

TEACHING/WRITING WORKSHOP: A CRITICAL MEMOIR OF TRAINING TEACHER  
CANDIDATES IN DEVELOPMENTAL COMPOSITION

by

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Finally, I am grateful to my heavenly father whose grace and faithfulness sustain me. No matter what I accomplish, knowing Jesus is better. *Philippians 3*

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Abstract

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I began by attempting to fill a gap I observed in the preparation of the novice teachers whom I supervised. I created a teaching apprenticeship program in order to give preservice teachers opportunities to enact the theories and methods of writing instruction I had taught them. The more I read and researched, the more I uncovered important gaps in those theories and methods.

Through narrative and critical self-study, I explore my own teaching life, my work with both struggling college writers and teachers-in-training, and my attempts to navigate the complex institutional forces that can frustrate innovation. Ultimately, I suggest that opening up gaps to make space for dialogue, reflection, and the interplay of theory and practice may be more productive than filling gaps through curricular change.

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## Chapter 1

### “Queasy” Introductions

When I first read Barry Lane’s introduction to *After the End*, I was tempted for a single moment to plagiarize. That’s how close his description is to where I am now, attempting to introduce this project. Lane says he wrote multiple versions of his first chapter before finally realizing he should just talk about his “struggle” (2) to introduce the book. It fit, he finally realized—a book on teaching writing by focusing on revision might as well begin with the process of struggling through it.

As I scribbled myself into Lane’s margins, I had the uncanny feeling of hearing my students’ voices when I sit across from them, reading, listening, and talking about their writing. When they’ve started to find a way through to some writing clarity, so many ask “Can I do this? Is this allowed?” and that’s exactly what I’m writing in Lane’s book. Why not? I tell them. I’m attempting to untie a knot of teaching, mentoring, writing, and research, and I’m finding that the challenge of clearly explaining it mimics the challenge of living it.

A while ago, one of my colleagues, who teaches research methods, asked me how the dissertation was coming along. I’ve begun to feel as resentful as I had during pregnancy, when my rotundity and obvious discomfort prompted people to ask me how much longer. “My dissertation? Uh, it’s coming along,” I lied. I hadn’t read Barry Lane’s book yet, but I was living the confusion and despair he describes, “wondering how important this book could be if I couldn’t even write an introduction to it” (4).

“Talk me through it,” my colleague said. I knew he was trying to be helpful, not condescending, like every mother who clucked over my pregnant belly and started sharing her experiences with me. So I stumbled through some stuff about apprenticeship,

composition theory, and narrative inquiry, and his bushy grey eyebrows drew closer together with every word.

Then, he brightened. "Oh! It's just a case study."

"Sort of, but it's not objective," I said. "I'm writing about my own experiences."

He frowned, we tried on a few more methods, and then he gave up: "Well, you'll figure it out. That's when you'll know you're really ready to write. When you can explain it succinctly to someone like me."

Super.

Later, I read Barry Lane's account of attempting to describe his book without-an-introduction to those who would ask what he was writing about, talking "queasily" and throwing in "lingo to make it sound as if I had it under control" (4). I drew my colleague's eyebrows in the margins of Lane's book and gave myself permission to ignore the well-intentioned advice of the eyebrows. Writing would help me make sense of my research.

When I first began teaching an undergraduate teacher preparation course in Adolescent Literacy, I was fresh from the high school English classroom myself. I had inherited a solid, respected Content-Area Reading text from the previous professor, and I dutifully set about creating powerpoints on comprehension strategies and vocabulary while my students produced creative integrated novel units and practiced holistic trait-scoring. Because I had come to teacher education by way of an M.A. in English with supplemental, general coursework in Curriculum and Instruction, I was teaching on the strength of my experience, and my students were comfortable with it. Most of what I covered seemed familiar to them, and the most debatable questions we tackled were along the lines of whether or not Carol Jago's assessment of Young Adult literature as "second rate stories"(6) might be too harsh.

I'd previously taken courses in writing instruction for college composition and had also taught first year composition since completing my Master's degree. Donald Murray's "Writing is Rewriting"<sup>11</sup> was my first introduction to the so-called "Process Approach" as a pedagogical stance, but by the time I read that essay, I'd already been taught a "process" model in high school and college that looked so little like the description I was now reading as a graduate student that I didn't even realize they were the same. I'd taken courses in composition theory, but, and I even now can't explain exactly why I didn't see the potential for cross-pollination, I had taught high school English the way I was taught: a little grammar, lots of novels, a few perfunctory writing assignments, and some other lessons mixed in as a nod to "standards." As a teacher educator, I began by modeling that same pattern for my students. Soon after that, I took a course in teaching through writing workshop that shook me. What I had understood as "process" instruction was nothing like what I was reading and practicing. Because I hadn't seen any evidence of the process-paradigm reigning in the K-12 classroom, except in a repackaged, derivative sense (hey, guys, you can pre-write on these pages in your standardized test essay booklet, even though I know none of you will), I hadn't seen it as a viable option in my own high school classroom or in my subsequent time as a teacher educator.

So I took an entire school break and started reading and studying, guilt fueling my quest to redesign this course. My first step was to supplement my traditional textbook on lesson plans and comprehension strategies with Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle*, 546 pages on teaching writing in middle school that coaxes its teacher audience into the writing workshop through narrative and astonishingly interesting writing by thirteen year-

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<sup>11</sup> This essay has been anthologized a number of times, and because of Murray's love of revision, it looks slightly different in different works. I'm frankly unsure where my well-worn photocopy, assigned reading in an undergraduate composition course, originated. For one version of it, see Murray's *The Craft of Revision*.

olds. Over time, I've dropped the main textbook and added other texts that describe the possibilities of the English classroom transformed into a space for developing readers and writers to actually read and write. Nearly every semester since, I read comments like this one in student response papers: "I really love the idea of the writing workshop, but I don't think it's realistic. Based on my observations and my own high school experience, English is novel units, a research paper, and standardized test preparation. Atwell doesn't teach in a regular public school, right?" At first, I had to admit that I didn't have many answers for their doubts. I still question whether or not my embrace of process/workshop pedagogy is partly penance for my time as a high school English teacher and those first few semesters in Teacher Ed. At least once a week, I say to my juniors and seniors, "I can't tell you this works with middle schoolers or high schoolers because I didn't do it. I didn't know I should."

The overwhelming majority of my students, preservice teachers<sup>2</sup>, are still interested, and some are even in love with the idea of students' choosing what to write, writing all the time, developing portfolios and reading mostly books they've chosen, at their own pace, with only response and dialogue as accountability measures. But, it's idealistic, they say—every year since, the same sort of discussion plays out—how could we, novices, do anything like that in the public school classrooms we've seen? What about standards and testing and administrators? What about student apathy? What about the need for explicit, systematic instruction? So we review the research, some of it unfavorable to the workshop approach, and talk some more. We deliberate about how

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<sup>2</sup> For the sake of clarity, I'll attempt to distinguish between my composition students and those students I taught in various other capacities, in teacher education courses, as teaching apprentices, and in their field-based student teaching classrooms. I'll use the terms preservice teachers, apprentices, and novice teachers, respectively, to differentiate them.

the workshop can address standards and can be (really, must be) organized and systematic. We talk about space for explicit instruction, both in response to educational standards and in response to students' needs. This structure isn't quite as rigorously critical as it could be—Steven VanderStaay describes a much more challenging method in his “Critiquing Process”—but I attempt balance while relishing the romance of the workshop.

Honestly, I don't have to provide critique. My students do that for me. At least a few always shake their heads. But we haven't seen this, they say. Not this way. Not really ever. Then they share stories of high school, being totally invested in *Steampunk Chronicles*<sup>3</sup> at lunch, after band practice, even while the teacher was talking about *The Scarlet Letter*, which they were supposed to have read but ended up just googling synopses for or getting grounded for failing a school essay but regularly writing a fan fiction blog at night. Occasionally, a student will pipe up: I've been in a class sort of like what we're reading about, but it was a creative writing class here, in college. Or, I took a writing elective at my high school, and it was like this, but, Mrs. Blair, we all chose that class, so of course we wanted to write and read and everything. How could this workshop-thing work for the average student? Occasionally, someone will say, wait a second. This is just writing process stuff. Bubble-maps and sloppy copies, right? The version of Process they invoke, though, is a curricular chimera in which a few prewriting strategies and some required revision got tacked on to existing grammar lessons and five-paragraph essays (née “themes”) and renamed a writing workshop.

As I said above, especially when I first started endorsing the workshop with my teacher candidates, I had to confess. I'd never taught like this either. I couldn't validate

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<sup>3</sup> This is a series of novels by Kady Cross, published by Harlequin Teen.

the success of the philosophy I was offering. Secretly, I had the same doubts as they did, and maybe that accounts for the recurring discussion. I've loved Atwell and her companion for high school, Penny Kittle. I traced the roots of the process movement and its links to K-12 education through the work of Janet Emig and of Donald Graves and marveled at the development of primary-age writers in Lucy Calkins' *The Art of Teaching Writing*. I'd read and reread and argued with expressivist Godfathers Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, loving them for the promise of real writing in the classroom but scoffing at the idea that students would really write without teachers.

More significantly, I'd finally understood them as a theoretical whole. I'd also read research which suggested that the workshop is inconsistent partly because it's become its own inconsistently-applied orthodoxy<sup>4</sup>. Of course, we're all supposed to be post-process now, so technically, I'm forty years too late for process theory/workshop methodology to be revolutionary or really even current for my teacher candidates. And yet, the distance between post-process theorists and the average middle school classroom is larger than just a few years' delay in trickle-down pedagogy. In every secondary English classroom I have visited in my role as a student-teacher supervisor-- from 6<sup>th</sup> grade language arts in suburban Nashville to a bilingual, two-hour literacy course minutes from the Mexican border in Laredo, to a 12<sup>th</sup> grade Advanced Placement class in a wealthy suburb of Dallas—I have never seen authentic writing instruction. I've seen worksheets, responses to prompts, research paper planning, standardized test practice, the occasional grammar lesson, and many, many novels being "taught," but I haven't observed student writers or teachers actually teaching writing. It's happening somewhere, I'm sure, but my experience can't be too far from the norm. Arthur Applebee and Judith

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Writing Next* or Gary Troia's research on the workshop's efficacy for struggling writers.

Langer have observed that the kind of writing students do most often in classrooms rarely provides them “with opportunities to use composing as a way to think through the issues, to show the depth or breadth of their knowledge, or to go beyond what they know in making connections and raising new issues” (15). This conclusion, from their 2011 “Snapshot” of middle and high school writing instruction, came from both classroom observations and teacher-reported data in a large scale study. Students are writing more regularly than they did thirty years ago, but the overall quality of that writing is questionable, say Applebee and Langer, as is some of the data reported by teachers. For example, an overwhelming majority of English teachers reported “frequently” using “process-oriented” approaches, but classroom observation and individual teacher interviews didn’t always bear that out. A twelfth-grade English teacher from a school selected for its emphasis on writing instruction was “shocked” and “disappointed” at her school’s writing emphasis: “I’m a Writing Project kind of kid, and I got here and like writer’s workshop and they’re like, ‘What are you talking about?’” (16).

What I saw in classrooms and what Applebee and Langer describe are essentially what I had done as a teacher: I assigned some writing, it was mostly terrible, I marked it up and gave it back to students, and they did whatever they do with it. I assigned some novels, which students mostly disliked, I did my best to get some students interested in talking about them, and we called it English class. The fact was that I wasn’t preparing students for anything meaningful, I wasn’t even really addressing standards, and we all knew it. The more I studied composition, the less I saw anything like what I knew from the classroom (what I had seen as a teacher educator and what I had done myself)—it was the same dissonance my students experienced. I needed better examples.

About this same time, my dean asked if I could take over a developmental writing course for an elderly adjunct who could not finish the semester. I began after midterm, so I started experimenting with elements of the workshop. Over the next few years, if one of my upper-level courses didn't make the enrollment quota or I needed some extra money, I volunteered for developmental composition. I began to draw from my experiences in that course whenever I taught pre-service teachers.

And then, in the midst of a discussion about the viability of implementing the writing workshop in a secondary classroom, it occurred to me that I had observable examples of this pedagogy I endorsed, right across campus in my developmental course. My preservice teachers and I could use the developmental English classroom as a space for modeling and practice, so I invited them. No one came. Many students seemed interested, but if I asked, they would say, "I really want to come observe that class, but I just don't have time."

I started thinking: if time or extrinsic motivation is what they need, maybe I could develop a more structured approach. In my mind, students would attend their professional course, where we'd read and prepare, and then instead of going to a local high school and seeing more of the same things they'd seen for so long, they'd come to my developmental composition course and participate in the workshop. Even though it didn't work out exactly that way, the learning experience has been invaluable for all of us.

I have learned a great deal about the nature of the English classroom, the challenge of balancing of pedagogical influences without creating a chaotic classroom, the need for interactive, intermediary field-based experiences for preservice teachers, and the difficulty of sustaining a program as an individual instructor. Ultimately, this project has become as much about discovering who I am as a teacher as it has been about training my students, both freshmen and teacher candidates.

Now, when people ask me what my dissertation is about, I give them the simple version and just say it's about training writing teachers through apprenticeship. It's more than that, though. It's about the intersection between teaching and writing on several levels. So, my real explanation, the "queasy" one, goes like this: It's a description of teaching a workshop-style writing course for struggling college writers while simultaneously teaching a small group of undergraduate preservice teachers how to apply similar principles in their own teaching, all the while attempting to clarify my own theoretical bases and methods for teaching writing. I'm attempting to write something new about something already-at-work-but-not-working-as-well-as-it-could that I hope will be useful but I know isn't reproducible. In fact, I'm still struggling with how to reproduce it for myself.

I caught myself launching into advice-story about my last pregnancy with a good friend. It's her first pregnancy, and I was helping her fill out her gift registry. "You know what," I said, "Every pregnancy is different, and so is every baby. Get as prepared as you can, and then just do your best."

And this is where I've been for several years. I had an idea, I've tried it out with some success (if I'm defining success in terms of progress rather than achievement), and that success looks different every semester. I've spent the entire time thinking, reading, getting so caught up in teaching that I forget I'm supposed to be writing. Then I remember I'm researching and try to write, but I end up reading and thinking some more. Like Lane says he did at difficult moments, I've wandered, sometimes "aimlessly," (4) through the works of teacher-writers I admire. He lists Nancie Atwell, Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, and Frank Smith. I'd add Penny Kittle and Ralph Fletcher to the list as others who are able to package research, theory, and method in an interesting and readable style. Plus, I love that they're so hopeful, all of them. And on the post-secondary side, I still find

Donald Murray and Peter Elbow and even Mina Shaughnessy more current than the latest thing we're "post-," at least in my world.<sup>5</sup>

My world is an intersection of kid writers, people who teach kid writers, and people who never really learned to write well as kids (or, at least, the SAT says so). My students at the University level are either preservice teachers—in my case, undergraduate teacher candidates training to teach middle and high school, usually English but sometimes other subjects—and AIM freshmen, our local term for conditionally-accepted students, the ones who didn't make the "college-ready" team.

Two of my academic fields, teaching writing and teacher preparation, overlap, and I often make that a point of discussion with both groups of students. My juniors and seniors hear examples from me about the writing (and sometimes, reading and literature) courses I teach, and my freshmen participate in my ongoing, active testing of the best practices I teach my juniors and seniors. The feedback loop here provides so much potential for me, but it's indirect for the teacher candidates I train.

So this was my big idea: I wanted to cut out myself as the middle man. I wanted my juniors and seniors to see what I meant, to try it out, to believe what I taught them about teaching because they'd experienced it, and I wanted my freshmen to reap the benefits of other experienced minds in our classroom, other sounding boards, other ways of explaining. I wanted my freshmen to be able to say to my almost-high school teachers, "Here's what I missed before. This is what I needed a few years ago. You should do this

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<sup>5</sup> I know I risk sounding lazy, like I drew my bibliography from the Heinemann catalog, or maybe worse, that I'm perpetuating some kind of theory-incest, since so many of these writers were contemporaries in the process/workshop/expressivist camp or were students of those originals. I'd hold out Shaughnessy and Smith to defend myself, since their work is more informed by empirical traditions, but I confess that I connect more with their theoretical positions than their actual methods, so that's not much better. I'll deal with this problem in a later chapter, but for now, this lineup of writers represents my theoretical starting point.

when you're a teacher." I wanted to be able to train my teachers and watch them go *at the same time*.

I feel like I should have a clever, even clichéd sentence at the end of that paragraph, like "That is when the teaching apprenticeship program was born." But I can't. Something was born, a fledgling process, perhaps, but not a program. And that's really the focus of this project. For one thing, it's still a work in progress. For another thing, I realized quickly that my goal couldn't be for my teacher candidates to, as I said above, "believe" in my methods. Instead, the apprenticeship needed to be a space for them to develop their own methods and, perhaps more importantly, to learn to continually examine and reflect on those methods.

Ultimately, then, this isn't a method for training writing teachers or for teaching struggling writers. It's not even a study of what works in training teachers or teaching writing. This is more story than study—what worked with some students, what didn't, what some students learned and others didn't. My conclusions are tentative, because this sort of work, as Jessica Yood writes, reflecting on the work of Mina Shaughnessy, is "a little revolutionary *and* a little reactionary *and*, often, transitional. But not paradigmatic" (28). Donald Murray's concept that "writing is never completed" (*Learning* 119) fits here, too: writing, teaching, and teacher training are always in flux, always shaped by new thoughts, new students, and new dynamics. I can't even make claims about the "success" of my methods, since both method and result are a bit different with every group of students, every apprentice teacher.

The challenge and beauty of this project all along has been that I always seem to be writing from the middle of it while simultaneously attempting to step back enough to examine my own experience. Even now, as I re-read sections I wrote before this last semester's mix of students and teaching apprentices, I'm revising both the writing and the

future classroom: what patterns are repeatable, and what needs to be revised? It's dirty inquiry, really; I can never be truly objective.

Since my teaching life is split between English and Teacher Education, it seems appropriate that I'll be drawing from method and theory on both sides here. Part of the telling of this story needs to include a look at the small but important field of work on the (sometimes dysfunctional) intersection between English and English Education. The apprenticeship program that I attempted to build lives at this intersection.

My philosophy of teaching composition remains inspired by the now-vintage process writing gurus of the 1970s and 1980s, whose pedagogical legacy became the K-12 workshop of the 80s and 90s. In the end, though, this isn't an extended commercial for the writing workshop. In fact, much of my actual classroom practice has evolved as a response to the inherent problems of the theoretical model that I love, so I'll dialogue with post-process theory as well.

I'll also look to the interesting qualitative research methods of Narrative Inquiry, Critical Self-Study, and Autoethnography, which emphasize foregrounding and interrogating the researcher-as-participant and presenting research as story, as well as Max Van Manen's theories of phenomenological research that argue for the scientific value of examined lived experience. In some ways, such research feels like awkward [auto]biography, but it also actively questions what it means for research to be objective or empirical and draws heavily on literary critical theory. I'm fascinated by the ways in which these relatively new methods are so self-conscious (pun intended), and the writer in me wonders why researchers employing these "methods" don't just go on and tell the story. But I know that Teacher Education research fought so hard to be taken seriously as "science" that I understand the compulsion for apologetics and data in what is, essentially, narrative.

On the same narrative continuum are two more forms that I'd like to consider as I tell my own story: my teaching has been heavily mentored by writerly teaching manuals authored by the big voices of Process writing, many of whom I mentioned earlier. Before I began this project, though, I had no idea that there existed an entire genre of teaching memoirs (some by the same authors) with generic conventions all their own. I draw on these books both for structural support and for the ways in which they deal with all kinds of interesting corners of teaching. The teaching memoir seems, ultimately, less slanted toward selective success than the teaching manual, and I hope to emulate that reflective and critical nature here.

Despite my earlier description of messy methodology, based on a jumble of theory, and still in process, I promise to arrive at some useful conclusions as I tell the story of the four semesters I spent working with teaching apprentices and developmental writing students. On the way there, I'll examine the potential of the interplay between teacher-memoir, teaching manual, and the more traditional qualitative research study as sites for examining my own growth as a writer, writing teacher, and teacher educator. I hope to finally offer some insight into the potential connection between teacher preparation programs and developmental programs and even some recommendations for cross-talk between English and Education overall.

## Chapter 2

### Finding a Framework

Late in the Spring semester of 2012, I announced to a small group of preservice teachers that I was working to make the teaching apprenticeship program a reality. We'd talked about the idea in our Adolescent Literacy class several times, and I was excited to share that they could participate if they wanted to. Everyone seemed interested in the prospect, and over the next few weeks, I had five participants signed up.

By the end of the summer, five had become three. One student had decided to change majors, and one never responded to my emails. The three who'd stayed in touch completed applications and agreed to my writing about their participation, so I invited them to dinner a few days before the start of the fall semester. While my husband cooked and I set the table, I imagined us crowded around it, talking about writing and teaching, coffee mugs and books and intellectual banter knitting us together. I would be their mentor, like Donald Murray without the beard.

Jenna and Caleb<sup>6</sup> arrived within a few minutes of each other, and we spent a while making small talk while we waited for Bailey. Caleb, quirky and earnest, filled up as much conversational space as he could, smiling and talking about the little house he was renting with his wife of a few months, about his latest adventures in the Army reserves, and about a new job that he hoped would allow him enough time to tackle the heavy course load he was taking on. He'd been my first student to commit to the apprenticeship and the last to complete the paperwork. Jenna was mostly quiet, checking her phone periodically to see if Bailey had gotten lost; I suspected she and Caleb didn't interact

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<sup>6</sup> I'm using pseudonyms for students' names, and all students consented to be written about or quoted.

much at school. It dawned on me later that all I really knew about Jenna was based on impression: she was precise, observant, and studious.

After a while, we went ahead without Bailey, and soon, we'd cleared the table and started talking about the project. I was nervous to break the news to my students that their time in the classroom with me couldn't count toward field experience hours required by their teacher education program for the semester. All I could offer would be good experience, personal mentorship, a line on their resumes, and a nice recommendation letter (by which I meant that I would write it from scratch instead of using one of my forms).

They took the news about their hours in stride and assured me they'd still participate as best they could. I assured them that I'd get as many accommodations as I could from our field experience coordinator.

"So, what exactly are we going to be doing?" Jenna ventured. "I mean, I know about coming to your class and observing and training, but what kind of work will we be doing?" I tried to describe what I envisioned, but I had a sense then of how little I had thought about the individual details of their time in the classroom. My notes were full of ideas and very little plan. I'd spent the summer working on the broad strokes of the project itself and the details of scheduling the course and attempting to get some credit-compensation for my students. I hadn't spent enough time working on a plan for what they would learn or do in the classroom.

"Honestly," I finally said, "We'll be constructing a lot of this as we go along. That's part of the research process here, I think. What we're doing doesn't have a lot of precedent, so we're going to have to create the apprenticeship together."<sup>7</sup> We had

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<sup>7</sup> There is, of course, a great deal of precedent for field-based experience in teacher training as well as a great deal of research on field training in general, which I will

dessert, chatted some more about their other classes, and they left. By the time I met with Bailey separately, I had a few more concrete plans to share with her, but I knew it felt to all of us like I was always improvising.

I told myself that what I was attempting to teach was complex and not easily packaged, in a curricular sense. Some of that uncertainty comes from my stances as a writing teacher—writing is process—and a teacher educator—knowledge is process. I needed both sets of students to develop reasoned habits of thinking, planning, acting, and responding, which could only happen, as far as I knew, by their investment and engagement in a dynamic, interactive process.

That night, after my students left, I started to worry that their trust in me and my trust in the power of my instructional approach wasn't going to be enough. I was having the same feeling that I had after a critical conversation with the chair of my dissertation committee a few months earlier. I'd sent him a draft of my proposal, which was uninformed and cluttered with jargon—I knew what I wanted to write about but not how to present it—and he'd urged me to step back, rethink my approach, and do some more reading, especially of research on teaching that focused on the lived experience of the researcher.

At first, I was relieved. I knew the kind of work he'd recommended but just didn't know how to fit it into a proposal. I had been immersed in the literature of developmental education and teacher preparation and had both taken for granted my own instructional approach (of course it worked—that's why I wanted to use it as a training site) and that my presentation of this project would need an empirical veneer. I read all summer, revisiting the work of some of my favorite writing teachers as well as their critics. The

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consider in a later chapter. There is little precedent, however, in research or practice, for the specific training context I was hoping to achieve.

Piagetian disequilibrium was real, though, as I wrestled with the weaknesses of both the composition theory that I loved and my own uncertainty about how all of this would work. Here's some of what I wrote that summer as I prepared to launch the apprenticeship and tried to figure out how I would write about it:

I'm right now revisiting the paradox that is Peter Elbow. A few years ago, I swallowed this stuff whole, and reading it critically is a little painful. Don't read your work aloud, bring dittoes. But reading aloud is good too. That's a direct quote, actually. Yikes. But then, he drops in "Reading your words out loud stresses what is most important: writing is really a voice spread out over time, not marks spread out in space" (82). Or "It's more important to learn what actually got through to a real reader than what might get through to an ideal reader" (83). Makes sense, except when you're working with students who aren't really readers.

I'm just wasting time. I need to be writing stuff I can actually use. But I'm frustrated by genre. I know it but don't know it. Do I mix dry academic stuff with more personally reflective stuff? So many of the textbooks I now favor have this kind of tone. It's office-scholar, not classroom- or library-scholar. But I can't write like that, can I? It seems like what I want to focus on is the kind of stuff I write, chuckle to myself, admit it's just for me, and then delete or put in footnotes and delete later. I just finished Jane Tompkins's teaching memoir, and she writes about teaching with such candor that I'm sometimes uncomfortable. I'm no Jane Tompkins.

I think maybe I don't have the experience and authority to keep up that tone. I need others' words and theories and success instead. Or maybe it's that I'm afraid of being the chiropractor in a room of real doctors. This is tough.

Maybe I can pretend that my approach here is based on some sophisticated theoretical stance in which I've critiqued my own subject position in relation to my students (both layers) and ultimately arrived at the conclusion that the only ethical thing I can do now is write about myself because I don't want to appropriate the voices of my students or some such thing. I should read more about that.

I don't remember how I originally discovered Nancie Atwell's book *In the Middle*. I hadn't even finished reading it when I made it one of the required textbooks for my course in Adolescent Literacy. I just remember being struck by Atwell's contention that her book, like her classroom, is an "invitation" to other teachers to reflect on their own practices through immersing themselves in her students' and her stories. The second

edition of *In the Middle* describes, Atwell says, her “evolution” as a teacher and writer (3), and she contends that narrative is “the best way . . . to reveal myself, my students, and my subject: helping kids put written language at the crux of their emotional, social, and intellectual worlds” (4). Personal narrative, she says, “frames” her presentation of pedagogy, itself interspersed with vignettes of “invit[ing] my students to find their ways inside writing and reading.” Research, she writes, allows her to deepen her practice, and writing about her teaching and her students has allowed her to “discover who I am in that classroom—as a teacher, learner, writer, reader, and grown-up” (4).

#### Searching for a model

That first summer, as I prepared to launch the apprenticeship and to write about it, I started by rereading Nancie Atwell. I knew that she was able to deftly move between personal reflection and pedagogical description, citing foundational research along the way. I tried to generalize Atwell’s structure: begin with how I came to embrace the now-outdated process approach as a primary foundation of my teaching, drawing on important teacher-mentors of mine, early teaching experiences, and even a mother-story. Move on to a description of the workshop in my developmental course, then a description of training teachers in that same classroom, including student writing from both groups. Finish with a few specific example lessons/methods, lots of reproducible stuff, and some final remarks.

I’d particularly loved Atwell’s story of Jeff, the practically illiterate fifteen year old in her eighth grade class. She won him over by giving him extra time and finally acquiescing, because he insisted, to his preferred method of invention, drawing. Jeff illustrated Atwell’s realization that she’d “missed the chance to understand . . . and support what he was doing, to talk with him and learn from him how to help him” (9). The point, though, was that Jeff learned to read and write in Atwell’s class *in spite of* her

methods, and from her experience with Jeff and after a bit more research, she learned that “the structures of [her] writing program had served Jeff as constraints” (9). I tried my own Jeff story:

*Aaron was bright and charming. He’d opted out of Pre-AP English and ended up in my class, which probably meant that he didn’t want to keep up with the extra workload in that course. I can’t remember if it was my first or second year teaching English II (10<sup>th</sup> grade). Let’s go with first year since it makes me less ashamed of myself.*

*Aaron handed me his essay and grinned. “It’s good,” he said. “I may not have wanted to work in Pre-AP, but I can write.” I just looked at him. We’d struggled quite often: he reminded me in all kinds of ways that he was too smart for my class, and I pretended that his intelligent challenges weren’t threatening to me. He either slept through class or asked too many questions.*

*Today, without looking, I handed him the paper back and motioned to the plastic tray for papers. While I had been teaching about how to write this essay, he had been writing, and I was not going to indulge him by reading his paper immediately, in front of him. I was sure I knew what he wanted. He wanted to me to admit that I had nothing to teach him. He might challenge my intellectual authority, but he would follow our class procedures, darn it.*

*Later, much later, since I dreaded reading what I knew would be terrible work, I sat down to read the essays and score them according to our state-test aligned rubric. I had taken an entire 90-minute class period to teach students how to read the state-test aligned prompt, to outline a structure that best fit the prompt, to model some rhetorical strategies that would address the state-test readers’ needs, and finally, to evaluate some sample essays according to the rubric. With twenty minutes or so left in class, I released (an ironic word, in retrospect) students to write and asked them to finish their essays at*

home to be submitted by our next class meeting in two days. By the time I reached my desk and the rest of the students had begun writing, Aaron met me with paper in hand. Before the twenty minutes were up, most of the students had stopped writing and turned in essays.

Many of the essays followed the formula I'd taught. My colleagues had given me this lesson. It was reliable, like the formula that would help my students pass their state test. I was proud of myself for making it my own, though. I even retyped some of the handouts and transparencies, since years of photocopying had blurred the edges of letters and lines. As I had read through the lesson, I remembered my own 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class, when my teacher had read my introduction for our state test essay to the whole class as an exemplary formula-follower.

First, show students the sample prompt. Next, show them how to mark the key words in the prompt. They may act like they've seen this all before, but stress the unique writing strategies we use on this year's test. Remind them that they have plenty of time to pre-write and revise, and then give them the steps. (It's the microwave dinner of argumentation. No, Lunchables. Argumentation Lunchables.) You might even write an introduction and outline for them. Brainstorm some opinions. Facts, statistics, cause-and-effect. If necessary, estimate statistics since you won't actually be able to do any research. Use the transition words first, furthermore, and finally. Restate your thesis in the conclusion. You might even get creative and disguise it. **Dear Principal Woods, I am writing to you today about a matter of great importance to the students of our school. I know that you care about your students and will want to hear our concerns. It has come to our attention that [insert words from prompt]. I [opinion about issue here] because [insert reasons 1-3].**

*Of course, I wrote this out in front of students so they could see the writing process at work. I handed out a planning worksheet to help students remember the key parts of the formula. I made suggestions about where they could be creative, and I think we practiced a mnemonic acronym or two.*

*And Aaron's essay had none of it. I don't remember the specifics of the essay except that it was creative, even satirical, and included lots of big words. It wasn't great writing, though. And more important at the time, it didn't follow the formula. I really would like to believe that, if Aaron had come up with something spectacular, I would have given him a good score even without the expected structure. I do remember walking across the hall to the teacher who had handed down the lesson and others like it. She read the essay and came to the same conclusion I did.*

*After Aaron read my score and comments, his head went back down on his desk for the remainder of the year. He came up for air during a poetry project, when he wrote and illustrated a poetry collection that was unique in that he didn't copy it from the internet. The poems were typically adolescent but interesting in their own way. Between the poetry project, the research project, and the unit on "persuasive writing" which was really our standardized test practice, that was all the significant writing we did that year.*

*I'm pragmatic enough to not dwell on what could have been if I had actually taught writing. Even just "the" writing process in any significant way. I was a new teacher just trying to survive. I do wonder, though, what would have happened if I'd just read Aaron's essay when he handed it to me. What if I had talked to him about it and let his rejection of the formula become the beginning of actual instruction for him?*

I read it over a few times and decided if borrowing Atwell's structure was going to work, I'd need some transformative stories to serve as bookends. I could stop here, with uncertainty and reflection, but I couldn't leave it here. Atwell never did; her essay about

Jeff earned her a spot in the Bread Loaf writing program the next summer, where she first realized that she had to teach writing differently. I tried writing about Corey next. He joined my English III class several weeks into the spring semester.

*He was perpetually defensive and struggled with reading so much that he was combative and insulting when we read during class. After about a month of tense classroom time, some of which he spent in detention and not class anyway, we'd come to a draw: I let him sleep in class, and he didn't swear at anyone or bolt during class. It was about then that I received his Special Education documentation (IEP) with a note from his caseworker that he was in a new foster home, and his paperwork had been delayed. He had serious reading delays, and all of his assessment needed to be done orally. He'd never told me about his SpEd accommodations, so I guessed he was embarrassed. Probably, it was just that I'd never asked. Just like I'd never known he was in foster care. I invited him to after school tutoring, and he actually came. We read Of Mice and Men together, and as long as we talked through it, I got enough from him to give him a passing grade for the six weeks. Just like that, he stopped coming to school. I contacted his caseworker, who said he was in trouble with another teacher and would be sent to the "Alternative" campus, but his foster parents had withdrawn him first. That's how it is in my memory, anyway.*

!#%\$#@#. This story wouldn't work. It wasn't not even about writing, let alone some issue that would have been resolved with the workshop. I tried to remember some stories that could work as watersheds: moments when I knew that I needed to do things differently. Nothing. I didn't even have a clever name for what kind of writing teacher I was before I committed to the workshop. I wasn't really anything. A literature teacher who didn't know how to teach writing. Agnostic, maybe? A survivalist? I'd fast forward, then, to

the first time I really embraced the workshop with struggling students. My first half-semester of Developmental Composition.

*The students, whom I mostly knew already because they were in my Developmental Reading course, celebrated my arrival. "There's been so much grammar!" I swooped in, the savior, to allow them to just write. We had some dynamic sessions. I shared some of my latest personal narrative with them, the one about Rebecca that was too long and too personal to try to publish (not that I'd ever tried to publish anything personal before). We spent a class period generating writing ideas after reading a recent Newsweek article about "Adultolescents." Students were excited about their essays: Diego wrote about what it would be like to go back to Argentina after he graduated, Charles wrote about his time in rehab, Daniel wrote an exposition of a Bible passage that he could convert into a sermon. Conferences went well, with students describing the choices they were making as writers, and I eagerly collected that first set of papers. The result was mixed. They were interesting enough, earnest enough, and clear-ish. They still needed lots of work, though, and I was sure that the legendary retired teacher who'd handed the course over to me to finish could sense the run-ons and typos across town. I dutifully responded to each paper and finished the semester. I'd taught writing before, but this was the first time I was dedicated to a method, and it was the first time that I wouldn't lay students' failure at their own feet. Still, it wasn't a full semester...*

I filed the vignettes away along with my random notes on Peter Elbow. Later, I read an essay by Stephen Vanderstaay in which he calls Atwell's book, especially the first edition, "shamelessly persuasive," a "romance" and a "conversion story," which, he says, is the "signature move of the process movement" (100). I use the second edition, I told myself, and I'm a critical reader. I hadn't been brainwashed or anything. In fact, some cynical student of mine usually catches this when we discuss the book in class. One

student will ask the class whether or not we noticed that there are no bad writing samples, except the ones that got better. Another might point out that Atwell skims quickly over issues of standardized testing, curricular standards, local governance, large classes, or time-consuming assessment. Presumably, and generally another student points this out, she doesn't really deal with those issues. She's writing from a school she's constructed. Except for the variability among students, her school must have optimal conditions. And she's honest about that. One of us usually reminds others that the point of the book is to talk about what works for her or how she worked through something that didn't. And another student usually wonders how helpful or successful the book would be if Atwell dwelt too long on the perennial problems of teaching or teaching writing.

I could even make a case for Atwell's language in the introduction as ironic—surely she's conscious of criticism like Vanderstaay's: the first sentence of her second edition is "I confess" (3). She goes on to describe the "heady" days of the "revolution," when she and others "abandoned the old orthodoxies," "laid down . . . [their] burdens" and "ecstatic[ally]" learned to create student-centered classrooms in which she "[fell] in love with every one" of her students (17). Her confession, though, is of having fallen too hard: "As part of my transformation I embraced a whole new set of orthodoxies" (17), which she then lists and critiques. This isn't the language of blind faith. She's at least aware of the limitations of her earlier approach.

Still, I had to admit to myself that because I'd used Atwell's teaching as a model to emulate in my own, I'd been doing the same when considering it a model for presenting my research. That is, I may have taken up, considered, integrated, and even rejected her methods, but I never considered the validity of her position as an authority.

I read it again. Despite the fact that Atwell devotes several pages to her early failures, her misplaced devotion that has since produced a more thoughtful, more flexible workshop, her “second thoughts” (18), and her experiences with other teachers that forced her to consider the potential problems with replicating the workshop, it is, on the whole, still a romance. Her narrative demonstrates how she learned from her mistakes and moves quickly into the practical description of the workshop that has been helpful to many teachers for many years. It is full of photographs and student writing. All of the pictures are of engaged students, teacher, or students-with-teacher. All of the pieces of writing are successes or drafts on their way to success. Atwell occasionally relates a vignette of an off-task student or a piece of writing that didn’t work, but it’s all problem-solution.

I began hunting for problems then: unresolved issues, poor student writing that stayed poor, especially resistant or unmotivated students whom she couldn’t win over, institutional constraints that weren’t overcome. I find a potential candidate in the chapter on writing conferences. Atwell relates the story of Sabrina, who is trying to work through a personal narrative that’s essentially her mother’s experience and not her own. She and Atwell talk, Atwell gives Sabrina ideas to consider, and Sabrina rewrites it as a poem that is eventually published in the school’s literary journal (218-19). “The before, during, and after of my conference with Sabrina,” Atwell writes, “is typical” (220). I know, of course, that she’s making a point about the potential of the individual writing conference, of letting students struggle and talk and work through their writing challenges. That students come to rely on these interactive patterns and even anticipate them as they work through their own processes. I’ve seen this in my own student conferences, but many of my students don’t want to struggle or work:

*Alyssa sits at the desk across from me, and before I can say anything, she hands me a typed paper. Before I read it, I ask her to talk to me about how her writing is going, and she nods toward the page in front of me: "It's done."*

*I realize that she's not going to talk to me until I read, so I start to skim "How to Make a Bed," hoping that maybe it's supposed to be ironic, remembering that I'd handed out Dave Barry's "How to Make a Board" earlier this semester. Nope. It's just what it says. It's like an about.com article without the pictures or the searcher's need to know. I start with something positive. "It looks already edited, which is great. Did you work on that?" She shrugs.*

*I take a deep breath. "So, are you just really interested in bed-making, or are you . . ." I pause, trying to figure out another possible reason for this choice.*

*"Not really."*

*I look over to see where my teaching apprentice is. She's talking with another student, so she probably can't hear that this is the worst writing conference in history.*

*"Well, first, I'm proud that you worked hard to finish before the deadline, and if you didn't work too much on editing this, that's good, too, because it means you have an ear for grammar, and we won't have to work too much on that at the end. But I, and I wish there were another way to say this, as a reader, I really. . . I'm not interested in this essay. What do you think we can do to create exigence? Do you remember that term from last week?"*

*"Do you mean I need to keep working on it?" She's obviously disappointed.*

*"Well, yeah. We have another week left until the deadline, and there's so much more that this essay needs. Don't you think so? I mean, do you like it? Do you feel confident that it meets our criteria for communication? Is this an essay you'd want to read?"*

*She just stares at me for a moment. I wonder what she's debating. Finally, she says, "So you want me to rewrite it?"*

*I step back, mentally, and start asking questions about why she wrote it, what led her to the topic, her interests. I brainstorm a few angles for her that might make the essay interesting. Somewhere in the middle, she confesses that she chose the topic because she thought it would be easy to write, and it was. She finished the whole thing, typed it, fixed the spelling and mechanics according to Word's squiggly underlines, and printed it for class. This was all last week. She'd just been waiting for conference day to give it to me.*

*We talked options, and when she left, I couldn't tell whether or not she was still disappointed about having to keep working. The next time I talked with her, she had some new, interesting draft work in her notebook. In her portfolio at the end of the semester, though, was the bed-making essay.*

I had no idea if I had taught "the student not the paper" (Murray, *Learning* 159). This conference wasn't exactly "typical" of conferences in my class, but Alyssa had obviously, in Atwell's terms, anticipated the patterns of our workshop (if not my specific responses in the conference) and "use[d] them to meet [her] needs" (220). But her needs were less about strengthening her writing and more about finishing her assignment.

In my teaching, I had loved Atwell's evolutionary narrative filled with practical descriptions of teaching method, but I realized it couldn't work as a guide for my research. The more I thought about it, the more I had to admit that I wasn't satisfied with the romance. She and her students write off into the sunset together, and my experience with the writing workshop is briefer and more complicated than what she presents. First, the "framing" structure allowed her to obscure any story that would indicate anything but forward progress: her introductory narratives are all about the teacher she once was, and

the rest of the book is about the magic of her classroom now. As my students often suggested, one would assume that every one of Atwell's students wrote like every one of the excerpts she published, and every time. Second, I was learning more about what didn't work than what did, and I don't have Atwell's knack for packaging it. She opens her chapter on preparing the course with an anecdote about when Donald Graves visited her classroom and his first response to her was "You're so damned organized" (90). I'd had this vision of a polyvocal work like Atwell's, but with my teaching apprentices' voices instead of just my students' voices and mine. That didn't really work out either, partly because I'm not that organized, but more on that later.

I continued to look for other models, beginning with books like Atwell's, textbook-ish hybrids, writerly combinations of autobiographical reflection and instructional recommendation. But they all seemed to omit the sticky parts in favor of a more focused view of what works, instructionally. It's true that books like these recount failures, but they tend to follow a pattern in which the problem became an opportunity for a mostly-perfect solution.

I found the roots of the workshop romance in two seminal books in this group, Donald Graves's *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* and Lucy Calkins's *The Art of Teaching Writing*<sup>8</sup>. Both books focus on young writers, starting with the premise/promise of the Writing Workshop as a natural extension of what kids—and, by extension, good teachers—already know and do. In the vein of early psycholinguistic (sometimes called "whole language") literacy theories, Graves and Calkins say that successful writing

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<sup>8</sup> Calkins assisted Graves on the original National Institute of Education study that became his book *Writing* and her doctoral dissertation. While *Writing* is grounded in that original study, Calkins's book is a broader and more comprehensive teaching manual, and the second edition, which I quote from here, attempts, if obliquely, like Atwell's revised edition of *In the Middle*, to answer some of early criticisms of the process model.

instruction capitalizes on the fact that “Children want to write.” That’s actually Graves’s opening sentence (3). The logic is simple: misguided teachers underestimate students, “placing unnecessary road blocks in the way of their intentions” (Graves 3). Calkins at first seems more practical than Graves: “I am not arguing that all our students are secretly yearning for the chance to write, . . . that classrooms will all fill with applause” (13) when students understand that they’ll be participating in a writing workshop. But where Graves blames generic-sounding “school approaches” (4), Calkins puts the emphasis on individual teachers. A good teacher who has herself “known the power of writing” knows that unmotivated students are that way “*not* because writing is inherently a dreaded activity, but because writing has been taught in ways that make it so” (13). Good teachers, then, “do not need more techniques and strategies as much as we need a vision of what is essential” (Calkins 3). What is essential, of course, for these writers and for really an entire pedagogical theory that would follow, is supporting what students organically do. The remainder of both books is about progressively building a structure that allows children to reach a potential that’s untapped in more traditional classrooms. Graves’s basic argument is that teaching writing is about training students to “control writing as a craft” (3).

Early on, I noticed traces of the conversion narrative in *The Art of Teaching Writing*, and though it was a familiar and problematic pattern for me by then, I still nodded in agreement: “I am embarrassed to recall how I used to initiate writing” (11) and “I realize that, back then, my teaching was based on . . . a devastating assumption” (12). Now that she understands herself as a writer and sees her students as developing writers, “teaching writing is a matter of faith. We demonstrate that faith when we listen well, when we refer to our students as writers, when we expect them to love writing and to pour heart

and soul in it" (17). If this sounds a bit like Donald Murray, that's because it comes from Murray's own literal mentorship of Calkins as a writer.

Very quickly, I found another problematic undercurrent, which I'd been confronting in other research and in my own teaching: the contention that if the workshop isn't working, it's the teacher's fault, not the method's. In Calkins's single chapter on adolescent writers, she focuses on the ways in which the methods she's advocating and stories she's relating in the rest of the book might work for young adults. Calkins contends that if there are problems translating the workshop into the constraints of the secondary school<sup>9</sup> and the motivational challenges of working with adolescents, the answer is not to adapt it to fit. "The writing workshop," she argues, "is meant to run *against* the norms of secondary education" (164). The remainder of the chapter is organized under "How Can We" and "How Do We" headings that give strategies for meeting the challenges of the middle and high school writing workshop. There is no suggestion, of course, that it won't work, and the chapter ends with a romantic flourish: "the most important thing that can be said about teaching in secondary level classrooms: We need to seize the moment. We need to see where the energy in our classrooms is and go with it" (176).

Tom Romano's *Clearing the Way*, a sort of high-school version of Atwell's middle school classroom, and published in the same year as her first edition, describes his conversion from a grader who marked students' papers "the way a delinquent might deface someone's personal property" (108) to someone who now is able to "evaluate and

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<sup>9</sup> Graves and Calkins were both University researchers writing about elementary school classrooms. The bulk of the work that had been done on process-oriented approaches when these two books were first published (early-mid 1980s) was done by university-based researchers writing about college classrooms. By the second edition of Calkins's book, she's able to draw on Nancie Atwell and Randy Bomer as workshop-gurus for secondary students.

assign grades . . . in relative serenity. The anguish and righteousness are gone” (109). He recounts stories, complete with student writing exemplars, of students whose writing or thinking comes alive during the process, like Rhonda, whose excerpted writing is perhaps a bit shallow and vague but was produced as she struggled through something she was reading. She describes her breakthrough to Romano, and he writes that he “cherished this opportunity to witness full literacy in motion, the complimentary to-and-fro of reading and writing” (31).

A newer Heinemann book (2008), written by a younger disciple of the New England Dons (she thanks both Graves and Murray for their mentorship in her acknowledgements), Penny Kittle’s *Write Beside Them*, skips the conversion story and gets straight to the point: she sings on the way to work because she loves teaching writers/writing and writing with her students (seriously, it’s on page 2). There’s an allusion to an earlier time before the magic of the workshop, but even that is in the upbeat, it’s-all-about-a-good-teacher style: “This is the book I wanted when I was first given ninth graders and a list of novels to teach” (2). Younger than even Romano and Atwell, whom she both cites as mentors, Kittle doesn’t spend time with the conventional apologetics for the workshop. Standardized tests, politicians, and policy studies, she says, won’t change her approach, because the workshop works (3). And if you need more proof, there’s an excerpt of a freshman composition literacy autobiography written by one of her former students, who writes that, because of Mrs. Kittle’s class, “I read for fun, I wrote because I wanted to” (4). Kittle’s premise seems to be not just that the workshop offers an organic and effective way for students to become writers, but also that it allows teachers to be good at teaching and to like their jobs.

I should admit that I still love this stuff. I eat it up, especially during school breaks. I want to sing on the way to school, run with the energy of my classroom, and then grade

in serenity. I want to send some writing to Don Murray and then fly to New Hampshire to have coffee with him, like every aspiring teacher-writer says they did in their acknowledgements. But he's dead, and I need to keep looking for teaching narratives that wrestle with what happens when even I don't want to write, let alone face an eager, young teacher whom I've promised to train and a group of bored eighteen year-olds who would probably applaud if I cancelled class. Maybe I need to look for some books not published by Heinemann.

I've used Jennifer Berne's book on the high school writing workshop as a teaching resource, but I mostly remembered its plain-textbook style. I revisited it, noting that it's published by Guilford—maybe branching out would help. Except for a single paragraph at the end of the introduction in which she invokes many of the writers I know, situating her book in the middle ground mostly untouched by them, it's all teaching manual. No narrative, little reflection, no conversation. So that one won't help me here.

Another book, by Cynthia Urbanski, published by Corwin Press looked more narrative than Berne's, beginning with Urbanski's process-conversion in a graduate seminar with Lil Brannon. I recognized this name from articles and books Brannon's written in collaboration with others, on everything from national standards to the rhetoric of teacher feedback. I decided to stick with Urbanski for a while, but I soon set it aside, too. It's creative and conversational, with an interesting coaching/running metaphor that extends throughout. It's like Atwell's, but more compact, without all of the pictures and examples of student writing, and maybe, the gravitas. I quickly found myself unable to believe Urbanski's love affair with her workshop, exemplified by her tendency to use exclamation points and italics: "I must admit, the day I introduce students to the magic of free writing is on my short list of favorite classes. I see the fruits of that day over and over again throughout the year. *Powerful!*" (62).

Along the way, I discovered that Tom Romano and Penny Kittle, whose teaching manuals I wrote about earlier, have also written memoirs about teaching. Perhaps these would offer a franker or more theoretical look at the classroom. I began with Kittle's and noted that it is franker and more nuanced than *Write Beside Them*. She includes plenty of epiphanies and success stories, but she writes her fear and uncertainty into her book as well. In a chapter called "Kleenex and Marriage and Learning to Teach," she asks her husband to read something she's written and finds herself on the other side of an unpleasant writing conference. When he reads it noncommittally, asking her to explain what she was doing, she's immediately defensive and rejects his questions and advice. She realizes, though, that no student has ever stopped her in mid-conference to tell her that her feedback isn't helping. "Too often," she writes, "I trudge on correcting structure and incomplete arguments, and the student has stopped listening long ago" (79).

Romano's book begins with a prologue that describes his life in teaching as "zigzagging" (vii). Sometimes, he says, his writing and teaching work, and sometimes they don't: "I have to rethink, replan, revise. Adjusting my balance and positioning is ongoing" (vii). The book itself is a sometimes humorous, sometimes perplexing chronicle of learning and teaching, sprinkled with a generous amount of name-dropping and beard-stroking. He recounts some difficult teaching choices, dropping out of a PhD program (but finally finishing years later), and making time (rather than "finding" it) to write while he's teaching, even if it meant letting some things "suffer" (173).

I read a sampling of teaching memoirs<sup>10</sup>, including books by Jane Tompkins, Jay Parini, Glenda Bissex, and Mike Rose. I see a few interesting trends: eccentricity,

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<sup>10</sup> This is a fascinating genre that I wish I had more time to work with. I didn't venture into made-for-Hollywood types (such as *Freedom Writers* or Frank McCourt's teaching memoir) but tried to confine my sampling to teachers whose English research I knew

childhood stories (especially those connected to school), moments of dissonance and failure, both personally and professionally, vignettes about students or courses that help illustrate something sage or philosophical. Jane Tompkins recounts a shouting match with a student; Bissex writes frankly about leaving the classroom. Parini writes about the “syntax” of academic dress. They offer some balance to the romance I’ve been reading. All of them, though, take on a retrospective, sometimes wistful tone that is a romance of its own. Swathes of the second half of Mike Rose’s book are theory in the guise of narrative; his student stories are vehicles for getting to hard-earned wisdom about learning, literacy, and poverty.

It was hard to put a finger on what exactly I was looking for. I knew that I lacked the authority or wisdom of the teachers whose books I was reading. Set against the manuals, I could not (still cannot) reconcile every problem, answer every question. And I can’t just skip the problems and write about the good stuff—there isn’t enough of it. Compared to the memoirs, the stories I’m writing lack length and perspective. I don’t have a lifetime of schooling to reflect on.

I started rereading books on teaching writing in college; they’re the ones I first learned from, after all, but I stopped after a while, unable to make the bridge between the structure of collections of essays by eminent scholars, some with narrative elements or introductions, and the more straightforward narrative that I had begun constructing.

I had, so far, avoided too much theory about narrative approaches to research. I had just been reading what I thought were examples. I know I’m supposed to be uncomfortable with the practical/theoretical dichotomy, but I secretly enjoyed reading Joseph Trimmer’s anecdote about sitting at a conference presentation on narratology and

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from other contexts. Stephen Preskill’s essay on types of teacher memoirs as well as a dissertation on the genre of teacher memoir by Jennifer Soalt are worthwhile reads.

deciding he had to “drop out” because of the dense, abstract nature of the talk. He ultimately decided that the speaker’s “theoretical speculation had distorted his subject beyond recognition” (ix). Atwell similarly makes no apologies (literally, on pages 21-22) for the simplified nature of her book (“practical . . . in other words, not theoretical, not philosophical, and probably not sufficiently intellectual”). I love reading writing about teaching; I quaked at the thought of reading writing about writing about teaching. I compromised by starting with some theoretical approaches to narrative research methodology.

#### Why narrative?

In some ways, a narrative approach to this project, like the process approach in my teaching, is old news, conventional enough to be clichéd. A quick survey reveals the rhetoric of inevitability. Don Murray, for example, claims that “all writing, in many different ways, is autobiographical, and that our autobiography grows from a few deep taproots” (“All Writing is Autobiography” 67). Even writing that isn’t straightforwardly personal, Murray says, still reflects the total of our language experiences, values, and views, and is therefore autobiographical. Wendy Bishop posits that personal, narrative approaches, “constructing a teaching life through our writing about writing and about teaching writing” (*Teaching* ix) offer “one way” to “serve” ourselves as writers and the “communities of writers” we teach (viii).

Mike Rose writes

In trying to present the cognitive and social reality of such a life [in an educational underclass]—the brains as well as the heart of it—I have written a personal book. The stories of my work with literacy interweave with the story of my own engagement with language. *Lives on the Boundary* is both vignette and commentary, reflection and analysis. I didn’t know how else to get it right (xvi-xvii).

And so does Lad Tobin:

[Th]e inclusion of personal voice and storytelling in academic writing . . . often leads to personal response and even better storytelling in return. At this point in my life and career, especially now that this issue has become so politicized, I can't imagine going back to conventional, apersonal academic discourse (5).

These excerpts are old-school, though. Murray's essay was published in the "Staffroom Interchange" section of CCC, which Bishop says is a "marginalized" place ("Places to Stand" 24), a section reserved for the personal, the lore, and the not-as-scholarly. Of course, that section is no longer part of the journal, but the privileging of the empirical over the personal doesn't seem to be a thing of the past. The Editor's introduction to the 2014 issue of CCC promises readers a "treat" in the fall edition: the inclusion of "vignettes of lived experience" reflecting the issue's theme, repeating a practice from last year that produced an "enthusiastic" response (Yancey, "From the Editor" 532-33).

Debra Journet's claims, in her critique of narrative methods, that narrative is an undisputed go-to mode in composition research muddy these waters even further. Her provocative essay critiques the narrative trend, asking whether or not we can tell the truth in narrative. Or, perhaps more precisely, since we can never really tell the Truth, how do we "persuade readers that this story offers some version of the real world," and, "by what criteria do we evaluate personal narratives in order to determine how 'truthful' or 'correct' they are" (19)? More importantly, she says, "how do we decide if this account is worth building on, worth incorporating within what counts as disciplinary knowledge?" (20).

Journet begins by quickly tracing the historical arc of narrative in composition research as it began with those who told stories by describing a conventional "introduction-methods-results-discussion (IMRD) format" (14), then peaked in the 1980s at the "famous 'social turn'" that emphasized the "libratory, even transgressive potential to reveal aspects of writing hitherto unavailable to researchers who worked from more 'distanced' or 'objective' perspectives" (14). Later, even after social science research

began to legitimize narrative-subjective methods, composition research continued asserting the subversive nature of such methods. Continuing to define narrative in terms of its “contradistinction” (15) to positivist, “sciency” (14) approaches and to “foreground” its “capacity to render the complexities of individual and social experience” (14), researchers claimed to also develop a “new awareness of the constructed nature of narrative” (15). The problem, Journet says, is when narrative is offered as “an almost direct way to represent qualities of personal experience—a kind of transparent window onto individual subjectivity” (15) and thus provide the reader and researcher access to the sorts of “experiential, contextual, and even ideological truths,” which, ostensibly, more empirical approaches do not, since they don’t deconstruct “the notion of accuracy or truth” and don’t problematize the subjectivity of the researcher (19).

Journet then turns to narrative research in the sciences as a guide for how to mediate these problems in Composition Research. Narratives in the sciences, she claims, operate from the assumption that a single narrative account is always just a piece of a larger puzzle in which “converging data” can be assembled to form conclusions that are true as of the moment they are constructed. Unlike scientific narratives, Journet argues, which are “open to public scrutiny and debate because they are based in communal agreements about theory and method, as well as rhetoric” (19), and which rely on something called an “index of reality,” a set of agreed-upon textual features such as references to research, conventional descriptions of data collection, and graphic elements. On the other hand, she argues, composition-research narratives rely on “tropes of authenticity” and “canonical plots” such as personal details about the researcher’s motives, “transformational arcs,” and the inclusion of multiple voices (19). Journet doesn’t dispute the worth of such writing but argues against its inherent validity, challenging composition researchers to come up with our own index.

I get Journet's point: discursive patterns don't equal evidentiary standards. I recognize her characterization of narrative research as relying on certain rhetorical features for legitimacy as true (I'm using that term because she used it) from my own reading. But, though her works cited list is extensive and helpful, she doesn't provide many direct examples of the ways in which those texts exemplify the patterns she's observed. She also raises a number of crucial questions but doesn't have space to answer them. Even more, they feel like some of the same questions Stephen North asked in 1987 in his discussion of practitioner research in *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*.

Finally, as I said, Journet poses these questions about what's at stake for narrative research in Composition against the backdrop of science narratives that adhere more strictly to community-regulated guidelines, suggesting that readers in those disciplines will dismiss as not "persuasive" works that measure low on the index, but she doesn't suggest a rubric or index for Composition. My point here is not to critique Journet's chapter but to find guidance in the existing literature about what persuasive value my own work will have. Unfortunately, answers to my questions weren't what Journet's work offered.

By the end of Journet's essay, I started to feel like I imagine my students feel when they ask me questions, I push back with more questions, and they wish I would just tell them the right answer. I'm back to my colleague's confusion about the nature of my own study. What, exactly, goes in the methodology chapter, and how do I prove that it's worthwhile? It seems to me that, for this work, I'll need to differentiate between the narrative presentation of my research and the particular methodology by which I arrived at something to present.

Without an external rubric in existence, and with those troubling questions in mind, I returned to North's book. At a time before more "sciency"—I love Journet's term—disciplines constructed taxonomies that included practitioner research methods and narrative presentations of research, he argued that the practitioner's authority lies in his experience and in the pragmatic nature of his research, and the validity of that research hinges on its staying in that classroom, or, perhaps, an office in the house-of-lore, to keep my metaphor precise. As long as practitioners aren't trying to oversell their research, he argues, the community polices itself based on the reader's being persuaded that "what he [the teacher-researcher, the practitioner] does, when he does it, works" (53). North seems to suggest that Ethnographic research, provided it's done well, has the ability to legitimize practitioner knowledge more broadly (372). Of course, he also prophesied that the future of ethnography in Composition "cannot be all that bright" (313).

Nonetheless, he takes great pains to point out the virtues and flaws of all of the knowledge camps he observed (constructed?) in the late 80s, finally proposing "what Peter Elbow calls . . . disciplined believing: a genuine and . . . mutual embracing of the perspective and assumptions of other inquirers as a basis for further relations" (371). His version of the believing game is about establishing a stronger community of Composition scholarship in which all of the camps see the value in each other's work, after rigorously studying its contexts, an answer to what he observed in his introduction as a "chaotic and patternless" growth of the field. This chaos has produced "an accumulated knowledge of a relatively impressive size, but one that lacks any clear coherence or methodological integrity." The reason, he claims, is that researchers didn't value their forebears' knowledge or interrogate their "own mode of inquiry, let alone anyone else's" (3).

A few years before North's book, Donald Schön proposed a new epistemology of practice, one that examined the prevailing concept of "technical rationality," which he

defined as “instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique” (21). In this system, Schön says, practitioners identify problems, and researchers, in their superior roles, “provide the basic and applied science from which to derive techniques for diagnosing and solving” those problems, which the practitioners in turn practice in order to verify their utility” (26). Schön argues instead for the value of practitioner-driven “reflection-in-action,” (which he later calls “reflective research”) because of its unique ability to confront individual situations and then theorize, inquire, experiment, and implement all at the same time (68-69 and 308-309). Such inquiry, he claims, can be a “legitimate form of professional knowing” (69).

So where does that leave me now, nearly thirty years after North and Schon, reading Journet’s chapter that asks many of the same questions as they did? On one hand, I could heed North’s advice and call what I’m writing “lore,” a humble offering of experience from the classroom, the “ruminations of a practitioner” (341). The problem with that stance, as I see it, is that I can’t rely on the “what works” index. Much of what I need to write about is what didn’t work. On the other hand, maybe I can interrogate my own subjectivity, fancy up the “what works” into a “transformational arc,” and go with the narrative flow. But then, anyone who’s familiar with the “index of reality” would find it unpersuasive.

John Mayher offers something like a rubric for evaluating practitioner knowledge (he calls it theory, though) in his book *Uncommon Sense*. Here, he invites his readers to use his book as a process of reflection in action, moving through a series of “games” with him: reflecting, doubting, empathy, believing, and sharing. I don’t understand why he didn’t go with “empathizing,” but whatever. Each stance would force the reader to dialogue with Mayher’s opinions, connect with his experiences, question their ultimate worth, and finally, test those “uncommon sense” notions for themselves in (9-10) “primary

research undertaken in [their] own classrooms” (11). Good research would “require a concerted effort first to uncover the biases and assumptions which may be coloring our observations, and then to try to observe classroom life in as systematic, objective, and unbiased a way as possible” (11).

Mayher claims essentially the same thing George Hillocks does in *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*: namely, that good, reflective teaching is inquiry and theory-making already. Hillocks, drawing on the work of Donald Schön, argues that when teachers “move beyond the automatic,” critique their own practices and construct alternate practices, the result is, in Schön’s terms, a “messy” problem that “must somehow be made coherent” (qtd in Hillocks 32) through a process of “attending to certain features, organizing them, and ‘setting a direction for action’” (32). Hillocks, ultimately, concedes that “the teaching of writing is fraught with difficulties. Teaching well . . . can be very time-consuming, demanding, frustrating, and given institutional constraints, sometimes infuriating” (217) but suggests that researching well helps teachers find solutions that aid students and redeem the mess. So, Schön, Mayher, and Hillocks all contend for the viability of teacher-research, of practitioner knowledge. What they don’t do, at least not explicitly, is argue for the worth of narrative as a way to package that knowledge.

I searched again for examples. Joseph Trimmer’s collection of teaching-narrative essays, *Narration as Knowledge*, which Journet lists but does not write about, opens with an acknowledgment of the sorts of problems Journet raises. “Most of our professional training has debunked teaching stories,” he writes. “They are not reliable. They are not verifiable. They are not statistically generalizable. We can use them as anecdotes, as introductions, but this is simply a . . . rhetorical device . . . to attract our readers’ attention” (xi).

Trimmer presents “recognizable” teaching moments—their claim to knowledge is in their potential for shared experience. Their narrators don’t claim “hero” status, though, affirming that the classroom is “an exciting but uncertain place” of “subtle assumptions and slippery assumptions” (xii) through telling “‘true’ stories about the partiality of their knowledge and the vulnerability of their power” (xii).

The “coda” to Toby Fulwiler’s interesting collage essay “Telling Stories and Writing Truths” captures the uncertainty and ambiguity that Trimmer says makes personal narrative valuable:

In the end, I’ve so analyzed, tested, and qualified my original narration as to make me doubt it. . . . Both the teacher and writer in me understands the value and necessity of clarifying and complicating my initial 112 story for the benefit of my students, my readers, and myself. . . . the writer has persuaded the teacher in me that true stories cannot be conveyed in single or simple tellings—that the truth of examined narrative will always be complicated, compromised, and uncertain (97).

Reading the essays in Trimmer’s book prompts me to find books by Lad Tobin and Wendy Bishop, both of whom mix personal narrative, research, and theory. Both are collections of essays, not focused memoirs, teaching manuals, or even particularly thematically bound (though Tobin’s is ostensibly about responding to student writing).

Both include chapters on writing as therapy, and both books suggest that writing the personal, either when our students do it or we do it, is natural, inevitable, and useful. There is a moment in Bishop’s *Teaching Lives* that feels so familiar to me, as if I could have lived it: she is leaving class on the last day before a break, and a student who has lingered in the room, writing, tells her he’s made a breakthrough. Before she can say anything, he follows it with a revelation about his personal life, and she finds that she cannot respond for a moment, finally deciding on a quick affirmation of his writing

progress. “It bothers me now to think of that pedagogical pause, as I froze for a moment, saying nothing. . . . I was distant from the teaching moment,” she reflects (316). I know this moment—when writing means something to a student, when, for a moment, we all feel like we’re not just going through school-motions—and I know the pause that Bishop describes—when I’m unsure about which self I’m wearing with this student. It is exactly this sort of moment that exemplifies what Tobin claims is the value of the teaching confession. More than abstract theorizing on its own, personal narrative, especially in the form of illustrating a teaching problem, can extend and flesh out academic discourse. Such “confessions,” he says, “serve as the kind of specific, concrete examples we always ask for in our students’ own writing” (*Reading 2*). Bishop concludes the vignette by reflecting on the missed moment, but she doesn’t (as some of the authors I’ve described earlier might) say how she should have responded. Her reflection is as uncertain and ambivalent as the moment she describes, and she uses it instead to theorize a bit about the value of the personal in composition. Her response, she says, “represents the opportunity, the danger, the lure and the confusion that teaching writing has always had,” and her passive response “willed it out of being.” Experience has taught her, she concludes, that lives (hers and her students’) are “at the center of what I do” (316).

In a chapter on students writing about the personal, Tobin observes that most students, when invited to write about themselves, end up falling into predictable topic-patterns of “loss, anger, confusion, and grief” (33). The specific narratives vary, of course, and Tobin notes that, some years, there are more about date rape or dead grandparents, but one feature is stable: the thematically “happy” resolution: “After detailing a hundred ways that they have been damaged and dissed, scared and scarred, these student authors usually try in the end to put on a happy face,” he writes, offering examples like “‘Now I’ve learned never to take life for granted.’ ‘It’s all for the best; you only learn

through suffering.' 'But I know he's in a better place.' 'I'm glad my father was not like the other fathers; he's special'" (42).

Tobin speculates that maybe students feel compelled to "repress in the end what they have just written" (43) because "they think we expect essays to have clear resolutions" (42) and later reflects on the idea, borrowed from Thomas Newkirk, that "certain student performances of self are usually privileged over other student performances of self. We tend . . . to prefer performances that emphasize ambiguity, complexity, skepticism, and that make a big deal out of a little thing" (99). I'm wondering what performances of a teacherly self tend to be most effective and preferred, and I wonder, too, if in books on teaching, authors tend to choose dramatic performances and then work them out to resolution. Maybe not a pat resolution, but something confirming that our work with students isn't in vain?

On the other end of the spectrum<sup>11</sup>, in a book about the value of the "subordinated" texts and positions in the academy, Terry Caesar speculates about teacher writing this way:

The very act of writing about the classroom is for a teacher an incipiently alienating activity. The public transcript does not require it. The research project does not honor it. Therefore, if, according to the public transcript, a teacher is someone who calls the roll dutifully and grades the midterm unproblematically, on what basis is one to articulate a more vexed relationship to these tasks? Moreover, if your classes have been mostly too elementary to be recreated in terms of research, how to avoid the accusations that what you've been doing all these years is staring at the heavens if you want to maintain instead that some account of your teaching has its own discursive contribution to make? (97).

*Writing in Disguise*, an interesting book, is theoretical and narrative at the same time without attempting to be a cohesive memoir. Caesar says he's exploring the

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<sup>11</sup> See also Linda Brodkey's *Writing in Designated Areas Only* and much of Jane Gallop's narrative work.

“situation of people caught up in a certain kind of domination that results from being normatively included in conditions of writing to which they can make no official protest” (1-2). You’d think, at first, that he’s about to launch into a discussion of Freire, but he’s referring here to academics, not students. In fact, the book is so threaded through with irony and so self-absorbedly subversive that I almost don’t know if I’m supposed to take it seriously. It’s a strange mixture of martyrdom and cynicism. “The following pages,” he writes, “are the result of a career predicated upon the subordination of subjectivity to institutional and disciplinary constraints about what merits expression in writing” (2). Caesar says his book is essentially about what academics can and can’t write about, what “character[s] of disguise” (3) they put on in order to live in a system in which some texts have more authority than people (4). He further argues that the personal has little authority because it either “abide[s] in a condition of subordination” or has come “into existence as a result of subordination” (4). In an academic context, then, “‘personal’ means . . . ‘too’ personal” (15).

It’s humorous, Caesar’s book, even though he takes up texts that deal with everything from job termination to sexual harassment. The point is, the academic reader recognizes the truth underneath here. When Caesar describes an alternate teaching observation form he created as a joke (the observer checks boxes like “the observer felt \_\_\_silly \_\_\_empowered \_\_\_superfluous \_\_\_contractually bound,” among other options), I think of a bingo card I began creating in my notebook to track the predictable parts of a faculty meeting. I nod at the points he makes about subordination, the personal, and what can be made public, but what does my agreement mean beyond something like a shared laugh at the copy machine?

When I take stock of the group of texts I’ve surveyed, I start to see a continuum forming in which hopeful, solution-filled books like Atwell’s and Calkins’ and Urbanski’s

take up one side, assuring readers that teacher experience is valuable because it demonstrates what works. On the other end are books like Caesar's, which question the value of the very stories they tell, and in the middle are the myriad stories that seem to say the value of narrative, of experience, is in the uncertainty. If the authors of these works believe what they write, that writing about my own teaching helps me understand myself (Bishop 316), or "To narrate is to know. We need to tell our teaching stories if we are to understand our teaching lives" (Trimmer xv), that seems an end unto itself. How do I avoid solipsism? What's the value in your simply understanding your (teaching) life and I understanding mine?

#### Going "sciency"

I've decided that part of the answer lies in avoiding the approach that Trimmer advocates when he reduces "educational research" into two schools. Empirical research, he claims, is story-void. In this school, "teaching in our own research projects distorts our findings," so we must set up scientific-looking experiments. Ethnographic research allows us to join a class as an observer and data collector. To this school Trimmer ascribes attempts to "compile 'thick descriptions' . . . and then reflect on how these descriptions change the way we interpret what we see" (xi). The results, he says, must be "plough[ed] through," and in the end, readers "cannot find a story in these stories" (xii). He concludes, "rather than abstract our teaching into empirical research or bury it in ethnographic studies, we need to face 'the real moments' we encounter each day. And we need to trust our stories" (xv).

I think that's the problem. We can't just trust our stories and stop there. I knew that Trimmer was oversimplifying, but I also realized that I didn't really know enough to argue, so I started reading again, this time, in educational and social science research. It was there that I found the benchmarks Journet says we need after the "narrative turn."

Narrative Inquiry, a group of qualitative research methods, offers specific guidelines on 1) what counts as knowledge, 2) how to offer narrative that is useful and truthful, and 3) how to avoid the two extremes I've seen of romanticism and cynicism.

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, whose book on narrative inquiry is a frequently-cited originary text for several different approaches, including autoethnography, critical self-study, and more phenomenological stances, take up Education research by starting with Schön, crediting his work with “legitimizing our professional memory and making it possible to return to experience . . . as a resource” (38). Because the basis of narrative is experience, they contend, data sources are rich and endless (36). David Schaafsma and Ruth Vinz similarly characterize the work of the narrative researcher as the work of interpretation (72), and across the literature, I saw more puzzle and knot metaphors than references to questions and results.

In their work on self-study, Carol Mullen and William Kealy suggest the metaphor of a “pathlamp” for an approach alternately called autobiographical research, self-study research, or critical reflection. The idea is that each researcher walks an individual path but puts down illuminated stakes along that path, marking “ruts and crevices,” “barriers,” “surprises” (156), and points of detour or uncertainty as well as “pivotal or breakthrough” moments (155). Instead of a “template to be imitated,” they contend, this type of approach provides “broadly creative opportunities for shaping our own research journeys” (157). All of the guidebooks I read tried to avoid procedural guides or design maps and instead focused on the researcher as a multifaceted research tool: “Researchers . . . invent and reinvent the research journey by continuously reading, rereading, and asking questions that keep the inquiry open. The research agenda is invented in the *doing* and in the reinvestigation and re-seeing. . . . Looking for or creating stories within stories is part of the interpretive work of narrative inquiry” (Schaafsma and Vinz 72).

What they all seemed to suggest was that the researcher might employ any number of methods, from traditional case studies and ethnologies to phenomenological or autobiographical approaches<sup>12</sup>. The point, then, is to continually interrogate the process; Amanda Berry and John Loughran describe it as consistently making “our intentions clear” (173). Clandinin and Connelly offer a figurative “three dimensional narrative inquiry space,” partly borrowed from Dewey, to guide researchers. In this space, the researcher attends to *interaction*, or personal/internal and social/external dimensions: “feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions, . . . existential conditions” (50). Next, the researcher considers the same experience along a temporal axis, which they call *continuity*, considering past, present, and future, and finally, the researcher considers *situation*, attending to place, “the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of [the] inquiry landscape” (51).

Far from eschewing theory, Clandinin and Connelly go so far as to recommend the weaving of narrative and theory together rather than constructing a bounded theoretical framework from which to research or write so that the result is a “conversation between theory and life . . .” (41). Becky Atkinson’s overview of narrative inquiry methods includes the idea that such research is valuable for its “reflexive dimension” and “interrogative purposes,” for the questions it raises rather than the solutions it can offer. Instead of stopping there, though, she contends that good narrative scholarship can create a multi-level “research community willing to sustain critical reflection,” inviting further inquiry, debate, and challenge (93). Schaafsma and Vinz describe similar

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<sup>12</sup> I’m realizing that it’s difficult to avoid doing exactly what Debra Journet complains of, conflating personal and narrative as if they’re the same. The narrative modes of research, though, are often taken together in the literature. Autoethnography, critical self-study, and teacher action research are different, but they do overlap, and they’re all a part of the narrative branch in which the “self” in question could be the researcher or presentations of the selves of research subjects.

characteristics and aims, emphasizing the explicit nature of the interrogative quality. Narrative research should, they say, take shape in process and work to “redefine [its] products or outcomes” (9). All of the works emphasize the intersubjective, intertextual potential in narrative research, and several also draw on Max Van Manen’s theories of hermeneutical phenomenology which suggest that knowledge is constructed through the reading of lives as texts.

Autoethnographer<sup>13</sup> Mike Hayler makes the distinction between literary life writing and autoethnographic research this way:

It can be argued that while autoethnography draws upon autobiography as a genre of writing and research, it is not autobiography; it is not ‘about’ the researcher or writer as such. From this perspective this research is not *about* me or the other participants. The variety of approaches that have personal experiences at the centre may look at a range of issues and phenomena through the lens of life experience but by using these methods researchers and writers such as me also indicate those experiences, those lives whether they are our own or the lives of others or a combinations of both, do, to a certain and central extent, make the phenomena (17).

If I were to synthesize the research guides on narrative approaches, I would note that epistemological questions are answered with more questions. That is, instead of defining what counts as knowledge, the guides urge each researcher to use stories to provide potential answers. Instead of being challenged by “does this count,” narrative methodologies are open to the question as part of the package. For example, instead of reliability, generalizability, and validity, Clandinin and Connelly argue for the general term “wakefulness,” which carries with it the terminology of many different kinds of narrative approaches, each with its own evaluative terminology, including “apparency and

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<sup>13</sup> Autoethnographers like to explain the methodology as focusing on the interplay between self (auto-), culture/context (ethno-), and data (graph).

verisimilitude,” “transferability,” and the descriptors “explanatory, invitational,” “authentic,” and “plausible” (184-185).

Atkinson takes up the epistemological question by first reaffirming the interrogative, polyvocal, partial, and fragmented nature of narrative inquiry. She argues generally that, since all knowledge is ultimately contextual, “contingent on sociohistorical constructs of power,” narrative inquiry foregrounds the question of how knowledge is constructed by presenting it as story. Thus, “quality control” discussions should focus on whether or not a narrative study “stimulate[s] reflective thinking” and enhances meaning (101). Further, she urges, researchers should include underrepresented voices, even “dissonant or jarring voices of teachers who resist . . . idealized notions of teaching” and avoid creating narratives in which “selected teacher voices come across as idealized and normative . . . conflated into a singular teacher voice that may be heard by its readers as moralizing or romanticized” (102). Narrative inquiry then should present “experience in its fullness of context and richness of dimension, its constraints, and its possibilities for transformation” (101). Similarly, Hayler reminds researchers that life is “created, not recorded” by narrative, and autobiographical writing in particular is a way of “construing and then reconstruing experience” so that the writing itself becomes part of experience and the research is continually informed by interrogating our contexts in “relational dialogue” (41-42). Hayler further theorizes that “if writing about my own story . . . reveals a genealogy of my understanding,” which he also calls a “meta story,” then that story is part of the research, too, since it is “part of the same iterative and temporal process. Writing the story changed me; it allowed me to ‘know’ the story in a new way and to know something new without claiming to know everything” (42).

Finally, each guide offered ethical, procedural, and rhetorical cautions for the researcher. Clandinin and Connelly urge researchers to “listen closely to their critics” in

order to avoid potential pitfalls. Though intersubjectivity is “central” to narrative inquiry, they write, “to dismiss the criticism that narrative inquiry is overly personal and interpersonal is to risk the dangers of narcissism and solipsism” (181).

What happens when “what seemed like fact appears more and more as memory reconstruction” (179) or when it’s not clear who “owns” a story (177)? To what extent do researchers employ “narrative smoothing” in order to move the story along, choosing some moments to discuss or reflect on but not others? Critical researchers, they say, will employ wakefulness, attending to these questions and discussing the choices they’ve made. At some point, though, Clandinin and Connelly say, critique can become “negative, monitoring, . . . stifling” (182). Berry and Loughran similarly remind researchers that dwelling on the “messiness” too much can “inhibit a sense of progress or direction for those involved,” thus, researchers should avoid becoming “too concerned with exploring the ‘meta-narrative’” to the point that they “diminish the value of the overall purpose” (173).

Reading more technical and unapologetically theoretical descriptions of how narrative works as research helped me reconcile some of the problems I’ve been wrestling with, but it also posed new problems. For one, all of these authors maintain part of the objective distance that’s so familiar in social science writing. Schaafsma and Vinz, for example, refer to themselves as David or Ruth, sometimes as “we,” but never “I.”<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes, also, the narrative feels forced or tacked on. The beginning of the literature review chapter of their book includes this description of the two of them attempting to boil down the growing body of research in their methodological field: “Imagine David and Ruth sitting on the floor surrounded by a stack of their 40 favorite

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<sup>14</sup> Wendy Bishop calls this “author-evacuated” style (“Rhetoric” 222). I don’t suppose that’s important, necessarily; I just think the phrase is delightful.

books" (18). They even create hypothetical dialogue and tie the chapter together with seafaring metaphors that feel clichéd after too long. A research question is "a knot of many crossings" (35), and boats must journey over choppy waters. It's as if, to force the narrative issue, narrative gets created, which is perhaps what Hayler is describing when he discusses how "researchers might *put themselves in their texts* and with what consequences" (41, emphasis added). I recognize Ruth Vinz's name from, ironically, her personal and beautifully written narrative in Joseph Trimmer's collection. That seems backward to me since I've always struggled with removing myself from my texts and struggled with the consequences, both aesthetically and ethically. And so, I leave myself in. Researcher, teacher, writer, thinker cannot be removed from each other or the text, right? Isn't the point of these narrative methods to interrogate what's already there? But then I remember that every story I tell, no matter how detailed the data notes it's based on, is a construction, too. Maybe the literature review told as a story of two researchers sitting in a room full of books is just a reminder of that.

The other problem I'm having is finding good examples, especially book-length versions, of these methods at work<sup>15</sup>. Hayler's book describing autoethnography is more apologetics and literature review than story, but the actual narrative portions are more meta-descriptions of employing the method than his own narrative. Maybe it's the way I'm searching, but I find a great deal more writing done *about* the methods than writing that actually employs them. More commonly, I find the "real" research mixed with narrative, as in *Teaching the Way Students Learn*. The book's eight chapters, each recounting an action research study by an in-classroom K-12 teacher that suggests a new or newly-improved constructivist orientation, are separated by "memoirs," classroom vignettes,

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<sup>15</sup> A few dissertations have been helpful, including Sara Somerall's autoethnography of literacy coaching (2012).

generally not written by the author of the research chapter, that help to “illustrate . . . experience” (vii).

Editor Jill Cole writes in her prologue that “memoir authors augment the paradigm and strategies with personal experiences” (vii). I’m intrigued by this set up: the authors, not the vignettes, have the agency here, but their experience is the sort of icing on the theory cake. I had to wait until a later chapter to discover that the paradigm in question is Constructivism. The voice of the prologue, with inspirational invitations like “Teachers make a difference in students’ lives!” (vii) and “Here is our story. Join us on the journey. . .” is so different from the voice of chapter one, in which Cole stands back to explain that “the authors” of the book “prefer” to describe Constructivism as a “philosophical paradigm” rather than a theory (12). The rest of the book continues in this way: personal, informal narrative wedged between the “research” chapters, even though most of these are teacher-action research studies. Both would have fallen under what North called Practitioner “Lore,” but some sound more sciency. In Cole’s book, at least, visible subjectivity of the teacher created the very real boundary between research and memoir, knowledge and experience.

Ultimately, though, I think I can begin to make a case for experiential knowledge presented as narrative. While there is no reliability in my personal experience, I can offer what my experience tells me is a generally reliable pattern, and readers with similar backgrounds to mine will likely recognize that pattern as having resonance with their own experience. Van Manen theorized that any phenomenon is “possible human experience,” and “Phenomenological descriptions have a universal (intersubjective) character” (58), and I experienced this many times in the texts I described in this chapter. I hope what I offer in the following chapters, though not generalizable, will create space for consideration, comparison, and critique as well as potential starting points for further

inquiry. And, as both Hillocks and Mayher have contended, verifiability comes when readers try out those methods and approaches themselves. It may get a bit cluttered, but if I can talk back and forth with composition research and education research, critically, consciously situating my experience in all of the contexts that inform it, I might have something worthwhile here. Douglas Hesse, in an essay about administering a writing program, put it this way: “I've not told you an exemplary tale. But then, neither have I told an entirely cautionary one. I've simply told how things appeared to me and hope that in doing so we might figure further what it means” (507).

### Chapter 3

#### Process

Bailey and Jenna arrive a few minutes early to the first class they'll observe. Bailey has been sick and wasn't able to attend our initial meeting, so she's unsure about her role in the classroom but eager to learn. Caleb has sent his regrets—his work schedule will prevent him from coming to class this week and maybe the next. Since I couldn't get them any compensation, this apprenticeship is voluntary in every sense, so I don't feel like I can ask for too much of their time.

I've arranged for a few opportunities for us to meet outside of class time, but in general, I'll only see them during class. This isn't optimal—I want to be able to explain what I'm doing, answer questions, reflect and revise with them. I hope that weekly emails from me, which will follow up on our class sessions, preview what's coming next, and provide opportunity for dialogue, will be enough. I've also encouraged the apprentices to journal throughout the semester.

For several weeks, Jenna and Bailey arrive regularly to class and observe the workshop I've patched together and refined over time. By the time we sit down for our

first meeting, it's three weeks into the semester. I've managed to send out only two emails, one of which was a brief sketch of our plans with a promise to follow up. Jenna has made a few notes in her journal, Bailey explains that she's been meaning to start journaling, and no one's heard from Caleb. Still, we have a great deal to talk about. The apprentices are full of questions and comments about what they've seen during the past few weeks, and after I verify that both Bailey and Jenna have been FERPA trained, I ask them to read our students' initial writing samples, which were timed, hand-written essays composed on-demand during the first class session<sup>16</sup>. Both students are visibly dismayed as they read through the samples. We have a small group—fourteen students—and both apprentices immediately express doubt that we can make much difference in the next twelve weeks. We talk realistic goals. I explain that I can't approach this class thinking that I can fix what's missing from twelve years of schooling. That would be demeaning to my students, whose experiences and writing needs are diverse, and discouraging for me. Instead, I explain, we need to focus on progress and improvement. What are some achievable goals we can set for students? I ask Bailey and Jenna to make some notes about specific areas to look for when we hold our first writing conferences later that week.

In these early weeks, the sense that I don't know what I'm doing becomes more and more tangible. In our class, I'd taught Bailey and Jenna and others to read the theories, read the research, assess their classroom and community contexts and their own outlook and aptitudes as teachers, and design curriculum from there. But now,

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<sup>16</sup> This procedure has evolved over time as part of an edict to produce pre- and post- test results for external reporting and research. Since students were placed into developmental composition on the basis of their admission test scores, the pre-assessment also gives them the opportunity to "test out" of developmental composition. Before this semester, the pre-assessment was a grammar test. When I contacted personnel responsible for placement of students into the course to ask whether or not I could review their SAT writing portion scores, I was told those weren't considered for admission or placement, since they're "subjective," and, therefore, "unreliable."

forced to model this design in real time, I find it difficult to consistently articulate my instructional rationale. In our hypothetical space, I'd cautiously advocated Process theories as a starting point and described how the workshop generally looked in my developmental courses, but now, I cannot hide behind the selectivity of my earlier narrative. My apprentices will see how well (or not) my theory and practice align and, I hope, begin to formulate theories and practices of their own.

#### Lost in the activity system

In the summer of 2001, I took a graduate seminar in Teaching Composition, the required training course for Teaching Assistants. I was a high school teacher, not a TA, but I thought the course would be beneficial. It was my first official introduction to Process pedagogy. Of course, I had a vague sense of "the process" as a student: I'd read a little Don Murray in an advanced composition class as an undergraduate, and I'd engaged in perfunctory exercises asking me to "bubble" or "freewrite" or "revise" in middle school, but I don't know that I understood the value of those activities beyond pleasing the teacher who required them.

I was in high school when Lisa Ede described the trend she saw of "an ideologically-charged construct" (36) becoming "coopted and commodified . . . by textbooks" and "oversimplified and rigidified" for teacher training (35). Paul Lynch writes that he probably had a set of "stark" posters when he taught middle school (260) like David Russell described seeing in his daughter's classroom years before. The set of ugly mass-produced posters demanded that students "PREWRITE. WRITE. REVISE. EDIT." (80) Russell described those posters in 1999, in Thomas Kent's book that suggested we go beyond the Process paradigm. That same year, as a new high school teacher, I had a set of those posters, though mine were colorful and cartoon-y, that I dutifully laminated (another layer of useful metaphor, maybe). Of course, I had never heard of Thomas Kent

and had no real sense of Process as a theory. For me, it was as much a part of school writing as topic sentences and writing prompts.

In that same book, Barbara Couture recounts observing lessons that reduced Process to requiring prewriting on Monday, drafting on Wednesday, and revising on Friday (30). Jessica Yood claims that everybody was already over Process by the time they read Kent's book (4), and Kevin Porter's 1999 review of Kent's book says it "contains much that is (or should be) comfortably familiar to contemporary scholars in composition studies" (710), and "our profession is . . . already 'post-process'" (715). Though Yood eventually suggests we should revisit Maxine Hairston's "famous" tenets of Process for their "potential to link writing, teaching, and institutional change together with epistemology" she rejects them as the basis for a "big theory" of composition ("Present" 4).

I had no idea that by the time I read Hairston's "The Winds of Change" in my 2001 seminar, the field I was entering was already past the paradigm it presented. Whether or not the change it advocated had really taken hold, Process was supposedly already past. I still have my photocopy of the Hairston essay, complete with original margin notes that read "New paradigm? This is 20 yrs old. How am I just now reading this?" Even if I had known Kent's book existed, I'd have hardly known what to do with it, since Hairston's description of the paradigm shift was currently profound for me.

I think, up to that point, I'd only ever read brief and beleaguered articles in *The English Journal* about teaching writing. In that summer seminar, we read pages and pages on teaching writing, we wrote model essays, we even broke into writing groups and gave each other feedback more substantive than adding commas. My professors (I had two, a luxury) had given us quite a few approaches to consider, but the one they modeled, and the one that stuck with me, was process-oriented and collaborative. I went

back to school that fall semester a starry-eyed process convert. It was like church camp: I'd sworn off the sin of current-traditional rhetoric (I wasn't sure I totally understood what that meant, but I knew it was bad) and vowed to be a real writing teacher, even though writing was just a sliver of what I had to teach in my high school English classes.

And, unlike my classmates, who would use their syllabi projects in their teaching that fall, mine remained hypothetical, and my process-zeal lasted right until my first department meeting. John Mayher describes something similar with summer writing projects, after which many teachers, more confident in their own writing and fresh from time spent exchanging teaching ideas with their colleagues, return to school ready to rework their classrooms. One problem, Mayher says, is the slippery slope from the generally "atheoretical" position of the Writing Project to sharing lore, which has value, but often was developed apart from the Writing Project, to the "domestication" of new ideas in the framework of old ones: essentially, teachers return to the classroom with the same teaching strategies they've always used but with some sense that what they're doing is new (230-231).

In the year-opener department meeting, I gushed about the things I'd read about, like the potential of writing feedback on students' drafts so that they'd actually use it. A few colleagues seemed interested, a few looked skeptical, and soon, one veteran kindly but patronizingly suggested I see how that worked out when I took home my first stack of 150 wretched drafts, marked them up, and then watched students still not use my feedback. Of course, I gave up, and pretty quickly. Our curriculum was "literature" heavy, which basically meant we read to students and then gave them tests about what we'd read. I imagined myself a creative teacher, so I constructed (sometimes) elaborate activities to illustrate a theme or concept in a text, and we'd have big discussions in which

I and a few students were interested. And I'd occasionally assign writing on the side, collect it, labor, cry, and hand it back weeks later.

By the time I finished graduate school and began teaching composition in the evening at a local community college, I felt like I could be a full-fledged process pedagogue. I pulled out the hypothetical syllabus I'd written in that seminar, dusted off my Hairston, Murray, and Elbow notes, reclaimed some of that enthusiasm, and started requiring students to "workshop" their essays. I talked to students about how I would require each of them to "participate in the process." Be patient, I urged them. Eventually, they would figure out the process, or they would see that it helped them, as if the process were something exterior to us. Most of my students followed the process rituals I required. One student had the temerity to say, "I don't do drafts and all that. I just write." I was all of 25 years old, so this challenged my unformed pedagogy and my authority. I said, well, if you want to pass this class, you'll do some drafts. Almost none of what I was learning about teaching writing from my own teaching at night was filtering back into my high school classroom by day. Even more, because of my heavy teaching schedule, I had no time to read or study or browse research, no time to refine my approaches through anything other than trial and error

My point is that, unlike Yood and others who were already past Process, I did not have the luxury of being a Compositionist who taught writing from a theoretically grounded perspective. When I began to understand Hairston's "tenets," it was a paradigm shift for me in the sense that moving from nothing to something is a shift. I know I run the risk of overgeneralizing here based on my own experience, but I also know that many writing teachers are not Compositionists.<sup>17</sup> And many English teachers don't even

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<sup>17</sup> I am generally not talking here about Graduate Teaching Assistants, who have more access, at least through proximity, to the larger scholarly conversation than middle and

consider themselves writing teachers. I was/we are the trend Lisa Ede, David Russell, and others have described. Ede says the scholarly community tends to take theoretical uniformity for granted, despite the fact that many theories are not fully circulated or fully articulated, and “what does circulate can be considerably altered in the process” (36). John Mayher, provides the example of the revision of a popular grammar and usage manual which simply updated its terms to be process-friendly without substantively changing the content of the textbook (233). Ede further argues that “the writing process movement has existed more strongly in the discursive practice that we call theory than in the theoretical enactments that take place daily in our classrooms” (36).

David Russell’s theory of “activity systems” is especially useful in illustrating this distance. He describes complex, hierarchical, interconnected “networks of human activity,” groups of people connected by common discourse practices, purposes, or tools. Especially in school-based activity systems, he says, new and old knowledge, “tools,” and practices coexist in an “eclectic bricolage” of theory and curricula (87). All disciplines, Russell contends, inevitably must package theory into something transferable and practical to multiple levels of the disciplinary system, and in this way, “commodification” becomes a “necessary” part of the interaction between different degrees of the system, though each level’s “objectives and motives” are likely different (85). “Given the specialization of labor,” Russell writes, “it would be impossible for students—or even most teachers (practitioners)—to have had a history of interactions sufficient to understand research articles, to follow the network far enough to make sense of a highly specialized activity system’s genres” (85). I would add that teachers like I was, maybe still

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high school teachers, adjuncts, community college instructors, and generalists at small colleges. Still, many GTAs would consider their stint in composition classrooms a service, not scholarly, activity and perhaps have quite a bit in common with the rest of us at the bottom of the academic food chain.

am, on the lower rungs of our “activity system,” non-specialists or pre-specialists, have little immediate impetus (beyond our own desire to teach better) to begin traveling through that network. And so, we arrive in classrooms having been trained in one or two courses on teaching writing, generally from one or two theoretical perspectives, from which we then distill a few teaching practices. Then we do what we can, generally hoping to perfect the system we’re already practicing, and we either don’t realize or don’t have the time or means to study the theory that’s being made above us.

All of this tracing, this reflection helps me understand why I suddenly felt like a fraud as I taught with my apprentices. I’d envisioned our apprenticeship classroom as a reenactment of the theory I’d advocated in our academic course. But I hadn’t contended with the limitations of our roles in the system, with the fact that even my own theoretical stance wasn’t fully formed (I would have argued that it was until I attempted to share it and realized it wasn’t). Even as I presented theoretical possibilities in my training of apprentices, even as I constructed my composition course based on a theoretical position, I had not critically contended with that position. I had examined my practice, certainly, but real wrestling with my theoretical position would have meant constructing new theory, and I am a practitioner. This is the limit, I think, to the role of reflective practitioner: in real life, it involves critiquing practice and bringing an already-bought-into body of theory to bear on those practices, rather than leveling up, as it were, in the activity system enough to be able to examine our theoretical positions.

My initial notes on this chapter focused on describing the version of Process on which I based my developmental workshop, and the ways in which I challenged my apprentices to try on the approach. What I have discovered is the need to embrace my intermediary position, as a practitioner studying to be a specialist while simultaneously attempting to train practitioners, as an opportunity to confront theory, to “follow the

network,” in Russell’s terms, and to reflect on it during and after its enactment. I want to make a case for the necessity of a conscious theoretical bricolage as a method for connecting theory and practice and for avoiding the sort of reductive fundamentalism that’s common both among theorists and practitioners. And, ultimately, I want to entertain the possibility of empowering my teaching apprentices with access to the larger activity system, including those inaccessible “highly specialized” (Russell 85) areas.

Not all the way past Process, or Guys, let’s not use “paradigm shift” again, okay?

I knew when I began this chapter that I’d need to talk about post-process theory, but I assumed I’d be defending Process from it, partly because I saw post-process critiques of Process as focused on a bastardized version of the theory. How does any theory avoid what seems like an inevitable essentialism, either as a mischaracterization from critics or as a method of handing itself down? Caution signs aren’t new. More than a decade before Thomas Kent’s introduction to his seminal book on Postprocess called for “breaking” from the “still-dominant process tradition,” (1) which he holds up as a singular thing that is “giving way to something new” (5), Lester Faigley warned that “if process theory and pedagogy have up to now been unproblematically accepted,” they could also be “unproblematically rejected” (537). Essentially, Faigley argued, Composition cannot build its disciplinary status on this already eclectic group of often “competing theories” lacking a “shared definition,” based on “conceptions of writing as a process” that differ “from theorist to theorist” without allowing them to build on each other into a “broader” (527) view, a synthesis that would be “historically aware” (528), “contextual,” and “dynamic” (539). Faigley summarizes Stanley Aronowitz’s and Henry Giroux’s alarming characterization of Composition itself as “general trend toward an atheoretical and skills-oriented curriculum that regards teachers as civil servants who dispense pre-packaged lessons” (528). While such a perspective, according to Faigley, is “radical” and “dour,” it

can serve as a reminder of the need for teachers and students to “resist domination and think critically” (528), looking “beyond who is writing to whom to the text and social systems that stand in relation to that act of writing” (539).

Process theories and pedagogies became “The Process Approach” despite such warnings, and not in the coherently synthesized, historically contextualized way Faigley hoped for. Russell has described it as the “stripping” down of a theory into a commodity that can be made “material,” for example, packaged in a textbook or a middle school poster. Lisa Ede has called for an acknowledgement of “the substantial diversity of the activities that are lumped together under the rubric of the writing process movement,” diversity that is “evident in the disparate and at times even contradictory pedagogical activities that teachers have cited as evidence of their commitment to a process approach to writing” (36). Paul Lynch uses the term “tote bag pedagogy” (257) to describe “the monotony of what the writing process . . . had become,” but he concedes that what it had become was the result of “widely perceived versions of *the* writing process” (Lynch 260). Gary Olson argues that the need for “coherence and unity among disparate texts and practices” (22) is precisely what led to the “inevitable oversimplification” (23) of Process. He describes Process as a “rhetorical narrative” (as opposed to theory, method, or empirical fact) in which the classroom functioned as a rhetorical situation with illiteracy as the exigence (26). While he reminds Process’s critics of the error of “presuming that ‘the writing process’ refers to a single set of invariant acts the way a manufacturing process might” (23), he seems to be fine with a generalized critique of “The Process Movement” prizing the isolated writer “tinkering” with the “humanistic essay” through applying simplistic, universal, “step-by-step” solutions (26).

Even prominent Process pedagogues have warned against what I envision as the transformation of the romantic artist’s workshop of process-guru lore into an industrial

factory. Nancie Atwell cautions readers to remember Donald Graves's edict "the enemy is orthodoxy" (17). Donald Murray says he contradicts himself all of the time, and in his seminal essay on the Process approach, his final rule is "No rules, no absolutes, just alternatives" (*Learning* 5). Barry Lane warns those who write about writing to be wary of "textbook fundamentalism" (3). Books on teaching, he observes, always risk being treated as if they are "written in stone," as "manual[s] to be followed word for word" (3).<sup>18</sup> Lad Tobin laments the "distortions, oversimplifications, even demonizations" of Process but says he understands why the "legend had it coming" as it turned into "an entity, even an industry, with a life of its own . . . apart from its first theorists" (*Taking Stock* 8). Over time, the disciplinary community has begun to talk about Process as its own version of current-traditional rhetoric, despite early researcher- and practitioner- warnings, and despite a general consensus that this sort of characterization amounts to a forced "reductive uniformity" (Lynch 260).

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<sup>18</sup> Such warnings (even to the extent that Aronowitz and Giroux predicted) seem fully realized now in K-12 classrooms, as exemplified by this question from a new ETS test preparation manual for English teacher certification in Texas:

A teacher compiles a blog entry that includes excerpts from a variety of news articles that demonstrate multiple opinions about a community issue. The teacher then asks students to read through the blog and write comments that respond directly to three of the statements made in the article excerpts. This activity best supports which of the following steps in the writing process?

- A. Prewriting    B. Drafting    C. Revising    D. Editing

**Option A is correct** because the blog activity will help students begin generating specific and targeted ideas for prewriting. **Option B is incorrect** because, while the ideas generated from the activity might be later applied to drafting, the strategy best supports prewriting. **Options C and D are incorrect** because the activity does nothing to promote modifying of ideas or application of grammar, usage and mechanics, which are entailed in the revising and editing steps.

On one hand, I want to hold on to methods that feel right to me and that seem to work for students. I don't want my classroom to be atheoretical, especially since I don't want to hand down another unexamined, packaged pedagogy to the apprentices I'm training. But I didn't come to Process by embracing its theories of composition. I came to Process for its views on teaching and I've stayed with it because the stable parts of the workshop, for me, aren't rhetorical; they're instructional. That single course in 2001 was so influential in my teaching identity that I can't get past the Process label. Plus, I was a teacher first, a writer and scholar second, so I embraced Process pedagogy because it values the formative. Products—compositions—would come as part of the mechanism of school writing, but the value of my writing classes would always be in the doing. The learning would happen through writing. I began to see every interaction with my students as part of a writing process, and this theoretical position appealed to me. If, as Gleason says, “the writing process movement [was] . . . the intellectual springboard for our modern field of Composition,” Process is my theoretical springboard for pedagogy.

But then, when I wrestle with Postprocess, I wonder. If my version of Process is collaborative and public and contextualized, maybe I'm benefiting from the Postprocess critique or extension of Process. That makes me want to invoke Olson's picture of crystalized food on dishes here: he wondered who has time to tinker with words. I wonder who has time to tinker with theory? Raul Sánchez makes the helpful distinction between “*process theory*, [. . .] a set of propositions about how writing happens” and “*process pedagogy*,” which “names teaching methods thought to emerge logically from those propositions” (185). He's interested in differentiating these “consequentially different aspects of one idea or phenomenon,” so that he can focus on the first one. He takes up the second and adds a third, *the process movement*, which “refers to the first and second within historical and disciplinary contexts” (185) only to the extent that they reveal

underlying assumptions that flow from the first. Process approaches constructed theory from classroom exigency: what do we know about writing that informs how we should teach writing? So-called process approaches were just that—approaches to pedagogical problems that researchers and teachers attempted to solve. Sánchez calls this Process’s “pedagogical imperative” (187), and, again, I’d point out that the demands of the activity system don’t allow practitioners much room to separate theory from practice. I think, then, that Process appeals as much to my identity as my philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

Postprocess begins with theory-building and finds that it complicates the whole enterprise of teaching. Teachers-as-“co-workers who actively collaborate with their students to help them through different communicative situations both within and outside the university” (Kent, *Paralogic* 166) sounds really great. This theory-first, pedagogy-second (or never) approach is compelling. Indeed, many scholars have resisted the so-called pedagogical “imperative” to follow up rhetorical theory with classroom application. Even Sánchez, who dismisses Postprocess as no more useful than Process any longer, says pedagogy is “a crucial issue,” but then he proposes eliminating the frame of Composition studies, with its classroom boundaries, concluding that “writing is culture, that writing is pedagogy” (193). In the end, proposals like this one feel empty.

Here’s another example: Sidney Dobrin’s 2011 book, co-edited with J.A. Rice and Michael Vastola, which positions itself “Beyond” postprocess, begins with a “New Postprocess Manifesto,” which says we’re post-pedagogy, too. Essays like this one

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19 I feel a kinship with Wendy Bishop here. In one of her last essays, she describes the process by which she found her expressivist position progressively marginalized, “attacked, dismantled, shipped off safely to Boynton/Cook, to K-12, to minor conferences, to state journals” to the point that she felt compelled to find “a new place to stand.” As her favored theoretical position lost its authority, she felt like she was losing hers: “I still need a place to write from, a writer’s identity; as a teacher, I need to ask students to question the self they are constructing in their physical texts and in the actual classroom” (22).

always feel so condescending to me, since my primary focus is teaching. I might read “because writing is nomadic and paralogic, the ability to teach or learn it dissolves along with the impetus for disciplines that specialize in the teaching of writing” (17), but what I hear is *like, stop talking about teaching. We just want to talk about writing, not about teaching. Preoccupation with teaching doesn’t let us focus on the important stuff we need to think about, like interrogating our own discipline and critiquing institutions and creating new theories and whatnot.* Of course I understand that folks like Dobrin, Sánchez, and the rest need to *do* theory, so to speak, because the rest of us can’t. I get it: we can’t really teach writing unless we can agree on what writing is. But highly theoretical work that dismisses pedagogy (or, in the case of a gentler essay like Sánchez’s, acknowledges pedagogy as “crucial,” but then doesn’t really engage it) doesn’t acknowledge that, if we aren’t about the business of educating students, no one would pay us to sit around dreaming up phrases like “disciplinary violence” (Dobrin, et al. 14). Instead, such work pretends (ironically, given its polemic tone) not to be engaging in the oldest kind of academic snobbery in its assumption that we’re all able to be postpedagogy. Again, I understand the need for Dobrin and colleagues, at the top of the disciplinary food chain, to theorize and disrupt and create radical positions. Otherwise, we’d never get anywhere. The problem is that, until we’re post-discipline and post-formal-education, we can’t do anything concrete with writing-is-culture-is-pedagogy. Those of us who must teach writing certainly can’t do anything with it.

Dobrin, Rice, and Vastola do acknowledge that dismissing pedagogy means also questioning our “institutional space and identity,” claiming that their collection of essays will “coalesce that critique” (16), but they never quite address the circular nature of such a critique. That is, except offering some general suggestions about writing “outside” of

“pedagogic scenes,” they don’t offer any sense of what would be left after their work of “tearing at the very seams” of our discipline (17).

Further, rather than acknowledging the moderate positions that attempt to reconcile postprocess with the classroom, Dobrin, Rice, and Vastola are starkly critical of Helen Foster, for example, for her too-conservative “mollifying” stance (15) that “masks a disciplinary fear of postprocess” (14). Their characterization of Foster’s work as “corralling,” “conciliatory,” and “normalizing,” while accurate, neglects the fact that theoretical bridging has a greater chance of influencing actual classroom practice for the better than does “disciplinary violence” (14).

Perhaps I’m too hard on Dobrin and his colleagues, but then I see that Dobrin’s written a Freshman Comp textbook with academic publishing juggernaut Pearson. The slick, expensive book can be bundled with the most commodified of composition teaching tools, the web-based *MyWritingLab*, complete with multiple choice grammar and writing process (!) questions. *Writing Situations* begins with a discussion of the rhetorical situation and tells readers that “traditionally, students have been taught a linear, step-by-step process for writing” but promises to focus on a “situational approach to writing processes that considers the shifting conditions of any given writing scenario,” since writing processes are essentially “recursive” and situation-dependent (Dobrin 18). Ironically, there is little in this description that wouldn’t fit Hairston’s original list of features of the process approach.

Maybe I’m getting in too deep. All of this seems too sophisticated for developmental composition. On the other hand, this course, perhaps even more than freshman composition, inscribes student writers with institutional labels and forces them to confront their status as non-writers and even non-students. In fact, developmental students are often more suspicious of and more intuitively poised to question the

academic power structure that's always told them they're bad or deficient writers than my students who've never had to deal with the label "struggling writer." It is pedagogically "imperative" that I find a way forward for these students and find a way to articulate a coherent pedagogical stance for the preservice teachers I train. But I don't have the luxury or authority to begin with theorizing writing. Instead, my work is always the work of teaching. When I read postprocess notions of the dialogic, public, material, situated nature of writing and subsequent cautions against attempts to package theory for pedagogy, I find that the reflective practice stance I already try to adopt accommodates those ideas. Maybe we don't continually, actively interrogate the constructed nature of classroom writing during class time or through writing assignments, but I try to acknowledge it. I talk to students about the fact that this non-class gives us the opportunity to write what we want to, how we want to, responding to real rhetorical situations, finding authentic voices that also communicate to an audience. They won't be graded, they'll be guided, and so on. In many cases, students are excited or at least appreciative. In other cases, my developmental writers are wise to what they perceive as power-tricks. They're just doing what I'm asking until I let them move on to the next level, where they'll pretty much do the same thing.

*I tell them there's no such thing as The Writing Process. Outlines, inverted pyramids, and formulas are tools we'll use as/when they're needed.*

*"I love you, Mrs. Blair," Preston gushes, "This is like some Freedom Writers stuff."*

*The girl in front of him rolls her eyes, mumbling something about not being from the 'hood.*

*"Man," another student says from the back row, "I should've taken this class last semester. Maybe I would have passed."*

*Before I can start casting the movie of myself as the Developmental Comp Messiah—is Hilary Swank older than I am? She’s too skinny, anyway—I see David shake his head and raise his eyebrows at me. He’s taken my class twice and knows that it’s not magic.*

Later in the semester, at the end of a conference about David’s current essay:

*“So, this still needs some work, but we need to go ahead and move on to the next one,” I say, turning his laptop back toward his side of the desk.*

*“That’s because I’m not a good writer. I mean, I don’t have a passion for it or anything, so I’ll never really be good at writing. I don’t really want to try to be a writer.” He’s saying all of this with his head bent. He’s snapped his laptop shut and is practically walking out the door.*

*I’m not sure how to respond. I want to talk to him about this, though. He needs to understand that it’s about practicing. I try to catch him. “But that’s what this class is for. It’s not about whether or not you’re a good writer, in general. That’s not what I was saying about this paper, anyway. This is a draft. This class is about working hard to overcome problems you’ve had with writing in the past. If you’d had time to work on it some more, it would be further along, right?”*

*He finally looks at me. “I guess. But more time would just mean more time for you or Jenna to work on it. I don’t know what to do with it. It’s not like I want to keep working on it.”*

*I pause, not sure what to say. He’s right, but I don’t want to admit it. Now I’m the one not making eye contact.*

*“Well,” he ventures. He feels bad, I think, as if he’s afraid I’m taking it personally, and maybe I am. “I know I’m going to learn something or whatever. I’ll do what you want for class. I’m not trying to say that I don’t want to be better at writing. At least”—he*

*grins—“I’ll try to be better for this class. I just mean, I’m not trying to be a writer in my life, you know?”*

This sort of experience demands theory-making. But is it a theory of writing or a theory of pedagogy or a theory of institutions? How do I answer David, especially when his implicit critique of our course is also a critique of Process approaches? If I tell him not to revise this piece anymore, what was the point of revising it to begin with?

I’ve realized that I cannot write an apologetic for a process-oriented stance against post-process theory. I don’t take issue with Kent’s basic description of the post-process view, that writing is “public,” “interpretive,” and “situated” (*Post-Process* 1), but then, who would? I do object to his notion that a Process view is inherently and erroneously simplistic: “writing constitutes a process of some sort and that this process is generalizable” (1), since it distills a compendium of originally flexible approaches and theories into a hegemonic straw man to-be-rebelled-against. I also wonder how revolutionary this description of post-process theory can be, since it seems remarkably similar to what Lester Faigley described as a synthesized view of Process more than a decade earlier. Even when Gary Olson—and he’s not the only one; this sort of thing appears to be the radical post-process line in the sand—proposes such an anti-conclusion as the “insurmountable problem,” that “writing, whether the acts or the products of the acts, cannot be usefully theorized” (27), it only feels crazy for a moment. That’s because it’s immediately softened by a context that’s easier to swallow: “writing is not epistemic in the sense that no one true system of explanation can be constructed out of analysis and codified in a textbook in such a way that anyone can teach anybody else how to write in fifteen weeks” (27), and “search[ing] for the theory that will enable a universally applicable rhetoric,” especially if we’re always searching for a theory as a writing panacea, is fruitless (29). I think most Process pedagogues who have any sense

of the theoretical traces of their methods would mostly agree with Olson. Writing may be difficult to theorize and teach, and it's likely impossible to find a single theory that accounts for everything, but that doesn't keep us from trying. For that matter, I don't believe Olson, Dobrin, Kent, or others would really push this un-theorizable thesis to its limit. Otherwise, why write about writing at all?

But then, I must concede that I'm late to this party, too. In fact, it seems like the last fifteen years of postprocess work is about either qualifying its revolutionary nature or complicating its early tenets. How is a practitioner to keep up if we're now "Beyond Postprocess" (borrowing from the 2011 book to which Kent writes the preface)?

In Kent's book, Russell says the solution to the textbook/totebag version of Process isn't to abandon "the old content wholesale for some post-old process/content" (95). Instead, also sounding an awful lot like Faigley, he argues for broadening the focus of the sort of writing processes we teach and study, "stepping back from *the* writing process as taught in [our] own activity system of schooling to see, with some perspective, the plural *socio/logics* of various networks of people and purposes and tools" (95). Newer theoretical positions attempt to look across the continuum of theoretical positions to find theoretical approaches that are useful, framing their stances as evolutionary rather than revolutionary (Lynch 258).

This reconciliatory approach, though Dobrin and others have criticized it for its conservatism, seems the most valuable to me. Lee-Ann Breuch begins by taking issue with the Postprocess assumption that Process is/was "content-based," which she says ignores its "how-centered" methodology (106). She contends that Postprocess adds to Process by challenging us to realize that writing isn't a thing to be—if it even can be—mastered (109). Olson makes a similar argument but frames it as a difference between the two approaches. When mastery is no longer a goal, we can avoid any attempts at

uniform pedagogy: “post-process theory encourages us to reexamine our definition of writing as an activity rather than a body of knowledge, our methods of teaching as indeterminate activities rather than exercise of mastery, and our communicative interactions with students as dialogic rather than monologic” (99).

In Helen Foster’s book *Networked Processes*, she argues for a meeting place between process and postprocess, which she calls stasis, and it’s this common ground, she says, that allows us to move forward in both theory and pedagogy. “Significantly,” she writes, “it is that grappling with writing’s possibility, the person who writes, that is indicated across the entire range of the process/post-process continuum” (40). This theoretical common ground would focus on “the subject who writes and is written within and among complex social political and cultural networks” (41).

Like Foster, Sánchez says Process theorized the decision-making-writer-subject-who-produces-text, “tether[ing]” composition studies to “an empirical, always-embodied subject that could not be dismissed from or theorized out of the conversation about writing” (187). Postprocess, he says, just slid the focus to those same subjects’ “acts” (189) of writing. Since Process theory “was developed in order to better teach subjects how to write,” the subject is the focus of Process, “not any act or process of writing” (187). Either way, Composition studies, Sánchez says, has always “had to reckon with the subject directly, persistently, materially” (188).

Perhaps theoretical reconciliation would allow for focus on the act of writing as defined by its author, with an awareness of the contextual forces that shape that definition. It’s certainly true that school writing involves more overtly-constructed rhetorical situations, but since all writing is shaped in some way by external forces, we can acknowledge this with students and engage those forces as we write with students.

Matthew Heard describes his coming-to-terms with theory in a 2008 essay, appropriately titled “What Should We Do with Postprocess Theory?” After describing his own application of postprocess ideas in the classroom, Heard comes to the conclusion that “a mixed-tactics approach may be a workable compromise between the exigencies of teaching and the visions of postprocess theory” (296). As long as teachers are aware and committed to teaching writing “through discursive interaction,” we have no need to throw out what works in the classroom: “The strategies we are already using can be adapted, with thoughtful consideration, to work for students who are learning to hone their writing through discursive engagement” (296).

Heard goes on to claim that one-on-one conferences and readerly feedback, both staples of many process-oriented workshop approaches (he doesn’t acknowledge this, but perhaps these are the traditional “strategies” he refers to), were the most valuable and most “authentically postprocess” (298) part of his instruction. He found that students were moving from being dependent on his affirmation of their writing or writing choices to making their own choices and then to analyzing their own, well, processes. It’s the collaborative frame that makes the difference for Heard, as he relates in an example of a student who, by the end of the course, is able to articulate “why she had chosen to use a specific strategy or show me how she had organized her essay in order to appeal to a real audience” (299).

#### Cross-Talk

Since Process is associated in nearly all strata of our discipline with its packaging (and understood in different ways), I have to be careful how I use the term. Before I began the research for this project, I’m not sure I would even have used the term Post-process in any meaningful way. And now that we’re “beyond” post-, the task of equipping undergraduate pre-service teachers with theory seems impossible. I tell myself that this is

why I can't hand down organized, clear methods and procedures to my apprentices, why I find myself so often needing dialogue and contingency while I train them. I also tell myself that this is a good thing, since it forces me to articulate and, when necessary, critique the theoretical underpinnings of my pedagogy. But then I'm brought back to my place in the activity system: while folks in my position may have the sense that such a reflective process is necessary, it's rare that we have the time, resources, or "historical" (in Faigley's sense) awareness to engage in it. Will the teaching apprentices who work for me understand our dialogue and negotiation as reflective, theoretically critical practice, or will they just assume—in part because they're even farther down the activity system's levels than I am—that I'm disorganized or that our approaches are flawed? Even more, I tend to hang on to instructional methods that have worked (for lack of a better term) in the past, and I find myself inventing a rationale (theory?) for methods as I train apprentices, rather than creating method from theory. All of this theory-practice tension is further complicated by the fact that, if theory isn't well-distributed vertically through the activity system, as Russell describes it, that's true horizontally as well.

Theorists, researchers, and writers who work in K-12 contexts and whose work is marketed to teachers and teacher educators generally ground that work in pedagogical, not rhetorical theory. Thomas Thompson's story of changing his subscription from *The English Journal* to *College English* when he moved from teaching high school to teaching college is a useful metaphor for the divisions on both axes.

In the semester before they signed on as apprentices in Developmental Composition, my students took a teaching methods course I taught (the evolution of which I described in an earlier chapter) in which writing pedagogy was a significant focus. We examined multiple models but focused specifically on Nancie Atwell's middle school writing workshop. I had discovered the second edition of *In the Middle* after I left the high

school classroom, and it had been revolutionary for me. It made the sometimes-idealized Process approach practical, even methodical. Atwell's book is the antithesis of the industrial process model, taking multiple chapters to explain variations and possibilities in the workshop. Atwell says her book is light on theory, and though a knowledgeable reader can trace multiple theories of Process (cooperating, not competing) through her work, that sort of reader isn't the target audience for a book like this one. Her third edition, released more than fifteen years after the second, doesn't take up theory either. Atwell connects her methodology to others' individual research or work but never roots it in a theoretical model or historical trend (unless you count her training at UNH in the Expressivist-Process heyday, and you have to know the history make the connection). The most theoretical listing in her bibliography is Vygotsky's *Thought and Language*.

It's difficult to find works that talk across, and those that do focus on teacher training (like Tremmel's and Broz's *Teaching Writing Teachers*), methodology, (*What is College Level Writing?*) or collaborative potential (*Teaching Writing in High School and College*). James Williams's textbook-style *Preparing to Teach Writing*, promisingly subtitled *Research, Theory, and Practice*, aims at a broad audience, including topics from a brief overview of rhetorical history to creating syllabi to adhering to legislated standards. In the preface, he alludes to the dearth of teacher-prep textbook options that include both theory and method, which gives me hope. His book covers, he says, the breadth of content that beginning writing teachers will need. The fourth edition, published in 2014, devotes a few pages to (rather dismissively) explaining the pedagogical paradox of post-process (72-75), but earlier in the chapter, he's already concluded that, "In one form or another, process pedagogy has survived the criticism, perhaps because so much about this approach seems so right" (60). In his insistence that problems with Process are the result of misunderstanding or misapplication, he doesn't engage Postprocess, or really

much contemporary composition theory, for even how it can better shape a Process-oriented approach.

Jennifer Berne's teaching manual on the writing workshop in high school provides another example of the reductive problem. At first, her introduction seems reasonably flexible. Berne says Process, "sometimes called the writing workshop approach, is less a set of practices than a philosophy or stance about the way students learn to write" (3), and she includes a list of "tenets" in the Hairston tradition. The distinction of this approach, she says, is that individual, external generic conventions or traits of writing aren't the basis of the curriculum; student writing itself is the curriculum (2). And, at first, her recommendation for "organizing a class around process," seems to resist textbook fundamentalism. But then, she begins describing "the components of the writing process—planning, drafting, revising, giving and receiving feedback, editing, and publishing" (3), encouraging teachers to "break apart the writing process and give students experience in strategies for managing each piece" (3). She adds the caveat that writing isn't necessarily stage-like, but says that, still, "it is necessary for students" (3) to think about writing this way until they've mastered the stages, at which time, they can stop thinking of them as discrete. This is where a rather systematic approach that's so desirable in standardized classrooms butts heads with the flexibility of a true workshop, which would focus instead on giving students experience in *writing* (not in practicing "discrete stages") and provide model strategies for managing that writing, not necessarily the stages of *the* process.

Berne says that teaching "the writing process, sometimes called the writing workshop approach, is less a set of practices than a philosophy or stance about the way that students learn to write" (3), and she lists and describes the "tenets" of the stance as:

- Students learn to write by writing

- Learning to revise is learning to write
- Students learn to write by writing about what they care about
- Student writing should be both good and correct
- Students should be assessed by their growth in using the writing process and by the resulting product

But here's the thing: curriculum should certainly be grounded in philosophy (and, I'd add, theory), but it is essentially practice. And though Berne takes measured steps to remind readers that, once taught, the "components" (I like this better than stages) are no longer the focus, in practice, it's hard for students to see the forest for the trees. Strategy/component/skill instruction's inherent weakness is its ability to become the focus instead of the broader learning it's meant to serve. And, it's hard to package philosophy, so instead, a set of practices is often distilled and handed-down, with or without its undergirding philosophy.

The idea of students' learning about discrete stages suggests, though Berne doesn't actually say it, a behaviorist/mastery approach. Again, she tries to account for these kinds of problems, but generally only in her introductory material. In the same way that the passing down of pedagogy doesn't always include such things, her later chapters on individual stages, on "kinds of assignments," and on assessment and evaluation lack any critical stance, thus running the risk of Lane's aforementioned "textbook fundamentalism."

Barry Lane writes about the dangers of the new-old orthodoxy, recounting the days when his colleagues at the University of New Hampshire longed to teach "students who had been taught the writing process since first grade. Concepts like finding your personal voice and the joy of freewriting would have been already taught. Students would

already be fluent writers. How much farther we could take them!" (12). He critiques his colleagues' desire with descriptions of students for whom the proverbial dynamics of a writing workshop had become rote. A group of fourth graders are relieved when he tells them they don't have to do "the first three steps of the Vermont writing process" which they'd been previously instructed to do "in order" (12). A college writer responds to feedback about his "stifling essays" full of voice and detail but "no personal investment or enthusiasm" with "Maybe I should just freewrite a little more about that." Lane goes on to express appreciation for "students who knew nothing at all about the writing process [. . .], students who had dribbled off five-paragraph themes their whole lives" because he could be instrumental in their conversion to workshop students: "now, suddenly, the flood-gates were opening and their personal experiences were exploding on the page" (13).

Again, Barry Lane's description of his evolution feels familiar for me. He describes coming to the conclusion that he won't "teach techniques of the writing process" and will instead focus on revision, "the one thing all real writers had woven into their stories and essays and poems and books [. . .], the one concept that fueled all writing processes" (13). Lane's book is only briefly critical of the problem of Process-as-new-orthodoxy, so I find myself wrestling with his language while I wrestle with my own theoretical stance. When is a writer not a "real" writer? What exactly are "techniques of the writing process," and isn't revision one of them? How can he offer examples from elementary school and college writers as if they're the same?

Lane's examples suggest that personal essays about beach trips with no compelling point are as problematic as 5-paragraph skeletons of thesis and topic sentences—both are the result of stunted writing growth, and both are presumably caused by focusing on means rather than ends. But the pedagogy of process/workshop

makes this kind of thing complicated, since, true to the generally hands-off (a bit ironic, since Lane says he wants to shake the UNH student) ethos of the workshop approach, Lane focuses on his internal frustration, which ultimately leads to an overall change in his pedagogy, rather than on his specific instructional responses to those students.

Still, Lane is on to something when he focuses on revision in writing and writing instruction: “to teach writing, teachers must continually find new ways of revising their teaching, so that they teach an enthusiasm for innovation and constant revision that all writers share along with the ideas” (13). Good teaching means evolution, but writing about teaching writing demands drama. I wonder if, to make a book on Process-oriented teaching really work, you need a foil. The narrative of teaching from a process orientation needs the villain of current-traditional approaches, five paragraph-writing drones, the bad teacher I used to be, something that makes it seem new, revolutionary, freeing.

#### Present-Process

I like Jessica Yood’s term “present process” to describe where I am now: “our mix means we don’t belong in a paradigm at all, but in a reflexive system of constant change” (“Present” 19). She’s referring to institutional factors that force theoretical compromises, but her description fits. Kevin Porter describes the mythical monolith of Process as a construct invoked by Postprocess, “an empirical/scientific attempt to completely describe—and therefore control through therapeutic pedagogy—the (singular) writing process” (711). This description, now nearly two decades old, rings true. It is a fitting oversimplification which many adherents of Process, perhaps unconsciously, have perpetuated. I want to avoid that. On the other hand, I feel compelled to describe my (evolving) position.

At the outset, I’d concede that such a description would be cobbled together from many sources over many years, and sometimes those sources contradict each other (or

themselves). I could trace these points to stances that might otherwise be termed expressivist, constructivist, sociocultural, and even Postprocess. K-12 practitioners will notice elements of “the workshop” here as well. I would try to distinguish between “propositions about how writing happens,” as Sánchez recommends, and the methods I employ, but sometimes, those methods don’t “emerge logically from those propositions” (185).

I can say that the Process movement helped form my teaching identity, so the traces of Process are clear in my pedagogy, and Postprocess has informed my theoretical stance. I have struggled with the need for theorizing to end with solutions: how can we get students to master writing, rather than how can we help students progress in the discourse system preferred by schools? From any modern or contemporary perspective, mastery isn't achievable. If the basic metaphor for the process view is a cycle, and the basic metaphor for postprocess is a network, no one would argue that we are leading students along a straight line toward writing mastery. Textbook fundamentalism is inevitably created, at least in part, when we don't describe the reflective process and instead present a teaching narrative as a portable method. Alas, nuance and complexity seem to be the casualties of cohesion and practicality.

Nonetheless, I feel compelled to offer a list of general principles and practices.

1. Writing is both context-specific and writer-driven. Writers compose texts when they decide that a given written form is the most effective way to say something about something.<sup>20</sup> Classroom contexts (like any other

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<sup>20</sup> Loyd Bitzer's seminal essay on The Rhetorical Situation is helpful here, and I often discuss excerpts and terms from it with even my developmental students. I attempt to focus as much as possible on the “rhetorically based” nature of writing (Hairston 86) I also like George Hillocks's description of writing as involving “how to decide what to do in a new situation and how to think about what to do when the what is new.” This knowing, he says, “is not algorithmic. Even at the lowest levels, it is far more complex than that,

set of contexts) both create and constrain this need to write, a fact which writing teachers should acknowledge and engage. When possible, students should be given opportunities to write for their own purposes, but when students write in school-based genres and under classroom constraints, teachers can challenge students to think about how to apply processes and strategies beyond school-based writing.

2. A given piece of writing is never finished, only published or shared, which makes it part of the “open-ended exchange of human utterances” (Kent, “Preface” xx).
3. Because all writing is a social act, the effectiveness of any text is determined in the exchange between writer and audience.
4. Writing teachers should be experienced writers who continually write themselves so that they can variously act as writing models, coaches, advisors, representative readers, and editors. Students take on various roles, too, from apprentice to author.<sup>21</sup> Teachers interact with student writers in these varied roles—not just “intervene in students’ writing,” as Hairston (86) puts it—throughout their writing time.
5. Though there is no single, universal writing process, experienced writers generally rely on recursive processes that have worked in the past. Such processes may be reenacted or reinvented based on the needs of the

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involving strategies such as how to render convincing dialogue, how to generate effective detail, or how to develop a definition that makes clear distinctions” (216).

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Horner has written quite a bit about the problem of the student-author, arguing that we should neither promote students to an author position that is unattainable nor “consign” them to “low-labor” positions (526). I would argue, though, that “resisting dominant definitions of our work, our students, and ourselves” allows students to take on the persona of authorship if not the position.

task or the writer. Student writers can benefit from trying on processes that have worked for other writers.

6. Writing curricula should emphasize formative, individualized assessment, even in postsecondary classrooms.<sup>22</sup> Such an emphasis allows writing teachers to value growth and progress<sup>23</sup>.
7. Writing is an ongoing discipline, not simply a skill to be mastered in a series of classes. When writing instruction must be “therapeutic,” a teacher’s first goal should be to make writing accessible and controllable for students, not an out-of-reach, magical skill that always and only works for the linguistically talented (of which their teacher is a member, a holder of the mystical code), but a useable, flexible set of processes that can be accessed, though, perhaps, not mastered, by hard work.
8. A single teacher may not be able to consistently apply all of these principles. Teachers can thoughtfully and critically apply any number of curricular elements and frameworks of organization management in order to help students achieve their writing goals.

With these goals in mind, my developmental composition course is a stripped-down workshop. We meet twice a week for 80 minutes each. Each student maintains a writer’s notebook in which they’ve recorded ideas, journals, responses-to-prompts, and other material on a regular basis both in and out of class time. The notebook, a widely-used ingredient in the writing workshop, functions primarily as a way to keep students thinking about writing. A large percentage of my developmental students are athletes, so

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<sup>22</sup> See Yood, drawing on Hairston: Process “is ‘an investigative strategy’ that seeks to connect writing with ‘practices’ that ‘emerge’ in the act of trying to know ‘how’ a ‘product came into being’” (“Present” 15).

<sup>23</sup> I’ll describe my assessment approach more specifically in a later chapter.

I compare the notebook to regular exercise outside of team practices. The metaphor works for many of them, but the regular points they earn by bringing the notebook to class are a more powerful motivator for students to write regularly. While students compose a new entry, I or my apprentice walk around and skim their entries from the prior week. I write in my notebook every week as well. Sometimes, I cheat and staple in something I've written for another purpose, but I try to emphasize regular writing as the focus of this ongoing discipline.

I've learned that the grade-reward for the notebook can't be punitive. If they've written, they get credit. If they haven't, I challenge them to write more often the following week. I acknowledge that the notebook can feel perfunctory but that it's another of the tools we're trying on for this semester. Afterward, I teach, modeling a writing strategy, describing a potential process, or talking with students about a model we've read. By the end of our time together, we've attempted to apply the day's focus to the projects we're currently working on. If that day's focus doesn't immediately apply to a student's current project, I encourage him to record the work in his notebook in case it's useful later. Early in the semester, I model developing a notebook entry into a draft, and nearly all students eventually circle back to their notebooks for writing material at some point in the semester.

On the second day, we work on current projects. I supply students with a final deadline, and I recommend benchmarks, but other than that, I don't explicitly dictate anything else. Students choose everything from topic to length to tone. Each week, I either check in briefly to discuss their progress, or, as time and deadlines dictate, read the current draft and discuss it with the writer. Periodically, students meet in groups to share their writing and collect feedback from others. I try to emphasize the nature of writing as a communication tool, positioning the writing groups as audience members, as

readers. Sometimes the group sessions are awkward, but by the end of the semester, at least a few students ask to get with groups to talk through some aspect of their work. When they work, writing groups function in dynamic ways so that students consider feedback and revise with communication in mind.

Using time in class to talk with students individually is one of the best uses of our time. At first, the face-to-face meeting functions more as an accountability measure for students and a mini-instruction session for me, since students don't often have the vocabulary or confidence yet to talk about their own writing. So, I read quickly, giving feedback, asking questions, and, often, copyediting. I can't help that. It's a compulsion. I also use the time to review submitted compositions with students and talk with them about applying my feedback to their next writing task. Eventually, students (at least some) begin to set the agenda for our meetings. Conference time is particularly valuable as an assessment tool. I know students are making progress here when they begin using language that indicates control: "Here's what I've done." "I'm thinking about this." "I'm working on this." "I've made these choices." "I've noticed these patterns." I note progress, too, when students use feedback to make choices rather than to feel judged.

When I provide whole-class instruction, I try to focus on modeling. Couture says teaching has traditionally meant we "model technique" but don't teach students to "emulate expression" (30). I've tried to avoid this mis-emphasis by modeling my own thinking, offering strategies and processes and approaches, and then helping students emulate those that best fit a particular rhetorical situation. This is the bit from Atwell's work that I find both useful and challenging, since it involves constantly negotiating the line between what I would do, what other writers have done, and what the student-writer in front of me might do.

I'll talk about "process," for example, in terms of how I work through constructing a text. Some days, I tell them, I'm stuck, and I need to fall back on familiar patterns that have worked for me before, so I demonstrate those patterns. Such demonstrations tend to focus on generic conventions, invention strategies, and my most reliable personal process. Sometimes, I say, I'm inspired by other writers to write inside frames they've built. On those days, we talk about generalizing another writer's structure, tone, or style. We look for patterns among texts that we've read, and I challenge students to emulate what they like in other writers. Some days, I say, I need to just get ideas out of my head so I don't forget them. In those sessions, I emphasize more expressivist techniques like freewriting and revision. I don't mean to say that I show up to class and offer lessons based on how I feel. Each session is structured and planned, but I try to plan them based on what students and their writing suggest they need and then frame them for students in terms of what I do as a writer, what I need, and what I've learned.

When I offer it, grammar instruction is situational and contextualized, with an emphasis on rhetorical grammar and editing. Because my goal for students is that they make significant progress in producing writing that communicates meaningfully to an audience, I focus on overall clarity. I also recommend to students that they use every available resource to progress to clear, edited prose, even if that means relying on tutors, friends, or online tools, to help them edit. Standard written English is a code that I take for granted, one I play by ear, as it were. I absorbed it through my own reading and writing and through an environment mostly populated with others for whom the code was clear. Many of my students have not had that privilege, and, as such, their ears are not trained. Since fourteen weeks is not long enough for me to supply this sort of training, I don't necessarily teach grammar. I provide minimal instruction on some usual suspects and deal with the rest through modeling editing for students during conference times,

encouraging them to go to the tutoring center and to use word processing helps, and pointing them to the rhetorical and syntactical moves that other writers make.

I think if I met my former student today, the one who said he didn't do drafts (and I have met others like him, but none so bold or sure), I would challenge him to be open-minded about the possibilities in revision and in refining his writing by working with peers. I no longer require drafts and revision, per se. Instead, I approach instruction by offering students options for constructing a go-to process while acknowledging that every piece of writing takes shape differently. I just require that they keep writing. We follow some predictable instructional routines, deadlines, and schedules, so that for most students, process is embedded in the classroom structure until I ask them to reflect on what they did that worked. I can't claim that by the end of the semester, they've all internalized a workable process that's their own, since we have to acknowledge that their writing has been shaped by the demands and structures of our classroom, but most of them have made great strides in both their attitudes about writing and in the actual written products they submit.

I try to be transparent with students. Especially at the developmental level, their vocabulary for discussing rhetorical and theoretical concepts is limited, but I attempt to acknowledge that writing for this course is a material act, a means to an end, but for now, I say, try to emulate what published writers or effective student writers do, since they have been materially rewarded for their writing. This sort of discussion is one of the theoretical compromises I've made over time.

*David slides into the desk across from me, his essay in hand, and starts right in. "Okay," he says. "I think, you know, time got the best of me on that first one. You said I had to turn it in, and I did, but I looked at it one more time, and it was really bumpy. So I think I need to spend some more time on this one. I've already typed it and everything so*

*you can read it, and I'm going to take it with me to AIM [the tutoring program] on Monday. I'm gonna finish this semester, Mrs. Blair. I'm really trying to listen to you. I don't, like, love writing, but I'm going to do what you said about making sure that, when I write, people get what I have to say." We talk for a moment about the structure and topic he's chosen, and I pull out his earlier essay. He cringes a bit while we talk, but I explain again that many of my marks are just there to demonstrate my responses as a reader, that I agree with his assessment: more time would have made his essay communicate much more clearly, and that I'm proud he's taking some control.*

## Chapter 4

### The apprenticeship, Ideal version

Jenna will be teaching on Tuesday, so she has come by the office to talk through her plan. We've decided that she'll guide students through some strategies for drafting and revising, with a focus on organization. I describe a lesson I've presented (adapted from a middle school book by Gretchen Bernabei and Dorothy Hall) in which students distill the sections or paragraphs of their compositions on to individual sticky notes and then experiment with arrangement. I sometimes demonstrate by bringing in an essay I've already written and project it for students, discussing together how the essay will read depending on how I move paragraphs around. I sometimes model connective sentences/phrases with this lesson, depending on the group of students—I don't use the term "transition" any longer since it often conjures for my students a list of stock phrases that they can drop at the front of paragraphs indiscriminately.

Jenna points out that many of the students will not be far enough along on their current projects to apply the lesson immediately, and she's right. They should have at least some drafting done, but she knows procrastination is an issue. "I'm kind of an outline person," she says. "I mean, by the time I start writing, I have a really clear plan in my outline, so I want to talk about that, since it's worked for me and since this is sort of a deconstructed outline." I remind her that we'll have to make that connection clear for students. It takes me a minute to notice that I'm prattling while she's thinking, so I stop. After a few moments, she brightens: "What about if I do the modeling first? Something like giant sticky notes on the board that I show them before they try it? I'll talk first about what I want to write about, and then I'll put the pieces on my sticky notes, and then I'll show them all the different ways I could arrange the pieces. That might be better, right,

since then I can show them how it sort of looks like an outline when I settle on a sequence?”

It's a good idea, and I'm a little embarrassed that I didn't think of it myself. We decide to use painter's tape to stick sheets of paper to the board. She'll think aloud the sections of the essay in front of the class instead of bringing in a prepared outline, and then she'll give them an opportunity to make suggestions for alternate sequencing. On Tuesday, I sit in the back, taking notes while she and students move the paper around the board, trying out different ways of arranging the essay elements. A few students are quiet, but the majority of them are connecting, with a few even debating between themselves which version they like best. At one point, a student in the middle row raises her hand. "So, which one is the right one?" She waits, as if this is a cooking show where Jenna has a pre-made casserole-essay in the oven so everyone can see how it's supposed to look.

I'm gratified as Jenna deftly reframes the student's question. "It all depends," she says, "on what I want to accomplish and what we think will work for the reader. Which one do you think is most effective?" Later, we circulate through the room as students use sticky notes to think through arranging their compositions. We spend more time than I would like talking students through what to put on their notes since they haven't done much work on their compositions yet, and too many of them need to be prompted to write specific ideas and not, say, "introduction" on the notes, but soon, most of them are getting it. A few students have used only two or three notes, so I ask them to think more narrowly and subdivide those into other notes. On the way out of class, a few students affirm Jenna's teaching, and our sense of accomplishment means we spend our precious few minutes after class talking about how well things went.

This chapter will focus specifically on the teaching apprenticeship, on the potential positive outcomes of this in-between training process for teacher candidates. This is the version in which I identify a problem, do some research, formulate solutions, and then show how I implemented them. For now, I'll say that I feel a bit like Tom Wingfield, about to step through filmy curtains in order to be a character in a play of my own memory. I worry that it's illusion disguised as truth, research with sentimentally soft, not realistic, edges.

### Gaps in Writing Teacher Training

As I've written before, the teaching apprenticeship grew out of a junior-level teacher education course called Adolescent Literacy. It's undergone some name changes over the years, but this course has come to represent my own development as a teacher, a teacher of English, and a teacher of teachers. My first year started with a few weeks on the state of adolescent literacy (terrible, of course), moved to reading and illustrating scaffolded reading frameworks, and ended up assigning a project in which students designed novel units. I taught my students to teach as I had taught, which was how my colleagues had taught, and how we were taught to teach (I think; I honestly don't remember anyone training me to teach this way). We squeezed some stuff on teaching writing in the middle, and that mostly consisted of sample exercises, rubrics, some discussion of "collaborative writing," which I think my students joked about being code for "let the other kids try to fix some of the terrible writing before you have to grade it." We did a bit of frustrated reflection on this idea of a writing workshop I'd read about in graduate school but didn't see as realistic given the constraints of the high school classrooms I'd just left. Also in the mix were my lingering doubts about whether or not we even really know what the secondary English classroom is supposed to *do*. Like, does reading a novel in sections and giving quizzes on it—or if you're a good teacher, doing

“activities”—count as teaching literature? But I forged ahead, partly because I needed something like authority in my classroom. So, students wrote about their philosophies of teaching English, their stances on censorship vs. protection when choosing texts for their students, and their weekly visits to secondary classrooms in the area.

As my perspective changed over the years, the reflections my students wrote about their field observations become increasingly discouraging: “I don’t see much of what we’re discussing in our class when I observe.” Or, “today, the teacher said, since the students have taken their TAKS writing test [in February], we’re done with writing for the year.” The replacement of TAKS with STAAR/EOC meant that I began to read responses like “I asked the teacher when students will do more writing than just the short responses to what they read, and she said they did a little bit earlier in the year and should get back to some more writing when the test is over.” Sometimes, the disconnect between the practices we discuss in class and the practices students observe even causes confusion about the principles in our course: “I think I saw a writing workshop today!” one student wrote in her weekly reflection. “At the beginning of the class period, she [the teacher] displayed the writing prompt that she was giving them for the day, briefly explained what she was looking for, and then asked them to write for seven minutes according to the prompt. When the seven minutes were up, the teacher and two students shared their writing with the rest of the class.”

The longer I’ve taught the course, the more I’ve realized how much I didn’t do well as a high school teacher. What my students describe as their own classroom experiences and as college students observing high school and middle school classrooms isn’t too different from my own past practices: students read a lot of books, mostly novels (or sometimes teachers read aloud to students, and sometimes students skip the reading and just google plot synopses), and then talk about them. The better

teachers ask questions and allow students to make conclusions; some teachers still spend their time scavenging for literary terms. Actual writing instruction is rare. When it happens, it's often connected to a standardized test.

Quite often, I am able to visit students from my Adolescent Literacy course a year later during their student-teaching semester, and the lessons look the same, even though I trained the people who are teaching them to do things differently. I once struggled to stay alert during a classroom observation in which the student-teacher reviewed the standardized test essay's scoring rubric with her students, then projected examples of high- and low-scoring standardized test essays and asked students to apply the rubric's characteristics to the essays.

We met after the class to discuss my evaluation, and I hadn't said a word before she launched into defense: "I know what you're thinking. You probably hated it, but this is what my teacher expects me to do. Also, I wanted to ask you about something. She says we don't write comments on their essays since they won't get comments back from the real essay graders." It was fine, I said; student- teachers should take their cues from the teacher in the classroom, though if she had time to give students feedback, I didn't think the teacher would mind. I was sure there were other ways the teacher approached writing instruction, so I prompted the student-teacher to open some lines of discussion about it and learn how the teacher balanced the demands of state testing with "real" writing. I suggested that, since the test is a fact of life, she could make opportunities to help students see its broader usefulness. Writing to a prompt with a specific scoring rubric can be a useful lesson in writing to the constraints of audience expectations. I reassured her that I didn't hate today's lesson, and the fact that she recognized that students needed more support to be able to transfer what they had analyzed in the anchor papers was a good sign. Besides, next year, in her own classroom, she could make her own decisions.

She cheered up, and I sent her back to class. I wasn't too worried. For one thing, my student's teacher was young and energetic. This was one of the "good" local high schools, and more than one place in her classroom announced her alma mater, known for its strong teacher preparation program.

A few minutes later, I met with the classroom teacher to talk about our student-teacher's progress. I encouraged her to share her overall philosophy of writing instruction with the student-teacher, who might otherwise assume that the test was it. "Oh, yes," she said, "we do a whole two-week unit in writing, so she [the student-teacher] will be here to handle most of it. Students will write two essays, one expository and one persuasive, and she'll get to score them all with a rubric." I wanted to ask so many more questions: How do students have time for any revision (two essays in two weeks?) or an opportunity to reflect on the specific kind of rhetorical situation created by a standardized test or time to apply anything they've learned about writing from feedback on the first essay to the second one? Instead, I asked what kinds of specific teaching the student-teacher would do in those two weeks. The teacher just looked confused. "Well," I said, "I'm sure you do lots of other kinds of writing instruction and practice the rest of the year. It's just bad timing for the student-teacher." Of course, she said, they also write a big research paper and do a poetry project.

I could relate more vignettes like this one, some from my own time as a middle and high school teacher. I don't think my experience is unique. Here's how Randy Bomer describes "'Doing English' in the usual way" (72) in American schools: "Reading a string of novels and plays as a whole class, followed by formulaic, controlled pieces of writing, peppered with some vocabulary and grammar instruction—that is the typical English class" (72). The "traditional habit" in middle and high school classrooms, Bomer observes, "privilege[s] reading over writing," where students "only . . . write essays

(actually arguments) about books, with attention to the books themselves being the only writing instruction they receive” (305-06). Robert Tremmel, writing specifically about teacher training in writing, makes a similar observation:

Bluntly put, there are still teachers out there who are teaching the five paragraph essay and research paper, handing out worksheets, and otherwise not doing much with writing. As a result, it is not uncommon for prospective and beginning teachers—despite their best intentions and the best intentions of their professors—to go through an entire field experience sequence without ever becoming fully involved in the teaching of writing and without ever thinking of themselves as writing teachers (9).

The other consistent factor in middle and high school English classrooms is a sort of curricular clutter. Bomer, again: “English has often become a jumble of particles—literature, drama, art, technology, vocabulary, syntax, literate habits, study skills, reading strategies, composition, creative writing, media studies, filmmaking, literary history, linguistics, research strategies, and academic writing for all curriculum areas” (4). In Texas, the curricular title *English Language Arts and Reading* helps to accommodate this kitchen sink approach. Middle school English shares an identity crisis with its population: too old for reading groups and phonics, too young for the high school canon and “the essay.” And high school English classes are so crammed with everything from argumentation to adjective clauses to King Arthur that time for real, focused training in writing, let alone meaningful writing, is scarce. The conclusions of Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer from their 2011 study bear this out: “Even in English class, on average, students are not writing a great deal” (14).

In a 2012 *Atlantic* article describing a “Writing Revolution,” Peg Tyre tells the story of a “failing” school in New York who turned things around by going back-to-basics (sort of) with a structured version—“initially, a rigid, unswerving formula” that “would not be unfamiliar to nuns who taught in Catholic schools circa 1950” (100)—of a writing across the curriculum initiative. The measure of success? Significant increases on state

testing and a reduction in the number of students needing remedial coursework (as determined by their scores on the same test) as well as higher enrollments in courses for concurrent college credit and higher graduation rates.

Tyre situates her narrative in the milieu of bleak national statistics about writing, suggesting that New Dorp High School's students struggled with writing because no one's teaching them to write. The article's celebration of the new-old-new methods employed by begins with a handy, though perhaps ill-informed, primer on the recent history of writing instruction in American schools:

Fifty years ago, elementary-school teachers taught the general rules of spelling and the structure of sentences. Later instruction focused on building solid paragraphs into full-blown essays. Some kids mastered it, but many did not. About 25 years ago, in an effort to enliven instruction and get more kids writing, schools of education began promoting a different approach. The popular thinking was that writing should be "caught, not taught," explains Steven Graham, a professor of education instruction at Arizona State University. Roughly, it was supposed to work like this: Give students interesting creative-writing assignments; put that writing in a fun, social context in which kids share their work. Kids, the theory goes, will "catch" what they need in order to be successful writers. Formal lessons in grammar, sentence structure, and essay-writing took a back seat to creative expression (99-100).

During the 1990s, Tyre writes, "elementary and middle-school children kept journals in which they wrote personal narratives, poetry, and memoirs, engaged in 'peer editing,'" and neglected "formal composition," leaving "middle<sup>24</sup>- and high-school teachers . . . to provide the expository- and persuasive-writing instruction" (99-100). She goes on to describe the subsequent emphasis on standards and testing and NCLB's focus on math and reading as another blow to "formal writing instruction," now a curricular "afterthought" (100).

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<sup>24</sup> Tyre's description is a bit confusing here. She asserts that middle school students were writing creatively but middle and high school teachers were the only ones teaching "formal" composition. This description is also supposed to make the case that no one was teaching writing.

Certainly, the outcomes of the “Writing Revolution” at New Dorp High School are positive. I won’t even quibble too much with the background that Tyre traces. Whole books have been written on histories of writing instruction, so a journalist couldn’t be expected to offer a clear summary of fifty years without oversimplifying. Education articles and policy documents love to haul out the banner of “kids can’t write because school”; it’s practically a convention of the genre. As early as 2003, the National Writing Panel had dubbed writing the “neglected R.” So, which is it? Were we neglecting writing? Or were we, as Tyre suggests, teaching writing wrong for twenty five years<sup>25</sup>? Articles like this one often don’t deal with the fact that there’s always a crisis that needs addressing. Otherwise, why would the dramatic change in instruction have even been needed? Tyre’s conclusion is that this school’s success can be credited to “an old idea done better” (101). Schools have, she writes, “devalued or forgotten” important “instructional fundamentals” (101).

It’s a great story. A school on the brink fights its way back through administrative reform and a rediscovery of good-old teaching. Buried in the middle of the essay is, for me, the most revealing point: “New Dorp teachers were growing uncomfortably aware of their students’ profound deficiencies—and their own. ‘At teachers college, you read a lot of theory, like Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, but don’t learn how to teach writing,’ said [new teacher] Fran Simmons” (100). Tyre’s implication here is that, while teacher candidates were reading Freire, they should have been studying commas or something: the teaching staff at New Dorp, armed only with esoteric theory, could not

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<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Tyre includes some feedback on the system from Lucy Calkins but identifies Calkins only as a professor, not as someone who quite literally wrote the book on the elementary-middle writing workshop.

“backfill the absent foundational skills their students needed in order to learn to write” (100).

Again, the reductive version: process/workshop/expressivist pedagogies reigned for two decades to the detriment of analytical, “formal” writing. Then, along came NCLB, standards, standardized tests, and the needs of the twenty-first century, and students didn’t measure up<sup>26</sup>. While teacher candidates filled their minds with lofty ideologies, children languished in a world where they had to write poetry and personal narratives. And, still, no one is teaching grammar, syntax, and whatever else makes someone write an essay better, and we all know that “essay writing,” a handy term for whatever “formal” form needs invoking, is more valuable for a successful education than memoirs and poetry. Here’s the thing: I don’t believe this narrative. *Some* teachers were writing with their students in the 1990s, and *some* weren’t. *Some* teachers worked in states that required standardized assessment well before NCLB, so they taught test-determined forms. *Some* teachers still taught grammar and sentence structure and essay writing at all levels, even teachers who made students peer-edit. *Some* teachers didn’t teach writing at all. The extreme, detrimental version of “taught vs caught” was much more likely happening with teachers who simply gave writing assignments and reviewed grammar and sentence structure lessons from textbooks. That’s the true old-school method that so much misplaced nostalgia is focused on. *Some* teachers, whom Tyre seems to favor, equate explicit writing instruction with formula-dispensing, such as

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<sup>26</sup>Samuel Totten argues in “Completing the Paradigm Shift to Process Writing” that, as of 2003, Hairston’s predicted “winds of change” hadn’t fully blown into our nation’s K-12 schools. In fact, the teachers he surveyed perceived that the rise of high-stakes testing had distracted schools from improving writing instruction in meaningful ways. By the time expressivist/Process pedagogies made their way into secondary classrooms, the forces of standardization complicated any attempts to determine its general effect on classrooms.

coaching students in how to build a skeleton of thesis, topic sentences, and transitions. Many, many teachers practiced (and still do) a piecemeal pedagogy that includes a little bit of all of these things.

In the New Dorp transformation narrative, all teachers were trained by a private-school writing guru whose systematic method provided lessons for making “ideas into simple sentences,” then “construct[ing] complex sentences from simple ones by supplying the answer to three prompts—but, because, and so.” The “Hochman Program” then progressed to lessons on sentence variety and structure, main ideas, and editing. And all teachers participated, drawing from a “large variety of assignments” for “teaching essay writing along with a particular subject” (100).

One example comes from a Chemistry course in which students were given worksheets which asked them to create complex sentences with information about specific elements. In this case, she doesn’t say that Chemistry teachers provided scaffolded instruction about the relationships between parts of a sentence or the function of different subordinating conjunctions or clauses or even sentence combining. The emphasis seems to have been on the relationships between the elements and their properties, the cause-and-effect that occurs when elements are manipulated or combined. The Chemistry teacher was teaching chemistry, and the structure of the English language that allows for subordinate relationships between parts of a sentence helped her students illustrate their understanding of the relationships between chemical elements and their functions. I’m no chemist, obviously, but the Chemistry teacher wasn’t teaching syntax or essay writing. Based on Tyre’s description, I’d conclude it wasn’t necessarily the formal essay that was resurrected at New Dorp. It was teacher training.

I don’t think the problem with writing instruction in K-12 contexts is that we’re using one method that’s inferior to another. While my personal preference isn’t a

formulaic one like The Hochman Method, I think any writing program that's consistently and thoughtfully implemented is bound to produce positive results. The problem is that we're often either not actually teaching writing at all (something like the Chemistry worksheet Tyre describes might be handed out in an English class, but with no context and no purpose beyond writing the complex sentences) or we're teaching it inconsistently or poorly.

In the previous chapter, I described my own approach to teaching writing, but now, I'm not even advocating for one approach or another. I'm advocating for something consistent. Will a pure, student-driven workshop work for every student? Probably not, especially if our only measure of its success is how well students perform on standardized assessments. Is a more traditional, formulaic approach workable for everyone? Probably not. Can we figure out which one works? Probably not, since neither one actually exists except in books and reductive descriptions like Tyre's and since we don't seem to stick with any trend consistently or long enough to really test it.

Would expressivist-oriented Process approaches benefit from structure, scaffolding, assessment, and explicit instruction of craft and conventions? Absolutely, and every book I've ever read by one of these practitioners advocates that. In fact, modeling, a cornerstone of explicit instruction, is also a cornerstone of every good workshop I've read about. Do "traditional" approaches need to make room for collaboration, student choice, and attention to the situated, rhetorical nature of writing? Yes.

Again, the root of the problem is not caught vs taught or workshop vs traditional. I think inappropriate methodologies, test-heavy systems, and even teacher reluctance are all symptoms of the fact that teachers don't learn much about how to teach writing. P.L. Thomas specifically contends that training, or the lack thereof, is the reason writing isn't

taught or isn't taught well. Underprepared teachers, he argues, are overwhelmed by the "daunting task" of teaching writing, which they are ill-equipped to manage, and "resistan[t] to change." The answer, he says, is continuous training, until writing becomes "a thriving field of study among English teachers" (40). That was fifteen years ago, but Thomas could have written that indictment today. I've mentioned before that my experience suggests middle and high school teachers either aren't teaching writing much or aren't teaching it with much of a sense of theoretical coherence. Like Thomas, I think that's because those who teach writing on a regular basis on any level (or, in K-12 classrooms, who are supposed to teach writing but may not) have ever had much instruction in teaching writing.

I wonder how much has changed in the thirty years since Maxine Hairston observed that, generally, only those in the "vanguard of the profession" were "attentively watching the research on the composing process in order to extract some pedagogical principles from it" (78)? Certainly, composition theory and research since then have called into question the very idea of "the composing process," but the underlying notion that professional writing teachers who are continually involved in the research-theory-pedagogy loop aren't the "overwhelming majority of college writing teachers in the United States" is still true. The professional ranks in Composition have burgeoned as a result of the winds of change, but professionalization means those who are at the vanguard of research and theory aren't as involved in the pedagogy portion of the equation.

And those who are doing the teaching, especially those who are more practitioners than professionals—generalist-instructors at small colleges and community colleges, many teaching assistants, and K-12 writing teachers—could still be described just as Hairston wrote in 1982:

They do not research or publish on rhetoric or composition, and they do not know the scholarship in the field; they do not read the professional

journals and they do not attend professional meetings such as the annual Conference on College Communication and Composition; they do not participate in faculty development workshops for writing teachers. They are trained as literary critics first and as teachers of literature second, yet out of necessity most of them are doing half or more of their teaching in composition (78-79).

K-12 teachers are especially separated from the vanguard. Two decades after Hairston, Robert Tremmel argued that the process movement's emphasis on teacher training was one of its great triumphs, but what began as an interdisciplinary dream splintered over time. In his introduction to *Teaching Writing Teachers of High School English & First Year Composition*, he urges teacher educators and WPAs to "consider reconfiguring our shared discipline and joining together to occupy the common ground to which we are heir" (2). Tracing the nature of departmental, if not disciplinary, separations between English Education and Composition programs and their "converging trajectories" (4), he begins with a quick but dramatic historical summary of both fields that sounds quite similar to Hairston's. The "prestigious discipline" of rhetoric, he says, "devolved" into "what became composition," and teaching writing became the job of either "unprepared, inexperienced" junior faculty members conscripted into a hard-laboring "apprenticeship" in composition until they'd paid their dues and could teach literature or "graduate students and temporary instructors" serving "what amounted to a life sentence" of first-year English (3).

In the meantime, training in teaching writing for K-12 educators served "feudal" lords in English departments, with newly-crowned English Educators "wrest[ing] control of their discipline" in the 1970s. According to Tremmel, this revolution met the fate of many others before it: "Unfortunately, once this uprising was completed it amounted to little for secondary teachers, for the teaching of writing, and for writing teacher education, since what had previously been secondary to university English departments simply made a lateral shift to become secondary to a new class of university English educators" (3). And

the “curricular focus in schools, like the focus in the university, ended up staying where it had been since the end of the nineteenth century: on literature” (3). P.L. Thomas, writing in 2000 for *The English Journal*<sup>27</sup>, observed a similar state of affairs. “Most practicing English teachers,” he writes, “were never educated to teach writing” since “writing instruction is still viewed by most as a sub-field of English teaching” (40).

Still, Composition and English Education “separately began to become aware of the need for writing teacher education,” and “ideas for meeting that need emerged jointly and simultaneously from a stubbornly cross-disciplinary matrix of teachers who operated with a working knowledge of both English education and first-year composition” (Tremmel 4). Such overlapping work included a joint MLA/NCTE conference and related research published in both *English Education* and CCC. Indeed, the process/workshop movement developed over the years with applications all along the K-16 vertices. Eventually, training courses for writing teachers were implemented at all levels. Perhaps because that early partnership was tenuous, the cross-disciplinary work since appears to have been minimal. Indeed, the remainder of Tremmel’s introduction focuses on the need for reviving that early cross-talk, especially when it comes to training writing teachers.

Many English Education programs, Tremmel observes, “fall short of fully representing the discipline by underrepresenting theory and overbalancing toward practice” (9). Between students’ demands for practicality (he says they “resist [theory] with enthusiasm”), the “lack of vertical integration between university and school programs” and the “unevenness in writing instruction” at field experience sites, English Education programs are often “decidedly predisciplinary and ambivalent with regard to

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas’s essay was published in a special issue of *The English Journal*, dedicated to teaching writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The collection of essays is an excellent proof-text for how far behind the theoretical curve English Education remains.

both writing teacher preparation and the teaching of writing” (9). Though Tremmel characterizes training in First Year English as stronger on theory, with field experience often of the sink-or-swim variety (Tremmel 10-12), nearly every essay in Sidney Dobrin’s book on the Composition Practicum, *Don’t Call it That*, addresses the theory-practice relationship in some way. In fact, Lu Ellen Huntley’s description of students who complained that “theoretical topics related to the field of composition were not helping them prepare to teach” and who did not understand the “relevance or practical value” of discussing it (298) could just as well be a description of students in an English Education “methods” course. The difference, I think, is that the methods course for secondary teachers is likely to be taught by an English Educator without an extensive background in composition theory, and the Composition Practicum could be taught by someone who presents theory as if it inevitably leads to effective teaching.

Given the differing values and aims of the fields that share responsibility for it, research on writing instruction, especially for K-12 contexts, is problematic. English Education research, with its social science veneer, has struggled to find ways to test methods that aren’t, well, methodical<sup>28</sup>. In their 1995 *How English Teachers Get Taught: Methods of Teaching the Methods Class*, Smagorinsky and Whiting don’t even address writing instruction, partly because of its subfield status, and partly because courses dedicated to writing instruction looked too much like writing classes and thus didn’t fit the research design. Denise Morgan and Kristine Pytash, writing in the October 2014 issue of

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<sup>28</sup> Here’s an example of the difficulty, it’s a study about teaching writing, not preparation to teach: The study focused on whether or not writing workshop methods were beneficial for student writers, and the outcomes essentially suggested that such research is inherently problematic, of the chicken-or-egg variety. The researchers, led by Gary Troia, concluded that they could not make any causal claims about the relationship between a workshop approach and writing outcomes, except that better writers tended to excel in workshops while poorer writers didn’t, and they couldn’t say for sure whether or not teacher variability, not the method itself, was the cause (97-98).

*English Education*, claim that their literature review is the first of its kind (6). They collected only thirty-one studies published in twenty years, and only ten of those studies included participants from secondary education (the rest were elementary-focused).

Nonetheless, recent education research has established a few fairly consistent conclusions related to teacher training in writing. First, **there isn't enough of it**. In fact, Morgan and Pytash say that's the reason there isn't more research: "Teacher educators cannot research what is not being taught and many have not made the teacher of writing a priority in their preparation programs" (30). At least on the undergraduate level, preservice English teachers may take a single course in writing instruction. In many cases, that course is a general literacy methods course or a general curriculum course for English majors that includes a unit in writing instruction. One 2005 study concluded that "very few states require specific coursework in writing for teacher certification. In general, the emphasis in literacy instruction is on reading, with knowledge of writing pedagogy embedded within reading competency requirements for teachers" (Norman and Spencer 25). After his survey of teacher preparation programs, also in 2005, Samuel Totten concluded that "it is reasonable to speculate that many colleges of education in the United States do not thoroughly prepare future teachers to use process writing and writing-to-learn concepts and skills effectively." And Sarah Hochstetler's study of students and programs in California claims that the best opportunities for research-informed courses in teaching writing-- "richer opportunities for learning about writing"-- were typically available only on the graduate level. Hochstetler's conclusions focused on coursework that would enable teachers to "enter the classroom with a stronger foundation in the teaching of writing and . . . be less likely to claim . . . their greatest weakness is in writing pedagogy" (141-42).

The teacher preparation program in which I serve replicates this picture of writing teacher preparation. We currently require four “methods” courses for Secondary English teacher candidates<sup>29</sup>. In Adolescent Literacy I, they focus on theories and approaches for supporting literacy instruction through the English classroom, with writing instruction comprising roughly half of the course. Another Adolescent Literacy course serves as a general disciplinary literacy course required for all teaching disciplines, so teacher candidates focus primarily on general literacy support (reading strategies, vocabulary instruction, and motivational factors). The course called Teaching English focuses on curriculum design, so writing instruction is a small part of its focus, and the fourth class is a general course for all teaching disciplines focused on general instructional methods, classroom management, and the like.<sup>30</sup>

Second, regardless of the structure of their preparation, **preservice and novice teachers tend to see themselves as underprepared to teach writing**. Mark Letcher’s 2010 dissertation study concluded that this true even in cases when teacher preparation coursework has expressly accounted for writing instruction. Participants in Letcher’s study tended to perceive themselves as less-proficient writers as well as under-trained writing teachers. They were overwhelmingly drawn to teaching “out of a love for literature” and as a result “did not view themselves as writers, with only a few exceptions” (Letcher 200). Researchers Vavra and Spencer found that teacher candidates in English are

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<sup>29</sup> Some of this curricular structure is currently under review. As a supporting faculty member from English, I regularly teach more than one of these courses, but departmental boundaries limit my role in overall curriculum planning to advising and consulting.

<sup>30</sup> Students take two writing-heavy courses in their major (one focused on creative writing, one focused on academic writing and rhetorical grammar), but instruction *about* writing instruction is incidental in these courses. Arguably, this is how it should be—these courses are focused on producing exemplary writers, not necessarily exemplary teachers. Since research suggests that students feel underprepared both as writers and writing teachers, adding an instructional focus to

“required to study literature three times more than they are required to study language” (4). Their pointed observation that “one’s ability to write well does not necessarily translate into the ability to teach others how to write well” (5) leads them to conclude that the primary issue in writing teacher training is an “identity problem” (9). Jane Danielewicz’s book on developing teacher identity challenges teacher educators to help preservice teachers connect their “passion for the subject matter” to “teaching performances or . . . a rationale of how they might teach” (161). The candidates she surveyed had developed “attachments” to “different aspects of the discipline,” but only one of six described writing as the basis of such an attachment (161).

Mark Letcher points out in the conclusion to his study that even students whose coursework has “addressed” and “integrate[d]” writing throughout the “sequence of courses,” may still perceive that their “only opportunities . . . to learn about the teaching of writing was in a single course” (207). In other words, even when “faculty members . . . were striving to integrate all elements of the Language Arts together in their methods instruction,” the student-participants in Letcher’s study “felt their methods coursework was more compartmentalized” (207). Such a perception might further be clouded by “the fact that the participants’ program of study in the Pre-Education track was [so] heavily literature-based” that “the opportunities for students following that track to engage in more writing courses were scant” (205). Even more, many of the participants in Letcher’s study had been exempted from entry-level writing classes because they were considered skilled beginning writers. Teacher candidates’ missed opportunities to observe direct instruction in writing, even as writing students, Letcher concludes, contributed to their general perception that they had not been well-trained.

Letcher’s observation is borne out by other research, including a national study in 2009 by Sharlene Kiuahara, Steve Graham, and Leanne Hawken. In their study, only a

third of surveyed English teachers agreed “‘moderately’ to ‘strongly’” that “they’d received adequate preparation in teaching writing in their teacher preparation programs.” While another small group indicated “slight” agreement, “that left nearly half of respondents reporting that they hadn’t really been trained” (148-149).

Teacher education research also suggests that, once in the classroom, **novice teachers tend to dismiss their teacher training as overly theoretical or not useful in practice.** Especially when their training was minimal or weak (or they perceived it to be so), new teachers tend to fall back on their experiences as students or adapt to the practices they observe in their field experiences. In Letcher’s study, the participants reported disconnects between their writing experiences in their major coursework and the ways in which writing instruction had been presented in their methods course(s). “As a result,” Letcher writes, “the participants felt that the methods course ‘competed’ with their own experiences with academic writing, and that they would have needed more time in a methods course to fully appreciate the way writing could be taught in secondary school” (208). The other result Letcher notes is that the more time preservice teachers spent in middle and high school classrooms, the more likely they were to embrace the “accepted practices within their particular schools and districts” (208) and the less likely they were to use the “theoretical and pedagogical tools from any of their methods classes, including Writing Methods, in their classroom practice,” reporting that they felt “safer adopting the practices that were in place in their mentor teachers’ classrooms” (209).

It is possible that the student-teachers Letcher studied were responding to the power imbalance in their methods courses and in their field experiences, putting on the theoretical or practical models favored by the authorities in each context. Research suggests, though, that since novice teachers find a significant match between their prior experiences as K-12 students and the schooling culture in which they form their teaching

identities, they gravitate to those models over approaches presented during their training. Peter Smagorinsky calls this dynamic the “wash out’ effect,” which he says occurs when teachers must develop their teacher identities “within competing traditions” while “answering to different values in the assessment of their work” (29). Norman and Spencer observe that the whole of a preservice teacher’s background has influenced the way they see teaching and learning, and it can prove to be more powerful than their explicit teacher training: “even if . . . belief systems are implicit, they serve to filter new information as candidates attempt to make sense of curricula that may or may not mirror personal experiences. If beliefs remain unexamined, new learning afforded by preparation courses may not influence their views or be applied to teaching contexts” (26). Still other researchers suggest that novice teachers carry this same tendency into their professional lives, and my own experience bears this out, as I described in an earlier chapter. The newer the teacher, the more likely he or she is to bow to the wisdom of veterans who question the novice’s preparation in light of “the real world” of the classroom.

Mary Kennedy has argued that the “apprenticeship of observation” (4), the compendium of experiences, theories, and practices that students take from their own schooling is as or, in many cases, more powerful for novice teachers than their formal teacher training<sup>31</sup>. Kennedy’s book is based on the premise that the first apprenticeship teachers participate in is their time as students, beginning as young children, and she says the how-I-learned apprenticeship is an enduring one. “[T]eachers’ deepest and most fundamental ideas about teaching are learned not from their liberal arts courses, not from

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<sup>31</sup> Kennedy borrows the term from Dan Lortie’s 1975 *Schoolteacher*, but this phenomenon is well-documented. Joy Ritchie and David Wilson have called it an “accidental apprenticeship” (68) that shapes and undermines explicit teacher preparation.

their formal study of teaching, and not from their experience teaching, but rather from their experience as elementary and secondary students,” Kennedy writes (184). In some cases, Kennedy documented, novice teachers would espouse theories they had learned in their University training, but their practice did not match (4). Especially because teaching “routinely” demands that teachers “accomplish multiple and conflicting goals” (3), they are often left simply to cope, “unsure of which [goals] they should attend to in a particular situation and which must be abandoned, even if temporarily” (3). In such situations, “teachers reduce . . . uncertainty by concentrating on things that are easily definable, easily achievable, or easily documentable. They cling to predictable, tried-and-true practices” sometimes “as a matter of expediency,” and frequently “because they learned as children that this is what is supposed to happen at school” (4).

The “predictable” practices Kennedy invokes are the very ones that both Composition theorists and Education reformers are likely to criticize, but “unless they are challenged,” she writes, “these ideas are likely to be retained throughout teachers' lives and to continue to influence their interpretations of classroom situations and their ideas about how to respond to them” (184). That is, even when teacher preparation programs challenge conventional pedagogical notions, the pressure of conforming to conventional school culture can force novice teachers to abandon practices they see as merely theoretical. Given this set of circumstances, Kennedy doesn't argue for more coursework in teaching writing or for more coursework at all. More field experience isn't the answer either, she says, since it often either reinforces novice teachers' preconceived notions or else does not allow space for considering change. Kennedy proposes that teacher training should emphasize change-as-learning as well as providing space for preservice and novice teachers to engage with the practices they are predisposed to cling to. The challenge for writing teacher educators, according to researcher Vicki McQuitty, is “how

to affect teachers' writing instruction within the culture and pressures of today's schools" (359), given that "the important question is not whether teachers reproduce ideas from writing methods courses but if they use those ideas to create more empowering, contextually useful teaching strategies" (385).

What preservice and novice teachers appear to need is more space for interrogation and reconciliation. That is, some of those represented in the research I've cited rather consciously exchanged their preparatory training for their new school-community's status quo, but others whose theoretical knowledge or writer-confidence were particularly weak either did so unconsciously or were unable to develop any viable teaching strategies. Their lack of foundational knowledge meant they struggled for instructional solutions, even among conventional methods. Perhaps Julie Wahleithner's conclusion that "in order to be able to meet the challenges that arise as teachers work to develop their students as writers, they [new teachers] must have a developed knowledge of writing instruction that extends beyond just a basic foundational level" (255) is rather self-evident, not to mention vindicating for teacher education programs. What such a conclusion demands, though, is challenging. The key for more successful novice teachers seemed to be their ability to assert enough confidence in or control over theoretical matters to be reflective about their practice. Those who were "supported in taking a reflective stance toward" the frequent mismatch between their practical contexts and their training were able to formulate solutions because they "continued to appropriate knowledge" about teaching and about writing instruction (Grossman, et al 30).

At the end of her study of the "Writing Methods Course" in Ohio Universities, Christine Tulley posits that teacher educators should embrace the dissonance, "making the pedagogical and theoretical gaps" in rhetoric, composition, and teacher education or between the training classroom and the field classroom the focus of teacher training. The

best writing teachers, she says, “already adapt teaching practices to changing teaching conditions and new research,” working through the “contradictions inherent in secondary writing instruction” in order to “improve what they can by adjusting practice based on theory and theory based on practice, in one classroom at a time.” Prompting preservice teachers to mind the gaps, as it were, in turn invites them to participate in “the ongoing negotiation within the field of teaching writing.” Vicki McQuitty’s case study reflected similar implications, as she detailed her subject’s wrestling “incompatible ideas” (384). Since new teachers will “inevitably encounter” contradictions, professors and mentors should encourage preservice and novice teachers to view them as “resources for creating more sophisticated pedagogies, not as obstacles to overcome,” which will allow for “more powerful and contextually useful understandings of teaching writing” (384). McQuitty notes that presenting teaching in terms of the “ideal” and evaluating for “effectiveness” are unattainable and problematic, suggesting instead that novice teachers should be trained to look for “evolving pattern[s] about the best way to teach” (385).

Ultimately, then, improving writing instruction through stronger writing teacher preparation involves more consistent cross-disciplinary work between English and English Education especially in terms of

1. shoring up theoretical knowledge,
2. clearly-focused training on writing instruction to the extent that students feel “trained,” and
3. the development of reflexive spaces in which preservice or novice teachers can engage theoretical, practical, and contextual contradictions with guidance to construct flexible solutions.

The teaching apprenticeship addressed these remedies in that its primary goal was to give apprentices a focused opportunity to develop their writing-teacher identities, which

would in turn give them the confidence to make knowledge. Such an opportunity would ideally open up space for reflection and examination as well as bringing theory within reach, or, put another way, making the activity system visible to apprentices, giving access to networks above them.

Practically, I wanted the teacher candidates I taught to have an intermediary step between their preparation coursework and their student-teaching semesters in which they could practice teaching writing without the added pressures of “running” a classroom or covering a curriculum. I wanted to model the theory and methods I’d taught in our preparation courses, then demonstrate it for my students with real learners, and then have time to negotiate practice without having to criticize another teacher or fight “wash out.”<sup>32</sup> These three interrelated areas—teacher identity, reflective practice, and theoretical looping—were the foundation of the apprenticeship.

### Three Prongs

Jane Danielewicz proposes ten principles (which I’ve combined into groups here) that “constitute a pedagogy for identity development” (139) in novice teachers. The first set of principles focuses on rich and open discourse as part of a dialogic and collaborative curriculum. Such environments allow candidates to routinely practice using the discourse of the discipline by engaging regularly with instructors and theories, “negotiating” (149) with each other, and refining their personal pedagogical philosophies

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<sup>32</sup> My idea wasn’t all that new. Such frameworks already exist in other forms: pre-service elementary level teachers will often work with small groups of students in lab-like settings. Secondary level pre-service teachers might serve as writing tutors in writing labs or other kinds of tutoring centers. I have found a few programs, which I’ll describe later, that are similar to the one I began, but only one appears to have lasted more than a few years. In fact, my research has revealed no active programs in which teacher candidates actively participate in not just tutoring students but planning and implementing instruction in writing separate from either administrative and management concerns or the pull of assimilation into the teaching culture of the public school classroom.

throughout their coursework. As part of this process, students “experience authority and feel comfortable first entering and then holding their own in the [scholarly] conversation” (172). Danielewicz’s book is primarily aimed at developing ideal curricula for teacher education courses, but the Teaching Apprenticeship supported many of these in an attempt to foster strong writing-teacher identities in the teacher candidates who participated. We began to realize many of the ideals that Danielewicz proposes, including those listed above as well as what she terms “deliberation” and “reflexivity.” She defines these terms, respectively, as “personal and invested thinking” (152) about “teaching practices and . . . theoretical beliefs” (153) and “active analysis of past situations, events, products, with the inherent goals of critique and revision for the explicit purpose of achieving an understanding that can lead to change in thought or behavior” (156). Through our brief before-and-after reflections, our regular email conversations, the apprentices’ journals, and our periodic meetings, the apprentices and I would exchange ideas, discuss alternatives, hone in on specific students and their needs, and plan upcoming class sessions. In the semester in which Jenna and Bailey were both participating, they were able to collaborate on several lessons, compare their interactions with specific students, and compare their responses to student writing.

As they progressed from observing to working with groups and individuals to teaching lessons and giving written feedback, I hoped that the apprentices would develop what Danielewicz identifies as “agency,” or the belief that, “when I question my own situation, inquire what it means, I . . . conclude that my efforts are worthwhile” (165). This quality, in particular, is important for teacher candidates who, without experience, “don’t yet know their actions matter” (165). At the start of the apprenticeship, Jenna wrote this in her journal:

The point of observations is to watch seasoned teachers and pull ideas from what we like or dislike. By junior year (in college), most education

students have seen enough teachers to feel confident critiquing, comparing, or contrasting teachers, but I do not feel well-equipped to step in front of students. Observations become ineffective when the student observer is more ready to be in front of the class than in back.

During the first few weeks of the semester, the apprentices observed and I modeled, but I talked to them about seeing themselves in my place. Here's Jenna's description: "I'm sitting in class [but] interacting, giving suggestions. [ . . . ] I am able to look at activities through both sets of eyes—the teacher and the student." During our apprenticeship, Jenna and Bailey were both learners and teachers, and they were able to collect feedback from me, from our students, and from each other that was entirely formative.

The time apprentices spent with real students thinking through real writing tasks helped them as they refined their understanding of the theories and strategies they had learned in their coursework and developed new approaches for themselves. At the same time, I had to model those thinking patterns, calling attention as much as possible to the ways in which the material we had previously studied was being enacted (another of Danielewicz's terms) throughout the course we were teaching together. At least in their written responses, the apprentices affirmed this match-up: "Working with Mrs. Blair," Bailey wrote, "prepared me for teaching in the classroom more than any other experience I have had while in the education program at SAGU. In her education classes Mrs. Blair emphasizes two teaching tools: modeling and [writing] conferences. While working with her developmental writing class, I was given the opportunity to participate in these two [strategies] on a consistent basis and evaluate their effectiveness."

Danielewicz further posits that teacher candidates need opportunities to practice and revise their teaching personas through a process she calls "recursive representation," or a "series of progressive tryouts" in which candidates construct and put on a variety of representations of themselves, "seeing reactions, and receiving feedback,

revising, and representing images of themselves as teachers publicly but in the protected space of the college classroom before they're actually seen as teachers" (167). The Apprenticeship provided opportunities for participants to assert themselves as teachers but, when necessary, step back into more comfortable roles as mentors, peers, and students. Because they spent the whole semester with students, they were able to develop a strong rapport. Relationship-building was a key part of the apprenticeship, both for the apprentices, who needed practice in building relationships with students, and for the students, who needed to trust their teachers. Bailey particularly found value in working with small groups and in one-on-one writing conferences: "I built relationships with students. Many students who at first were closed off in class changed their attitudes once they developed a personal connection with me. Students desire to share their lives if you will listen, and when you listen to them and share your life with them in return they begin to trust you and are more open to your help."

I tend to favor George Hillocks's view that teaching writing is essentially modeling "procedural knowledge" (215) or maybe, more specifically, conditional knowledge. We teach principles, conventions, and strategies, and we guide students toward the conditions under which they will apply them, but this process is "not algorithmic" because it "involves how to decide what to do in a new situation and how to think about what to do when the what is new" (216). It's logical, then, as Hillocks suggests, that learning to teach writing would follow a similar "tacit," process-oriented pattern. The "special knowledge of writing teachers . . . involves the invention of materials and activities, of environments that bring about and encourage development of strategies for the variety of tasks not already in the student's repertoire" (216). Hillocks suggests that effective pedagogy is shaped through reflective practice, which is a process in which the teacher calls on and integrates several types of knowledge "that intersect in the development of the learning

sequence” (216). These sets of knowledge include general types such as knowledge about students, knowledge about curriculum, and knowledge about various writing processes as well as the “nature of inquiry.” They also include more local knowledge such as the interests and potential of specific students, knowledge about specific writing tasks and their demands, and knowledge about specific methods for scaffolding those tasks, especially those that have been useful in the past. The intersection of these sets of knowledge, coupled with the ability to synthesize them appropriately to the specific set of students in view, is what teaching writing demands. As the teacher brings all of these knowledge sets to bear, she attends to students’ “affective and cognitive responses” in order to continually evaluate their learning (215-217).

What the research suggests, and what my experience bears out, is that this sort of active, reflective (Danielewicz prefers “reflexive,” a popular term in education research) stance, if it’s to be consistent and impactful, comes from the tension between uncertainty and confidence—uncertainty about the infallibility of my approaches, and confidence that I have the tools and the authority to refine those approaches. During a semester break, I was re-reading an essay by Donald Murray, and I looped back to one of our journal exchanges that led to an ongoing conversation. Bailey had written about a particular class period when we had planned to work through a drafting model with students. When we walked through to check, less than half the class had even come prepared with a broad topic to write about. I prompted the apprentices to decide what we should do, and Bailey suggested that we take the class period for impromptu conferences. “We set a goal for everyone to have a topic and either list of points or rough outline by the end of class, and everyone was at least that far by the end of class,” she wrote. Despite the tone of her journal, which suggested that students had salvaged the class period, she and Jenna were both disheartened at our meeting later in the week, expressing their concern

that students would learn to expect class time to do the writing they should be doing on their own.

“They were productive,” Jenna said, “but only after we were stern. We said they had to focus for the class time, and they did. I think we just need to set deadlines and stick with them.” For a few moments, she and Bailey talked back and forth about their own deadline-motivation and the fact that we all generally prioritize work for which we have firm deadlines. Because they had both been my students, they knew my position on deadlines—useful if not implacable. I had often talked about preferring stronger late work than poor work slipped in to meet a deadline. “I just think,” Jenna said, obviously deferring to me, “that it’s better to force new students to meet deadlines. When they’re more experienced as writers and students, they can be more responsible and make choices, like you’ve let us do.”

“It’s a tough issue,” I said, acknowledging that I, too, work better on firm deadlines but reminding Jenna and Bailey that if we strictly enforced deadlines, few of our students would finish the course. During the break between semesters, I sent them this email:

I’m writing today and came across this paragraph: “Everything may be avoided except the moment of publication. . . . There must come a time when the student writer has his own words wrenched from him so they can appear naked before his own eye, apart from apologies and explanations, good intentions and sincere promises. The writing course moves forward because the student faces the same discipline as the writer: the arbitrary deadline.”

It’s from Donald Murray, one of my favorite writers about teaching writing, but it sounds like you two! So, I’m now writing to myself to determine to be more stringent about deadlines next semester. ☺

Jenna, who had already signed on to work another semester with me, replied quickly: “This was so wonderful! What a perfect explanation of student writers. You know I’m in!”

In those quick moments of decision during class time, in our email conversations and our face-to-face meetings, and in our planning, we were practicing what Kathleen Blake Yancey has called “reflective transfer” (235). Her idea of the recursive process in which teachers examine their practice, hypothesize about what worked and didn’t work, and plan the next step based on that critical review, shares characteristics with Hillocks’ description of “active critical reflection,” which he says should be an ongoing, consistent part of everything we do. “Our assumptions and theories about teaching composition,” he cautions, “must remain open to inspection, evaluation, and revision, a condition that requires an active inquiry paralleling the inquiry in which we engage our students” (217).

This is where space for theory becomes important. Danielewicz relates the story of a former student who, beginning her first week in the classroom, returned to her professor for some of the readings they’d covered during a course. Her former student, she says, is more likely to be successful because she “sees herself as a theorizer capable of solving . . . problems.” The novice teacher’s theories “have utility” because they focus on “how things work, joint articulations of the personal and theoretical” (160). Danielewicz’s former student is actively resisting wash out: “ ‘I need to know what I believe because, once you get there, everybody is telling you what to do, what to think!’” she tells Danielewicz as she loads up with books, a vivid image of theory as a buttress against the “overwhelming” voices of those who would tell her to “forget theory” (160).

In fact, theory as an integral part of the reflective/reflexive loop is clearly supported in research but often missing in English Education programs. Here, the influence of more theoretically-heavy Composition programs would be useful. In fact, one of the most coherent explanations I’ve read for the relationship between theory and practice frames that relationship as dialectic and comes from an essay on training new graduate assistants who will be teaching Freshman Composition:

Rather than seeing theory as the intellectual foundation on which teaching gets done—or worse, as an unnecessary intellectual endeavor divorced from the actual work of the classroom—the relation between theory and practice has been understood more productively in terms of enactment. Teaching—or more properly speaking, pedagogy—is the enactment of a theoretical position. To put it another way, what we teach our students is a consequence of what we understand writing to be. Such a position rearticulates the relation between theory and practice not so much as a tension but instead as a dialectic, in which each has a consequence for the other, and in which neither the theoretical understanding of the pedagogy nor the practical understanding of theory gains the upper hand (Odom, Bernard-Donals, and Kerschbaum 215-16).

I have realized that the challenge and the value of the apprenticeship has been the opportunity for engagement. As the apprentices observed and practiced the teaching and writing methods and strategies I'd endorsed—and many they suggested—we were able, sometimes together with the students we were teaching, to interrogate the foundation of those practices. We had to deal with how teaching is (to borrow Post-process terms) public, interpretive, and situated.

## Chapter 5

### The apprenticeship, another version

I frantically text Jenna to be sure that she's headed to our class. I've just realized that the binder with all of our materials for class is in my office across campus from the classroom, and I haven't left myself any extra time on the way to work this morning. She'll be on time, she says, and can get class started. Mercifully, I'm only a few minutes late. Jenna is standing at the front of the room chatting with a few students. I can see that they've been killing time, waiting for me. For a moment, I'm disappointed that she hasn't started class; she's only held them until I arrived. Jenna smiles and takes a seat.

Today feels like another variation on a recurring dream I've had (and I'm sure I'm not the only one) for years: I wander into a classroom during a break or in the middle of the night, in my pajamas, only to find students assembled, waiting for me. Or I find myself in a classroom full of students waiting for me to begin teaching, and I don't even know what class it is. A few times I've dreamt that I rush into class late and everyone's leaving. I apologize and rush to begin class, but they look right through me and leave anyway. But today, it's not just my students who see this enactment of my dreams. Later, I apologize to Jenna for putting her on the spot. She's gracious and says she would have done more, but I had the binder. Even later, I wonder what I expected Jenna to do, exactly. She's comfortable with students, and she's empowered to operate in practically every one of my classroom roles, but I suppose that's only when I'm there or when I've given her specific instructions about what to do.

I have noticed an interesting pattern in my reading for this project. Lad Tobin describes his students' tendency to force thematic (if not literal) happy endings to their "Death, Disease, and Dysfunction" narrative essays (*Reading* 31). Practitioner research makes itself valuable by demonstrating "what works." A common trap for the teacher

researcher is “narrative smoothing.” Everyone’s uncomfortable when academic work gets “too personal.” Writing teacher memoirs are full of conversion, even Messianic themes.<sup>33</sup> The apprentices who worked with me seemed compelled to write about moving from a place of uncertainty (“I do not feel well-equipped to step in front of real students”) to confidence (“[the apprenticeship] has given me confidence to conquer any classroom”<sup>34</sup>). Mariolina Salvatori observes that even in those teaching narratives that focus on negative experiences, the “shameful, embarrassing, quizzical, puzzling experience” can be “made into an interpretive device that, sometimes too defensively, anticipates and contravenes possible criticism” (“The Personal” 575). In fact, she calls this a “staple” of the genre. Wendy Bishop reassures teachers that all of us “experience doubt and elation, the confusion of circumstances and the confidence that develops from improvement,” and that “growth is usually incremental and contingent” (1). Maybe it’s all one, this general tendency toward the comic denouement.

It’s complicated

I’m trying to avoid the overly-smooth, overly optimistic version of things. On the other hand, I want to avoid the other staple, which sometimes feels like a put-on, a rhetorical gambit to gain some connection with readers, to be edgy through imperfection. But I wonder if it’s even possible to write the kind of work that Salvatori describes as the “best” version of the personal, one that “forges a writing that *stages*, *recites*, and *exposes* through vigilant reflexivity the irreducible difficulties of telling the story of one’s life—physical, intellectual, and emotional—of the desire or the need to make communicable, to share and bring to public attention, what is personal, without reducing or commodifying it”

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<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Soalt’s 2010 dissertation analyzing patterns in teacher memoir is offers some excellent insight here. Especially contemporary memoirs, she says, “unabashedly present writing instruction as redemptive for both teachers and students” (118).

<sup>34</sup> These are excerpts from Jenna’s journal.

(567). Salvatori's description sounds like the answer to what anthropologist Clifford Geertz observed: "clarion calls to reflexivity, dialogue, heteroglossia, linguistic play, rhetorical self-consciousness, performative translation, verbatim recording, and first-person narrative as forms of cure" for the "pervasive nervousness about the whole business of claiming to explain" experiences because you've experienced them, especially when they include other people's experiences (131). I offered the reduced and commodified version in an earlier chapter, vignettes and research selected carefully to illustrate that my work had been useful, practical, successful. I'm attempting now to unravel that version, but it's messy and risky.

I've always felt some authority as a writer, and I've always felt some confidence as a teacher. Reflection unseats this authority. Unraveling risks rendering my work unusable. Still, the more I wrote about the idealized version of my classroom and my training program, the more I knew that I had to address the constructed, even dishonest nature of such descriptions.

Bishop opens *Teaching Lives*, a sort of memoir built out of essays about teaching, with a reflective introduction called "Composing Ourselves in the Writing Classroom." We can, she says, "construct and compose ourselves across our teaching years through narrative comparison, analysis, reflection, and action" (1). This riff on "composing" makes me think immediately of my dreams, where I'm always uncomposed, in professional or literal dishabille, trying desperately to compose myself, my credibility, my authority, in my classroom. Bishop's idea gives me some hope that, when I'm done reflecting and unraveling, what's left will be worthwhile.

#### Attempting Reflexivity

I keep seeing this term "reflexivity" as an ideal part of the (ethical) process of making knowledge through the personal. In her book on the subject, Donna Qualley

defines reflexivity as “a response triggered by a dialectical engagement with the other” (11). This process is “ongoing and recursive” because, as we reveal our “beliefs and assumptions,” they become “objects of examination and critique” themselves (11).

Though reflection, metacognition, self-examination, and even the Piagetian idea of learning through assimilation are similar, all parts of the same “recursive and hermeneutical process,” Qualley says they are different from reflexivity because they assume “that individuals can access the contents of their own mind *independently of others*” (12). Reflexivity, though, “does not originate in the self but always occurs in response to a person’s critical engagement with the other”<sup>35</sup> (11). This encounter, which is “bidirectional” and “contrastive,” produces “new information or perspectives which we must hold up to our current conception of things” (12). In order to reconcile these differing conceptions, we must “identify and examine,” and then articulate, “our own underlying assumptions,” which leaves them “open to reflection, critique, and perhaps, transformation” (12).

Ruth Ray, an apologist for the personal as a bridge between theory and practice, defines reflexivity through a less-collaborative frame than Qualley. She says it’s “the willingness to observe oneself as the observer and to acknowledge the tentative, interpretive, and political nature of one’s observations” (42) and that it can work to legitimize and make meaningful (maybe even generalizable) methods of research that are essentially self-centered.

I want to start by revisiting Danielewicz’s principles of pedagogy for identity development, which I applied in the last chapter as a measure of the benefit of the

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<sup>35</sup> The practical part of me wants to call this nonsense, an overblown neologism—of course I can access my own mind by myself—but I’ve told myself that I’ll try on some different perspectives for this chapter.

apprenticeship program. I should first note (expose, as Salvatori says?) that I found Danielewicz's book early on in my research but didn't have time to read it until the summer after my first two semesters working with apprentices. So this is less a critique of Danielewicz's principles and more a critical look at my use of them as an affirming assessment tool.

Danielewicz first recommends building curricula on a structure of discursive richness and openness, dialogue, and collaboration. She is generally focused on her teacher preparation classroom which is by necessity hypothetical and theoretical (that is, not field-based). Here, she says, teacher candidates will try on the discourse of the discipline, engaging with theories, research, instructor and classmates in an ongoing negotiation that will help them "feel comfortable first entering and then holding their own in the [scholarly] conversation" (172). She does occasionally take up the interplay between her classroom and the field-based classrooms that her teaching candidates visit, but she generally does so through their reporting to her—they go visit and return to her, and together, she and her students negotiate the connections and conflicts. As they design their hypothetical teaching materials, philosophies, and personas and grapple with what they see in their field-based classrooms, they perfect attitudes of "deliberation" and "reflexivity," which she defines, respectively, as "personal and invested thinking" (152) about "teaching practices and . . . theoretical beliefs" (153) and "active analysis of past situations, events, products, with the inherent goals of critique and revision for the explicit purpose of achieving an understanding that can lead to change in thought or behavior" (156).

While I know that the apprentices benefited from our dialogue about the students we were teaching and from trying on approaches and methods, I didn't feel like I could require theoretical readings or even as much regular written reflection as I would have

liked, and I fear the result was some divorce from the theoretical roots of our practices. As I could, I steered them back to theory, reminding them of things they'd studied before or recommending a book or article for follow-up. They'd make notes, but we all knew they wouldn't have much time for supplementary reading or writing. By mid-semester, they were having trouble just making it to class as they juggled all of their other responsibilities, including their officially-scheduled field experience. Eventually, we fell into a somewhat-regular pattern in which at least one would attend class at least once per week, and when I would send out a reflection, an excerpt from my personal journal, at least once per week, at least one of them would respond.

My journal, October 15:

Last round of writing conferences today for this deadline, and apprentices weren't there to participate or observe. Two were sick, and one still hasn't shown up. I'm assuming he's not going to participate. Debating whether or not to call him about it. Of course it's voluntary, but I feel like he might be intrusive at this point. Both Bailey and Jenna were sick this morning, but they came in for the meeting since it's our first one in weeks. I described the class for them, and we talked. They were appropriately reflective, though with less specificity than I'd hoped for. They were able to offer a little more insight on some of the students' work, and I tried to compare it to what I saw today. That's the problem when it's not a regular thing... Not enough context. I'll have to email them some ideas for what we'll be doing next week. I wish they were able to be more involved in planning and assessment, but they just don't have time.

My journal, October 17:

Caleb is here for the first time today. He just watches for a while, then, during independent writing time, he talks with some students. At our break, he is excited. He says he thinks students are really responding to today's material. They got the idea of significance because of the ways in which they connected to the videos and photos we viewed. We talked for a while. Maybe we can salvage his participation.

My journal, November 8:

They didn't show today. No text, no email, nothing. We were doing hands-on work, too. I'd hoped to go through some assessment processes with them. Not sure what to make of it. I've told them that, since this is a voluntary program, they aren't bound to come every time,

so I can't let it bother me too much. We'll see what they say next time I see them. I've been less organized with this program than I wanted to be, and that's created some difficulties: they haven't taught as much as I'd hoped. They've planned very little, and it hasn't been as structured or re-useable as I'd expected either. Last week, Bailey emailed that she doesn't see herself putting another lesson together, since she'll be too busy with her other commitments from now until the end of the semester. She's not quitting, but she can't do more than come to class. Not being able to debrief on a regular basis means that we're often exchanging a few words as they leave or only communicating through email. Because I don't want to overload them, I haven't asked for their journals yet. Maybe those will help me see what they need. I should have required a specific structure like Dr. Meyer<sup>36</sup> did, but I can't ask for too much. I finally heard from Caleb—he dropped by to tell me during a break that he just can't accommodate the apprenticeship in his work schedule.

The primary aim of the apprenticeship was for candidates to have access to me while we practiced what I taught, so Danielewicz's concept of teacher candidates' "theorizing in practice"<sup>37</sup> (160) should have been a clear outcome of our program. During student teaching, some deliberation takes place, but the system is more fixed and the stakes are higher—there's a set curriculum, another teacher's structure, the students are minors whose parents check their real grades in real time. My developmental course wasn't hypothetical, as the curricula Danielewicz describes—my students weren't lab rats, and the broad course structure was already in place—but our system was more fluid. Because I had designed the course syllabus with quite a few "subject to change based on class needs" sorts of elements, I was open to negotiating a great deal with the apprentices. Since the course was pass/fail, we could practice formative assessment without having to justify grades, and I could always intervene when necessary. I told myself frequently that the openness of the course and of the apprenticeship would allow

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<sup>36</sup> I'll talk about Margaret Dietz-Meyer's program at Ithaca College in the next chapter, but it is one of the few programs I have located that resemble the apprenticeship program we established.

<sup>37</sup> Yancey's notion of "reflective transfer" is a similar concept, as is the overall framing of theory as dialectic (Odom, et al.).

for as much deliberation and adjustment as we could provide. I didn't consider, though, how often my apprentices, who had been excellent students, and to whom I had taught theories of literacy and composition, would be at a loss when attempting to make theoretical connections or provide an informed rationale for their recommendations or choices. Worse, I found myself more than once walking back to my office after class or after one of our collaborative meetings and realizing that I had forgotten to make a clear theoretical connection or neglected to press them for a theoretical basis. I was also confounded more than once by one of the apprentices arriving at a conclusion or recommendation that I couldn't accept (we need more explicit grammar instruction, for example), sometimes from an authoritative source (another professor or a theorist with whom I disagreed). Sometimes, the opposite occurred: our theory was dialectic, our rationale sound, and our talk reflexive, but our solutions weren't effective.

My journal, November 13:

Bailey was here today, and she'd obviously been thinking a great deal about class. She says students need more supervised time to write in class. She's unsure of the value of their group meetings [our students' writing groups], since often members are unprepared or reluctant. We've all made some great strides, I think, but the apprentices are still bothered by the lack they see in the students' writing.

Early in her second semester working with me, Jenna wrote about how excited she was to introduce the Writer's Notebook to students:

When the students were asked to jot down some ideas in their writer's notebook, I thought it such fun to join them and to answer their nervous questions. The Writer's Notebook. I think it may be my new favorite toy, I mean tool. Toys can be tools, right? The benefits of this notebook can reveal themselves in numerous ways and I am excited to see how the students react to them. What will each student find in their lives to be worth writing down? Each student is uniquely individual--that was evident in class. I look forward to the uniquely designed notebooks of each blossoming writer.

One week later, this was my reflection after our collaborative meeting.

When we checked notebooks, only 2 out of 23 students had done the regular writing we'd asked for. 2 more students had done some writing, and a little over half of the rest had written only what was asked of them in class. Everyone I talked with gave an excuse or feigned confusion about what to write. "I grabbed the wrong notebook," one said. Another pulled a crumpled sheet of paper out of his backpack. On the front was almost a full-page draft of his first experience on the football team. He can obviously generate a lot in a few minutes. I hope that he'll take our challenges seriously. I'm praying that a more consistent accountability system this semester will make a difference for students.

I have neither notes for nor memory of what I did, if anything, to help Jenna reconcile her hope for the instructional tool with the dismal early results we saw. Many students did begin taking on the tools we recommended (required, really), but it's difficult to know how much of that was because we leveraged points toward earning credit and not because they saw the improvement in their writing from regular practice, from revision, or from applying other strategies we presented.

Danielewicz says she aims for agency, authority, and "recursive representation" as marks that her students are developing strong teacher identities. I made much of these concepts in my earlier discussion, situating the apprenticeship as an ideal place for such development. I still believe this, but I must acknowledge some limits here, too. Ritchie and Wilson suggest that agency and authority, at least, are illusive for all teachers, and especially for novices, since they are based on an overly "simplistic view of identity" which conceives of identity development as a "linear, rational or cognitive process" and neglects the "powerful array of ideologies" with which students contend and which will have "already shaped students' views of teaching and language," including "social and political ideologies calling out to them via their own experience in schools, the stories and advice of family and friends, and cultural representations of teaching and literacy learning" (*Teacher Narrative*, 10). Indeed, they observe, the bulk of teacher preparation feeds this view by presenting "the teacher as a rational agent whose pedagogical decisions emerge from a single intellectual position provided by teacher

education, . . . which contributes to an uncomplicated view of teacher agency and learning” and does not account for the “multiple, fragmented, and overlapping positions of individuals and the way those positions are controlled through discursive narratives of education, gender, and class” (11). Though Danielewicz positions her principles as based in an open-ended and dialogic philosophy, “expos[ing] the submerged assumptions about language, knowledge, and power that drive the traditional curriculum” (147), and her notion of “recursive representations” suggests a more complex view of subjectivity, the overall curriculum she has designed seems to imply that the novice teacher’s fragmented self is a stage on the way to becoming a unified (and, of course, theoretically-informed and confident, through having been immersed in her curriculum) teaching self.

Ritchie and Wilson say the typical narrative of teacher identity development illustrates a sort of “conversion” process based on the “naïve” conception of “teachers as autonomous agents who, when immersed in a carefully designed English teacher education program” could be “‘transformed’ through that experience into the kind of teachers . . . envisioned” in the program’s design (10). Even more, they argue, conceiving of teacher identity development in terms of “transformation” is essentially “an attempt to regulate, control, and shape teachers” into their own image, which reflects “yet another ideology of education, one that we were not making visible to ourselves or to our students” (10). Danielewicz would likely agree—her final chapter follows some of the teachers she has trained to find them in all sorts of positions, and her final paragraph philosophizes about our lack of control: “Selves are made unwittingly in moments of convergence. . . . Identity arises from the perpetual dialectic between internal states and external conditions” (197). She cautions that the principles she offers are “not directives,” but “characteristics of the learning environment, philosophical lenses through which teachers can look,” forming a “pragmatic theory” (177). But the final vignette she offers,

about interviewing one of her students who's gone to graduate school instead of into the classroom, ends with the young woman coming to the realization that her assistantship is "just like teaching" and "I am a teacher" (197). And she says that this student's experience demonstrates that, "these principles, once internalized, become perspectives or dispositions, in effect, part of one's self" (177).

So, while Danielewicz's proposals about the ideal teacher education program and the ideal curriculum for teacher training acknowledge what Ritchie and Wilson say most "fail to see," namely, that preservice teachers are "sites of contradiction" who are "being scripted by conflicting social and political forces" (10) and who are "contending with multiple issues of identity" (12), Danielewicz still ends up telling a conversion narrative. Her students, benefitting from the ideal she attempted to construct, have formed teaching identities, even those who are not teachers.

I'm realizing now that, to the extent that I assessed teacher identity development in the apprentices who worked with me, I generally watched for signs that they were coming along into my vision of what sort of teacher they should be, which is likely some version of me. That's not to say that I expected them to always agree with me or even do what I would do—I hope I was more sensitive and collaborative in my approach than that—but when I observed their confidence with students or comfort in the classroom, I equated those with overall growth. I didn't consider that they were perhaps just settling into my system, the culture I'd created, just as they would when they entered their student teaching classrooms. We certainly never dug deep enough to consider identity formation in any significant way, and I still exercised a general control over my classroom, which, I must now admit, meant some control over them.

The apprentices took their cues from me. And I'm sure there were a number of times when an apprentice's identity was negotiated or imposed—they had to ask me

questions in front of students, or a student looked to me to validate the apprentice's decision, or an apprentice had to take on a student position again, apologizing that she hadn't gotten around to journaling that week.

*"Ronald, we've talked about this before. If you don't do any writing in between classes, I can't give you any feedback now." I hadn't caught the first bit of their conference, but I tried to appear busy collecting materials from around the classroom while Ronald and Bailey finished. He was the last student in the room.*

*"But I wrote this little bit here in class today," he said, then lowered his voice. "I just need to get checked off for this conference."*

*Bailey shrugged. "I can't do that. The point of conferences is for us to talk about your writing and help you move forward. You only get credit if you're committed to working on your writing."*

*Ronald gathered his things and left the room, silent but clearly unhappy. Bailey rushed over to me, and I wondered if the flush in her face was triumph or uncertainty. "You heard the last part, right? He had started getting a little confrontational before that, like demanding that I sign his conference form. But he'd written maybe a paragraph, during class." I shook my head and smiled a little, waiting to see what she needed from me.*

*I guessed that she needed affirmation. "You were right, of course. And you stayed calm and explained our purpose. He didn't argue much that I heard, but if he had, you were doing just what you should do."*

It was only later that I realized we should have talked about how to get him writing rather than simply focusing on her establishing authority: we needed to try to get at why he's not making progress. Is it just procrastination, or does he need help but can't figure out where to start? Would such a response, a prompting to think beyond the

moment she felt challenged and instead enter into dialogue with the student, have worked? Would she have felt less empowered if I had gone there, if she had gone there with the student? Was she empowered enough to begin with to take that step?

Another time, Bailey had to deal with one of our students flirting with her. Rasheed would seek her out on campus to ask questions about class or about his writing. He would join her writing group or wait until she was free to request a conference. When she was teaching, he asked questions and volunteered responses. At first, her teacher-self was pleased, and she felt a strong connection to him. After a while, he worked up to declaring his romantic intentions and asked her on a date. For my part, I was oblivious to his infatuation with Bailey—I was rarely in any of the social areas of our campus, he seemed generally friendly to everyone, talkative and energetic, and Bailey's personality was warm and friendly as well. Her journal was full of references to connecting with students. I didn't notice him singling her out and only began to suspect that there was an issue when he specifically waited to work with me one day in class, even though he'd been working with Bailey regularly and she was available to meet with him.

In our collaborative meeting that same day, Bailey launched into the story, and we spent most of our time talking about it. I tried to listen for a while before offering any guidance, thinking that this was a good opportunity for her to assert her own authority and assuming that we both knew a romantic association between them would not be a good idea. Aside from fact that she was not interested in Rasheed romantically, she was attempting to negotiate some kind of professional boundary, which I said was wise. She said she'd already had to politely refuse him but wished we had some sort of official policy that she could use to soften the rejection. I said I hadn't thought about an official policy, since our apprenticeship itself was experimental. We all talked for a while about

the boundaries between teachers and students, which I said were both self-evident (maintain professional, not personal, relationships) and complicated (aren't some personal connections natural and even positive as part of a professional student-teacher relationship?). He was a likeable young man, and Bailey conceded that she didn't mind spending time with him and for a while had enjoyed feeling like her teaching was making a difference. "I mean," she said, "it might have been flattering. I've had freshmen ask me out before, and it's sort of sweet, but I just smile and tell them I have a boyfriend, and since I'm a senior, I don't date freshmen. It's usually not a big deal. This time, though, I was, like, shocked and mad at first." Bailey's developing professional pride had been stung when she realized that it had all been a pretext. She began to wonder if the guidance she'd offered in her role as teacher had meant anything in his writing development.

Jenna asked if Rasheed's first essay had been a personal narrative. She had worked with several students on personal narratives and wondered about how that complicated their role-boundaries, since it would have opened up space for accelerated and even anomalous self-disclosure from both of them—he through his writing, she through offering examples from her own. I suggested that they both think and write about it further, since our talk had brought up so many important theoretical questions, some we might not have considered if there were a clear no-fraternization policy in place. The official boundaries would be firmer in their future positions as high school teachers, but the questions would be similar. In this case, Bailey wasn't intending to "try on" the particular "representation" (Danielewicz 167) of the objectified woman. Her student imposed that on her, and when she rebuffed his romantic advances, he no longer allowed her a teacher position.

Danielewicz's final principle is "enactment," and she explains it first by describing her own classroom practice. When she's "embodying the principles" she's described, "teaching so that students experience [her] simultaneously as theorist and participant," and with a "full investment of . . . self (person, mind, spirit) in the act of teaching and learning alongside [her] students" (174), she says, she's practicing enactment. This principle suggests a holistic synthesis of everything else, and though she says she can't know if students really get it until they've been teaching a while (and she rarely has access to them at that point), she sees glimpses of it in their culminating work for her class.

In the previous chapter, I presented the apprenticeship as a sort of armor against what Peter Smagorinsky has called wash-out, and which Ritchie and Wilson describe as the swallowing up, neutralizing, or compartmentalizing of teacher training by the "traditional narratives of teaching" represented in a novice teacher's early schooling, field experiences, and first years of teaching (62-63). Danielewicz describes enactment as what happens on "a good day," and I think I can say that our apprenticeship had a few of those. I'm afraid, though, that I measured the general success of the program, at least in part, on my apprentices' ability to enact our pedagogy, theory, and practices once they were no longer working with me, as if I could say, "now you're confident and clear about the best way to do things; don't get sullied." I was able to follow them into their student teaching classrooms, and they found it difficult to avoid significantly compromising or compartmentalizing their training in service of the practices of the schools and classrooms to which they were assigned<sup>38</sup>. Of course, I'm also assuming that they embraced what they learned with me just because they told me so.

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<sup>38</sup> I discuss this further in the final chapter.

How much appropriation is appropriate?

Ray, in her epilogue to *The Practice of Theory*, says she could have “produced a more collaborative work in which teachers and graduate students contributed chapters, thus better reflecting the dialectic nature of the teacher-research enterprise.” She explains that she “chose another direction” because she needed to “come to terms— personally, intellectually, politically—with composition as a field” and her “particular place in it” (159). In writing about others, specifically in the less-authoritative groups of graduate students and K-12 teachers, she says, she does not intend to “leave the impression that they need a scholar-theorist-university researcher to speak for them.” Instead, she says, her work in this book is about “attempting to work out” her own thinking and challenging others to take on “various lines of inquiry” (159) in underexplored areas and methods of research. In her book, Ray calls for (as others have) a broader conception of theory that “ascribes as much value to interpretive, provisional theories as to grand, all-encompassing ones” (35).

I like Ray’s explanation—it lets me off the hook for being responsible for everyone else’s voices. Except that I’ve already used them. I don’t have the authority to lend to others’ voices that Ray does, even if I wanted to, and any consciousness I have of reflexivity is happening after the fact. I have recreated interactions with my developmental students and my apprentices based on notes, reflections, and memory, not transcripts and recordings. Because I didn’t want to intrude on the actual workings of my classroom, and because we had real time pressures, I didn’t do interviews and don’t have the detailed field notes of an ethnographer<sup>39</sup>. I have the hastily-scratched notes of a listener

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<sup>39</sup> Classroom time could be an entire essay in itself. In this context, I’m referring specifically to the few official meetings I was able to schedule with apprentices. All of our other discussions were impromptu, as we were walking out of class, for example, or what

combined with the as-soon-as-I-could-afterward reflections of a teacher. The broad narrative and the italicized vignettes I've offered are my own, and the journal excerpts are selected from the notes my apprentices sent to me. The result is that everyone I'm writing about—freshmen, teacher candidates, apprentices, even teachers in the field, all sound like me attempting to sound like them.

Jennifer Soalt says the inclusion of student writing in teacher memoir is one of its stock features, lending the teacher's writing "a sense of freshness, directness, and urgency" and the student's writing, in turn, "a sense of legitimacy and authority" (95). The combination "expands" both "the narrative capacity of teachers' memoirs" and, perhaps, even "the formal and thematic possibilities of memoir" in general. But Soalt wonders if this inclusion is "Co-opting or enabling, manipulative or freeing," since it "enables teacher writers to more fully use the story of the self to illuminate the story of others" and makes their "identities as writers" dependent on "the presence of each other's work" (95).

Though I took great care to ask permission for and to save writing samples from my developmental students, I chose not to reproduce them here because I wanted to keep focused on the instructional process. Perhaps there are other reasons, though. I could surely present some samples of what my developmental freshmen write at the beginning of the semester and compare it with the end, and we'd note improvement. It's one of the ways they can move on to credit-bearing courses. But sometimes, the improvements are more significant in terms of what they represent—say, the realization that good writing takes work—than a substantial jump in writing proficiency. And many times, the process (of our course, but maybe also the parts of Process theory that

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could be discussed by email or text. I've already (and will in the final chapter again) take up the problem of the "voluntary" nature of the apprentices' participation. I didn't feel like I could ask them for more time than they were already giving.

undergird it) doesn't work for students. My student Preston, who evoked *Freedom Writers* in reference to our course at the beginning of the semester, was so disillusioned with me (I kept pushing him for more revision) and with school in general, I think, that he dropped out soon after mid-term. Soalt also says that the student writing featured in teacher memoir is usually that of a "precocious writer" (96). My developmental writing course rarely offers one of these.

Ellen Cushman and Terese Monberg, addressing inherent ethical issues in ethnographic research and writing, even say that reflexivity and authorial "decentering" don't go far enough. They prefer "social reflexivity" (170) and the "recentering" of the researcher's authority, cautioning researchers about polyvocal approaches in which potentially "elitist" researchers end up "exoticizing" their participants' voices, trotting them out "in a decontextualized parade of literacy artifacts, stories, and fieldnotes with the disappointing effect that the complex social and cultural values of participants are relegated to the background while their literacies help create a sensationalized foreground" (169).

I'd like to pretend that my approach here is based on some sophisticated theoretical stance in which I've critiqued my own subject position in relation to my students (both layers) and ultimately arrived at the conclusion that the only ethical thing I can do now is write about myself because I don't want to appropriate the voices of my students or some such thing. But Cushman and Monberg would require "careful interaction and knowledge making with the individuals in the study," during which researchers "negotiate, through reciprocity, the power and status related to our positions" (171-72).

My apprentices and my writing students knew I was writing about my teaching and gave me permission to use their writing when necessary, but I cannot say with

certainty that I ever “openly negotiate[d]” our “interdependent relations using dialogic interaction” (172). In one of our collaborative sessions, Jenna suggested we have a post-writing conference with students to help them see what they did well and what needs work. For the sake of time and efficiency, we bundled these post-conferences with the mid-point conferences for subsequent essays, asking students how they could apply our feedback to their current work. Even after Jenna moved on from my program, I continued to use this process because I found that it addressed some specific concerns we had about how students use feedback and about the quantity and specificity of our comments on their papers. The bundled conference is the basis of one of the most useful revisions I’ve made to my teaching, one that I’ve worked to fully theorize over the last few semesters. I don’t think I’ve talked to Jenna about this, even though we’ve managed to stay in contact with each other.

Garvey, Stokes, and Megginson similarly describe discursive power relationships in coaching and mentoring business executives. In these contexts, the person giving “account” of the “coaching relationship,” generally the mentor, will stand in the place of Lacan’s subject-who-knows, and therefore control the discourse about both the coaching process and the mentee. Even when such descriptions/narratives are framed in terms of “convey[ing] . . . impressions” or “offer[ing] insights,” in other words, reflective exemplars rather than instructional texts, they still operate as “dominant or powerful, legitimated discourse” that “determines ‘who can say what, where – and why’” (137). In turn, “the ‘gaze’ or mindset of the writer influences how people coach and mentor” (137).

Salvatori also wonders about the potential of speaking for others, offering as her example the interplay between two essays, one by Jane Gallop and one by Gallop’s student, which tell different stories about how a concept they both write about (teaching as impersonation) emerged. The student’s version of the same story his professor told,

Salvatori says, “indirectly . . . calls attention to the effect of *staging* pedagogy in ways that relegate the function of the actual material and the subjects of learning to supporting cast, and reduce complex and dynamic relationships between teachers and students to teachers’ self-referential monologues” (574). How do students, Salvatori wonders, guard against “erasure,” and what “strategies” must they “deploy to continue to be present” (574)? Garvey and colleagues suggest that when we narrate from our positions of power—the author position itself is a power position, they say—we could just as easily be writing “a sales document,” complete with the client- (or student, or research subject) endorsement at the end (Garvey, Stokes, and Megginson 138). Ritchie and Wilson use the term “monologues” also, to describe a similar process in which teacher educators, as they recite narratives of their own experience for their teacher candidates, essentially close off analysis or critique. In this way, Ritchie and Wilson argue, such stories of *how it was* and *what I did* effectively “colonize” (61) their teacher candidates.

Of course, many works about teaching aren’t as literally dialectic as the Gallop/student exemplar that Salvatori described. Even attempts at polyvocality can be marred by a lack of context or connection, so that the reader is left to assume, to interpret the connections and outcomes. Gallop’s version, as Salvatori describes it, seems to champion what Ray called interpretive, provisional theory, one that “follows from, grows out of, rather than drives practice” (575). But in Salvatori’s view, such “improvisational” theory-making can be problematic. She says Gallop’s narrative, peppered with “brief, intermittent mus[ing]s,” reveals the “unpredictability” of the classroom, “the fact that teaching and learning are always more complicated, and in excess of, subject matter, subjectivities, contexts, and their intricate relationships,” but also suggests “improvisation rather than a carefully articulated and practiced variation on a theme” (574). At least for Salvatori, this sort of writing problematically frames pedagogy as “fundamentally and

inevitably accidental, improvisational, marginal, jocular. And with great loss” (Salvatori 575). The loss, I think, is the loss of a critical balance. After all, teaching really is improvisational, but writing about it can only pretend to be.

Salvatori doesn’t offer much in the way of solutions—her essay is actually a book review—but she does suggest that teachers and “vigilant” readers (581) are wise to think of versions of the personal in academic writing as a “multiplication of recitations” (580) complicated constructions of the “inaccessible” self, which is, despite postmodern conceptions of it, “created by” (582) an “obsessive desire for individual identity” (581). It’s another infinite loop: this desire is what drives the “processes of creation and authentication,” those processes are “inevitably mediated, recited, constructed,” and the product is a self which longs for an identity.

In *Works and Lives*, Geertz raises questions about writing anthropological/ethnographic research that have some relevance here. He ends up, essentially, concluding that the Text is the thing: he says we bury important questions about how texts are “author-ized” under “anxieties . . . about subjectivity” (9). Specifically, questions such as “how is the . . . author made manifest in the text [and] . . . what is it—beyond the obvious tautology, a ‘work’—that the author authors?” are not epistemological but ontological, he suggests (7-8). Whether we’re writing what he terms author-saturated or author-evacuated texts, we choose, frame, edit, and present people, events, voices—it’s unavoidable. Geertz says the constraints of empiricism on one hand, associated with “insensitivity, of treating people as objects, of hearing the words but not the music” and honest subjectivity on the other, “or Impressionism, . . . treating people as puppets, and hearing music that doesn’t exist” make it difficult for writers to find “somewhere to stand in a text” (10). Since both stances are also open to “charges . . . of ethnocentrism,” authors end up “oscillat[ing] uncertainly between the two . . . often in the same” work (10).

Thirty years before these discussions of reflexivity and narrative as self-recitation, Jerome Bruner proposed in his "Life as Narrative" the "radical hypothesis" that personal "narrative forms and the language that goes with them" are more than "simply expressions of their inner states, ways of talk that are required by the nature of those internal states." Instead, he says, the narrative, once begun, determines the experience, to the extent that the concepts and narrative patterns we employ, the discourse we use, the "formal structures" that undergird the stories we tell of ourselves are established early enough and rehearsed enough that they become inextricable from the experiences themselves and even shape (like "recipes") our future experiences, creating "routes into memory" (139). In the same way that Danielewicz would later argue that teachers' identities are discourse-constructions, made "real for us" through "attempts to interpret and articulate experience" (Danielewicz 141), Bruner argues that "life is inseparable from a life as told. Life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold" (139). Because we have constructed a narrative that is our lives, he posits, we commit ourselves to "hypotheses, versions, expected scenarios" of what life is for us, so that even when "conditions" change, we may not "alter the narratives that we have settled upon as 'being' our lives" (141). I think it's certain that the text I'm writing shaped the *telling* of it. I knew I would be writing about our experience, so I asked specific questions of the apprentices, I ran back to my office after class or logged into the closest computer and tried to record a conversation or a conference with a student. For the first time now, I'm wondering whether the writing shaped the *doing* of it.

Like Salvatori, Bruner suggests that the appropriate response is awareness, both on the part of the teller/writer and on the part of the reader (analyst/researcher, in his case). Examination, comparison, and critique ("learn how people put their narratives

together when they tell stories from life, considering as well how they might have proceeded”) are the key contributions he would offer (139).

At this point, it’s starting to feel like an absurdly pretentious checklist, and I wonder if Terry Caesar would be proud:

- be reflexive
- figure out which kind of reflexive is best
- admit that I’m not writing about how it was but how I saw it
- create provisional theory, but don’t be jocular about it
- try to accommodate others’ voices without colonizing them
- avoid self-referential monologue
- something about subjectivity and identity

Geertz’s description of what all of this will produce makes me chuckle and breathe again: “Half-convinced writers trying to half-convince readers of their (the writers’) half-convictions” (139). Such works, he says, seem unlikely to have the “power” or influence of their predecessors, which, “whatever their failings” managed to “enlarge the sense of how life can go.” And yet, “that is what must happen if the business is to continue” (139). It’s no simple thing, he says, to produce a text that accounts for both research audiences and research subjects. “Who is now to be persuaded?” he asks, “And of what: Factual accuracy? Theoretical sweep? Imaginative grasp? Moral depth? It is easy enough to answer, ‘All of the above.’ It is not quite so easy to produce a text that thus responds” (133).

*Today, Jenna is presenting her lesson on opening paragraphs. She worked hard to adapt a concept she has watched me teach before. She illustrates my examples with video clips and then models a couple of options. I love her take on this, but students don’t seem dialed in. I sit in the back and take notes, wondering how I would deal with their disinterest. I’m not sure she could have done better than she did, and I feel frustrated with our students. We move on to some writing time for students to apply what she’s*

*presented. After class, we have a few minutes to talk about how the session went. I note that several students have made notes about the options and strategies she modeled. My first instinct is to reassure her—she did a good job, and there are lots of reasons why students are apathetic. But I think that would be condescending somehow. This is a strange disequilibrium, since we're not really colleagues but she's not my student anymore. I pause and take a chance. I don't want to dismiss the problem. It's one we've struggled with throughout this part of the semester. I start by asking what she learned today. She talks quite a bit about the time and effort she put into her presentation, and I know I need to assure her that it was worthwhile.*

*"They weren't really paying attention, though," she says. "At least I felt like they weren't. Maybe I shouldn't have turned off the lights? I don't know. Because of the time? Should I have asked more questions? I think, when we were circulating, a few of them talked to me about their ideas. I don't know. Maybe they paid more attention than I thought? Some others, though. . ."* She stops, and I realize she's said "I don't know" more times than I want to record. *Something new occurs to me.*

*"I think the others haven't done enough thinking about their writing to have any place for what you presented," I say, glad for a moment that I had the presence of mind (this time) not to blurt out "I don't know either." I tell her that I was discouraged too, but I wonder if we need to talk to them about what to do with the options we're demonstrating. If they're not writing outside of class, if they have no plan for the current project we're working on, we've given them a vehicle (the opening paragraph, in this case) with no passenger.*

*As we pack up and walk out, I think that I need to describe this strange feeling of talking to myself when I talk to Jenna. She's not me, but she's standing in my spot, saying some of my words, both as she teaches and as she reflects on her teaching. If I*

*had been presenting today, I would have been tuned out, by students and by my own frustration. I don't know that I would have had the time or the openness or the opportunity to think through what happened in class today.* Maybe this is what Qualley meant about the need for collaboration in reflexivity.

Jenna's journal, September 26th:

As I began planning for the lesson for today's class, covering introductory paragraphs, I thought it would be fun to use movies as examples. Most students enjoy entertainment and I figured it would be a good way for them to wake up and become interested in the topic. Unfortunately, I think my lesson only reached--mentally--a few students. I found this a little disappointing, but brushed it aside as a result of the early morning.

However, the remainder of class proved to be at the same level of apathy. When I walked around and checked for student's rough drafts, there were quite a few who had nothing at all. On a positive note, about a quarter of the students had something written, and the other quarter had full essays. I feel as though there are a couple of good apples among the orchard, but I wish they could spread their optimism to their classmates.

I am hopeful that these next few weeks will show some progression. I have a few individuals in mind that will be on my radar this next week. If improvements are not made, I think it will be necessary to have one-on-one chats or speak with their coaches.

I want to pull this last sentence out because it doesn't fit the point I'm making here. I want to make her tone less formal. I resist the urge to crop and edit, focusing on what I might learn from what she's written. I notice that she's grasping for solutions. The language distance—"if improvements are not made"—is maybe about her need to reassert her authority. I think she sees the less-than-successful outcome of her lesson as a challenge to her fledgling teacher's identity more than a failure of pedagogy or method.

My journal, September 26:

This week has been a tough one. I made the decision over the summer to embrace the writing workshop as much as I can for a college class. This means that our direct instruction sometimes seems hit-or-miss, and I don't know that students are making connections. I shared a student's essay on Tuesday that usually gets a great reaction or at least appreciation from students, but this group seemed thoroughly confused.

Maybe it's because several of them aren't writing narratives, so they didn't see how it applied to them. We had a much better overall participation rate in the writer's notebooks, though. I'm going to be as hard-nosed as possible about deadlines this semester.

Jenna taught a great mini-lesson today on essay openers, giving examples from the opening scenes of 4 familiar movies. It's frustrating how unresponsive students were. Maybe we need to do more pairs work during direct instruction to get them talking, or we could even have them record their responses throughout the lesson. It's hard to know with this group whether its lethargy, apathy, or confusion that's keeping them from interacting. I guess we'll know more next week when we see more of what they've written. The 8am time spot is challenging, and maybe I have rosier memories of past semesters, but this class seems unusually apathetic.

I kept notes in a notebook and then sent a follow-up email that served as my journal to the apprentices. I wonder now, through the lens of reflexivity, if Jenna's journal is a response to mine or if she wrote it unprompted. I wonder, also, how much of my journal, as well as my notes, were attempts to soothe her disappointment more than to objectively analyze the success of our methods. The formality of Jenna's journal also makes me wonder how much of it represents her real thinking and how much is packaged for my consumption—her need to appear professional and in control rather than, say, frustrated, apathetic, or uncertain.

My journal, October 22:

I'm dismayed at the students who have already missed class several times. I shouldn't be surprised by this after so many years, but I still am. We have many motivational structures in place to be sure that students don't continually skip class, and I get all motherly with mine when I remind them to be there every day that they possibly can. In some ways, I feel like if I can just get them to practice consistency in some basic areas (attendance, in-class participation, and individual writing), I can help mitigate some of the challenges of operating a workshop with struggling writers.

Today was disappointing on several fronts, though. First, students were sleepy and despondent at the beginning of class. We had a few participants in the opening modeling activity (generating writing ideas from blogs and twitter), but others simply tuned out or even put their heads down. At one point, I had them stand up and stretch. I'm

wondering if I shouldn't find a game or something for the start of class, just to get everyone's blood flowing.

Jenna's journal, same day:

There were quite a few students missing in class today, or maybe it was just a lack of voices being heard. The students seemed to be a little dreary and uninvolved in the day's activities. I thoroughly enjoyed the lesson on using social media means to brainstorm ideas to write about. It would be fun to have the students do a short writing project on the things they found when browsing their social pages, but I think this may be an activity that doesn't benefit their academic learning enough to take class time to do. The students seem to understand the importance of writing their stories--as demonstrated through their first essays. I loved that I could hear distinct voices in their writing. It was a pleasant surprise that I was not expecting to find.

This time, I think she must be writing in response to my frustration, which I would have shared with her after class. She's the one soothing me—offering suggestions, soothing me, giving me ideas, reframing my focus on student behavior into instructional talk that moves us forward, and finishing with some reassurances about the value of the experience for her, at least.

#### The hall of mirrors, or, teaching as a gazing contest

I'm wondering again about Bruner's notion that we live out the narrative we've been writing for ourselves. Not only did I have the sense of always being accountable, always performing for my apprentices, who were supposed to be learning from following me, but I also felt the burden of needing to explain my moves and thoughts in the classroom to them, sometimes when they weren't even there. At least twice a week, I made notes for them and for myself, and at least once a week, I constructed some version of myself or of our classroom for them. Surely this is true of all teaching in some general sense—the need to perform, the awareness of being watched (and ironic frustration when those supposed to be paying attention aren't), the knowledge that we are accountable, and even the self-awareness/analysis necessary to continually improve

our teaching. Something about these added layers of eyes and of representation, through my writing about it, was different, though.

I really didn't want to wade too deep into psychoanalysis, into waters too deep and scientific for me. Lad Tobin says psychoanalytic theory is particularly instructive for writing teachers. He invokes psychoanalytic models, literal ones, in his thinking about working with students and process models of writing. Perhaps I just missed the clever subtext of Porter's description of the oversimplified process model as "therapeutic pedagogy" when I first read it (711). I assumed he was referring to fixing always-deficient student writing and said I wanted to avoid the same misrepresentation. I hadn't considered Process as having psychotherapeutic pretensions. When I read Tobin's argument that "writing instruction and psychotherapy have much in common" and "in order to read student writing intelligently, we need to become much more systematic about self-study and self-presentation" (*Reading* 14), I nodded at the second part but mentally skipped the first, intimidated and ignorant.

The more I wrote about teaching writing, though, and especially about training the apprentices who worked with me, the more I realized I couldn't, as Tobin describes, "deny the significance" of the psychological dimension of my teaching because "these things make [me] . . . uncomfortable" (31). It isn't discomfort with the personal—I mostly got over my nausea in chapter one. I don't even have trouble with the idea that writing conferences à la Don Murray have a great deal in common with talk-therapy. I'm uncomfortable because I'm grasping at some tenuous theoretical connection, something I don't really understand. I know theorists have written about the power of the gaze, about mirrors and reflection and subjects and objects and transference, but I have no authority there. I feel like I've already done what Bishop laments about her early essays, "scatter[ing] citations behind me," relying on "the voices of others" in an attempt to "build

my own authority and apply the work of others” to mine (1). My notes for this section are strewn with catchy theory-speak, and I’m afraid a careful reader will see traces of Google University and *Lacan for Dummies*<sup>40</sup>. Still, the more I read my own journal, the more I reflected on observing my apprentices and having them observe me, the more I realized I had to deal with these connections.

Theorists in education have noted the ways in which Lacan’s description of the Mirror Stage applies to learning to teach. Essentially, the new teacher sees herself in the mirrored gaze of both students and mentor, shaping herself both according to the ideal that she has constructed and the feedback she receives. According to Tony Brown and Olwen MacNamara, who studied preservice Math teachers in the UK, teacher trainees operate out of a “personal need” for a “story,” an “emancipatory quest” that their work with students is and will be worthwhile, and in order to further this narrative, they construct professional identities that may supersede “externally imposed performative criteria, or any actual alignment with a collectively defined ideological programme” (30). Because the novice teacher “does not reach a final resolution of such dilemmas,” he operates as a “fragmented self, where alternative discourses feeding through [him],” including the potentially differing theoretical perspectives “activated according to demands made at different stages of . . . training,” as well as gaps between his perception of himself and his assumptions or information about how others view him, “fail to meet and be reconciled with each other” (30)<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> This is not, of course, a real book. I am, however, grateful for Lionel Bailly’s *Lacan* in the Beginner’s Guide series, which I read before attempting to deal with Lacan on my own. I dutifully read some of Lacan’s essays in graduate school, but I always avoided writing about them.

<sup>41</sup> Owen and MacNamara also offer an interesting critique, based on psychoanalytic theories of identity, of Reflective Practice (which appears to be a formalized process in the UK) as a method of teacher training.

Colette Granger suggests that the classroom itself is the mirror, where the gaze of students reflects “her own face as it once was (or as she idealizes it), and as it once reflected another teacher’s or a parent’s earlier self” (249). In Granger’s view, the teacher is both the baby and the mother of the Lacanian tableau in an endless repetition of transference and countertransference. She speculates that the teacher chooses (unconsciously, of course)

“a kind of pedagogical love object, a reflection (or perhaps more than one) of ‘what she herself was.’ [. . .] Insofar as the object chosen in this scenario resembles the subject who chooses, we might understand part of the resemblance as reflected in the object’s choice of her object: those I choose because they resemble and reflect me may mirror that choice, likewise choosing me for my resemblance to them. Or I may imagine that they do. A teacher cannot usually be said to consciously ‘choose’ her students, given that they are assigned to her; still, we can speculate on a kind of projection of an idealized fantasy that effectively ‘makes’ those objects—‘her’ students—by imagining (imaging) them not only ‘loving’ her as she ‘loves’ them, but also ‘choosing’ her as their own pedagogical love-object. [. . .] Here the fantasy, embodied in that reflected gaze, is that for those objects, who themselves are the subjects of their own experience, the teacher is a love-object, as she was (or as she imagined herself to be) for either her parents or her own early teachers. In this sense the students can be understood as reflecting back to their teacher her own love of the object that is like herself (in part because, in turn, it loves her as its object)” (249-250).

Peter Taubman, on whose psychoanalytic reading of teaching Granger based some of her theory, uses the term “hall of mirrors” (222) to describe a similar classroom dynamic. He says the novice teacher’s “fragile identity is still in the realm of the imaginary and transfers onto the students the unconscious relationships that constitute that identity” (219). The gaze of students, then, has the power to affirm or to reflect back to the teacher an image of “the original Other in whose gaze that teacher came into being.” For new teachers, “boundaries between teacher and student are diffuse. And it is in this realm of the imaginary that one can hear the unarticulated unconscious fears, desires, and needs that constitute the new identity of the teacher.” Soon, though, the symbolic (“the realm of

the law of school”) intrudes, replacing “imaginary elements in an identificatory reshaping of the teacher and demands that the teacher renounce the imaginary realm—as if that could be done—for the ‘reality’ of the institution” (219).

Taubman, essentially describing a Lacanian version of wash-out, further sees the new teacher struggling to adopt a discourse of the “symbolic realm of the school” (221). She can adopt the discourse of master, which will prompt her students to either return “the words of the master” and thus “appear to become the master,” which Taubman says is “impossible, for the master always knows more” (221). Or, her students will “resist and become ignorant” (221), an “empty mirror in which the master searches for his reflection” (222). Taubman calls this relationship one of “absolute distance” (224).

What if the beginning teacher instead “renounces the figure of master” in favor of “caring, helping, or engaging students”? The resulting desire is “to be the student, to know the student, to have the student. The figure of the student compensates for the unconscious need to be like that original Other in whose gaze the teacher initially emerged, to be one with that Other, and to be what that original Other desired.” This relationship, “no longer mediated by knowledge” creates the “abolition of all distance” (224). Taubman rejects a Foucauldian system in which the “individual figure is dissolved as the constituting figure of discourse and is dispersed and replaced by various subject positions opened within discourse itself” because, in the “symbolic realm of the school these positions are [all] the positions of the master” (229). Ultimately, he says, teachers must construct “a dialectic between two lines of thought whose end points must be attended to but not submitted to” (232). This movement, he says, begins by going back to “that moment when our identity as teacher first congealed in the gaze of the Other,” whom he says is the person who first identified teacher-potential in you. Turning back, he says, should not “dissolve that identity, but . . . enrich it; not in order to free a desire to

which we will be a slave, but to understand, accept, and acknowledge the needs that, when forced into intentions, spill out into desire” (232).

I’m not immediately sure what to do with these conceptions of the teaching relationship. Certainly, they help to explain the pull of other discourses (what Smagorinsky calls “competing traditions” [29]) against theories and methods offered during teacher training. Even more, they prompt me to consider that, rather than thinking of “wash out” as a potential danger we must guard against with superior bodies of knowledge, theory, and practice, we should find ways to help novice teachers reconcile the multiple forces that have, and are continuously, shaping them.

I think also that I must deal with the power of the gaze for myself. I’m thinking first of Granger’s notion that the teacher chooses pedagogical love objects in the form of students who are like her. My apprentices and I chose each other. They chose to model their teaching after mine; I chose them because they were willing to do this, because I had the opportunity to make them over in my image. Officially, I chose them because they applied, and they chose my program because it would benefit them, but when I read Granger’s description of the desiring gaze, I see them. Here, Lacan’s question of whether or not the mimicking organism has “formative power” over the gaze that sees its “manifestations” (73) challenges me. Madeline Grumet, in her essay on the teacher’s body which is at once subject and object, says that teaching offers us an ideally narcissistic world in which “we stand before our students, older, credentialed, and endowed with the power to judge them” and which also provides the powerful “lure of mimesis” (256). In this world, she says, our desire is to make our students “like us,” for them to “confirm our choices, admire our achievements, and share our interests” (256). This process might very well be good for them, moving them “along the path to material, social, and intellectual success,” but it, ironically, also becomes a form of self-effacement,

since we must “be present just so much but not enough to risk their alienation” (256). I think the particular lure of training teachers must be even stronger. I wanted them to think like me, act like me. Since I model conditional knowledge, an idealized outcome is not just mimetic but replicative.

This sort of mimicry also complicates the already-fragile development of my apprentices’ teaching identities, since, when they are teaching, I am watching. Perhaps they take their cues from my facial expressions, from how much or how little I write, from which of our students my attention becomes fixed on. Even when I attempt to make analytical sessions collaborative and open—“how do you think it went?” We find ourselves playing a sort of guessing game—“here’s what I think; is that right? Did I form the correct interpretation of events and my role in them?” they seem to ask, willing to change their interpretation of “how it was” based on my telling of it.

Denise Comer says this is the problem with all classroom observation—at some point, it feels like surveillance, of the Foucauldian-panopticon variety. Even when one’s observer is collegial, supportive, and “generally affable,” she says, we tend to feel “a near- overwhelming anxiety over the particular moment and an excruciating self-centeredness” about our quality of performance (517).

She’s writing specifically about teacher evaluation in the college composition classroom, but her general recommendation of “bending” the observer’s gaze appeals to me. Otherwise, this version of the classroom-as-mirror becomes decidedly depressing, since it has the potential to make me either an object or a controlling master or both. Comer’s system is based on a specific evaluation that she experienced in which she attended her evaluator’s class beforehand in order to establish a visit of her own that was “reciprocal, rather than unidirectional, and focused not so much on me as a performer but on how we as colleagues were both grappling with how to teach writing more effectively”

(519). After all, she says, we're already watching our watchers, so to speak: "The gaze—even the coolest, seemingly most detached supervisory gaze emanating from the back of the classroom — always and ever turns in on itself. The gaze can and should be reversed" (522). But this reversal is best when it is "transparent," "formative," and negotiated (531). I fear losing my authority when I open myself up to critique, but Comer addresses this fear with the reminder that good teaching is already self-critical and reflective.

I don't think my apprentices, and, I hope, other novice teachers I've evaluated in their field-based internships, felt the kind of powerful, punishing gaze that Colette Granger describes when she evokes the panopticon as a metaphor for the student teaching experience. But further embracing a self-reflective model would do more to mitigate the power of my evaluative gaze, as my observer-notes from one of Jenna's lessons suggest: "Try to record some of the ideas on the board so that students have something to draw from. Model more concretely: make a list of possibilities for students so they can see your process at work. Maybe I haven't modeled this for you enough."

As the one watching and writing, I also exercise the power of the Author, a form of Lacan's subject-supposed-to-know. Jennifer Soalt says that the student writers featured in the memoirs of writing teachers functioned as "doubles and projections" in the sense that they helped their "teachers explore their own identities as writers" but were "portrayed as significant writers in their own right" (96). Nonetheless, their portraits are constructed by and circumscribed by their teacher-writers' narratives.

I wonder also about the mother in Lacan's mirror. It seems to me that no one's discussing her. I've admittedly not read exhaustively in this area, but her only significance appears to be as a reflector for her baby—helping shape his identity through her gaze. What does her baby's point of self-recognition mean for her? To what extent must she

deal with what she sees reflected in his eyes? As I read back over my journals, I see that the gaze of my apprentices was often empowering—they sought my approval and my counsel—sometimes challenging, especially when it caused me to see gaps in my own pedagogy, and sometimes, draining.

My Journal, Mid-September:

Enjoying talking with apprentices about teaching. Causes me to be reflective and consider my teaching practices. I need to plan more carefully, though. I need to be writing down everything so that I can illustrate how the pieces fit together. So much of what I do is responsive: a loose plan that I adjust as I see students' needing more guidance. Specifically, we did further work today on audience and purpose, since the apprentices discussed those issues with students during group time.

My Journal, mid-November:

I'm a little relieved that they aren't coming today (at least they both emailed this time). I didn't write out my plan for the day, and it isn't a conference day. Sometimes I think I could teach writing in my sleep, but then I see the specter of Nancie Atwell in the back of my classroom, clipboard in one hand and little conference-stool in the other, and I feel guilty. I worked on something else yesterday and intended to come in early to prep for today but didn't make it. So, I'll grab the stack of essays I know are sure to generate discussion and give them ideas and we'll study a "mentor text," which means we'll read an essay out loud and talk about the "craft." How lazy is that? Today, you could substitute workshop for worksheet; today it's my well-used crutch.

#### Writing/ Teaching/ Writing

I don't know how to end this chapter, except to accept the notion that teaching, like writing, is recursive, and thus unfinished. What, ultimately, am I to do with this recursive reflexive thing? What happens when the reflexive becomes reflux-ive (speaking of being queasy)? When I've unraveled my argument, my conclusions, and even my self, to a point of no cohesion? I'm looking at myself in the mirror of my students, gazing at them gazing at me, controlling my teaching apprentices with my gaze but desperately hoping they'll want me to be their mother-in-the-mirror, that the gaze they meet there is one that shapes their teacher-identity development in healthy ways. I wonder what to

make of a reflexive process that involves “observing oneself as the observer” (Ray 42) in light of Lacan’s edict that we can never see ourselves seeing because of the fundamental split between eye and gaze. I feel like Rosencrantz, pondering the hereafter: “Eternity is a terrible thought. I mean, where’s it going to end?”

Lad Tobin describes a similar point where he’s come to the end of his proverbial writing rope. His editor passes along some negative reviews, and he must decide what to do next. Editors are like teachers, he says, and the relationship doesn’t end with being “happy with your own texts; it’s also about power and authority, identification and resistance, negotiation and compromise” (“Reading” 7). But like most students, he “did not want to mull things over.” He wanted affirmation as much as students want to know a “grade right then,” with positive feedback on the side (7). Just as badly, he says, “I wanted to resolve immediately whatever tensions existed between us and within my text” (7). Then he relates a story of the same process, but this time, he’s the teacher, attempting to move a student toward better writing but admitting to himself that his version of better writing sounded much like himself and perhaps not the student. In the end, the compromise meant wariness and uncertainty between them, and even, Tobin says, hate. I want to feel superior to Tobin in this instance, but at times, I secretly fear I’m writing my own long, fancy, expensive version of “How to Make a ~~Bed~~ Writing Teacher.”

Daniel Lindley says that training good teachers means helping them find the potential in liminality. It means showing them how to contend with ambiguity while keeping anxiety at bay (112-114). He describes school as an already liminal space, on “the border between childhood and adulthood, between unknowing and knowing, between mystery and certainty,” and “good teachers know how to live in this liminal space: they contain, and there express, knowledge and uncertainty at once” (114). Though Lindley doesn’t use the term reflexivity, his notion that good teachers see

“knowledge as being in liminal space,” that the key to doing something worthwhile with this knowledge is confronting “the question, not *what* do I know” but instead, “*how* did I come to know it” (116) seems to fit. And it gives me hope that I’m making progress.

I find more hope in the cautions of Kathleen Blake Yancey, who says teacher educators need to embrace a cyclic conception of development. Teachers, novice and experienced, will move back and forth through cycles of development, she says, not necessarily making linear progress (“Theory” 235). “The best pedagogy,” Jane Danielewicz writes, “gets its shape and force from its theoretical roots: a teacher puts what she knows into practice while considering the material conditions and needs of her students. Then begins the cycle of reflection and reconception. Teaching is an act that once started is never over” (16).

I’m frustrated about leaving this chapter caught in a cycle that I think could be unending, but I hope to, in my final chapter, take up some of the questions I’ve raised and areas I’ve critiqued and offer some practical ways forward.

## Chapter 6

### Attempting Conclusions

Bailey sends me a lengthy overall reflection on the apprenticeship right before graduation. Her email is apologetic, letting me know she'd taken notes throughout the time she'd worked with me in the previous semester but thought an overall reflection would be more coherent than sending me her weekly notes:

Working with Mrs. Blair prepared me for teaching more than any other experience I have had while in the education program. [. . .]

In her literacy classes Mrs. Blair emphasizes two teaching tools: modeling and conferences. While working with her developmental writing class, I was given the opportunity to participate in these two [strategies] on a consistent basis.

I had some enlightening conversations with students about the effectiveness of these [teaching strategies]. While having conferences with students, I heard things like, "I've learned these things before, but I never really understood. This is the first time someone has taken the time to sit down with me and help me understand."

"I like it when you show me examples and we walk through it together. A lot of times I know what to do, I just don't know how. When you show me how something works, it makes it seem more simple, like something I can do."

"I wish someone had sat down with me and shown me how to narrow down a topic before. Most of my problem is getting started- sometimes I never do. Now I see how to begin with a general topic and narrow it down."

This feedback convinced me that modeling and conferences aren't just good ideas in educators' heads; they are truly effective tools that even the students themselves recognize as being very practical and helpful for learning how to apply writing concepts.

As a student teacher, modeling and conferences are my key strategies for teaching writing. I have received overwhelmingly positive responses from students about the conferences.

She'd also found some questions I'd asked at the end of their semester and responded to those along with the lengthier reflection. Everything she sends is complimentary, even

her more critical response to the format apprenticeship itself: The program has “a lot of potential,” especially if it could have “more structure and specific requirements for those involved.” I understand. Maybe Bailey had written to herself honestly throughout the apprenticeship but wanted to send me a more selective version. Maybe she worried that she wouldn’t come across as professional or competent in her notes. Maybe she just hadn’t written much during the apprenticeship and is now writing glowingly about her experience to compensate. Her feedback is helpful, but I knew it cannot be totally frank. I had been assigned to supervise her student teaching semester, and I was glad to have at least a limited opportunity to see whether or not she could use what she’d learned with me.

The second time I visited her English IV classroom, she’d been working for almost two months and was wrapping up her second week of teaching all day. I skimmed the notes and handouts she’d left for me and noted that the lesson listed on the board was titled “Writing the College Application Essay.” Since it involved students’ engaging in a real writing task for a real audience with real stakes, this lesson could be really meaningful. Though their teacher (and Bailey) would be evaluating the essays, the essays would conceivably have a real audience outside the classroom. The growing theorist in me had to temporarily ignore the fundamental institutional constraint of the writing task—students’ essays were circumscribed by both the college entrance process and the inanity of the prompts—but, for now, I was hopeful.

I settled in as Bailey ran through some preliminaries before launching into the main event. From her position at the front of the room, she demonstrated how to navigate to the website for the standard Texas college application. I thought it was interesting that, though the whole process was online, the students weren’t using computers. The essay would be uploaded, Bailey explained, when they really completed the application, but for

now, they would write their essays and then meet in the departmental computer lab in two days to type them. It made sense, I thought. The essay was the focus, not the application process. Computers could wait a few days. Except that maybe some students would prefer to compose at a computer. I tuned back in as Bailey described a few more steps in the application process and then polled the class about which prompt to tackle.

Bailey suggested some whole-class “brainstorming” about possible applications of the generic prompt, which asked applicants to describe a time in which they had to learn from someone different from themselves. She cautioned students to paint themselves in the best possible light, to be careful not to come across as judgmental or bigoted unless they were describing an attitude reversal, and then, well, that was it. She released them to write, and some of them did. Some, learning that the essay was “due” on Monday after their trip to the computer lab, began (or resumed) sleeping, texting, or talking to a neighbor. For her part, Bailey circulated among students and, as much as students were willing, held impromptu writing conferences on possible directions, openers, structures, and the like.

I talked with her cooperating teacher who explained that all of the English IV teachers plan together, so the lesson wasn’t Bailey’s. She mentioned that she was pleased to hear that Bailey walked around among students. “She does that a lot,” the teacher said, “walking around, helping them with their questions. I don’t think she just did that because you were watching.”

What I didn’t observe, to my dismay, was much instruction. Bailey provided no modeling (beyond using the website), no examination of the rhetorical demands of the writing task, and very little time even discussing the parameters of the prompt with students. She offered the single suggestion about what to avoid, but they didn’t discuss why that strategy was necessary. Certainly, the individual writing time and the personal

coaching Bailey provided as she circulated were beneficial—they had certainly been part of the workshop she apprenticed in—but without some other mechanism in place, many students weren't using the time to write or to talk with Bailey. A few students told her that they preferred to compose at a computer and would do their writing at home.

I mentioned my concerns to the cooperating teacher, who blinked for a moment and then said, well, she'd taught the lesson "so many times" that she probably didn't point out to Bailey to provide any more instruction for students. The teacher said she'd had to caution Bailey against giving students too much time to write, since they'd likely just waste the time. She said she'd suggest to Bailey that she draw out the first activity (an unrelated vocabulary lesson), and then model how to find unique scholarships online.

I cannot write from outside my own bias at this point, and my job was not to evaluate the teacher's position, but I also cannot infer a clear theoretical (composition or pedagogical) basis for the sort of approach that she suggested. Essentially, the teacher reframed the pedagogical problem I had observed as an instructional time management problem, and even a behavior management problem (as in, Bailey should have told those students who prefer to compose at a computer to get started anyway). In our talk later, Bailey said that she'd modeled her own letter in some classes but noticed some students relying too heavily on her essay, borrowing whole sentences. Without an opportunity to think through how to avoid that, she decided more writing time would be better. At least, she said, if they were leaning too much on her influence as she talked with them, it would be tailored to their individual essays. She said she could think of no reason to force students to write in class if they preferred to work in a different environment, especially since that was her own preference as a writer. We talked through some options, and I left feeling both uncertain and encouraged.

I'm realizing, as I read and revise what I've written, that I've made a lot of promises about what I'll do by the end. What is one to do with the uncanny, unquantifiable parts of the classroom, with the difficult-to-reconcile tension between theory and practice, with outcomes that are tentative at best?

#### What I've learned about the discipline

At the outset of this project, I made a sweeping reflection that I'd learned something about the nature of the English classroom. Actually, I said I'd learned "a great deal," which likely overstates what one might learn from reading this, but not what I learned from writing it.

First, the divide between middle and high school English teachers—regular ones like I was, not the few who publish action research or work regularly with university researchers—and the rest of the discipline is wide. I've been critical of inservice K-12 teachers in this project, though I hope I softened the sharpness of that criticism by naming myself among their ranks, acknowledging that I taught for many years not knowing what I didn't know, and placing much of the blame on the larger system they inhabit. Even that sentence sounds condescending, though. I wish I could avoid that. The teachers who've opened their classrooms to my students for mentorship and training over the years, giving of their time and wisdom, are some of the most committed educators I know. Unfortunately, in the classrooms I visit, I see scenes that look like what Giroux and Aronowitz envisioned, teachers as "civil servants who dispense pre-packaged lessons" based on an "atheoretical and skills-oriented curriculum" (qtd in Faigley 528).

I see teachers who are dedicated to students and who are continually reflexive when it comes to the practical working of the classroom but who don't have either the time, the access, or the opportunity to "teach in ways that are consistent with, in fact that are the enactment of, [their] theories of reading, writing, and thinking" (Salvatori,

*Pedagogy* 1). If a representative of a University had visited my high school classroom and challenged me to articulate such theories in order to defend, even to explain, my practice, I would have struggled to do so—assuming I could get past my initial indignation.

Mariolina Salvatori describes feeling “disoriented, and often silenced” by the reluctance of her University colleagues to discuss pedagogy (*Pedagogy* 7). That wary, negative, or dismissive response, she says, must have been the result of misunderstanding: her colleagues were conflating pedagogy with “didactics, an integral part of pedagogy that, when divorced from the theory of knowing that motivates it, produces approaches to teaching that shun a teacher’s and a student’s critical reflexivity on the act of knowing into a sequential schematization of that method” (8). Instead, she defines pedagogy<sup>42</sup> as “an always already interconnected theory and practice of knowing, that in order to be effective must make manifest its own theory and practice by continuously reflecting and deconstructing it” (7). These days, the prejudice against pedagogy in University-level English departments is less pervasive. Composition, for its part, has always grappled with the so-called *pedagogical imperative* to the extent that scholars must carve out space for work that doesn’t include a teaching application. Such distancing from pedagogy seems to be trendy in Composition now<sup>43</sup>. I wonder how much of this is a holdover from the days when pedagogy was less-valued, so that theorists feel

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<sup>42</sup> Salvatori’s definition is situated among many others as she traces the history of the term *Pedagogy* in her book of the same name, collecting documents into a historical narrative of sorts, “emplotted to tell different, even competing stories—stories that, hopefully, will lead to critical interrogations of what gets to be called, praised, or dismissed as pedagogy” (7). I only offer this description because I found it interesting that she frames what is essentially a collection of documents as a narrative.

<sup>43</sup> Bruce Horner’s “Traditions and Professionalization: Reconceiving Work in Composition” begins with the observation that Compositionists use terms like “transcend” to indicate that the discipline has come into its own enough to be past pedagogy. See also Paul Lynch’s *After Pedagogy*.

the need to shift focus from pedagogy in order to be taken seriously as theorists (I'm looking at you, post-process)

In any case, Salvatori's description is still useful, especially when set against my own description of middle and high school English departments. In my view, English scholars are more likely to have a clear sense of their own "theories of reading, writing, and thinking" (Salvatori 1), but their opportunities to "rigorously and responsibly practice" those theories may be more limited<sup>44</sup>. At the same time, teachers further down the activity system are more likely to be the fully-realized pedagogues Salvatori describes if you limit "theory" in her definition to theories of learning. In exchange, in order to efficiently manage the scope and size of their practice, their views of the discipline become, in Salvatori's terms, the more atheoretical "mechanical conceptualization of teaching" (1).

Heidi Estrem and Shelley Reid, writing about the "curricular space" they've termed *Writing Pedagogy Education* (223), observe that "cross[ing] boundaries" will help to "foster wider understanding of practices and theories in the field" (234). It's an obvious and well-worn proposal, but as Robert Tremmel confesses, in his article about cooperation between English Education and Composition, no less, such things are easier said than done. He uses the term "boundaries" as well, noting that institutional forces, "tribalism and specialization," residual "patriarchal arrogance" (15) and even our own personal hangups form "natural and artificial" barriers that are difficult to "cut through" (16). Tremmel recommends a few specific types of collaboration, concentrating mostly on training sites. In a response to Tremmel's essay, Stephen Wilhoite offers suggestions

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<sup>44</sup> I'm thinking here of teaching situations in which *scholars*—those most entrenched in theory—are most often deployed: small graduate seminars, research supervision, mentoring, and the occasional undergraduate course.

about the sorts of conversations we might have during collaboration, over coffee, to further unite us (18).<sup>45</sup>

Estrem and Reid point out, though, that while “trends” in our related fields may be similar, “they do not exactly match up,” since “English educators prepare *future* writing teachers to teach within a K-12 educational framework” and “WPE practitioners work with *in-practice* writing teachers teaching within a higher education framework” (234). They suggest that we seek to “understand both the convergences and the gaps between learning to teach writing to 160 fifteen-year-olds in literature-based high school English courses and learning to teach 50 first-year college composition students” in order to produce stronger scholarship and that we attempt to “envision all the multiple spaces in which WPE practice and scholarship operate” to better “engage with the most challenging issues in the field” (234). Such work, they say, will help everyone who shares the disciplinary space around writing, especially when WPE scholars can lend their research and theory-making abilities to everyone else. That research can go beyond the “primarily *reactive*” sorts that WPE is accustomed to, “claiming a little ground here and there where possible, but frequently under pressure to follow others’ leads” (239). Instead, scholars should embrace “the large territory open in front” of them” in order to “make significant strides away from reactive and toward generative practices in teaching and in scholarship” (240).

What if we could do both? The “reactive” seems to create exigence and connection with those who often cannot see the “large territory” because their classroom-view obscures it. Further, what if we didn’t limit our generative work to the lofty (and

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<sup>45</sup> I should note that all of the essays in this volume, *Teaching Writing Teachers*, focus to some extent on the shared interests of K-12 teachers, English educators, and Composition programs.

bordered) field of Composition? That is, what if we could change the nature of “literature-based high-school courses” to make more room for writing? What if we were to reconsider how we train writing teachers to blur some of the lines between *future* and *current*, *preservice* and *inservice*? I appreciate the distinction that Estrem and Reid make about the relative positions of teachers-in-training: K-12 training holds prospective teachers in the student position until they’ve earned a credential. TA training often occurs concurrently with “real” teaching. It’s interesting, by the way, that we give “real teacher” status to TAs but not to student teachers, when those who’ve been training to be teachers have often spent more time preparing than their counterparts at higher levels. I don’t necessarily think this is inappropriate, but I think what’s missing on both sides is a necessary submersion in the complementary areas of theory and practice. As I’ve attempted to illustrate in earlier sections, preservice teachers (and, subsequently, inservice teachers) are often lacking in training in or access to important theoretical discussions in their discipline, while those preparing for university-level roles generally have little background in pure pedagogical theories. Perhaps I’m wrong about the latter observation—I haven’t examined it as thoroughly in this work—but I don’t think so. And, while there is some crossover between English Education and Composition in research and publication, that crossover is narrower than it could be. It makes sense, then, that those training new TAs likely have less background in more general pedagogical theories while those training new K-12 teachers have more limited backgrounds in disciplinary theories.

In my particular context, my role crosses disciplinary and departmental boundaries. I teach courses in both English and teacher education, oversee developmental English courses, and help mentor preservice English teachers. Unfortunately, the built-in bridge comes with its own difficulties. First, just because I fill

multiple roles that cross boundaries doesn't mean I always have the time or ability to balance them, to research in each area deeply and methodically. Further, because our departments are small enough to share my position, I'm left to talk to myself, essentially. I don't mean to shortchange my colleagues, who are interested in and supportive of interdepartmental cooperation. Moving from cooperation to collaboration is more difficult, though. The slow speed of institutional, structural change also poses a significant barrier. I imagine this is true in larger institutions as well. That is, an English Educator and the WPA might sit down together, but how empowered are they to make actual change? And would they even agree on what sorts of change should be made? Then, what are the chances that, even if they work together to strengthen training for writing teachers, such efforts will make any significant changes in the structures outside of their local context? In other words, let's assume that they build a program in which there are opportunities for cross-talk, for training that marries the potential theory-wealth of the TA practicum (for lack of a better term) with the practical strength of a teacher prep program, and for rich, complex, field-based experiences with all of the elements I've written about already. I think such programs must exist already, in fact. Even given those assumptions, what influence does such cooperation have on, say, the suburban high school where a graduate will end up, struggling under the weight of 160 teenagers and a curriculum based on novel units and a grammar handbook? I have no answers here, except to hope that, the more we achieve both horizontal and vertical cross-talk, the more solutions we'll develop.

#### What I've learned about institutional factors

As I researched programs in order to design my own, I found that undergraduates serving in instructional or quasi-instructional roles is quite common. For decades, students have filled roles from unofficial helpers in individual courses to

teaching assistants responsible for whole courses (Smith 1). The aim of such programs is generally to “increase the quality of the student learning experience within the standard curricula of academic programs,” with potentially positive residual effects for faculty, the institution (usually staffing or financial benefit), and the student in the mentoring/teaching role (3).

I could only find two in such programs, though, for which teacher training was the primary goal. The first, a program at Ithaca College, ran for several years in the 1990s. The Ithaca program was a senior-level course that allowed high-achieving students (they had to have earned high grades in multiple writing courses) to “serve as a Teacher’s Apprentice in a writing course, correcting and commenting on student papers, tutoring, leading class exercises and discussions, and participating in conferences” (Meyer “Standing Stall” 103). In 1996, Margaret Dietz Meyer, whose role at Ithaca was similar to my current role at my institution, recruited students to apprentice in an experimental, accelerated developmental course. She had a vested interest in both teacher training and developmental education: when she writes about the apprenticeship, she calls her apprentice-students “future colleagues” (“Journal” 81). She makes the case for her department’s program by positioning it as a process similar to student teaching but for candidates not necessarily interested in teaching in the K-12 classroom and (as of 1997 anyway) by claiming that it is “one of the most thorough, most successful Teacher Preparation mentoring situations” she has found (81). I wrote to Dr. Meyer after reading the two essays she’d written on her program, along with two by apprentices, published alongside hers. She wrote to me that, though her apprentices weren’t necessarily preparing for a teaching career, she is still convinced that the developmental classroom could be an ideal place for preservice teachers to “learn and practice methods of teaching English in a setting conducive to learning.” Because “the challenges facing

public high school English teachers are so numerous and real,” she says, “even able and willing pre-service teachers may feel overwhelmed if they lack strong methods preparation” (personal communication).

Meyer is retired now, but she fondly remembers mentoring teaching apprentices. In our correspondence, she explained that the program dissolved when the college decided to stop offering basic writing courses, but its original description indicated that students could apprentice in one of several writing courses. I can only speculate—I wrote to the current director of the composition program at Ithaca but received no response—but it appears that the apprenticeship course did not live beyond Meyer’s time at Ithaca. A note about her resignation is appended to her second essay about the apprenticeship.

I only make this point because I have experienced the difficulty of sustaining a program as an individual instructor. When I first proposed the apprenticeship, everyone was interested, even excited—students, colleagues, the Director of Teacher Education. As I’ve described before, when I initially recruited students, I was petitioning to have their time spent with me in my developmental course count toward their required field experience hours for the teacher education program. Though the apprenticeship (and the rest of their training) met and exceeded our state’s requirement for field experience in every other way, because the apprenticeship was not occurring in an accredited K-12 classroom, the department (understandably) wasn’t willing to make an exception in our case, especially since the program was technically experimental. So, all I could offer my students was useful experience and a great addition to their resumes. I lost one recruit early on and another mid-semester because of the lack of compensation<sup>46</sup>. Two students

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<sup>46</sup> Other casualties: Two students who initially expressed interest never followed up with paperwork. When I contacted them, one couldn’t find the time, and the other said she just didn’t feel confident enough in her own writing (that student, interestingly enough, won an award after her first year of teaching in an urban school district).

worked through until the end of the semester, and one returned to help in the Spring. In a later semester, I was able to secure funding for an apprentice through our tutoring budget. In exchange, I offered to take on extra students in my course. I was able to recruit another apprentice for a different developmental course because, like Meyer's students, she hoped to gain some experience in teaching at the college level, but I could not offer her compensation. In the meantime, because of enrollment factors and my residence in the English department, the literacy course from which I had recruited apprentices and in which I had initially trained them was reassigned to a member of the teacher education department. Ultimately, then, I learned that a university, even a small one, is an unwieldy machine with a great number of working parts. Even good ideas with positive results can be the collateral damage of otherwise necessary institutional factors.

The other program, which gives me hope that my own could continue someday, has had a more than ten-year history. At Western Michigan University, selected undergraduate preservice teachers are assigned sections of English 100, a basic writing course, and mentored by a counterpart TA from the pool of graduate students teaching freshman composition. Both groups of teachers spend a semester in a preparation course, and they spend a week together in a combined training session. In their essay on the WMU program, Jonathan Bush, Georgina Hill, and Jeanne LaHaie (who represented English Education, Composition, and Basic Writing, respectively) explain that both their teaching candidates and their developmental students reflect their "moderately selective" enrollment (144-146). The program runs with participation from all of the stakeholders, and undergraduate teachers meet with their GTA mentors on a weekly basis. I browsed the English department webpage at WMU to find out if the program was still operational (their essay was published in 2005) and noticed that Jonathan Bush is now the chair of the English department. I emailed to ask about the program, and he affirmed its

continued success. When I asked about the interdepartmental cooperation necessary to manage such a program, his reply sounded familiar: he is himself the physical link, and his position likely gives him the authority to make it work. Incidentally, he was also instrumental in forming a CCCC Special Interest Group on Writing Teacher Education that has provided just the sort of network that Estrem and Reid (and many others) described.

#### What I've learned about teacher training

I began this project with the conviction that my students needed a different sort of training opportunity, an interactive, intermediary experience with real students and real teaching but without the pressure of managing a classroom. I wanted it to be more than tutoring, more than observation, but less than student teaching or even a conventional teaching assistantship. The teaching apprenticeship was meant to help preservice teachers gain experience and confidence while keeping alive the active inquiry and theory-building of their preparation courses. The program achieved this goal in many ways, and my students, I think, were better teachers for it. I didn't account for the extent to which institutional pressures and my own weaknesses as a teacher and mentor—inherent problems in a traditional student teaching experience as well—would impact the program.

I hope that, by discussing my, and the apprenticeship's, failures as well as successes, I've avoided the monologue that so many have cautioned against, urging us instead to engage our own failures instead of "colonizing" our teacher candidates with stories of "what works." In the world of teacher preparation, we're always talking about engaging students, about developing plans and methods that work. Perhaps this is where I need to soften my stance toward theory-first, pedagogy-second (or never) scholars. That is, if we're always trying to get students engaged in what we're teaching—we

dedicate whole units to student engagement in teacher preparation courses—we're rarely considering whether or not what we're teaching is worth learning. This part I haven't figured out yet, but I'm working on it.

Daniel Lindley, in his book on developing teachers (rather than, say, developing curricula), relates a story of a novice teacher who was frustrated after a strong lesson that, nonetheless, did not hold students' attention—much like an example I offered from Jenna's teaching. After the lesson, he and the student teacher discussed an inherent problem: "She wanted her students to know the material, and how else was she to 'cover' it efficiently?" (52). His answer likely surprised her. He wondered "whether covering is worth the emotional cost" (52). Later, he describes a now-antique piece of research, from Florida State in the late 1960s, an extensive, long-term study of English curricula in which the researchers concluded that the curricular program in use essentially didn't matter: "a teacher-proof curriculum is an elusive quantity, perhaps unattainable" (qtd in Lindley 37).

"The fallacy," Lindley says, "is in the assumption that there will be a connection between what is taught and what actually happens in the teaching" (37). "Indeed," he concludes, "almost all things that making teaching work or not work—originate within the teacher herself" (38). Lindley focuses on the psyche of the teacher for most of his book with the apparent notion that the effectiveness of any curriculum (or any approach or any theory, I guess) is dependent on the effectiveness of the teacher. I'd tend to agree, were it not for this caution from Ritchie and Wilson: "Instead of promoting a tolerant but rigorous dialogue among plural philosophies, a more common result is a relativistic stance that forecloses dialogue and debate, an 'anything is right if it works for you' way of thinking that, in fact, constitutes a failure to critically examine assumptions and beliefs—to investigate what we mean when we say, 'It works.'" (*Teacher Narrative* 63). Lindley isn't necessarily advocating a relativistic stance, but following his argument to its end

could lead there. He would likely agree with Ritchie and Wilson that students need a “place for dialogue between competing assumptions and beliefs about education” and “for discussions about what counts as knowledge in education” (64). “Indeed,” they ask, “where is there time or place for simply reflecting on the education they have endured?” (64). I hope that both my writing instruction course and the apprenticeship provided such opportunities, but I’m sure there were times when I drew the line for dialogue, discussion, and reflection at the beginning of those courses—my students’ current “education,” focusing on the assumptions and beliefs I favored, wasn’t always part of that critical inquiry. I often fell into a trap Ritchie and Wilson describe, presenting theory

in a way that makes it seem ‘authoritative’ rather than dialogic, not enabling us to talk back to it and use it to strengthen our work. We need to be reminded and to help students understand that rather than being ‘real’, fixed, and empirically established, the meaning of experience and of theory must be continually open to revision and dialogue as the participants, the contexts, and the perspectives change, as narratives are revised and retold (18-19).

As much as I’m annoyed by what I perceive as hype around reflexivity, I keep coming back to it, coming to terms with the discomfort it produces. “When reflection ‘works,’” Kathleen Blake Yancey writes, “it raises as many questions as it answers, perhaps more. It works from the particular to the general without ever leaving the particular.” This necessary process forces us to “articulate the tacit,” “frame our observations multiply,” and “look for a coherence that patterns without disguising or discoloring or misrepresenting” and thus helps us understand “what we know now and what we need to learn next” (“Theory” 249).

This is where my need for success—making developmental writers “college ready,” forming novices into confident, theoretically-informed teachers, creating an innovative program—muddies the waters. When I was actively reflecting (reflexing?), I

ended up with inconsistent, sometimes incoherent, often emotional and reactive analysis.

Here's a journal from early-on in the apprenticeship:

Things I'm learning:

- Need to be more prepared
- Need to talk to apps more explicitly about teaching decisions I'm making. Why did I skip the style mini-lessons and try to fit them both into today's time, when they were less useful (maybe), and we could only get through one of them?
- Why (\*&(^& does she do that?

Now, with some perspective, more research, and the opportunity to be a little more articulate than I was in my journal, I'm making progress, though it won't benefit the apprentices I trained.

In my earlier chapter, I positioned the apprenticeship as filling the gap between preservice teachers' training and the experiences that compete with it, both in their schooling backgrounds and in their field experiences. I discovered, especially as I visited the apprentices later, that it was more complicated than that—I couldn't draw a clear line between what they had learned with me and some improved teaching experience later. Hepzibah Roskelly and Kathleen Ryan offer a way out for me. Building on Iser's theory of interpretation, Roskelly and Ryan propose that gaps between training and experience (or other sorts of gaps: between theory and practice, between teachers and students, between ideology and reality, and even more concrete gaps such as those between high school and college writing or between English Education and Composition) work as important spaces for growth. When preservice or novice teachers experience an inevitable "culture shift," they can be prompted not to "close the wide gap" but to enter it as a space to "remake theory and practice for themselves" (44). Thus, "the gaps between teacher education and teaching in schools may become more the dynamic sites of

interpretive possibility then merely regrettable divisions” (45). This means, of course, that I have to be okay with leaving some things open for my students. They need my guidance, surely, but perhaps I can get over the notion that I have an obligation to create solutions, to provide answers, to produce success.

In the analogy that Roskelly and Ryan present, Iser’s notion that gaps are necessary for engaging in “interpretive processes: proposing ideas, applying theories, assuming practices” becomes the basis for training teachers who become adept at “both creating and filling *gaps*” (50). Because such gaps are, as Iser writes, “an inducement to communication,” readers (and, thus, teachers) become better at interpretation as they practice moving in gaps. “Seen in this way, gaps are both crucial and positive,” putting novice teachers at “the center of” constructing their own methods, theories, and solutions (51). “Those of us who work English education,” Roskelly and Ryan urge (51), must in turn “resee” the gap between the training contexts we provide and the eventual classrooms our students will (and won’t, in some cases) inhabit.

Roskelly and Ryan, through direct research with student teachers, contend that novice teachers who see themselves as professionals with “the agency and authority to contend with” gaps will be the most successful (55):

Teacher educators need to help student teachers turn the gaps between the high school classroom and their college preparation into possibilities, opportunities to compose the teaching praxis. Recognition of gaps as limit situations rather than barriers is an important start toward developing an understanding of teaching as a problem posing activity always located in particular, and contested, contexts (55).

For both teacher candidates and their mentors, re-envisioning gaps allows us the opportunity to “make meaning through reflection and action: asking questions, pursuing dialogues, doing research, envisioning change, [ . . . ] turning what seem to be intractable problems into workable limit situations” (57). When I visited Bailey in her student teaching classroom, I didn’t see what I hoped to see: a teacher I had trained teaching as I would

teach. I had to first come to terms with the fact that, if I wanted to train teachers who were comfortable with navigating gaps, I had to be comfortable with teachers who would make decisions I would not have made. What I did learn, and what I would count as success, is that Bailey was able to articulate her choices for me. She was, with some prompting, more reflective than the classroom teacher mentoring her.

#### What I've learned about teaching writers

I think Bailey had it right about how much stock I put in modeling writing and in writing conferences. I find the writing conference to still be the most effective tool I have for teaching writers and writing. It's a negotiated space. We reflect on the writing strategies I've presented as well as the work that students have done, but we spend a great deal of time attempting to reconcile those two. I think the conferences, when students take them seriously, also help me to connect to their writing in ways I would not if I hadn't seen it before I evaluate it. Because my developmental classes tend to be small, I conduct conferences right in the classroom, during class time. In some cases, it acts as a motivator for students to be prepared with their latest work when they come to class. When they aren't prepared, they have to schedule appointments at my office. For now, I choose not to deal with the fact that coming to my office is somehow punitive.

At least one colleague has asked how I have class time to spare. My answer is both simple and complicated: over the years, I've stripped out everything that I've determined doesn't help my students become better writers. I suppose that, at some point, I traded other things for the time we spend in conferences, and I'm sure at least a few of those were course elements that I really enjoyed. I've conferenced in-class so long, though, that I don't really remember them.

In the age of privacy hypervigilance, I have to be careful about the specific things I discuss with students during conferences, and I always give students the option of an

office conference. In the semesters when I had one or two apprentices working in the classroom with me, conference time was particularly beneficial because we were able to either meet with more students or offer students multiple perspectives (or both, when we had the time and students were prepared). On conference days, students either worked on their own or met with a group of their peers to read each other's work. Group meetings (I no longer use loaded phrases like "peer editing") are often a mixture of reading, discussion, and off-topic personal conversation. Over the years, I've grown more comfortable with the off-topic, provided it doesn't eclipse the on-topic, since it makes sense to me that students are more likely to trust their writing to and listen to people with whom they've formed relationships. Even more, I consider that some of the richest collaborative sessions I've had about writing have mixed in quite a bit of personal talk.

Responding to student writing is both a joy and a burden<sup>47</sup> for English teachers in every context, but I've come to reject the idea (proposed on multiple sides) that we don't have the time. Atwell and others talk about bearing the cross of responding to student work on their weekends and in their long hours at school. I think we should just work smarter here. What if we really embrace *response* and stop worrying about trying to justify grades? This is not a new idea (I'm thinking about some of Peter Elbow's more

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<sup>47</sup> I once talked with a friend, an instructional dean at a local high school, who said the English teachers at her school wanted to teach writing more or better but couldn't figure out how to manage grading 160 papers more than once or twice a semester. In her memoir, Penny Kittle responds to a critical letter to the editor that asked for teachers to require an essay a week from students. She says this is a good idea, if she only had the time to grade them. She then does the math for reading and responding to student writing with the typical student-load for a high school teacher, an all-too familiar "we already work really hard" polemic (*Greatest* 84-87). While I sympathize with her, I would also think an essay a week is unrealistic because of the amount of time it can take to produce good writing, especially for a novice writer. The content of such pieces either doesn't need much time to develop, or those students have a great deal more time than they do now to focus on their writing. Nonetheless, responding/grading/evaluating are a perennial problem for teachers.

radical proposals), and it takes some getting used to for students. I honestly would need to think a while and talk with my friends in middle and high school about how this would work in a number-driven assessment system, but here's how I do it in Developmental Composition, a pass/fail scenario. First, I spend a great deal of class time—at least half of our allotted time—in conferences. Toward the end of the semester, when deadlines are closer together, I spend even more time working with writers individually. For each of the essays students write, I or one of my apprentices will have seen the piece at least three times. We use a form to make notes about what students are working on, how much progress they've made, what questions or concerns they have, and what feedback we've offered. The result is that students receive the bulk of my feedback (and others' feedback) *before* a piece of writing is submitted.

I've written about this in an earlier chapter, but one of the most valuable changes to my own pedagogy wasn't my own idea. Jenna helped me shape the other side of my response procedure. It's not a perfect idea, but it's so much better than slaving away alone for hours, bleeding all over papers, only to see those efforts either shut down students' motivation or get ignored (or both). Early in the apprenticeship, even though we had given students a great deal of feedback during class, and even though students didn't earn a conventional grade for the course, I still felt obligated to approximate a grade for each essay, complete with traditional written comments and editing marks. I talked with Jenna honestly about the potential tedium here, since, by the time students' essays were submitted, we'd already read them in multiple draft stages. Some pieces were really encouraging: students had taken our feedback to heart and had committed to producing the best work they could. But others hadn't done so. There's nothing more frustrating than seeing a final draft that looks exactly the same as the previous one but having to go through the now-artificial task of commenting on it.

Often, by the time I had students' work ready to give back, they were well into their next essays, and I couldn't even tell if anyone was reading the comments and feedback I had given them. One day, Jenna suggested that, as students were getting to the point that they could contextualize the feedback on their first essay, as they neared completion of the second one, we should bring a copy of the first essay along with a few specific areas of strength and weakness that would inform the second one. We had been doing this informally, based generally on memory, but we began systematically building in response-conferences for each completed essay in a semester. In many cases, we were able to celebrate the final work with students as their readers. In others, we would simply acknowledge that the student hadn't really followed through with working on the piece until it communicated clearly and significantly to a reader. With those students we could strategize about motivation or time management to help them do justice to their writing.

In every case, we discussed specific elements of the text that the writer could apply to his or her current project. The ability to talk through our responses meant we could focus on the big picture in each text, looking for overall patterns that could inform that writer's overall progress. When necessary, we could clarify a concept for a student or make a note that we needed to reteach something for the whole class. Again, in every case, we had already invested in that piece of writing, meaning we already had notes and editing marks from earlier conferences on which to draw, so the response-conference became an opportunity to talk with a writer about his development.

I'm sure many of my colleagues would regard this process as too time-consuming. Again, I've consciously traded one block of time for another. Instead of toiling on my own, writing back to a student (potentially) through my frustration or fatigue, I'm spending a moment comparing the submitted text with the notes I've gathered along the way. I read it through, attempting to be just a reader. If something stands out to me, I

make a quick mark so I won't forget it, then make a few general notes to myself. This means that when I respond to the essay as a teacher, I'm looking directly at a writer, talking to her, for example, about why a comma splice can be confusing for a reader. If I'm not satisfied that she gets it, I'll find a few more and even have her find a few while she's sitting across from me. If I'm still not satisfied, I point her to some additional resources and we start talking about her finding a friend who can help with copyediting. When surface errors are masking structural problems, we've already dealt with those as structural problems.

This process, for me at least, has helped to rectify some thorny problems I've had with evaluating student writing. I don't find that students do much with copyediting marks after an assignment has been submitted. I think we often "mark" essays because we feel compelled to do so, as if, by not marking every comma splice, we're accessories-after-the-fact to some linguistic crime. Again, I find addressing surface errors with students before they've submitted a final essay is much more productive. During the response conference, the feedback I'm giving to students is general, with some specific examples from that text when necessary. In the best conferences, we can turn to the student's current work to illustrate and apply. In some cases, we can even discuss how the nature of the current text either poses different problems or solves problems the student had with the earlier work. In a few cases, I have to say things like "I know that opener worked really well here, but I'm not sure it fits what you've told me you're trying to do with this essay."

I've also noticed that I'm able to mostly prevent students from latching on to one or two comments and dismissing the rest or my having to explain what I meant when I marked a passage. A few times in my earlier career, I was embarrassed to admit that I didn't know what I meant by a mark or a comment. I think that must be the byproduct of

attempting to grade student writing as quickly as we can, not because we don't want to spend more time on it, but because we often don't have much time. When we're forced to rush through grading, we resort to shorthand, one-size-fits-all rubrics, and cryptic margin notes. When my son was a second-grader, he consistently earned low grades on his school writing. I'd see entries like "Persuasion rough draft: 70, Persuasion final copy: 70" in the online gradebook. When I'd ask him how he earned those grades or what his teacher said he could do to improve his writing, he was always unsure. The most specific idea he could provide was that he wasn't finishing them on time. When he would bring his "compositions" home, they'd have a few misspelled words corrected and a word or two in the margins. I was as mystified by the grade and feedback as my son was.

If I had to provide more extensive written feedback or to provide feedback as the basis for a grade, I would likely borrow Jennifer Berne's "template" recommendation that includes some specific "types of response for every paper," which would "speed up the work without sacrificing too much of the valuable contribution that written response makes to student writing" (113). The template is adaptable, but she recommends giving students two margin questions per page to prompt revision plus some general end commentary in which the teacher takes on the roles of reader, coach, fellow writer, and classroom manager. An example end comment, then, might include

1. a personal reader's note
2. a note about the development of the piece through the process, such as a reminder of what peer reviewers suggested or an affirmation of the effectiveness of some revision choice
3. a focused suggestion on a single trait or passage
4. notes on how further instruction or attention to a previously-taught concept could continue to improve writing (112-115).

We're still refining this process, and it takes a great deal of explanation for everyone to get onboard with the progress-not-grades system. In the first semester after

I'd begun using the response conference (which meant I wasn't giving back papers with grades on them), I spent a large portion of class before the first essay was due explaining my philosophy of improvement over achievement in a developmental course. This course is credit/no credit, I told students, so we don't have to worry with grades on their essays. Instead, the final determination of who would earn credit would come from a combination of factors, including a final essay that would be evaluated by a committee and my own evaluation of their progress throughout the semester. During our conferences, they should also keep track of their progress themselves. The important thing was to continue to revise a piece until both the writer and readers (teacher, teaching apprentice, student writing groups) felt good about it, and to try to work within the deadlines. The only essay that would be formally graded, at least in a summative sense, would be the final essay. All of the other evaluation was formative. In the following weeks, several students asked where they could find the grades on their essays. I tried to patiently explain my assessment process again, to varying responses. One student seemed to understand but still wondered, even after the response conference, whether or not her essay was good enough. Another was still confused and continued to ask throughout the course what his grade was, and still another wondered what "was the point" if they didn't get a grade.

Such confusion is inevitable, especially since even my colleagues don't always understand the process. The administrative office on campus responsible for determining whether or not conditionally-accepted students will move past their provisional status also tracks those students' progress throughout their first semester as a further measure of accountability and support. I finally had to write an explanatory memo for them, since, regardless of the course's pass/fail designation, they were having trouble figuring out students' grades at midterm. When I explained my response process once in a

department meeting, one colleague, usually a really congenial lady, said “Well, I’d have a lot more time if I stopped grading papers.”

What I’ve learned about myself (and why that matters)

Ultimately, then, I am certain that the most valuable thing the apprenticeship offered was an opportunity for me to refine my own theoretical positions both in teaching writing and in training teachers. I needed the push to construct some sort of coherent theoretical/philosophical stance when my tendency is toward eclecticism. In many ways, these two positions have developed as parallels to each other. My approach to teaching writing has become much more about arming students with some confidence and some tools with the hope that they’ll be able to make what Deborah Dean calls “writerly choices” (xii). In her book on the writing workshop in the secondary classroom, Dean describes holding on to Process in the sense that it has become a “set of tools” she can use “instead of the track [her] course runs on, a way of thinking about what writers do instead of a series of assignments students associate with school writing, a way of thinking that might make school writing valuable to all the writing students might do in a lifetime” (ix). She acknowledges that this is what most writing teachers want, but she says she’s learned to intentionally talk about strategies and processes and about how students might make “writerly choices” that will serve them in their current task as well as in other tasks (xii) rather than “a sequence of ‘activities’” or “requirements for completion of a project” (x). This makes sense to me.

I’ve also been able to streamline the writing concepts I teach my developmental writers, and these are the same as those I present to advanced writers. I teach students three abstract concepts as anchors for the semester: exigence, focus, and significance. We use their writer’s notebook to help them think about exigence. What were the things that drove them to write? I have to acknowledge that the most of what drives them to

write is the requirement that they do it, but given that, what makes them choose what they do? How can they take what they've written and make it clear to someone else? How can they make someone else care enough to read it? That's how we move from exigence to significance. And read all the way through? That's focus.

My approach to teacher preparation should be the same—pushing aside the need for coverage and instead opening the door to theories, presenting strategies and approaches, and helping preservice and novice teachers gain some confidence to move through the inevitable gaps on their own. I think, for all of its flaws, the apprenticeship provided much of this. It also forced me to model for my students how, in real time, I muddle through.

Writing about teaching has taught me more than anything else. If I had it to do again, I'd require my apprentices to write more. I'd talk to them about how much learning occurs when reflection becomes fixed for a moment, rather than existing only in a fluid, intangible way. We're doing this all the time as we teach, but forcing ourselves to record something makes it real. Perhaps my reflective moments weren't quite as analytical and organized as the stuff of Yancey's proposal, but they've provided me with a great deal of insight that otherwise would have been fleeting or overlooked.

My journal, July 10

Today, I'm doing planning for my fall class and wishing I had apprentices here to talk to about this process. I'm collaborating (read: bowing to an edict of standardization) with colleagues on Friday, so maybe that will help scratch my itch. I find that the more I read, the more I want to change about how I teach. I'm currently writing procedural handouts for my students (and me) related to practices I already do but aren't organized enough and practices I want to start doing.

My bad angel keeps reminding me that laziness will set in at some point, and I won't follow through. We'll lapse back into poorly-presented lessons on thesis statements followed by uninformed and underprepared writing groups.

I'm deciding that there's a sweet spot somewhere. I try to be authoritative but not unreasonable with my students. I encourage and cajole and sometimes threaten (like when I told Brian I wanted to punch him in the face—I think he knew I was joking, sort of). But there will be growth and regression, sometimes simultaneously, and it's frustrating. *How do I help my apprentices put this cycle into perspective?*

September 10

I always feel at loose ends in the early days, especially in this class. Maybe if I were Nancie Atwell-organized, it would be different. We did some intro stuff and did writing territories. Some students seemed to get into it and some seemed really reluctant or apathetic. Hoping encouragement and regular writing will make the difference. Glad to have Jenna back again. I'm wondering if I'll ever be able to teach a writing class again without another skilled writer. It really helps students to have the additional perspective, even early on. I challenged students to add to their territories over the weekend. We'll see.

These journals, in all of their sloppiness and inconsistency, helped me to come to terms with a few things: I love writing, even when I don't want to do it. I'll never be as organized as the teachers I admire, but I can keep trying, and I can tell myself that, if my teaching were fully structured and organized, that might eliminate some valuable gaps I, and those I train, need to work through.

Reviving the program now may be beyond my control, but if I can get enough support from my colleagues in both departments and find ways to sell the program as beneficial on other levels, it could be workable again. It would also benefit from support outside our institution, which I think could begin to answer how we might influence not just our future teachers but those who will mentor them. If I could collaborate with a small group of inservice teachers, my apprentices and I could learn from them and they from us. This project has given me the luxury—I think I can call it that—of being able to read, research, and theorize as I'm teaching. Certainly, all good teachers do this, but I have realized that teaching, if I let it, can swallow up all of my focus, leaving me without the time or motivation to visit the world of scholarship. It takes effort to research and write while I teach. It follows, then, that most secondary teachers have less opportunity.

Such a collaboration would also help provide opportunities for future apprentices to reconcile what we do in our developmental composition course with what they will face in middle and high school classrooms. For now, I can say with certainty that the apprentices who worked with me benefited from spending a semester or more concentrating on teaching writing without much curricular and administrative clutter. The students we served are, for the most part, very similar to the students they'll encounter in their future classrooms; they're just a little older.

Nancie Atwell has written, "The longer I teach, the simpler my teaching becomes," and "my thinking about teaching has grown less cluttered" (Lessons ix). I want to get here eventually. For now, I'm embracing the gaps, living in the liminal spaces, making a little more progress with each new classroom draft.

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