

Traditionally, graduate teaching assistants have been taught writing pedagogy by giving them courses or workshops, having them go into classrooms to practice what they have learned, and then evaluating them. I think joining the teaching, practice, and evaluation of pedagogy in team teaching is more effective. The demands on the teaching assistants and on the pedagogy teacher are formidable in the team teaching approach—teaching assistants have to get used to working with a person who is both colleague and supervisor, and the pedagogy teacher has to deal with confusing teaching situations. However, as both the SIUE teaching assistants and their students attest, the benefits easily compensate for the demands.

I used to think that because I had taught certain methods in a pedagogy class they had been learned and were now being effectively practiced in the teaching assistants' writing classes. I now know better. The methods had been learned, but they were not always being well executed. And in many cases only an experienced writing teacher would be able to assess why and how the execution was failing. Sitting in the back of a room every now and then allows the pedagogy teacher to see some problems and to talk about resolving them. However, working in the front of the room with the teaching assistant allows the pedagogy teacher to see several problems *and* to participate in their resolution. Teaching writing has more to do with showing than telling, and the same is true for the teaching of writing pedagogy. Team teaching fosters the showing essential to learning to write and learning to teach writing.

Whether a university's freshman writing program is large or small, gaining information as to the quality of the program is difficult. Without that information, though, it is impossible to determine which areas need improvement. Team teaching an hour a week with teaching assistants—or with part-time teachers—gives pedagogy teachers or program directors a much clearer sense of what is happening in a program than can be gained through observing classrooms, reviewing written student evaluations of teachers, or talking in the halls. Since team teaching allows the evaluator to participate in the teaching experience of the teacher and in the learning experience of the students, it allows an access not otherwise available. At SIUE, in addition to furthering the training of the teaching assistants, I have discovered a variety of classroom strengths and weaknesses through team teaching. I doubt that composition specialists elsewhere would encounter precisely the same problems and characteristics were they to team teach with their teaching assistants or part-time teachers in their particular programs. However, I am sure that they would better understand what is happening in their school's classrooms; that with that understanding they would effect better teacher training; and that the better trained teachers would result in better student writers. I am convinced that in any university team teaching is a valuable means both of training and evaluating teachers and of gaining insight into the freshman writing program.

Footnotes

¹The five teaching assistants participating in the experiment in 1985 were Wil Fennell, Renee Hoskin, Toni Oplt, Brad Schmidt, and Donna Singleton. Toni's article, "Caroline Gordon's 'A Last Day in the Fields': Reading, Thinking and Writing," appeared in the *Illinois English Bulletin* 72 (1985): 25-30.

²The five teaching assistants participating in the 1986 experiment were Ed Flure, Julie Full-Lopez, Susan Gabriel, Lisa Langstraat, and Jack Selbert.

ASSUMING SUCCESS: THE STUDENT WRITER AS APPRENTICE

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Terms such as "student-centered," "facilitative," and "collaborative" have been used to describe contemporary process-oriented writing classrooms for some years now, but we are only beginning to appreciate what happens when teachers surrender some of their traditional authority as evaluators of prose to become mentors to students in the process of *becoming* writers. Our more benign treatment of student writers stems in part from a sense that students will write better if we support them sufficiently and place them in situations that prevent or at least forestall the consequences of failure. We do this, I think, in part to compensate for a lengthy reign of grammatical terror that has given English teachers reputations as nit-picking pursuers of split infinitives and dangling modifiers. We champion more liberal ways of describing the new writing classroom as a means of expurgating collective guilt.

I am certain our instincts are correct in moving toward the fashioning of environments in which writing is produced by students in fuller control of the processes of composing, in which they are given more support in the invention of ideas, more advice as they draft, revise, and edit, more response from actual readers—their teachers, colleagues, and others. But we can go beyond just the emphasis on support, and beyond the assurance that students can take risks because they need not fear failure. I think we should operate on an assumption we are actually trained *not* to make: that students can and regularly do succeed in the writing classroom and beyond. A supportive writing environment—whether a workshop, seminar, or class—ought not to provide just a safety net against failure, but a training ground for inevitable success.

Naturally, most teachers are delighted when their students do well and they reward successful performances. But we are still rather too surprised by good writing when we get it. Listen to an English teacher colleague when he or she discovers a piece of noteworthy student writing. The tone will be almost apologetic: "It's a good essay. Of course, the piece *could* be better. It loses control in several of its examples and the thesis could be more convincingly developed. The kid is no Milton or Mill, but at least his *basic* ideas are *interesting*."

We resort to equivocal language like this as a hedge against colleagues finding fault in what we have momentarily admired. One of our problems, in-born and in-bred, as English teachers in composition classes is that no matter how well students have written we undoubtedly have read something better. We are always measuring student writing by the very highest standards of literature, produced by men and women whose achievements as writers are more properly regarded as anomalies than norms. We are so stuck upon the idea of literature as a privileged form of composition that we cannot conceive of full success as anything short of *Areopagitica* or *On Liberty*.

Fortunately, more and more writing teachers are accepting ampler boundaries for the domains of good writing, discovering whole worlds of successful writing that may never send representatives, next century, into a Norton Anthology. (Teachers of technical writing have been wandering in these territories for decades.) We are more aware than ever that almost all the stu-

dents who enter our classrooms will spend part of their lives writing, and that a great many of them will write adequately and productively without literary ambitions.

Near the end of a corporate writing training session, I once watched thirty or so mid-level management people respond to an assignment to compose a memo arguing against a budget cut for their office. Barely twenty minutes after starting, each of six groups had produced impassioned, detailed, and polished arguments. In far less time than we might give a class just to discuss a topic, these professional people, none of whom would consider himself or herself a writer by trade, had produced successful writing. Of course, they were accustomed to measuring success not only by what they said but by how rapidly they could say it. Their memos cannot gestate for three weeks, cannot enjoy endless revisions. Each group, pooling resources, had produced the best work it could in the time available. And all were successful.

And what surprised me at the training session was that success. Defined by the absolute standards of the English Ph.D. specializing in Shakespeare (my own background) no one succeeds—not Ben Jonson, not Christopher Marlowe, not Tennessee Williams, not Sam Shepard. Defined by the world of writing by which our society grows and thrives, success is a more regular thing, but no less extraordinary an achievement. It occurs in offices, in classrooms, in newspapers, in magazines, anywhere writing takes place. And it happens all the time.

In *In Search of Excellence*, Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman point out what most of us learn sooner or later: that few people are as good as they think they are, but people produce more and better work when they can assume self-worth, when they can expect success, when they meet positive reinforcement, and when they feel in control of their situations. To quote Peters and Waterman's advice for managers: "Treat people as adults. Treat them as partners; treat them with dignity; treat them with respect" (238). If you think English teachers have a good track record in this regard, ask people outside the profession to tell you their favorite horror story from an English class. Everybody seems to have one and almost all of them involve public scorn or humiliation for a grammatical *faux pas*. Such experiences lead to a diminution of self-respect and an avoidance of writing.

Of course, students won't succeed just because we tell them they can, but it is a good beginning. If we expect students to write well, they *may*. If we program them to fail, they almost certainly will. We all know teachers who begin their writing classes by announcing that they don't give A's. My advice to a student trapped in such a section is to drop it, fast. The teacher is a failure—and projecting his or her shortcomings onto students.

But even if we speak optimistically about achievement in our classes, action must follow words if we are to convince students that success is a reasonable goal. We must act naturally and habitually on an assumption of student competence. This isn't always easy. I'm afraid few of us, for example, are strong enough to resist the occasional howler we come across in our papers, but we should try. Belief in the competence of students is an attitude that must be steadily and routinely cultivated. Sometimes we have to go out of our way to assert that principle.

Several years ago I asked the publisher of a textbook I was writing to pay some students to review the manuscript. Now, the publisher was more than accustomed to having reviewers with academic credentials read and comment on manuscripts, but it hadn't occurred to them to ask the people who would actually use the textbook whether its prose made sense. I shouldn't have been surprised, but I found the students' com-

ments as perceptive as those of the professional reviewers, and I made many changes in my manuscript as a result of the students' criticisms.

Fortunately, we are growing more accustomed to the presence of student work in guides to composition, but the fact remains that model essays in many textbooks and handbooks are still as apt to be the work of editors and graduate students as of real undergraduates. (How else do you think it is possible to load fifteen different kinds of parenthetical footnote references into the sample research essay?) Yet the fault isn't with the publishers. Several years ago, when for a textbook I deliberately chose a student essay that was something less than perfect—not to suggest that imperfection was a goal, but to provide a model a typical student could reasonably expect to better—the academic reviewers weren't happy. These experienced instructors wanted the piece reworked to repair the obvious blemishes. Well, reworking student essays can be a little like airbrushing a centerfold. Things sure look good on the page, but that isn't the way they exist in nature. And thinking they do just sets everyone up for disappointment and disillusionment. I'd like student essays in textbooks to be real student essays—as a measure of the faith we have in them. When they aren't, textbook authors should have the guts to say so: let's call it "truth in labeling."

I'd also prefer if we would begin thinking of student writers as apprentices—even though the analogy breaks down often enough to expose embarrassing flaws in our systems of education. An apprentice is someone who works with a master—someone already proficient in a trade, activity, or art. The master selects apprentices on the basis of talent and agrees to give them the training they need over an extended period of time, to teach the fundamentals of the trade, to show them the processes, habits, tricks, and techniques of the mystery, the "body English" that can't be explained in words alone. He or she gives them the opportunity to grow gradually into expertise, collaborating on small jobs first or on portions of bigger ones, building minor routines into major ones. The master expects the apprentices to fail occasionally in the process of learning, but continuity is assumed. Both master and apprentices are bound by mutual investments of time and effort. The master labors with the youth to see the craft continue; the apprentices expect to profit by their new knowledge.

We, of course, cannot choose our students, cannot work with them over long periods of time, often don't write enough ourselves to be credible models. But treating students as apprentices assumes that—given the necessary time, training, encouragement, and opportunities—they will become capable writers. If we cannot actually replicate an apprenticeship system, we can perhaps adopt its major principle: the anticipation of success. But we must be sure not to define that success too narrowly, or only in terms we understand; we should be careful about assuming too certainly what students will do with the writing skills we give them.

After all, we can never predict exactly how we have touched a student. I remember only too vividly the day when a former Shakespeare student of mine appeared at my office door, decked in a glittering uniform, looking for all the world like Stringfellow Hawke or Steve Canyon. On an Air Force leave in the United States for several weeks, he had dropped in to let me know that he was now a NATO pilot, flying missions over Europe, nuclear weapons aboard his craft. He described, almost poetically, the thrill of supersonic flight and how, guiding his craft, sailing his megatons of nuclear destruction near the Iron Curtain, he would

think of passages from Shakespeare he had learned in my course. My God, I wondered, what passages was he thinking of?

When we teach students how to write, we are liberating them to say whatever their world, personal or professional, encourages them to say. We cannot anticipate what they will write, or the successes they will know, or how they will measure those successes. I will close with a piece of student writing that shows how the definition of success can stretch beyond our poor powers to predict it. The passage was the last journal entry produced by a student whose performance in a freshman English class had been — to that point — mediocre. He was getting a "D," richly earned. The only thing he had shown any enthusiasm for all semester was sentence-combining. I had just about written him off, but it turns out he had succeeded as writer despite me, despite school. Here's what the writing course had enabled him to say.

Unlike many of the students going to school here at the University of Texas in Austin, I know exactly what I want to make out of myself in life. I'm going to be one of the world's best carpenters. My school career is coming to an end. I'm giving up this senseless work that has been upsetting me for the last few months.

I will find a place next to my old friends in a free and easy life, easy on my nerves, tough in other respects. I will be the strong, dark-skinned carpenter cutting his rafters in the hot sun, my saw screaming, my helpers nailing the wood together, impressing the inspector who watches, trying to find mistakes. I will drive up to the job site, attracting all the carpenters on the street. My new four wheel drive pickup will back up to my frame package, the wheels tall and wide, the paint clean and shining. I'll travel to Mexico just for fun whenever I feel like it. After saving enough money I'm going to travel all over the states, stopping whenever I find a place I think is beautiful, build a few houses, see the land and lakes, and move on when I get the urge.

He had learned to write his Declaration of Independence.

Work Cited

Peters, Thomas J. and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. *In Search of Excellence*. New York: Warner, 1982.

TOWARD A TEXT-BASED PEDAGOGY IN THE FRESHMAN COMPOSITION COURSE— WITH TWO PROCESS-ORIENTED WRITING TASKS¹

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In a recent critique of university-level "remedial writing courses," Mike Rose has argued that these courses, unfortunately, ". . . have little conceptual or practical connection to the larger academic writing environment in which our students find themselves" (109). True enough. Yet, *a fortiori*, most typical freshman writing courses — remedial, "developmental," or standard — fail, themselves, to establish those necessary connections to the reading, writing, and thinking behaviors that will be demanded of students in courses beyond the freshman year. Instructors con-

tinue to assign composition tasks in freshman courses that accentuate the "personally relevant and motivating" (109), that involve and reflect the (sometimes precarious) egos of students,² and that fail, above all, to engage students in what Patricia Bizzell has termed the "ethos of academic discourse" (355).

Whether we are training our students in freshman composition classes to write for academic purposes or (less likely, now, in freshman-level courses) for professional purposes, most students will rarely, if ever, regularly generate *transactional* prose (informative, persuasive, scholarly, or technical) in isolation, out of their own general knowledge base. Rather, students will be confronted with either academic or professional writing tasks that surface in relation to *texts* of various kinds (literary, historical, psychological, legal, managerial) or *data* (computer, laboratory-testing, statistical, chemical).

If we assume, then, that freshman composition is now (or should be) largely a course (or series of courses) in which students are trained to write centrally for a wide range of *academic* purposes, we must incorporate a broad sampling of the kinds of texts students are likely to confront in courses and majors beyond the freshman year. We must introduce full, rich, complete texts — from a variety of disciplines and in a variety of subject areas — into the classroom experience and ensure that student interaction with such texts regularly occurs. In short, we must, as Rose insists in connection with so-called "basic" writers (127-28), develop a freshman composition pedagogy that recognizes the "holistic" nature of the enterprise and integrates continually the complex skills of reading, thinking, and writing that must be taught, learned, and internalized. What we are after, ultimately, is the development in our students of those "integrative" abilities, those intellectual "extensions" — an accrual of the "tacit" knowledge — that Michael Polanyi explores in his discussion of "scientific knowing" and perception (138-58):

When we use a tool or a probe and, above all, *when we use language in speech, reading, or writing*, we extend our bodily equipment and become more effective and more intelligent beings. *All human thought comes into existence by grasping the meaning and mastering the use of language*. Little of our mind lives in our natural body; *a truly human intellect dwells in us when our lips shape words and our eyes read print* (159-60; emphasis added).

Generally, though, in order to immerse our freshman students in the panoply of complex skills necessary to generate good writing, we composition instructors have used densely packed anthologies with hundreds of essays by, usually, scores of celebrated writers — from such traditional volumes as *The Norton Reader* or the updated *Patterns for College Writing* to such current volumes as *The Process Reader* or *Life Studies: A Thematic Reader*. And while these sorts of volumes provide students with a considerable number of putative demonstrations of good, and sometimes powerful, writing, they provide students with only fragmentary, partial reading experiences. In a recent study examining a pedagogy designed to enhance the analytical reading skills of college students, Jan Cooper, on behalf of her co-authors, asserts the following:

We want our students to read *whole* books, to experience the richness and depth of the *whole* journey with a writer, even in a freshman composition class. They need to develop the ability to sustain the process of predicting and comprehending over a lengthy piece of discourse. (6)