

be extended to three or more. In fact, the research paper I usually assign in an introduction to literature asks students to bring together three groups of writers. The first group consists of four of the writers read during the semester. Each student must take a theme from one of those writers, discuss it, and show how the writer develops it, dramatizes it, and so on. But that's only the paper's introduction. Next the student must show how this theme emerges in the work of the three other writers, even if, as is often the case, the theme will be hard to detect in contexts different from the original one and different from one another. Perhaps the (re)emergence of the theme will be as much a matter of the inexperienced writer's ingenuity as of the experienced writer's intention. By this point students will have become quite adept at the fine art of "reading in."

Then comes the research, the student's encounter with a second group of writers. She must make copies of her first draft and give them to four of the writers in the class, each of whom will respond to her analysis. (There will be reciprocity of course: she will have to do the same thing for each of her four classmates. Yet another kind of activity "between writers.") In the final draft of her paper, the writer must incorporate portions of the responses she has received — she must quote, paraphrase — and she must make appropriate use of them: either they will serve as supports or they will raise objections that must be considered.

The writer must also do further research, research of a more traditional sort. She has had to deal with one group of writers already, experienced ones; and a second group as well, inexperienced ones. Now she must turn to a group of more or less experienced writers — literary critics, "English teachers in print." Again the operative number is four, but this time it is four critics for each literary work. (Often, though, particularly with a promising class, I do not allow my students to stop there. I ask them to find additional sources: to have friends or family members read the literary works being considered and to get their responses, either in writing or just verbally, either without their having read the writer's first draft or right after they have had that privilege.)

This sort of maneuvering and exchanging "between writers" not only humanizes the entire process of research, not only makes the activity of writing a paper something of a social event, but has the effect of making students less dependent on literary criticism. With a variety of responses at their disposal, they are more likely to regard it as a particular source than as the ultimate solution. To dramatize the fact that literary critics are after all only writers too, I have my class read first Molly Bloom's soliloquy from Joyce's *Ulysses* and then the comments of three famous Joyceans with regard to her (in)famous final "Yes." William York Tindall says that it is indeed a Yes, an affirmation of life, the flesh made key word. Hugh Kenner, on the other hand, insists that it is really a No — Molly is an adultress after all, a recumbent Dubliner as well as a paralyzed one. S. L. Goldberg sees a Maybe — the novel is quite complex; we must consider the ambiguities; and so on. It is crucial to give students the publication dates. Tindall comes first; Kenner comes second and is obviously responding to Tindall; Goldberg brings up the rear, responding to both Tindall and Kenner.

Students come to see that the answers offered by literary criticism are valuable to the extent that they provoke us to find our own answers. If the literary works themselves are not sacred — not, or at least no longer, "verbal icons" — then how can the words of mere English teachers possibly be? A playful, somewhat deconstructive approach like that I have been advocating helps inexperienced writers learn what experienced writers

know: any act of putting words on the page is related to other acts of putting other words on other pages. Writing is always "between writers."

TEACHING AS PARENTING, OR "MORE DIE OF HEARTBREAK"

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Semantic ideals of meaning could not possibly provide a proper vocabulary in which to consider the complexities of moral growth, because there is here no pragmatic routine to be "learned by repetition," as with proficiency in a trade. There is nothing to be "practiced" in the sense that one may practice tennis or carpentry. Qualitative growth cannot be "practiced" any more than biological growth can be "practiced."

— Kenneth Burke, "Semantic and Poetic Meaning"

Southeast Missouri State University, where I teach, sponsors a local, spin-off version of NCTE's Writing Achievement Awards contest for students in our service area, from the bootheel to and including St. Louis. At this year's awards ceremony I found myself sitting behind the tall, long-necked, wavy-haired young man whose essay — a moving, unsentimental account of his grandmother's losing battle with cancer — I awarded first prize in his category, Essay, Grades 10-12. His parents sat beside him, his father directly in front of me. That they were father and son was obvious even from behind: their (big) ears were identical. I was in a good position, too, to see the young man's face when he walked back to his seat after being presented his award certificate. The stiff smile, lowered head, awkward gait — the mixture of pride and adolescent self-consciousness — and then, as he came closer, the quick glance at his father — brought tears to my eyes. I don't know which one I identified with more, the young man himself, the aspiring writer, or his adoring father, jug-eared Dad.

It is as a parent, then, *in loco parentis*, with a sense of the burden, the challenge, and the guilt (as well as the pride) of that role that I feel entitled to complain about the writing of all those students who didn't win. To speak plainly, it's awful.

There's the inflated diction ("He helped me stand up and looked at the bruised lesion across my abdomen"), the faulty word choice ("As my eyes lolled over the list . . ."; "He finally made his way back to his defaced brother"), the over-writing ("A deep thunder erupted over the valley as I pulled the trigger of that life-taking thing, that gun, that murderous weapon of destruction"), the clichés ("Their teasing stung like a razor's wounding edge"), the naive, subservient putting-into-practice of the usual advice ("I . . . scurried back to my desk," "I shuffled by," "boys guffawed loudly"), and one striking instance (among several) of what may happen when a student attempts to write with a purpose that he can't claim to be his own (because he hasn't read, talked, or lived enough) about "content" of which he has only the most superficial understanding:

Evil was personified in the past and physically destroyed good. However, in Medieval England evil intervened into man's life and caused him to sin. Furthermore, the women progressed from worthless to precious and worth dying for.

But this isn't the worst of it. What actually offends me—I'll admit it—is all the evidence of these writers' immaturity as *persons*. Their essays aren't merely "personal"; they're about Little Me: the utter *thrill* of being chosen for Girls' State, the absolute *agony* of not being popular, the devastating disappointment, the *humiliation*, of not making the track team.

WE ALL WEAR MASKS, a tenth-grader writes; WE NEED TO GET IN TOUCH WITH OUR TRUE SELVES. An ironic remark in light of these students' apparent lack of self-awareness (and its corollary, intolerance). A girl writes that once during a quiz, she refused to give the cutest boy in class a correct answer, going on to say how proud of herself she is now for not cheating to win acceptance by the popular crowd (as if that alone would have done it!) because, as it turns out, the popular crowd has become a bunch of *drugheads*, and one girl even had an *abortion!*

Another student is so self-absorbed that her tribute to her mother reads more like a description of her (the daughter's) own virtues—for which she has her mother to thank, of course. Which is generous of her.

I blush when I read the self-serving praise another student heaps on his gymnastics coach, without whom. . . . But enough. My "exhibit" proves nothing except that kids will be kids. These students are only acting their age. But isn't "maturity" what we're supposed to be teaching? Isn't "maturity" our most important product?

Maturity Is Our Most Important Product

Maturity is the end that justifies our teaching methods. In the recently published *Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching*, George Hillocks, Jr., describes the state of the art, and two of the three "modes" by which he classifies the various approaches we take to teaching writing focus on helping students think for themselves. The teacher who employs the *inquiry* method, for instance, makes assignments that allow students to learn by doing. In one assignment, for example, they learn the importance of detail by writing a description of a seashell they've selected from a collection; then they let other students attempt to identify the shell from their description. In another assignment, small groups practice composing arguments by analyzing cases provided by the teacher, inventing points they can use to defend a particular position, and playing the roles of litigants. Hillocks explains that the inquiry method helps "students learn how to generate information, analyze it, and plan how to use it. . . . [Such treatments] focus on higher-level planning, particularly on structuring data and on what Flower and Hayes . . . call creating a focus 'by such complex actions as drawing inferences, creating relationships, or abstracting large bodies of ideas'" (230-231). Especially in its debt to Flower and Hayes, of Problem-Solving fame, the inquiry method promotes writing as thinking—the ultimate goal being mature thought.

Maturity of thought is the ultimate goal of the method Hillocks labels *natural process*, the approach identified with Janet Emig, Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and others. This is the workshop mode, in which students draft and redraft under the guidance of peers and the instructor, who joins the rest of the class (their desks arranged in a circle, typically) as just another reader of the students' writing—if a more experienced, knowledgeable, and articulate one. Hillocks favors the inquiry mode, pointing out that "while free writing/natural process treatments occasionally achieve results significantly greater than their controls, the inquiry treatments contrasted with some other treatments always do" (186).

The success of the natural process mode depends, Hillocks concedes, on whether "students are willing to write on topics

involving unfamiliar or difficult strategies and [whether] peer and teacher comment can effectively teach the strategies as they are demanded by the topic and mode of discourse" (186). When these conditions "obtain," however, the teacher skillful in this mode of instruction will exploit the exploratory nature of expressive writing, leading students to the discovery of an ever-expanding world of discourse. In this case, the "natural process" will be identical to the process of development described by James Britton (*The Development of Writing Abilities*, 11-18), its goal being to foster independent thinking (197) and the analytical (as opposed to merely linguistic) competence associated with the "participant" role (202).

The one method which does *not* foster maturity is the *presentational* mode. To oversimplify, the teacher who employs this method lectures students in the rules of good writing, perhaps providing models, which are analyzed for form. Evaluation comes primarily if not exclusively from the teacher. Whether it's called "formalist" (Fulkerson), "The Expository Rhetoric Approach" (Judy and Judy), or "The Handbook Tradition" (Foster), this same approach has been out of favor with progressive teachers for years—although it still "dominates in all subject matters" at the high school level, says Hillocks (118).

Teaching as Parenting

Interestingly enough, the basic conclusion of *Research on Written Composition*—that "authoritarian" methods don't work—finds corroboration in the field of "parenting." Dr. Thomas Gordon, author of *PET: Parent Effectiveness Training* (1970) and *TET: Teacher Effectiveness Training* (1974), says that effectiveness for both parents and teachers depends on the quality of the relationship between the persons involved, a relationship in which both parties can be themselves. The teacher has a responsibility to pass along her superior knowledge, but the student needs to find his own way. The relationship suffers, the balance is disturbed, whenever one of the parties assumes too much power. The teacher does it when she sets up one or more "Communication Roadblocks," which include (1) ordering, commanding, directing, (2) warning, threatening, (3) moralizing, preaching, giving "shoulds and oughts," (4) advising, offering solutions or suggestions, (5) judging, criticizing, disagreeing, blaming, (6) teaching, lecturing, giving logical arguments, and even (7) praising, agreeing, giving positive evaluations.

Which is to say, the relationship is threatened at every turn. "Teaching" threatens teaching! If the notion seems absurd, it is nevertheless the point of an essay by the eminent Walker Percy, "The Loss of the Creature," in *The Message in the Bottle*. "Everything the educator does," says Percy, "only succeeds in becoming, for the student, part of the educational package." The challenge for the teacher is to instruct without "teaching," to help students see for themselves. "The highest role of the educator," says Percy, "is the maieutic role of Socrates: to help the student come to himself not as a consumer of experience but as a sovereign individual" (63).

Dr. Gordon's way out of this Catch-22 is "Active Listening," by which the instructor allows the student to talk, first of all, and through her responses guides that student to the understanding of his or her own ideas. The teacher holds a mirror up to the student's words, describing what he has said and prompting him to explore its implications. (Teachers familiar with *Writing Without Teachers* will recognize a connection between "active listening" and Elbow's method of responding to student writing.) Once the student sees that his words are heard and respected, the relationship is established in which the teacher is now free to be herself—even to "teach," even direct, threaten,

moralize, and advise. However it is achieved, the relationship allows students to take responsibility for their own problems (behavioral, writing) and by extension their own ideas, the goal being, again, maturity of thought.

What is being described here—our problem and its solution—is acknowledged as well, from still another, sociological perspective, by Robert Brooke in his recent essay “Underlife and Writing Instruction” (CCC, May 987). The goal is “autonomy,” says Brooke. (I’ve been calling it “maturity”—but I think he means the same thing.) To achieve this goal, we have to be more than mere “teachers”; we have to structure our courses “so that normal classroom expectations are only partly in effect” (151)—which we do when we adopt the inquiry and natural process methods, for instance—so that our students will see themselves as more than mere “students.” They do it anyway, says Brooke, when they refuse to play the game, when they’re recalcitrant, ironic, cynical. But they do it naively, without thinking. Our job is to exploit this natural tendency, making them aware of the various roles they do play, toward inculcating the role of “writer,” a person who questions her experience, achieves some distance from it, and goes far, in the process, toward arriving at an identity.

But It's Not Easy: The Triumph of Anecdote

Case in point, Stephen Chessor, sophomore, EN-150, last semester. I wanted him to write with specific detail; instead, he was determined to mystify, writing even about himself in metaphors. He wrote about his “tail,” which everyone noticed when they looked at him and which prevented their getting to know the real person. His tail that he dragged around everywhere and that kept getting in the way was his reputation possibly or his “outward appearance” possibly. Whatever it was, the other students and I could certainly identify with what he was saying. We all felt that nobody could see the real us, either, and that our tails were always getting in our way, too, and that they could be heavy at times. But damn it, he wasn’t using *detail*!

So I told him, for the next assignment, he could write about anything he wanted—as long as he could tell me his *purpose* in writing it and the *audience* he was writing it for. What he wrote appalled me. He wrote that guys should date fat, ugly girls rather than trying to date good-looking ones. Beautiful girls are stuck on themselves, he wrote, and liable to tease or worse, reject you. But fat, ugly girls aren’t. They’re desperate for affection. So give ‘em a break. Date dogs.

I said in conference, calmly, that humor was a tricky thing to attempt—and judge. And since EN-150 wasn’t a course in comedy writing, both of us were operating at a disadvantage. I could only give him my honest reaction. I didn’t think the paper was funny. Making fun of fat girls was too easy, I said, like making fun of bald men. And besides, it seemed callous.

I was being too sensitive, he said. “After all, who thinks they’re ugly? *You’re* the one who’s hung up on appearances,” he said. (And indeed, when I let him read the paper aloud, the heaviest girl in class—about whose feelings I’d been most concerned—seemed to enjoy it. [What does *that* mean?])

In any case, we were at odds—I to teach, he to show off. In the only paper he wrote all semester in which he wasn’t “performing,” he explained why he *had* to perform, why performing was his life. He’d grown up with two older brothers, star athletes both of them, one in track and wrestling, the other in baseball. Stephen wasn’t good at any sports, so he became “the smart one” by default. “I read the encyclopedia because I was ‘the smart one.’” he wrote. Then in high school he joined the Drama Club (to meet girls, presumably)—and his whole life changed. He dis-

covered he could act. He could be hilarious. And the people wouldn’t stop applauding. “I stepped out on those boards and somehow found the confidence I’d never had before,” he wrote. “I found something I could do better than anybody else.”

In conference I tried to convince him that I understood. I *understand*, I said. I respect what you’re trying to do. But there’s a difference between “creative” and “expository” prose, I tried to explain. But of course he wasn’t interested in the difference between poetry and prose, literature and work, art and life. He had found something that he could do better than anybody else, and that was what he was determined (fated, ordained, chosen by God Almighty) to do, regardless of what some teacher said. He wasn’t just “writing.” He was being (defining, creating, becoming) himself.

I Am a Parent

Perhaps Steve knows it’s a role (he’d understand, being an actor), but he’s stuck, and my efforts to pry him loose aren’t succeeding. In fact, I am sounding just like a “teacher,” despite my commitment to the latest pedagogy, my willingness to let Steve make the rules for once, my declared respect for his intentions, his ambitions. Steve is an extreme and special case, in any case, that takes nothing from the general rule (a student whose “underlife” has subsumed him, who is making a career, in fact, of his “underlife”). And I am a teacher with equally good (and well-informed) intentions, doing my best to create an environment in which autonomy is encouraged and rewarded, but failing for any number of reasons—as mundane as a vague (and theoretically irrelevant) obligation to the content of a departmental syllabus (EN-150 isn’t “Creative Writing,” you know) and as regrettable as a tendency on my own part to dig in my heels, to let my own role subsume me as well, to react in an equal and opposite direction.

So next semester I’ll try harder, be even less a “teacher,” listen more actively. Or I may in fact make a virtue of necessity, teach writing as style, identity as “voice,” rhetoric as role-playing, composition as imitation. But one thing is certain, and Robert Brooke has said it before I could, and better, in a lead article in our most prestigious journal (emphasis mine): “. . . *the process of building identity is the business we are in*” (152). That being the case, and assuming we fully appreciate the implications of such a statement, it’s no wonder that writing isn’t easy to teach—despite the apparent consensus about goals and methods. No wonder we’re moralists—whether we think we are or not, whether we teach “values clarification” or not. And no wonder I feel more like a parent sometimes than a writing specialist. I don’t now refer to the connections Dr. Thomas Gordon makes between teaching and parenting in his “effectiveness” programs. (What self-respecting parent would miss the absurdity of such a thing, a science of “parenting”!) I am thinking instead, childless though I am, of a parent’s frustration, and a parent’s sense of history:

Teaching Is Remembering

In his evaluation of me at the end of the semester, Steve wrote, “He is a teacher that could teach you a lot.” (So why was Steve making a “D”?) “Yes I am lazy in all fairness. Still I manage to get every assignment. So perhaps laziness is a problem. Is it problem enough to make a ‘D’? Nope. The problem is I have imagination.”

I had imagination once. In 11th grade I wrote a story called “Mourir Seul” (“To Die Alone”—because I was making an A in French and because I thought the title expressed a deep and eternal truth, the point of the story: WE ALL DIE ALONE!) about

an American soldier in World War II who, mortally wounded, expires in his French mistress's arms in a wine cellar somewhere under Paris. She could tell he was dead when she noticed his "cadaveric lividity." I'd looked it up.

That same year I delivered an address on the subject of "character" at the National Honor Society induction assembly. No one understood a word of it, myself included. It beat me and everybody else. But I thought it was all the more powerful for being impenetrable. It was as deep as I was. And I was so deep, all I could do was sort of stand back in awe of my own mind, like a tourist at the edge of the Grand Canyon.

Senior year of college, I wrote something for the yearbook (I'd been invited to reminisce about my college experience) in which I managed to flatter outrageously and without shame every one of my favorite professors, my composition instructor, Dr. Macksey, in particular. I was desperate for his respect, his approbation. If he didn't like my writing (he said my writing lacked "facility"—and the judgment still hurts "like a razor's wounding edge"), then I would make him like *me*. My writing and myself were one and the same, after all.

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THE TRINITY TURNED WHOLLY: A TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR ADULTHOOD

Carmen Cramer

We have over and over read the same English papers even though the assignment was an open topic: abortion is wrong (or right); capital punishment is wrong (or right); legalizing marijuana is wrong (or right). This is a bit of an exaggeration, but the empty quality of what we take home to read after a couple of weeks of "process" teaching frustrates even the most dedicated teacher and numbs us to the potential energy in student writing.

James Kinneavy gave us a triangle to describe communication that rivals Aristotle's invention, structure, and style in its breadth of application (18-40). Kinneavy is a rhetorician whose theories teach us how to write and speak well. His triangle also

transmutes into a structure for explaining the emptiness of student essays; it is an explanation that holds the simplicity of rightness. His diagram points out that the interplay of who the speaker is, with who the listener is, with what the subject is elicits a particular style. If any one of the three points on the triangle changes, for instance if the listener changes from father to mother, the other two change subtly, causing an automatic change in style.

The composition classroom has a deadly effect on style because of the listener. To a student, a teacher is not a listener. The teacher may be personable, even opinionated, but there is a non-human quality to the teacher. The teacher is a function rather than a person; the teacher gives grades.

With no listener, a communication system collapses. Having no listener is different from being one's own listener; journal writing—look at Anais Nin's—can be powerful, primarily because of the listener, who happens to be the speaker. With "teacher" stuck in the role of listener, the student has no sense of audience.

With no sense of audience, the subject that the speaker chooses, or the approach to that subject, matters very little (Washington 219). I label the third point of the triangle "subject" in order to avoid "purpose" which might imply that a speaker says things "for" a listener, rather than "to" a listener. And, essentially, subject evaporates when the listener evaporates. Why say anything at all to no one? One emptiness begets another. This applies to communication in both the writing and the speaking modes.

Supposedly, the audience for this article is full of people interested in teaching English, both writing and reading as well as thinking. Transactional Analysis, a psychological fad whose time is faded, may not seem to have much to do with what you are interested in. TA asserts that inside each of us are three personalities, a child, a parent, and an adult. TA, taken outside of a person, applied onto people who are communicating, makes sense. And when TA overlays Kinneavy's triangle, it explains a lot of the interaction between the speaker and the listener, especially when the listener provides only a negation of audience.

We all have experienced that uneasy moment when during a conversation, often in the middle of one of our most powerful sentences, the host of the cocktail party turns away from us to speak to someone else. The listener disappears; so does the subject, swallowed in embarrassment usually. The feeling within us at those moments explains the problem in the papers of our students. When listener and subject are empty elements, so is the speaker. With no one to speak to causing nothing to say, the speaker becomes the worst sort of hollow spot, the sort where something should exist. The triangle implodes. Needless to say, there is nothing from which to create style.

There are various techniques for an English teacher to use in an attempt to overcome this empty audience phenomenon. Letters to a specific audience are a possibility. But the problem of emptiness in the writing that comes out of a composition classroom runs deep. Altered assignments, or harangues for that matter, only touch the surface without affecting the source. The source of emptiness flows out of the childhood of our student writers and their communication patterns. The source of student emptiness is out of the reach of a teacher, almost. Teachers with broad interpretations of their discipline can reach it, interpretations that include people and everyday life and their own private lives and love and sex—things like that as well as subject matter.

Way back when, when we are infants, we are smart. We are smart enough within a few months to realize that if that big per-