

ever, that *auctoritas* is a poor guarantor of truth: for the primacy of any one authority, as history and experience tell us, is mere myth; and when the "authorized" version changes (authorities vie, after all, for supremacy) correctness, standards, truth, reality itself change with it. *Auctoritas* is no guarantor of stability, either. While we are taught to use the concept of authority as a weapon against change, experience once more teaches us that *change alone* is guaranteed, for society as well as the individual—and change is thus equally guaranteed in our language and discourse. Truth is always jacklegged, though it seems (and we often wish it to be) static and permanent.

We admit that all speaking and writing entails some sense of authority, if only because all discourse is a plea for trust (if not a claim for truth), and all discourse is an expression of *ethos*. We affirm this ethical sense of authority and find it good. But what other senses of the word shall we affirm in our own discourse and in our own teaching of writing? Authority that is normative restricts discourse by defining—freezing—standards. Normative authority attempts, in short, to find the "definitive" text. Authority that is prescriptive again fixes—freezes—discourse in its conformity with sacred, revered models. (Once more, the search for the "definitive" text.) Authority can make discourse into a piece of property, an object of reverence, a subject of analysis, an imitation, a product. But only the authority of *individual creation* remains faithful to the root meaning of the term: *auctoritas* is the power and principle of origination and growth—*augere* means to grow. "To write" also means to grow, and *augere, auctoritas*, should celebrate this *process* of growth: discourse grows through the writing, and the writer herself grows through the discourse. Truly authoritative discourse should always originate, always express the power to create, always be in process. When discourse ceases to be in process it ceases to originate itself, ceases to *augment* itself, ceases to be its own author. Perhaps only then it can be "owned." Perhaps only then it can be a model or law. But its loss when it shifts from freedom to fixture, from process to product, is the loss of living authorship and growth. Discourse freezes into product, an artifact or mere commodity; much worse occurs when another's discourse is imposed between a writer and her own writing, to become an alien authority—one that demands conformity and imitation, prizing these things over growth and origination. This, alas, is the situation in most writing classes.

There is, however, a hope. Over here is the *author*, who must be free in order to learn and to write. Over there is *authority*, the texts (teacher, institution) become fixed, definitive, normative. But in between is *authorship*—the process, the perpetual hunt for texts only to back off, improvise, try again, search again through freedom to speak a gain in a continuous and ever provisional making of self and world. Invention is always becoming structure and style, which are always becoming invention, always becoming the spoken in diverse rhetorical occasions, which are always becoming the need for further invention and structure and style. We are always provisional self-makers, provisional world-makers, provisional text-makers. When we read or when we teach, we and the texts that are read, we and the course that is taught are making reality and creating identity in ourselves and our students. In *authorship* we begin to learn how to hold our own cyclings and dartings dear though weak, to nurture and preserve them in order to change them, knowing that we invent in order to make structures in order to serve occasions in order to invent and to make structures and styles and to serve occasions . . . in order to be making ourselves. In authorship—which we should prize as a state of living/writing over static (yet ulti-

mately unstable) authority—we begin to learn how to cherish, to unfold the other, holding dear that other's need to make, to be free to speak, to be free to learn a new or deeper voice, to become a self always becoming a self.

As authorship (*augere*, augmentation) implies, it is process and growth, and not perfection or conformity to some standard, that makes discourse true and beautiful and personally useful and personally valuable. Goals like process and growth make writing instruction jacklegged, too. Necessarily so. It seems that discourse must always be jacklegged. It must, for its own health, never be "fixed," never perfect or complete, never, really, a product to be judged as complete or (worse) owned and sold. It must only (and always) be "good enough," capable of change, always in motion. Discourse, when we think it is perfected (and perfection means completion), is a dead thing to the writer, incapable of allowing growth in him. We must always, for this reason, jackleg our discourse, in the same way we jackleg so many other things in our lives. Perhaps only the jacklegged things can have the highest meaning and value. Other things we can own, even admire; only the jacklegged things can be continually present and loved and involved in our being. And the jacklegged discourse that is us (and our students) will always die before an alien authority. We may often have despaired of jackleg carpentry, yearning for the well-crafted, the finished, the definitive. We should have known better, or as well: there is no sadness in jackleg carpentry, only wonder.

(3)

Shall we celebrate authorship, then, or authority in our writing classes? And if we keep the notion of authority, what meanings shall we valorize, the creative or the normative? And who shall be the "authorities" in our writing classes? (Just ask yourself: who are the "authors"? Must it be so hard to say, "Our students"?)

NOTES

¹The following section expands upon our previous discussion of *auctoritas*: Jim W. Corder and James S. Baumlin, "Lamentations for—and Hopes against—Authority in Education," *Educational Theory*, 38 (Winter, 1988), 23-24.

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AUDIENCE AWARENESS: METHODS AND MADNESS

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Over the last ten years or so the problem of audience in written discourse has been among the central concerns of our field. We writing teachers now have a developing (while sometimes confusing and contradictory) body of audience theory and

research always within our reach. We know more, we understand more about this complex problem of audience than we ever have before. Yet I often wonder how many of us find ourselves swept into the classroom enthusiastically awash in this body of knowledge, as I so often have, only to discover that we're somehow unable to translate this knowledge into classroom techniques that work, that make a difference in our students' writing. Our students, it seems, often find our talk about audience just so much abstract madness, and too many of the texts we provide them with don't get far enough beyond commanding students to know their audience and to obtain largely demographic knowledge about that audience.

So I've spent several years trying to find ways of dealing with audience in the classroom, ways that actually make a difference in my students' writing, and trying to translate what we've learned from research and theory into pedagogy. It hasn't been easy. Ten years ago Lisa Ede said that "the current situation seems a clear case of pedagogy lagging behind theory" (291), and this remains true today. I have managed, though, to find, create, and experiment with numerous approaches that, for the sake of organization, I'll lump roughly into what Barry Kroll has outlined as the three "Perspectives" on audience in our field: the rhetorical, the informational, and the social. While the first two of these perspectives are necessary and often quite useful approaches to audience, I've found that it's the social perspective, with its emphasis on the transactional nature of writing, that is by far the most productive way of dealing with audience within the rhetorical context of the composition classroom.

The rhetorical perspective is still the dominant perspective of audience in our field, at least if we are to judge from the number of textbooks and heuristics that continue to focus on this perspective almost exclusively. It has been passed along to us nearly unchanged from classical rhetoric. Taking this perspective, writers concern themselves with analyzing "the audience's beliefs, traits, and attitudes, so that their messages can be adapted to the particular characteristics of specific audiences" (Kroll 173). Spend an afternoon wandering through current handbooks, rhetorics, and texts of all sorts. Aristotle would be thrilled to see the attention we still pay to the audience's race, religion, economic status, political affiliations, and so on and so forth. And I think he'd be surprised to find our society so much more open and vast than his own and to find that our ways of knowing ourselves and the world have changed so drastically.

The common denominator of the rhetorical perspective, at least as it gets presented to students by our texts and by us, is that it often views the audience as a "target receiver" toward which writers aim their persuasive darts," and this, as Kroll goes on to say, is "an oversimplified account of the audience. Readers are not passive targets; they use their previous knowledge and active processing strategies to construct the meaning of a text" (175). Because it oversimplifies the audience's role in the discourse situation so much, the rhetorical perspective is one reason why our students end up engaging in what Long calls a "sort of noxious stereotyping" we wouldn't tolerate in any other context (223). You know what I mean—students write a persuasive essay for readers of, say, the local newspaper, and end up so diluting their points-of-view that we can't tell just what it is they really *are* saying. We've all read such essays, no? As passionate and interesting as cold oatmeal. As complete and well-developed as a building whose frame has been tossed up and left to stand naked in the elements.

Sure, there are times when the rhetorical perspective is necessary—when demographic knowledge of an audience is very

important to the writer's purpose. My business-writing students need to concern themselves with this sort of information often as they prepare formal reports, proposals, sales presentations, and the like. They need to fictionalize themselves as active members of a community of salespersons or accountants or marketing managers or whatever—as someone who they'll be called upon to *be*. Other classes within their majors have prepared most of them to play these roles and have given them some experience as members of the type of audience for whom they're writing. This *before* attempting to analyze such audiences. For the most part they're capable of handling such an analysis.

Freshmen, though, are something of a different story. Many composition texts do offer cases and many instructors design writing assignments that ask students to write from different roles to widely varying audiences, assignments that often call upon students to consider their audience from a rhetorical perspective. The question we need to ask ourselves is, Can we expect our composition students to play such roles? They've had little opportunity (or desire) to experience themselves as writers of and as an audience for the expository essays we usually ask them to write, much less for some of the complicated cases we present them with. As Les Perelman notes, "the institutional context [for writing in composition courses] predominates over any real sense [students might have] of authentic purpose and actual audience" (471). He goes on to say that

rather than being anomalous to "real" writing situations, classroom writing can be considered a subset of a general type of communication that can be defined as *institution-based discourse*, and such discourse that is inscribed, that is written, as *institution-based prose*. In institution-based discourse both speaker and hearer [or reader and writer] exist largely as projections of institutional roles rather than as idiosyncratic individuals. (474)

What our students need, then, is experience as writers of and as an audience for this institutional prose, and having them explore the demographics of so-called "real" audiences in so-called "real" writing assignments isn't helping them much. As Park notes, "traditional analysis, for all the apparent sanction of tradition, has . . . little practical rhetorical value for us [in composition courses]" ("Analyzing Audiences" 478). He goes on to point out just what a difficult rhetorical position inexperienced students find themselves in, a position where they

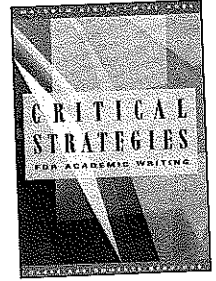
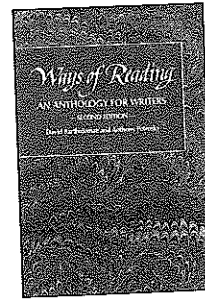
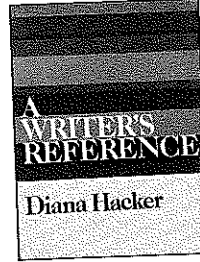
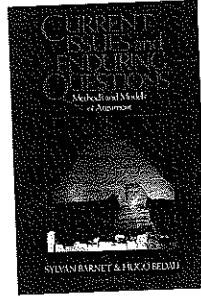
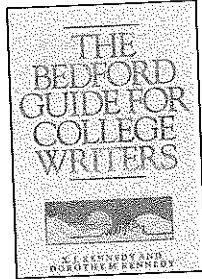
must somehow imagine or invent an audience in a situation where no audience *naturally* exists. Here the primary purpose of audience analysis becomes not the usual one of providing information about an existing audience but rather a means of actually helping students discover an audience. [emphasis added] ("Analyzing Audiences" 479)

The rhetorical perspective doesn't provide us with those means; it will take a social perspective of writing and of audience to do this, as I'll discuss below.

For now, though, the fact remains that many of our texts and our heuristics begin with a rhetorical perspective of audience, and our students themselves often quite naturally bring up demographic concerns when we approach audience with them. Our job, then, is to help our students put such concerns into their proper places relative to the rhetorical contexts we place them in.

I've found Pfister and Petrick's "A Heuristic Model for Creating a Writer's Audience" to be an excellent classroom tool, not so much despite the fact that its starting point is the demographic

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concerns typical of the rhetorical perspective, but *because* of this apparent weakness. I, as do many of us, often follow Moffett's advice that "Classmates are a natural audience. Young people are most interested in writing for their peers" (193), and I have my students write their essays for each other—for each other, that is, as representatives of a larger, educated, rhetorically-involved community of readers. Using the heuristic, students may explore each other's social and economic status, age, educational and cultural experience, religion, income, and such (214). They soon discover that within the larger context of audience awareness which the heuristic provides this sort of knowledge has little practical value for them. I then discuss with my students larger and more difficult-to-define audiences and rhetorical situations, the sorts of audiences and contexts that, I believe mistakenly, many texts and teachers try to get their students to write prematurely for and in. I'll present them, for example, with a hypothetical assignment to write a persuasive essay about some sensitive racial issue for the readers of a Miami newspaper, or of a newspaper in any other area that has recently experienced some form of racial controversy or trouble. They then begin to analyze the intended audience's demographics, which quite often allows them to see how difficult it is to create a realistic picture of "real-world" readers if they approach those readers only through such rhetorical concerns. Because the picture they can gain of their audience is incomplete, students *have* to push beyond the rhetorical perspective. And they do it without having to be *told* they've got to do it.

And I must deal here with the fact that often the only audience our students really give a hoot about, no matter for whom we're encouraging them to write, is *us*. And we can deal directly and honestly with this fact and still deal with and move beyond the rhetorical perspective quite naturally. Jeff Schiff has outlined a syllabus that has audience analysis as its central, semester-long concern, and he meets this problem of the real audience our students write for by simply letting them write for him—they spend their semester analyzing this one audience, relevant to each writing task. I sometimes use Schiff's approach immediately in the semester, then move my students on to a peer audience. (Pfister and Petrick, too, indicate their own willingness to let their students explore their heuristic with themselves as the primary, intended audience.) Using a modification of one of Schiff's initial assignments, I ask students to make up a list of five questions they would ask of me, their audience, that might help them write the first essay of the semester, and I answer all (well, nearly all) the questions as honestly as I can; many of the questions my unguided, uncoached students come up with are demographic in nature. By discussing these questions in class, my students often discover what is or isn't important to know about their audience relative to the specific rhetorical situations they find themselves in when writing essays in a composition class. The questions they come up with will also go beyond the rhetorical perspective into more valuable social perspective, moving the discussion in the direction I want it to take.

The informational perspective, the next of Kroll's classifications, views audience analysis as "a process of conveying information" to a reader (Kroll 176). A long-time favorite of composition texts, syllabi, and instruction, it becomes a very explicit part of the advice we give for audience analysis: "Consider your audience a mixed group of intelligent and reasonable adults. You want them to think of you as well informed and well educated. You wish to *explain* what you know and what you believe" [emphasis added] (Baker 6). To do this successfully, students are often told, they must decide, *before* they begin to write

and based on their analysis of their topic, purpose, and audience, just *how* they're going to do it. Consider this advice from Berke:

A fundamental principle of rhetoric is that *you should never write anything in a vacuum*. You should try to identify your audience, hypothetical or real, so that you may speak to it in an appropriate voice. A student, for example, should never "just write" but should always include in the pre-writing process a visualizing of definite groups of readers. (40)

Oh? Such advice puts our students into a doubly-difficult situation. First, I think Elbow makes as convincing an argument as anyone that students should indeed "just write" when beginning to explore their topics, sometimes completely ignoring any perspective of audience: "The value of learning to ignore audience while writing," Elbow says, "is the value of learning to cultivate the private dimension: the value of writing in order to make meaning to oneself, not just to others" ("Closing my Eyes. . ." 60). And second, in order to get anything across to "definite groups of readers" such as those Berke talks about, students are often instructed to take an informational perspective of those readers, which explains, in part, our approach and continued fidelity to the rhetorical modes and our instruction "on general writing techniques—use of dovetailing, proleptic devices, thematic tags, parallel forms, and so forth—which can reduce a reader's uncertainty and thus aid comprehension" (Kroll 177). Many, many of us work with syllabi that still map composing neatly out into lovely little parcels of description and narration, of explanation, of cause and effect, of comparison and contrast, and that devote a week or two to instruction on "general writing techniques," instruction done too often in a vacuum, disembodied from any real topic or purpose or audience. And if, as Roth points out, "one's audience may emerge during composing, [then] we are no longer looking at a static entity: we can consider how it changes as composing proceeds—and what writers do to make it change" (48).

With the informational perspective, though, we begin with techniques and modes rather than with the topic the students wish to write about and, eventually, the audience whom they're addressing. Audience becomes some entity out there whom our students must somehow (sometimes at *any* cost) inform, instruct, or persuade. And as Roth goes on to say,

if we view the writer's audience solely as a group of real-world readers external to and predating a text, we may inadvertently reduce the complex problem of audience awareness to one of audience analysis alone, thereby misleading writing students. If student writers are to shape roles for their readers to enact, they will be hindered by rigid predefinitions of the audience. They may need to discover their own audiences and to redefine them as they go along. (53)

As Kroll points out, one limitation of rhetorically-oriented perspectives is their tendency "to see nearly all communication as persuasive in intent, with the concomitant conception of the audience as an adversary" (174); the informational perspective often assumes the same thing. Because "the writer's job is to facilitate the intake of information, designing a text so that its readers will encounter few obstacles to their understanding and will thus comprehend the text with a minimal amount of effort" (Kroll 177), students come to view the reader as an obstacle to their compositions, some sort of great wall that stands between them and their message (or quite often, between them and their

grades, for those students whose only real audience is their English teacher).

As was the rhetorical perspective, though, the informational perspective is a natural and necessary part of audience analysis, and we have to address its concerns no matter which primary approach to audience awareness we choose to take. We've got to talk about modes and techniques and tone and the like eventually. And I return to Pfister and Petrick's heuristic model as an example of a way we can put the informational perspective in its proper place, as the last of the sets of concerns the writer addresses. This part of the model is labeled "Audience/Form," and begins with the question, "What are the best methods the writer can use to achieve cooperation/persuasion/identification with the audience?" It goes on to explore the best mode of development, the tone, the level of diction, and such (214). All this comes *after* students have explored their own natural starting point – the rhetorical perspective – and *after* they have been directed through the social perspective that makes up the bulk of the model, thus subordinating informational concerns to the students' purpose and audience.

Elbow's *Writing With Power* also tells students to pay attention to informational concerns, again at what appears to be the proper point in the writing process. A tremendous amount of raw writing, freewriting, and other exploration is recommended before students even *begin* to consider audience in any way, and the informational perspective is properly subordinated to the concerns of the social perspective. (Focusing on audience at other stages in the composing process, particularly as a freewriting activity, is an acceptable option offered to students here. The *emphasis* is on attending to audience when revising.) The important thing is to make sure that students begin with what they want to say, explore their purpose for saying it, and move on to the audience to/for whom they're saying it, whatever perspective(s) they need to take of that audience.

Finally, then, we come to the social perspective, the key process of which, at least in the terms of a cognitive view of the writing process, is getting students to "decenter" and escape from their own perspectives (Kroll 179). As Kroll says, "If we assume that egocentrism is checked and finally conquered through social experiences, then perhaps our composition students need to experience writing as a form of social interaction" (180). Here we have the richest variety of methods, potential and existing, by which to help our students become more audience aware.

Again I'll return to Pfister and Petrick's heuristic model for a look at the sorts of concerns central to the social perspective. The center two sections of the model – "The Subject Interpreted by the Audience," and "The Relationship of the Audience and the Writer" – deal quite explicitly with these concerns. Here students are asked to explore their audience's knowledge, opinions, and attitudes about the topic and about the writer, as well as to consider their own rhetorical purposes and how they wish to affect their audience. When students really explore these questions, especially when, as in Elbow, they are doing this relevant to a specific writing task they're actively undertaking (rather than about to undertake, maybe, soon, when the urge strikes them, or when the deadline is imminent), they are engaging in a decentering activity. I've found the model to be especially valuable for small-group work and for individual writers working alone, but as Pfister and Petrick show, it is also effective for focusing classwide discussions of audience awareness and for introducing the theoretical backgrounds to audience, a step which Schiff thinks so important to his own approach.

Elbow has given us the "Catalogue of Reader-Based Questions" (255-263) in *Writing With Power*, which invites the reader to react to a piece of writing as an act of communication between writer and reader. I've made up several versions of this catalogue, each a little different depending upon the class/essay I've designed it for, and I have students give each other detailed written responses to the questions before making final revisions of a given piece of writing.

Most important to helping students gain this social perspective, then, is giving them every opportunity to write to and for each other and allowing them the time and atmosphere in which to come to know one another and themselves as readers of expository prose. Moffett talks about an "ideal" situation, one where students are writing real discourse, the types of discourse one finds *outside* the classroom, a situation where much feedback is provided to students in the form of audience response:

[students'] writing would be read and discussed by this audience. . . . Adjustments in language, form, and content would come as the writer's response to his audience's response. Thus instruction would always be individual, relevant, and timely. These are precisely the virtues of feedback learning that account for its great success. (193)

Peer revising groups, in which students use Elbow's catalogue or Pfister and Petrick's heuristic or some such other aids, are an essential part of all this.

I've also required writers to respond, in writing, to the following simple list of questions:

1. Make a list of those things your readers most likely already know about your topic.
2. Now list those things that your readers probably don't know, but which they will need to know in order to understand your essay.
3. Briefly explain how you decided what your audience's prior knowledge or lack of prior knowledge was about your topic. Try to explain how you knew what your audience did or did not know.
4. Now take a few moments to really consider your answers to points 1, 2, and 3 above. Now that you have focused on these concerns, how will you adapt your essay to accommodate your readers?

Any list of this sort will do, any list that asks students both to consider their audience and to consider how they know what they know or don't know about that audience. Students workshop the answers to these questions in their revising groups and in discussion with the class at large, then go on to evaluate one another's essays both for general quality and for how well the writers have accomplished the accommodations they decided upon as a result of their analyses. You can make up many variations on this list, for classes from basic writing to business and technical writing, some of which may also ask writers to explore their readers' feelings, opinions, prejudices, etc., as appropriate. In a study by Roen and Willey, the students who used the simple list above before and during revising produced significantly higher-quality essays than students who didn't attend to this social, or what Donald Rubin has called, "episodic" perspective (234).

And yet another way to enable our students to explore the social perspective of writing is by having them write dialogues, dialogues in which they allow one voice within them to play the part of their reader and in which they respond in their writer's voice to the reader's concerns. Elbow encourages students to

write dialogues as part of his "Loop Writing Process," and tells them that

Writing a dialogue produces reasoning . . . spontaneously out of your feelings and perceptions. Get two people arguing with each other on paper [for our purposes, the writer and the reader]—or give your opponent a voice so he can argue with you on paper [for our purpose, perhaps a reader who the writer knows will disagree]—and you will naturally produce arguments: assertions, supporting reasons, and evidence. (68)

And Leo Rockas, in his "Dialogue on Dialogue," draws a parallel between dialogues and the stuff of essays by pointing out that "Just as the story needs to break out into the voices of the speakers, into concrete drama, at high points of tension and conflict, so the essay needs to break out into conflicting arguments, into abstract dialogue, at high points of argumentative conflict . . ." (571). The benefits of this approach for argumentative essays are obvious enough, but we can use it for nearly all the assignments we commonly give in freshman composition classrooms. My own students, once they've gotten over the initial embarrassment of sharing their dialogues with their small groups, have had some of their liveliest, most productive discussions about those dialogues. Writers are often surprised when their peers, members of their actual audience, affirm for them how well their needs/feelings/objections and such have been anticipated by the readers' voices in the writers' dialogues. And, of course, it's a wonderful opportunity to allow actual members of writers' audiences, rather than just *us*, you know, *English Teachers*, to show writers how they've misjudged that audience's needs/feelings/objections.

Dialogues are also an important invention technique in Axelrod and Cooper (373), who also go on to suggest such strategies as "Cubing," where students look at their topic from six different perspectives (372-73), and "Dramatizing," where students explore their topics in terms of Method, Motives, Setting, Actors, and Action (373-76). I suggest having students take other people's perspectives as a "Cubing" activity, looking at their topics in those six different ways from another person's point of view. Small-group members then provide feedback as to how well the student has anticipated or recreated the points of view of others. As another small-group activity, students can "Cube" one another's topics, providing for each other actual feedback from their actual audience. You can use the same mix of activities with "Dramatizing," and, of course, these techniques can also be fruitfully applied as a between-draft revising activity.

In addition, Axelrod and Cooper provide students with sections on "Reading a Draft With a Critical Eye," sections that ask students to give a *First general impression* of an essay, to mark the essay in certain ways as *Pointings* to the essay's strengths and weaknesses, and then to do a detailed *Analysis* of the essay based on a list of questions designed for and appropriate to numerous different types of essays—"Remembering People," "Remembering Events," "Reporting Information," and such. These sections focus on social, reader-based concerns, and students can use them to give each other feedback on drafts of essays. I've also used these sections during group work where students read drafts of essays aloud and discuss the questions from the *Analysis* portion relative to each group member's essay. Quite often, I've overheard and joined in on conversations that have veered quite far away from a particular student's essay, and have centered on the question itself—conversations where students end up discussing the value of different sorts of knowledge about how read-

ers will react to things within essays, conversations about how writers can learn to better anticipate such reader-based concerns.

Douglas Park points out that, "For writers writing, all things germane to audience can perhaps be described as a field of awareness that can manifest itself in different ways in different rhetorical situations" ("The Meanings of 'Audience'" 254). This being so, primary among our concerns as teachers should be helping our students develop such a "field of awareness." We need to give them ample opportunities to use those growing, developing fields. We've got to deal more, more directly, and more effectively with the whole idea of audience awareness. As Moffett points out, "If anybody is going to do anything about the teaching of writing, the first priority is going to have to be the rekindling of the sense of audience. Until that's done, nothing else is going to happen" (Squire et. al. 298).

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