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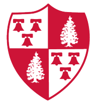
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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

A Case of Identity

by

Robert R. Sillery

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

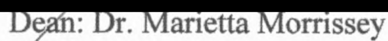
Master of Arts in English

August 2010

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

English Department

Certified by:



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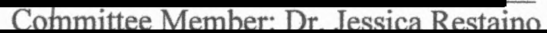

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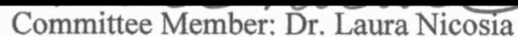

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A CASE OF IDENTITY

by
Robert R. Sillery

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in
The Department of English in
The Graduate Program of
Montclair State University
August 2010

A Case of Identity

In this thesis, I examine the writing pedagogy known as identity negotiation. I focus specifically on the models Robert E. Brooke presents in his book, *Writing and Sense of Self: Identity Negotiation in Writing Workshops*, and in several essays. I also review later adaptations of this theory by such writers as Zan Goncalves, Nancy Welch, Lad Tobin and Bronwyn Williams. Finally, I will discuss practical applications of identity theory in the STRUGGLE program in Pittsburgh and in programs that are affiliated with the National Writing Project.

Throughout, I analyze and affirm Brooke's argument that identity negotiation is so woven into human psychological growth that it ought to be emphasized in writing instruction. I agree with the author's contention that teaching writing as a form of identity negotiation enhances instruction and increases the chances of that instruction's success. I will discuss various further benefits that writing students will derive from identity-negotiation strategy.

Chapter I—Defining Identity

Standard definitions of the term "identity" cite "the part of the person that refers to one's real self," but stipulate that such a self-concept is "based *in part* [italics mine] on one's status and roles in the world" (Weiner et al xxx). So identity negotiation involves both an individual's ongoing inner negotiation and his or her terms of engagement with the outer world. It extends both inward and outward. The concept of locality, or the influence of

environment on identity, has moved to the forefront in more recent variations on identity-negotiation pedagogy—for example, in the writings of Welch (55), Tobin (44-56), and Zan Goncalves (1-26).

Brooke cites social psychologist Erving Goffman's three categories of the term *identity*. For Brooke, and for me, the third category, "ego identity," is the most appropriate in the context of this thesis. For Goffman, this definition means "what [the individual] wishes to be or to project" (qtd. in Brooke 13). This gives identity a wide scope, including what individuals hope to become, what they hope others perceive them to be, how they perceive themselves, or how they feel they need to present themselves to others.

Mikhail Bahktin illuminates the concept of identity in a most useful manner. His explanation involves perception and point of view. The tension between the dual engagements with the inner and outer worlds is part of the conflict Brooke exhorts the teacher to help the student access through writing instruction. In their contribution to *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson explain Bahktin's viewpoint as follows:

> At any given moment, each of us is a person in two senses: an "I-for-myself" (how I feel from inside to my own consciousness) and an "I-for-the-other (how I look from outside to somebody else). Although both perspectives are real, only the latter is articulate and palpable. I-for-myself … is the realm of potential, of unrealized alternatives and unformed dreams. In principle, it is constantly in flux, dissatisfied with any given act

> because it knows that every-thing alive is unfinalized and could have been different or better. (qtd. in Emerson and Morsan n. pag.)

As composition pedagogy, identity negotiation, or negotiation of what individuals wish to be and to project so that others may perceive it as identity, qualifies as an example of what critics, theorists, scholars and educators call process theory. Identity-negotiation theory is a process-oriented pedagogical approach because it concentrates, not on a predetermined final product, but on a series of steps *toward* a final product, rather than by introducing a final product and devoting the class toward activities that require students to emulate that product. In identity-negotiation theory, writing exercises fuel direct identity negotiation and foster *engagement* with assignments and with writing in general.

Identity-negotiation pedagogy is distinct in the levels of process it makes available, but it *does* use a series of processes to reach an objective. Identity-negotiation theory is far more fluid and flexible than the process approach Robert J. Connors analyzed in his 1997 *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*. Connors' description of the process approach is bare-bones: planning, writing, and revising (105).

The varieties of identity-negotiation theory I will discuss add highly innovative elements to provoke student engagement during the levels of the process, a factor that the process method as Connors describes it does not entail. Stimuli for engagement in identity negotiation may include, for example, public relations writing at an off-campus site, composing fund-raising material for an important cause, or even communicating with fellow students and with teachers through a computer network at an electronic "dinner table."

Identity-negotiation pedagogy involves a confidence that if students genuinely engage with the steps; come to trust in the process and in its value; and come to take pride in their writing; they will eventually be able to communicate more effectively. It can not guarantee, of course, that any individual student will achieve writing skill—often the hurdles to this are unforeseen and daunting. When a student engages with writing and works toward using it to communicate effectively, however, identity-negotiation pedagogy recognizes and endorses these developments as significant steps forward, and as springboards toward further advances in writing facility.

A process—in this case, writing—that helps us formulate an identity and project that identity, that helps us find our place in the world around us and influence that world, is obviously of benefit. Identity-negotiation pedagogy is designed to help students *experience* that benefit in the belief that such an experience will provide motivation to hone that skill in whatever form of writing they choose to pursue, be it academic writing, journalism, corporate communications, diary writing, proposal writing, essay writing, advocacy—the list is virtually endless.

Brooke contends that the identity-negotiation process works optimally when it mirrors the steps by which we learn—and by which we develop our individual identities—throughout life itself. Brooke identifies that particular, lifelong process as identity negotiation. I contend that, while identity-negotiation pedagogy fits most neatly into process theory, traces of identity negotiation will emerge no matter what pedagogy the instructor uses or the theorist endorses. This must be so because identity negotiation is deeply entwined in the human life of which writing is a part.

As with everyone who has traversed the educational system, I have negotiated my identity in response to the various types of writing instruction I have received, from grammar school through graduate school. As a master's degree candidate, writing a thesis surely involves identity negotiation.

Do the innovations identity-negotiation pedagogy brings to process theory merit a "post-process" appellation? Is identity-negotiation post-process, advanced-process or enhanced-process? I believe that adhering inflexibly to a single approach in composition instruction is a less-than-desirable strategy. This has become particularly apparent to me in the high school writing classes with which I am most familiar, where an instructor may need more than a single approach at his or her command. What is most important is that any particular pedagogy makes sense and improves writing skill.

I further argue that identity negotiation may be applied pedagogically in the classroom or may at least be considered an attitude that benefits any of the theories that have struggled to reach the forefront of academic acceptance. If life requires the continual negotiation and renegotiation of identity, awareness of this ongoing process ought to be as important in composition pedagogy as it is in life.

To achieve a refinement of the understanding of identity negotiation, I define it as a theory that—when applied to the teaching of composition—uses assignments, projects and other instruction particularly designed to activate personal responses, usually (to state things colloquially) by stimulating, even provoking, some form of internal "commotion" in student identity. The student uses writing to work through the unsettling ambiguities and challenges the instruction initiates. This writing theory uses identity negotiation to

engage students, to help them see the benefits of writing, and to care about their writing, with the expectation that this will propel them toward greater writing fluency.

Chapter II—Theories

As I have argued, identity-negotiation pedagogy involves an emphasis on process. The process method of teaching composition replaced the "current-traditional rhetoric method," a term originated by James Berlin in his 1987 *Rhetoric and Reality* (7). In 1997, Connors described it as a "product approach" (104). Descriptions of this pedagogy have taken a decidedly negative turn, such as a: "disapproving term for textbook-based approaches to composition instruction popular during the first two-thirds of the 20th Century" (Nordquist n. pag.). For the sake of simplicity, I will shorten "current-traditional rhetoric method" to "traditional rhetoric method" or "product approach" throughout.

As its name implies, the process approach places more value on the steps involved in instruction than does the traditional rhetoric approach. The older pedagogy focuses on the finished product, suggesting that if students complete exercises in modeling excellent writing, their own product will gradually achieve excellence. Only one step is involved—to imitate excellent writing whenever and wherever possible. The student writer is asked to leap from exercise to excellence in one imitative stroke.

Before I begin an analysis of identity negotiation, and Brooke's model of the theory, a look at the "traditional rhetoric" approach and notation of the evolution of prevalent pedagogy away from the product approach to the process approach, and beyond the

process approach to post-process and the social approach, is appropriate. As Pritchard and Honeycutt state in "The Process Approach to Writing Instruction: Examining Its Effectiveness," the writing-process instructional model emerged as a pedagogical approach in the 1970s" (275).

Phyllis Newcomer is not gentle in her description of the transition: the arrival of this new approach relegated the product approach, she says, to "outmoded" status (559). Sarah J. McCarthey has noted that the writing pedagogy has shifted away from a focus on the written product, featuring instead an emphasis on the "complexities" of the writing process (1). As I shall argue, these complexities represent an opportunity to fine-tune classroom approaches, offering such variable strategies as modeling, free-writing or peer editing.

The movement toward process pedagogy roughly mirrors a transition in the general teaching of English as a subject as well. In 1966, about 50 American and English teachers who met at a 'Seminar on the Teaching of and Learning of English" at Dartmouth College expressed the need to transition the teaching of English from something students *learn about* to something they *do*:

> After Dartmouth… you could think of English as not simply a patchwork of literary texts, figures and periods, but as the study of how language in all its forms is put into use…. An old model of teaching centered on the transmission of skills (composition) and knowledge (literature) gave way to a *growth model* focusing on the experiences of students and how these are shaped by their uses of language. (Harris 1)

Chapter III—Problems, Dissatisfactions, and Misconceptions

As Lisa Ede states in "On Process, Social Process, and Post-Process," dissatisfaction with process theory began emerging in the late 1980s, leading to what has been termed "post-process theory" and "social-process theory" (83-4). Ede minimizes distinctions among these theories, contending that these more recent pedagogies do *not* represent movements distinct from or "mutually exclusive" to process theory; rather, all three are interrelated, adding merit to my argument the various process theories are not mutually exclusive. The two later theories, she further argues, are merely "permutations" of process theory (84-5).

The criticisms of process theory, as Ede documents them, are faulty, and identity-negotiation pedagogy offers positive responses to the criticisms. In her definition of process theory, Marilyn Cooper articulates the first form of dissatisfaction that Ede documents. Cooper states that process theory involves "certain universal stages," suggesting an unnecessary rigidity (qtd. in Ede 81). However, as identity negotiation as a form of process theory exemplifies, the process stages are quite flexible and capable of teacher modification—they need not be universal, nor need they apply to every classroom lesson plan or curriculum. Teachers have a variety of strategies at their disposal

Instructors need not use every so-called "universal" stage; particularly at the high school level, imaginative teachers can insert, at various steps in the process, activities of their own creation that represent individual, rather than universal, student needs, and that can be modified in light of student reactions to the process of identity negotiation, or to

other student needs. For example, free-writing, or brainstorming, may replace such traditional forms of planning as the outline, a staple of the planning process Connor described. Instructors should not employ *any* pedagogical theory in a rigidly non-adaptive way, unless that theory is being particularly studied in a theory class.

Identity-negotiation pedagogy is hardly the "formulaic" process that Joseph Harris has criticized in process theory. Indeed, Harris's contention that process theory is centered on "various algorithms, heuristics, and guidelines for composing" (qtd. in Ede 84) seems to indicate a familiarity with only certain rigid forms of process theory. He is surely, at least, not describing identity negotiation.

Cooper wonders "if our thinking is not being severely limited by a concept of process that explains only the cognitive processes that occurs as people write" (Cooper 363). This is a misconception, especially as concerns identity negotiation. As a pedagogy designed for implementation, Brooke's theory is concerned not so much with *explaining* processes as helping students *experience* such processes. And to say process theorists have no interest in a final product is unfair. Instructors using process theory in general and identity-negotiation theory in particular are surely concerned with a final product.

What that final product will look like, however, is not certain. It will vary according to the identity of the individual students and how their negotiations unfold. The assumption of what a final product, will look like—as if there were a required "cookie-cutter mold" into which it must fit—is unrealistic and oppressive. In identity-negotiation theory, what *is* certain is that the final product will not be a mere recreation of prescribed writing and that it will compel the student to negotiate identity.

Harris exhibits another misconception. "It is useful," he says, "for students to learn to distinguish among the activities of drafting, revising, and editing text .... but I don't think that such insights began with the 1970s process movement" (58). Correctly taught, the process movement and identity-negotiation do more than help students "distinguish" between the levels of process. Harris is "against a view of teaching that places some vision of the composition process *rather than an interest in the work of students* [italics mine] at the center of a course of writing. This is an unfair diminishment of process theory.

In another "dissatisfaction" that Ede cites, Lester Faigley's criticism of process theory is based on a fairly conventional twisting of logic: inflating an argument or theory to a point at which even its advocates would not agree with it. Faigley scores process theory for its "failure to fulfill the goal of `empowering' students as part of a larger project of creating equality through education" (qtd. in Ede 82). The road to creating such equality is a long, hard one, for the powers of inequality are entrenched. No single educational theory has yet succeeded in this achievement, nor is any likely to in the immediate future. Indeed, progress is slow and inconsistent, occurring "in increments, rather than in massive transformations," as Ede later points out (82).

No advocate of any procedure, process or theory ought to imply or assert that the viewpoint he or she champions has an exclusive hold on value—or that earlier theories or practices are devoid of usefulness. As outmoded as the tradition rhetorical approach is, it is the pedagogy many capable writers "cut their teeth on." At least in my own case, it was not totally ineffective. I have come to believe, however, that as I grappled with the traditional method from grade school through college, I gradually conducted my own,

independent identity negotiation with it, transitioning from slavish imitation to my own distinct styles and viewpoints. The breakaways also mirrored certain changes in how I came to perceive myself.

Chapter IV—Revisiting an Old Acquaintance

Because the process approach is often usefully compared with the product approach, and because I am quite familiar with this earlier, traditional approach, examining it will be beneficial to my ongoing argument. Examples of the product approach are found, among other places, in *Warriner's English Grammar and Composition: Complete Course*, a common grammar and composition text of its time. Let us turn back the clock to reference the version of *Warriner's* re-edited by John Warriner in 1973 for high school seniors, a text which I used during my first year of high school teaching in 1977.

Throughout, *Warriner's* couples examples of less-than excellent writing with "improved" versions of the same paragraphs. Students are instructed to take note of the differences and then perform exercises requiring similar improvements, and finally to write essays that reflect these improvements. Here is an example of such a pairing from *Warriner's*, with less-than-excellent first, followed by the improved version. An undistinguished sentence, "The lighted houses were black against the sky," contrasts with "The homes stood … black against the sky, like wild beasts glaring curiously with yellow eyes down into the darkness" (285), written by D.H. Lawrence. When I taught the concept by using this and other examples, I discovered that students often found the "improved" versions to be "stupid," needlessly ornate, and generally alien. Presenting

students with examples of superior writing and exhorting them to emulate those examples yielded confusion and half-hearted effort, with unsatisfactory results, throughout that 1977-8 school year. In short, the strategy was ineffective.

There are reasons, of course, why the strategy yielded disappointing results. Through experience, I have come to regard the traditional-rhetoric approach as an example of well-intentioned but generally ineffective advice on how to live and, consequently how to write (somewhat akin to instructing students to imitate Abraham Lincoln or some other worthy famous person—better to let them learn about Lincoln and draw their own conclusions).. It is roughly as useful as attempting to teach painting through the timeless *Venus Paradise Paint-by-Numbers* approach—the student owns neither the learning process nor its product—and consequently engages with neither in the manner that a real painter, or someone striving to be such a painter, would.

In the "Shaping Tools" chapter of *Composition-Rhetoric*, Connors singles out a single essay, Porter Perrin's *The Remedial Racket* of 1933, for being the sole expression of the idea that "handbooks and workbooks are by their nature the wrong answer to the question of remediation.... These exercises ... violate the lone principal that present teachers of composition have salvaged from 2,500 years of the discipline of rhetoric, that one learns to speak and write by speaking and writing" (qtd. in Connors 99). Why "racket" in the title? Because, says Perrin, grammar and mechanics, being rather black-and-white, are easier to teach than the much less-certain standards of actual effectiveness in communication" (Connors 149). Writing in 1997, Connors concludes that most of the writing texts of the past were "oppressive masters" (111) ready for replacement by more liberal, open-ended approaches.

In "Modeling a Writer's Identity: Reading and Imitation in the Writing Classroom," Brooke challenges another form of slavish oppression. He draws a distinction between Warriner's imitation exercises and what Brooke calls "modeling." He decries such texts as Miller's *Composition and Decomposition"* and Compey and Scholes's *Literature, Composition and the Structure of English* for advocating the attempted "copying" of good writing. When a student learns something about writing by imitation," he says, it is:

> from imitating another *person*, and not a text or process. Writers learn to write by imitating other writers, by trying to act like writers.... When imitation works, it is because the student writer admires the teacher (or professional writer) enough to want to act like her. When it doesn't, it is because there is no respect, and the exercise in imitation becomes an empty exercise in sterile form. ("Modeling" Brooke 23)

Chapter V—Modeling: Welcome to the Writers' Club

Brooke's comments above require the addition of another element. Lessons work better not only when students respect and admire the teacher, but also when they come to respect the writing itself, and what it can do for them.

In high school, for instance, I wrote a poem—a sonnet, Shakespearean-style, with iambics and rhyme scheme—to satisfy a classroom assignment, and it was chosen for the school literary journal. When I saw it in print, I was filled with astonishment at the fact that I had written it, and that the words in the fourteen lines indeed were mine, right there

on paper and enclosed in the journal. My parents were stunned: "You wrote that?" they marveled. I was already feeling proud.

My grandmother, a chronically grumpy Austrian immigrant with only a grammar-school education, whose self-taught English left her sounding like a foreigner, much to her dismay, for her entire life, exclaimed to me in wonder, "you're a genius," after reading the poem. I knew this was hardly a well-informed compliment and that there was a near-infinity between the denizens of the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey and myself, but I knew as well how much it pleased her that her grandson was fluent enough in her adopted language to have his words published. It was the first time she ceased her litany of woes and complaints in months.

I was only on the farthest rung of the writers' fraternity, but I felt like a member nonetheless. I sailed on cloud nine, and was hooked on writing. Even though I entered on the fringes, I had joined a group—published writers—that I admired very much. My identity had expanded: I was a published and practicing writer. I had *experienced* what it felt like to b a writer. In identity-negotiation theory, I had engaged.

As part of my participation as a volunteer in a writing-instruction program in a local middle school, I enjoyed watching an instructor teach poetry writing to an eighth-grade class. An older gentleman, he was not at all embarrassed at tapping into his beatnik past. The walls of his classroom were filled with abstract art posters, student poems and posters of such beat writers as Kerouac and Ginsberg. Students read their poetry sitting on a high stool under a bright light with other students gathered around coffee house-style. One student beat on a bongo drum the teacher may have rescued from his attic.

This was clearly an identity negotiation that was easy for students to say "yes" to. Their teacher had invited them to sample membership in a fascinating club. Throughout the day, talk in the hall among the students was about how "cool" the class and the teacher were. The instructor had invited students to experience what it would be like to be part of a group of poetry readers and listeners. They found it to be a lot of fun. The impact of this process upon final products the students would eventually produce was uncertain, but many of the students responded with engagement: they *wanted* the spotlight. When a process offers this form of enticement, a favorable negotiation is likely. The engagement and enthusiasm will push many students to write with enthusiasm.

I have used other high school literature assignments to help students feel like writers. "Imagine," I instructed a class, "that you are a reporter at the *Salem Gazette* during the time that Arthur Miller described in *The Crucible*. Your managing editor bursts into the room shouting, "There is some commotion all over town. People are accusing each other of being witches. You, there, cub reporter, this is your big chance for a juicy byline. Hit the street. Find out who's involved, get some interviews, and file a story for tomorrow's edition." Some students negotiated, and received permission, to create a television interview instead. Today, a blog on the witch hunt would be appropriate. Or perhaps Twitter.

Or, "pretend you are Lord or Lady Macbeth. Write a daily diary recording your thoughts as the events of Shakespeare's play unfolds. Try to imagine how the characters might have really felt as they did their dastardly deeds. Your diary is personal; you don't think anyone will read it. So go ahead, spill out your thoughts."

These were two of my most well-received assignments. In these cases, the students not only feel like writers, they *act* like writers. I found my students casting off boredom and indifference and writing with enthusiasm: a small entry point into the writers' club.

Chapter VI Answering the Critics

The celebration of nonconformity and the value of modeling that I witnessed in the beatnik poetry exercise provide a contrast to the imitation that Brooke has criticized in the product theory. Of course, traditional-rhetoric is not alone in absorbing criticism; the process approach has drawn fire as well. Research that Pritchard and Honeycutt report in "The Process Approach to Writing Instruction" indicates that: (a) the process method has become more complex, absorbing a variety of theories and procedures; (b) while the pedagogy originally called for very little teacher intervention, it now "demands careful scaffolding and creating lessons that traverse the entire process"; (c) it has become the dominant mode of teaching writing in K through 12; (d) a wide variety of tests confirm that process writing is the most effective method of instruction in K-12, at least ; but finally (e) this testing is widely unscientific, limited in scope, anecdotal, or otherwise flawed." In conclusion, "practitioners still need theories of teaching writing that are firmly grounded in research," they state (275-85).

To respond to (a), (b), and (d): the fact that the process has become complex is an indication of what Ede has termed "permutations" that have spread throughout the community of scholars and teachers of writing. This is an indication of growth and richness. The fact that a variety of distinct theories and procedures such as identity-

negotiation pedagogy have blossomed forth from process theory is an indication that the varieties of innovative processes offer much from which to choose. Instructors should never be reluctant to prepare a class with "careful scaffolding and creating lessons," so long as they allow those lessons to respond freely to the variability of classroom response. The junior-high school teacher who created the beatnik poetry reading spent a lot of time on his "scaffolding." And as I argue above, teachers need not employ any particular tactic in the permutations of process theory or identity-negotiation theory; they are free to choose what is most appropriate and important to their students. They need the freedom to react in mid-stream to unexpected developments.

Regarding criticism (d), writing is an art rather than a science. Scientific testing is a necessary comparative measuring stick, but it should never be the final arbiter of what constitutes good writing.

Furthermore, Brooke and his colleague Joy Ritchie *do* present classroom- and workshop-based evidence that the identity-negotiation pedagogy works. And the National Writing Project, which Brooke cites and endorses and of which he has become director of the Nebraska chapter does offer statistics that show the effectiveness of the processes that are part of the identity-negotiation approach.

Gradually, Brooke also unveils what I call the "life-experience argument," contending that identity negotiation is so woven into the fabric of life that ignoring it as a pedagogy misses an insight into life as well as into writing instruction. This argument relies on common sense, simple logic, and the perception that identity negotiation does indeed exist all around us.

Chapter VII –Writing Theories *and* Philosophies

Brooke's suggestion that writing instruction should mirror life processes corresponds to the argument Leon Marcelo makes in his master's thesis, "To Write With Wonder." Though Marcelo's work has not earned recognition, nor has he achieved notoriety as any sort of noted expert, he is a kindred spirit to Brooke.

Brooke and Marcelo are "soul-mates" because both theorists attempt to improve writing instruction with a philosophy rather than an empirically tested pedagogy. Though Brooke's theory can be adapted as a pedagogy as well as a philosophy more easily than can Marcelo's, both his and Marcelo's theories are at root *attitudes* toward writing instruction. And both authors ground their attitudes so thoroughly in common sense that their philosophies merit inclusion in writing pedagogies.

Wonder, as Marcelo expresses it, is as critical to writing as it is important to all aspects of life. Wonder, in my experience, is a spark for life and for inquiry, something that impels us toward rising every morning and savoring the sunrise. Writers tend to wonder about things. So how can wonder help but aid writing, and writing instruction? Arguing that wonder is intrinsic to writing is the wisdom that comes from seeing the obvious with fresh eyes. Brooke's espousal of identity negotiation in writing instruction exhibits similar wisdom.

The advocates of such forms of wisdom, in this case Brooke and Marcelo, present it in the absence of hard scientific proof, though identity-negotiation theory has more empirical results at its disposal than does Marcelo "wonder theory." Yet the theories merge around two points: (1) the fact that our identities are always open to negotiation

invites change, and with it possibilities that that change may be wonderful; and (2) both are well grounded in logic and common sense.

Brooke poses a compelling question. If, as he states, identity negotiation is essential to identity development and is a requisite subset of ongoing interactions with life itself, should not identity negotiation be similarly essential to writing instruction?

The question is rhetorical, and Brooke's answer is a resounding *yes*. If writing instruction fails to engage identity negotiation, Brooke believes (as I now do also) the instruction will have a far-less-than-optimal chance of success.

On its widest scale, an emphasis on identity negotiation implies a distinct viewpoint on life, yielding insight into the ability of a person to navigate the demands of existence in a rewarding manner, and helping to solidify and track the evolution of personal growth.

Brooke bases his observations on studies in sociology, anthropology and psychology, and on classroom experience. He describes identity negotiation as a continuing series of dynamic interactions between individuals and their environments—for example, culture at large, school, business, or a network of friends—that help construct and strengthen the individual's sense of identity (Brooke, *Writing and Sense of Self* 16-7). The manner in which such negotiations are resolved and the importance of the issues involved will affect the development of individual identity and the success or failure of whatever the negotiation involves—such as, within the treatment this paper provides, the willingness to write and even to become a writer. To maximize the chances for success, teachers must themselves take note of identity negotiation in writing instructions and assignments. Identity-negotiation assignments are writing exercises that help students better know who

they are, to be more insightful about how they want to present themselves to the world, and to foster insight into the world so that they might be better able to negotiate with it. Though any good writing assignment ought to require personal insight on the part of a student, writing exercises that follow the identity-negotiation approach have, as I have said, been deliberately crafted to elicit insight into identity.

Teachers may make identity negotiation the overriding principal of a workshop or a semester-length composition class. Or, at least, the idea can be an important check-off for any assignment, as in: "Will this assignment engage the identities of my students?"

Admittedly, instruction with psychological overtones may become inappropriate in the classroom. Tact and discretion on the part of the teacher are essential. The manner in which the student approaches the writer's role is an identity negotiation, and the teacher must be aware of how this negotiation evolves in the classroom. To accomplish this, teachers must acquaint themselves with the distinctive identity of each student, and gain understanding of their own identities and how those identities affect the teacher-student interaction. The students help the teachers achieve this by producing writing that engages identity building and by direct identity negotiations with the teacher. The student-teacher interaction in this manner is the essence of teaching writing through identity negotiation.

Chapter VIII—Authentic Opportunities

Why does the student need to have some sort of authentic identity at all? As Anthony De Mello, an acclaimed Jesuit priest, psychotherapist and founder of the De Mello Spirituality Center at Fordham University, argues in *Awareness: The Perils and*

Opportunities of Reality (a book filled with profundity and practicality), awareness means waking up and seeing the influence of preconceived notions, conformity, and the tendency of society to shape behavior. Making decisions without awareness of who you are or what you are dealing with, or both, makes for poor results—unless the decision-maker gets lucky. Persons without a sense of identity are likely to be inauthentic, finding out too late that they have not conducted their lives in the way they would have wanted at all had they been free of illusion—finding out with regret that they are not the persons they would have wanted to be, to conclude as Eliot's Prufrock does, "I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, / And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, / In short, I was afraid" (84-6). De Mello prescribes "self-observation" as one antidote to belated awareness or absence of awareness altogether (35-7). Writing is a superb method of self-observation.

Applying the concepts of Russian psychologist and educational theorist Lev Vygotsky, Andrea Lunsford argues that when students develop awareness of the role of the writer and the impact of their writing, they develop a "meta-awareness," in this case, an awareness of a process, writing, that is itself an instrument of awareness. Lunsford writes:

> Vygotsky goes on to distinguish between "spontaneous" concepts, those which are formed as a result of ordinary, day-to-day experiences, and "scientific" concepts, which are formed largely in conjunction with instruction. The student[s] described … by Vygotsky … all are able to formulate spontaneous concepts, but not able to remove themselves from such concepts, to abstract from them, or define them into the scientific concepts necessary for successful

> college work. In my experience, basic-writing students most often work at what Vygotsky calls the "thinking in complexes" stage and the spontaneous-concept stage rather than at the true-concept formation stage. While these writers may have little difficulty in dealing with familiar everyday problems requiring abstract thought based on concepts, they are *not aware of the processes they are using.* Thus they often lack the ability to infer principles from their own experience. (39)

By recording, reflecting, critiquing, questioning, endorsing, opposing, and so on, writers sharpen awareness in themselves and in those around them. As this process occurs, Vygotsky implies, awareness increases to the point where it is a "cognitive advance,"—that is, an awareness of the process itself. Students who have reached this point in their writing are ready to decide if they want to be writers. And if they don't want to be writers, they are still probably able to write as well as they want to and need to, when they need to. Not only is willingness important, the shades of willingness—from compliance to commitment—are important. A process that stimulates awareness of the process itself—and its value—thus leads to a successful product: a student who is comfortable with writing and *can* write

Writing exercises that are not designed to activate identity negotiation, identity awareness, awareness of the process of negotiation or awareness of the role of the writer, "go against the grain" of writing, deflect the impact of instruction and erode the possibility of student engagement.

In the transformation of a struggling writer or "basic writer" to full-fledged "writer," the fledgling writer, according to Lunsford's interpretation of Vygotsky, becomes aware

of the process he or she is using and—even more important—endorses it. Such a development creates an agency of self-awareness of inestimable importance in identity negotiation. It is this sort of awareness—awareness of what you are doing and the implications of doing it—that De Mello advocates.

The recognition on the part of the student of the value of writing facility is also crucial to teaching and learning. In writing instruction, awareness is essential to the ultimate valuation of writing. Good writing involves a commitment of the self, and if the writer can use the activity as an entry point to insight on what Bahktin calls the "I-for-myself" and the "I-for-the-other" (Emerson and Morson n. pag.), valuation of writing activity will be enhanced. When writing is solidified in the identity, fledgling writers will respect, value and use writing.

Chapter IX—In the Classroom

The process of identity formation through ongoing negotiation is complex and occurs continually throughout a lifetime. The way people see themselves, how they perceive that others see them, the myriad forces that interact with these perceptions and with the growing sense of identity—the issue is as deep as the fields of psychology and sociology themselves. The research and writing of this thesis has helped convince me that human life in virtually all its aspects is suffused with identity negotiation, from the psychiatrist's couch to the choice of a coffee shop, to the selection of a thesis topic. To force an artificial model upon writing instruction, as John Warriner has done, is to choke the

possibility of the insight that is essential to writing. Some would-be writers are lucky enough to have wriggled free from the choke hold.

Individuals have various responses to the forces with which they interact. They may reject, resist, merely comply, accept, accept with full commitment, or register indifference. All of these responses are ongoing negotiations. Conscious, formal decisions to modify identity demands, to amend identity perception, or to seek to change the environment to accommodate identity perceptions and demands are the most radical negotiations that an individual may undertake. Writing instruction is most powerful when it elicits reflection on the possibility of such radical negotiations, when it engages the student in a significant reflection on, or revision of, identity, or of society to accommodate identity.

A classroom is a critical subset of society at large, and identity negotiation plays a huge role in how students relate to education. Because education is so central to the lives we live, and to how we think of ourselves, the way we negotiate our identities in the classroom is of major consequence to identity formation. A student might approach the classroom, for example, as someone eager to learn, someone in search of a good grade or, conversely, someone wishing to earn the esteem of friends through challenging or rebellious behavior. Resistance may indicate distaste for "toeing the line" in school, or that the student favors another identity incompatible with classroom achievement.

Classroom negotiations on the part of teacher and student, whether formal, informal or even below the level of consciousness, will determine how and how much the student is willing to learn. A teachers' classroom invitation to delve into such behaviors and attitudes can warm students to the task of writing. "Why I Hate Writing" is not a bad

beginning topic for students, so long as they are convinced that teachers will not hold their opinions against them. Written in several drafts, with gently probing by the teacher on such responses as "because writing is stupid," or "because I just cannot do it," the exercise becomes an ongoing identity negotiation that can lead to valuable insight. Gradual trust in the teacher and in writing, and willingness to consider the benefits of writing have a good chance of taking hold. "Why I Hate Writing" need not be a door that is closed to the possibility of further advances through writing; it may be an opening to a world of attitudes and feeling that a persistent yet diplomatic instructor can help the student explore. No better topic may exist for connecting a student with the way they wish to be perceived, or are hiding so that it cannot be perceived. Hates and loves involve very intense negotiations. Identity negotiation is, among other things, a motivational pedagogy.

As a subset of classroom learning, writing instruction holds particular relevance. Accepting a writing assignment wholeheartedly or halfheartedly or deciding to "tune out" entirely involves a process of negotiation, if one considers withdrawing from negotiation the extreme negative terminus of the process, somewhat similar to a union representative walking away from the bargaining table, which, of course, the student cannot literally do. The subject the student writes about may itself be a negotiation, or elicit a negotiation, or reflect on a negotiation. The student will likely come to the instruction with pre-established attitudes toward writing. To the student, writing may be boring, pointless, agonizing, exciting or fulfilling. Student may visualize writers as enviable in their articulateness and influence upon peers, or narcissistic in their self-absorption. Groups to which the student wishes to belong may disdain or admire writing, thus helping to shape

an individual's attitude and defining the nature of the negotiation. Here, again, writing work that delves into such issues can engender respect for the value of writing and the insights it can yield. Of course, students may attempt to use such writing topics to negotiate on their own terms—a fruitful opportunity for the teacher to begin negotiations with the student.

If life is suffused with identity negotiation, then negotiation logically *is* a part of all writing pedagogies, including Warriner's. But it may, unfortunately, be disregarded, buried or cast aside. It is present nonetheless, and it is the committed teacher's job to unearth it and emphasize it. The student who called the D.H. Lawrence sentence "stupid" was saying "I don't understand why you say this is good. I'm not stupid, so the writer must be. At least, re-present it to me in a way I understand. But don't try to slide things by me, tell me the sentences are good, and ask me to imitate them without me knowing why that is so." This is an assertion of identity and a negotiation strategy. Such student negotiation must be recognized and used, not ignored. A complete negotiation-ender on the part of the teacher would be "It does not matter what you think. Just be quiet and do the exercise. You will be graded on it." When the teacher takes this approach, resentment is almost guaranteed.

Brooke argues that workshops in which assignments foster engagement with negotiations, from "macro" (society at large, for example) to "micro" (biases toward writing and the roles of a writer, for example) and that engage student attitudes are more effective than classrooms in which students are drilled sequentially in various types of writing skills. If the teacher can place insightful, expressive writing within the context of identity negotiations—and, ideally, help students come to resolutions of such

negotiations, the possibilities of success will be enhanced (5). This mandates writing assignments that explore issues to which a teacher believes students *should* have a reaction or to which students themselves *choose* to have a reaction. Throughout the writing sessions, the assignments should offer experience in the role of a writer and allow students to feel comfortable or uncomfortable with that posture. Teachers and students should "see writing as part of a much larger and more basic activity: the development and negotiation of individual identity in a complex social environment," Brooke suggests (5).

The assumption behind writing instruction based on identity negotiation is that if teachers want students to be better writers, the process by which they teach those students must make them *want* to be better writers, must accustom them to the attitudes and behaviors of writers, must encourage them to see the benefits of being better writers—whether practically, as a strategic life navigator, or emotionally, as a process toward self-discovery. Alienating the student from writing by exercises that are perceived as "make work," foreign or irrelevant to life experience, deals a critical blow to the development of a confident, engaged writer.

Chapter X—Key Principles

Quoting from Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle,* Brooke endorses several of Atwell's "key principles." Brooke's colleague Joy Ritchie is also an enthusiastic advocate of Atwell's ideas. Among these are *ownership*: "Writers need their own topics. Right from the first day of kindergarten students should use writing as a way to think about and give shape to their own ideas and concerns." Another principal is *presenting writing as a process.*

Atwell suggests that teachers write, share their writing with students and "demonstrate what experienced writers do in the process of composing …" (qtd. in Brook 85). Atwell encourages teachers to see the vulnerability of the student writer:

> That's the writer there on the page, his or her essential self laid bare for the world to see. So when students don't want to write, it may be because they feel too vulnerable—too insecure about our own ability levels as writers, too insecure to want to make their feelings felt….
>
> … Writers need to be listened to. They need honest, human reactions. They need teachers who help them discover the meaning they don't yet know by helping writers discover and build on what they *do* know.
>
> (66)

As students, with the aid of their writing teachers, make the sorts of discoveries that Atwell sees as necessary, the students will inevitably grow more aware of their own identity issues.

Rather than presenting students with examples of "correct" and "incorrect" writing and assuming that students will intuitively see the difference, or that the one example is so much better than another that they will understand the value of pursuing good writing, teachers need to help students experience what it feels like to be a writer. If it feels comfortable, or beneficial, or enables them to learn about themselves and the world around them, they will engage with writing and accept it into their identities. If they can not fit the process into identity development, they will resist the process or merely "ape" good writing. They may conform to the rigors of the teaching they receive without committing to the instruction, without letting the teaching in any way transform them.

In a class taught by Ritchie, for example, students were instructed to choose among such essay topics as "Growing up Catholic"; "Surviving the First Freshman Semester"; "Living as a Minority Student in White Culture"; "Coping with Cancer"; "Racism at UN-L [University of Nevada-Lincoln]"; "Losses and Gains in Love Relationships"; and "Why Isn't Education in Our Country Working?" (Brooke, *Writing and Sense of Self* 93). With topics like these, students delve into important aspects of their upbringing or environment, or focus on issues in the nation at large. The immediacy and pertinence of such issues should command significant attention. To ignore or dismiss such themes is a refusal to negotiate on the part of the student, which is itself a form of negotiation, though an unfortunate one. Throughout drafts of the types of essays Ritchie has assigned, the teacher has the opportunity to leverage negotiation, gently suggesting the implications of the students' attitudes and providing avenues for further thought. If the writing becomes insightful, the student absorbs the insights and stretches or solidifies identity. If a student "digs in" and opposes any further reflection on a topic, it is an identity negotiation that needs to be taken seriously. If a student feels that a teacher is becoming too personal, digging too deeply, the teacher needs to "back off," or to try to find a way to let the student pursue his own ideas and reactions. The teacher might congratulate an intransigent student for "sticking to his guns" and encourage the student to follow his or her own tack in writing.

The issue of responding to such personal writing in a positive way is, of course, hard to ignore. Telling any student, for example, that his or her essay is not well-developed can have a chilling effect or draw an angry response.

The Writers' Room, a volunteer writing tutorial program that services the entire school system in Montclair, New Jersey, offers advice. The organization suggests tutors "identify something that works in a piece of writing—something the student can build on" (Kolba and Crowell, "How We Train Coaches" n. pag.). Teachers throughout the town school system have been using the program since 1993. During this time, responses from instructors have been very favorable and scores on the program's own evaluations adapted from New Jersey state standards, and on official state assessments, have shown marked improvement in student writing (Kolba and Crowell, "Evaluation: Measuring the Effectiveness of the Program" n. pag.) " The evaluations have used organization/content, sentence construction, usage and mechanics as rubrics (Kolba and Crowell, "Criteria for Good Writing" n. pag.). Noting the evolution of their program over the years in response to student needs, founders Ellen D. Kolba and Sheila C. Crowell declare that the Writers' Room itself, has become, "a process, not a product" ("The Writers' Room: The Story of a Writing Center 53).

Chapter XI—Models of Commitment

Regarding the challenges of motivating minority students and avoiding the alienation of those students, Mike Rose has documented in *Lives on the Boundary* his own lifetime of exposure to teaching techniques that opened him up to the notion of becoming a writer. "Many students," he observes, have talents that their tests do not reveal, but they have not been taught how to weave that knowledge into coherent patterns" (9). As Rose attests, he was such a student (xi), but a variety of teachers who, as an aggregate, left no technique

untried, no resource untapped, were able to reach out to the author and help him transform his life. His story, as narrated throughout *Lives on the Boundary*, is a testament to teachers who were not locked into any rigid approach but rather were committed to encouragement , modeling, and finding strategies that would work with even the most disaffected of students. Rose's narration repeatedly documents teachers reaching out and helping Rose shape an identity that shook off the affliction of helplessness.

In *Lives,* Rose describes many teachers who mentored him and gave him figures to model, such as Dr. Frank Carothers at Loyola University in Los Angeles (52). One of the modeling opportunities Carothers presented to Rose was the English Society, a 78-member group consisting of lovers of English. This gave Rose a sense of belonging and exposure to additional figures on which to model his identity (53). It also opened up avenues to negotiate an identity in an environment that had seemed filled with roadblocks and dead ends.

Regarding the modeling technique, it is a key part of identity-negotiation pedagogy for Brooke's colleague Joy Ritchie. She has guided her classes through various steps on the way to completing a writing assignment. To clarify her expectations, Ritchie has had students respond to a free-writing exercise that she had performed herself for an essay she was writing, allowing the students to see her own efforts. She thus signaled students that she was bonding with them as writers, without implying "Do it my way." Rather, allowed them to peer inside a writer's mind, and imparting to students the sense that she is treating them as equals.

Giving students free reign to negotiate their own direction, she has had students do their own free-writing about topics they had selected themselves. She has broken classes

up into groups of four or five, in which students have responded to each other's work. This is an example of a strategy that goes beyond the rigid process-theory structure that Connors described and of which Cooper complained. She has also invited students to free-write "about any piece of writing they had recently read which might prompt a response and asked them to develop these thoughts into drafts." She has asked them to read the drafts aloud. In proceeding toward the final draft, she has discussed the various roles of a writer with the students and inquired as to how comfortable they felt with such roles (92-3).

Chapter XII—Understanding the Self as Writer

As with the role of painter or sculptor, so it is with the role of the writer. The artist learns to paint by self-expression through painting itself, not by aping masterpieces. The process of learning to write is similar: the writer learns to write by writing, and learns about him- or herself and the world around them by writing. Students do not learn to write by imitating Lawrence or Hemingway, or Warriner. Brooke and Ritchie argue that to encourage students to want to become better writers requires showing them how to behave like writers: critiquing, investigating, examining, pondering, and writing.

Brooke describes this process as follows:

> Learning to write meaningfully in our culture requires developing an understanding of self as writer, someone who uses writing to further personal thinking and to help solve public problems. The development of such a role, such a self-understanding … depends crucially on

> connecting the role of self as a writer with other roles in the culture outside the classroom, especially writers' roles in the culture at large—including roles for the self as reflective thinker and community influencer. Developing writers need to work through the tensions posed by such writers' roles in relation to school student roles. (5)

Journaling, critical essays and response papers to significant societal issues, personal reflections—these are writing activities that stimulate self-understanding. In identity negotiation, the discovery and the experience of the writer's role count far more than exercises in which students attempt to learn by mimicking writing techniques from the "product" of more masterful writers than themselves.

Chapter XIII—Keats and His Nightingale

The "model-the-masters," product approach tends to be top-down and hierarchical. Let us now see how it might operate in a writing exercise based on a poem that is a favorite of millions of poetry lovers: Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*. The *Ode* is particularly relevant and meaningful to me because of an incident that occurred during my first year of teaching high school English and which I will relate below.

One "product approach" might consist of a teacher lecturing students on the importance and "meaning" of Keats and *Nightingale*, requiring students to write down the teacher's remarks in their notebooks, and then, for homework or perhaps on a test, having them compose an essay on the order of: "What is the importance of [or just as bad, `the meaning of'] Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale?"* What metaphors and similes does

Keats use? What is the rhyme scheme? (These are definitions and writing requirements I myself asked students to learn and imitate in my early teaching career. According to such a pedagogy, which I practiced to poor results, a truth long established is carried forward as part of a history of great thoughts nobly expressed. This is the "banking concept" of education as articulated in his opposition to the same by Paulo Freire —teachers in essence "depositing" knowledge into student "receptacles" (57).

In many high schools, composition pedagogy is still folded into "Appreciation of Literature" classes. To teach composition effectively, relegating writing themes to solely to "knowledge deposited" is less than ideal. My classmates and I responded to such topics in high school with a formulaic approach: "How can I give this teacher what he or she wants, so that I can get a good grade?"

When writing about literature, examining it as an artifact that has characteristics which are to be explored in writing affords little opportunity for positive identity negotiation and risks the reverse: resistance or half-hearted compliance. Especially for high school students, to approach works of literature as cultural artifacts is to suggest the obsolescence of those works and minimize engagement among these younger students. If "the canon" is to live today, written works of art can not be treated as so many museum pieces, for which "information deposited/information regurgitated" is required to achieve a passing grade.

Brooke's theories reference such larger issues as freedom, repression, resistance, consciousness, sub-consciousness and self-fulfillment. These notions are antithetical to the "banking" pedagogy. If students are not free to reflect and react personally—in other words, to behave like writers—then indeed they might as well be mere reflectors or

transmitters of proscribed meaning from certified instructors, passive pawns in the process of passing on "noble thoughts."

During my first experience teaching the *Ode*, I learned, through the incident I alluded to above, that my senior-year high school students were not ready to be told the reasons why Keats' poem is a "literary classic." "Why," a student asked me, "would anyone write a poem about a stupid bird?" [The student actually used an adjective other than "stupid," quite inappropriate to the classroom.] Not only had my students never been exposed to Romantic poetry before, they had never considered reflecting on the positive attributes of the avian species.

So we began with a free-write on things that students might think about when they thought of a bird. Sure, there were some wise-guy answers, but the exercise also turned up *freedom, flight, music* and *beauty.* That was enough to let us commence some relevant writing in which students attempted to put themselves in Keats' place in responding to the beauty, freedom, and limitations of the bird, or of any other object that stimulated such thoughts of freedom as unfettered flight: *Have you ever had any feelings that are similar to those that Keats expresses?* Keats might be presented as the model of a writer—albeit a rather deep and exquisitely skilled one. Keats the writer experiences something exceptionally profound in his environment—an aspect of nature—draws it within his own identity, experiences it and then uses writing to capture his response.

For a writer, a prescribed reaction or formulaic truth is anathema. Belief in identity negotiation requires acceptance of the notion of motivation based on free will, and of uniqueness in each individual that seeks recognition through a variety of choices that, as with writing, are self-expressive.

Regarding resistance to top-down, product-based writing instruction, Brooke is especially elucidating. A journal article, "Underlife and Writing Instruction," deals with the reasons why product-based instruction often encounters resistance or elicits nothing more than mere compliance. "In sociological theory," he says, "'underlife' refers to those behaviors which undercut the roles expected of participants in a situation—the ways an employee, for example, shows that she is not just an employee, but has a more complex personality outside that role" ("Underlife" 141). In student underlife, they may be stubborn enough to object to the definitions society imposes and resist those definitions with whatever strengths they can summon. An assignment that asked neophyte writers to tap into their own personal underlife would illuminate the issue of identity negotiation nicely and perhaps open the door to a personal sense of inquisitiveness and even wonder: "Why I Hate/Love Nightingales"; "What Bothers Me?"; Why It Is Fun to Sing"; Why Homework Should/Should Not Be Abolished"; "Is What I Am Learning in School Important?"; "What Is It Like to Be an Introvert/Extrovert?"; "Why Balloons Are Cool," or topics of the students' own choosing. Topics such as "Why I Am Afraid to Drive," or "Can Our Government Be Trusted?" initiate student engagement with the outer environment and coax them to access inner reactions that activate their sense of underlife. Tapping individual underlife is an ideal way to gently encourage writers to challenge and expose superficialities and in so doing explore their own identities. "Why It Is Fun to Sing," for example, may initiate student discomfort and resistance to such an extroverted activity. "Why Balloons Are Cool" may irritate students uneasy about being sensitive. The writing activity should, speaking metaphorically, be the grain of sand that irritates the oyster into producing the pearl.

Of course, not everyone who experiences some form of art reacts identically. Some students can be suspicious, disruptive, even subversive. They might regard personal essays as an invasion of privacy. Certainly, students might see efforts to engage them personally as a sham or ploy, among a host of other negative reactions. One possible strategy then is to engage the resistance, viewing it as identity negotiation, and ask students to write honestly about their reaction to what the teacher is attempting to do. *Why do you think I am being less than honest with you?*

Negotiation with student resistance can occur beyond the high school level as well, of course. In a paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1991, John Stratman of the University of Michigan discussed the application of Brooke's "underlife" concept in an upper-level undergraduate essay-writing workshop that explored student-centered approaches to the teaching of writing and literature. The team teaching the course chose Brooke's pedagogy for:

> its strong explication of and support for the workshop approach to writing; for: the way it articulated a theory of identity negotiation that had been researched in actual composition practice; and for the possible assistance his study might offer students who were learning for the first time to conduct themselves as participant-observers in reading and writing classrooms. (3)

Stratman declared that he particularly admired the fact that underlife "allowed the individual to resist asserting one side of their character, in order that another, perhaps more authentic or more compelling side, might emerge" (4)

The instructors also believed that their students would welcome opportunities to "form a close community" and to "immerse [themselves]… in a total learning situation" (2). But the students did not welcome the social interaction of the class. The teachers did not anticipate, Stratman says, the discomfort with which students were forced to confront their own identity negotiations in the face of an unfamiliar format. The students were especially worried about grades in a "sharing" context (6)

After students voiced their concerns to faculty, the teachers invited them to break into smaller groups and begin "formulating a plan of action" for the rest of the semester. Though the students were able to articulate an ongoing need for smaller groups, the eliminating of less-essential readings from the syllabus, and the willingness of the instructors to clarify assessments (8), "these were nothing as substantial as might have been expected given the control and authority students had secured," the teachers concluded (9).

The adjustments satisfied the students and the seminar continued. Perhaps unknown to themselves, the students had engaged in a intense identity negotiation, without which the class could not have continued. One thing that they refused to banish from their identities was the value of grades.

Stratman and his colleagues remain committed to identity negotiation and the application of the "underlife" principle, which Brooke calls, "a process at the core of our discipline" (qtd. in Stratman 1). For each of the 27 participants, Stratman reported:

> … the question "Who will I be? was perhaps the most persistent and provocative question encountered all term. I say "persistent" because whether this question was addressed explicitly—as when the teaching team asked

> students to think of metaphors for what a teacher needs to know, to be, or to do ... the question remained as pressing in December as on the first day of class.... In one sense, it implied: What kind of student do I want to be in this class?" In another sense: "What kind of writer do I want to be, or perhaps need to be ... to succeed?" And lastly, "What kind of a *teacher* do I want to be?" (1).

Though Brooke's notion of underlife does not share the notoriety or widespread influence of such Freudian concepts as the subconscious, it has similar psychological validity. Subconscious aspects of our personalities about which we are unaware tend to gnaw at us until we gain awareness.

As anyone who has wound up on the losing end of a negotiation will attest, awareness is crucial to a successful outcome—whether it is for an adjustment of a grade or a curriculum, or for a mortgage or a car purchase, or for a winning hand of black jack. Unless negotiators know what is going on within and around themselves, they are at a serious disadvantage. And in matters personal writing is a powerful agent of awareness.

The mind is continuously barraged by information. To use writing as a filter toward what we retain, and reflect upon, is to exercise personal choice. Here we have I-for-myself and I-for-the-other negotiating their way through the flood of stimulus—affirming, acquiring, resisting, rejecting.

Chapter XIV—Modifications and "Permutations"

Since Brooke first introduced his theory of identity, others have modified his basic notion. What these modifications have in common is a process that seeks out the "action"

spot—the trouble spot—where the complexities of identity can be unearthed. Thus does writing toward the underlife differs from writing that is merely personal engagement. The underlife is the place at which identity is volatile and therefore vulnerable, where growth may blossom or be threatened.

As the title of her 1997 work, *Getting Restless*, suggests, Nancy Welch encourages writers, teachers and editors to search for identity by examining the "dissonance and disruption" at its heart. She boldly sees the writing process—especially in revision, where teacher and writer work together—as an "act of getting restless… with feeling unsettled by … the implications of our words" (1). As does Brooke, she places considerable weight on using psychoanalytic principles to delve into the disorientation caused by writing and revising (4). Welch sees in the classroom "tense, charged and sometimes even erotic and antagonistic attachments [that] are central to revision—revision as strategy for intervening in the meanings and identifications of a text, revision as a strategy for intervening in the meanings and identifications of one's life" (55). The classroom, according Welch, is an exciting, dangerous place.

This approach supercharges a classroom—not an inviting prospect for many teachers. Yet Welch is in agreement with Lad Tobin that in identifying and exploring relationships in a classroom, desires, assertions, pressures and fears are, in Tobin's words, "not peripheral or secondary to the writing process or the teaching of writing [but] central" (qtd. in Welch 55). Such insights are not dissimilar to looking through a microscope and seeing life teeming where, with a less focused view, all might seem to be placid. The instructor must apply the more focused view.

The years following the publication of Brooke's *Writing and Sense of Self* have seen, in addition to Welch's, other work that adapts the theory of identify negation. Thirteen years after Brooke's *Writing and Sense of Self,* Tobin was expanding the theory that effective composition instruction directs neophyte writers to tap into the subconscious. In *Reading Student Writing: Confessions, Meditations, and Rants* (2004), Tobin, the son of a psychoanalyst, steers his pedagogy much more closely than does Brooke toward the notion of teacher-as-psychologist, advocating "honest disclosure, risk-taking and self-awareness" in Chapter Three, "Replacing the Carrot with the Couch: Reading Psychotherapeutically" (44-56). He asks that, while reading essays that connect with students' inner lives, the teachers examine their own inner lives before reacting: "… personal writing stirs up teachers as well as students, and if we are going to respond responsibly we need to investigate our own unconscious biases and associations" (52). Tobin does issue a most important caveat:

> I am not suggesting here that we should … "do therapy" in our classrooms or to insist that our students confront and reveal material they have repressed. In fact, I've learned that even the best suggestions and questions might be ignored, that people can only go as far as their own defenses will allow, and that we need to be patient enough to understand that a writer, like a patient, might not be ready to write the narrative that we think or hope is lurking just beneath the surface. (54).

But, he continues, "I am tired of being defensive about something we ought to be proud of—the way our field, like psychotherapy, can people make sense and gain control of their personal as well as their public lives" (54). As with Brooke, the sensibility in

Tobin's theory is that students who gain the insight and "control" he mentions will regard writing with esteem, and maybe even get "hooked" on it.

Ede cites Thomas Kent's criteria for "post-process" as exemplifying that theory: 1) writing is public; 2) writing is interpretive; and 3)writing is situated (qtd. in Ede 96). These characteristics of post-process fit comfortably within Brook's identity-negotiation pedagogy. Ede comments on Kent's criteria as follows:

> An emphasis on the rhetorical situation has been central to my teaching, research, and scholarship for at least the past 20 years .... "I do not see the rhetorical tradition's emphasis on the situatedness of all communication and the writing process movement's emphasis on recurring features of the writing process as incommensurate. Rather, I view them as providing alternate but related traditions upon which writers can draw. (96)

In linking the rhetorical, process, and post-process movements together in this way, Kent and Ede provide a justification for instructors to tap any of the three theories as the teacher deems useful. That is as it should be. Teachers should deny themselves no potentially beneficial method by which to reach out to students and engage them. Teaching strategies need to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Theorists who dismiss earlier pedagogies as having no merit close out strategies that still may offer benefit.

A considerable portion of the most current scholarship in identity negotiation centers around sociological issues rather than classroom practice. This scholarship looks toward groups that are excluded or alienated from academic situations. The goal of some new literature is to help teachers identify their own identity negotiations.

In *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom*, Zan Meyer Goncalves expands the notion of identity to the more encompassing term "ethos," typically considered to be a defining characteristic, moral stance or primary belief of an institution, group or person. She presents her own definition of ethos as "context-bound identity performances" (xiii). She asks writing teachers to "focus our attention on ethos by noting how writers and speakers regularly craft identity performances for rhetorical effect and to understand how those identity performances are shaped by the complex and often inequitable social contexts of our classrooms and communities" (xii). As her title indicates, she is particularly concerned with placing the tools of identity negotiation in the hands of students who "claim a gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgendered (GLBT) identity" (xiii). She focuses specifically on the "identity performances" that GLBT students execute in order to survive.

"Identity performance" is a manifestation of Bahktin's I-for-the-other. Being sure of one's own identity makes one more able to project the identity that others want to see. With this approach, identity-negotiation pedagogy takes on greater complexity in its examination of how students who may face disapproval and prejudice must negotiate to survive prejudice and/or exclusion.

Finally, in *Identity Papers: Literacy and Power in Higher Education*, Bronwyn T. Williams gathers essays that document and analyze the forces that shape identity in the academic arena, and the consequences of those forces. In his introduction to the collection, Williams writes:

> When I enter a classroom, I am conscious of constructing my identity for my performance as a teacher. And I am certain that my students are engaged in

> identity construction of their own to fit the classroom context. When I am talking to a friend, I believe I am being "myself," but if I am honest I know that I perform different identities for different friends, not always being the same identity for my friends from childhood as I am for the people I I met last year. Consequently, I have not a single identity, but multiple shifting identities, determined by culture and context, and sometimes in conflict with one another.... Tensions emerge when we cannot read the cultural context or construct and identity that fits the expectations of others. (5)

For identifying, studying and challenging these cultural and contextual influences and dealing with their consequences through self-mediation, few tools are as powerful as reflective writing.

To return to identity negotiation as classroom practice, it is efficacious to turn back to Brooke. In 1999, "Underlife and Writing Instruction" was included in a compilation of essays that are winners of the Braddock Award (named for Richard Braddock, founder of the journal *Research in the Teaching of English*). In the new "Afterward" that accompanied his winning essay in the compilation, Brooke argued that the ideas expressed in "Underlife" now:

> resonate with many of the movements energizing composition: cultural studies viewing identity as a product of cultural illiteracies; critical pedagogies asking students to critique their cultural places; postcolonial and feminist compositionists describing the self as torn between opposing discourses.... Much of the work of compositionists in the 1990s has been to develop deep connections between identity and discourse and community.

(Afterward 240-1)

Brooke's efforts to synthesize writing-instruction theories mirror Ede's observation that post-process and social process are merely permutations of process.

Chapter XV—Writing With Honesty

With this backdrop in place, it is best to move to the classrooms and workshops in which identity negotiation occurs. In Brooke's and Ritchie's workshops, students have engaged in activities and assignments designed to sharpen sensitivity to what a writer is and does and, consequently, explore the role of writer so that they may freely accept or reject it, and be aware of why they are doing so.

Surely, writing teachers can and do employ other approaches to activate student engagement. Marcelo's is one such approach. Writing instruction can sometimes seem as hum-drum as, unfortunately, can life itself. Wonder infuses most every aspect of life, my life at least, with spice. Where would we be without a sense of wonder? Yet it is hard to imaging an entire writing instruction syllabus directed by achieving a sense of wonder. And Marcelo himself implies that the process of identity negotiation can uncover wonder: As he points out, "In delving into `self,' we unfold other truths" (8). He adds that, "It was not until I saw everything that I wrote … as *my* writing that [a] spirit of wonder began to take root …." (20). "*My*" is the key adjective here. When Marcelo began to see his writing as embedded in his own identity, his sense of wonder began to flourish. Identity negotiation theory and "wonder theory" are corollary, identity negotiation being the more encompassing of the two.

Based on their own inclinations and the type of writing they are teaching, instructors might coin variable themes like "Writing With Wonder," or "Writing With Curiosity" or perhaps "Writing With Excitement"—though such examples do not sound as engaging as "Writing With Wonder." What would a writing course specifically focused on identity negotiation be called? "Writing With Honesty" would fit the bill.

A search for wonder or excitement that finds no fulfillment can be disillusioning. But disappointment forces an identity negotiation that can be a catalyst for change. Disappointment may lead to discontent, which may cause *resistance* that itself can unleash a flood of self-awareness and a demand for identity renegotiation and change.

Chapter XVI—"Underlife"

Throughout *Writing and Sense of Self* and "Underlife and Writing Instruction," Brooke depicts writing as essentially a rebellious act— it changes the world, even if only minutely. If a potential writer were perfectly content with the status quo, he or she would be unlikely ever to bother to write. "Why I Like Things the Way They Are" is not a very compelling or motivating topic. So workshop exercises that tap into rebellious underlife, including the resistance caused by stunted wonder, will access the part of the personality—the underlife that agitates for expression—that wishes to negotiate with reality through writing. As Brooke writes:

> When people embrace the roles a situation offers and make them a part of their ongoing behaviors, they have learned something. When, in contrast, they reject or merely comply with the presented roles, then they have not learned but have

> merely passed through the class as they daily pass through any number of contexts …. (26)

Brooke does not dwell at depth on the importance of students coming to place value on writing, but the idea is worth elaboration. Valuation is the source of commitment to writing: the realization that engagement with writing will bring benefit—utility, pride, even pleasure in a developing sense of authorship—to the student. This insight may come suddenly, through an inspirational teacher, for example. Or it may be the result of applied effort over a period of time. With Brooke and Ritchie, providing models—through assignments and discussions of assignments, of the thought processes of a writer, and what the various roles of a writer might be—another opportunity for valuation (96).

As fledgling writers continue to value writing, that endorsement is expected to initiate a symbiotic effect on the writer's self-esteem. Pajares and Valiante stress the importance of self-efficacy in learning how to write, stating that, "Whatever factors operate to influence behavior, they are rooted to the core in the belief that one has the capability to accomplish that behavior" (159). Real writers *know* they can write.

Identity negotiation operates as a stimulus to validate self-efficacy beliefs. Serious, ongoing negotiation tends to toughen the negotiator, honing his or her confidence. Identity negotiation is the arena in which self-efficacy is stimulated, tested, and strengthened through engagement.

Engagement means that the neophyte writer grasps the idea that writing can bring expression to thoughts and feelings that before had been little more than evanescent wisps, or that writing can enable meaningful interactions with others. Writing can open doors that are valuable to enter.

The instance of value-perception, the "aha" moment, signals understanding: "Now I see why this is important, why it can help me." It leads to the pursuit of writing as a tool, a craft, an avocation, an outlet, or even an art. For teachers, the arrival of this insight is one of the joys of sharing the craft of writing through instruction.

In *Everyone Can Write*, Peter Elbow frames the cognitive instant dramatically: "… one of the most practical goals for us as teachers is to help students fall in love with their own ideas and writing" (Elbow 24). Here, the verb "love" may express the ideal development, but "appreciate" will do nicely. He adds that, "When you actually want to tell your audience things, you will do a better job of telling them" (33). Lessons gained by self-expressive essays are cemented by identity development. Burgeoning awareness, engagement with resistance, and presentation of the self to the outer environment are part of the negotiation and development process.

As described by Brooke and Ritchie, classes that occurred early in the evolution of their pedagogy—taught by either Brooke himself or Ritchie, or both—that emphasized the sequential development of rhetorical skills (Ritchie's text in such classes was Young, Becker, and Pike's *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change)*, did not produce the above-mentioned process of identity negation, with its concomitant awareness and valuation of writing. Brooke reports that students were "frustrated in their attempts to negotiate their place in this classroom and the place of the class in the rest of their experience" (30). That was because little or no opportunity for negotiation exists in attempting to shape writing into the "proper" rhetorical skills that the instructor requires. What students *did* spend a preponderant amount of their time trying to negotiate was teacher evaluation—that is, grades (*A hand is raised. Teacher: "Yes, you have a question?" Student" "Is this*

going to be on the exam? Or: How are you going to grade this paper? Does spelling count?" And probably worst: *"How long does this paper have to be? How many paragraphs? How many pages?*) I have seen students who, assigned a two-page paper, have asked a classmate if he had any of that "skinny paper" which would enable him to write less: anything to get the assignment done according to specification while expending the least amount of energy.

As an observer of Ritchie's class, Brooke reports that:

> "as the course progressed, its purpose changed. Where it began with a developmental purpose (students would improve their level of thinking by working through a series of exercises), it ended with a modeling purpose (students were presented with assignments that imparted models of how writers behave; they were encouraged to try out those behaviors themselves and apply them to their writing" (62).

In other words, modeling worked more effectively than skill development through exercises. In Brooke and Ritchie's courses, understanding of the student-teacher relationship moved from "Teacher is evaluator; student is performer," or "diagnostician to developing adolescent," to "We're all writers, helping each other" (39-41).

Because everything we encounter outside the boundaries of our own identity is by definition other than us (*other)*, individuals must negotiate their places in regard to the world's otherness in every encounter they make. To help guard against lockstep behavior (in a twisted paraphrase of Thoreau, marching to the beat of an identical drum), writing must work as a catalyst for fostering awareness of personal identity and how it relates to that vast otherness that is the world around us.

To use Maslow's term, we "actualize" (150) ourselves with whatever strengths, whatever tools, are at our disposal—and writing is a very powerful monitor of self-actualization. If, for example, we are forced to merely repeat back to the teacher what he or she has told us, we are freezing our identities rather than actualizing them—as I see it, a "voyage of non-exploration" that never leaves port.

With repetitive, coercive strategies, the "negotiations" are entirely one-sided. Accessing the inner world, whether we call it underlife or subconscious or something else, opens the identity to that which is outside, a process that Maslow describes indicating that the individual is "unthreatened and unfrightened by the unknown" (154). Conversely the attempted coercion of identity growth invites resistance or—worse—the self retreating back into itself.

Chapter XVII—The Writers' "Couch"?

I will stop short of the statement that identity negotiation through writing is a form of psychotherapy. Rather, it is a tool of reflection, reaction and comment that can unearth aspects of identity. In writing as identity negotiation, the writing teacher's mandate is to work with the student to sharpen writing skill until it is an *effective* tool for navigating I-for-myself and I-for-the-other, and recording the journey. In numerous forms of psychology, for example, journaling is considered a valid technique toward achieving mental health. In her introduction to "Journaling about Stressful Events," Susan K Lutendorf of the University of Iowa Department of Psychology points out that:

> …. Writing about personally experienced stressors or traumatic events has been

> associated with improved mental and physical health in numerous investigations.... A recent meta-analysis of the effects of written disclosure found that writing about stressful or traumatic events is related to improvements in self-reported health, psychological well-being, physiological functioning, and general functioning. Moreover, the positive effects of written disclosure appear to be equivalent to or greater than effects produced by other psychosocial interventions. (244).

On the psychiatrist's couch, free association or talk therapy may be the access tool of choice to reach the inner psyche; for the writer, it is the notepad or keyboard. Journaling may be considered a recording of one's identity negotiation. It may or may not be a direct negotiation itself, but it clarifies ongoing negotiations, enabling the writer to reflect upon them. If this process helps people negotiate their identity through a state of anxiety or depression, it surely can help all of us be in touch with our identity negotiations and galvanize our writing.

As author Erica Jong has been famously quoted, "How can I know what I think unless I see what I write" (qtd in Pajares and Valiante 158). As Pajares and Valiante state, "Writing is not only a process of making meaning but also an activity through which we engage in self-understanding" (158). Here, the authors do not necessarily mean that all writing must be personal—merely that it must engage the identity.

Especially during adolescence, dealing with identity issues can spark that particular malaise known as identity crisis. Brooke cites Erikson extensively in discussing the critical nature of identity negotiations and the anxieties they can either engender or sooth, so it is unsurprising that Erikson's ideas bolster Brooke's argument. Commenting in

Identity: Youth and Crisis on the various levels of identity development, Erikson says that out of the crises of youth:

> [the child] must emerge with a *sense of initiative* as a basis for a realistic sense of ambition and purpose…. What, then, are the criteria for an unbroken sense of initiative? The criteria for the development of all the "senses" discussed here are the same: a crisis beset with some new estrangement is resolved in such a way that the child suddenly seems to be "more himself…"(Erikson 115).

An initial encounter with the tasks of writing may bring an increase in estrangement and alienation. By writing, by reflecting on writing, and by seeing writing as a useful method of identity development, and by pursuing writing honestly as an identity negotiation, estrangement may be alleviated as individuals negotiate niches for their identities amongst the otherness of the outside environment.

Ideally, the "resolution" that Erikson describes will in fact be achieved through identity negotiation. A further hoped-for ideal is that an interest in writing becomes part of the solution of the crisis that is found in schooling at its various levels, and in the renewed identity that emerges from the crisis through various negotiations with the issues. Erikson describes the resolution of the identity crisis caused by exposure to rivaling viewpoints with the term *mutuality*—a "hospitality" for the way a person's inner world is ordered and how the inner worlds of others are ordered (219). This mutuality is essentially identity coming to terms with the world, lessening the threat of *other* through the negotiated expansion of the self.

In *Identity: Youth and* Crisis, Erikson sounds a warning:

> The danger at this stage is the development of an estrangement from himself

> and his tasks—the well-known *sense of inferiority*…. Family life may not have prepared him for school life, or school life may fail to sustain the promises of earlier stages in that nothing that he has learned to do well so far seems to count with his fellows or his teacher. And then again, he may be potentially able to excel in ways which are dormant and which, if not evoked now, may develop later or never. (124)

If the neophyte writer can be situated on the path toward writing facility, if writing can be part of the solution to the crises involved in identity formation, writing lessons may well be sustained to fruition, with the individual gaining a respect for the craft of writing.

Chapter XVIII—Negotiating Aristotle

The incidence of assignments that impede engagement with writing persists. As a participant in the Writers' Room, the Montclair, New Jersey, public school program in which volunteers go one-on-one with students, counseling them on how to proceed with writing assignments after reading first drafts, I have seen examples of writing assignments from teachers that engender a spectrum of reactions from tepid enthusiasm, to boredom, to resistance. The volunteers work with students on the essays the classroom teachers assign.

A case in point: after reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, eighth-graders were taught Aristotle's famous theory of the "fatal flaw" in tragedy. Then, they were

instructed to argue for or against the proposition that the protagonist Okonkwo's downfall makes him a tragic figure in accordance with Aristotle's criteria.

Reviewing dozens of rough drafts and counseling student writers on how to proceed, I encountered plenty of bored students and little enthusiasm for the topic other than as an opportunity to get the grade they wanted or needed. Assignments like this rarely advance writing capability or tempt students with the goal of becoming writers. With this type of assignment, students typically comply, not commit: *Ho-hum. I don't know how teachers come up with assignments like these, but they do. They have us jumping through hoops again. Oh well, play the game, I guess.* To break down the italicized comment, students do not know why the assignment has relevance other than to satisfy some unknowable criterion. They regard it merely as an obligation and proceed with resignation.
By advocating plenty of positive feedback throughout the drafting stages and offering one-on-one guidance thanks to the Writers' Room volunteers, this assignment paid lip service to the process approach. But it provided little incentive for identity negotiation. I worked with student with wide ranges of writing ability, but the assignment brought little or no satisfaction to any of them other than the realization that another rather alien writing exercises had been dispatched so that students could move on to the next hurdle they needed to negotiate, until the day when they might be done with it all.

Though a teacher or a graduate M.A. candidate in literature would find applying Aristotelian theory to a modern work is justifiably enticing, the response of the student I encountered was tinged with a shrug of the shoulders. The students cared more about Okonkwo than about Aristotle. Put another way, asking students to analyze a literary character brought to vivid life in a novel was quite negotiable; layering on the theory of

remote Greek philosopher, to most students little more than a picture of a white bust in a textbook, was a more challenging negotiation.

The students I counseled did not fully grasp why their instructor was involving Aristotle. When I queried one of the student clients on this, he looked puzzled and said, "Well, it's a teacher thing." In other words, to the student it was a thing that "teachers typically do." An assignment that involved the students directly with the characters and plot of *Things Fall Apart*, seeking personal responses to, and analysis of, Okonkwo's self-destructive decisions rather than through an Aristotelian lens might have been more engaging.

Chapter XIX—The National Writing Project

Brooke is a strong advocate of the writing pedagogy used by the National Writing Project (WNP). He is the director of the Nebraska Writing Project, so it is unsurprising that NWP carries the imprint of identity-negotiation theory.

The National Writing Project (NWP) is one of the primary initiators of methods of teaching writing that carry the imprint of identity-negotiation theory. The NWP is a nationwide professional development program for teachers, cited for its ability to allow "self-understanding to develop more readily than many other courses" (Brooke, *Writing and Sense of Self* 5). The concept of using writing to negotiate with the world, even to change the world, is paramount to the goals of the NWP. On its web site home page, the NWP stresses its recognition that practice in writing "is strengthened when we incorporate multiple ways of knowing that are informed by culture and experience" (n.

pag.). Among the "multiple ways" of engaging students with their writing is service writing. One of the national initiatives on the NWP Web site, for example, comes under the heading "Creating Spaces for Study and Action Under the Social Justice Umbrella" (Peitzman n. pag.). At a link at the site, an accompanying monograph "provides an in-depth look at the UCLA Writing Project's approach to two social justice concerns—matters of race and issues of homophobia … that engage the learning community."

The concept of "service writing" is an *accelerated, intensified form* of identity negation in which the individual plunges directly into the *other* through specific outreach strategies to address challenges and problems outside the bounds of the self. By moving so quickly beyond the self, it obviates the "teacher-as-therapist" problems of which Tobin warns. Both Brooke and Ritchie have worked closely together, collaborating on research, team-teaching in the Nebraska Writing Project (Brooke *Writing and Sense of Self* viii).

Pritchard and Honeycutt rate the NWP as "an exemplary professional development model" (282). In answering the question, "Do students write better as a result of their teachers' implementing new practices after NWP training?" (284), Pritchard and Honeycutt conclude that NWP principles "… are so instantiated in schools, and in textbooks, that it is a challenge even to define a control group unaffected by the NWP in order to conduct experimental studies about its impact on student achievement. Of the published studies, all results favor the NWP approaches over traditional methods" (284). The NWP's employment of the service learning method as one of its teaching strategies shortcuts personal, internal identity negotiations, raising the stakes by engaging the student to reach out to issues in society at large.

A cooperative effort between NWP and the Centre for Social Action (CSA), a training, consulting, research, and publications organization based at De Montfort University in Leicester, England, offers compelling argument for the development of writing competence through social action, this accelerated form of identity negotiation—sometimes community-based and sometimes taking place in the classroom and reflecting issues of the students' own concern, thus engaging the student's identity in their writing and reporting about the project. (See *Writing for a Change: Boosting Literacy and Learning Through Social Action* 2).

In *Writing for a Change,* Richard Sterling reports that the two groups found that "Social Action had tremendous potential for engaging students and creating a context for boosting literacy and achievement in schools" (xvii). Involving students in writing about Achievement societal issues with which they are forced to come to grips requires them to initiate rapid identity adaptations.

On the NWP Web site home page, in a NWP 2008 Research Brief entitled "Writing Project Professional Development for Teachers Yields Gains in Student Writing," the NWP reports that:

> … in every measured attribute of writing, the improvement of students whose teachers participated in NWP professional development exceeded that of students whose teachers were not participants. Student results are strong and favorable in those aspects of writing for which the NWP is best known, such as development of ideas and organization Students in writing project classrooms made greater gains than their peers on writing conventions as well, suggesting that NWP professional development also helps teachers improve their students'

basic skills (n. pag.).

Writing for a Change details achievements of NWP-based programs. At the Roswell Independent School District in New Mexico, for example, Dietta Poston Hitchcock had her students write extensively on their reactions to how No Child Left Behind initiatives affected what and how the students were learning. Further, the students used writing to involve themselves in many decisions about classroom strategy (19-23). "My students are aware of what they must learn as prescribed by the district, but in my class they have a say in *how* they learn," Hitchcock reports (23). Tellingly, Hitchcock asked her students to brainstorm one group goal that would encompass all that the class had discussed over a period of time. "After less than a minute, they decided: `Develop into better writers'" (22). This is the "aha" moment—the moment of value perception—that Peter Elbow has discussed (Elbow 24) .

At Stadium School in Baltimore, a group of students ages eleven through fifteen, reacting to student disruptions at dances, decided to lobby for a youth center. The group, who called themselves the "Youth Dreamers," originated in an elective course called Community Action (*Writing for a Change* 25). In this course, conducted in collaboration with the NWP, students initiated a letter-writing campaign to the mayor and other government officials, the Department of Public Housing, local professional sports teams and local newspapers. The first success, a $75,000 grant from a federal bill, was followed by others (27). Now, at the start of each school year, veteran Youth Dreamers teach new students lessons on fundraising, telephone protocol, budgeting, balancing a checkbook and other skills (29). Teacher Kristina Berdan reports student enthusiasm in writing business proposals, grants, budgets, and letters of inquiry to foundations. She continues:

> In my English class, students refused to write a short story, but the Youth Dreamers would write ten-page grants…. In my English class, asking a student to revise a paper became an emotional disaster. In Youth Dreamers, students would come to me to ask if they had left out any important information in their letter of inquiry to a foundation. …. When rejection letters rolled in … students would look at me and ask, "So who should we write to next?" This was an abberation from the English classroom, where the students would fall apart if they did not receive the grade they expected on a paper. (33-4)

The students had exorcised the panic they had formerly experienced when failure loomed, and forged new identities that were resilient enough to continue pushing in the face of rejection. Why did they soldier on despite rejection? Clearly, they wanted a youth center. The goal was real, and the more clearly and persuasively they wrote, the greater was the liklihood of success. The motivation was high, and the writing brought results.

At Sparks High School in Nevada, Lori Farias taught "Critics of Society," a one-semester, untracked English class offered to juniors and seniors. Students were required to "choose their own cause, research it, create a plan of action to positively affect the cause, act on it, reflect on their progress, and present their entire project to the class" (51). The students also read such works of literature as Thoreau's "On Civil Disobedience," Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," and Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*. As Farias' students put it, "We all read pieces that made us think, made us cheer, made us mad" (53). Within *Writing for a Change*, these efforts are detailed in an article entitled "Changing Our World," which Farias' students wrote collaboratively.

Have such programs improved student writing? Yes, according to the NWP. The NWP used seven measures of writing performance in nine test sites across the country. In all 63 cases, the NWP reports, students with teachers who had received NWP training outpaced the improvement of students without such teachers. The differences, they report, are "so large as to be statistically significant" ("National Writing Project Research Brief 2008," n. pag.). The seven measurements are as follows: content, including quality and development of ideas; structure, the arrangement of ideas and supporting evidence; stance, success in expressive perspective; sentence fluency, including appropriate variety in length and type; diction, including appropriateness and maturity of words and expressions; conventions of grammar, mechanics, and usage; holistic assessment, an independent score describing the quality of the piece as a whole.

That standardized measurements would register such results shows that student engagement with the writing process yields success criteria consistent with emperically based measurements. Particularly noteworthy is that students met the criteria for "conventions of grammar, mechanics, and usage" without exposure to the imitative strategies of the product method: traditional grammar drills.

Because its programs steer dramatically away from grammar drills, the reported, seemingly counter-intuitive improvement that NWP programs achieve in grammar, mechanics and usage may seem surprising. In "Reading Papers: A Teaching Response," Sydell Rabin suggests why. "The truth is," she contends, arguing against drawing attention to grammar errors on early drafts of a writing assignment, "that the most egregious errors often vanish *when students finally know what they are writing about*" (47). The italics are mine. I contend that the phrase signifies student engagement with the

topic. An identity negotiation has occurred, and the student has understood and endorsed the assignment and is willing proceeding with it. The student knows what he or she is doing and has committed to doing it. An "aha" moment has arrived.

For students, Brooke articulates the "aha" moment as "feeling and articulating an understanding of themselves as writers, as people who use writing for useful social and personal purposes" (Brooke, *Writing and Sense of Self* 5). When people finish a class with this feeling, Brooke writes, "they assert that they have learned something and that the course was successful. Because of the kinds of identity negotiations that occur in them, writing workshop courses like … the NWP allow such a self-understanding to develop more readily than do many other courses. (5) Identity-negotiation theory makes the benefits of writing more tangible.

Though Pritchard and Honeycutt have raised such caveats as criticicism of ratios of success that the NWP reports for "lacking emperical evidence," they do conclude that "There is no doubt that the NWP has been a major force in accentuating the role of writing in learning, in reinvigorating teacher enthusiasm, in garnering respect for what teachers of writing accomplish in their classrooms, and in professionalizing the teacher as leader …, consultant, and researcher" (283). And that, it seems to me, cannot help but improve student achievement.

Chapter XX—Struggle

I finally present and analyze the program that I regard as an outstanding example of the educational philosophies Brooke elucidates. It uses computer networking technology to

facilitate writing that engages continuing identity negotiation within a framework of electronic communication. Struggle, an outreach program at a community house on the north side of Pittsburgh near Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, is a community service program that addresses community needs—dialogue among members of the community, particularly parents and their children, and providing young adults with a safe and productive place to spend after-school hours—while directly addressing writing through identity-negotiating. Struggle is highlighted in "Struggle: A Literate Practice Supporting Life-Project Planning," an essay written by Long, Peck, and Baskins. It is part of *School's Out! Bridging Out-of-School Literacies with Classroom Practice.*

Struggle uses a simulation that includes writing exercises that direct students of all ages toward engagement with real issues in their lives (131). The simulation could be reconstituted, reprogrammed and moved to the classroom in innumerable variants. Imaginative speculation in this regard may provide a glimpse of what might take place in a classroom of the future.

In a six-week, outside-the-classroom seminar, instructors direct youngsters to create a graphic "dinner table" that they are to populate with whomever they choose. They construct the table on networked computers, a media with which they are very familiar and comfortable. They customize their own home pages, putting themselves on familiar electronic grounds and encouraging individual creativity in design.

The creativity and use of imagination continue: the diners may be people the young writer knows personally—members of the writer's family, for example—or they may be historical figures like Dr. Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela. An older mentor, who

is also a member of the Struggle organization, is "seated" at the representation of the table. All the computers are networked.

Writing assignments involve conversations between the student and members of the table, or among members of the table themselves: think of creating a dialogue between Mark Twain and a participating student. The student will also initiate dialogue with his or her mentor, and with fellow students. If adapted in a classroom, for example, students might compose characterizations of the dining participants as a writing exercise. Further writing assignments might involve essays or stories involving the people at the table.

As time passes, the student is encouraged to write about real world problems that he or she is facing. The student may discuss these in writing with the mentor and may also create "discussions" with members of his table, or invite another networked classmate to participate. If a student has seated his or her father at the table, for example, the ongoing exercises can provide an opportunity to air grievances, worries, ask for advice, or discuss solutions to a problem. Student imagination can take flight here. A created dialogue between, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and a boy's father can perform several of the many services of good writing: It can clarify and inspire, foster awareness, uncover underlife motives, and in general gives the student an opportunity to develop his or her identity.

The Struggle table is the electronic equivalent of the real table that Atwell describes in her Maine home when friends come to call:

> It is a literate environment.... We don't need assignments, lesson plans, lists, teachers' manuals or handbooks. We need only another literate person. [Here, students may need to be encouraged to believe that they

> *are* literate]. And the talk isn't sterile, grudging or perfunctory. It's filled with jokes, arguments, exchanges of bits of information, descriptions of what we loved and hated and why. (Atwell 19)

Atwell loves the way she and her friends "chat most evenings at that table" and wishes it could become "the way my kids and I could chat, entering literature together. Somehow, I had to get that table into my classroom and invite my … students to pull up a chair" (19). The electronic table that Struggle uses can be the computerized version of that table—and it can be more.

For in-classroom teachers using the Struggle program as a template, the imaginative possibilities are equally open-ended. In a discussion of *Things Fall Apart*, for example, participants might write petitions to their ruler Okonkwo, whose role might be assumed electronically by a student, or by a mentor, or act as part of a group of his counselors. They might invite him to appear at the table. The counselors would have plenty to say to their tragic leader.

Such a program might even be adapted to heal an old wound of mine. A teacher might, for example, be programmed to welcome "John Keats" and give students the opportunity to ask the electronic recreation of the author about why he wrote about that "stupid" nightingale.

End note: For me, this essay has surely been an identity negotiation of its own. I look forward to continuation the negotiation with my students, colleagues, and myself in teaching and writing during the years ahead.

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