes DAWSONVILLE on the inside of his hand. The joke he will soon deliver is now inscribed on his skin. His eyes jump around the room and land on me. He crunches his shoulders and chuckles.

"Comedians have gotten away from performing at colleges," John states next as he drops my pen back on the table. "Too much group-think." He points to his head and explains that college students only laugh when those around them laugh. They aren't bold enough to laugh on their own because they so desperately want to fit in.

"Didn't Tosh get his start at colleges?" I ask, referring to popular comedian Daniel Tosh who hosts his own show on Comedy Central.

"Yea," John replies, "And Dane Cook." But acts become too "college-y," John explains. In a sense, the location of one's act becomes one act. John continues talking quickly about how the location and the bit—a comedian's term for his act—influence and give rise to each other. I want to reach for my digital recorder in my bag to capture his musings but worry that by the time I find it, the moment will be gone. John stops his explanation, pauses, and asks: "Are there Greeks here?" John wants to know more about the people in the space. The joke scripted on his body will drive his performance, so, too will his audience. I explain that where we are, the Gainesville campus, is a commuter campus. The Dahlonega campus for the University of North Georgia is a residential campus and has a Greek system but no official Greek housing. I can tell I lost John's attention. His eyes bounce around the room. "College sports?" He asks. I start with a "not really" but am not able to finish because John heads toward the stage and then disappears behind a door. With one joke written on his hand, he is a rumble of kinetic energy ready to burst.

In a few minutes, John will walk on stage and for the next hour deliver pages and pages of written material he began as hastily composed notes on his iPhone and then fleshed out on Word for Mac. He will deliver jokes about McDonalds, American currency, policing, and trampolines. But John's written material only exists to serve his physical performance. For readers interested in the recent work connecting extracurricular literate practices to curricular ones, a study of a comedian's performative literate practices is of importance because John's are grounded alphabetically but manifested kinesthetically through a marked attention to location and audience during his invention and delivery. Attending to John's invention and delivery practices holds promise for how we conceptualize classroom writing instruction, specifically how we may teach revision strategies to student-writers.

My argument advances as follows: I begin by offering a review of literature interrogating how writing research build bridges between school and non-school literate practices with a specific responsiveness to what rhetorical studies of stand-up comedy may teach us about classroom writing instruction. I then attend to the participant in this study: stand-up comedian John Crist. I report on his noon show at the food court at the University of North Georgia and offer a description of how he writes for stand-up comedy based on an in-person, semi-structured interview and a study of his textual material: hurried notes on his iPhone, scripted jokes on his Word for Mac, hand-written outlines for his performance. At the close, I suggest two implications for teaching revision in classroom writing instruction derived from John's performance. The first grounds the act of revision in location and the second in the audience's visceral and visible reaction.

Inventing and Delivering the Performance of Literate Practices

My thinking on the term *literate practices* follows the lead of scholars in New Literacy Studies. As Brian Street, David Barton, and Mary Hamilton persuasively argue, literate practices refer to specific ways a community uses literacy. Cultural, historical, and social conventions shape these literate practices. Paul Prior takes up this notion of

literate practices and broadens it by asking us to consider *literate activity*. He submits that literate activity refers to "cultural forms of life saturated with textuality that is strongly motivated and mediated by texts" (138). Kevin Roozen brings literate practices and literate activities together when he offers that the former are "situated in and mobilized across broader literate activities" (569). As Prior and Roozen nest literate practices within the larger literate activities of a community, in this article I listen to John's invention and delivery as examples of literate practices within the larger literate activity of stand-up comedy.

Of specific interest to my focus is how writing studies research leverages extracurricular literate practices into curricular ones. In Kevin Roozen's fine-grained study of Charles, an African American undergraduate enrolled in a basic writing class—who is also a published writer, stand-up comedian, and spoken word poet—Roozen—focuses on Charles's opportunities to display publically his literate development and how these opportunities informed his academic course work. Charles read his original poems during the African American Cultural Center's weekly readings and performing jokes at his university's open mic night. These performances of literate practices "enhanced [Charles's] speeches" ("Journalism" 24) for Speech Communication 101, a course Charles was initially failing but managed a C in large part because he honed much needed rhetorical skills outside of the classroom and then brought these skills into the classroom. This connection between school and non-school spaces allows Roozen to argue that "extracurricular and curricular literate activities . . . are so profoundly interconnected that it becomes difficult to see where one ends and others begin" ("Journalism" 27).

For Roozen's participant Charles, stand-up comedy was one performative arena in which he exercised his rhetorical muscles. Other writing studies scholars have turned to comedy as a gateway for gleaning a stronger understanding of the linked work of text, rhetor(s), and audience in performances of literacy. Amanda Morris analyzes a gig by Native American stand-up comedian Howie Miller at the Winnipeg Comedy Festival. Morris studies Miller's "performances, words, gestures, and audience" (46) to develop larger claims about Native American comedy. Drawing on ancient western rhetorics forwarded by Aristotle, Morris projects Native American comedy as a form of "epideictic rhetoric . . . [that uses] generic conventions of stand-up comedy, traditional elements of Native humor, and Aristotelian strategies to challenge what audiences think they now about Native experiences in this land" (37). Like Morris, Andrea Greenbaum grounds her understanding of stand-up comedy in ancient western rhetorics by opening her argument with the claim that "Stand-up comedy is an inherently rhetorical discourse" (33). Following her year-long ethnography of the comedy scene in Tampa, Florida, Greenbaum holds that comedians strive to develop a "comic authority," which draws on the Aristotelian appeal of *ethos*, with their audiences. Once this comic authority is developed, a comedian is able to implement *kairotic* jokes that connect with the audience.

In this article, I echo Greenbaum's and Morris's case studies of the rhetorical dimensions of stand-up comedy and respond to rising interest in tailoring writing pedagogies that call upon a learner's full-range of literate practices. Specifically, I draw from John's stand-up comedy performance at UNG and my follow-up, semi-structured interview to sketch an argument for positioning performative, stand-up comedy as a literate practice

which offers writers and writing teachers productive methods for conceptualizing revision grounded in location and audience.

A Food Court Comedy Show

John has performed stand-up comedy for five years. After graduating from Samford University, he moved to Colorado and now lives in Los Angeles. He got his break in 2009 when he appeared in Louie Anderson's comedy show in Las Vegas. He won comedy competitions in Colorado and performed at a USO comedy tour for troops in Kuwait. He opened for Seth Meyer's NBC show, shared the stage with Dave Chappelle, Adam Carolla, and Trevor Noah, and performed in front of over 7,000 people at Red Rocks Amphitheater, a popular outdoor amphitheater in Colorado.

John's fan base is largely Christian. He self-identifies as Christian and weaves in jokes about being the son of a pastor and reading his Bible daily. He performs at youth groups and church retreats while also honing his craft at Fortune 500 company events. John's comedy is clean and though he steps into cringe-worthy material at times, he doesn't curse or deliver crass jokes. He isn't a physical comedian like Chris Farley or John Cleese. He isn't going to fall on the floor, do a handstand, or work himself into a sweat through punctuated and rapid gesticulations like Steve Martin. And though John projects different voices—he has a few standard voices for generic characters he mimics— he doesn't do impressions like Robin Williams or Frank Caliendo. John has a smooth, conversational delivery. He talks with the audience, often asking the audience questions, and engaging with those who talk to him or even heckle him.

During the noon food court show, John starts by asking the sound technician to play a three-second clip of a popular song. He tells the audience to sing the rest of the lyrics once the clip ends. The first clip is from the catchy pop-song "All About that Bass." A few voices in the audience sing the chorus. It is a meager effort. John asks for the second clip: a Garth Brooks track. Again, a meager effort from the audience. Most are still absorbed in their pizzas and iPhones. The third track is the theme from *SpongeBob SquarePants*. This clip gets the largest reception. Multiple voices collectively rise and shout the remainder of the lyrics. John is amused and says this teaches him a lot about his audience. The sound tech tries playing the fourth track but is unable. John laughs it off and moves into his routine. About two minutes later, the song clip interrupts John's routine. He doesn't look perturbed but later tells me the song clips were an "unmitigated disaster." Holding the microphone stand with his right hand and the mic with his left, John starts into his routine. He immediately comes out throwing punches at Dawsonville based on my suggestion: "I swung by Dawsonville on my way up here to check on my sponsor child," he cracks to a few tentative chuckles. The joke doesn't hit like I think John expected. He moves into Lanier Tech, the technical college school which shares a campus with the Gainesville campus of UNG, and asks if his car is going to be stripped down when he finishes his show because he parked near the Lanier Tech campus. Two people in the audience are from Lanier Tech. They chuckle. As John anticipated, the location and time are already hurting his routine. People are walking across the middle of the food court. The girl at the table next to me rapidly thumbs the screen of her iPhone and complains that it is too loud to hear herself think. In the back

row, UNG's interim provost is eating a salad at a high-top table with two other people. I occasionally glance back at him to gauge his reaction, but he appears fixed on his salad and lunch-mates.

The card-playing group in the soccer jerseys are paying attention and turn out to be some of the best audience members. At one point, John points to them and cracks "I guess it's just going to be us today." After he has touched on trampolines, the Monopoly game at McDonalds, he suggests Bill Clinton should be on the dollar bill, Obama on the coins (or "change"), he comes to his edgiest joke, the one that elicits the loudest collective gasp from the audience. Observing the oddity of naming alcoholic drinks after natural disaster from other countries—like a *mudslide*—John mentions how inappropriate it would be to order a "Detroit's economy." Some student's laugh, but the joke is a bit-dated. Detroit and its struggling economy seem far in the past, and they don't resonate with most college students in northeast Georgia. He keeps pushing: "never happen. You had a tough day at work and you pull up to the bar: 'let me get a Ferguson police department.' Bartender's like 'what's that?' You're like, 'it's six shots in the back.'" When delivering the punch-line, John turned around and pointed to his back, looking over his shoulder at the audience.

I video-taped this joke on my iPhone and later re-watched it. The crowd gave John his biggest reaction by far, and this joke brought the audience into his act. Not all found the joke funny. But John delivered this joke during a time in the United States when passionate discussions of police militarization and brutality were driving the news-cycle of major media outlets. These issues forced our country to have painful but necessary discussions of race and racial inequities promulgated by disproportionate incarceration numbers and civilian deaths occurring during civilian/police interactions. Those discussions still animate our nation even as I revise this article in a 2016 post-presidential election America. John's joke got people's attention kept their attention for the last thirty minutes of his gig.

John worked into this joke slowly. In *Zen and the Art of Stand-up Comedy*, Jay Sankey describes this process as "showing your neck" (111), as the neck is a vulnerable spot on a feral animal. Greenbaum, in her study of the comedy culture in Tampa, suggested that comedians develop what she terms "comic authority" (34). Despite the different terminology, Sankey and Greenbaum are describing the process of developing a relationship with the audience, a process critical to the delivery of stand-up comedy. As Chris Ritchie argues, "the [stand-up comedy] performer-audience relationship is symbiotic; the one cannot exist without the other" (164). To invite the audience into vulnerable territory (such as joke about police brutality), according to Sankey, a comedian must first display themselves as vulnerable to the audience. John showed his neck first; he provided biographical details during his performance and self-identified as Christian. He even talked about race, asking audience members about their ethnicity and talking about religion. He talked about names and suggested people name their kids "normal names" that aren't racially coded: "If you have only one spot on the basketball team and you got to pick between DeAndre and Caleb, well, Caleb ain't getting on the team." Once he felt like he had showed his neck enough, he asked the audience to show theirs. He invited them to laugh with him about a troublesome and incendiary issue.

Somehow, John moved from Ferguson to joking about the stupidity of little kids and then ending with a pun on Carrie Underwood's pop-song "Jesus, Take the Wheel." He received a strong applause from the audience and spent a few minutes chatting with the card-playing soccer jersey group before the campus entertainment board greeted him. I stood off to the side waiting to escort him to a conference room for our interview. I could overhear students and staff of the campus entertainment board express worry that the Multicultural Office might complain about the insensitivity of the Ferguson joke. John shrugged it off with a chuckle.

Inventing and Delivering Comedy: A Study of John's Literate Practices

John's performance begins with the first canon of rhetoric, ends with the fifth, and maintains a focus on audience and location throughout. Though I mention the invention and delivery separately, an analysis of John's work shows how the two bleed into each other. Moments occur when John's invention occurs during delivery, such as when he improvises, and delivery occurs during invention, such as when he practices reading jokes aloud.

I first attend to John's inventive practices. As James Berlin succinctly states in the opening chapter of *Rhetoric and Reality*, rhetoric is concerned with the *production* of text (1; emphasis in original). I, therefore, turn not only to how John delivers his text but also how he produces it. Karen Burke LeFevre argues against dominate Platonic notions of the individual mind ruminating in isolation. She posits "thinking and inventing of any [writer] happens in large part because of the ways each has interacted with others and with society and culture" (139). LeFevre's argument expands the focus of invention from the individual to the larger ecology in which she invents and gives the first canon of rhetoric a sociocultural spin. Anis Bawarshi builds on LeFevre's push toward an ecological understanding of invention by arguing invention resides in "a larger sphere of agency that includes not only the writer as agent but also the social and rhetorical conditions . . . which participate in this agency and in which the writer and the writing take place" (51). Bawarshi ascribes a co-constitutive nature among rhetor, audience, and context during invention. As with the emphasis on performance with delivery, there is a performative element to invention, as well. John the comedian invents his material in an ecology of people and place.

Secondly, like Andrea Greenbaum and Amanda Morris, I look to delivery as I consider John's comedy. I am aware of the important work on digital delivery practices, which has even spun off into a new field of inquiry often termed circulation studies. However, I hold with more traditional ancient western conceptions of delivery, which link delivery with physical performance. Here we can think of Plato's *Phaedrus* where Phaedrus delivers to Socrates a sophistic speech by Lysias, which Socrates critiques—or we can consider Gorgias's flowery declamation, *Encomium of Helen*. Indeed, jumping from Athens to Rome, the Latin word for delivery, *pronuntiatio,* calls to mind our English verb "pronounce" or noun "pronunciation," and, as Edward Corbett and Robert Connors write, *pronuntiatio* emphasizes "modulations of the voice" and "proper stance and posture of the body" (22) during oral delivery (22). Continuing in the ancient west-

ern rhetorical tradition, Kathleen Welch defines the fifth canon of rhetoric as "the ability to perform in any medium," again nesting performance and delivery (168)

John and I spoke for an hour in a conference room in a building adjacent to the student center. After he signed an informed consent form, I explained my interest in learning about his writing process and the role of invention and delivery in his process. I audio-recorded our interview; the transcription runs roughly five single-spaced pages.

Comedy is a thoroughly textual process. One finds no shortage of how-to books promising to reveal the hidden secrets to penning jokes. Though the audience hears the final oral product, comedy is grounded in written text. To reach this final oral product, John, like most writers, has a recursive writing process. His jokes begin on the Notes app on his iPhone where he composes just a few lines or phrases he has been turning over in his head. During our interview, he pulled out his phone and showed me. He leaned toward me and began scrolling through the Notes app rather quickly with his thumb. While scrolling, he kept reminding me that I was looking at ideas: "These are just ideas, just things I am thinking about, these are terrible, these are ideas." I can understand John's self-deprecation as revealing one's messy first draft makes one vulnerable, especially for comedians who are often characterized and self-characterized as, in John's words, "control-freaks." One phrase John shows me on his phone: *75 cents*. "So this one," John says pointing to 75 cents, "I'm thinking about that line 'another day, another dollar.' And a woman might say 'another day, another 75 cents.'" "Just an idea," he says again. I see one fragment that reads "Zero emissions Prius," and a sentence that reads "I'm not outdoorsy. I don't do anything beyond the range of cell phone service." Both are phrases to jog his memory.

Every Monday, John sends the notes on his phone to his Mac book. On his desktop, John has a folder icon labeled "2015." John opens the folder to reveal many files. One is labeled "Standup," another is labeled "Finances." John clicks on "Standup" and about ten Word documents appear. As a Christian comedian, John performs at youth camps and church functions. Some of the folders are labeled "Church jokes." He assures me he would not deliver the Ferguson joke at youth camp. Opening one of the documents, I see pages and pages of text. Every paragraph is single-spaced, 11-point, American type writer font. John takes the rough ideas from his phone and then fleshes them out on Word for Mac. Every word John delivers is scripted. He points to one paragraph. "Delivered that joke almost exactly like that," he states. "I said exactly those words." John doesn't seem to be saying this with pride but more matter-of-factly. The ultimate delivery of this joke hinges on written alphabetic text. He says, "the goal is to make it look like this [the writing] doesn't exist." One page of written comedy is roughly five minutes of standup material. Looking over a paragraph of his writing, John notices, "fifteen lines here. Fifteen punchlines. That's good. Probably four minutes." By this math, John runs through roughly twelve pages of single-spaced text during his hour long performances.

He even goes so far as to bold words and phrases that he believes will be the punch lines. As he writes, he anticipates where the audience might interject a laugh causing him to slow down, pause, or even repeat himself because the audience's laughter might muffle his words. John is not a physical comedian and does not rely on a great deal of gesticulations, but he does insert periodic hand gestures into his routine. These, too, are scripted. At one point in this document, I see the phrase "Act out." The jokes ready

for the stage are in green font, the ones that need more work are in red. The ones in-between are yellow. John tells me, as he is closing his Mac book, that he has over 400 pages of red material. The night before a performance, John will jot down his set list. He shows me one he wrote for the noon food court show. On Marriott hotel stationary and in black marker, John wrote fifteen words or phrases running from top to bottom. He doesn't consider the transitions between the jokes—transitioning, say, from his jokes about the suburbs into his Ferguson joke. When he walks onto stage with his water bottle, he presses "record" on his iPhone in his pocket and then relies on one sheet of paper to remember the roughly twelve pages of written material and gestures he will perform.

Like many stand-up comedians, John records all his performances with an app on his iPhone. When traveling from one gig to the next, John listens to his performance, taking notes on material needing refinement. He will return to his pages and pages of documents on his Mac book and tinker with the wording or add gestures to the text. In this sense, the audience's reaction to his delivery may cause John to reinvent his source material. Using the fifth canon of rhetoric to spur the first canon is not unique to the writing process. Writing researchers have long shown the recursivity of the composing process despite the proliferation of posters in secondary classrooms detailing the linear and sequential writing process. However, what prompts John's recursivity is audience reaction. Much like an anonymous reviewer's feedback may spur a writer to revise, so, too, does the reaction of the audience spur John to return to his text. Yet for John, this audience reaction is instantaneous; he need not wait six to eight weeks for the editor to follow-up with reviewer feedback. John even goes so far as to say the audience is central to his gig:

> I need you guys [the audience] for the show . . . when you bill yourself as a stand-up comedian and you go 10 seconds without laughter, we got a problem. It's the only reason you came. I need you to make this work; I can't do this on my own. It's the most confident and the most vulnerable spot.

For John, the audience is one of the largest constraints in the invention and delivery of his written material. With the term *constraints*, I am nodding toward Lloyd Bitzer's understanding of the term as that which "influence the rhetor" by constraining a "decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (6, 8). Following Bitzer, Keith Grant-Davie positions constraints as aids—either positive or negative—in composing. With such a constraint, John's composing process illustrates what Erin L. Branch terms the "rhetoric of cultivation" (166). Branch offers a rhetorical analysis of the writing and publication of Julia Child's revolutionary 1961 cookbook *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* to illumine how Child cultivated an audience within a challenging matrix of material, historical, and cultural contexts. Written when publishers did not think readers would be receptive to a dense cookbook detailing the labor-intensive intricacies of a foreign cuisine, Child and her co-authors worked in this "apparently hostile rhetorical climate" (167) to not only connect with their audiences' interests but also create—or *cultivate*—these interests within their audience. The American audience didn't know it wanted to know the complexities of *Fricassée de Poulet à l'Estragon* until they saw it in print. Branch terms this rhetorical phenomenon "the rhetoric of cultivation," which she defines as "a thorough understanding of current conditions, careful choosing of amendments and additions, and continued maintenance" (167). Additionally, this phenom-

enon invites "rhetorical responsiveness and flexibility . . . [since] a rhetor who cultivates an audience carefully *selects* to whom she directs her rhetorical efforts" (167; emphasis in original). To be sure, the agrarian metaphor within the term *rhetoric of cultivation* is more apt for cooking than comedy. However, I see striking similarities between what Child and her co-authors were attempting and what John is attempting. Both rhetors—Julia the cook and John the comedian—not only meet the audience's initial needs, but also craft their words to meet needs of which the audience weren't aware.

Projecting the audience as a constraint and cultivating an audience illustrates the dual effect the audience has in John's writing. While John seeks to know his audience and connect with their life experiences when he crafts his jokes, he also wants to move the audience to where he wants them to be. He doesn't want to, in his words, "completely conform to them." Yet, as John expressed, "I can't do this on my own." He needs the audience for his performance. One of the first things John said to me at the noon food court show was if he could make fun of Lanier Tech, a technical school abutting UNG's Gainesville campus. John wasn't asking my permission; he was asking if the audience would be receptive to such a joke. He tells me "I know they [my audience] watch comedy, they are from Georgia, so from the South, so their parents were probably religious, and they are white, middle-class. I know these kids." Knowing these kids is a constraint in John's writing process, and he adjusts his jokes to the people in the audience. That said, he also wants to lead them into new areas. He told me, "the best comics say, 'I don't care about you guys; I'm going to take you to it.' And [then] lead them to your place":

> You want to 'do you.' You don't want to completely pander. You don't want to completely conform to them, but you want to be knowledgeable about them. So when you say a joke about 'if you got a bunch of cash, you are either a drug-dealer, bankrupt, or from Dawsonville,' or 'I think kids need to learn how to be mediocre so when they get older they can play football for [the University of Georgia]' these are things that people [can recognize and say,] 'he took the time. He's not doing this everywhere. He took the time to care about us, to relate to us.' Just so that you're not a robot. I want to be at least personable.

John pulled the audience to where he wanted to go when he delivered the Ferguson joke. The joke occurred roughly midway through his performance, as if he needed to lead the audience there and then lead them out again. Racism, police brutality, and a fractured American society are heavy issues striking a chord in John. He wants to speak to these issues and use comedy to facilitate and not stymie conversation. John sought to, in Branch's words, "alter audience behavior by capitalizing on existing (counter-) cultural currents" (182). Capitalizing on these currents required John to not only know his audience but to show the audience his neck by carefully cultivating a relationship with the audience and moving them into unexpected areas of laughter.

Bowing Out: Performing Comedic Notions of Invention and Delivery in a Writing Class

Throughout his argument for including humor in a writing class, Steve Sherwood reminds us of how ancient western rhetors grappled with humor as they mapped out

their unique contributions to western rhetorical theory. He ultimately argues contemporary writing teachers can use humor and wit to "enhance their *ethos* as good persons speaking well, rise above embarrassing moments, soften criticism, stimulate creative thinking, and make their students feel less like prisoners and more like welcome guests in the classroom" (2; emphasis in original). By inviting humor into a writing classroom, Sherwood steps into a larger argument concerning how to incorporate bodily performative pedagogies into our writing classrooms. Within the pages of *JAEPL* alone, Christy Wenger, Donna Strickland, Sara K. Schnieder, and Carolina Mancuso offer such suggestions. As these teacher-scholars, I too, find great promise in looking toward theories of embodiment and performance—and stand-up comedy is the space into which I enter this current conversation.

Returning to Sherwood—though I appreciate the attention paid to the historical relationship between humor and rhetoric—I am a bit hesitant to embrace fully the positive spin Sherwood places on humor in the classroom. For one, humor and wit are multifaceted rhetorical performances that can sometimes include verbal tropes and social cues that might alienate students. I am particularly thinking of non-Native English speakers and neurodiverse students (or students who identify as neurodiverse). Additionally, as John's performance illustrates, comedy is a co-venture between the audience, the location, and the comedian. When John took a blue pen to jot DAWSONVILLE onto his palm, he illustrated how stand-up comedy is a tightly scripted performance directed to a particular audience at a particular time in a particular location. The spatial and temporal boundaries placed on stand-up comedy shape the performance, and the ever-changing audience demands John continually revise and revisit jokes. With the textual and performative demand placed on the stand-up comedian, I am hesitant to ask the instructors I work with in my capacity as director of first-year composition to spend time writing and revising jokes to connect with their five different sections of first-year composition. But I do nod along with Sherwood when he reminds us that humor is grounded in ancient western rhetorics—rhetorics which additionally ground much of the work of our writing courses. I am optimistic about the theory of humor more than actual humor itself. In other words, instead of suggesting instructors drop in a well-timed knock-knock joke into their classes, I suggest instructors drop in well-timed comedic notions of delivery and invention into their classroom.

Operating from this understanding of delivery and invention allows me to consider John's larger bodily performance and consider the question: What do the invention and delivery practices of a stand-up comedian teach us about how to work better with student-writers?

John's performance offers two implications for teaching revision. The first grounds revision in location; the second grounds revision in the audience's visceral and visible reaction. A note of caution, however: in the spirit of comedy, I do not offer a pedagogical dictum which an instructor can transport from one learning context to another. My reading of comedy backed by my study of John leads me to see comedy as a fluid, capricious performance wherein all elements of the rhetorical situation give rise to a unique comedic performance that could not be replicated in another place, at another time, with another audience. I can think of countless moments in my own life where I unsuccessfully tried to mimic the deadpan delivery of Chevy Chase's Clark Griswold or the

neurotic desperation of John Cleese's Basil Fawlty to a befuddled listener. All comics, like all rhetors, develop their own voice and then allow the audience and the location to guide their performance. To the stage and in front of the microphone, John just takes with him a scrap of paper with the order of his jokes, a water bottle, and his iPhone. He does come prepared, but he also comes prepared to change. In this spirit of preparation coupled with adaptability, I offer modes of thinking—not concrete dictum—grounded in stand-up comedy that I believe could help student-writers see how their bodies and the bodies of others connect with text to construct a performative argument.

First, location is a primary component of John's rhetorical situation. Nedra Reynolds contends writing studies needs theories and practices which "engage with . . . the actual locations where writers write, learners learn, and workers work" (3). Drawing on literature from geography and postmodernism, Reynolds emphasizes the "*where* of writing," which she understands to be not only the "places where writing occurs, but the sense of place and space that readers and writers bring with them to intellectual work of writing, to navigating, arranging, remembering, and composing" (176, emphasis in original). Reynolds's focus on the actual and imagined location of writing dovetails with John's invention and delivery process. Stand-up comedians spend a great deal of time fretting over the location of their performance. When he practiced stand-up, Steve Martin confessed to worrying about "the sound system, ambient noise, hecklers, drunks, lighting, sudden clangs, latecomers, and loud talkers" (2). John told me people laugh easier in the dark. With the lights off, he explains, people feel more freedom to laugh when they want and are not concerned about who is seeing them laugh at something that may be off-color. "Everyone can laugh to themselves," he told me. Seats in rows are also a better physical position for eliciting laughter than circular seating where the audience may have to twist around to watch the show. When John walked into the food court, everything a comedian worries about was present. It was the afternoon and all the lights were on. People sat a circle tables, and the constant noise of the food court and people walking, literally, through the show, erected an unhelpful barrier between John and his audience. As Steve Martin writes, "comedy's enemy is distraction" (2), and the audience John played to were distracted. Some were even unaware he was in the space.

Returning to Reynolds, this is the place where John's writing occurred as he delivered his material. On stage, he revised his material to make use of the space. He talked directly to the group in soccer jerseys playing cards and to people walking through the middle of his performance. He also confessed to me later during our interview that he never felt comfortable in the space. Even though he has been performing stand-up for five years, he still admits he is insecure in his act, especially when the lighting and seating are not to his liking. During his performance, John rarely took the microphone off the stand and tended to hold it with his left hand and toy with the knob on the stand with his right. John told me the mic stand provides a sense of security for many comedians, a way of anchoring them. Even though John has hundreds of pages of jokes and has performed around the world over the past five years, the location of his performance at UNG influenced the oral delivery of his material. Location is a prominent role in the rhetorical situation for John. So, too, should it be for classroom writing activities. A view of revision grounded in comedic notions of location would invite student writers to see how the space and time in which they compose grounds and guides their arguments.

Moreover, this view of revision would invite students to see such grounding during all steps in the writing process—that their inventive work, their drafting and editing is grounded in the immediate context in which their cognitive action is taking place. Such a view of revision help student-writers see how where they are and when they are leads to what they say. It would also help them align their bodies in a time and space and feel the weight of themselves. It would help them adopt the *kairotic* notion that *Because I am here, because I am now, I argue this.*

Secondly, not only did John revise according to location but a study of John's invention and delivery illustrates the importance of revision based on bodily reception. Revising based on audience feedback is nothing new. Yet with stand-up comedy, a comedian adjusts material based on audience reaction. And that reaction is immediate. One of John's bits revolves around growing up in the peaceful suburbs instead of growing up in a rough urban area. His punchline juxtaposes Crips and Bloods (rival intercity gangs) with sharks and minnows (a popular swimming pool game). John delivered the joke on many occasions to mixed reviews from the audience. Then he added hand gestures. He would flash a Crips and Bloods gang sign and then juxtapose these gestures by mimicking a shark fin and a small swimming minnow with his hands. The hand gestures added visual depth to the joke, and John says is it now "much, much funnier." Instead of viewing writing as a solely internal, cognitive activity, John's recursive writing process is largely prompted by either his own bodily delivery or by the audience's bodily reaction. On stage, John can hear and sometimes see (if the lighting allows) his audience react. He can hear the hecklers or the silence after he delivers what he believes to be the punchline when he scripted the joke. He can see people leave their seats or remain seated. During his performance at UNG, John could see the people lost in their phones and those that kept their back to him. The audience's bodily reactions affect how John will think about his performance (reflection) and how he will better his performance (revision). For classroom writing instruction, instructors would do well to create a space where student-writers read their work aloud to each other: in pairs, in triads, before the whole class. As we read our work aloud to a present audience, we work hard to feel how are our words are received. We search for visible and oral feedback of any kind. We worry when someone yawns or reaches for a screen. We thrive on eye contact and get dispirited with a furry of the brow. We can feel when we have lost the audience and gain confidence with an attuned audience. Etymologically, *audience* comes from the Latin past participle of *audire* or *to hear* ("Audience"). Reading work aloud—a hallmark of writing center practice—highlights the etymological roots of *audience*, but more importantly allows writers to revise text according to how the audience physically responds. Doing so, leads writers to see how their words are birthed through others' bodies.

As John writes, he considers how he will bodily deliver the material, and through his delivery he returns to the words on the page and revises. Such a concomitant relationship is best understood through John's theory of comedy, with which I close. John believes the best comedians strike at the audience's hearts and not just their heads:

> What works is when you speak from the heart . . . Basically all a comedian is doing is saying things you are not allowed to say. That is all our job is . . . Jokes that don't work like, 'My girlfriend was upset with me so I [said I would take] her to Jared's. She was

pretty upset when we pulled into Subway.' There's no depth under that joke. The joke is the joke and that's it . . . . The best jokes are the jokes the kids are saying when everyone is walking out . . . . They are probably talking about the Ferguson joke . . . . if you can speak from there [points to heart], then you win. And those kids were laughing [when I delivered the Ferguson joke]. If you are doing joke-jokes and people aren't laughing, you want to commit suicide. But if you are speaking from here [points to heart], then if people aren't always laughing you don't care because you are like 'I need this.' . . . If you can get from here [points to head] to here [points to heart], if you can get there, those are the best kind of comics.

When John moves from his notes on his phone to his Word document, when he scribbles a joke on his palm before heading on stage, he is trying to move from the head to the heart. Such a goal is admirable for a performing writer, anywhere at any time.

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Getting Centered: A Meditation on Creating Pottery and Teaching Writing

Rosanne Carlo

I sit at the wheel, stooped over, pushing the clay inward with my hands. The clay globs between my thumb and my finger and I have to shake the excess off. I can feel the clay wobbling under my fingers and I can't seem to control its movements. I'm really working this clay; I'm sweating and I'm cursing and I'm tired. I attempted to center my clay for about an hour and a half—the instructor, in her brief demonstration, only took five minutes. This is merely the first step in a long process of throwing on the wheel, which actually leads to other steps, like trimming, glazing, and firing.

I skipped the next pottery class.

I quickly became "that student." I would skip class, or I would show up late or leave early—apparently, my grandma died three times over the course of ten weeks. I was unprepared—sometimes, I showed up to class without my finishing tools. I was sometimes less than engaged—often, I employed the same tactic I use in committee meetings: silently singing show tunes.

Although I did see improvement, it was slow, and only with the most focused of efforts on the part of the instructor and myself.

But, pottery class wasn't the only site of frustration for me. In Spring 2016, my first year as a faculty member at College of Staten Island (CUNY), I taught one section of FYC off-sequence. The class was capped at twenty-five, and as the weeks of the semester advanced, five students stopped attending, receiving what our institution calls a WU (Withdraw Unattending); by the end of the semester, one student received a D, another an incomplete, and one failed the course. Eight people did not advance to their second semester of composition, and by extension, may not have made it to their second year of college.

These numbers are staggering. This semester, I referred to the syllabus and updated my Blackboard site with important due dates; I taught writing as a process and included many low-stakes and no-stakes writing; I included several opportunities for in-class peer review and writing workshops; and I held conferences for every paper. These are the best practices we all know as composition teachers. Our field's knowledges and practices aren't to be abandoned, of course; but I am still left with trying to figure out how to further connect with struggling and failing students, the ones who just can't seem to center their clay after hours of work.

To discuss struggling and failing students is difficult, especially when the dominant narrative in the field of composition, and academia at large, is predicated on student success. In scholarly journals, when we discuss pedagogy, we resort to vague success tropes. I am reminded of Craig Dworkin's "Mycopedagogy" where he talks about composition classroom narratives as psychedelic fictions: "Testimonials about classroom

successes always have the feeling of hearing someone tell about their experiences on drugs (you should have been there, we had these mushrooms and…)" (604). The reality of classroom teaching is not so cool; many of us experience a high rate of failure in our composition classrooms. We must then think about what we can do—individually, systemically—to improve our students' class experiences. I imagine that my student losses in Spring 2016 reflect a larger picture of what is happening at the college, in the state system, and in public higher education as a whole. Critical populations—minority students, first-generation students, working students, and others—are reflected in these numbers, and they continue to be the casualties of our education system.

When we consider "success" in writing, I don't wish to frame this concept solely around a student's ability to compose really good "academic" discourse with error-free prose. Knowing where the comma goes does not a good writer make. Even clarity—that prized trait—can only offer so much satisfaction. I mean to align success with the idea of developing a capacity in composing for pleasure and play as students learn the power of language use. I mean to align success with the knowledge of composing styles that are appropriate for different genres, audiences, and purposes. I mean to align success with a desire to write to the course assignments—and beyond them, to see writing as a means of self-expression, identity formation, and intervention in our world. Struggling and failing student writers should be taught to see writing beyond the correction of error and toward a critical way of being. This description of success reflects what many have argued for in the several decades of scholarship produced by our field, from scholars such as Peter Elbow to Victor Vitanza to Geoffrey Sirc.

Student success, as I have described it here, is a lofty goal when we consider the material conditions of our schools and our students' lives. Ira Shor's *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* describes the environment of teaching in the CUNY system and working with its students and the challenges he faced as a composition teacher. This is a story of underprepared, first generation, and working class students entering college and the college having limited resources with which to educate them. We are 35 years removed from the world of Shor's book, but I find that these descriptions of professorial life in the CUNY system still ring true. A recent *New York Times* article, "Dreams Stall as CUNY, New York City's Engine of Mobility, Sputters," further details the current conditions of professors and students at the wake of Michelle Obama's commencement speech at City College, the system's flagship campus. Chen, the author, exposes to readers crumbling infrastructures—one picture even shows a row of buckets in a hallway at City catching April rainwater from the leaking roof; the raising rates of tuition, $300 per year over the last five years; the growing numbers of student enrollments, leading to increased class sizes; the stagnation of full-time faculty hires and an increase in adjunct labor; and, to top it off, more budget cuts presumably on the way from the New York State legislature. We also must remember the strain on students in terms of their finances, work, and family obligations; the academy contends with other worlds and responsibilities, especially for students at commuter schools and community colleges (Mauk). The picture I paint here is happening in colleges and universities across the country, and we all face this question: How do we continue to profess in a time of austerity?

Not one instructor, not one type of pedagogy will transcend the systemic, financial, and historical problems we see in our state schools. And yet, I still muster—like many

of us in the profession do—the belief that the next semester offers the promise of hope and renewal. I believe I have something to share about struggling students when I reflect on my own experience in learning pottery.

This essay, like a potter's wheel, circles around terms like invention, embodiment, and timing in order to try to explain the acts of creation that occur in writing and in pottery. Understanding the practice of doing and learning, I argue, will allow for a pedagogy that addresses the struggles of students who make things with words.

As I pursue my comparison between making pottery and making things with words, I will also recall the many composition theorists and writing scholars who have influenced what I've learned about teaching over the years, shaping me as I still struggle to shape my students. It's important to me and to the profession of teaching writing to revisit our historical influences, much as it is to the potter, who creates new objects by remembering the practices of her craft that have withstood the test of time.

Invention

David Bayles and Ted Orland observe that students in a pottery class who produced more eventually created better products. Repetition of practice is where learning occurs. Students play with words and play with clay. They take risks with every turn of the wheel and free-writing exercise. Many pottery classes I sat at the wheel, creating lop-sided clay mutations, squashing these creations back into clay mounds to be molded once more. I tried to remind myself that this was okay, though sometimes (like my students) I was frustrated. I wanted to give up, take my withdrawal. One thing, though, that comforted me in this process was that I felt myself learning through trial and error. This bowl didn't come to be because I didn't pull the clay up evenly—or because the pot was thrown off center by my hands that clutched for too long and with too much force; or because the wheel was moving too slowly, thus warping the clay; or because the opening I made on the initial pull was too narrow; or because the hole I dug made the bottom too thin, collapsing the clay as I trimmed. Through playing with the clay, through making mistakes, I learned strategies for invention. We can imagine our students undergoing a similar creation process with their writing as we ask them to draft and revise.

The art of composition and the art of pottery share a common root—both disciplines focus on a process of making, of inventing. Jim Corder discusses how composition is a discipline ever in renewal because it is founded on the dialectic of invention and structure; invention is openness to possibility in composing and structure is a choice of form. He explains that the two feed off each other:

> Every choice, every decision, every structure has the potential of being another entry in the inventive world you live in, punching it in here, pooching it out there, giving color to it yonder. Invention precedes, structure follows, but invention does not cease thereby. The structure we make today may give grace to tomorrow's invention. (334)

I often have to remind myself that students are taught to focus too much on the structure of their papers and the final product, but doing so obscures the critical thinking they made to come to those choices. In the same vein, focusing on the final product

of a pottery project obscures all the steps taken in its production. I have to remember how invention constantly innovates and surprises. Invention is potential. A lump of clay can become a vase, a candleholder, a mug, a bowl; words on a page can become an essay, a blog post, a letter, a zine. Corder, in his discussion of first-year composition, enumerates propositions—tentative truths—that he has discovered through his experiment of writing all his students' assignments himself. These propositions are numbered, but have gaps; for example, the list starts at the "ninth law of composition" because "there are yet other propositions I have yet not found" (333). I don't think we will ever say all we can say about first-year composition, about struggling and failing students, and I want to put forward a few more propositions in this essay.

But above all, invention is the key term in the art of composition and of pottery. Students must continue to build upon the works they begin, for it is only in the repetition of movements that ideas and shapes emerge. The heuristics for invention, Young and Becker write, can be organized into two major types, the first being "a taxonomy of the sorts of solutions that have been found in the past," and the second being epistemological, "a method of inquiry based on assumptions about how we come to know something" (89). In other words, invention is defined and applied in two ways: (1) as a way of discovering the means of persuasion through common culture beliefs, and (2) as epistemic, relating to discovery of new perspectives.

The first definition of invention originates through Aristotelian use of *topoi* (topics) where the speaker searches out the values of the audience and how to present his or her argument in meaningful ways. We communicate the proofs of our argument through the form of the syllogism in logic, the enthymeme in rhetoric. As Aristotle notes, to be enthymematic is "to see the true and [to see] what resembles the true . . . thus an ability to aim at commonly held opinions [*endoxa*] is a characteristic of one who also has a similar ability to regard the truth" (1355a, 33). Rhetoric's reliance on opinion to inspire belief is emphasized in the treatise. The topics are sometimes in opposition to each other (of course, there are several opinions on a given subject). Furthermore, the speaker must rely on knowledge of the situation, the subject, and the audience to guide her selection of topics. The topics a speaker chooses to present and the way she arranges the evidence communicates to the audience whether or not the speaker knows the feelings and values of the listeners. The topics remind us that rhetoric is for life, about communicating with people for certain ends. It is no wonder that the topics appeared useful to those rhetoricians in the 20th Century who revived their study (see, for example, Corbett).

The topics were a heuristic for invention in the 20th Century rhetorics that remained very close to the traditional rhetoric; however, other scholars were developing new heuristics for invention, heuristics that were based on the second understanding of invention, rooted in theories of epistemology. Invention, in this sense, is seen as an art of experimental inquiry—one that involves the posing of problems and processes of rhetoric as a way of coming to possible solutions. Some examples of these invention heuristics in the New Rhetoric are Burke's pentad, Becker and Pike's tagmemics, and Toulmin's reasoning. This second definition of invention is most relevant to my discussion of the art of composition as it related to pottery. It is the act of doing, of experiencing, that drives practice. As Janice Atwill describes, invention is a way of creating new norms and shifting perspectives through its practice. She writes: "Art intervenes when a boundary

or limitation is recognized, and it creates a path that both transgresses and redefines that boundary. Fate and necessity may set temporary limits for invention, but their boundaries are perpetually redrawn by techne" (48). Invention needs to be at the center of composing practices because it allows for moments of disruption from the normal flow of being and thinking. Invention creates cognitive dissonance—it allows for epiphany, for creation. It is the essential way to learn new things, even in the midst of struggle.

Invention, in fact, cannot happen without struggle: the competing of ideas and the wresting of clay. Invention is not stasis; it is not a period of waiting, but of doing. From my acts of writing and my experience of pottery-making, I see two other principles for doing, for invention, that can be further discussed and utilized in order to help struggling students. A writing classroom must become the space to practice embodiment and develop an awareness of time (and timing). In the two sections that follow, I show how these principles have been braided into composition practices, and I further intend to explain how knowledge of these can be used to improve student success.

Embodiment

I watch Susan, my instructor, demonstrate the process of centering clay. She is bent over, leaning forward, her chin looms right above the lump of clay she previously smacked onto the visible center of the wheel head. Her body is tight, her movements controlled; she tells us that centering is achieved from the effort of core muscles. I am reminded of my many years of vocal training—control is not solely about the movements of the mouth and throat. It also comes from steady breathing and the diaphragm—from the core. Susan's hands then meet the moist clay and she pushes inward; the clay readily responds to her, moving up, gaining in height as the wheel spins. She forms a cone. As she molds the clay, despite her efforts of strength, she is calm and steady, as if in repose. She then locks her hands together around the clay, pushing it in from the side with the heel of her left palm while holding the edge of her right hand over the top, flattening it to a hill with a small plateau. She takes her hands away, and I look at the clay. I can see how it spins with the wheel. It is even, smooth, steady. Susan puts her fingertips lightly over the top of her clay and closes her eyes, "If I can feel the clay moving with the wheel," she says, "then I know it's centered."

Novices must instantly understand that making pottery is an art that involves bodily movements and some degree of control on behalf of the artist. When I first started working with the wheel, I felt out of control as the clay spun in my hands, but I learned that I had to apply a certain amount of pressure to make the clay respond to me. This embodied knowing is integral to the art form. You cannot work from the wheel without a sense of your body and its strength and positioning.

Writing requires a type of embodiment as well. Writers are not just seated thinkers stooped over our compositions, and instructors have to create an environment where the practice of writing is a form of embodied ritual, like centering clay. With the development of the field of rhetoric and composition in the 1960s, the process movement taught us that writing is recursive, not linear. Sondra Perl's "Understanding Composing" reminds us that writers have something called felt sense when they compose—a return to experience where they are "waiting for an image, word, or phrase to emerge

that captures the sense they embody" (365). Students work recursively through an idea by oscillating between putting their thoughts on the page and framing those ideas as an argument; they also run through a catalogue of felt experiences—hearing dialogues, sensing, moving, and so forth. Students write as a process of coming into being, to bear witness to their knowledge through their own experience.

The writing process can be one of pain, of mania and depression, of fulfillment. These emotions are not something we merely "think," but also feel through our bodies. The rhetorical tradition, from classical rhetoric to today, has accounted for embodied knowing through its understandings of ethos. As Michael Halloran writes, the orator in Aristotelian understanding "through the cogency of his logical and emotional appeals" becomes "a kind of living embodiment of that heritage, a voice of such apparent authority that the word spoken by this man was the word of communal wisdom, a word to be trusted for the weight of the man who spoke it and the tradition he spoke for" (332). The speaker invents herself through the use of appeals to the audience, and this process of invention is a kind of embodiment that relies on the speaker's living space and time. Contemporary rhetoricians have also insisted that rhetoric is material, a physical act that moves others. As Thomas Rickert describes it, rhetoric "is an embodied and embedded practice. Rhetoric is an emergent result of environmentally situated and interactive engagements, redolent of a world that affects us, that persuades us prior to symbolicity" (34). Rhetoric is not only the spoken word, but it is environments and bodies and things interacting with each other. Students have to navigate the world they are situated in so that they can speak and write in credibly embodied ways.

Writing is a process of attuning yourself to the cues of your body and the world, just like pottery. Susan, when demonstrating centering, showed how she had a felt sense of the clay and its correct positioning. This sense is only achieved through repetition and ritual—I wonder how many times she had to sit at the wheel and work the clay before she could center with such facility? Stephanie Paterson discusses how writing is an embodied practice that requires repetition and ritual. She argues that to write we must have a bodily awareness, or *proprioception*. She develops this capacity in herself through a series of prompt writing exercises; she further describes these writing sessions:

> The practice which includes lighting a candle, listening to myself, listening to Bach, and circling back to ask the important proprioceptive question has grounded me. I start to notice more of a balance between the believing and doubting games. I learn to listen as I write. I start to feel like a Writer who is writing. I start to breathe differently. I start to trust myself more. (70)

What Paterson describes here is the physical beginning to embodied practice. She is assured of her abilities, just like we want our struggling and failing students to be. We have to create space in our classrooms for embodied writing practices, to help students see that writing is a physical act that connects them materially with others—moving others to respond in like kind. I believe that this way of writing creates a space for new creations and ideas. This way of writing is also a strategy that may engage our students so that they can practice writing outside of our classrooms and see it as a part of their daily lives.

Time and Timing

I've heard potters at the studio talk about their practice as moments of insight. They will say thing like, "As I was pulling up the clay, I thought this could be a vase" or "The clay wobbled in this way, and I thought it would make a great pencil holder." Something about vision emerges in these acts of creation, and it relates to the potter's understanding and relation to time, or timing. Something about improvisation and an openness to being in the moment becomes crucial. Pottery is an art with linear steps, and at the same time, it is not. Allowing for the clay to intervene and take its own course is what separates a novice from an expert. Focusing too much on the steps, on the linear way of making a bowl, can lead a novice to a decent product but does not make a master potter, just as writing a five paragraph essay does not a writer make.

The practice of making things with clay or words relies on disengagement with linear steps and time. As Paterson notes, only when her students practiced the ritual of the Friday Writes did they get a "respite from chronos time (the linear school clock) and allowed us to enter into kairos or sacred time" (74). Unfortunately, Paterson does not unpack what she means by this orientation toward time, and I believe it is important to understand *kairos* more fully in order to meaningfully incorporate a sense of it in our pedagogical practice. I believe that *kairos* is essential to invention as it allows us to be open to the emergence of new forms in writing and clay.

Many scholars have written on the multiple meanings of *kairos* (See Hawhee; Kinneavy; Miller). In sum, *kairos* has been characterized as relating to timeliness, or seizing the opportune or critical moment; to practicing due measure, discretion, and appropriateness; to experiencing moments of insight or connection; to harmonizing opposite perspectives and select among alternatives; and finally, to knowing when to speak and when to be silent.

When I consider these definitions, and the ways they apply to how we relate to the world and each other, I see k*airos* as offering a framework for understanding ways of being, seeing, experiencing, knowing, and creating. *Kairos* is concerned with both ontology and epistemology because it orients us to our own being and reveals to us how we come to know the world and others. Being sensitive to timing allows us to move in the world in more meaningful, and hopefully, ethical ways. It is important to understand our existence as a part of temporality, or how our "existing orientations, as dispositions that have already been formed in us, . . . must always already be at work in our Being, in our potentiality for Being, and in such a way as to find their appropriate attunement, their fitting measure, in a particular system of action" (McNeil 90). Writing and making pottery are actions that require a sense of timing. In these moments, the inventor begins to trust her insights in creation.

Thus, *kairos* is largely—I think—a feeling. *Kairos* strikes us with force, it is a "transitory moment" that opens a passage for us beyond linear time, one where "the passage of this time of the present comes from the future to go toward the past" (Derrida 28) or where "Dasein's futural existence depends on its having been: the future is a carrying back to a time to which one has always already come" (Wyschogrod 158). However we describe the disruption of time, it has large implications for how we understand our existence in relation to each other in our environments and to how we make art.

Kairos further reminds us of how time flows through and around us—how the past, present, and future intersects to affect us. Additionally, there is a type of displacement we experience in *kairotic* moments, because we *feel* time as its own entity—both connected and yet separate from us. In other words, *kairos* is not just to be thought of as a moment that a person seizes, or an opportunity she takes; rather we should also see *kairos* as something at once connected to us and yet also beyond us and in our engagements with other people, places, and things (Rickert 83). *Kairos* is not necessarily an act of will—is time ever something we solely have control over? Surely, *kairos* is about attuning oneself to time, and there is an element within its meanings that speaks to a person's ability to respond and to act accordingly. Yet I can't also help but feel, as Rickert does, that *kairos* "does what it does to us, with us, and alongside us" (90). We can imagine a dialectical relationship here as we imagine *kairos* as both a part of the interior and exterior. *Kairos* is then to be thought of as a happening that leaves an impression upon us—a *feeling*, one that may be disorienting, one that may give us a new perspective, certainly one that prepares us to move forward and to take action. *Kairos*, as you can see, is closely related to embodiment and to play. It is a major principle in invention.

In terms of helping our student writers, we need to try to foster in them a sense of openness to creation and time. This is accomplished, in one way, through repetition and ritual. It is also accomplished through a sustained commitment to writing practice. As Hesse writes, it is "the increment of the slow" that allows students to find the right "pace and time" to transform their ideas into compositions (5). If we encourage students into lock-step measures for writing, a kind of check the boxes sort of process, then we leave the possibilities for invention out of that process. When we prescribe writing as neat steps, then we are somehow imagining time as linear, and we all know it is and yet we all know it isn't. We need to expand space and time in our classrooms, and this requires us moving from a chronological sense of time to a *kairotic* one.

Conclusion

I have learned some valuable things about the process of pottery and its similarities to writing. Making art was about taking risks and not letting myself be bogged down by the platonic ideal of, say, a bowl. Making art was about learning through doing. And learning through doing is about the practice of inventing, embodying, and timing. Learning through doing is not something to be taken lightly, but it is meaningful and encourages a spirit of getting back up again after a failure, or several failures.

Writing is hard. And as I can attest, so is pottery-making. A maker needs to learn and apply specific forms of knowledge and skills in these arts, and of course, she must develop a sense of the time it takes to create anything. Creation is not without struggle. As Doug Hesse reflects, "Writing is hard for a reason, in the same way that running a marathon or finding a spouse or attending your father's funeral is hard: it's a fundamental human act" (2).

The experience of the pottery class turned my thoughts more to the struggling and failing writers in my classroom. Like many writing teachers, I've had some bit of success; I forgot what it was like to be a novice. That night centering the clay for an hour brought me to that state of vulnerability, as I turned to my instructor, asking: "Is this right?" My

instructor taught me that learning to center clay, and mastering any skill in pottery for that matter, was a process of doing. She modeled to us her process of invention through her many demonstrations at the wheel.

From a ten-week pottery course, I created one bowl that someone could use. I experienced many starts and aberrations as I worked with the clay and the other tools. I experienced moments of real frustration and struggle and self-doubt. I also experienced moments of joy, such as when I discovered the right amount of pressure needed to pull up the clay. What the class inspired in me, most of all, was a desire to create—not just with clay, but in the medium with which I am most used to working, with words.

When I confided in a friend that I had signed up for a pottery class and that I had discovered I was quite terrible at it, he said: "Aww, Ro. I can't wait to get a bowl from you someday. Of course, it's questionable as to whether or not I should really eat my ice cream out of it." His snark reminds me not to take everything I produce with the utmost seriousness. My friend would love that bowl I gave him, despite its questionable usage, because he understood the process I took to make it. In the same way, we should value student writers for who they are and for their efforts. We must ever work toward and hold onto the kinds of practices in teaching that remind us who is behind the work and what struggles she faces to get good at it.

I believe that centering a classroom on the principles of invention, embodiment, and timing allows for students to see the writing process as something that is not focused solely on a product arrived at by linear steps. Rather, writing becomes an activity that we do to express ourselves, clarify our thoughts, and work them out for others. Writing is not solely something to be done for a grade or for practical purposes but is a practice for living and being with others. We want students to gain a sense of authorial pleasure from our classrooms, for only then will the desire to create be instilled in them.

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The Transformative Practice of Writing
and Teaching Writing

Robbie Clifton Pinter

> Whatever is foreseen in joy
> Must be lived out from day to day
> Vision held open in the dark
> By our ten thousand days of work
> Harvest will fill the barn; for that
> The hand must ache, the face must sweat.
>
> And yet no leaf or grain is filled
> By work of ours; the field is tilled
> And left to grace. That we may reap,
> Great work is done while we're asleep.
>
> When we work well, a Sabbath mood
> Rests on our day, and finds it good.
>
> —Wendell Berry, *A Timbered Choir* 18

Transforming Students

This year marks the 33rd year of teaching composition for me. I would not still be teaching if not for the confluence of many pieces of good fortune in many areas: timing, a stimulating and ever-changing profession, and the simple good luck of being at a place with interesting students, classes, and a strong support system across campus. More than any of those pieces of good fortune, though, I am still teaching because of the nature of the writing process and the way it can be taught. The craft of teaching writing asks teachers to be awake in the present moment, to absorb the words students share as they detail divorces, suicides, finding religion, losing religion, and all the many other parts of life that writing challenges them to examine. Students write their lives on the page, and teachers facilitate how those words might work in a different way, after attending to them closely and respectfully. That part alone makes me think of the teaching of writing as a transformative act.

I didn't consider writing instruction as transformative when I began teaching, and I certainly wouldn't have used the words "spiritual" or "sacred" (see Schiller). But now things have changed. Perceiving writing and the teaching of writing as transformative has given me the language to understand better what happens in the classroom, and I believe it helps me do my job better. Perhaps most important, it provides a way of understanding just how significant students' words are. Charles Bazerman, in receiving CCCC's Exemplar Award,

offers a brief but insightful description of the transformative nature of writing instruction when he gives us these words:

> Writing has been considered sacred, for it sets us apart from the moment, creates an expanded reflective space where we can be more thoughtful, more persistent in our inquiry, more planful in our statements and actions. Reading and writing are associated with inwardness and personal development. Writing facilitates building a parallel world of knowledge that allows us to monitor, project, and influence the here-and-now world in which we live. Writing makes communion, bringing together people across space and time in shared attention, meanings, imagination, understanding, and action. As teachers of writing, we are bearers of this transformative technology, leading current and future generations into more refined skills, deeper understanding, more complex cooperation, new adventures, greater communion." (571-2)

The nature of writing invites the writer to look at life intentionally, to see it as something that can be explored from other angles. It allows us to see beyond our first impressions and dig deeper into the process of why we say what we say or do what we do. We might ask: why does this point matter? Where's the energy in your writing? Why do you want to write about this topic? In asking these questions, the teacher invites students to become readers—and readers to become writers—in ways that open up their view of the world to themselves and others. I especially like Bazerman's powerful analysis when he ends with the role of the teacher of writing: we are the ones who ask students to explore their perceptions again and again until they see them more clearly; we are the ones who ask students to make connections to old texts, new texts, texts without words, and ideas in ways that produce patterns, themes, insights; we are the ones who get to create the assignments and activities that engender "adventures, greater communion." I like these words because they highlight the role of the teacher of writing as one who is engaged in a special vocation.

But again, as I look to Wendell Berry's "Whatever is Foreseen in Joy" and his metaphor of farming, I realize he could well describe what happens in teaching writing.[1] "Foreseen in joy"—these words tease me at odd times, but especially in spring when the bulbs and seeds I planted years before begin to once more appear and I am delighted, as I would be when greeting an old friend: "The blue woodland hyacinths! I put them in when I first was learning to garden, and now they are back again." Sometimes. Sometimes the things I plant don't come back or are mowed over or just die after sprouting. It's all part of the intricate and often fickle-seeming organic process involved when dealing with a living creation. Yet even when life doesn't return or seeds don't sprout, the process of planting is a transformational act, an act of expectation and acceptance.

I teach writing for the same reason I plant seeds in the fall, as acts of faith and hope. These are living processes that offer few guarantees. In teaching, it's not a foregone conclusion that hard work such as grading the papers, fielding the excuses, and vetting the sources will lead a student to a good paper. But these acts of teaching are an offering and a statement of some basic truths. Chief among the truths is this: something out there is worth teaching, worth writing about, worth doing. That "something" has to do with the writer's connection with her authentic self. I don't have control over the process—

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1. Wendell Berry has written over fifty books of poetry, fiction, and essays.

how many seeds have I planted that have not sprouted? I sometimes see those shrunken seeds as students who left my class without bringing their authentic voice to the page. A semester may not be enough time for that. At other times, those withered seeds may be my own tired journal entries that seemingly lead nowhere. It's then that I hear Berry's voice: "The field is tilled/ And left to grace" (ll. 7-8). Ultimately, I work and relinquish control. It's a process that seems all the more mysterious because I invite my students to participate in a similar way every time I ask them to write and then listen deeply to what they write. Writing and teaching writing, as farming, can invite deep and lasting change. It's the transformative part of writing and teaching writing that makes me want to do it. Berry's language invites us to wait, to realize how little control we may ultimately have in writing and teaching. It also encourages us to keep at it.

That which is "foreseen in joy must be lived out . . . , vision held open in dark" (ll.1-3). These words point to something outside our sensory perceptions, just outside a human's intellectual capacity to understand, but what we trust exists as we wait in the dark for the new life that we sense. Applied to writing, Berry's words point to the mystery of a writer's process as she gets an inkling of what to write but knows deep work is waiting to be done.

How so? A student recently wrote to me that his draft would not be strong, because in writing it, he discovered what he really wanted to say. This assignment only asked students to write a non-fiction narrative; it did not ask for the writing to focus on his transformation, although the process that called forth the writing could be defined as meditative. I invited the class to close their eyes and reflect on their topics, dwell in their topic, remember their topic. This student realized the transformative power that the assignment offered him when he wrote:

> In writing this paper, I have questioned myself, 'What is most sacred to me in life?' I have tried to find some sort of connection or touch point that I can revolve my entire way of life around. It was a difficult search, but I think I found it late last night. I had one of the largest *AHA!* moments of my life. It was astounding, and I want to get it on paper. It is going to redefine me and accomplish what I thought the story I had already written was trying to do.

Here the student offers something like a confession as he explained why his assignment was not finished well. How many of these explanations have all writing teachers seen? Yet he was not doing so superficially:

> . . . I have a mediocre paper that I'm going to turn in to you today. I did work hard on it, but it is still just mediocre. The ideas are there, but not the way they should be. Part of the story is there, but not all the parts that matter. I am going to rewrite this story the way it's supposed to be. I want you to read it when it's done, because it's no longer a matter of academics to me. This is a matter of discovering who I am, and where I want to be.
>
> I am not writing you pleading for anything really, but because I am genuinely excited. . . . I just wanted to share that with you and thank you for enabling me to make this discovery. In the end, I think this is what education is about. It is a process that inspires someone to do greater.

Our writing may result from a particular exercise or assignment, but good writing usually transcends the simple confines of an assignment to become something more individualized, unique, surprising. Waiting for that mystery, just outside of our logical understanding, is something that the writing process can incubate. The student who wrote the above excerpts was part of a class that used drafts to discover and create meaning. The class was also encouraged to experience their lives in writing as part of a strongly intuitive exercise that involved making lists of important life experiences and then dwelling in silence as they turned towards these past experiences and away from the rest of their busy thoughts—they were portioning off part of their lived experience to both create something from it and then something to reflect upon. This creative, introspective practice allowed them to refine their work, sifting back and forth across what was written for what needed to be culled, what needed to remain. Such activity, akin to the practice of working the soil, is a living process, one that often allows for an idea to take root and flourish.

Seeing the teaching of writing as a living process leads to further implications about how and why teachers want to teach writing. We learn there is "something in there" as Mary Rose O'Reilley says about students—something that awaits the opportunity to be transformed (*Peaceable Classroom* 58). O'Reilley reminds teachers that what we do is very hard, but very much worth doing if we can. What is "in there" cannot be reached easily—"you need strong practice" (58). We recognize it when we meet words on the page that point to students' authentic lives. The students may have not yet found the precise words to express that authenticity yet, and we often see our students struggle in the darkness and despair of revision. But if we look closely, we can see that "something" when students finally write the words that express a part of themselves they didn't know, a discovery of who they are and what they feel or believe.

As teachers of writing, we also create space for our students in which they can be open to re-seeing what they write. They are often misled by all the cultural practices that masquerade as authentic voice: texting on IPhones or posts on Snapchat and Facebook can become activities that direct us away from our own authentic selves and voices. Nicholas Carr expresses it accurately:

> What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. Whether I'm online or not, my mind now expects to take information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski. (6-7)

Stripping away the white noise of daily living, preserving class time for writing and the discussion of writing can be a first step for writers to engage in a direct experience with that self they may not know. When teachers hold open the possibility that there is something beyond the technological gestures that students use to "connect" themselves to others, it can lead students to write beyond their expectations as they lean into what surprises them. Such direct experience is truly countercultural, truly beyond what Nicholas Carr describes.

The challenge in teaching is how to introduce students to their inner depths, to their own authenticity, when the world they inhabit does just the opposite. But by asking students to listen more deeply to their own thoughts, narratives about so many of their

concerns emerge: a friend's death, a broken dream, or a life-changing trip. We see this deeper listening when peers listen to the stories that each other's words create.

A recent example comes from a student who wrote about her early life in American Samoa. As she wrote, she recognized her conflicting responses to the beauty of the place and the horror of its practices:

> This small island, in the middle of the South Pacific where I resided a mere four years, would impact me greatly throughout the course of my life. Although somewhat westernized, in many ways, the culture still reflected the historically primitive nature of the Samoan people. After all, cannibalism was widely practiced, and it is uncertain as to when it was actually phased out. The presence of a ritualistic, souvenir brain fork that rested on our bookshelf served to remind me of this. Being exposed to the culture's brutality, abuse, and corruption, no doubt stemming from these tribal practices, quickly stole from me much of my childhood innocence. I regularly witnessed parents beating their toddlers in public and even came to understand that you could get away with murder occasionally. The juxtaposition of this barbarianism set on the backdrop of a beautiful island paradise educated me in all the cruelty and beauty the world could simultaneously offer.

This writing offered a strong experience to her readers as well. One asked, "Did you say 'brain fork'?" Others wanted her to tell more about tribal practices. In an attempt to make meaning from her conflicting perceptions, such a process allowed the class to act in community as they heard, responded, and made suggestions. But as the student shared her reflection, it held the potential for going beyond her attempt to make simple meaning from her conflicting perspectives about another culture. It provided a way for her and her peers to wonder about our *own* culture and its similar brutalities, abuses, and corruption, its own historically primitive nature, where people like us have also engaged in barbarianisms and gotten away with murder. When a student attempts to sift through what shapes her own identity in this way, without stroking her ego or sentimentalizing a story, the process is akin to what a farmer does to make crops grow instead of wither.

Such classroom experiences also return me to Berry's words about "Vision held open in the dark." That's what writing and the teaching of writing asks both teacher and student to do. We know a vision is there, we sense it, we know it's not completely ours as if we could set our intention upon a perfect paper, and then make one come forth. It requires those "ten thousands days of work," and even then it must be "left to grace." Teachers of writing encourage students to sort through their thoughts, write them, listen to them alone and with others, and then hear what the words can say anew, even if it's not what they want to hear.

In writing, we want students to engage in the mystery of writing because it gives them a way to ask, "What if?" "Why?" "What does it mean?" These questions serve as touchstones for transformation, as Berry notes: "And yet no leaf or grain is filled/ By work of ours." We sense, and we allow our students to sense something larger than ourselves that can be reached. As Bazerman states: "Writing facilitates building a parallel world of knowledge that allows us to monitor, project, and influence the here-and-now world in which we live" (571-2).

These thoughts make me recall a middle-aged dancer who reflected on a career that she began as a first-year college student. She recreated her life through the memory of

that experience and allowed herself to consider how that experience affected her life several years later:

> My body whispers to me in dance class, and mornings after long rehearsals. The language is often subtle, but with an edge of admonition—a sharp but fleeting pain in my lower back, an aching knee, hips that pop during leg swings, an ankle that doesn't want to bear the crushing pressure of one more jump. 'Is it worth it?' she poses. 'You know a lifetime of dance has its price.'

This writer, through the metaphor of her body "whispering" and "admonishing," was not defining but evoking, to me and her classmates as well as to herself, a strong example of "embodied" writing gained through what Sondra Perl calls "felt sense." This kind of writing leaves even more room for the "vision held open in the night." This kind of writing happens when teachers let their students connect with topics, arrange their papers to match their purposes, and revise. It is the continual sifting-through of drafts that allows students' words to become embodied, to make their language live.

To teach students to write with language that is alive is, again, to understand that there is something our words suggest. The underlying principle of learning how words can transform is to pay attention. Language is organic, growing, changing. It lives in our minds and the minds of those who read each other's words. When I spend a day teaching, I often return home still buried in my students' words. Only when I see a startling image—a flock of robins breaking their grounded perch, flying across the road—do I wake up and notice my goal is to create an environment for students to be able to do just that: break from their grounded perches and fly.

Transforming Ourselves

I don't always remember that writing and teaching writing can transform students, especially at the end of a busy term that seems to include "ten thousand days of work." When the papers come, so do the student excuses: too many other papers, no real understanding of the assignment, and a few jabs at me personally—"You didn't tell us we needed eight sources." It's only after years of teaching writing that I can begin to realize the depth of authentic living connected to it.

To continue to have the energy and focus to follow Berry's admonition and "hold open the window in the dark," teachers of writing have to have strong support from various sources. In the same way that writing is transformative, teaching writing is also a transformative process, a process of "what ifs," and "I don't knows" that often cannot be easily accounted for through reason. What I think we must do for our students, if we are to be true to what we do, is to offer ourselves as whole human beings.

Perhaps the first step toward such an offering is to acknowledge that the expectations of others do not have to become our own expectations. I require more of myself because others do, and that's not always a sustainable choice. Once again, the poet helps me find a way through this muddle as I reread: "By work of ours; the field is tilled/ And left to grace. That we may reap/ Great work is done while we're asleep."

Perhaps we need to leave some things to grace, to relinquish—to let go of having to meet every challenge or to accomplish what is not ours to accomplish. For teachers, as for students, we may have to let some things go in order to fulfill the greater good that

writing and teaching can offer. Specifically, how does a teacher do that in this age where we are held accountable for so many things other than teaching?

Maybe relinquishment begins when we admit that we can't do all that's required of us. A system that asks too much from its members is skewed. What would the practices of relinquishment look like for writing teachers as well as overwhelmed writers? At times, whether in a faculty meeting or on the commute, we must take our emotional temperature and realize our need for self-care. Whether it's intentional breathing, meditation, or taking a pause, we must recognize when we need to engage in a practice that supports us. Engaging in such practices can be an easy way to remember we are transcendent creatures in temporal bodies. Such practices help us remember the world outside of the faculty meeting, class, or tutoring. Relinquishment might mean asking insightful questions, such as "What is mine to do?" Meditative practices of all kinds can go a long way towards restoring our sense of self, allowing us to see the work of teaching with a wider view. Along with Berry, O'Reilley offers wisdom on this point when she writes: "The great test of this time is to maintain an open heart, not to close in cynicism and self-protection . . . . the best and perhaps the only utterance one is capable of at such a time is the prayer that one's heart be opened, one's compassion increased" (*Garden* 71).

Embedded within the call to relinquishment is another call—a call to rest. Berry calls it "a Sabbath mood" that "Rests on our day, and finds it good." Not all teachers are granted that rest. Yes, there can be summers and long holiday breaks, as well as sabbaticals for some. But the call for relinquishment is also a call for replenishing—the job cannot be done if it's seen as one measured by numbers of students and sections taught. To perform a role so tinged with the sacred, teachers must have ways to honor and support themselves, and they must organize with others to help themselves do that.

We must look to each other to realize that we are not alone in wanting to see our work life through a larger lens. We must become "open to all those interested in exploring the boundaries of teaching and learning beyond traditional disciplines and methodologies" (see AEPL website, http://trace.tennessee.edu/jaepl/). Together, we can recognize the many aspects of transformation that relate to teaching writing: "aesthetic, emotional, and moral intelligence; archetypes [for learning]; body wisdom; care in education; creativity; felt-sense theory; healing; holistic learning; humanistic and transpersonal psychology; imaging; intuition; kinesthetic knowledge; meditation; narration as knowledge; reflective teaching; silence; spirituality; and visualization" (AEPL). Also pertinent are retreats that provide teachers a space for hope, clarity, and sustainability—where trained facilitators can help them rediscover and claim their authentic selves (see http://www.couragerenewal.org/). Such retreats offer renewal through the acts of reading, writing, and reflection—replicating on a professional level the kinds of meditative and contemplative methods we can practice with our students. Such retreats can also help us recognize the high call and power of teaching as a vocation (see http://www.contemplativemind.org/).

A great thirst for authenticity arises from the teaching life. Growing numbers in our profession share the same need for and conviction about the transformative power of teaching writing. Although recent trends in higher education tend to measure education as an "investment," requiring measurable outcomes, others argue that these trends are misdirected. Johansson and Felten argue that the purpose of a college or university

should not be to "mold students into a specified form, belief system, or mind-set . . . . [Instead,]colleges can play an important role in cultivating transformation, understood as an ongoing process of intentionally aligning one's actions and behaviors with one's evolving sense of identity." (1-2). This argument offers a sustaining point of view about how to respond to the changes in student demographics and the economic crisis facing higher education.

As Wendell Berry reminds us, "The thing being made in a university is humanity. . . . The common denominator has to be larger than either career preparation or preparation for citizenship [if it is to form] a fully developed human being (*Home Economics* 1).

Transformative. Intentional. Sacred. When done with the care and attention that Berry's poetry highlights, writing and teaching writing can be acts of transformation. Although Berry's and others' words may carry perspectives on life that some consider dated or impractical, their message is timeless.

There is "something there" in writing and teaching writing—a mystery just beyond the human ability to create. It's worth the work and the wait. Writing teachers construct classes and assignments for students to engage in that mystery. Especially in "the technological age" where we live, we can return to the truths in our roots as we continue to "hold open the vision" for others, as well as for ourselves. To do that, we must find ways to support our students *and* ourselves. We must grant ourselves the rich, supple time to wait, to rest, to take Sabbath. We can and must foresee in joy. It's just across the horizon, tinged with the hope that brought us to this work.

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Rattling Cages

Pamela B. Childers

Like many of my colleagues, I took the normal path of undergraduate and graduate degrees in my majors (English and Biology) as well as secondary education. Those degrees gave me a strong foundation in content and experience in student teaching. However, as soon as I stepped into my own classroom, I felt what my science team teaching partner and co-author Michael Lowry describes as an "unsettled quality." That is, by observing and listening to my students, I sensed a need to rattle some cages and make changes in the status quo. My first assigned mentor's answer to everything was "We've always done it this way." Right or wrong, I wanted to see how we could make things better than the way we'd "always done it." So, when I began teaching, I started learning from students as they learned from me. We were both going to make changes to improve teaching and learning.

The first year I taught 9th grade English at Red Bank High School (now Red Bank Regional High School in Little Silver, NJ). The students were quite aware of their status in sections English 9-1, 9-3, 9-5--all odd numbers, starting with the highest performing students. English 9-17, on the other hand, was a diverse group of kids that included Kenny, an African-American senior who had flunked a semester of 9th grade English; Juan, who communicated his limited English by tapping on my shoe as I walked down the row of desks; Harry, an African-American basketball player whose shoes could stomp on a cockroach halfway across the room; and Theresa, nicknamed "Pioneer Woman" because she dressed in long skirts, blouses buttoned tight at her neck and shoes more appropriate for a grandmother. We met the last period of the day. They were respectful of me but tired at the end of the school day. I was tired, too, but determined to meet the challenge of engaging them and myself each day we met in a former science classroom. We worked together trying a variety of interactive activities to cover the required literature and grammar in the curriculum. I let Kenny be a leader that first semester, giving him assignments to teach, and he loved his role that one semester. From this class I learned more about child abuse, poverty, determination, ESL, and different religious, ethnic and racial factors. I also realized that these students needed more than one period to complete whatever we were working on and a commitment from the school to prove they were important, too.

One day I heard a loud voice "teaching" a history lesson from a classroom down the hall. I peeked in the open door and saw most of the students from my English 9-17 class trying to stay awake as the teacher continued his lecture. I thought, "What if I could convince this teacher to team teach these students with me for a double period?" This

had never been done at the school, but with little convincing, the history teacher agreed, and we presented our idea to the new principal for the following school year. The principal thought this idea might eliminate some potential discipline problems and prove to the community that he cared about all students, not just the top academic and athletic ones. We took the lowest scoring incoming 9th graders from four sending districts, invited some to attend a one-week summer program to select their history and English texts before we team taught them a double period the following school year. English 9x and Social Studies 9x (for experimental) started in 1967, and we met in a house next door to the school. We made this downstairs a "home" for our students with a telephone connected to the school switchboard, a pantry for our supplies and coffee in the kitchen, our desks in the dining room with a portable chalk board dividing it from the living room where we had 25 desk/chairs for students, an enclosed front porch with a few outdoor chairs, and a bookcase under the stairs.

The results of this new program were that students wanted it to continue for all four years of high school. We formed teams of teachers who had never worked together, and I had the privilege of following the original group all four years with a different team teaching partner each year. After the initial group graduated, I remained teaching the seniors when we moved to the new regional high school. Because of the program, many of the students went on to college, the military, or became self-employed and community leaders. It was a risky thing to do as a new teacher while also continuing to teach regular classes, but the professional and personal rewards of collaborating with a colleague in a different discipline and learning from the students outweighed the hours of additional preparation. By listening to and observing my students, I could discover what was and was not working for them in their learning process; in other words, my students were my most important resources and greatest collaborators to improve teaching and learning. When you have an itch, you scratch it; if a situation is uncomfortable, collaborate with others to make it better.

From that point in my teaching career, I continued to rattle cages. I even took a different route for advanced degrees, including a new teaching of writing MA at Northeastern University and a Doctor of Education with a specialization in writing in the disciplines at Nova Southeastern University. These two low-residency programs allowed me to work with top scholars from other institutions who taught their specialty for these graduate programs. From the Northeastern program I created both a writing across the curriculum (WAC)-based writing center at Red Bank Regional High School in New Jersey and a creative writing elective as part of a new state-designated Performing Arts Program within the same school. Both of these programs offered students unique opportunities, leveled the playing field for diverse students, and introduced technology and new methods of teaching. I also published my first book, *The High School Writing Center: Establishing and Maintaining One*, based on the research I did at Northeastern.

At Nova Southeastern, the director of the postsecondary program convinced me to take the adult education path, since he sensed that my background in content was strong but I needed to learn how to teach teachers. Through that program I wrote a manual for creating a secondary school WAC program and became much more involved in faculty development with secondary and postsecondary colleagues through NCTE, CCCC, IWCA and IWAC.

In 1990, I was offered a chance to rattle more cages at a new institution, The McCallie School in Chattanooga, Tennessee. As Endowed Chair of Composition, I was able to create a new WAC program and writing center, and teach poetry at this all boys' day/boarding school. I brought in WAC specialist Art Young of Clemson University for a retreat with faculty across disciplines, the students became involved in setting up the Caldwell Writing Center by even naming the computers and printers, and Michael Lowry and I began working on writing portfolios with his 8th and 9th grade physics students. But that wasn't enough after I had finished my doctorate and completed research on how writing to learn activities improved student learning of Algebra. There were other cages yet to rattle including work with Art Young and Anne Gere of University of Michigan on *Programs and Practices: Writing Across the Secondary School Curriculum*.

Also, I missed the salt air, and Michael Lowry approached me with an idea. What if we offered a team-taught senior interdisciplinary science seminar on oceans to students in a landlocked state? We could help them understand the importance of where they lived to the ocean and how the ocean impacted where they lived. We proposed the course, it was reluctantly offered at first, but became a successful senior science seminar even though student evaluations said they worked harder and read more than they did in their English classes but loved the collaborative approach to teaching science with literature, history, art, music, and other disciplines. We team taught the course for a dozen years and even gave workshops at the National Science Teachers Association convention together.

Finally, I created a new writing fellows program in place of a paid assistant director of the writing center due to budget restraints. It was a highly selective senior program that required recommendations, application, interview, and an essay explaining why the student wanted to become a writing fellow. Writing fellows studied the teaching of writing, wrote and gave workshops, taught classes, helped faculty create writing activities to improve learning across disciplines, prepared materials for student and faculty use on the website, and even presented at IWAC and CCCC. Although the administration had not allowed students to travel out of state to present at conferences, we rattled a few more cages by comparing these experiences to competing in sports events out of state.

My interest in changing how students used the visual as an essential part of learning developed from my study of learning styles, Howard Gardiner's work on multiple intelligences and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Through workshops Eric Hobson, Joan Mullin and I learned from participants that what we thought was important might be worth collaboration to produce the book *ARTiculating: Teaching Writing in a Visual World*. Through our partnership on this project, I also discovered the essential connection of high school and postsecondary education. The more I interacted with other educators through AP Language and Composition readings as a table leader for over a decade, through my work with IWCA, IWAC, NCTE and CCCC, I realized that WAC partnerships were the natural solution to bridging the gap for students entering postsecondary institutions. Jacob Blumner, a writing center and WAC colleague from University of Michigan-Flint, agreed. We created several workshops for conferences, wrote an article, and recently completed *WAC Partnerships Between Secondary and Postsecondary Institutions* (2016).

None of these experiences would have occurred without the support of administrators at both schools who allowed me not only to rattle cages but also to take on other challenges nationally and internationally. I was a visiting professor at Utah State one summer, began working as a consulting editor for *The Clearing House* where I later became an Executive Editor, taught graduate courses in the teaching of writing for Lesley University at cohorts in Georgia on weekends, and consulted or presented at high schools and universities throughout the world.

I have learned so much from those experiences working with students and faculty, but I was also influenced by Donald Murray, who inspired me to move from behind the desk to in front of it and finally taking risks by writing with my students back in 1980; and Malcolm Knowles, the father of adult education, who practiced andragogy in his own presentations by asking question to help students learn rather than talking at them. The following books helped me feel safe rattling cages and suffering the consequences of my actions: A *Writer Teaches Writing*, *Learning by Teaching*, and *Write to Learn* by Donald Murray; *Insult to Intelligence* and *The Book of Learning and Forgetting* by Frank Smith; *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, *Self-directed Learning*, and *The Modern Practices of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* by Malcolm Knowles; and *Lives on the Boundary* by Mike Rose.

But I am not through rattling cages. I want to know "What have high school students learned about writing that has influenced their pursuits as adults in their diverse careers and personal lives?" Sixteen former students who are at various stages in their lives have agreed to answer that question to determine if there is a pattern of characteristics or important lessons that have influenced them. My hope is that educators on the secondary and postsecondary level may benefit from what I learn. There is still much to observe and learn from our students and professional colleagues and many more cages left to rattle.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Thresholds

Julie J. Nichols

"Threshold concepts" are the first principles of any discipline. They're concepts that, through practice and tradition, have become "critical…for continued learning and participation in an area within a community of practice" (see Lucas et al's review below). For AEPL members, for example, threshold concepts are that intuition, insight, and inspiration are as intrinsic to effective education as empirical data; that emotion and values inform the best teaching; and that spirituality and body wisdom are cornerstones of the learning process. Furthermore, we assume that imagery and archetypes belong in science and math classrooms, as well as that students need meditation and silence as much as they need physical education and good nutrition. These concepts are fundamental to the practices of most members of AEPL, foundations on which our research and pedagogy are based. They're outlined on the Assembly's web page. I didn't make them up. They've never actually been called "threshold concepts," and your list might include more or different ones, but this is surely what they are.

It's therefore fitting that we review in this issue three stimulating volumes, exploring first, the very notion of "threshold concepts." Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle define and exemplify the notion in *Naming What We Know*, both on its own terms and in regard to the rapidly evolving, multi-faceted discipline of Rhetoric and Composition.[1] One of the most exciting elements of this review is that it was written collaboratively by students in a capstone undergraduate writing course along with their professor, Brad Lucas of Texas Christian University. They have found the volume valuable as a key text for students and educators in the field, both as it explains 35 concepts critical to the discipline, and then as it unpacks their significance for teaching and learning. Lucas and his students point out that the notion of "threshold concepts" is itself a threshold concept, an idea that can reveal to learners on both sides of the desk a sense of what concepts have come to be seen as essential in any area of study, and what directions are now open for further exploration.

Another threshold concept for AEPL members is that reading and writing create the self. But that concept alone isn't enough. *What* we read matters profoundly to the reader's creation of identity, and *how* we respond to what we read matters profoundly to the reader's psycho-spiritual development. In Maureen T. Hall's review of Robert P. Waxler's *The Risk of Reading,* we are reminded that narrative is a dialogical process. In other words, in narrative lies the potential for overcoming the serious disconnection from each other that threatens our distracted world. "Deep reading"—blessedly different from the "close reading" that may provide necessary surface comprehension but not always

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1. Editors' Note: The term itself is in flux. While the Modern Language Association uses "Rhetoric and Composition" for job categories and statistical tracking in the field of English, the terms "Composition Studies," "Writing and Rhetoric," and "Writing Studies" commonly identify similar scholarly and pedagogical categories as well as programs, departments, majors, and degrees.

psychological or emotional processing—yields soul connection via character identification and understanding, according to Waxler. Hall's volume explains the way he unpacks these concepts by analyzing nine novels and the Creation story. Not only the text's meaning, but the reader's life meaning, comes clearer through such deep reading.

But, interestingly, Gae Lyn Henderson's review of Goodson and Gill's *Critical Narrative as Pedagogy* interrogates the claim that narrative's greatest benefit is primarily the construction of a *coherent* self. A Rhetoric and Composition professor herself, Henderson believes contemporary narrative theories that *deconstruct* the self offer readers beneficial methods for interacting productively in contemporary society. Goodson and Gill explore critical narrative pedagogy as a vehicle to empower students to reimagine their worlds. Their audience includes agents of rehabilitation as well as educators in public or private institutions. They present theory and case studies; and Henderson takes them one step further. She suggests that acknowledging gaps, inconsistencies, and fragmentation may actually facilitate such reimagining (or rehabilitation). Incoherence in narrative need not be an obstacle.

This is a merciful observation, it seems to me. One of the gifts of a good review is its invitation to examine critically the implications of the theories and practices being considered. In these three reviews, scholars remind us that a conversation which includes such "threshold concepts" as narrative, reading, and writing requires our deeply engaged participation. We cannot sit on the sidelines and let others define these concepts for us.

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Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth Wardle, eds. *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies.* Logan: Utah State University Press, 2015. 280 pp.

**Brad E. Lucas, Nia Brookins, Russell Hodges, Abby Long,
Ashley Madonna, Ian McKelvy, Andria Miller,
Taylor Santore, and Josh Whitehead,
Texas Christian University**

Naming What We Know is not a typical edited collection. Unique in its development, it is a long-overdue weaving together of two long-term strands in writing studies: our collective practical wisdom and the long-term results of knowledge-making in the field. Editors Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle have brought together an impressive array of experts to identify and articulate "threshold concepts" in the field of writing studies, concepts which are "critical for epistemological participation . . . for continued learning and participation in an area or within a community of practice" (2). What emerges from this collaborative creation is truly one of the best books we have for articulating "what we know" about writing. As Kathleen Blake Yancey notes in her com-

prehensive introduction, "The assumption underlying *Naming*, of course, is that the field is now established, and it thus would be a useful enterprise to consider together what it is that we do know" (xxix).

Threshold concepts emerged from the work of Jan H. F. Meyer and Ray Land, who identified effective elements in undergraduate teaching and learning in the U.K.; they realized how economists shared a set of concepts central to understanding their discipline and, by extension, how those concepts could be identified in other fields. Threshold concepts share a number of common characteristics: they are transformative (influencing who we are and how we perceive in the world); integrative (explaining phenomena and how they relate to one another); and irreversible (once understood—once someone has, in effect, crossed over the threshold—such concepts are not likely forgotten). They also involve forms of counterintuitive or "troublesome" knowledge, ideas that contribute to the common myths and misperceptions of writing (e.g., it's widely *believed* that a singular model can be used to teach writing, but we *know* that our pedagogy must account for individual writers who have different histories, processes, and identities). Put simply, threshold concepts point to a number of central truths in writing studies, definitions crafted from a variety of perspectives—and fully cognizant of the pitfalls of working toward such definitions.

Realizing the impossibility of naming all threshold concepts in writing, the editors note that they are "comfortable identifying these final-for-now definitions of *some* of what our field knows" (4), ideas that are currently our best placeholders and guiding principles for understanding what we do and how we think. Moreover, readers are cautioned against reducing threshold concepts to some sort of answer-key to the mysteries of writing or a numbered checklist for determining or evaluating curricula, pedagogy, and practice. After all, these concepts cannot be mastered in a single class because learning them happens over time and at differing levels of understanding: "this type of learning is messy, time consuming, and unpredictable" (9).

This collection emerged out of several stages of collaboration, from summer seminars at Elon University (2011-2013) and moved to online wiki-writing sessions, as Adler-Kassner and Wardle recruited a group of 45 knowledgeable teacher-scholars in writing to work toward identifying threshold concepts central to the discipline. Consequently, this collective then identified and refined 35 concepts in the field that comprise Part I of the book—what the editors call "a sort of crowdsourced encyclopedia of threshold concepts of writing studies" (3). The pithy threshold-concepts essays, each cross-referenced to one another and limited to 1000 words, are unencumbered with the apparatus of research citations and scholarly lineage, providing readers with quick and thorough introduction to the wisdom of the field, represented by some of its most well-informed voices.

Five categories of threshold concepts comprise the first five chapters of Part I, each stemming from a singular meta-concept, "Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity." This is a dynamic meta-concept familiar to the field but not to outsiders. The editors remind us that this meta-concept "often comes as a surprise, partially because not only people tend to experience writing as a finished product that represents ideas in seemingly rigid forms—but also because writing is often seen as a 'basic skill' that a person can learn once and for all and not think about again" (15). As the book progresses, the five categories (clustered into sub-concepts) walk readers through many ways to view

writing and how writing functions, from "Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity" and "Writing Speaks to Situations through Recognizable Forms" to "Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies," all the while underscoring that "All Writers Have More to Learn" and reminding readers that "Writing is (Also Always) a Cognitive Activity."

Altogether, Part I describes the 35 threshold concepts and why they matter to those inside and outside the field. Each contribution builds upon the others, offering a unified framework that confirms the importance of both writing studies and the roles of writing beyond the academy. For example, contributors account for the complex and unique background of writing in general, reminding readers of basic aspects of writing, such as the concept of writing as a knowledge-making activity and the ways that writing not only addresses audiences but also creates them. The book then delves deeper into the acts of agency within writing, with ideas about how "writing is not natural" and "writing involves making ethical choices." *Naming What We Know* also addresses the complicated relationship between the writer and the reader and attempts to describe the roles of each.

As the editors assert, "If we want to actively and positively impact the lives of writers and writing teachers, we must do a better job of clearly stating what our field knows and helping others understand how to use that knowledge as they set policy, create programs, design and fund assessments, and so on" (7). To that end, Part II of the book follows the more typical genre expectations for an edited collection, approaching the *use* of threshold concepts via eight sites of writing instruction and development. The first four chapters (6-9) consider how thresholds can be used in program and curriculum design (via student learning outcomes, first-year instruction, the undergraduate major, and graduate curriculum,). The second group of chapters (10-13) focuses on ways that thresholds can be enacted across larger institutional domains (via assessment, writing centers, professional development, and writing across the curriculum).

Chapter 6 reconsiders outcomes-based learning, acknowledging that it can productively foster expectations for student learning, institutional accountability, curricular cohesiveness, and productive assessment. However, outcomes can be troubling in two ways: (1) demonstrating evidence of learning only at the end of key experiences (when the "actual learning happens between these signposts and outcomes"), and (2) over-representing writing solely as comprised of discrete skills (103). Chapter 7 considers how to introduce threshold concepts in first-year composition, not only for students to evaluate previously instilled misconceptions (and open new possibilities) in writing, but also for students to transfer their knowledge to new writing contexts beyond the first-year course. Chapter 8 reflects on threshold concepts as guidelines for writing majors and minors, contemplating them as a foundation to structure an undergraduate program and the core classes therein. Chapter 9 explains the relationship between threshold concepts and doctoral programs, using the example of the doctoral curriculum at Florida State University to illustrate how the concepts can reveal the underlying principles that have already guided these programs.

The remaining chapters in Part II extend threshold concepts beyond classroom instruction and program design. Taking up the crucial role of validity and reliability, Chapter 10 elucidates how threshold concepts can redefine the ways writing studies intersects with educational assessment. Chapter 11 explores the need for understanding

threshold concepts specific to writing centers, considering the complex negotiation of expertise practiced by tutors. Chapter 12 revolves around three teaching concepts associated with faculty professional development: (1) that threshold concepts are themselves a threshold concept; (2) that one's discipline serves both defining and restraining functions; and (3) that student learning involves demonstrating particular ways of thinking, but that familiar goal ultimately may be unreasonable to expect in any *single* course. Last, Chapter 13 stresses the importance of cross-curricular faculty understanding that writing across the curriculum is essential to improving the writing and rhetorical skills of students in various fields of study: "it is only in the careful, considered exploration of such concepts that meaningful change can begin" (216).

Because *Naming What We Know* aims to be a core source of knowledge about writing, this book is a perfect choice for a capstone course for undergraduate writing majors. Indeed, this book review was drafted in Fall 2015 by the instructor (Lucas) and the students at Texas Christian University, as we took a similar collaborative approach. In addition to its impressive breadth and collective authorial ethos, the book's detailed articulations of threshold concepts—often couched in everyday examples—make it accessible for many advanced undergraduate students. However, a few students may struggle with some of the material, pointing to complex vocabulary, redundancies, and academic tone (reinforcing, for us, the basic premise that threshold concepts cannot be simply digested in one sitting, nor in one course). The discussions range from what the authors call "the obvious but overlooked" to new and complicated ideas that are likely to make more sense as readers spend more time developing their understanding of writing studies. As this group of reviewers concludes, "It will ultimately verify what the reader believes and strengthen even more what they have learned through practice." When the instructor assigned the book in a graduate-level research-methodologies seminar the following semester, it was even more well-received, prompting several doctoral students to lament that they hadn't had access to *Naming* earlier in their careers.

The editors assert their hopes that "this collection can provide a basis for writing studies professionals to describe what we know in ways that are accessible to educated readers (and listeners) who are not necessarily specialists in our discipline" (6). For an audience unfamiliar with writings about writing, the concepts can be difficult, but working through them is part of what defines threshold concepts. Ultimately, the editors and contributors have effectively consolidated our thinking to make the ideas comprehensive, flexible, accessible, and useful for furthering our discussion regarding what we know about writing. Given the remarkable contribution of this book, it's not surprising that Utah State University Press issued a "Classroom Edition" of this book in June 2016, focused only on the content from Part I. Ultimately, *Naming What We Know* does a superb job of congregating our collective thinking, distilling what we've learned in our journey together, and preparing us to traverse the pathways before us.

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Waxler, Robert P. *The Risk of Reading: How Literature Helps Us to Understand Ourselves and the World.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. 200 pp.

Maureen T. Hall, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

Robert Waxler was one of the keynote speakers at the summer conference of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning, June 23-26, 2016, at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. The title of the conference was "Deep Reading: Reinventing Identity through Imagination." Waxler's *The Risk of Reading: How Literature Helps Us to Understand Ourselves and the World* lays out the fundamental concepts behind the conference's themes as it examines the power of language to serve as a conduit for traveling both inward to our most private selves and outward to our communities, reminding us of the centrality of linguistic narrative to our personal and communal journeys towards understanding human identity.

Reading literature has a two-fold power; that is, it allows us to "*immerse ourselves in* and [gives us] the perspective to *distance ourselves from* experience so that we can make sense of the experience and begin to create our own story" (12, emphasis added). Waxler's vision holds great importance in the twenty-first century in terms of connectedness, health, and well-being for self and society. His ideas resonate and align with the Socratic argument that the unexamined life is not worth living. Without reflecting on one's life, the journey becomes one of just going through the motions and remains superficial. Conversely, Waxler highlights that reading, discussing, and writing about good literature allows an embodied opportunity for reflecting on literature, on self, and on society.

Waxler identifies a growing problem in our society: "We no longer seem to engage deeply with others or ourselves" (1). Ironically, though we perceive ourselves to be well-connected through Facebook, email, and other screen-lives, we do not connect in the most important ways, ones that helps us to keep "dialogical relationships fresh and in motion" (5). Waxler underlines how "spectacle" and "surface sensation" have become the order of the day, leaving deeper and embodied engagement in the dust. The argument is not to turn away from electronic devices, but to establish a counterculture. Reading good literature resides at the nexus of this counterculture.

In each piece of literature that Waxler unpacks for meaning, he clearly acknowledges a dialogical stance. In other words, he makes clear how each piece of literature can connect to readers' life experiences as well as empower them to connect to new, textually-derived experiences, stretching and strengthening their capacity to explore beyond their primary personal history.

In *The Risk of Reading,* Waxler also posits the power of narrative as a potent elixir for addressing issues of disconnection from self and society. He uses well-developed

examples from the Creation story and novels by Shelley, Carroll, Conrad, Hemingway, Salinger, Kesey, Palahniuk, and Barnes. In Waxler's chapter on *Alice in Wonderland*, for example, he focuses on the "human quest for knowledge, always a passage from innocence to experience" (53). In *Wonderland*, Alice is immersed in a nonsensical world filled with strange characters, language, and ideas. In her journey to understand, Alice needs to stay open to the information she gathers from her fantastic experiences. Waxler asserts that she must "embody meaning by shaping contingency into necessity through the ongoing dialogue between 'real life' experience and language, doing and knowing, sensuous bodily movement and the telling of that movement in linguistic narrative" (61). Alice's capacity for empathy expands by "mapping her past story onto the present" (61). Although Alice does not achieve full maturity in this story, her testimony of her experiences in the King's Court shows that she is *en route* to a deeper understanding of self and others.

Likewise, Waxler's chapter on Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea* analyzes the quest for human knowledge by considering how the character Santiago, is defined both as an individual and by his relationship with the boy Manolin. Santiago embodies resilience and heroic endurance—and because he does, Manolin believes in Santiago and loves him. Santiago and Manolin share a vision of fishing and of life, one that embraces the unpredictability of a journey. As Waxler puts it, they also share the belief that "You will inevitably encounter what you cannot prepare for, the unexpected and contingent experience that shapes you; and because you cannot shape it, it will destroy you. But it will not defeat you unless you allow it to" (89) Faith not fear keeps one from being defeated. Waxler points out that Santiago also models to Manolin the significance of going alone out to sea and being responsible for one's self in order "to know who you are as an individual, what you are capable of in your singularity, your uniqueness in the world" because one must know oneself in order to deeply know another (90).

At the center of Waxler's vision is how reading provides "one of the best opportunities we have today to maintain a coherent human identity and remain self-reflective individuals in a world that seems particularly chaotic and confusing" (13). In the educational sphere, "close reading" may hold sway, but instead, Waxler advocates for deep—not just close reading. Unlike close reading, which, as a part of the Common Core Standards, may help students to fully understand the information in a text, deep reading helps us to understand ourselves and our own stories.

There's nothing small about Waxler's vision as it puts trust in the power of the individual to shape a democratic society. This democratic society is a humane place, one that privileges and holds up all voices and perspectives. One cannot separate the interaction of efforts of and for oneself from the greater good of the society.

As such, Waxler reminds us that "to read deeply is always a risk" (178). And, if we call forth the courage to do this deep reading, we reap many important intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. More specifically, Waxler explains that language always holds power to make a difference; narrative provides so much more than mere information. *The Risk of Reading* invites us to take the reading journey, a trip that evokes memory and desire within us. If we accept the invitation and stay the course, Waxler makes clear just how this journey can provide passage to our interior selves and back out to our human com-

munity. He calls to us, "Take the reading risk," and we should heed this wise and hospitable advice.

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Goodson, Ivor, and Scherto Gill. *Critical Narrative as Pedagogy.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. 288 pp.

Gae Lyn Henderson, Utah Valley University

Asecondary school art teacher, Katrina, participated in an M.A. Educational Studies seminar at a UK university, sharing with her fellow students her "river of life" learning biography. She created a giant mural depicting in art and words not only her lifetime educational experiences, but also her divorce, single-motherhood, and cancer diagnosis (221). As Katrina reflected on the pain and promise of her creation, she wrote, "I felt as if I was meeting myself for the first time. I laughed and cried, I was emotional and philosophical . . . I emptied myself and I refilled myself with images and stories" (238). Katrina had engaged in a "whole person" approach to learning through narrative, as articulated in Ivor Goodson and Scherto Gill's *Critical Narrative as Pedagogy*. As I read reflections from Katrina and other students, my reaction was, "Sign me up!" I expect many readers of *JAEPL* might want to join me in what is reported as a transformative dialogic writing seminar that allows teachers to investigate how their professional, personal, psychological, and political lives intertwine. Most important, this investigation allows students to remap or chart an imagined future course.

But would I be comfortable teaching such curriculum? Gill details in the book's final chapter how participants read, engage in dialogue, write reflectively, share oral narratives, exchange biographical vignettes, conduct research, theorize, and present final results. My courses teaching undergraduate English majors and first-year writers include many of the same activities. But one apparent difference between my courses and Gill's is in the level of critical interrogation, following Paulo Freire, with whom peer interlocutors ask questions, suggest further reading, challenge thinking, and provoke holistic, historical, social, and political associations. The deeply personal revelations that emerge, Gill reports, can help teachers reconceptualize learning goals within a dialogical group experience. But surely students, even at the graduate level, would feel intensely vulnerable in a situation that Gill admits "does resemble" group therapy (222). While she acknowledges possible "tension between the need to work with 'rigorous' scholarly practices and standards, and the perceived risk of merely being self-indulgent with emotions through 'touchy-feely' programmes" (226), she cites Freire, Parker Palmer, John Dewey, and bell hooks to assert that emotional frames provoke deeper, more integrated learning (228-29). Freire would approve. In one of his last letters, he remonstrated educators to

"make an effort . . . to narrow the distance between what we say and what we do. . . . being consistent is the final stage of our being whole" (21).

How, then, do we (always or consistently) elicit positive and supportive outcomes with such a pedagogy? The book offers additional case studies and abundant theory to help readers figure out the answer to that question. Goodson, Professor of Learning Theory at the Education Research Centre, University of Brighton, UK, and his coauthor, Gill, Research Fellow at the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace, UK, build upon a number of their previous publications dealing with narrative theory, narrative pedagogy, and dialogic pedagogy. They aim at a broad audience of educators at all levels, as well as advocates for peace and justice projects, such as prisoner rehabilitation and restorative justice. This book is part of a Critical Pedagogy Today series that focuses on the legacy of Freire, including books by Henry A. Giroux and other prominent educational theorists. Thus Goodson and Gill propose a narrative pedagogy for citizens in diverse contexts. They urge students, teachers, trauma victims, or prisoners not only to critically examine past experience, but also to intervene in the status quo and to construct new avenues for personal and community growth. Goodson argues, "Narratives are not just stories that search for meaning and coherences but compasses as we plot out our action in the world" (120).

In the first section of *Critical Narrative*, Gill provides a multidisciplinary review of literature in three chapters—mapping research in critical narrative, delving into why criticality has transformative potential, and arguing that critical narrative provides a creative opportunity for learners to locate their voices in larger contexts. If some readers find this theoretical section less than compelling, they may want to move directly to the remaining six chapters that tell stories of how critical narrative has been applied.

One theoretical issue that troubles the authors repeatedly is an apparent conflict between their thesis that individuals may build personal coherence by narrating life stories and contemporary theories that deconstruct notions of an essential self. Gill acknowledges that postmodernism and social construction complicate claims to universal ethics and also that individuals exist within infinitely complex contexts. Yet she asserts that such complexity does not negate the construction of "a prevailing moral vision" to ground personal meaning, as well as societal values of justice, goodness, and dignity (28). She challenges the fragmented postmodern vision of the self on a pragmatic basis: "It is impossible to imagine how he or she can act coherently" (28). Gill and Goodson insist that the potential for action is crucial, and they assert that their pedagogy motivates people to act, change, and thrive, not only personally, but also socially.

In the second section of the book, Goodson illustrates ways to critically examine personal narrative. In Chapter 4, he cites cultural critics who decry the global reach of a mainstream American culture that is narcissistic, materialist, arrogant, and ahistorical. In contrast, he discusses how certain tribal cultures (Chinese, Native American, Australian aboriginal) enact rituals of sustainability, historical identity, and ancestral connection (103-05). He proposes pedagogy that similarly fosters such rituals, describing a workshop that prompts students to answer a series of questions regarding ancestors and then imaginatively create and perform a reenactment of a great, great grandparent. Such dramatization, Goodson explains, allows participants to critically examine economic, social, and political effects faced by prior generations: "I am deeply aware from my

ancestral voices that certain groups face dispossession and displacement when new economic orders emerge" (112). Revisiting Freire's notion of "generative themes," students narratively imagine future social action through the lens of the past (120).

In Chapter 5, we find the heart of the book: Goodson and Gill converse, dialogically teasing out details of Goodson's autobiography. He explains that his father didn't read and that his Mum taught him orally, with stories (133). His entire village had "a deep distrust of schools," so he grew up "a pretty rough street kid" (134-35). When he was eight, a teacher visited his home, urging his parents to help him learn to read by buying him books (135), resulting later in his surprising success on "the 11+" exam, a feat accomplished by only one other student in his village (135-36). But his growing literacy also created emotional conflict for him. He worried about challenging his father's "sense of competence," so (perhaps unconsciously) he refused to learn skills at which his father excelled: "I still don't drive, and I'm useless with my hands . . . . I hold onto these strange moments of rupture" (137-38). Because this narrative is presented conversationally, we see Gill asking clarifying questions and pushing Goodson at times to be more analytical: "How would you consider the impact of such [educational] transgression on you and your family?" (137). For Goodson, this reflective conversation provokes a process of "disembedding" memories and then "relocating" them—a narrative journey that continues to be "strangely ambivalent" (145-47). Out of these narrative tensions, the opportunity emerges, detailed in Chapter 6, to construct a "life theme" of meaning and motivation for action. Goodson's life theme emerges in his continuing efforts to empower working class students. The construction and reconstruction of a creative and yet critical narrative recasts "our individual perceptions . . . in a web of relationships, and indeed in social imagination" (4).

In the final chapters, educators, students, and advocates for change will find compelling case studies. Chapter 7 presents a powerful dialogue between Lebanese former combatants, one Christian, one Muslim, who listen and learn from each other to move beyond demonizing to understanding how both were heavily socialized into similar patterns of hate and distrust. In Chapter 8, prisoners in a restorative justice project narrate their progress in relating to victims' pain and in reimagining their own rehabilitation. Interested readers may also want to examine Goodson and Gill's 2011 *Narrative Pedagogy* containing additional critical dialogues between the authors, as well as further case studies and class activities.

The strength of *Critical Narrative as Pedagogy* lies in its stories, but my response to the authors is that these stories are not only powerful when their conflicts are resolved. Textual revelations of conflict, between various self-representations (past/present/future) and between self and numerous others also provoke learning. The coherent self, narratively primed to change the world, may indeed be the result of this pedagogy, but the incoherent self who can nonetheless narrate and acknowledge inconsistency may also be a valuable outcome. As Katrina points out, "I may never realise my dreams, but it is the journey that matters" (238).

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CONNECTING

Risks and Rewards of Purposeful Vulnerability

Christy I. Wenger

Embracing vulnerability is difficult. When writers risk vulnerability, we invite exposure and uncertainty. *Will we be read? Will we be judged? Can we still persuade?* Vulnerability is often construed as weakness brought on by personal failure, only on display by accident when we let our guard down. Yet, vulnerability can be a powerful, rhetorical choice harnessed by writers.

The following collection of writings captures the challenge of embracing vulnerability as writers, teachers, and learners—but the authors also point to the rewards of opening up to students, to colleagues, to ourselves. Anchoring this section's theme, Christine Martornana reviews Ruth Behar's anthropology to suggest that we consciously position ourselves as "vulnerable observers" to embrace the ways vulnerability, in contrast to objectivity, can open us up to greater connections with our research participants and our students. Behar's strategic vulnerability brings to mind Donna Haraway's scathing indictment of scientific objectivity, which undergirds the modern university. Seeking a feminist alternative akin to the vulnerable observer, Haraway calls out the objective, scientific observer as "an authorized ventriloquist for the object world, adding nothing from his mere opinions, from his biasing embodiment. And so he is endowed with the remarkable power to establish the facts. He bears witness: he is objective; he guarantees the clarity and purity of objects" (24). It is precisely because such objectivity has been granted so much value in academic writing that we currently see vulnerability as a "risk" to avoid, rather than a worthwhile challenge to pursue. Behar's concept of the vulnerable observer is a feminist alternative to such objectivity that provides a useful lens to view all the writings in this section.

For Martornana, the choice to be a vulnerable observer is a choice to participate in the very "zine" writing she studies. It helps her decenter her authority of researcher and experience firsthand the materialist, personal genre of writing she studies. Inspired by her experiences of being a vulnerable participant-observer in the classroom, Martornana takes a deeper look at her teacherly expectations in the classroom and is forced to examine the opportunities she provides students to connect to their writing. She ultimately provides more spaces for students' purposeful vulnerability through invited explorations of their personal motivations for writing and researching.

Personal writing is the focus of Jacquelyn E. Hoermann-Elliott's narrative, which combines her reflections on teaching personal writing, prompted by the experience of writing with students her own "This I Believe" essay—an assignment given in her first-year writing classes. Also made vulnerable by the purposeful self-practice of writing with

students, Hoermann-Elliott finds connections between her writing, teaching, and yoga practice, making her reflect on the importance of metacognition in teaching writing.

Meanwhile, Beth Godbee and Adrianne Wojcik detail their collaborative partnership as they coded Godbee's interviews of tutors and tutees within writing centers. Godbee and Wojcik engage in a purposeful vulnerability by reading and learning new ways of seeing the interview data from each other's perspectives. As vulnerable observers of each other's interpretations, this research team draws agency from their collaborative experience as it occurs. As they learn to embrace the ambiguity that their different interpretations present, they also learn about themselves as researchers.

Finally, Laurence Musgrove's poems, "Dress Up" and "Tree," explore this process of opening up and letting go of our own perspectives long enough to see another's. These poems ask us to look deeply at ourselves and the people and the material objects around us in order to generate more meaningful encounters. Musgrove's poems thus encourage us to consider how listening and seeing are essential to opening a space where purposeful vulnerability is welcomed and acknowledged, a space where scientific objectivity is stripped of its power.

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Embracing Vulnerability in Research and Teaching

Christine Martorana

Ruth Behar reflects on her experiences as an anthropologist observing and writing about other people's lives. Troubled by the distance she feels between her role as an anthropologist and the people she observes, Behar suggests that anthropologists adopt the stance of the vulnerable observer. The vulnerable observer, she explains, "use[s] her own experiences in her research, writing, and teaching" (10). Rather than adopting the academic tenets of "distance, objectivity, and abstraction," she chooses to highlight her personal connections to her research (13). In support of this stance, Behar offers the example of the anthropologist studying mood disorders who chooses to reveal that her

research is motivated by her own family history with manic-depressive illness.

Although I am not an anthropologist, I can relate to Behar as a feminist researcher. I am a feminist compositionist who studies feminist perzines, a subgenre of zines that spotlights the personal experiences and opinions of the zine writers—otherwise known as zinesters. Put briefly, zines are handmade "self-publication[s], motivated by desire for self-expression, not for profit" (Freedman). Zines come in many diverse shapes and sizes, and they cover a myriad of topics ranging from parenting and social justice issues to traveling, music, and comics. My research on feminist perzines has led to several conference presentations, a university-sponsored research project, and a forthcoming book chapter—each of which shines a spotlight on the innovative, creative, and thoughtful composing strategies of feminist zinesters. However, as I follow my research interest into the world of feminist perzines, I find myself wondering, *Am I actually doing these women a disservice by inviting the mainstream, academic gaze to fall on this community of writers? What does it mean that I am shining an academic light on such personal, intimate experiences?*

In Behar's work, I find a response to these questions. Specifically, Behar offers the vulnerable observer as one way in which "women [can] make other women the subjects of their gaze without objectifying them and thus ultimately betraying them" (28). This perspective aligns so closely with my own goals as a researcher that I have committed to embracing the vulnerable observer identity in my research with feminist perzines. Although I can imagine the vulnerable observer identity taking many forms, in my work, becoming a vulnerable observer means participating in the very genre of writing that I study. It means entering the zine world as more than a researcher. It means experiencing firsthand the intricacies of creating and distributing a perzine, of making myself vulnerable just as my research participants do. It means that not only do I write *about* perzines, but I also write perzines.

In October of 2016, I embarked on my first attempt at creating a perzine. Uncertain of how to begin, I decided to look through my collection of perzines for inspiration. I noticed that most perzines focused on a particular theme relevant to the zinester's life at the time, and they often start with a letter that welcomes readers and lets them know what to expect in the coming pages. So, I decided to start there, and it was in the process of writing this letter that I discovered the name of my perzine: *Practice*. I wrote, "Practice what we preach, right? How can I be a feminist writing about feminist perzines if I have never experienced what it is to write one? To be vulnerable and open to readers I may or may not know?"

I decided to focus this first issue of *Practice* on my own experiences with anxiety and disordered eating. I'm not going to describe the contents of my perzine here. If you would like to see this issue, I'd be happy to send a copy. Instead, I am going to reflect on this process of embracing vulnerability. As I sat on my living room floor, surrounded by paper, glue, markers, and other crafting tools, I could feel uncertainty and tension gathering in the pit of my stomach. It was not the act of writing that garnered these feelings. Rather, it was the knowledge that I was preparing to share these experiences with an audience. This audience felt both known and unknown to me, and, honestly, it was the known portion of this audience that made me the most nervous. Most people in my life do not know about my continuing struggles with anxiety, and I wondered how

knowing about this would impact their conceptions of who I am and their interactions with me. Would I suddenly seem more fragile and less stable? Should I censor myself, limit the level of personal sharing, so as not to degrade my credibility as a professional and an academic?

I was not used to these feelings of uncertainty surrounding my writing. Currently, most of my writing occurs within the academic genres of article manuscripts, chapter proposals, and responses to calls for papers—genres that have anonymity embedded into them. This is not to say that these genres are void of vulnerability. When I submit a manuscript to a journal, for example, I am making myself vulnerable in that reviewers may respond with negative criticisms or outright rejection. Still, I find that the anonymity of the review process—the fact that I do not know my reviewers and they do not know me—offers a barrier that shields me from being too fully exposed as a writer and researcher. However, I quickly realized that this barrier of anonymity was nonexistent in my perzine creation process. All of the personal stories and details within *Practice* would be unmistakably my own, and all reader responses—both supportive and hostile—would be directed at me specifically.

As a composition instructor who regularly invites students to engage in personal writing, these realizations regarding anonymity and vulnerability gave me pause. When I ask students to write personal narratives or otherwise put their personal perspectives in writing, I am asking students to embrace vulnerability. Not vulnerability coupled with the shield of anonymity, but rather full vulnerability, complete with the risks of self-exposure and outside evaluation. As I crafted *Practice* and grappled with the apprehensions of sharing myself, I wondered, *do my students experience similar feelings of uncertainty at the thought of sharing themselves with an evaluative audience? Do they censor themselves and their self-presentations? How can I cultivate a classroom space where personal writing is productive rather than anxiety-producing?*

I arrived at one response to these questions as I continued through the process of becoming a vulnerable observer. Despite my initial uncertainties, I decided to fully embrace the vulnerability, to write honestly and candidly about the ways in which anxiety has colored my past and continues to impact me today. I have since come to more fully understand this kind of sharing as an act of feminist agency. Patriarchal society teaches us that we must polish and refine ourselves for public view. We must always appear competent, confident, and self-actualized. Traditional notions of ethos remind us that it is in *overcoming* challenges that we gain authority and credibility. The assumption here is that by moving beyond an experience, the individual achieves "hindsight, reflection, and…objectivity," whereas the significance of an in-process experience remains unknown (Foss, Foss & Griffin 8).

However, my experiences within the zine world have taught me that in-process and/or personal experiences can offer sources of authority. We need not look solely to the past for significant happenings; rather, we can "engage in self-conscious reflection about [our current] lives as women," drawing upon and sharing in-process experiences (Foss, Foss & Griffin 6). Similarly, although personal experiences are often considered less credible because they are subjective, the reality is that objectivity is not a prerequisite for credibility. In *Daring Greatly*, Brene Brown reminds us, "In a world where scarcity and shame dominate and feeling afraid has become second nature, vulnerability is sub-

versive." Thus, in making the choice to be vulnerable to a public audience, to share our in-process and/or personal experiences, we can challenge this patriarchal conception of self-presentation and credibility.

After I completed this issue of *Practice*, I used Twitter to invite interested readers to contact me if they wanted a copy. I received requests from people in all areas of my life—zinesters, academics, family members, friends, and complete strangers. I have received several interesting and supportive responses, most of which are from other zinesters. One such zinester sent me a handwritten letter. In it, she wrote, "We are the experts of our own existence. I won't ever need another person to peer-review my journals on how it felt to be so lonely and isolated in my [struggles]. I lived it." After creating *Practice* and offing my personal experiences to a public audience, I understand this statement better than ever. Interestingly, none of the academics who requested a copy of *Practice* have yet to respond. Although a response is in no way expected, I do wonder if the lack of response from my academic community is due to the fact that we aren't yet sure how to respond to purposeful vulnerability.

While creating my first issue of *Practice*, I was also teaching a second semester first-year composition course. This is a course I have taught many times. However, as I continued to embrace vulnerability in my research, I noticed a shift in my teaching, an intentional leaning towards a more vulnerable pedagogical approach. The main assignment of the course is a research project, an assignment I have previously approached as distinct from more personal forms of writing such as narratives and reflections. However, this semester, I made specific efforts to provide opportunities for my students to keep their voices and experiences central alongside their research. For instance, I invited students to begin their research projects with an explanation of their personal motivations for conducting this research.

Not all students felt comfortable with this approach, but the ones who did crafted some very powerful statements. For instance, Mo, a student researching media depictions of Islam, begins his research with the following reflection: "I knew Islamophobia existed from a young age when I saw my mother's headscarf get pulled off. My understanding of Islamophobia has widened as a result of my research and experiences." Similarly, Angel, a student researching racial discrimination in the workplace, writes, "My research [began] because of something that had happened to me when I was in high school within a daycare system where they didn't want people of color to be around kids. Through my research, I've learned that this is not the only place that people face racial discrimination."

As I read my students' writing, I realized that they were experiencing a shift in perspective similar to what I experienced when I wrote *Practice*. They were coming to a realization that our personal experiences can offer a source of credibility. Monica, a student researching second-language learners, makes this realization explicit in the reflection she turned in along with her research project. She explains, "The way I identified myself [in my research] was by stating 'I am a Non-Native English speaker.' [This] show[s] I'm reliable to talk about this topic because I state an actual experience I went through. . . . I presented myself like this because I want my audience to know that they are reading it from someone who understands them." For the first time in my teaching experience, I witnessed my students presenting their personal experiences as a means of enhanc-

ing authority. That is, not only were they learning that documenting sources and citing experts is important for presenting oneself as a credible writer, but they were also seeing their own experiences as a source of credibility. My experiences writing *Practice* led me to this realization in my own life and writing, and I was excited to see my students coming to similar understandings regarding the value of their own personal experiences.

At the end of the semester, I was invited to present at my college's Dean's Symposium on my approach to teaching research. I have given similar presentations before, and my usual approach is to give an overview of relevant scholarship followed by my pedagogical application of this scholarship and several implications for the college classroom. However, motivated by my commitment to embrace vulnerability, I decided to invite Mo, Monica, and Yanique—three of my students—to present alongside me, to gain practice sharing their writing with others. At first, the students were a bit hesitant, and understandably so. They were not yet finished with their research projects, and none of these first-year students had ever presented to a college-wide audience. Did they have anything valuable to share with an audience comprised of students, faculty, and deans from the college? I assured them that they did, and the students agreed to participate in the presentation.

This presentation was unlike any other I have done. I started with a brief overview of our class and the research project assignment. I then introduced the students and gave each of them the opportunity to speak about their research projects. I did not tell them specifically what to say, and I was surprised to hear that each student started by explaining the personal motivations they held for their research. Mo described growing up as a Muslim-American. Monica claimed her identity as a non-Native English speaker, even pointing out the thick accent that accompanies her English. Yanique recounted a time when she faced gender discrimination in her job and was not sure how to handle it. Each student presented these personal experiences as sources of credibility, and they made explicit the connections between their research and their personal experiences. They presented their in-process work to a potentially unknown audience, and in hindsight, I can see that these students were embracing vulnerability.

Although this was not an intention I held for my students at the start of this semester, it was an outcome of my experiences embracing vulnerability in my own research and writing. As I reflect on these experiences, one of the biggest lessons I learned is that all personal writing is not automatically vulnerable writing—at least not as Behar defines it and as I have come to understand it. "The exposure of the self," Behar writes, "has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. [Vulnerable writing] can lead the reader, not into miniature bubbles of naval-gazing, but into the enormous sea of serious social issues" (14). In other words, vulnerable writing is *purposeful* personal writing aimed at connecting with and impacting worlds beyond the self. By adopting this perspective of personal writing in our research and teaching, we can become more ethical and aware scholars and teachers, capable of seeing our personal experiences as valid and valuable and inviting our students to do the same.

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Writing as a Sea of Oms: A "This I Believe" Essay for Contemplative Writing in First-Year Composition

Jacquelyn E. Hoermann-Elliott

At Texas Christian University, I teach a themed section of first-year composition called "Yoga-Zen Writing." One of the first writing assignments my students receive is a "This I Believe" essay, for which I ask students to choose a belief or a personal mantra that guides their daily living or reflects their values in a way that is personally meaningful to them. My students are prepared for the assignment by listening to several "This I Believe" podcasts—available for streaming through *Thisibelieve.org*. As a class, we write in our journals and discuss out loud how these podcasts reflect the personal essay genre outlined in Bruce Ballenger's *The Curious Writer*. The greatest challenge of this writing assignment is that students are expected to deliver one to two brief but well-detailed narrative experiences in approximately two pages, which always challenges them to winnow their words down to what is absolutely essential and memorable. Having taught this essay several times, I decided to write my own "This I Believe" essay in the fall of 2016. My intention was to refresh my memory of the process involved in writing a personal essay, and throughout the process I was reminded of how challenging personal essays can be.

In keeping with the mindfulness practices taught in my course, I begin this essay discussing my experiences with a kind of meditation called a Sea of *Oms*, a communal type of meditation in which one practitioner begins making an "*Om*" sound and others follow until the sound of multiple "*Oms*" washes over the room without anyone stopping for longer than is needed to inhale deeply. The essay begins in my yoga studio, Yogali:

Writing as a Sea of Oms

In my first sea of Oms, I felt out of control. The sound was therapeutic to hear when

coming from the other meditators, but as I sat between Om sounds, I felt the sound of my own silence hanging heavily over my head, widening the gaps of space between myself and the other yoga students, wondering if they were listening to my pause. With eyes closed, I tried to exhale deeply, contracting my navel closer to my spine, wringing all the air out of my body before my lungs could balloon wide with breath on my next inhale. My intention was to let an Om sound slide down the next long exhale, but instead my breath kept getting stuck in my throat. I could hear different voices beginning and ending a wave of Oms with little hesitation or pause, so after an unreasonable amount of effort, my inner critic faulted tone-deafness as a valid excuse for steeling my lungs with cold, stagnant air and relinquished the possibility of my Oms creating warm and silky sounds like those I heard coming from the others.

Defined only by an aural essence, not words, Om has long remained a symbolic syllable, vibrating across the experience of creation, first (with an "ah" sound), the maintenance of life energy, second (with an "oh" sound), and the grounding feeling of transformation, third (with an "oom" sound) before silence inevitably follows as the lungs begin to fill with air once more. In a Sea of Oms, yoga practitioners and meditators can lift up their voices on the long lilt of a vowel sound, one after another, overlapping and overflowing out into space without hesitation or embarrassment. The sound washes over bodies and unclenches the tightest of minds.

A few months later, at the end of another yoga class, I waded through my second Sea of Oms. I found myself freezing, at times, my lungs feeling unnecessarily tight and rigid. At other times, though, my Om felt more natural, almost softer than before. Each inhalation brought a subtle chill of fresh air, and a few exhalations brought a balmier breath up to my throat. Letting go of my breath without inhibition made the rinsing effect of the Om sound easier to enjoy as the sensation of each sound rippled out through the rest of my body, bringing me to an important meditative insight on that day: my inner writer creates, and my inner critic consumes.

Those first three paragraphs in my essay excerpt above were the most challenging ones to write because I carried the responsibility of defining an ancient tradition, the chanting of "*Om*," and describing the ethereal nature of this meditation practice, which is unlike any other style of meditation I've encountered. I learned, though, that defining a relatively unknown cultural practice for an unfamiliar audience challenged my pre-writing understanding of the experience, reaffirming that the genre of "This I Believe" essays presents opportunities for students to engage in a metacognitive style of reflection that is rarely realized in any activity other than writing. In the next section of my essay below, I expand my previous mention of my inner critic, building up to the lesson I want my student readers to retain:

I believe that creativity comes at writers like a reverberating Sea of Oms. When creativity decides to perch up in my office and shoot the breeze, it's usually because she's heard that my inner critic was dropped off at a Starbucks or left on a meeting room table after I mentioned a fruitful idea to my Studio's director. When creativity knocks once with an idea, there's usually a second and a third knock, sometimes too many knocks to handle as I try to write all the ideas down before the scope of my creative endeavor gets out of control. Even so, I welcome every idea and start to study them as they swirl around in my mind. Why? Because eventually creativity's wild brainstorming session will come to an end in the same way the sound of the Om will trickle away in silence before the next sound is created by some inhibitionless voice. Much like the first "ah" sound that forms an Om, I always begin by creating some kind of energy before I

know exactly when that "ah" will be transformed into an "oh," bringing with it a grounding feeling of satisfaction. Creative moments satiate my mind.

> *As a consumer of words, I know, too, that taking in the many words already written in articles and books can feed my inner critic. Any text sugared by someone else's lovely language only makes me crave more sugar--rather than working to sweeten what I already have. Paying too much attention to other people's Oms may feel relaxing, initially, but listening never fulfills my need to create the sound in my own mind. Notes in my meditation logs make perfectly clear the days when I've been most receptive to creativity and the days when I've felt most trapped by my inner critic's mindless chatter. What I find most helpful are the opportunities to create alongside other writers and to submit my voice to a group of meditators collaborating in a Sea of Oms. In both creation practices, ideas move with me and through me with a nonjudgmental awareness of what's possible for me, and for having struggled to create in both contexts, I've learned to let go of the writerly tendency to consume.*

On a primary level, I began this personal writing assignment to reinvigorate how I teach this genre. On a secondary level, I began to realize that through the writing of this essay I could also teach my students more about a style of meditation that hasn't been popularized by mainstream media or the fitness industry. The tertiary benefit I did not anticipate was how meaningful this personal essay would feel to me. My thoughts on writing as a sea of oms relates to my struggle to walk a tightrope of creativity and consumption, a challenge I've since discussed in class with my students. For this first-year composition course, I did not ask my students to engage in practicing a Sea of Oms for several reasons, such as the extended amount of time it takes to begin and end this practice and my own newness with the practice. What was most rewarding overall was feeling challenged by a genre I thought I understood so well, only to be reminded that what my students learn, I must always strive to relearn.

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Decoding Each Other through Coding: Sharing Our Unlikely Research Collaboration

Beth Godbee and Adrianne Wojcik

This narrative is a story of our cross-disciplinary collaboration. While teachers and researchers in English studies often share stories of teaching, we too infrequently share those of research. The consequence is that the everyday, lived experiences of conducting inquiry and doing research—the key intellectual activities in *all learning*—become muted, if not hidden. In response, we relate here our journey of teaching and learning the method of qualitative coding.

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It's late Wednesday afternoon, as we're finishing our first collaborative coding session. The two of us look up from our laptops. We have papers, notes, and hot tea spread across the small, round table in Beth's office. We've each just reviewed the same bit of transcript, a document representing one of Beth's interviews conducted with writers and tutors who meet regularly in campus and community writing centers. Now we're ready to compare our qualitative "codes," or labels for recurring patterns that we've added to the transcript. These codes reveal the themes and outliers we've identified through analysis of the data.

By this point, Beth has reviewed this and other transcripts many times, as she conducted and transcribed the interviews for her dissertation research in composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies. Now a faculty member at Marquette University, Beth has been working with these transcripts for years, yet still finds new ways of interpreting what she reads and continues to be curious and surprised by what emerges. In contrast, Adrianne has never coded before. As a doctoral candidate in Victorian literature and a research assistant (RA) in Marquette's English Department, Adrianne has performed a range of research tasks from locating and copying sources to checking references and editing manuscripts. This coding project is her first venture into qualitative research, and she's still making sense of new terms like "qualitative analysis" and "coding."

On this late Wednesday afternoon, the two of us compare our initial coding categories, and we find more common ground than one might imagine. We both note the importance of tutoring relationships and the ways in which roles are conflated (e.g., a tutor is also considered a writing confidant, a friend, a student, and a colleague). Alongside these patterns, we also notice some intriguing differences, such as how we understand what it means when a writer says she values the tutor's "voice" and having that person's voice in her head. Does a coding category like "VOICE" refer only to one's literal speaking voice or the voice represented through writing or even imagined, perceived, or desired voices? Such questions open, for us, the ongoing discussion, rethinking, and refinement of coding categories.

At first, our collaboration may seem unlikely, if not misaligned. Neither Adrianne's studies in literature nor her typical work as an RA directly apply to this project. Given our different disciplinary orientations, research interests, and methodologies, it's possible that we never would have met (or at least not collaborated) within our department. Yet, whether coincidental or serendipitous, this unlikely collaboration has led to our own research-and-writing relationship. Together, we have analyzed a number of interview transcripts, furthering Beth's research agenda and giving Adrianne hands-on research experience, while we are learning to think more creatively together. Through an ongoing process of teaching and learning qualitative coding—a process that began with our side-by-side coding on this Wednesday afternoon—we've learned and taught each other to see the same data in different ways. We've built a collaborative relationship that has allowed for mentoring beyond the coding project, and we've considered the value of sharing research stories like the one we relate here.

Seeking a Research Partner (Beth)

As a qualitative researcher, I appreciate having multiple people—multiple analysts or reviewers—involved in processing, discussing, and especially *coding* data. Not only do multiple perspectives bring new insights into a project, but multiple perspectives also raise new questions that help with seeing and re-seeing emergent patterns. Over the years, I have worked closely with interview transcripts—reading them line-by-line, noting patterns within and across interviews, and linking codes with prominent categories within my conceptual framework. That said, when returning to the transcripts after conducting a series of follow-up interviews, I knew that a fresh approach would help me to fill in gaps and cover new ground.

In our department, faculty members submit requests to be paired with RAs, all of whom are graduate students in literary studies. Luckily, Adrianne and I had been matched with each other previously, and so she was familiar with my larger project focused on relational communication (and identifying how writing relationships can bolster writers and their assertions of epistemic rights). When I asked Adrianne if she was open to learning qualitative coding, she showed willingness to learn and began reading both methodological guides and documents framing the project, including grant proposals, initial findings, and one of my previous articles. I also shared with Adrianne the full methods chapter of my dissertation, which included (1) names of codes and sub-codes, (2) definitions, and (3) examples of each. The following is an example of one initial code, which we revised and folded under a broader category of "RELATIONS" through our re-coding process:

> ***NOT ALONE***—coming to recognize that you're not alone, not an anomaly; being vulnerable with/to another person; hearing others' stories and finding strength together
>
> Example from Jane (pseudonym), writer in the main writing center:
>
> "You know dissertations can be a very dreadful experience. It's alone. Because nobody can help you with the writing. You have to do it yourself. It's a very lonely journey that you are doing. But this long-term working with [Tutor's Name] and developing a relationship—not only does she know my dissertation, but I know she will be very happy when I start collecting data. She *was very happy* when I finished my collecting data. 'Oh! That's wonderful.' I would always tell her what's the status: 'I'm now going through IRB, going through [Hospital Name's] IRB. Now I can do this. Now I can do that!'"

While reviewing these materials and reading interview excerpts like the one above, Adrianne also completed training modules for Marquette's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and reviewed some of my past coding (to get a sense of the process). From there, we began working in a shared google folder, where Adrianne and I constructed documents to define and refine our coding categories, to organize coded and uncoded transcripts, and to document questions and concerns. As Adrianne added to these materials, we also met

weekly: at first, checking in about our research goals, then coding together, then coding separately, and finally with Adrianne coding on her own and reporting on each week's findings. The process was emergent and spanned more than a year's time, leading to in-depth conversations ranging from discussion of writing and writing centers (the focus of the study) to comparisons of qualitative coding with other research methods (particularly with close reading, the method Adrianne is using for her dissertation research).

Discovering My Inner Coder (Adrianne)

None of my previous RA responsibilities involved data analysis, so coming into this project, I wasn't sure what to expect. What I learned is that unlike some of the more clerical tasks associated with my research assistantship, this work truly engaged me *as a researcher*, as someone who needed deep intellectual engagement to make sense of "raw data." Although I was not involved in gathering the data, I critically analyzed it as a true collaborator in research.

Even at the beginning stage, I was excited about qualitative coding: though this method of reading text was entirely new to me, it reminded me of the close reading method I often use as a literary scholar. Right away I saw similarities. With both qualitative coding and close reading, the researcher pays careful attention to the written text, looks for recurring themes that shape meaning, and pinpoints evidence in the text itself. With both methods, the researcher brings their own theoretical perspectives and personal subjectivities, which shape the analysis in particular ways, even when efforts are made toward the most fair or unbiased reading possible. And with both methods, the researcher wants others to *trust* their analysis and, therefore, works to ensure that readings/findings are reasonable to others.

After our initial coding session on the Wednesday we describe, I began reading and reviewing transcripts on my own. I became confident after coding alongside Beth, feeling reassured that our codes mostly aligned. However, we also quickly discovered some differences when we coded the same sections, which alerted us to the need for a few additional coding categories in some cases, and the need to collapse categories in other cases. As an example, within just a few weeks, I saw that the code "VALUE" could mean anything the participants valued: from visiting the writing center and working with a particular writing partner/tutor to developing a regular writing practice to just writing itself. The potential variations and *many* sub-codes of "VALUE" became too numerous to count, and the category ceased being useful as it began to describe all responses rather than any unique pattern/phenomenon.

Even as I worked to add, refine, and define codes and sub-codes, I wanted to be sure that my coding didn't change the focus of Beth's qualitative inquiry. After all, every categorization indicates a new way of reading the text and encourages a new interpretation of the broader pattern/phenomenon. Therefore, I met with Beth often, gained familiarity with the research questions, and also practiced keeping a list of tentative changes (e.g., new sub-codes and suggested deletions) that we talked through before implementing.

In addition to the actual qualitative coding, much of my work involved writing clear definitions and compiling illustrative examples of the various codes and sub-codes. This

definitional work involved noticing connections and cross-referencing categories whenever they appeared to overlap with regularity. As the list of codes and sub-codes grew and grew, I eventually had a document of twenty-six pages and fourteen primary codes. Such a long list reflected the subtlety of codes and the noting of outliers in addition to recurring themes. Yet, the long list also became impractical and overwhelming to use. As I conflated and clarified codes and sub-codes, I was able to trim the list to two pages with six codes—a more manageable list that represented the data more clearly.

Throughout this process, I discovered that researchers must know their data well—and must have sifted through multiple iterations and explanations of likely categories before settling on ones that *best* describe patterns. Though time-intensive, this process also results in the "thick description" that ethnographers and other qualitative researchers hope to achieve in their reports. For my part as an RA, making important decisions and determining relationships among codes/sub-codes heightened my interest in the work. My experience as an RA no longer involved the semi-drudgery of collecting and reproducing materials, but required my interpretation of it. I really enjoyed the room for interpretation and creativity in the research process. The more I could clarify the codes, the more I wanted to understand the meaning of their relationships, and in this way, I could see myself truly contributing to original research.

De-Coding Each Other through Coding

We share here our stories side-by-side to highlight the teaching and learning involved in research activities, hoping to emphasize a mindful, relational approach to learning via research. Many of us participate in collaborative research, many of us spend our time sorting through large data sets or textual materials, and many of us supervise or work as RAs. Though our narrative only scratches the surface of much larger matters, we hope that by sharing it, we invite and inspire others stories of research. Imagine if we took seriously the mandate to record research as "learningful" experiences in need of narration, in need of unveiling messy and relational processes of meaning-making.

In our case, we appreciate what the other person contributed to this coding project. As a faculty member, I (Beth) especially appreciated having another person involved in research, making what could be a solitary process social and relational. Thinking *meta*, Adrianne and I were building our relationship and coming to understand each other (i.e., de-coding each other) as we were coding participants' self-reports into *why* relationships matter in the writing process. Not only did we come to value the other's insights, questions, and sometimes-challenges—preventing a too-easy or too-simple coding schema—but we also learned to value the other's disciplinary training and position.

As a research assistant, I (Adrianne) especially valued the opportunity to do meaningful research work (beyond piecemeal or clerical tasks). Even as I was challenged by working outside my primary research area, I also brought the habits of mind and my experience of reading texts closely into qualitative analysis. More than just seeing similarities between coding and close reading, I used my training in literary studies to participate in cross-disciplinary research and to learn another methodological approach. Further, the hours spent coding led me to think more about the ways I approach texts and to think in terms of "patterns" and "outliers" (the language of qualitative analysis).

This learning now lingers in the back of my mind as I continue with my own dissertation research, seeking to explain why texts matter and what they have to say, similar to what participants communicate through interviews.

On that Wednesday afternoon, now several years ago, we opened ourselves to learning with, alongside, and from each other. Not only were we learning from the participants and their interview transcripts, but we were also learning from each other's backgrounds, disciplinary orientations, and ways of understanding the world. Openness to such learning and teaching typically defines collaborative research, yet needs to be developed and practiced again and again within faculty-RA relationships and mentoring. Just as qualitative coding asks us to look and look again, we ask you, as readers: Where might unlikely collaborations be found in your life? How might they enhance your research projects? And how might we consider research itself and related research relationships as part of our expanded perspectives on learning?

✦

Dress Up

Laurence Musgrove

If there's an end to the words
We use to control each other,
I can't see it from where I sit
And I expect you can't either.
After we made this machine,
It started making other machines
That made even more machines.
Still, it's all the same language
Made to keep us (every one of us)
Under its thumb, because once
We start letting our feelings
Refuse to play dress up in letters,
No telling what'll happen next.

Tree

When I'm not covering it with
My hands and paper and books
You can see the wood of my desk
And the grain pooling on top
Or spreading across the surface
Like a river in a hurry flows
Where a tree once stood and drank
When the clouds had plenty to pour
Or the years when the river sat dry
And those are the years it made
The story this wood is telling us now.

✦

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Corporal Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning as Bodily Arts
Special section, *JAEPL*

While the body is always mediated and mediating, the stubborn, irreducible presence of our physical selves continues to challenge, provoke, and radicalize our teaching and learning. Traditional Western hierarchies and print culture favored a disembodied intellectual discourse that obscured the body's status as a productive epistemological site. However, social movements have combined and collided with technological trajectories of representation to make visible and reposition the relationship between being and embodiment, "to challenge the centering of subjectivities in the mind" (Selzer 1999).

For teaching and learning, focus on the body often means paying attention to lived experience and "situated-ness." What happens to the literal "student body" in our classrooms and what happens to teachers' bodies as our classroom practices necessarily continue to transform themselves in the face of cultural crises and technological developments? This special issue seeks to explore how our classrooms might "re-engage and experiment with sensory connections other than the relentlessly visually reductive" (Wysocki 2014) pedagogies and modes/genres of traditional literacy practices that have previously dominated our classrooms, especially in secondary and higher education. For the ancient Greeks, rhetoric was a "bodily art" (Hawhee 2004). What happens when we understand teaching and learning as bodily arts that holistically engage us rather than disconnect us from our embodied selves?

Without denying the significance of the trend that sees embodiment as inextricably tied to and invoking broader aspects of materiality and production, I use the word "corporal" rather than the expected "corporeal" to reemphasize the "bodily" real rather than the imaginary or merely tangible. The body in discourse often emerges concomitantly with discussions of emotion and questions of privacy that paradigms of intellect have sidestepped or elided. How does the body liberate and limit us when we refuse to allow it to be dissipated in metaphor or obscured in broader materiality? What is at stake and for whom?

Topics might include but are not limited to:

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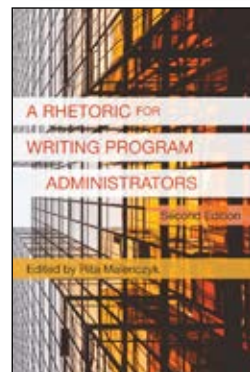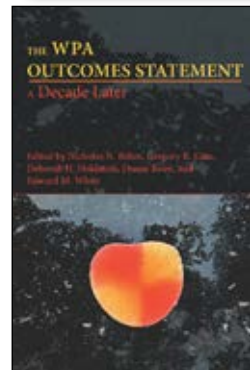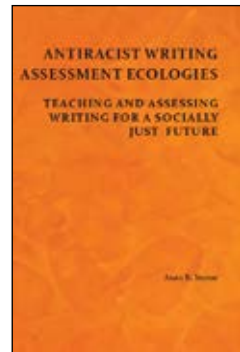
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