

INDIVIDUALIZING THE WRITING PROCESS THROUGH A  
GENRE-BASED, SOCIAL-PROCESS PEDAGOGY

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Arts

in

English

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Bozeman, Montana

April 2006

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April 2006

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## ABSTRACT

Many contemporary composition scholars are moving beyond process theory, contending that the act of writing effectively is one of complex social interaction, an intricate ballet of intellectual feigns, parries and thrusts, that cannot be reduced to the simple process of prewriting, writing and rewriting to be taught in the same, or even similar, manner to every person. In fact, they argue, there can be no effective classroom composition pedagogy that reveals the social nature of the act of writing to the student in any meaningful way.

And yet a wealth of personal observations have shown that a great many working world adults—a substantially greater proportion of the population than that found in the first-year writing class—have mastered the skill of effective writing to a significant extent, leading to the conclusion that experience and maturation can and does teach the social nature of the many genres of everyday writing.

What follows is an attempt to create a curriculum that recognizes the social nature of writing and incorporates it into the classroom setting through collaborative writing exercises, genre-awareness and assignments designed to reveal to the individual writer his or her own way of producing desired effects on readers. The curriculum also aims to hasten some of the experience and maturation that reveals the social nature of writing to so many writers as they wend their way through the working world.

What is initially proposed is then taken into two first-year writing classes in succeeding semesters and evaluated on the basis of student responses and instructor observations. Those methods of evaluation are admittedly lacking in a high degree of reliability. However, this essay concludes with some suggested refinements and a proposal for a more thorough testing of the curriculum's effectiveness.

## INTRODUCTION: TAKING A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

True story: I was in the Montana State University writing center helping a first year student with a paper she was working on for a human development class. As we were reading along together, I was reflexively inserting commas in places where she had left them out, each time saying only something like “you need a comma here” or “it would be a good idea to put a comma there.”

After ten or twelve of these instances I said, “I feel like I should apologize for just inserting commas willy-nilly in your writing without really explaining why. But I never know quite what to say. I just can’t figure out why some first-year writing students seem to use almost no commas.”

“Oh I know exactly why that is,” she said.

“Really?” I asked. “And why is that?”

“It’s because when we wrote in high school, the teacher would always put a red mark on any comma that shouldn’t have been there. You get tired of getting your papers back all covered with red marks, so, after a while, you just stop using them.”

This remarkable exchange (at least to me, as a first-year graduate teaching assistant) pointed out the dicey nature of trying to teach young people to write well. Even the best intentions can backfire.

As teaching assistants at Montana State, we were each entrusted with teaching a section of first-year writing. In preparation for this task, we were given a book to read (*The St. Martins Guide to Teaching Writing*) and four days of training, both of which

were helpful, though perfunctory given the size and ambiguous nature of the task we were about to undertake. Through the reading and training, there came to me a growing sense that the profession of teaching composition is remarkably unsettled. It's new relative to many academic fields, I was discovering, and fraught with disagreement and controversy. All that struck me as very troubling given the critical importance of clear and effective writing to the success of college. Many academic studies point to the ability to write well as the most important predictor of academic and professional success.

I come late to this challenge—after 20 years of writing and editing professionally in small newspaper newsrooms. I know from that experience that it can be indeed difficult (perhaps impossible, I'm willing to concede for now) to *teach* someone to write well. I know, though, that people can *learn* to write, and that it is possible to create an environment that is conducive to the development of writing skill in those who want to improve. I had the pleasure of watching a number of people develop their writing skills to notable degrees of sophistication. Three, in particular, grew to distinguish themselves in three separate newspaper genres—sports writing, humorous column writing and feature story writing—and went on to successful careers at large metro newspapers. In each case, several key ingredients came together: extensive, daily reading in the genre; extensive, daily writing; a nearly continuous freewheeling discussion with colleagues about writing and the development of ideas and, finally and perhaps most importantly, a compelling desire to improve.

The typical newspaper newsroom can strike the uninitiated as a model of inefficiency. A lot happens fast as publication deadline approaches, but outside of those final moments in the publication cycle, there are many hours of what appears to be wasted time. In reality, however, nearly all of this time is quite well spent and essential to the creative process. Reporters spend a lot of time looking at other newspapers. As they do this, they broaden their understanding of what constitutes good newspaper writing—and they expand their vocabulary. They often loudly and heartlessly criticize the work of their colleagues at other publications and, at other times, grudgingly admire their work. They spend a good deal of time talking to other reporters and editors around them about their observations of other publications. In the process, they hatch ideas for stories they should pursue. Some original, but many shameless imitations of some idea they saw in another newspaper but to which they add their own twists. Ideas are fleshed out, amended or even discarded through this verbal interaction with colleagues and supervisors. It's only after what seems like an inexcusable amount of time spent shooting the breeze—much of it seemingly beside the point—that the writer finally sits down to compose. But what appears to be wasted time is actually essential to the business of *invention*—the verbal creation and testing of ideas that are the essence of good writing.

At first blush, the Montana State first-year writing program struck me as an attempt to approximate this very recipe. It was a writing-across-the-curriculum program in which students were to be assigned readings and response writings to those readings for virtually every class. During class, discussion is fostered among the students. Reactions to what was read are voiced and met with the reactions of other students;

disagreement, agreement and elaboration are all part of the mix. After a number of these short responses are assigned, written and followed by class discussion, students are asked to develop a claim for a longer paper that incorporates the students' short responses as well as ideas inspired by class discussion. After a draft of the longer paper is submitted, the students meet one-on-one with the instructor for some individualized coaching on how the paper could be significantly improved through revision. All of this deliberately orchestrated activity seems roughly analogous to the reading/discussion/writing that occurs spontaneously in the newsroom and that has demonstrably contributed to the substantial improvement of writing ability in those professional writers with the desire to improve. In the classroom, the hope is that the students bring to the process this final ingredient—a desire to improve (stimulated, of course, by a measure of inspiration from the instructor).

It's an effective program—to an extent. The repeated exercise reading, writing, critical thinking fostered through class discussion, followed by longer writing, coaching and rewriting, measurably improves students' ability to write in a grammatically and syntactically correct manner. Even minimally motivated students improve through the sheer repetitiveness of the process. But it's a less-than-resounding success. There are rarely to never any "teaching moments" when a student or students manifest a new appreciation of their own unique ability to invent ideas and move their audience through well-crafted prose. Even the most motivated students do not seem too excited about their writing or driven to improve their writing skills. Rather, they seem more interested in meeting the expectations of the instructor and scoring a high grade. There are no

remarkable successes, just the achievement of tedious, small increments of improvement within a narrow range of textual mediocrity.

What's different between the newsroom and the classroom? Duration for one thing. Getting students to move to a significantly higher level of writing ability in just three hours a week for a sixteen-week semester is a tall order. Also lacking is the Pavlovian "reward" of immediate publication. Reader response—both good and bad—to the newspaper reporters' writing comes within hours of when it was written. But also missing is the matter of choice: students attend a writing class because it's required; newspaper reporters are working in their chosen profession, so improving their ability to write brings professional satisfaction as well as financial reward. Those are factors that we will never be able to incorporate into the first-year writing classroom. Still, there may be ways to create an environment that is more conducive to writing improvement than what we have today. Exposing to the students their own writing processes and developing those processes through collaborative efforts in the classroom can, I believe, mimic some of the highly productive conditions found in newsrooms. And creating a relationship between student and instructor that is less like the dictator-subject relationship found in the typical classroom and more like the mentor-mentee relationship between an editor and professional writer can also be productive.

With these ideas in mind, I convinced myself that I could put together a first-year writing curriculum that would produce significantly better results than what were achieved in the MSU writing program to date.

## COMPOSITION THEORY IN THE ERA OF POST-PROCESS

Any effort to develop a new composition curriculum will benefit from a review of recent theory. Composition instruction was dominated by “process” theory from the late 1960s until the late 1980s and persists today in many aspects of current composition curriculum. As I enter the conversation, scholars in composition theory appear to be becoming increasingly skeptical of the process movement’s prewriting, writing and rewriting analysis of the act of composing. These scholars’ writings have been labeled “post-process” theory, a term applied to any number of different postmodern, anti-foundational perspectives that generally advocate that writing cannot be taught, that it is “indeterminate, public, interpretive, and situated” (Kastman Breuch 117) and therefore, presumably, a unique experience for every individual and every instance. While that’s a provocative suggestion, it’s of little use to the instructor who has to go into the classroom every day to teach her students to write. Says Lee Ann Kastman Breuch: “there are good reasons to believe that post-process theory resists pedagogical application: the declaration that writing cannot be taught, the lack of a clear pedagogical agenda, and the divergent applications thus far of post-process theory” (104). Joseph Petraglia puts it another way: “sociocognitive and other strands of post-process research are more likely to suggest the ways in which the enterprise of composition is misguided and why the explicit teaching of writing—as rhetorical *production*—is a losing proposition” (60).

Many of the criticisms of the process movement seem fair. For example, there were attempts at systematic codification of the writing process. Emblematic of this was a

study conducted by Sondra Perl (1978), which encoded each act of observed unskilled writers as they engaged in the act of writing and then plotted them along a timeline using an elaborate system of symbols. PL, for example, would designate general planning, PLL, local planning, W, writing silently, TW, writing aloud, RD, reading the directions, RQ, reading the question, and so on. Each interval during which the writer was observed engaged in codifiable form of behavior was translated into symbols and arranged along a line of dashes, ten of which would designate one minute of activity. Thus an interval during which a student engaged in the act of prewriting might be coded something like this:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{RDRQRDRQPLL} \\ \text{-----} \\ 10 \end{array}$$

indicating that the student spent one minute engaged in reading the directions, reading the question, re-reading the directions, re-reading the question and engaging in local planning (22). Using this method, Perl was able to fill pages with strings of symbols that might plot out an hour or more of a writer's various activities and thought processes while engaged in the act of writing. Intervals within the overall interval plotted would be designated by the process theory researcher as acts of prewriting, writing or rewriting depending on the type of activity involved. Perl's study represents perhaps the most clinical approach to the writing process, and perhaps it contributed to the understanding of the individual writer's composition process. But, while this approach may have been somewhat illuminating to those who study the act of writing, it failed to reach the next

step—a pedagogy that would “teach” the unskilled writer how to write. It was of little or no value to the student. In the words of Alan France, this type of cognitive theory

introduced a research method that further decontextualized writing by translating it into a record of internal mental processing. Composing aloud protocols—student writing without the student—provided generalizable data, objects that could be subjected to the rigors of cognitive science.... This led away from the interface between individuals and culture, from discourse as social dialogue, and from writing as an intertextual and cultural process. (qtd. in Petraglia 56)

There were other criticisms of the process movement that emerged, but most dwelled on the fact that, while process ideas dominated the publication of works and the presentation of papers at conferences on composition for many years, very few of those ideas translated into meaningful changes in the typical composition classroom. Instead, post-process critics have contended, process classrooms just perpetuated the “theme-a-week” regimen so characteristic of the current-traditional pedagogies that preceded process.

This was my experience in the MSU first-year writing program. We, the teaching assistants, were instructed to assign a brief writing exercise for virtually every class, with these shorter essays leading up to longer papers, four of which were required for the semester. As observed earlier, this regimen was not without its results. Repeated reading and writing assignments, all painstakingly corrected by the TA’s, followed by more reading and writing assignments, did have the effect of cleansing the students’ writing of at least some of the formal errors that characterized their writing at the beginning of the semester. But is this the measure of good writing? We certainly helped the students understand what level of grammatical and formal correctness was going to be expected of

them when their upper-division course instructors assigned papers to write. But did we instruct or inspire the students in ways that made their prose more colorful, descriptive, expressive—interesting to the reader? Unfortunately, not in any meaningful way. But if we abandon the theme-a-week regimen and follow the Pied Pipers of post-process—who suggest that writing cannot be taught—what are we left with? Not much. As noted earlier, many post-process theorists share the belief that writing cannot be taught.

As we know all too well, however, nature abhors a vacuum. Rushing in to fill the vacuum left by some composition scholars' retreat from process have been a number of socially or politically activist pedagogies and service learning pedagogies. And while certainly it can be argued that many of these approaches have merit, at least some raise a whole new spate of questions and concerns.

### Are Activist Pedagogies an Academic Minefield?

The political and social ideologies espoused by university faculty have come under increasingly sharp criticism from the lay community in recent years. These objections come largely from politically conservative circles and stem from a perception that today's youth are being inappropriately indoctrinated into the ideology of the left that most college faculty openly advocate. I would argue that this issue has produced measurable effects on public policy relative to higher education (read: funding) during the more than ten-plus years that the Republican Party has dominated state and national politics. I would most certainly not suggest, however, that these criticisms should result in any wholesale reconsideration of the freedoms extended college faculty in the

classroom. But, while the overarching issue of political and social ideology in all university curriculum is far too complex to take up here, there is a case to be made that the open advocacy for social and political positions in the composition classroom can be counterproductive at the least, and downright risky at worst—especially given the growing debate over the need for a required composition course at all or the English department’s exclusive responsibility for composition instruction. After two years of teaching writing to first-year students, I would contend that it’s important to continue the universal requirement for the course and that there are important reasons why it should be offered through the English department.

Most of what I would characterize as socially or politically activist composition pedagogies are staunchly defended by their advocates as a way of introducing grist into an otherwise uninspiring curriculum found in the typical composition classroom. But what happens when these curriculums go too far and run headlong into off-campus ideologues cut from a different cloth than members of the academic community can be unpleasant. Linda Brodkey ran into a just such a buzz saw of confrontation in 1990 at the University of Texas when she and a committee of colleagues developed a first-year writing curriculum that would “focus on argumentation and [require] students to read and write critically about ‘difference’ in the context of antidiscrimination law and discrimination lawsuits” (Brodkey, qtd. in Anderson 448). When some dissenting faculty members went public with their complaints about the appropriateness of the course content, a very divisive controversy ensued, one that was later dubbed “The Battle of Texas.” In a paper that analyzed this notorious event, Virginia Anderson tells us that,

“Among the many publics trying to seize control of Brodkey’s agenda were unconverted members of the English faculty at UT Austin, the media, parents, and legislators” (Anderson 455).

In a piece published in numerous newspapers around the nation in late 2004, the highly influential conservative author, newspaper columnist and broadcast news commentator George Will wrote almost sarcastically about a study cited in the *New York Times* that found professors at major universities who labeled themselves as liberal or Democrat outnumbered those who characterized themselves as conservative or Republican by a factor of ten to thirty or more, depending on the institution. Will went on to characterize the phenomena as worsening: “Academics, such as the next secretary of state [Condoleezza Rice], still decorate Washington, but academia is less listened to than it was. It has marginalized itself, partly by political shrillness and silliness ...” (*Chronicle* 4). Will’s reason for writing the column was not spelled out, but one can safely speculate that it was intended to underscore a belief he and other conservative commentators have held for decades—that higher education is disproportionately dominated by politically left-leaning faculty. It’s also safe to say he was at least hinting at some kind of unspecified academic reform. Will wrote that American campuses “do indeed cultivate diversity—in race, skin color, ethnicity, sexual preference. In everything but thought,” and implied that campuses utilize discriminatory employment practices to keep the ranks of their faculty pure. I would argue that universities are populated with faculty who are largely self-described liberals because they are self-selected. People get into the teaching profession to make a difference in other people’s lives, not to make a lot

of money. That almost naturally sifts out those who are more politically liberal by definition. Those who are more interested in financial wealth are drawn to the *laissez-faire* pro-business philosophies of the Republican Party and then come to embrace some or all the other conservative values that party represents. Will, however, dismisses this very argument by quoting Berkeley linguistics professor George Lakoff, who contends: “Unlike conservatives, they [college faculty] believe in working for the public good and social justice.” To which Will caustically replies: “That clears that up” (*Chronicle* 4). Colleges and universities should not be intimidated by this kind of rhetoric and, in fact, must labor to stay true to their academic mission in the face of unwarranted outside pressure. But it’s not in the interest of academics to deliberately aggravate this perception by allowing left-leaning social ideology creep into composition curriculum when it is not really necessary or justified.

It is my sense that composition instruction’s place within English departments is already a tenuous one, that many academic administrators are at least considering the possibility of eliminating the first-year writing course requirement or moving composition instruction into the various disciplines within the university, creating one writing curriculum for the sciences, another for the social sciences, another for the humanities, and placing the responsibility for teaching composition within the respective colleges, or perhaps even in the individual departments within those colleges. I believe this will worsen rather than improve the state of composition instruction by splintering course objectives and diluting resources. Such a move also ignores that fact that students,

regardless of their major, will be called upon to write in numerous genres throughout their lives and not just those within their chosen profession.

Composition instruction belongs in the English department and should remain there, but its presence there could be endangered if it is perceived that the curriculum includes indoctrination into a certain set of social and political values. While readings on controversial social and political topics are useful tools for stimulating critical thinking and analytical academic writing—I use them myself and plan to continue to use them in the classroom—I would argue that it is in the best interest of composition instructors and English departments to manage the use of these materials carefully so that the subject of composition instruction is writing, and not what many perceive to be a debatable set of social and political values. Certainly a writing course should encourage students to develop their own ideological positions on the issues being discussed, and then to frame those positions in their writing. Those are important components of skillful writing. But it should be incumbent on the instructor to ensure the students maintain ownership of those positions and not have them handed to them by the instructor.

Can this be done? There are post-process scholars in the field who argue adamantly that it cannot. After relating the dilemma that confronted a composition instructor with a foreign-exchange student who wrote an essay advocating the death penalty for homosexuals, as was the practice in the student's native country, Trish Roberts-Miller writes, "neither the concept of communities of discourse nor communitarian political theory has helped or will help composition instructors work through issues of inclusion and difference because these concepts are similarly troubled

by confusion about the place of discursive conflict in communities” (537). Roberts-Miller’s example is an extreme one, but if we teach long enough, we will encounter something like it, a situation in which we feel morally compelled to take a firm position on what seems obvious to us but may be a debatable issue outside of our own ideological sphere. Indeed, some of the TA’s have already reported milder versions of the same situation in English 121 classes at MSU. It has been and continues to be my contention, however, that, while complete neutrality on controversial political and social issues in the writing instructor is an ideal that can never be fully realized, it is an ideal that we must strive for nonetheless. In other words, while ideological advocacy can never be fully scoured from the composition classroom, it can be, and should be, carefully *managed* in a way that keeps the emphasis on the craft of writing.

All that said, it bears repeating that the readings and topics we ask our students to discuss and respond to in writing should be timely and stimulating. Almost of necessity that involves some controversy. James Berlin tells us Marxist Sociologist Goran Therborn argued that controversy inherently involves ideology: “Therborn insists that ideology is transmitted through language practices that are always the center of conflict and contest” (“Rhetoric” 719). Amy Lee addresses the issue of social and political ideology in the “radical pedagogy” classroom, citing the writings of Donald Lazere, who sees political conflict as an important composition instruction tool, but who emphasizes the importance of maintaining a distinction between teaching writing and teaching political science: “I endorse the general concept of introducing political subject matter in writing courses ... But I also share the concern of critics that such courses can turn into

an indoctrination in the instructor's ideology..." (Lazere, qtd. in Lee 35). Lee complicates the issue with her own observations, touching on the more fundamental ideology we assume when we don the persona of teachers in the university: "Education is *never* neutral because, even if we believe ourselves to be working for and with *all* students, we operate within the contexts and discourses that did not evolve arbitrarily nor to serve the best interests of all students by ensuring equity, access and inclusion" (35). But, in the final analysis, she allows that instructors should strive for Lazere's ideal of avoiding indoctrination in the classroom. And then she goes even further, suggesting the risks of indoctrination are not exclusive to radical pedagogies characteristic of post-process and post-post-process curriculums:

I would suggest that every teacher—student-centered, humanist, expressivist, feminist—should be reflexive about and accountable for how she enacts her pedagogy.... The concept [that] heavy-handedness and the risks of silencing or indoctrination are endemic only to certain, explicitly identified "political" pedagogies leaves unchallenged certain normative and naturalized concepts of teachers, students, pedagogies, and education. (36)

Patricia Bizzell's thoughts on the issue seem to have gone through a sort of evolution. In the introduction to her book *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, she writes, "Critical consciousness,'... once meant for me something like an awareness of the injustices of social inequality in America, coupled with a commitment to rectifying those injustices." She goes on to say, "I was hoping to use teaching to act on my left-liberal values in these ways: by teaching the close analysis of texts, I would equip my students to see through the discriminatory and oppressive messages flooding the media from the dominant culture" (3-4). Time and experience intervened:

But then, teaching basic writing changed many of the attitudes I brought to my work, indeed, began to make these attitudes woefully naive. My simple assumption that my own values would be ratified by reality ... received repeated rude shocks from students who were willing to misread, as I thought, with great creativity in order to vigorously support what I took to be an oppressive status quo.... (5)

She eventually arrives at a kind of fuzzy middle ground. In the afterward to the same book, Bizzell writes of James Berlin, who was apparently in the habit of describing himself as a Marxist to his students while assuring them he had no intention of indoctrinating them in that school of thought. He would then, however, tell them the course “aims to promote values of sexual equality and left-oriented labor relations and that this course will challenge students’ values insofar as they conflict with these aims” (272). Which prompts Bizzell to ask: “But wouldn’t Berlin then be a propagandist?” She responds to her own question by arguing that, when confronted with students who espouse ideas perceived to be sexist, for example, the instructor can make an argument that points out the contradictions between sexism and our common senses of fair play and equality as a legitimate rhetorical exercise. “Thus the oratorical exercise of authority does recommend a positive position but does not impose it” (273). Her point is well taken, but I would contend that it would be one tough sell in some circles. Some theoreticians go even further, suggesting that composition pedagogy can be an avenue to world peace. Quoting Mary Rose O’Reilly in *The Peaceable Classroom*, Elizabeth Ervin writes, “‘finding voice is a socially responsible political act,’ [O’Reilly] asserts, and assisting others in this effort is akin to mounting a mass protest against ‘the suppression of the personal and idiosyncratic’ that generates—and signals—an atmosphere ripe for war” (186). A high aspiration, but I wonder how that would go over at the Republican

national convention. For to espouse a pedagogy that overtly promotes world peace is to oppose war, and to oppose war begs the question, “*What war?*”, a question that invites the answer: *This war*. And then, as they say, the fight’s on. Should the writing instructor care about how her curriculum will play at this or any political convention? There are certainly those who would argue that she should not. But failing to take political objections into account when developing curriculum—particularly a first-year writing course curriculum—can be costly when the university administrators go hat in hand in search of public funding.

Anderson, in an attempt to explain what happened to Brodkey at UT Austin and why, compares the overzealous composition instructors’ jealousy of their academic freedom to the battle over property rights—an apt analogy given the political right’s fervor for protecting those very rights. Anderson suggests that Brodkey’s error was her “exclusion” of those she ideologically marginalizes as she was developing the new UT Austin composition curriculum. This is particularly ironic in that she was attempting to develop a curriculum that was all inclusive. But, as Anderson argues: “Simply excluding the excluders, even though they deserve it, seems like a shaky solution” (459).

Anderson’s analysis takes her into a highly philosophical realm, suggesting that we cannot simply dismiss those ideologies and traditions we oppose, no matter how fervently we oppose them. “As [Victor] Vitanza says, puzzling out what it means to ‘negotiate with the forces of violence’ and admit our ‘collusion’ with them without yielding to them is a vital but difficult task” (464). It is a particularly difficult task, Anderson says, for liberal-thinking academics. “[T]o listen would seem to grant authority to the morally

untenable, to refuse to judge, to shirk the decision making that goes with the establishment of proper boundaries” (458). But to fail to do so, Anderson proposes, is risky indeed. “In Brodkey’s conception of academic freedom as a sacred space and where this conception finally led her, we can detect the consequences of turning deaf ears to the tradition” (464). Ultimately, Anderson concludes, Brodkey was guilty of violating a cardinal rule of composition, failing to know one’s audience: “For surely she was aware, as a practicing composition scholar, that there were those in the world for whom words such as *difference* and *discrimination* were marked terms—marked with traces of race, gender, and class, and therefore unsuitable subject matter for a writing course” (457). I find myself substantially in agreement with Anderson. As composition instructors we venture into new curriculums, but it is incumbent upon us to be acutely aware of who we are teaching in the enforced environs of the required first-year writing course and what expectations our students, their parents, politicians and university policy makers have of this course.

In fairness to Brodkey, when she wrote about the controversial UT Austin curriculum years later, she constructed a convincing defense for the need for academic freedom unfettered by outside interference. In her book, *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only*, she also included some of the course materials intended for the ill-fated curriculum. They consist in part of court rulings on cases involving a variety of discrimination claims. I must admit that the documents strike me as unique and useful readings for a writing class aimed at fostering critical thinking and lively debate—especially in a genre-based pedagogy (which will be discussed later) where analysis of

the language in the rulings, and the effects that language produces, could prove very instructive to students in need of understanding the many kinds of work text can do. Perhaps had some of the terminology in the curriculum been changed (i.e., avoiding the use of the term “difference” in the course title), the course might have skirted by without objection and become part of the UT Austin writing program. I suspect, however, that Brodkey would argue that the terminology was too much a part of the course objective to be altered just to mollify the critics. She argues, convincingly, from a post-structural perspective, that the binary oppositions so much a part of our language inflict inarguable racial, gender and sexual-preference disadvantages on a significant segment of the population and are thus fair game for critical inquiry in a writing course, even a first-year writing course.

Brodkey’s eloquence in defense of her effort at UT Austin gave me pause, but I still maintain that her experience demonstrates graphically the kind of public opinion dangers this approach can pose in a universally required course, and I am yet to be convinced that such a curriculum can be justified given the possible consequences. There are many in court of public opinion who will never be convinced that Brodkey’s court cases were going to be used for anything except to advocate for a particular political ideology.

Let me add a caveat: I am new to this enterprise of teaching writing, and I am open to any and all arguments on this or any other relevant issue. My perspective may change over time. Perhaps I will one day be convinced that college composition is an appropriate place to school students in the art of resolving conflict, and therefore a

vehicle through which we can avoid war and other forms of what I am readily willing to concede is “oppression.” I also allow that greater latitude should be extended to instructors in more advanced writing courses as opposed to the required freshman writing course. But in the interest of full disclosure, I think the composition courses that espouse political or social agendas should be labeled in such a way that students who choose to take them know what they’re getting into. It would also be useful to acknowledge that all of the above essentially ignores the more fundamental argument that all teaching is, by nature (as Amy Lee has already pointed out) politically or socially ideological. This is true. When we enter the classroom we bring certain assumptions about what kind of writing skills we demand that our students learn, and those assumptions are premised on certain values we hold about the university, academic discourse, and the society in which we are situated. And those values inherently exclude some classes of people. It is our intention to educate *all* students in the values and standards we hold in common within the academic community and thereby include *everyone* in that community. But that’s another ideal that will never be fully realized. Our best intentions do not preclude the fact that we enter the classroom with certain assumptions and a certain political authority. It is not this level of assumed social and political ideology I am arguing should be avoided in the first-year composition classroom. Its presence there—and in all classrooms—is inescapable. It is in the advocacy for positions on topical political and social issues that I think the composition instructor runs the risk of getting into trouble, whether those positions be stated or implied.

If Not Ideology, Then Perhaps Service Learning

Bruce McComiskey developed a “social process” composition pedagogy and lays out carefully crafted writing assignments designed to engage the students with the community around them. In one, the students are asked to examine magazine advertisements and to compare the messages contained in the advertisements—obvious and subtle—with the values promoted by the publication in which the advertisements appear. Where the students found discrepancy—where ads promoted practices or constructed identities that were clearly counter to the magazine’s stated mission and values—the students were assigned to write a letter seeking to rectify the situation. They could write to the magazine, pointing out the fact that advertising within the publication is in clear conflict with the magazine’s mission and, therefore, damaging to the magazine’s reputation; they could write to the advertiser suggesting that the ad is inappropriate in the publication in which it appeared and urge them to change the content in future ads or change mediums; or they could write a letter to the editor of *Consumer Reports* alerting consumers to the duplicitous advertising practices and urging them to boycott the magazine and advertiser in question. In another assignment, the students were asked to examine their own outside jobs and compare their employer’s stated policies with actual practices. They were then to identify areas where the employer was failing to live up to policy. The students were then to write a letter to the employer constructively suggesting changes that could reconcile the discrepancies. McComiskey’s assignments have value in that they inform the students of the *work* that writing can do, the ability of writing to affect change in positive ways. The assignments steer clear of

controversial social and political wedge issues but still engage the students in the act of meaningful writing. It should be noted that McComiskey does not require—nor does he discourage—that the letters the students write ever be mailed.

I would submit that McComiskey's social process pedagogy could be placed under the broader heading of "service learning," an effort to integrate the classroom curriculum with the community beyond the campus in ways that bring about positive social change for the good of all involved. But I would also argue that even some of these seemingly innocuous endeavors are not without their risks. For a service-learning syllabus project for a graduate composition theory class, I put together an assignment that mimicked McComiskey's method. The assignment would require students to analyze the inadequacy of parks and recreation facilities in an area community of their choice and find ways to address those inadequacies—through the solicitation of volunteer work, cash and in-kind business donations, and researching and applying for grant money. As non-controversial as the parks facility issue sounds, I could see where it could be construed as advocacy that promotes one set of social values over another. I modeled the assignment after a "community journalism" project undertaken by a West Coast newspaper. Community journalism is a buzz phrase for the newspaper practice of identifying pressing and supposedly universally recognized community needs, reporting on them extensively, conducting community meetings in search of solutions, and editorializing in favor of the solutions identified. In the project after which I patterned the syllabus, the newspaper devoted considerable resources to investigating a shortage of soccer fields in the community. At a trade conference where the journalism project was discussed, I

argued that the project was perhaps not as benign as it seemed. Who could possibly object to better soccer facilities for children? Well, a lot of people might. By advocating for the soccer fields over other community needs—such as an urban renewal project, a homeless shelter, or a community medical clinic for low-income residents—the newspaper was making a value judgment, one that placed one group’s agenda over another. And by devoting precious news resources to that idea—and advocating the expenditure of public funds on that agenda—the newspaper neglected other needs, and abandoned its commitment to journalistic impartiality in the process. I can’t say I won the argument, but I still believe I made a strong case.

Service-learning composition pedagogies run similar risks when they ask the student to fully participate in community issues, using writing skills to help agencies—typically government agencies or non-profits—to get meaningful work done while stretching scarce social program dollars. This idea may offer many opportunities to engage students in ways that could invigorate their writing. But in MSU’s hometown of Bozeman, where highly divisive environmental issues abound and environmental non-profits are a cottage industry, it could also pose an ideological minefield. I suspect other communities could pose similar dangers though perhaps in different issue areas.

Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles, Jr. mounted a spirited defense of service learning in *Where’s the Learning in Service-Learning*, but devoted just a page and two-thirds to directly addressing the danger that service learning pedagogies will cross over into advocacy: “There is some tension around this goal [perspective transformation in students] because social action is a process that involves advancing some interests over

others ... In other words, it is political, and politics is about competing interests and controversy” (131). Eyster and Giles’ only direct response to this challenge seems to be a citation from the teachings of Paulo Freire, who viewed “the development of political consciousness as central to instructing adults in literacy. Education was not just about learning to read, but learning to question the conditions that left many without access to education, economic opportunity, or political power” (132). This strikes me as insufficient response to an issue of this magnitude. Despite my doubts, however, I am willing to consider the potential of service learning pedagogies to more fully engage the students in their own writing while achieving some good in the community and improving town-gown relations. In fact, given the opportunity, I anticipate that I will at some point carefully craft a course syllabus aimed at getting traction with students because of the way they affect noticeable change within the community—while steering clear of advocacy.

### Making Writing the Subject of the Writing Course

Anis Bawarshi offers a post-process pedagogy that sidesteps the whole business of using topical material to create the binary conflicts we use so extensively to stimulate critical thinking and analytical writing:

Rather than having students write about topics such as race, gender, gay rights, the environment, animal rights, flag burning, the death penalty, the media, and so on (important topics all), we can encourage students instead to write about how different genres position writers to write about these topics—to write, that is, about writing. (163)

Bawarshi's curriculum invites students to examine, analyze and ultimately mimic many of the genres that are part of everyday life: obituaries, wedding announcements, business communications, scientific reports, letters to the editor. In this way he engages the students in the act of writing while they gain an understanding of the many kinds of work writing can do, all without actively inviting students to choose up sides on controversial, topical issues, be they social, political or community-related. I find this approach attractive and Bawarshi's focus on writing as the subject of his writing instruction admirable. But I initially worried that his approach will not be as effective as he tries to sell it. I could envision a large portion of the first-year writing class responding with a blank stare to Bawarshi's genre assignments. On reflection, however, I realized that the curriculum I was trying to develop is, in fact, a genre-based curriculum, one that attempts to instruct in the basics of newspaper writing. I would just take it a step further than Bawarshi. Instead of merely asking students to *mimic* a variety of writing genres, I would ask the students to *adopt* relevant writing (or, more specifically, invention) strategies that can be used in many, if not all, of the writing genres in which they will be called upon to write in the future. This much is certain: Bawarshi's thinking resonates with me when he writes of "a frustrating assumption that FYW [first-year writing] is a contentless course, that has no inherent subject." To which he responds, "I have tried to demonstrate that FYW *does* have a subject; it is writing ... Not just the process of writing, but writing itself—what writing does, how it works, and why—should be the subject of FYW" (168-169). Amy Devitt adopts a similar perspective with an important difference, arguing that the teaching "genre awareness" may be a far more

effective way of using genre to teach first-year writing students. Devitt's pedagogy makes use of a wide spectrum of genres: personal letters, rental agreements, and lab reports, among others. And she engages the students in an equally wide range of assignments: asking them to analyze the power relations in a rental agreement or a patient's medical history, and asking them to propose ways in which these genres could be improved, by including more information, or giving the patient more of a voice in a medical history (199).

I have become convinced that genre is an effective method and a valid subject for the first-year writing course. What I propose to do here is add one more element—collaborative writing in the whole-class setting. Competent writers create superior texts by engaging with a hypothetical reader, imagining that reader's reaction to various words and phrases and continually testing for the most desired reaction. By engaging the students in a collaborative effort of writing together and adopting the conventions of particular genres, I believe they can have the experience of being reader and writer simultaneously in a form of writing situated to perform a particular function. Those with the desire to improve as writers should quickly learn the utility of experimenting with different phraseology in order to achieve the most desired effect. In this way, the subject of the writing course *can* be writing, without the need to infuse the course with advocacy for a particular political or social ideology.

The conflicts—real or perceived—among the university, the public and state policy makers are longstanding and will always be with us to some extent despite the best of intentions. And let me emphasize once again that I believe it is vital for the university

to maintain academic freedom and vigorously defend it against would-be assailants. But, as Anderson writes: “even a time-honored ideal like academic freedom is a territory we cannot take for granted. It must be defended. The question is *how* to defend it if simply saying No to the No-says does not work” (459). Religious studies must of necessity objectify Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and other religions in ways that many inside and outside the university will find disturbing, or even offensive. Philosophy studies must examine thought that questions many of our society’s most fundamental values. Any decent curriculum of art studies will stretch the limits of what we communally embrace as good taste in other contexts. All of those and much more are appropriate and defensible areas of inquiry in the university. But composition courses should—as much as possible, anyway—be about writing. They should invite, encourage and cultivate critical thinking skills by examining contentious contemporary issues. But they should stop short of indoctrination.

As teachers, we are all—or at least should be—committed to making our students “better people.” The difficulty arises when we try to determine just what constitutes a better person. Progressive academic thinkers are particularly offended by what they regard as the simplistic thinking of the religious right and its objections to legalized abortion, same-sex marriage, certain works of literature, and the teaching of evolution in public schools. But, as evidenced by recent elections, there is a substantial component of the Montana and U.S. population that holds these beliefs dear. And that is the public that the public university serves. While we may feel compelled to argue for reproductive choice, same-sex unions and religious-free public education—and with strong moral

conviction—we must be careful when and where we do it. We must *not* simply dismiss the opposition as irrelevant. To do so is to take considerable risk. That’s what Brodkey did at UT Austin, and she—and I expect the institution she worked for—paid for it.

### Where Do We Turn Now?

It’s counterintuitive to suggest that the act of writing is not a process—of course it is; as so many post-process theorists contend, it just happens to be a different process for every individual, as distinct as any other aspect of the human personality. And the individual writing process is subject to the influences exerted upon it by time and place. This revelation has led to some rather harsh words for and rejection of process pedagogies, leaving too much of a vacuum in its wake. Fortunately, though, for the beleaguered composition instructor, at least some theorists did not stop there. McComiskey offers some constructive thoughts: “Writing, then, is not a codified process of discovering ideas but a hermeneutic exploration of different interpretive strategies, and writing teachers, then, become paralogic participants in a classroom dialogue rather than masters of some desired discourse” (“The Post-Process Movement” 39).

McComiskey and other theorists have contributed to the so-called “social turn” in post-process composition, underscoring the need for dialogue and collaboration as tools for introducing student writers to what Thomas Kent calls “parology,” a term he resurrected to describe “the uncodifiable moves we make when we communicate with others, and ontologically, the term describes the unpredictable, elusive, and tenuous decisions and strategies we employ when we actually put language to use” (3). Kent’s

words on the future of composition instruction sometimes have a pessimistic ring: “If we accept these claims, we cannot ignore the pedagogical consequence of our position: writing and reading—conceived broadly as processes or bodies of knowledge—cannot be taught, for nothing exists to teach” (161). On a more hopeful note, though, it is because of this uncodifiable, paralogic nature of human communication, Kent argues, that “we will need to drop our current process-oriented vocabulary and begin to think about writing and reading pedagogies in externalist terms.... [A]n externalist pedagogy would stress collaborative and not dialectical interaction between teacher and student” (164).

Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford have pursued this vein further:

Here the research in learning theory is clear and unequivocal: real learning occurs in interaction as students actively use concepts and ideas or strategies in order to assimilate them ... What follows from this line of reasoning is the need to reconsider course structure in terms of assignments that will engage students in interaction and collaborative learning. (121)

All this talk of collaboration and socialization in the classroom strikes a chord with those novices among us who believe we have experienced a “teaching moment.” This is that not-frequent-enough moment when students—a substantial portion of the class—are actively engaged in discussion about an issue they are writing about. Without question, there is a spark created by this sort of lively discourse, a spark that invigorates the students writing. It is this social aspect of the composition classroom that seems to have the most potential for instilling that much sought after *voice* we want so desperately to infuse our students’ writing.

An Even More Modest Proposal: Let's Keep the Required  
First-Year Course and Let's Keep It in the English Department.

Any discussion of the required first-year writing course should address Sharon Crowley's "modest proposal" for the elimination of the requirement altogether and converting the course to an elective. Her arguments are too powerful to ignore. Despite the fact that composition is a relatively recent addition to the university curriculum, it is one of the oldest *required* courses—in many cases the only one. Crowley indicts this requirement as a relic. She argues that the required freshman writing course is little more than justification for the size and makeup of modern English departments—expanded to meet the demands of the sheer number of students who must take the course—and a validation of the university's authority over the student.

In some respects, freshman composition is a remnant of the traditional American college. Its indebtedness to the older model of American education is obvious in the fact that it is still required of all matriculants. But the required course retains more than its traditional institutional position: it still performs the sort of moral surveillance on students that [James Morgan] Hart claims was the task of the entire traditional college curriculum. (57)

The purpose of today's required composition course is not to teach students to be better writers, Crowley argues; "it is instead to subject students to discipline, to force them to recognize the power of the institution to insist on conformity with its standards" (74). She further faults the requirement because it is treated as a second-rate course, taught by TAs and part-time instructors. "According to administrative lore, this arrangement is necessary for economic reasons. No institution, the argument goes, can be expected to

staff such a large program as first-year composition with full-time permanent faculty” (118).

Certainly not all scholars agree with Crowley. Amy Devitt offers a convincing defense of the first-year writing requirement in her theory of genre-awareness pedagogy.

Some scholars and teachers have called for abolishing writing courses apart from disciplinary contexts. First-year writing courses in particular have been attacked as not useful, in part because of a potential lack of transferability of the general writing skills learned in composition course to the particular writing tasks students will later confront. The teaching of genre awareness rather than particular skills gives a new potential justification for first-year writing courses and a way of helping students transfer general rhetorical understanding to particular rhetorical tasks. In that respect alone, a pedagogy of genre awareness can rescue first-year writing courses. (202)

Devitt has built a convincing case for teaching genre awareness (as opposed to genre) as a means of giving writing students a greater selection of tools as they approach each writing task—both in school and their professional lives beyond. More on this later.

In her call for the elimination of the first-year writing course requirement, Crowley makes a point—several, in fact—but she fails to address an important one: this course persists at the insistence of administrators and faculty *outside* English departments, those who ask English departments to “just teach them how to write.” Year after year, decade after decade, college faculty members express profound frustration over incoming students’ inability to express themselves clearly and effectively in writing. Crowley might argue that the persistence of this inability—even in the face of the continued first-year writing course requirement—is just one more argument for its elimination. I, however, am not so ready to give up.

It surely goes without saying that the ability to read *and* to write—to express oneself effectively in text—is fundamental to the students’ success, both academically and professionally, regardless of the field pursued. And the fact that some students come to the university lacking in these basic skills is nothing new. Studies conducted over time suggest that writing ability in first-year students has been fairly consistent from decade to decade, indicating to me at least that acquiring writing skills is a function of maturation and exposure to writing assignments in the college setting—not the least of which is the first-year writing class. The debate continues over whether it is even possible to teach students to write better, but I have seen ample evidence in my own classes that the students’ ability to write improves noticeably, if incrementally, through exposure to the first-year writing course. So if they are not learning from me, they must be teaching themselves through the repetitive reading and writing assignments I demand of them.

And as long as we persist in requiring students to take the course, I submit that it should be offered through English departments. There is a case to be made that the post-process contention that all writing is situated argues for the location of writing programs within the colleges and departments throughout the campus where the genres peculiar to the various disciplines taught are practiced. That, however, would expose students to only a single, narrow set of conventions with limited applicability. And, as is amply demonstrated every semester, most students will change their major field of study at least once, and many several times, throughout their college career. That doesn’t even consider the students who go on to professional lives outside the major field of study they finally settle on. As we shall see, a genre-awareness pedagogy offers the advantage of, not only

acquainting the students with multiple genres, it also can train them to recognize and learn the conventions of individual genres quickly and easily and adapt them to their own styles of writing. And given the above, English departments should be the site of this genre-based writing instruction simply because nowhere else in the university is quality writing—clear, crisp prose and faithfulness to the standards of style—valued more highly than in the English department.

## A BETTER WAY: TEACHING WRITING AS A SOCIAL ACT THROUGH WHOLE-CLASS COLLABORATION AND GENRE AWARENESS

Any attempt to develop a composition curriculum should begin with the setting of course objectives. Despite something on the order of a century and a half of history, freshman writing as it is taught in American universities lacks a clear, common course objective. The obvious objective is to improve students' ability to write. But all agreement ends there. What is good writing? Is it writing with voice? Is it writing that conforms with the standards of "academic discourse"? That which is syntactically and grammatically correct? The latter—writing "correctly"—was the objective by default throughout much of the history of freshman composition. Often termed the "current-traditional" composition pedagogy, the objective was to scrub the work of young writers free of formal error through a monotony of repetitive essays assigned, written and laboriously corrected by the instructor.

Process pedagogy was an attempt to shift the focus away from the product of composition to the process that created it. But as John Trimbur noted, "the distinction between product and process, which initially seemed so clarifying, not only proved conceptually inadequate to what writers do when they are writing, it also made writing instruction appear to be easier than it is" (110). Though this movement contributed something to our understanding of the component activities writers engage in when they write, it offered little practical use for teaching students how to improve their writing process. The teacher can instruct students to prewrite, write and rewrite emphatically and repeatedly, but process pedagogy treats the act of writing as a private thing, conducted in

solitude, and few students, if any, will actually force themselves to approach the task in such a prescribed manner; fewer still will achieve any real success with it. Students take the writing assignment home, put a modicum of effort into it and hand it in to be “corrected.” And so much of the composition curriculum of today continues to be little more than the current-traditional sterilization of formal error from students’ writing.

As was noted earlier, a good deal of the impetus for retaining the first-year writing course comes from demands outside the English department to “just teach them how to write.” So, by acclamation then, it seems, that to “just teaching them how to write” has become the objective, however vague, of the required first-year writing course—to teach freshman to write clearly and effectively throughout their academic career and beyond. The current-traditional pedagogy, which ruled for somewhere on the order of a century and has essentially persisted through 30-some years of emphasis of process over product, addresses only part of that objective by inflicting the discipline of academic standards of grammatical and syntactical correctness on young writers. The repeated writing-correction-rewriting regimen to which we subject our first-year writing students, *does* effectively reduce—and, in some small minority of cases, even eliminate—the frequency of formal errors. But is that enough? If so, then we achieved the pinnacle of our success in the 19th century when we first imposed the theme-a-day tedium on students and instructors alike. But I would submit that it is not enough. Writing clearly and effectively—capturing and holding the attention of readers in sufficient numbers for sufficient duration to successfully communicate, persuade and edify—requires more than text free of formal errors. It requires confidence in one’s

ability to communicate through writing. It requires an *ear* for the kind of writing that works. It requires writers who are fully invested in the act of writing—writers who *own* their writing.

I agree with post-process theorists when they characterize successful writing as a social act, an act performed in the interaction between and among human beings through that subtle, fluid, verbal interplay that all people engage in on some level and that Thomas Kent calls “parology.” It is there that we should begin to look for a new composition pedagogy. As Kent writes:

An alternative to the traditional dialectic instructional methodology—an alternative that might account for the paralogic nature of discourse production and reception—has begun already to develop in the area of collaborative writing research, and this approach to the teaching of reading and writing might be called an “externalist” pedagogy. (160)

Kent calls for the abandonment of all process terminology (though I disagree on this point; it just needs to be considered in a new light). No more prewriting, writing and rewriting, he says, maintaining that the act of writing is of such an indeterminate nature that it cannot be reduced to three steps (or even a dozen, or more) in an instructional curriculum. “Teachers cannot ... provide students with a framework that explains the process of collaborative interaction, for the dynamics of collaborative interaction change on the spot as our hermeneutic guesses change” (165). It would be akin, I think Kent would maintain, to trying to develop a guide to becoming a witty conversationalist. There are no two situations that are alike, for which the same remark would enjoy precisely the same appropriateness. Kent doesn’t abandon all hope for the future of composition instruction, though nearly so. If we accept his assumptions, writing

instructors can no longer serve as teachers in the conventional sense, but they can serve as a sort of “mentor.” These mentors, working one-on-one with each student, would no longer occupy a privileged vantage of authority, but would enter into a partnership to explore the interpretive—or hermeneutic—options available for our text production. As mentors, instructors would thus learn along with their students. But can this new relationship be had for a price the university is willing to pay? “[A] shift to this collaborative instructional method would be very costly, for significantly more teachers would be required in our schools, and faculty in disciplines outside English departments would need to be retrained in order to take responsibility for the written discourse generated in their courses” (169).

Would it though? The collaborative pedagogy I propose here could be conducted within a larger group setting—the entire class. And though there will be limits to how frequently the exercises can be conducted, and not every student would engage in the activity on the same level or to the same degree, I would submit that every student who willingly engages this pedagogy will have revealed to her or him in some measure the kind of hermeneutic guesswork that takes place in effective writing. Each student would then be invited to modify the techniques experienced in class to her own liking. As Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford suggest, “What follows from this line of reasoning is the need to reconsider course structure in terms of assignments that will engage students in interaction and active collaborative learning” (121).

### Revealing the Social Nature of Writing

If post-process theorists are correct when they characterize the act of writing as “indeterminate, public, interpretive, and situated” (Kastman Breuch 117), and I believe that they are, then it becomes the function of the effective writing course to situate the student in a public genre while leaving the indeterminate and interpretive aspects of the act for each writer to discover for herself. It goes without saying that writing takes the form of a virtually limitless number of genres, only a small number of which each student will encounter in their academic life and later. There are the many genres of academic discourse that we ask the students to adopt and adapt to their major fields. Then there are the numerous professional genres the students will encounter in their working lives—legal briefs, inter-office memos, research reports, patient histories and environmental impact statements. But I maintain, when done right, there are characteristics all of these genres share.

Newspaper writing is some of the most public and publicly situated writing routinely produced in our culture, and a composition pedagogy that introduces the fundamentals of newspaper journalism—including the collaborative nature of the open newsroom—could instill in the student an appreciation for the social nature of the writing act that could be carried over into the other genres, specifically academic writing in the short term. Though all the different kinds of newspaper texts fit in a narrow set of genres—breaking news, sports, features, opinion and obituaries, to name a few—they are all designed to grab and hold the attention of as many readers as possible for as long as possible. This, I would argue, should be a quality sought in all writing, regardless of

genre. And, more importantly, this simple objective can be used as a starting point for a class through the use of some simple exercises that address the obstacles first-year writing students often face.

When writing breaking news stories, journalists are taught to strive for and keep reader attention by arranging the information into an “inverted pyramid,” where the most important information is provided at the beginning of the story, with additional information added in order of descending importance. Sports writing, though clearly a separate genre from breaking news writing, employs the same basic strategy. Thus the account of a football game is not a chronological narrative beginning with the opening kick-off and proceeding play-by-play through the four quarters of the game to the final whistle. Rather the final score is delivered first—often in the first sentence, almost always in the first paragraph—followed by highlights of the game in order of descending importance to their relevance to the final outcome. It’s a very basic strategy and, in most cases, easily learned. What it provides, though, is that ever-so-necessary *strategy*. What I have found in the limited experience of teaching four first-year writing classes is that first-year writing students are more frequently stymied by invention than any other issue. They all too often just don’t know where to start. The inverted pyramid offers students a starting point, a method for finding that first sentence in the story, essay or report—whatever it is they are called upon to write in school and their careers.

When screening prospective reporters, newspapers often use a series of simple tests designed to see if the applicant is fluent in the fundamentals. These tests consist of a series of randomly ordered facts, often gleaned from an actual news story. The applicant

is asked to craft the list of facts into a narrative adhering to newspaper style. The results are judged on how well the story reads—based on word choice, efficiency, transitions—and how well the facts are arranged into an inverted pyramid of importance based on reader interest. Besides providing a glimpse of a potential hire’s job skills, these exercises also approximate the task a reporter faces every day in getting information organized in a way that is most accessible to the reader.

In the classroom these “newsfact” lists serve as writing heuristics that can be projected through a PowerPoint projector on one half of a screen easily visible to everyone in the class. A narrative is then created on the other half of the screen. The instructor does the typing, at the direction of students who choose the facts in a descending order of importance. Each student who offers a suggestion is required to provide a brief justification for the suggestion. Other students are then invited to challenge each suggestion until a rough consensus is reached. As the facts are incorporated into the narrative, class discussion also focuses on possible transitions, word choices, and all the other textual devices that writers normally struggle with in isolation. Only, in these exercises, the issues are hammered out with all class members invited to participate—as a *social* act. By exposing the writing “process,” making it audible and visible on the screen, the students discover three things: a strategy for beginning the writing process, i.e., the inverted pyramid, a sampling of the kinds of hermeneutic guesswork that goes into the act of writing and, as the words go up on the screen and are changed in accordance with prompts from other students, they will see the way in which the much maligned prewriting, writing and revision processes do not happen in a neat

sequence but, in fact, happen almost simultaneously as the text unfolds on the screen. In addition to working with the newsfact heuristics in whole-class collaboration, students are given heuristics to take home and turn into narrative. Only the homework assignments are to be completed without the benefit of word processors.

The technology of word processing has been a blessing to the business of writing in more ways than one could list here. But, by providing a quick, easily mastered tool for writing, revising and polishing text into a finished product, with all traces of what led up to that finished product erased, vanished into the ether, word-processors have also served to obscure the evidence that could reveal to each individual writer her *process* of producing text. Before the advent of laptop computers with word-processing programs, newspaper copy produced in the field was typically written out longhand on every other line of lined notebook paper. As the writer revised his own copy, changes were made by crossing out text and inserting new text in the lines in between the text of the first draft. When the blank lines were crammed full, further revisions was accomplished in the margins. The “finished” copy was then read over a telephone to a clerk in the newsroom who would type it on a typewriter or, later, into a mainframe computer. The writer read not only his text into the phone, but every quotation mark and punctuation mark as well. All of this revealed to the author the sound and the rhythm of his own writing, prompting him to revise further yet as he read the text.

Sound cumbersome and messy? Indeed it was. But this method of producing finished copy had the effect of making the traces of the writing process visible. The revised copy on the lined notebook paper was actually a remarkable artifact that

documented the thought processes the writer employed as he wrote. Listening to him read his own copy was revealing as well. In an attempt to make the process of students' writing visible again, I prohibit the students in my first-year writing class from writing any of their assignments on a word processor for the first few weeks of the class. They will revise their writing by crossing out text and inserting revisions between the lines and in the margins of the first draft. They will then write out a final copy in longhand and submit their finished assignment along with whatever drafts they went through to produce that finished assignment.. In class, individual students will be required to read their finished work to me as I type it into the laptop and onto the screen. But the student will be required to read their paper from the front of the class with their back to the screen. So they will have to tell me every quotation and punctuation mark they want to see in their writing. This process gives me and the students our first glimpse into the heretofore obscured writing and thinking *process* of the first-year writing student. Once revealed, that process can then be analyzed, with modifications suggested, developed and implemented to improve the process.

From the newsfact heuristics we segue into feature or magazine-style writing. Students are assigned to decide on a personal experience they want to share with others through a feature-style story. In first-year writing classes, I have had the pleasure of witnessing a distinct phenomenon—the writer who is suddenly interested in what she is writing about. The effect is perceptible. The writing takes on a palpable urgency that's notably absent from the monotonous drone of the students' attempt to conform with academic discursive writing. For the second through fourth major papers required of my

first-year writing students, we transition into that academic discursive genre of writing. But for this first paper, we help the student find her voice through an exercise in personal writing.

The personal experience my students are asked to write about could be an outdoor adventure (so common to the experiences of young people in this part of the country), or it could be an emotional or intellectual experience, though students are advised, as always in the first-year writing class, that all writing is “public” and subject to reading to the entire class. They are thus cautioned to choose an experience they are comfortable with sharing with others. The students are assigned to begin this task by compiling their own list of facts—every memorable, or perhaps not so memorable, aspect of the experience. That list is written out longhand and brought to class. A volunteer is sought to provide their list for the whole class to work with. A modified application of the inverted pyramid will provide a beginning strategy for ordering the information in a feature story. Students are invited to prioritize facts for placement in the story—not necessarily in order of descending *importance*, but in order of reader *interest*, a much more subjective, and therefore perhaps, more creative standard. This exercise expands the basics of news writing into a strategy the students can adapt to and employ in the many other genres of writing they will engage in their education and professional careers.

### Grading

The issue of grading is uniquely critical to a pedagogy that teaches the act of writing as collaborative social process, for nowhere is the traditional authoritarian nature

of the instructor more institutionalized than in the act of grading. It became my goal, therefore, to take the confrontational nature of grading out of the picture—as much as possible. As I was to find with many other aspects of this endeavor, it was not a simple issue.

At no point in the process of learning to teach first-year writing was I as mystified as when I sat down in front of my first set of freshman essays with the intent of grading them. I had not anticipated the level of writing skill that I would confront. Responding in a meaningful way to a college freshman about his or her writing, I found, was going to be different from anything I had experience with to date. The business of “grading” text, as opposed to processing it to make it acceptable for newspaper publication, was going to present a formidable challenge. During the week of training we received in advance of beginning our teaching assistantships, I can recall no more than an hour or so spent on the subject of grading. As part of our training materials, we were provided with several samples of first-year writing students’ essays. We went through two of them, marking them up for grading purposes. It was a baffling experience. It reminded me of helping my own children with their high school writing assignments. During the training session, the writing program director offered some advice on what to expect from first-year students and some suggestions for how to respond to it when grading the work, as well as a grading rubric for our students’ papers. All in all, our preparation for grading was pretty minimal, though I don’t fault the writing program director for that. He had a lot of material to cover in a very short period of time, and he did a creditable job of doing

that. But, in the end, we were left to find a way around the whole grading conundrum pretty much on our own.

As we started into our first semester, the teaching assistants frequently compared notes on how they approached the task of grading, with some of the most productive advice coming from the second-year TA's. They offered practical grading assessment forms that some of us adopted and attached to our students' papers as a sort of explanation of how we arrived at the grade. The forms divide the papers down into components—introduction, support, conclusion, etc.—and provided a space for writing a point score for each with 100 points the maximum score possible for the overall paper. By accident or design, these TA's had arrived at a form of “analytic” grading that is widely used and favored by some composition teachers (Wolcott 104). But I found myself using the forms in a backwards fashion. I would read a student's paper, decide on a final grade first (based on some “sense” of the quality of the paper) and then fill in the points for specific aspects of the paper so that, when the points were totaled, I would arrive at the final grade I had already decided on. Other TA's reported similar experiences.

With a growing sense of frustration, I found myself philosophizing about the whole practice of grading. Why do we do it? Is it absolutely necessary? Couldn't the teaching of writing—a skill as opposed to a field of knowledge—be better accomplished through some form of enthusiastic coaching without the demeaning and discouraging act of assigning a grade to the students' work? I was not alone in these thoughts. Much has

been written about the need for and advisability of grading writing. As Lynn Z. Bloom says,

*Grades are big trouble because they undermine good teaching.* Current composition theorists agree, in principle, anyway, on the importance of dialogic discussions in which all students have a right to speak up and speak out ... But grades automatically signal who is more equal than all the rest put together. The teacher, who has the power and authority to award the grade, therefore has the power to impose her views on the directions the discussions and the resulting papers should go. (Bloom 385, italics in the original)

Peter Elbow, an outspoken critic of conventional grading, lists a litany of issues associated with grades:

- They aren't trustworthy.
- They don't have clear meaning.
- They don't give students feedback about *what* they did well or badly.
- They undermine the teaching-and-learning situation ...
- Figuring out grades is difficult, and the task often makes us anxious because fairness is so hard to achieve. (Elbow 400)

He cites two institutions, Evergreen State College in Washington and Hampshire College in Massachusetts, that have done away with grading altogether with no apparent ill effects. Instructors provide a "narrative evaluation" of students' work but stop short of assigning letter grades. Elbow describes evaluation as a form of constructive feedback given to the student, while grading is more like an unappealable verdict that stops the student in his or her tracks, with all efforts at revision and improvement essentially over (400).

All that said, I nevertheless quickly and decisively came to the conclusion that, yes, it is necessary to issue grades to students, not only because the English department and the university require it, but because grades are the only real incentive for the bulk of

students to go through the motions of the composition curriculum. Grades are the “currency” of the whole student-teacher transaction. Elbow, of course, has an answer to that:

We hope that by awarding fair grades, we will cause students to exert themselves to engage in the learning activities we want them to engage in. But our hope is dashed as often as it is fulfilled. Some students get good grades without much work; some have given up trying to get good grades; a few don't care what grade they get; still others work only to psych out the teacher rather than to learn (and a few even cheat or plagiarize). (403)

Elbow does not go so far as to advocate the abandonment of grading altogether. Rather he endorses a form of “contract” grading. More on that later.

At one point I succumbed to another naive notion: as a newcomer to teaching writing (and a latecomer, with all sorts of real world experience in the process of writing and editing texts with writers from across the spectrum of writing skills), perhaps I could develop the definitive grading method, one that would require minimal time and effort on the part of the instructor and yet would maximize the desired effect of advancing the students' writing skills. But as I began to look into what had already been done in the way of research and development on writing assessment, I found a humbling body of material—one that had explored the possibilities of grading writing in creative and exhaustive ways that I had never even contemplated. None, however, seem to qualify as *the* method, the one that any composition teacher could learn and use with success.

Any discussion of writing assessment must grapple with the question of just what constitutes good writing. We all have our own ideas about what constitutes good writing. Research has found repeatedly that any number of experienced writing instructors will all give different grades to the same piece of student writing. As I cast about for a better

grading method, I succumbed to yet another foolish notion: that it would be possible to glean all, or at least nearly all, the subjectivity from the process of grading composition. I was quickly disabused of that notion. As Bloom points out, “Each and every grade reflects the cultural biases, values, standards, norms, prejudices, and taboos of the time and culture (with its complex host of subcultures) in which it’s given” (384). Still, it seems that if (and, granted, that’s a big “if”) we could agree on some specific and measurable course objectives, we should be able to minimize the subjectivity of grading, if all grades are awarded on the basis of those objectives. However there are many who will never be convinced, including Bloom: “As graders we can be fair, but as human beings we can never be objective” (384).

Recent research and development in the field of writing assessment emphasizes a growing regard for two particular methodologies: the use of portfolios as a basis for assessment, and the concept of “holistic scoring” scoring, of which there are number of variations. Portfolios are collections of students’ writing samples generated over the course of a semester and maintained by the students. Portfolios have found favor with writing instructors who argue the range of work they include is more effective for gauging the students’ progress than a series of essays that are graded and then forgotten. “Many teachers use [portfolios] because they had been dissatisfied with the system of evaluating individual essays. Grading essays separately provides snapshots of what students are doing on particular topics in a given week, but the aggregate may not be a coherent picture of the students’ progress or abilities” (Glenn 154). There’s something to be said for this argument. Besides providing a view of the students’ progress over the

course of the semester, the portfolio has the potential to give the students a sense of ownership over their writing as well as a sense of permanence in their effort. All of their writing assumes a certain “shelf life” instead of being discarded immediately after a grade is issued. But I think the portfolio may be better suited to a second-year writing course or beyond. Here’s why: many, if not most, first-year writing students (at least at MSU, where many adept writers skip the first-year course by taking an advance placement course in high school or testing out of the course) face considerable challenges just mastering control over chronic writing problems as well as basic organization and invention issues. Asking the students to maintain a portfolio could serve as a distraction from some of these more basic issues, although I may be convinced to try it at some point.

Also practiced extensively is “holistic” grading.

[H]olistic scoring is based on the premise that the whole is worth more than the sum of its parts; this scoring approach hence seeks to focus on an entire piece rather than on its individual components. Thus an essay is not evaluated in terms of its specific features, e.g., its development, creativity, sentence structure, or mechanics; neither are ratings derived by mentally adding together scores for the individual features. Instead, a paper is scored in terms of the overall impression—the synergistic effect—that is created by the elements working together within the piece. (Wolcott 71)

It’s important to add that holistic scoring usually does not measure the individual’s writing against some universal standard. Instead it “ranks” each essay within a group of writings, i.e., that of other first-year writing students within the class or institution. The term, “holistic scoring,” as well as the terminology (“synergistic effect”) that describes it, has a New Age ring to it that is, frankly, a little off-putting. Practitioners should expect to be met with some suspicion that they are merely avoiding the tedium of correcting

students' essays line-by-line, marking every run-on sentence and missing comma, as well as evaluating individually the students thesis statement, support and conclusion. And, depending on how the principles of holistic scoring are applied, those criticisms may be valid. In fairness, though, it should be noted that, in its purest form, holistic scoring involves fairly extensive training in the application of scoring scales that are developed very carefully. And I don't believe that any college instructor can in good conscience completely ignore the mechanics of a student's writing, particularly if there are chronic issues. But I think if we as instructors are going to advance our students' writing abilities in significant ways, the lion's share of our attention has to be paid to the overall effect of the students' writing. That's where we should concentrate our efforts and our discussions with our students. It's interesting to note that the method typically used to score student essays on standardized tests is "primary trait scoring," a variation of holistic scoring that measures the success with which the student achieves a particular task in writing. In other words, while purely holistic scoring tends to view good writing as good writing, primary trait scoring breaks the task of writing into three categories, explanatory, expressive and persuasive. The student is assigned a specific task in one of these types of writing and is then judged on the effectiveness with which he or she completes the assignment (Wolcott 88-89).

Other current approaches to writing assessment include analytic scoring, which was discussed earlier and forms of which seem to be commonly used in the MSU English Department, and direct writing assessment. We might associate analytic scoring with the extensive marking of papers that has been so common to the composition classroom since

its inception more than a century ago. But it's more. Analytic scoring "implies examining the particular—or at least salient—features of compositions in terms of their audience, and purpose and commenting upon the students' effectiveness in handling these features" (Wolcott 102).

The scoring method I adopted from the second-year TA's at MSU fits the description of analytic scoring. Points are awarded on a scale to various components of the students' compositions, such as introduction, thesis, support, organization, conclusion and formal errors (grammar, syntax and spelling). Though this method does give, or at least has the potential to give, some specific feedback on components of students' writing, I think it tends to put too much emphasis on the specifics without addressing the overall effectiveness of the essay. There is also considerable discussion within the field over whether the extensive correction of students' errors actually teaches the student anything (Lee 216). On the whole, I find the method tedious and unsatisfying, and my sense is that the students also find it unsatisfying and somewhat distracting from the more important business of addressing the overall quality of their writing. Analytic scoring, in a very real sense, reinforces the students' natural tendency to try to please the instructor in order to achieve a higher grade, and this can only distract the students from the kind of dispassionate examination of their own writing habits that will translate into genuine improvement.

Direct writing assessment employs impromptu writing assignments to be completed within certain time constraints. Though more common to standardized testing situations, direct writing assessment can be incorporated into classroom teaching, through

the assignment of freewrites, as a periodic check on the development of students' writing abilities (Wolcott, 10-23). While I have used freewriting assignments to gauge the state of students' writing abilities at various intervals during the semester, I don't think it's an effective way to teach students the kind of writing competence we should be looking for in a first-year writing course. In upper division courses, students are assigned to write extensive papers in their major subject areas. These assignments call for organization and invention skills that can only be developed through drafting and revision processes essentially absent in in-class freewrites.

Peter Elbow's preferred method of grading employs a "contract," a set of conditions—completed assignments, significant revisions, minimum attendance, etc.—that, if met, will be rewarded with a particular grade. He prefers this method because it removes, at least temporarily, the distraction of grading, while freeing up the instructor and student to engage in "evaluation," the assessment of the students' writing strengths and weaknesses.

[T]he contract permits me to make blunter criticisms or pushier suggestions and have students listen to them better. They know that my responses have nothing to do with their grade ... Students needn't go along with what I say in order to get a good grade. I've set up the contract so that they cannot refrain from making significant revisions, but I emphasize to them that they can revise entirely differently from how I might have suggested or implied—and they don't have to make their revisions necessarily better, just substantively different. (Elbow 402)

This method has real appeal, and I determined to make it part of the pedagogy I am proposing. With the issue of the grade taken out of the picture—at least for the moment—there is the potential to significantly modify the relationship between the student and instructor, making the give and take more spontaneous and uninhibited. "In

short, by decoupling evaluation from grading, I think we can make it healthier and more productive” (Elbow 402). I did have reservations about the typical first-year writing student’s ability to fully understand and trust the contract grading method. But I resolved to develop a contract that is crystal clear and wholly justifiable in its requirements. (See Appendix A.)

### Error

As much as I would like to, my attempt to develop a collaborative, social-process writing pedagogy cannot ignore the nine-hundred-pound gorilla in the room: error—typographic, grammar, syntax, punctuation and spelling error. Unless it is eliminated, it will be the downfall of otherwise clear, effective writing. But dealing with it can be the most tedious, enthusiasm-draining aspect of teaching the course, and any attempt to improve the first-year writing pedagogy must find a better way to deal with this issue.

It strikes me that one of the greatest dangers the well-meaning composition teacher faces is slipping into the habit of making the correction of formal errors the subject of the course. It happens so easily. As we read through each stack of writing assignments, the urge to mark mistakes and insert corrections is almost irresistible. Soon, virtually all time and effort is devoted to this task. But I am convinced that these corrections go largely ignored by the individual student. Almost every first-year student has some grammatical and syntactical issues, but for most they are few, and errors are infrequent. For some, though, this is a far bigger issue. ESL students, for example, often have trouble speaking, much less writing, the language. This presents special challenges. And there are native speakers who face similar difficulties due to learning disabilities or

insufficient encouragement, guidance or practice in their elementary and secondary schooling. These do not have to be career-stopping obstacles, however. My advice to students at the beginning of the course is that, if they face any of these difficulties, they will have to overcome them with help—whether the help of the university’s writing center or that of friends or family. This also prompts a thorough discussion during which I make a clear distinction between what constitutes getting help from an outside source and what constitutes plagiarism. As I am exposed to their writing through early assignments, I advise students of their need to seek help in particular areas. I stop short of marking and correcting every error but note at the end of the assignment of the frequency of certain types of errors. I also do not make the frequency of formal errors a grading issue (i.e., a contract violation) unless it occurs in one of the four major papers the students are assigned to write over the course of the semester.

Frequently, though, an abundance of formal errors is not the result of unfamiliarity with the English language, learning disabilities or the lack of formal training. More often than not it is the result of laziness on the part of the student—the failure to give their paper a final proofread or, when word processors are permitted, the failure to use a spellcheck program. These errors *are* a violation of the grading contract and, if they persist, will result in a lower final grade for the course, and I make this clear to the students at the beginning of the semester.

## TAKING IT TO THE CLASSROOM

The actual classroom application of these ideas yielded some unanticipated benefits while evidence of anticipated benefits was encouraging though less than conclusive. Of the unanticipated benefits, one, that of high attendance, seemed to be driven by the contract grading, while the less than conclusive results were what I observed, coupled with what was self-reported by the students, and therefore suspect. My bias should be obvious; I want my ideas to work. And no matter what you say to dissuade them, students have a powerful tendency to say or write what the teacher wants to hear or read in the interest of achieving the most desirable results on their transcript. They are only human, after all, and twelve years of conditioning through elementary and secondary schools is hard to overcome. All that said, however, responses to the in-class collaborative writing exercises, handwritten papers, exposure to newspaper journalism writing strategies, and contract grading were almost exclusively positive and, in many if not most cases, enthusiastic. Therefore I concluded that, for a first try, the effort was at least marginally successful and worth further development for a second semester.

Also of note, is the fact that these methods address many of the concerns critics have voiced about process pedagogy. I believe that these methods succeed at least to some degree in teaching the students that writing is a social act that cannot be taught as the regimented, three-step, prewriting, writing and rewriting process that is the same or even similar for most people. And they succeed in acquainting the students with many subtle choices the writer can make to communicate more effectively with a very real audience.

### Invention Strategies

The introduction of journalism invention strategies probably got the most traction with my first-year writing students. One of the most frequent complaints that I hear from the students is that when they are given a writing assignment, they don't know where to start. The "inverted-pyramid" approach to ordering information into a narrative is simple, easy to understand, and—with minor modifications—adaptable to a variety of writing genres. "The strategy of writing in an inverted pyramid ... helped me out tremendously," wrote Josh Strissel, who was just out of high school and from the tiny Montana community of Rudyard. "I feel it helped me write a more organized and easy to read paper. I have even started using these strategies in other classes." Patrick Fradette, a traditional freshman from Helena, wrote, "I really liked the inverted pyramid strategy because it allowed me to arrange my thoughts together faster and get them down on paper. And, yes, I will definitely be using these strategies on future papers I write."

The use of these writing strategies clearly constitutes a genre-based (or at least genre-awareness) pedagogy, and there is a considerable debate over the efficacy and advisability of such an approach. Those who voice objections fear that the teaching of forms and conventions associated with a particular genre runs the risk of locking students into certain approaches to producing text, approaches that could handicap them in their quest to learn new genres in their academic and professional careers. Ken Hyland, however, constructs a convincing defense for the practice of teaching genre.

... [R]ather than as an uninterrupted, left-to-right *Pre-writing* — *Writing* — *Post-writing* activity, this paradigm [genre-based pedagogy] sees writing as essentially individual problem-solving. It thus seeks to construct cognitive

models of what writers do when they write, emphasizing the complexity of planning, the influence of task, and the value of guiding novices to greater competence by awareness of expert strategies. Writing in this view is essentially learnt, not taught, and the teacher's role is to be non-directive and facilitating, assisting writers to express their own meanings through an encouraging and co-operative environment with minimal interference. (18)

Amy Devitt makes a clear distinction between genre pedagogies and genre-awareness pedagogies: "What is being taught in my proposal is the process of learning new genres rather than specific linguistic features of specific genres.... Such meta-awareness of genres, as learning strategies rather than static features, may also withstand greater distance in time between learning and application" (197). Devitt makes this distinction, at least in part, as a defense against critics of genre pedagogies as potentially dangerous because teaching one genre extensively could limit the ways in which the students face future writing challenges. Devitt allows for this potential but argues that genre-awareness pedagogies, which give the students but a brief exposure to a multitude of genres, will be beneficial in that it will heighten the students' awareness of all kinds of genres and alert them to the kinds of work they can do (197). Given the cursory treatment of a variety journalism genres I was forced to confine myself to in our abbreviated course, I think the pedagogy I developed would more accurately be characterized as a genre-awareness pedagogy rather than a genre pedagogy. I have also determined to include a greater variety of genres in any future teaching endeavors.

### In-Class Writing Collaboration

More than any other component of this curriculum, conducting whole-class collaborative writing exercises requires a certain skill and technical savvy on the part of

the instructor. Ideally, these exercises are conducted in classrooms equipped with “smart podiums,” an Internet-connected computer coupled with a PowerPoint projector. Though there are only a very limited number of these classrooms on the MSU campus, I was coincidentally and fortuitously assigned to classrooms equipped with smart podiums during the two semesters I worked on this project. However, if I had not been so fortunate, I had already determined to conduct the same exercises using a wi-fi capable laptop and portable PowerPoint projector. Either way, this technology allowed me to access documents needed for in-class writing exercises through my email account. I merely attached the documents to emails, sent them to myself and then called up my email account in the classroom and downloaded the documents onto the classroom computer for projection onto a screen in front of the class. Using Microsoft Word software, I would create two side-by-side documents on the screen. The first would include a news story fact list that I emailed to myself and downloaded onto the smart podium computer. (See Appendix B.) I would then type into the second, blank document the writing suggestions the students provided during collaborative writing exercises.

These exercises require a certain amount of skill on the part of the instructor in order to maintain the tempo of the class and maximize class participation. That skill, I’ve found, comes with experience. These exercises were much more interesting and productive in the second semester class than in the first. With any class discussion, there is tendency for a few students to dominate, but I determined at the outset to employ strategies aimed at including the maximum number of students in the exercises. My thinking was that, in order for these exercises to have the maximum effect, i.e., reveal the

social nature of the writing process to the students, a great variety of voices needs to be heard. I was pleasantly surprised at the level of participation. I think that relates to the relative simplicity of the task—arranging readily provided information into an inverted pyramid of descending importance (or descending interest in the case of feature, or personal, writing)—and the fact that I was able to successfully sell the exercises to the students as “experiments,” and thus a sort of a game without significant consequences hanging in the balance. A significant number of students (almost unmanageable at times) would chime in spontaneously with suggestions on how to proceed with constructing the narrative from the fact list. As mentioned in the description of these exercises earlier in this paper, the only requirement for making a suggestion was that the student must provide a brief justification for their suggestion. I found there was no shortage of such justification, or for disagreement, for that matter, and counter suggestions for how to proceed with the narrative. In all honesty, this was a pretty messy process, but I found I could get better at it (both with managing the discussion and with keeping up with the suggestions on the smart podium keyboard) with practice. After the class (with myself acting as moderator and word processor) was able to reach a rough consensus on how the narrative should be ordered, I would then produce the original news or feature article on the screen for purposes of comparison. What we found was that, though the class was able to produce a perfectly serviceable narrative that arranged the provided facts in a cogent manner, the professional writer exercised a greater economy of words, packing more and more important information into each paragraph of text. The students seemed genuinely interested in comparing their collaborative work to that of the writing

professional. My sense is that some significant learning came out of these comparisons. As we progressed through the exercises, students contributing to the group effort would verbally employ strategies they saw the professional writer use in earlier stories for getting more information into fewer words.

An interesting and, in retrospect, significant and productive byproduct of these exercises was a frequently recurring discussion about the motives of the writer. As we compared the ways in which our collaborative efforts differed from the professional writer's work, students began to make observations about how the ordering of information, the tone of the writing, even word choices, can color the effect the narrative has on the reader. For example, a story about an Albany, New York, physician who pleaded guilty to selling drugs illegally over the Internet prompted a student to note that the use of direct quotes from the defendant's attorney, and where those quotes were placed in the story (toward the beginning rather than toward the end), changed the readers' overall impressions of the defendant. This led to a line of questioning (of me) about what kinds of restrictions are placed on newspaper reporters in terms of allowing them to write their own personal biases into stories. As this discussion developed, more and more class members began to participate. There was, it turns out, a rather high level of interest in how the media presents the news and the motives behind various presentations. I've found that it's in my nature to let class discussions go when they get lively, as it was in this case. But often my conscience starts to bother me a little if I perceive that the discussion is getting off point. In this case, my conscience prevailed and I eventually cut off the discussion in order to get back to the writing exercises I had

planned for that day through the use of the smart podium. But, in retrospect, this was not very bright on my part. As Amy Devitt argues, one of the most important benefits of genre-awareness pedagogies (of which, I eventually became aware, mine is one) is the students' discovery of the ideology inherent in various writing strategies. "Having learned how to perceive purpose behind form, the learner can discover the purposes behind particular forms she or he notices. Having learned how to discern potential ideological effects, the learner can be alert to the ideologies underlying the genres she or he is acquiring." (197).

As the students learn how the writer employs a repertoire of skills to achieve a desired effect, they become aware that different genres accomplish things in different ways. Devitt used a wide variety of genres in her pedagogy—personal letters, rental agreements, medical histories—and, given the opportunity to teach future writing courses, I intend to expand the genres examined. What is accomplished through this kind of "genre-awareness" pedagogy is the "transferability" of writing skills Devitt argues is one of the most powerful justifications for continuing the first-year writing course requirement. What occurred in my classroom during these discussions of writers' motives, then, were perhaps some of the most important learning that students can experience about the nature of writing, the work it does, the effects it can have on readers. Their observations about the motives that journalists can bring to a particular writing task—and how those motives might manifest themselves in the finished texts—were approaching the very nature of Thomas Kent's "parology," all those myriad and subtle choices we all make when we engage in the act of writing, or the act of

conversation, for that matter. These spontaneous classroom discussions surely heightened the students' sensitivity to the power of words and opened up for them new possibilities for producing desired effects on the readers of their own writing. After the initial experience with this phenomena, I began to encourage rather than deliberately conclude discussions of this nature.

After the fact, the students' reactions to these exercises were mixed, with some clearly enjoying them and learning from them and others indifferent. Those who found them engaging offered insightful observations. In response to a writing prompt that asked the class to evaluate these exercises, Deborah Lang, a precocious student from California who entered college at age sixteen, wrote something that suggested to me the exercises definitely sensitized her to the idea of audience: "I rather enjoyed the writing exercises. I was put in a situation where I comprehended what event took place but now the challenge was to convey that to numerous people. I was constantly asking myself what 'they' would find to be important." Sonja Brinkel, a traditional first-year student from Bozeman wrote, "It was interesting to see how different people approached the same problem ... The exercises helped me gain a better understanding of the purpose for writing and the importance of writing well." Justin Smith, a non-traditional student who entered the university after several years in the work force, wrote, "I think the in class writing assignments helped in that I was able to get into the mindset to write.... When a person writes a story it is easy to convey a feeling in the writing. I think this is why so many people approach it differently."

Two collaborative writing exercises I had envisioned clearly didn't work—one because it was perhaps just a bad idea and the other because I lacked the nerve to try it. The first involved having the students swap the lists of details they had recalled from a specific experience in preparation for their personal writing assignments. My thinking was that if the students saw how another writer put their list of random thoughts together into a narrative, it would stimulate even more possibilities for telling the story in the mind of the original writer. What I found, though, is that an individual student can have somewhat eccentric ways of notating the details recalled from her experience, ways that another student had difficulty translating. Some students were unable to make enough sense of their partner's list to construct a narrative. Those that were able to, however, succeeded only in producing a rather shallow interpretation of their partner's experience.

The second idea I had was to take one of the students' lists of recollections and have the whole class collaboratively piece together a narrative from the list. But the list of recollections that would lend itself well to this exercise is a rare one. Additionally, I was reluctant to approach a student and ask if they would be comfortable with this kind of public treatment with their personal experience. Despite these failings, I think there is still potential for both these ideas to work if they are refined sufficiently.

### Personal Versus Academic Writing

The course objectives for the MSU first-year writing class as published in the class catalogue clearly state that the emphasis is to be on expository writing versus personal or creative writing. This falls in line with a great deal of what has been

published on the discipline of composition instruction. The thinking tends to hold that the students will be asked to produce academic or expository writing in their college careers and beyond, therefore that is what should be taught in the first-year writing class. But the issue has been the subject of extensive debate. Robert J. Connors wrote a succinct history of this debate first published in 1987 in *College Composition and Communication*. He notes that personal writing has fallen in and out of favor in composition instruction theory since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century but that, despite this ambivalence, remains a mainstay in many composition courses.

Many advocates of the writing process movement seem to opt, at least tacitly, for personal writing as the only honest and revealing sort of discourse. At the other end of the spectrum, the advocates of “cultural literacy” have formalized many of the vague disquiets [discussed earlier in the article] ... claiming that student writing is threadbare because students simply don’t know enough about their culture to say anything beyond their own experience. (153)

Connors’ essay also amounted to a spirited defense of personal writing assignments in the first-year writing course. “Learning that one has a right to speak, that one’s voice and personality have validity, is an important step—an essential step. Personal writing, learning on one’s own experience, is necessary for this step, especially when one is being encouraged to enter the conversation at age eighteen” (154).

It has been my own observation that the quality of students’ writing—its expressiveness, descriptiveness and even freedom from formal error—rises substantially when the student is intensely interested in what she is writing about. I observed this on several occasions during the first two semesters of instruction in which there were no personal writing assignments. When students were responding to topical readings with

their regimen of three-part, claim-and-support, discursive assignments, they might stumble on an issue with which they had had an intense experience, the teen pregnancy of a friend, the death of a loved one or the aftermath of a broken home. In these all-too-rare cases, the students suddenly seemed to find their “voice” and had powerful and interesting things to write about the subject at hand. The personal writing assignments that constitute the first part of this curriculum achieve this effect in a far greater number of students—to some degree, it could be argued, in all the students. It is my contention that using personal writing assignments can ignite the students’ voice and awaken an awareness of the power their writing can have. Then, with guidance and encouragement from the instructor, they can transition at least some of what they learn into the expository and persuasive writing they are asked to do in later assignments in the course. This can be accomplished by coaching the students on the need to find interesting angles in subjects that are not inherently interesting and strategies for finding those angles.

Joseph Harris visits the subject of personal writing assignments in his contemporary history of composition instruction. He begins with the watershed Dartmouth Seminar of 1966 at which British theorists (including John Dixon and James Britton) “invoked the idea of *growth* as part of an attempt to shift work in English away from the analysis of a fixed set of great books and toward a concern with the uses that students make of language.” This idea was taken up by American teachers who “centered their work around notions of personal *voice* and the composing *process*” (ix).

“In the teaching of writing,” Harris wrote, “it means starting with jotting down inner speech and dialogue (‘what is happening’), moving to memoir and biography

(‘what happened’), and concluding with speculative or argumentative pieces (‘what may happen’)” (12). He went on to observe, “Growth theory most often pictured that scene [of teaching] as a place where students write and talk about personal experience” (14).

Harris cites James Moffett’s 1968 *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* as offering “a compelling plan for starting the work of a course by having students experiment with personal and expressive uses of language and then having them move from there to more formal and public kinds of writing” (29-30).

Adding to the critique of process theory, Harris writes:

The problem with the older current-traditional approach to teaching writing ... was its relentless focus on the surface correctness of student texts, so that writing was reduced to an empty tinkering with verbal forms. But the advocates of process did not redirect attention to what students had to say so much as they simply argued for what seems to me a new sort of formalism—one centered no longer on textual structures but instead on various algorithms and heuristics, and guidelines for composing. (56)

However, the question of whether the enthusiasm that is apparent in the personal writing assignments finds its way to any extent into the later more formal writing assignments remains largely unanswered. My experience with one first-year writing section left me with the impression that, at the very least, these assignments excited some interest in the class that wasn’t apparent in the two earlier sections conducted solely with the conventional writing-across-the-curriculum methodology. But, admittedly, that impression could have been colored by my own desire to succeed, or the enthusiasm observed in the class could have been coincidental.

One side effect of the personal writing assignment is the way it promoted positive personal relationships with the students early in the semester, positive relationships that

may have paid dividends in the form of greater effort and higher attendance and class participation later in the semester. The personal writing assignment stimulated conversation about the student's background at the first one-on-one conference with the instructor. This not only puts the student at ease, it helps demonstrate the social nature of writing, how it communicates information and conveys important aspects of the writer's personality to the reader.

### Writing Without Word Processors

Of all the ideas I brought to this effort, I probably had the most doubts about the merits of having students write longhand as opposed to using word processors. My thinking—that the revision process (crossed out and inserted words and phrases) would reveal each writer's process to his or herself—was admittedly a bit of a reach. But when I quizzed students about their experiences in the class through a writing prompt, the answers I received were surprisingly perceptive and make a case for continuing this strategy. “For me the extra time it took to write out the assignments was beneficial for catching error or just thinking of better ways to rewrite a sentence. I will most likely start most of the papers I write in college out longhand,” wrote Patrick Fradette. Luke Klompfen, who recently returned to school after a two- or three-year hiatus from higher education, wrote, “I found myself considering other ways to write a particular sentence or paragraph just because I was taking extra time to write it.” Andrew Pearson, a traditional first-year student from Billings, wrote,

When I wrote it out, I found that my subjects wouldn't be as jumpy as if I were typing it. Instead, I was able to discuss what I wanted to talk about

more thoroughly and to the point. I felt that overall it helped me collect my thoughts better than if I typed. When I type, I only look at one option of how to approach something and go with it. When I wrote [longhand] I simply just saw more options.

What I hadn't anticipated (but probably should have in retrospect) is that not all students are adept at using word processors. Some had never taken a keyboarding class in high school and practiced some sort of hunt-and-peck style of typing that was actually slower than writing longhand. A few, in fact, were already in the habit of beginning the writing process by drafting their thoughts in longhand. A case in point is Tony Ballew, a non-traditional first-year student pursuing an education degree after a fairly extensive career as a film industry sound technician.

I find it a distraction to compose while typing. My [longhand] drafts are full of words or sections crossed out, circled (meaning re-insertion to me), [and] fresh insertions. Even whole sections I may circle and use a lead line from the selection to the spot it's to occupy. It does give me a better idea of the sound, the cadence and the feel of the words and their effect by comparing the differences. A computer deletion doesn't give me that opportunity.

Support for longhand composing was not unanimous, though there were only four in the first semester class of twenty-nine who found the disadvantages clearly outweighed advantages. Alexis Lindberg, a traditional first-year student from Sidney, Montana, wrote, "For the most part, I felt that writing longhand disabled my writing abilities because it's hard to keep all your ideas straight when you're so focused on writing out the words. Once I lost track of my ideas, I was stuck. With a word processor, it's faster and easier to put every thought down."

For these longhand writing assignments, students were required to write one clean, finished copy of their work to hand in for credit. But they were also asked to

submit all earlier drafts as well. I told the students that I was interested in seeing how their work progressed through stages, and that they should in no way be self-conscious about the messiness of earlier drafts. In fact the messier these earlier drafts were, the better, as far as I was concerned. I am not sure how much can be learned from these earlier drafts, but they definitely revealed to me that individual students employ a wide variety of approaches to particular writing problems. (See Appendix C for examples.)

After seeing these drafts and reading the students' thoughts, I determined to continue using the longhand assignments into the next semester, which is ongoing as of this writing, and I have yet to hear any strenuous objections. In fact, students in the current semester offered observations that were even more insightful. One education major who had managed to avoid the first-year writing course until her senior year wrote,

At first I found writing longhand an annoying chore. But in the long run, looking back on the process I feel it has effectively made a positive influence on my thought processes and creative writing.... Writing longhand gives me an opportunity to really participate in the writing process.... Seeing words on paper in my handwriting gives the story more character and personality.

### Contract Grading

My stated purpose for the use of contract grading was to take the subjectivity of traditional grading out of the picture. This, my thinking went, would free the students from trying to figure out what kind of writing I would "like," and therefore award a high grade to, and allow them to concentrate on the quality of their writing according to their own perceptions. They would simply have to fulfill the contract to the extent that they achieved the grade they wanted or needed. When first confronted with the contract

grading method, the students asked few questions and seemed to experience little to no anxiety. But, as we all know, young people can be literalists in the extreme.

The contract I presented to them (see Appendix A) said specifically that, in order to achieve a B or higher, they were to miss no more than three of the 43 classes scheduled for the semester. I did not specify that there were to be no more than three *unexcused* absences (though that was my intention). The contract went on to specify that students were to turn in no more than one short writing assignment and none of the major paper drafts or revisions late. Failure to meet these or any other conditions of the contract would result in their grade slipping “rapidly below a B.” My intentions were to apply the contract somewhat leniently since I was not all that confident in what I was doing. Therefore if a student had four unexcused absences, her grade would not immediately plummet to a B-minus or, in the case of five absences, to a C-plus, but I didn’t volunteer this information and none of the students asked for any more specificity. What transpired, then, was remarkably high attendance. In the first six weeks of the class, perfect attendance was the norm with more than two of the twenty-nine students absent on only one occasion. And when students had to be absent, they typically notified me in advance, either in person or through email with great detail as to why they had to be absent from the class. Their explanations were usually sufficiently convincing that I granted them an excused absence. As of this writing, I am about halfway through the second semester using the grading contract, and the same high-attendance pattern is recurring.

This high rate of attendance had not been my experience during my first two semesters of teaching first-year writing. My sense was that, even though the conventional syllabus I used for these classes specified that any more than three unexcused absences would be counted against the students' final grades, attitudes towards attendance tended to be casual at best and cavalier in the extreme. I considered classes during which no more than four of the 30 or so students enrolled were absent a success.

A word on the overall issue of attendance: first, there's the simple matter of the instructor's ego. I was surprised by how important I considered attendance to be in the classes I taught. I interpreted low attendance as lack of interest on the part of the students and lack of interest as a failure on my part. If I couldn't make the class interesting enough to make the students want (or at least be willing) to attend every session, perhaps I was failing at this enterprise. Self interest aside, however, there are more important reasons to place a premium on attendance in composition classes. Composition courses are different from almost every other university course in that they impart (or, more accurately, develop) a skill rather than a body of knowledge. Among the few analogous courses, might be music courses that involve instrument instruction or some math courses that involve systematic practice in new procedures. The first-year writing course at MSU is based on the development of skill through repetition. If students' attendance is sporadic, they are not exposed to the repetitive assignments, classmates' response to those assignments, critical thinking fostered by class discussion and numerous in-class free writes, all of which serve to help the student develop his or her writing skills.

Courses premised on the contention that writing is a social act are even more dependent on the presence of students in the classroom in order for the social act to occur. In almost any case, then, attendance appears to be an important factor in the success of a first-year writing program. Whether the contract grading has had anything to do with the high attendance in my class is certainly open to debate. It could be merely coincidental, but it may be a phenomenon worth further inquiry.

After the fact, students' reactions to the contract grading were minimal but almost exclusively positive. One student expressed anxiety about it in class. She indicated that the lack of a formal grading record left her in the dark about where she stood. This same student, along with one other, were the only two who asked about their grade during the last of three one-on-one conferences we had during the semester in conjunction with major paper assignments. I always kept my record book with me when conferencing with students, but I didn't volunteer to give each student an update on their progress. In retrospect, it seems like a good (and perhaps obvious) idea to go over each student's record during each of the three conferences with the goal of inspiring more effort.

Several weeks after the end of the first semester, I sent an email to all the students asking for feedback on the grading system. Not surprisingly, the response was sparse—three students to be exact—and all three were, also not surprisingly, students who had earned A's for the course. With final grades in hand, there was not much motivation to write a response to my email. And the questionnaire was a bit long; perhaps a shorter one might have evoked a greater response. Of those who did respond, Zach Stricklin, a traditional student right out of a Great Falls, Montana, high school, wrote that he found

the contract grading to be easy to understand and that he was satisfied with it as a grading method. Alexis Lindberg wrote that the contract grading was “very easy to understand and very effective.... I wasn’t as concerned about my grade with the contract grading, mostly because I was certain that I would achieve a B in the course at least.” Patrick Fradette wrote, “Yes, I did find the contract grading method easy and easy to understand. Do all the assignments, come to every class, and try to improve your writing and you are pretty much guaranteed a B at least. Nice and easy.... I think it definitely made me try and just improve my writing instead of just looking for ways to get you to give me a higher letter grade.” Two of responding students—Zach and Alexis—suggested that a discussion of each student’s grade status at each, or at least one, of the one-on-one conferences might be a good idea and a way to dissipate any anxiety about grades. I have taken that suggestion and plan to discuss contract compliance with each student at the second and third conferences during the semester that is ongoing as of this writing. It should be noted that, in anonymous course evaluations all students fill out at the end of all MSU courses, one student characterized the contract grading as “foggy,” an indication, I believe, of that student’s discomfort with the method, although because of the evaluations are anonymous, there’s no way to contact the student and ask him or her to elaborate.

*(A note on the contract-grading syllabus included in Appendix A: there is little original in it. The basic syllabus is patterned after the syllabus provided us during our TA training. The contract portion of the syllabus borrows heavily—word-for-word in a few cases—from the grading contract found in Peter Elbow’s book Everyone Can Write.)*

Error Revisited

To me at least, the proliferation of formal error continues to be the most nagging problem in the first-year writing course. As stated earlier, I had resolved to avoid making “correctness” a significant portion of the course. I was somewhat successful in achieving this. When reading the students’ short responses—either to personal writing assignments in the early part of the semester, or to assignments written in reactions to essays taken from a reader in the latter part—the urge to mark every misspelling and misplaced comma was a powerful one. I succeeded in marking only a spare few of exemplary errors and then writing a note at the end of the paper indicating that particular types of errors were occurring frequently in the student’s writing and that the student needs to get help with these issues. In class, and in the grading contract, I told the students that I would not consider formal errors on their short responses a failure to meet the grading contract (unless they were so frequent as to indicate a slipshod effort at the assignment) but that their revised major papers must be virtually free of any formal errors in order to meet the contract conditions for a B.

My resistance to correcting students’ papers stemmed from several observations. First, it’s become apparent that only a minority of students—and perhaps a small one at that—bother to read corrections and/or comments written on their short, less-important papers. I’ve noted other TA’s taking great pains with these papers, marking every formal error and, in some cases, writing revisions to the faulty passages in the margin. I’ve offered the observation that only a few of their students are spending any time reading the comments, and one responded by confirming my second observation: that extensively

marked drafts to their major papers seem to send the message to the student that, if he or she corrects all the errors the instructor has marked, that will constitute sufficient “revision” to the draft and produce an acceptable final paper to be handed in for credit. Based on observing my own 16-year-old son’s process of completing writing assignments, this tendency—to consider a corrected paper to be a revision of the draft—may stem from high school writing pedagogies. (A third reason for my determination to get away from meticulous corrections can be found in the writing center student who had been “cured” of using commas.)

Of course, the most important question to be asked about this shift of emphasis away from extensive corrections to students’ papers is, did it work? Did it produce a significant decrease in the incidence of formal error in the students’ writing? My sense is—and this purely subjective backed up by no empirical evidence—that the students’ major papers in these two semesters were somewhat better than those of the previous two semesters in terms of formal error. This could be wishful thinking or coincidence, but I think it’s fair to say at least this much: the results were no worse, and the wear and tear on the instructor (and the resulting detrimental cynicism) was significantly less.

I find it very interesting that chronic formal error is almost nonexistent in the bulk of the letters to the editor I have received over the years. This could be easily explained by assuming that the examples I see of this writing genre are written by writers who are consistently self-selected, i.e., people who regard themselves as capable writers whose words are worthy of publication on the editorial page. Those who have difficulty with writing, it could be effectively argued, write to the newspaper rarely or never because

they are aware of their problem and reluctant to write for fear of embarrassment. However, I have seen more random and spontaneous examples of writing by older writers—many of whom have no more than a high school education—and, even in these cases, formal errors seem to be much more rare than in the writing of first year college students. I am beginning to believe that error-free writing may be, at least partially, a function of experience and maturity and that, given time and the practice demanded by continual college writing assignments, most of the writers we typically see in first-year writing courses have grown out of their writing problems by the time they graduate.

#### A Note on Revision

In my second semester in this project, I took my emphasis on the importance of revision in the writing process to a new level. Revision is the essence of good writing or, at the least, an integral step. But students' resistance to revision is tenacious. The reason for this is apparent: writing is a chore to get through just like any other work. The idea of "discarding" any of their hard-won, "finished" prose to look for a better way of writing a text strikes the students as akin to tearing down a fence they just built in order to build a better one. But, although any serviceable fence will keep the cows in, rare is the piece of prose that fulfills its purpose adequately without at least some revision. I drove this idea home to my students in the first major paper cycle—the personal writing assignment. As the students were developing this paper through the extensive listing of recalled details from the experience they wished to relate, I assigned them to choose one of those details and write a three hundred word introduction to their paper—written out longhand—using

their chosen detail as an “entry point.” As soon as they had completed this introduction and dutifully handed it in for credit, I assigned them to do it again using an entirely different detail, chosen from their list, as an entry point. That done, they were then assigned to write the first draft of the complete, 1,200-1,400-word paper, using a third, entirely different entry point for their introduction, again chosen from their list. For the final paper, they were assigned to write a “significant revision” of their draft. Though I didn’t require them to choose a fourth entry point from their detail list for the final paper, I strongly encouraged them to consider doing so and emphasized that—in order to meet the conditions of the grading contract—they must, at the least, write a new introduction or conclusion, reorder the details in their narrative in some significant way or add new information to their draft. My intent was to force every student to experience the act of revision and, hopefully, glimpse the benefits, i.e., that revision produces a better outcome.

I think this effort succeeded in a significant way. Somewhat to my surprise, I did not hear even a murmur of resistance to these forced revisions. It was probably there, but the forced revisions were small enough in scope—they only involved the first three hundred words of their paper and they were writing, after all, about their favorite subject, themselves—that the students engaged in these acts of revision without complaint. More significantly, though, when we met in one-on-one conferences between the draft and finished papers, the multiple introductions frequently came up in the conversation, with the students asking me for my opinion on which of their introductions worked best. I think this is compelling evidence that this forced regimen of revision helped the students

begin to appreciate the social nature of writing and the importance of considering audience in the writing process. Even when invited to complain about the repeated revision, the students declined. By a show of hands, the students unanimously agreed that the multiple revisions made their final papers better. In a written questionnaire following the completion of this paper, the students were likewise unanimous in their enthusiasm for the results, if not the act, of revision. Deborah Lang wrote:

In high school or even college in the past, you are told to bring a 4-5 page paper into class that week so you just type. In this situation you have no room for revision. I started out my paper one way, dead set that was the way I was going to keep my paper. However, my paper has a much better, compelling beginning. When you change things numerous times you pick up things you like and dislike until you have what you feel is the “best.”

Daniel Judge, a traditional first-year student, wrote of his paper, “I thought each time I rewrote it, it got much better ... I was also able to experiment with different effects that I wanted to leave on the reader.” First-year student Jonathan Alexander wrote, “Having to read and re-read and really tear it apart makes you think of better ways to write your ideas.” Nearly every student in the ongoing spring semester class expressed similar sentiments. This widespread agreement among the students about the value of revision I consider to be one of the greatest successes of this entire endeavor.

Given the method of measurement (student self-reports and my observations), the assessment of the effectiveness of these methods of teaching writing may be less than conclusive, but I think I can argue that these methods answer many of the concerns critics have about process pedagogy. By incorporating collaborative writing exercises through whole-class participation, I believe this method acquaints the students in new ways with the kind of creative “paralogy” Thomas Kent says is inherent in the individual’s act of

writing, the sensitivity to audience, the “play” of words with meaning, that are so important to good writing. These methods also succeeded in teaching the students that these paralogic effects could be more effectively achieved through revision, and that there is a wide repertoire of genre from which the writer can choose to achieve the desired effect.

CONCLUSION: GENRE-BASED, SOCIAL-PROCESS PEDAGOGY IS TAKING  
WRITING INSTRUCTION IN A PRODUCTIVE DIRECTION

A social process pedagogy that incorporates genre, then, seems to provide an effective composition pedagogy, certainly as good as or better than others I have been exposed to in my very limited experience, and one with which I find myself increasingly comfortable. But having said that, of course, there remains the obvious question: does it get results or, more to the point, better results than more conventional process or current-traditional pedagogies? Based on my (and my students') subjective observations, the answer would seem to be yes, but I am the first to admit that those results are suspect. They are suspect because I am anxious enough to succeed that I will, perhaps, see successes that aren't there, and my students, as always, were anxious to please. The effectiveness of this methodology would be better measured by having outside evaluators (other faculty members) judge the quality of writing produced by the students exposed to this methodology compared to a control group of students from more conventional writing-across-the-curriculum pedagogies. These comparisons would have to be conducted in a double-blind study and with a sufficiently large number of students and evaluators to produce valid results. That would be a major undertaking that would require a persuasive sales job. Given the opportunity, however, I have ambitions of designing and conducting such a study in the future.

I believe that what can be said convincingly, though, is that this pedagogy successfully incorporates much of the social-process and genre-based thinking that has been extensively developed in recent composition pedagogy discussion. It attempts to

teach writing as “indeterminate, public, interpretive, and situated” (Kastman Breuch 117) as so many post-process theorists have effectively argued is necessary in order to put first-year writing students in touch with their audiences and demonstrate to them the work that effective writing can do in their lives. Perhaps it goes without saying that genre and genre-based pedagogy is, indeed, a form of social-process pedagogy. For, surely, nearly all genres are public, interpretive, and situated, if not wholly indeterminate. In my limited experience, I have become convinced that these approaches do an effective job of acquainting students with the nature of good writing and inviting them to participate in the same—in their own way, a way that is discovered through the highly social nature of this pedagogy.

Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch argues that there is no such thing as a true post-process pedagogy, but concedes that there are “two main principles that post-process theory can offer pedagogy: the rejection of mastery and the engagement in dialogue rather than monologue with students” (118). And these qualities, I would contend, are found in the curriculum I am trying to develop. Teaching writing more effectively involves, in Kastman Breuch’s words, “. . . becoming teachers who are more in tune to the pedagogical needs of students, more willing to discuss ideas, more willing to listen, more willing to be moved by moments of mutual understanding” (122). While Kastman Breuch and other scholars argue that this is a rejection of the much-maligned process movement in composition, Bruce McComiskey suggests otherwise: “the ‘social turn’ in composition studies, which [John] Trimbur labels ‘post-process,’ does not constitute, in practice or theory, a rejection of the process movement, but rather its extension into the social world

of discourse” (41). Social-process pedagogies also find justification in post-structural analysis of the composing act. James Berlin’s “social-epistemic” course “is organized around an examination of the cultural codes—the social semiotics—that are working themselves out in shaping consciousness in our students and ourselves” (26). The use of genre in the curriculum, I believe, answers Berlin’s needs:

In enacting the composing process, students are learning that all experience is situated within signifying practices, and that learning to understand personal and social experience involves acts of discourse production and interpretation, the two acting reciprocally in reading and writing codes.

... [T]he more the writer understands the entire semiotic context in which she is functioning, the greater will be the likelihood that her text will serve as a successful intervention in an ongoing discussion. (30)

And I believe Thomas Kent, too—as skeptical as he is about any post-process writing pedagogy—could be convinced. In his argument that writing is an outward, social (externalist) act rather than inward act performed in isolation, he contends: “... we will need to drop our current process-oriented vocabulary and begin to think about writing and reading pedagogies in externalist terms.... an externalist pedagogy would stress collaborative and not dialectical interaction between teacher and student” (164).

If there is consensus emerging then in the realm of post-process debate, it seems to be that the successful writing classroom will be heavy on collaboration and social interaction with an instructor who engages in dialogue with his students rather than monologue. I have become convinced that this genre-awareness pedagogy accomplishes all of the above with the potential to achieve even greater success through further refinement. By incorporating genre-awareness in the very social process of writing in a collaborative setting, it allows the student to experience the act of reading (their

classmates' writing) and writing (through their contributions to the collaborative effort) simultaneously. In this way, it promises to demonstrate Kent's "paralogy," the subtle and various hermeneutic guesses that go into the creation of superior texts, to those students with a desire to improve their writing skills.

As mentioned before, my exposure to mature adult writers of all walks of life through their letters to the editor has convinced me that at least some of the process of acquiring effective writing skills comes through plain and simple life experience. Certainly there are many exceptions, and adult literacy remains a major issue in some socio-economic strata. But it seems that as adults who are exposed to a typical public education mature, even those in blue-collar professions, they have numerous occasions in which they are called upon to write. As they gain this experience, even in small increments, they observe and come to appreciate the very social nature of writing, of the effects their writing has on their intended audience, and adjust and refine their writing processes in order to achieve the most desirable effects. They also learn intuitively to conform to the various genres in which they are called upon to write—including that of the letter to the editor. At least it's eminently apparent to me that something happens to the typical adult's writing skills between her first year of college and the onset of middle age.

It would seem to me, then, that the objective of the first-year writing course should be to approximate the many life experiences that students will be exposed to later, to pack as much of that experience into a semester, in an effort to speed up the process of maturation so that they may succeed to a greater extent in their college career. This may

also have the effect of pushing a little further the individual student's potential for achieving even higher levels of writing proficiency later in life. And the evidence suggests that social-process and genre-based pedagogies do the best job of achieving all of this, better than any of the other writing pedagogies the field has explored—at least so far.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

SYLLABUS WITH GRADING CONTRACT

## English 121, Section 1, College Writing I, Spring Semester 2006

Instructor: Bill Wilke      Office hours: Tu: 9:30-10:30, Thu: 9:30-11:30  
email: bwilke@bridgeband.com

The purpose of English 121 is to provide new college students with training in doing the kind of writing they will be doing in college. The course is part of the core curriculum for all students because college-level competence in written communication is essential for adequate performance in academic work. As a college student, developing the mental skills of critical thinking and analysis is one of your most important tasks; writing is an essential part of this process. English 121 will help you mature and develop as a thinker and communicator, providing skills that you can apply to virtually all areas of your college work and beyond.

English 121 will focus on academic writing (versus creative or personal writing) but we will be doing some personal writing during the first part of the course. We're going to do some exercises in newspaper news and feature writing. Following that, you will be reading from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities — the three fundamental areas of knowledge at the university — and doing analytical writing in response to that reading. The goal is to become increasingly confident in the form and style of academic discourse that you will see in the texts that you will encounter in college. You will write three major papers over the course of the semester. Other components of the course include writing regular short responses to readings, in-class writing, participation in class discussion, and participation in workshop groups.

### Required texts, materials, and resources

- *Writing in the Disciplines*, by Kennedy, Kennedy and Smith
- *The Pocket Style Manual*, by Hacker
- An 8 1/2 by 14" white legal pad
- A stapler and a box of paper clips
- Access to a word processor and printer
- Money for copying
- An e-mail account

### Major papers

During the semester you will write three major papers, each approximately 1,200-1,400 words in length. Each of these papers will go through a process of 1) rough draft, 2) conferencing with the instructor, and 3) revision into final form for a grade. Each component of this process will involve participation points. Specific details of content, form, and presentation will be given when the paper is assigned.

### The classroom environment

The college classroom is an adult learning environment. This means that inquiry, discussion, critique, and argument are not only honored and encouraged but considered essential to the purpose of the course. As an individual student, you will benefit most from this class by contributing regularly to discussion — both as a part of the whole class and in small groups. The more you talk, the more you will learn. This is because talking

forces you to think through and articulate your ideas and gives you an opportunity to see how people respond to them — which then gives you more to think about. An adult learning environment also means that respect for one another is a given. This includes not carrying on private discussions while others are speaking and sharing the floor with others who have something to say.

### **Grading for English 121, Section 22**

This course will be different from other English 121 courses at Montana State University. The goal of the course is to improve your writing ability. My experience in professional writing settings (newspaper newsrooms) has been that — with help and given the right conditions — people can improve their own writing skills.

Instead of thinking of this as a required writing course, imagine yourself as a professional writer in a professional setting in which I will serve as your editor. You will submit work for publication; I will make suggestions on how your writing can be improved and made more suitable for publication. You will then revise your work and resubmit it for publication. During this revision process, you may incorporate my suggestions in your writing, or you may think of other, different ways to make your writing better — that is, more effective in communicating your ideas to others.

My goal is make this class different from the traditional classroom setting in which you are forced to be here and I am forced to assign you a grade which will become part of your permanent record. Another way to think about it is to imagine that this class is not part of the university but a self-help course you found advertised in the newspaper. You contacted me and paid me a fee to help you improve your writing — or your cooking, or your computer literacy, or whatever. In that setting, just as in the professional writing setting, instead of *you* trying to figure out what will make *me* give you an A or a B, all of *our* attention, yours and mine, will be focused exclusively on making your writing better.

My goal in all of this is to free you up to experiment with your writing without feeling pressure to conform to some standard that will get you the grade you need. Unfortunately, however, at the end of the semester, the university insists that I give you a grade.

Toward that end, I will be using what is known as a contract grading system. I will be giving you a substantial amount of feedback on your writing during this course. Some of it will be in person during several one-on-one conferences that we will have over the course of the semester. Some of it will be in writing on the assignments that you submit and that I then hand back to you. Some of it will make qualitative judgments about your writing — what I think is good about your writing, or what I think you need to work on. But I will not be putting grades on your papers. Any evaluative comments that I put on your papers will have no effect on your final grade — up to the grade of B. For the policy on higher grades see below.

**You are guaranteed a B for the final grade in English 121, Section 1, if you meet the following conditions:**

1. Do not miss more than three classes.
2. Are not habitually late for class.
3. If you are late or miss a class, you make it your responsibility to finding out any assignments that were made.
4. You do not turn any major paper and more than one short response late.
5. You participate regularly in class. This means that you contribute to our whole-class writing exercises on a regular basis, and you are a productive contributor to small group discussions.
6. Major paper assignments must meet the following conditions:
  - In addition to a final draft, major paper assignments must include all previous notes and drafts, and all feedback you have received.
  - *Revisions.* Major paper revisions must be more than proofreading. Your revision must be substantially changed from the preceding draft. This means a significant reordering of or elaboration on the text in the preceding draft. It must include new and different ideas. Your revisions don't necessarily have to be better, but they have to be different. They have to indicate that you put some thought into changing the preceding draft.
  - *Formal errors.* Major paper revisions must be free from virtually all spelling, grammar and syntax errors. It is okay to get help with this. Use the writing lab or solicit the help of a friend to help you find and correct all of these errors. Earlier drafts of papers may contain some errors without penalty to you. ***But it's very important that your final drafts be error free.***
  - *Effort.* Your papers must show a solid effort. That does not mean that they must be tedious, stiff or formal. I encourage you to have fun with your writing in this class. Experiment; try different things. But I must see that you put a genuine effort into the paper.
  - *Depth of thought.* In each of your major papers, especially after we get into the later, more academic writing assignments, you must show that you put some thought into your writing. In other words, don't just latch onto obvious, shallow observations on the subject at hand just to fulfill the assignment; show some interest and feeling about the subject.

Your final grade will drop rapidly below a B if you don't meet these conditions. Don't be overly concerned about the last two conditions. I know that putting significant effort and depth of thought into your papers will necessarily complicate things and make it more difficult at times to stay on point. It's okay if early drafts of your papers have problems with organization or structure, as long as it is a sign of effort.

**You are guaranteed an A for the final grade in English 121, Section 22, if you meet the following conditions:**

1. You fulfill the contract for a B.
2. During the process of fulfilling each major paper assignment, you get an additional person's feedback on your rough or final draft (in addition to the feedback you get from me during our scheduled one-on-one conferences). It can be someone from this class or someone from outside this class. It can also be help from the writing lab. It can be whatever kind of feedback you seek — feedback on organization, grammar or even help with the ideas in your paper — as long as it is substantial and thoughtful. This feedback should be in writing, at least several paragraphs in length, and signed by the person who gave you the feedback. This should then be turned in with your final draft.
3. At some point during the middle of the semester, take a paper you've already written — it can be one you wrote for this course or from another course — and make a major substantive revision. Include a write-up of some significant feedback you got from someone else for this revision. Include the original with the revision when you submit this paper.
4. Make a genuine effort to interact productively with your classmates and to help the class go better. This includes participation in group writing exercises with the whole class and in small group discussions about the readings and papers written in response to those writings. This means being open and honest in class, without hogging the floor and always showing respect for your classmates during discussions. With 33 students in class, gauging the quantity and quality of class participation is always difficult. Drop me a note about midsemester and at the end of the semester explaining how you have tried to fulfill this requirement.

A note on getting an A- or A: during the course of the semester, I will be giving your feedback on the quality of your writing, but in order to get a B in this course, you don't have to take my advice. As long as you engage in all the activities assigned for this class, which includes making significant revisions between the draft and final versions of each of your major papers, you will be eligible for a B. For an A- or A, however, the quality of your writing will become part of your grade. In other words, in order to get an A- or A, you must produce drafts and revisions of a consistently superior quality, based on my judgments. We'll talk more about this in class.

I hope you like this grading system. It's designed to encourage you to have fun and experiment with your writing. I will be giving you feedback on what I think are the strengths and weakness of your writing, but that's all it will be — feedback, not a grade. I hope that you can regard me as an ally or a coach, and not an authority figure that you must please in order to get the grade you need. Some of you may not like this grading system. In some ways, the demands of the contract for a B is harder than in other courses where you can just skip classes and show up to take the tests. But I know that all of you

can gain from this class — improve your writing, no matter what level you are writing at now — by engaging in the writing and discussion activities that are part of this course.

APPENDIX B:

NEWSFACT HEURISTICS AND NEWS STORIES  
FROM WHICH THEY WERE DEVELOPED

Guilty doctor fact list: In this exercise, the class arranges the following list of facts into a narrative in the form of an inverted pyramid with the most important fact listed first and the remainder added in order of descending importance.

- The case was prosecuted by Albany County Assistant District Attorney Christopher Baynes.
- As part of the deal the doctor accepted Wednesday, he will be required to spend five to eight years in prison.
- Stephenson is 44 years of age.
- "He's not a bad, bad person," said attorney Fred Ackerman. "He's did something that was wrong."
- Undercover Colonie police investigators and the state Health Department identified the doctor after he bought unusual amounts of drugs from drug wholesalers.
- Sentencing is scheduled for Oct. 19.
- Dr. David W. Stephenson pleaded guilty to one count of third-degree sale of a controlled substance.
- Stephenson was arrested March 3.
- The guilty plea came just days before a criminal trial was set to begin.
- The doctor was charged with selling prescription drugs illegally on the Internet.
- The drugs were sold to thousands of customers.
- The drugs sold included painkillers and antidepressants.
- As part of the deal, the doctor must cooperate with state and federal officials in a probe of the scam.
- The doctor conducted the sales from his Oneida home.
- Stephenson has been a doctor for 13 years and is licensed to practice in four other states.
- Sales were made both here and abroad since 2001.

## Doctor admits guilt in drug case

David W. Stephenson pleads guilty to sale of controlled substances

By **MICHELE MORGAN BOLTON**, Staff writer  
First published: Friday, August 26, 2005

ALBANY -- An emergency room physician charged with running an illegal Internet drug network from his Oneida County home has pleaded guilty to a count of third-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance.

Just days from a criminal trial, the deal Dr. David W. Stephenson accepted on Wednesday will require him to serve 5 to 8 years behind bars.

He also must cooperate with state and federal officials in a probe of the scam that was carried out both here and abroad since 2001.

Stephenson, 44, was looking at more than 50 years in state prison before entering the plea before Albany County Judge Stephen W. Herrick.

"He's not a bad, bad person," said attorney Fred Ackerman. "He did something that was wrong."

The case was prosecuted by Albany County Assistant District Attorney Christopher Baynes.

Stephenson was arrested March 3 and charged with selling prescription drugs including painkillers and antidepressants to thousands of customers.

Undercover Colonie police investigators and the state Health Department -- which regulates physicians -- identified the doctor after he bought unusual amounts of drugs from pharmaceutical wholesalers.

Four computers and thousands of pills were seized from Stephenson's Rome residence.

Stephenson, a doctor for 13 years, is licensed to practice medicine in four other states.

Sentencing is set for Oct. 19.

Heuristic for news story on hostage standoff:

- 1) About 23 police officers were at the scene.
- 2) Michael Gerhart was wanted in connection with bank robbery.
- 3) The incident took place at a two-story red-brick apartment building.
- 4) The location of the incident was Eastland and Frase avenues.
- 5) When he came out of the building, Gerhart was forced to the ground.
- 6) Edwards was charged with aggravated robbery.
- 7) The building was cordoned off with yellow police ribbon.
- 8) The children were taken to a waiting EMS vehicle where they were examined and released in excellent condition.
- 9) The policemen were SWAT-team members wearing black uniforms and were carrying handguns and rifles.
- 10) None of the neighbors was familiar with the man being sought by police and the FBI.
- 11) FBI agents called for police for help at 11:30 a.m., according to police Lt. Rick Edwards.
- 12) Police Lt. Rick Edwards said FBI agents went to the three-unit apartment building looking for Gerhart.
- 13) Gerhart emerged from the rear of the basement apartment at 1 p.m.
- 14) Police tried to negotiate with Gerhart using a bullhorn, but he didn't respond.
- 15) When the woman was taken out of the apartment, her two sons, age 15 months and 5 months, were left behind.
- 16) About two dozen neighbors had gathered around the building.
- 17) Ten minutes after Gerhart surrendered, police emerged from the building with the toddler and infant.
- 18) The bank robbery took place July 11 at National City Bank on Massillon Road.

- 19) When the FBI agents knocked on the apartment door, a woman identified as an acquaintance of Gerhart answered the door.
- 20) The standoff lasted 90 minutes.
- 21) When police arrived, Gerhart had barricaded himself in the apartment.
- 22) at least 10 guns were trained on Gerhart when he emerged.
- 23) The robber left the bank with an undisclosed amount of money.

## Toddler, infant safe after standoff

### Bank robbery suspect surrenders

By Carl Chancellor  
Beacon Journal staff writer

A potentially deadly standoff ended 90 minutes after it began Wednesday when a suspected bank robber surrendered to police and two young children were reunited with their anxious mother.

Nearly two dozen black-uniformed Akron police SWAT-team officers, with handguns and rifles ready, surrounded a two-story red-brick apartment building at Eastland and Frase avenues shortly before noon Wednesday. They had been called to the location by the FBI.

Akron police Lt. Rick Edwards said FBI agents had gone to the three-unit apartment building -- formerly a grocery store -- looking for Michael Gerhart, 23, who was wanted in connection with the July 11 armed robbery of the National City Bank at 181 Massillon Road.

During the robbery, the robber had laid a gun wrapped in a towel on a teller counter and passed a note demanding money. He fled the bank with an undisclosed amount of money.

Edwards said FBI investigators went to the basement apartment Wednesday to arrest Gerhart on a warrant; a woman described as an acquaintance of Gerhart's answered the door. Edwards said agents immediately took her from the apartment but soon learned that her two sons -- aged 15 months and 5 months -- were still inside.

The FBI called the Akron police for assistance shortly after 11:30 a.m., Edwards said.

By the time Akron police arrived, they learned that Gerhart had barricaded himself in the apartment with the boys.

Police negotiators using a bullhorn attempted to persuade Gerhart to surrender, but he didn't respond, said Edwards.

About two dozen neighbors quickly gathered near the building, which was cordoned off by yellow plastic police tape.

"I was just heading down to my basement when I saw all these police cars," said

Annie Malivuk, who lives directly across the street from the building. Malivuk sat on the front porch of her home and intently watched the action.

Years ago, Malivuk's husband operated a grocery store in the building. ``When it was no longer zoned for a grocery store, it was turned into apartments. I think that was in 1975," she said.

Another longtime Eastland Avenue resident, William Moneypenny, said the apartment building has been the scene of problems for years -- with tenants moving in and out frequently.

None of the neighbors was familiar with the man being sought by police and the FBI.

The standoff ended just after 1 p.m. With at least 10 guns trained on him, a shirtless Gerhart, his hands on his head, stepped from the rear of the apartment building. He was immediately forced face down to the ground and restrained.

``The party's over, young man," said Malivuk as she watched police take Gerhart in custody.

For the woman taken from the apartment earlier, it would be another excruciating, tear-filled 10 minutes of waiting before her children emerged -- one in the arms of a police officer, the other carried out in an infant car seat by a second officer.

The woman, who was not identified by police, was quickly escorted to a waiting EMS vehicle, where the children were checked for injuries and eventually released in excellent condition. She declined to speak to reporters.

Edwards said Gerhart, who was charged with aggravated robbery, doesn't live at the Eastland Avenue address but on North Martha Avenue. Edwards said Gerhart, who also is a suspect in several other robberies, was visiting at the Eastland location.

``It was a very peaceful resolution. It is what you hope for," said Edwards.

``Our main concern was for the safety of the children. Today it worked out for us," he concluded.

APPENDIX C:

EXAMPLES OF STUDENTS' HANDWRITTEN REVISIONS

On March 3, <sup>exposed</sup> ~~discovered~~ Dr. David W. Stephenson <sup>Dr. Stephenson</sup> age 44, and doctor for 13 years, <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ arrested <sup>for</sup> ~~for~~ selling prescription drugs illegally on the internet. It was discovered that Dr. Stephenson was selling ~~them~~ out of his Oneida home pain killers and antidepressants, to thousands of customers, both here and abroad since 2001.

~~Dr. Stephenson was~~ <sup>exposed</sup> ~~discovered~~ by undercover Coltonie police investigators as well as <sup>the</sup> state health Department. This case was ~~how they~~ <sup>when Stephenson was caught</sup> ~~solved this case~~ <sup>buying</sup> ~~was they bought~~ an excessive amount of drugs from ~~they~~

drug wholesalers.

In Stephenson's case

✓ The Albany County

Assistant District Attorney

Christopher Baynes is <sup>the</sup> prosecuting

~~Dr. Stephenson's case.~~ Just

days before the criminal trial

began Dr. Stephenson plead

guilty to ~~one~~ one count of third-

degree sale of a controlled substance.

Dr. Stephenson's attorney

Fred Ackerman states that "He's

not a bad, bad person, He's did

something that was wrong."

On <sup>October 19 the</sup> ~~the~~ sentencing determined

that Stephenson must cooperate  
with State & Federal officials  
in ~~the~~ investigating the scam as  
well as spending Five to eight  
years in prison.

On March 3, Dr. David W. Stephenson, 44, was arrested after undercover Colono police investigators and the State Health Department identified ~~Stephenson~~ <sup>him</sup> after he bought unusual amounts of drugs from drug wholesalers. ~~The doctor~~ <sup>Dr. Stephenson</sup> was charged with selling prescription drugs illegally on the internet. (2)

Stephenson <sup>who</sup> has been a doctor for 13 years and is licensed to practice in four other states ~~has~~ <sup>had</sup> been conducting sales from his Oneida home since 2001. The drugs ~~were~~ <sup>that</sup> he sold to thousands of customers, ~~many~~ <sup>included</sup> of ~~these~~ <sup>of</sup> drugs were pain killers and antidepressants. Stephenson's attorney states

Stephanson pleaded guilty to one count of third-degree sale of a controlled substance, just before a criminal trial was set to begin. <sup>(3)</sup> As a part ~~of~~ of the deal, the doctor accepted <sup>(3)</sup> Wednesday, he will be required to spend five to eight years in prison and he must <sup>also</sup> cooperate with state and federal officials in an investigation of the scam. <sup>(3)</sup> The case was prosecuted by Albany County Assistant District Attorney Christopher Baynes. "He's not a bad, bad person," said Stephanson's attorney Fred Ackerman, "He did something that was wrong." Sentencing is scheduled for October 19.

- Stephenson was arrested March 3
- Stephenson ~~was~~<sup>s</sup> 44 years of age
- Undercover Colonie police investigators and the state Health Department identified the doctor after he bought unusual amounts of drugs from drug wholesalers
- Dr. David W. Stephenson pleaded guilty to one count of third-degree sale of a controlled substance.
- The guilty plea came just before a criminal trial was set to begin.
- As a part of the deal the doctor accepted ~~to~~ Wednesday, he will be required to spend five to eight years in prison
- The case was prosecuted by Albany County Assistant District Attorney Christopher Bayles.

- "He's not a bad person," said Stephenson's attorney Fred Ackerman.
  - "He did something that was wrong."
  - Sentencing is scheduled for October 19
- Stephenson has been a doctor for 13 years and is <sup>licensed</sup> ~~licensed~~ to practice in four other states.
- The doctor was charged with selling prescription drugs illegally on the internet
  - The doctor conducted the sales from his ~~home~~ Oneida home.
  - The drugs were sold to thousands of customers
  - The drugs sold included painkillers + antidepressants
  - Sales were both <sup>made</sup> ~~made~~ here and abroad since 2001
  - As a part of the deal, the doctor must cooperate with state and