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COMPOSING OURSELVES: ETHOS AND THE
NEGOTIATION OF TEACHER IDENTITY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Victor Ronald Mortimer, M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2000

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Andrea A. Lunsford, Adviser
Professor Brenda Brueggemann
Professor Kay Halasek

Approved by

Adviser
Department of English
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Victor Ronald Mortimer

2000
ABSTRACT

This study examines the ways that new graduate teaching associates (TAs) at a large, Midwestern land grant university negotiate multiple responsibilities as scholars, teachers, and department citizens in order to construct teaching identities. The key rhetorical term for the project is “ethos,” understood as moral character (a combination of practical wisdom, virtue, and good will) and location, as defined by Nedra Reynolds (accustomed places or the haunts or abodes of people and animals). This construction of ethos points to the dialogic process of forging a teaching identity in negotiation with TAs' individual histories, the discipline of composition studies, and the writing program in which they teach.

At the center of this project is an exploration of the complex set of relationships in which new TAs make sense of disciplinary issues of composition and the institutional constraints of a writing program. The primary sources of data include interviews with new TAs, interviews with the writing program staff, and the writing assignments the TAs produced in a graduate seminar in the theory and practice of teaching writing. These graduate student teachers compose their teaching identities in the stories they tell about the teaching and learning of literacy, and those stories recompose the writing program in which they work. Thus, while other studies of TA identity formation have foregrounded teacher change, this study revisits our
understanding of "teacher" by highlighting the evolving, reciprocal relationship between TAs and the writing program.

In addition, the study makes use of autoethnography to locate account as fully as possible for the researcher's own negotiation of his identity as writer-researcher-teacher. Thus, the author writes and reads both with and against the selves that he constructs in the study, in response to the voices of others. This move supports the argument that ethos is negotiated across time and space, shaped in and by genres, and in response to audiences that are themselves located in particular times and places.
Dedicated to the memory of my father,

Ronald L Mortimer

1938 - 1995
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writers of books and dissertations often mention their spouses at the end of the acknowledgments, almost as an afterthought. But my wife, Toni, has been anything but an afterthought in relation to this project, to say nothing of my life. She believes in me more than I sometimes do myself, and I could not have completed this dissertation without her support, understanding, patience, and good humor.

Those who participated in this study—Lynn, Eve, Julian, Sarah, Kristin, Emily, Aaron, Marie, Mark, and Sue—taught me much about teaching writing and doing qualitative research. I will be forever grateful to them for their generosity and patience.

In the spring of 1994, I enrolled in a course in research methods in rhetoric and composition. Brenda Brueggemann was the instructor, and during the next few years she kept telling me that I could do this study—that, in fact, I needed to do this study. Although Brenda has generally refused to tell me what to do with my professional life, she must have known that I needed someone to give me permission to see myself as a researcher.

Dozens of other people at Ohio State have seconded that permission—and, in truth, they did not grant so much grant permission as extend an invitation. Suelynn Duffey gave me my first taste of composition theory and pedagogy in courses on
teaching first-year writing and basic writing. She also gave me the opportunity to work as a graduate student writing program administrator (WPA) and has supported my dissertation project with her encouragement and insight. Andrea Lunsford cheerfully agreed to be my adviser for this project, even though I never had the opportunity to take one of her courses. Whenever I complained about difficulties with my writing, Andrea cocked one eye brow and said, “Just do it, Victor.” Andrea can do more than cock an eye brow, of course: her knowledge of composition and rhetoric is encyclopedic, her suggestions about form and content are always immensely helpful, her optimism is inspiring, and she encouraged me to make this project truly my own.

Kay Halasek introduced me to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin in a composition seminar; I have never looked at the world in quite the same way since. Louie Ulman guided me through what was the worst experience of my graduate career: the process of reading for and taking the Candidacy Exam. Without Louie’s calming influence, I might have panicked. Other teachers were equally gracious and helpful. Roger Cherry achieved the nearly impossible task of helping students enrolled in a survey of the history of rhetoric put more than 2,500 years of rhetorical history into perspective—in just ten weeks. I had the good fortune to take a seminar on feminist rhetorics that Nan Johnson taught; those of us lucky enough to be in the room that quarter agreed that it was the best class we had taken—ever. Jackie Royster opened up for me the rich rhetorical world of African American women essayists and taught me much about teaching when she asked me to help her develop her fine composition textbook, *Writing and the Public Good*. And during my second year as a WPA, Sara Games, then the director of first-year writing, managed to get phones installed in TA
offices, supported a project that turned the writing program's custom-published reader into a nationally marketed textbook, and generously collaborated on a book chapter that several of us got published a few years back.

I have also been fortunate to have the considerable help of many graduate student colleagues. Conference presentations with Jennifer Phegley, Melinda Turnley, Ben Feigert, Nathan Grey, Andrea Williams, Suelynn Duffey, and Brenda Brueggemann—faculty members at Ohio State have the generous habit of treating graduate students like colleagues—helped me to articulate many of the ideas that eventually found their way into this dissertation. I also received invaluable help, especially in the early stages of articulating this project, from Amy Goodburn, Carrie Leverenz, and Paul Hanstedt. Several graduate students have also read and commented on early—and in some cases, late—drafts of chapters: Melissa Goldthwaite, Melissa Dunbar, Becky Taylor, Todd English, Andrea Williams, Kim Spring, Lisa Tatonetti, and Matt Wanat all pushed me in very helpful directions.

I also received financial support from The Ohio State University: A Board of Regents Challenge Grant paid for transcription costs during the pilot study, and the First-Year Writing Program Writing Lives Grant for Professional Development helped to pay some transcription costs as well. The Ohio State University Alumni magazine published "Wrestling with my Father" when it received honorable mention in a creative writing contest. The Alumni staff granted permission to use the piece in my dissertation; while they did not require that I mention the magazine in my acknowledgments, I am happy to do so here.
Other influences have been less immediate but no less profound. I am especially grateful to three professors I met while an undergraduate at the University of Northern Colorado: John Loftis, Norm Peercy, and Tomás Santos. John made me understand what it means to really revise a paper; Tomás directed my undergraduate honors thesis and gently—but persistently—encouraged me to begin graduate school; and Norm introduced me to Ed Corbett’s *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, which made my enrollment at Ohio State—Mr. Corbett’s school—seem especially appropriate.

Several high school teachers also had something to do with this project, albeit indirectly. The late Dale Patterson, at Evergreen High School in Colorado, yanked me out of the middle track of English and made me take senior honors English, and Judy Goodman, also at Evergreen High School, made me see that I might really be good at English, after all. In my first year at Greeley Central High School, Eric Larsen handed me a copy of Ken Macrorie’s *Telling Writing* and thereby gave me the language to express what I had been trying to say about teaching writing; and Bill Oliver, also at Greeley Central, reminded me of the necessity to challenge students to read difficult but ultimately rewarding texts. I have always been blessed, it would seem, by the kindness of friends and colleagues.

Like most graduate students, I was a pretty good student in high school and college. While my parents, Ron and Sharon, were always proud of whatever I achieved, they always reminded me that I did nothing alone, that there were many people along the way helping, from my Kindergarten teacher—Mrs. Mallow—to my graduate professors. My parents never added that *they* might have had something to viii
do with showing me, by example, what it means to work hard and love deeply. My sister, Pam, and my brother, Greg, have taught me similar lessons and have cheerfully tolerated my sometimes over-enthusiastic promotion of books that I thought they just had to read.

My father died in September, 1995, just months after I began the PhD program at Ohio State. Since then, my mother has shown me that she is far tougher and resilient than I ever knew—maybe more than even she knew. I am grateful to her for demonstrating what it means to revise one’s own life with strength, love, and compassion.
VITA

January 25, 1961 ................................... Born - Denver, Colorado

1983 ........................................................... B.A. English, University of Northern Colorado

1995 ........................................................... M.A. English, The Ohio State University

1984 - 1990 ............................................. English Teacher, Greeley Central High School, Greeley, Colorado

1990 - 1991 ............................................. English Teacher, Olentangy High School, Lewis Center, OH

1993 - 1999 ............................................. Graduate Teaching and Administrative Associate, The Ohio State University

1999 - present ....................................... Lecturer, Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing, The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"Character is formed by habits, not engendered by nature, and those habits come from the community or culture. One identifies an individual's character, then, by looking to the community. An individual's ethos cannot be determined outside of the space in which it was created or without a sense of the cultural context. That cultural context, however, does not necessarily mean a conflict-free environment; a social group is not necessarily made up of like-minded individuals who gather in harmony."
—Nedra Reynolds, "Ethos as Location" (329)

Setting the Scene(s)

On the Monday before the 1997 autumn quarter begins at a large Midwestern University that I will call Enormous State, the five new TAs whose teaching lives I will describe in this study join forty other new TAs for the First-Year Writing Program's week-long pre-quarter professional development workshop. They gather in the Department of English Commons Room, a place where visiting lecturers and job candidates speak, creative writers in the department give public readings, and the English Department Council meets. The drone of campus buses on the street three stories below sounds every fifteen or twenty minutes. Because the ESU campus provides a landmark for incoming airliners, the roar of jet engines punctuates conversation a couple of times an hour. The room has a southern exposure and by
early afternoon the strong, late-summer sun and humidity have nearly overpowered the air-conditioning system. This is a room that graduate students come to know well in the years they spend in the department.

Although their careers as writing teachers at ESU officially begin on the first day of this workshop, most of these 45 new TAs have spent much of the summer thinking about themselves as teachers: wondering if their students will like them, hoping that they do not fail, worrying about how they can possibly be ready to step into the classroom as a teacher and face 24 students in English 110, the first-year composition course that they will begin teaching in a little over a week. Earlier in the summer, they received a packet of readings that provided a brief introduction to English 110—the first-year writing course that they will teach—and a selection of undergraduate and graduate student writing and a handful of articles on composition theory and history. During the workshop itself, the TAs will meet and talk with many of the people who will help them construct their teaching identities: Eve Wagner, the director of the First-Year Writing Program, and her full time staff assistant; three graduate student writing program administrators (WPAs) whom I will call Marie, Mark, and Sue; and nine graduate student peer mentors, including one whom I will call Lynn. In addition, the writing program secretary will come to some meetings, the Writing Ombud will make an appearance, and a handful of department faculty will lead some sessions. They will visit the ESL composition program, the Writing Center, and the Writing Workshop, which houses the basic writing program.
During the workshop, new TAs will construct course syllabi based on a common curriculum. They will also be invited to begin theorizing such issues as teacher identity, the politics of teaching composition, elements of the writing process, diversity, reading and responding to student writing, and so on. When they step into the Commons Room on the first day of the workshop, printed on the agenda is Kenneth Burke’s description of a parlor in which a long and heated discussion that has been going on long before “you” arrived. New visitors listen for awhile, until they decide that they have “caught the tenor of the argument”; gradually, they join in, finding allies, arguing with others, and working themselves into the nuances of the debate (“Philosophy”). New TAs, then, are asked to imagine that they are entering the Burkean parlor of a long and often contentious conversation about teaching writing. Where and how they locate themselves in that conversation is the subject and the story of this dissertation.

The key rhetorical term for this project is “ethos,” as defined by Nedra Reynolds. Beginning with the assumption that “identity is formed through negotiations with social institutions ([Robert] Brooke) and through one’s locatedness in various social and cultural ‘spaces’” (326), Reynolds works to recover a fuller, richer meaning for ethos that moves beyond ethical proof. Reynolds includes in her definition the Aristotelian notion of ethos as moral character, understood as a combination of practical wisdom, virtue, and good will that is defined by, and formed in, social contexts. As Reynolds puts it, character “is formed by habits, not engendered by nature, and those habits come from the community or culture” (329).
Indeed, the basic denotations of ethos, in addition to character, include "an accustomed place," and the "haunts or abodes of animals" or "the abodes of men" (327-28). To understand ethos as location, Reynolds argues, opens up "more spaces in which to study writers' subject positions or identity formations, especially to examine how writers establish authority and enact responsibility from positions not traditionally considered authoritative" (326). My aim is thus to explore the disciplinary discourses of composition and the institutional discourses and structures of the First-Year Writing Program in which the participants in this study locate themselves professionally and thereby construct their ethoi—their rhetorical authority—as teachers.

Reynolds' concept of ethos as location resonates with the work of Erving Goffman and Robert Brooke. It is a commonplace that teachers learn to teach, at least in part, by borrowing ideas from each other in casual conversation; that the relationships that teachers build with other teachers are at least as important as what happens in theory or methods courses; and that a significant part of building a teaching identity often involves some form of resistance to institutional, programmatic, disciplinary, or social expectations about the role of the teacher. In this respect, Robert Brooke's work (1987) with underlife in the classroom is particularly helpful in understanding identity formation.

Brooke uses Goffman's concept of identity negotiation in order to describe student resistance in the writing class. Goffman argues that in entering any institution, a new member implicitly agrees to be "properly oriented and aligned" in that situation
I suggest that new teachers are also implicitly agree to be “properly aligned in the institution” and that, as Goffman suggests, to “engage in a particular activity in the prescribed spirit is to accept being a particular kind of person who dwells in a particular kind of world” (186). But at the same time, Goffman points out, individuals also resist institutional identities when they engage in “underlife.” Underlife is any activity that members of an institution engage in that allows the individual to stand “apart from the role and the self that were taken for granted for him by the institution” (189). Contained underlife fits into existing structures “without introducing pressure for radical change,” while disruptive underlife ruptures the smooth operation of an institution by pushing for radical change (199-200). Brooke argues that writing teachers who get students to identify themselves primarily as writers are, in effect, engaged in a form of disruptive underlife. That is, writing teachers who work in student-centered classrooms are working against the dominant, teacher-centered classroom that characterizes much of American education.

Many new TAs also engage in resistance, although it does not usually take the form of disruptive underlife. For example, some resist composition theories and practices that do not match their assumptions about the teaching of writing and the role of the teacher. Others may resent being required to teach composition when they identify themselves as literary scholars or creative writers. Yet another form of resistance to the First-Year Writing Program emerges in a keen interest in what Stephen North (1987) has called “practitioners’ lore,” the body of pragmatic knowledge on which writing teachers rely. I will argue that while resistances of
various kinds do play a substantial role in the negotiation of teaching identity, the concept of underlife, by itself, cannot fully explain the complex terrain in which teaching and scholarly identities are formed. Reynolds’ concept of ethos as location allows me to consider the ways that new TAs construct their authority as teachers in negotiation with the first-year writing program in which they work. As Reynolds notes, ethos, “like postmodern subjectivity, shifts and changes over time, across texts, and around competing spaces” (326). The construction of ethos is thus a thoroughly social act that involves continual composition and re-composition in social spaces.

The locations that concern me in this study are the disciplinary discourses of composition studies and the institutional and bureaucratic structures of the First-Year Writing Program: the English 110 curriculum, a required graduate course in the theory and practice of teaching composition (English 781), and peer teaching groups. Discipline and institution overlap, of course, particularly in English 781, where various strands of composition theory, the English 110 curriculum, and the roles of teacher and student meet in a crowded intersection. Further, even as TAs struggle to construct their roles as teachers and students, they must contend with disciplinary and institutional efforts to construct them. The relationships here are dialogical: in learning to teach writing at ESU, TAs take on the accents of the writing program; at the same time, I will argue, they reaccentuate that program. What is more, the teaching identities that TAs construct must be consistent with the identities they bring to the program, and those identities—what I call “narratives of the self”—quite often alternate between resistance and accommodation in relation to disciplinary and
institutional discourses. If an institution and discipline can engage resistance and encourage that resistance by balancing necessarily centripetal desires for stability with the centrifugal force of graduate student-teacher resistance and critique, then both institution and discipline can provide an environment that nurtures collaboration and creativity.

This is a question, then, of ethos as moral character—as a combination of practical wisdom, virtue, and good will—and of ethos as location. That is, ethos as location calls attention to how teachers, researchers, and administrators (roles sometimes juggled by one person) act responsibly from the ethical, professional, and political places in which they locate themselves. The new TAs in this study generally begin by framing questions of authority and identity—ethos—in terms of practical wisdom: the “what” and “how” of teaching college composition. Although they are aware that teaching has ethical and political implications, the new TAs in this study are usually willing to defer “theoretical” concerns; what they want, quite often, is the “practical.” That is, they want immediately applicable truths that are guaranteed to work in their classrooms. The writing program staff and the instructors for English 781, however, insist that new TAs engage in a collaborative construction of knowledge about teaching. Practical knowledge is thus intimately tied to ethical and political considerations.

One of the ways that new TAs begin constructing their knowledge as teachers is by writing teaching narratives, teaching philosophies, and response journals in English 781. Weekly meetings of peer teaching groups are another site for knowledge
construction. In both locations, new TAs must account for how they construct themselves as teachers by grounding their teaching and writing in the discourses of composition studies and the writing program. The teaching selves that TAs narrate in English 781 and in interviews with me turn on questions of their responsibilities to their students, the writing program, the university, the larger society—and to themselves as well. The negotiation of teaching identity—as it is represented in the TA writing and interviews that lie at the heart of this study—therefore turns on questions of ethos.

I approach these questions of ethos in two different chapters. In “Two Lives,” I argue that composition studies is, to a considerable extent, composed and recomposed by narratives of literacy. Of particular interest to me here are autobiographical literacy narratives composed by several composition scholars in the last decade or so. These books and essays blend autobiography with arguments about the teaching and learning of literacy. The TA participants in this study do something similar in the portfolios they construct in English 781. These portfolios include teaching narratives, teaching philosophies, and reading/teaching journal entries that reflect on the intersections of composition theory and practice. In effect, new TAs are asked to narrate teaching selves, and that they do so largely by identifying with various strands of composition studies in ways that mesh with the values and beliefs about literacy that they bring with them to the program. The criteria for identification include practical wisdom (i.e. “what works”) but depend, ultimately, on questions of authority, ethics, and responsibility. In other words, ethos. This ethos emerges in a
complicated, sometimes contradictory, but ultimately coherent tangle of narrative lines that include composition studies, individual literate experiences, and deeply rooted cultural narratives that link literacy with personal, cultural, and political transformations.

In the following chapter, "Zones of Familiar Contact," I examine the negotiations between new TAs and the curriculum they must teach. I rely on Bakhtinian notions of speech genre, authoritative discourse, and internally persuasive discourse to show how new TAs struggle to make the relatively authoritative discourse of the English 110 curriculum their own and, in the process, put their own accent on it. There are scenes in which TAs bring the assumptions that inform the curriculum into a zone of familiar contact where they probe it, parody it, handle it familiarly, cut it down to size; and there are scenes in which new TAs rely on internally persuasive discourses—literary studies, the text of a favorite novel, the inspiration of former teachers—to reaccentuate the curriculum. Ethos, in this chapter, is largely about locating oneself in an institution and the negotiations involved in that effort.

In Chapter Four, "The Human Barnyard," I consider how those who administer the First-Year Writing Program are as constrained by disciplinary and institutional discourses as the new TAs with whom they work. In many ways, this chapter is a local variation of a familiar story: the second-class status of first-year writing programs (and their directors) in departments of English devoted largely to literary studies; the grind of bureaucratic details; the nearly maddening degree to which
change is inhibited by bureaucracies; and the continuing divisions between those who study literature and those who study composition.

My focus, then, is on the necessity of maintaining a strong and stable writing program even as Eve and her graduate student assistants encourage new TAs to enter into a good faith negotiation between the demands of the writing program and their own, sometimes conflicting, beliefs and values about the purposes of writing instruction. Although many new TAs sometimes imagine that the writing program staff has more autonomy as administrators than graduate students do as teachers, the staff members themselves report that their roles are in many ways constructed for them—often in ways that they resist—by graduate students and Department of English faculty members. No one in this study is a completely free agent.

That is not to say, however, that TAs are blank slates upon which the First-Year Writing Program can write whatever it chooses. Neither composition studies nor the First-Year Writing Program is a monologic, static discourse. The long-running debate between "expressivists" and "social constructionists" in composition studies, for example, makes repeated appearances in the readings and class discussions in English 781 and leaves traces in TA literacy narratives. The curriculum of the First-Year Writing Program has similar traces. Nor does the writing program staff speak with a unified voice, which is to say that there is no official party line that new TAs are expected to toe—despite repeated TA claims to the contrary. In the complex and sticky web of identity negotiations that I explore—and sometimes get stuck in—in this study, identities shift over time and from location to location. The participants
compose themselves as teachers-scholars-administrators-students even as they are composed by others. One participant in this study, Lynn, talks about teaching as a dance; individual agency, I will argue, emerges when teachers—and students and administrators—learn the dance well enough to begin changing the steps.

Literature Review: Locating the Talk about TAs

The disciplinary discourse on teaching assistants is located in the divisions among composition and rhetoric, literary studies, and creative writing, with literary scholarship occupying a position of prestige while composition instruction is associated with drudgery. Creative writing, unfortunately, usually receives no attention in this discussion. The critics of these divisions are legion. Perhaps the best example of the political discourse about the location of composition as a discipline is Susan Miller’s Textual Carnivals, which chronicles the process by which the subject of composition and its teachers were relocated to the figurative and sometimes literal basement of English departments, in part as a way for literary studies to occupy a position of prestige and power. Graduate students, as TAs, thus perform work located on the bottom rungs of English department hierarchies. Variations of this argument appear in the work of several other writers, who tend to portray graduate students as victims of their professors’ iniquity. Ward Hellstrom (1984) and Richard Marius (1992), for example, both claim that because there are few professional awards for teaching (at least in the large universities where most graduate students are trained), graduate students are encouraged, either explicitly or implicitly, to put most of their
efforts into research and scholarship (the assumption being, apparently that teaching bears no relation to scholarship or research).

The beat goes on. Wayne Booth, in an essay that appeared in *The Future of Doctoral Studies in English*, asserts that graduate students at most institutions are told, in effect, that “you will also begin teaching freshmen, right now, and with no further training for doing so: a required course, a *service* course that you will be asked to go on teaching until you earn the blessed right to abandon it, as those of us fortunate ones who hire you have long since done” (6). Nancy Comley, in the same collection in which Booth’s essay appears, makes the familiar claim that graduate students are a major source of cheap labor for undergraduate composition programs. Comley, however, notes that some institutions do provide extensive training and staff development opportunities for TAs, and she suggests that, taken together, “the lessons of composition theory and literary theory have the force not only to change the way we teach, the way we think about teaching, and, possibly, even the nature of English departments” (46). Such theories may have force, but Patricia Sullivan’s research indicates that, as of the late 1980’s, writing in graduate literature courses was not taught at all. Instead, each course that Sullivan studied “reflected a text-based, product-centered approach to composition” in which no suggestions were made about how a particular critical approach might make a difference in how students write.

The status of teaching assistants was addressed in the CCCC Wyoming Proposal (1989), which insisted that teaching should be part of the training for professional responsibilities, that TAs should be well-trained and supervised,
reasonably compensated, and provided with good working conditions. However, the Wyoming Resolution seems to have faded from view, although not before generating some polemics. James Sledd, in "Why the Wyoming Resolution Had to Be Emasculated: A History and a Quixotism," after making the familiar claim that "insecure, inexperienced, poorly prepared transients are called upon to teach courses which their professional masters disdain" (272), goes on to assert that the "boss compositionists" have themselves contributed to the exploitation of teaching assistants and part-time instructors by paying far more attention to theory, research methodology, and, above all, to establishing their own professional status within English departments, than to actually teaching writing. The resolution was "emasculated," Sledd argues, when the final version of "The Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" did not include the original sections that called for a grievance procedure and "a procedure for acting upon a finding of non-compliance..." (277). This "emasculaton" was inevitable, writes Sledd, since it posed a threat to the status of "administrators, literati, and boss compositionists" (277).

Sledd may overstate his case, but the critique of the "boss compositionists" appears in a self-reflective essay by Clyde Moneyhun, which appeared in the same special issue of Rhetoric Review that featured a survey of doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition. Moneyhun describes himself as ABD and on the market, seeking to join "the managerial class of the composition industry" (406). After describing the credentialing function of graduate programs in rhetoric and
composition, and exploring his own uneasiness about his implication in such a system, he hopes that someday he might see a very different kind of survey of graduate programs: "If there is to be 'growth,'" he writes, "probably the most common word in the survey reports printed here, let it be not for the greater glory of our own self-aggrandizement, but rather for the greater good of greater numbers of people, both on and off the campus, than we have ever dreamed of serving" (411).

TAs have also been addressed in another, primarily technical, strain of discourse. Books like The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing (Connors and Glenn) provide practical advice regarding syllabus design, writing assignments, responding to student writing, and even suggestions about what to wear in the classroom, in addition to overviews of various strands of composition theory. Other books offer advice from established voices in composition studies, as is the case with Charles Bridges' Training the New Teacher of Composition, while a collection edited by Thomas Newkirk offers specific teaching strategies developed by (mostly) TAs and instructors at the University of New Hampshire. Interesting stories lurk in the margins of both collections: Newkirk’s introduction evokes the cramped quarters in which New Hampshire TAs work, and John Ruszkiewicz (in Bridges) recounts his first quarter as a TA at Ohio State. It is in such stories, I believe, that readers may glimpse traces of the ways that new TAs construct their identities, their ethos, as teachers.

Recently, researchers have turned to the stories hinted at in the margins of collections like Bridges’ and Newkirk’s in an effort to understand how TAs working in specific places and times construct their identities as teachers. These studies
suggest that the processes of learning to write as scholars and of learning to teach writing take place in institutional locations where graduate students negotiate between the competing demands of academic and non-academic discourses, various theories of composition, the influence of previous experiences as readers and writers, and programmatic expectations. This third strand of discourse is primarily, although not exclusively, built on narrative.

The first study I want to consider here is primarily quantitative, although it does have a story to tell about how graduate students learn to discipline their writing to conform to particular academic conventions. Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman (1988) studied the writing of a student ("Nate") in the rhetoric Ph.D. program at Carnegie Mellon. Before entering the program, Nate’s writing displayed "a number of linguistic and rhetorical features that are discrepant with the discourse conventions of social science expository prose that he will be expected to use later at Carnegie Mellon" (17). Specifically, Nate had to relinquish his preferred mode of "expressive" writing in favor of the conventions of his discipline. The stakes for Nate are clear: "... publishing one's work in professional journals or having one's grant proposals accepted for funding requires that the writer negotiate his claims within the context of his subspecialty's accepted knowledge and methodology" (10, authors' emphasis). Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman argue that Nate’s texts "constitute the visible index of his initiation into an academic discourse community" (11, authors’ emphasis). Between the lines of a research report devoted to quantitative analysis, then, is a story
of resistance and conversion that has appeared in other studies of graduate students-teachers.

In all of these studies, “Theory” (with a capital “T”) figures prominently as a site of conflict, resistance, and uneasy truces. In *Something Old, Something New* (1990), Wendy Bishop’s account of five experienced teachers working on PhDs in rhetoric, conversion metaphors abound. The professor—called “Tom Bridges”—who teaches a graduate seminar in the teaching of basic writing talks about “converting” teachers from a current-traditional to a whole language pedagogy; indeed, he talks about “confession” and “testimony” before the “congregation.” Bridges believes his students will be agents of change. Bishop agrees, but argues that the process of changing pedagogical practice is slow and convoluted, and that we should not expect change to occur as a direct result of instruction (or preaching). She finds the locus of teacher change in identity negotiation. In particular, teachers have public and private teaching philosophies as well as public and private teaching identities, and change depends on a number of factors: personal constructs of teaching that are shaped by institutional conditions, personal preferences, individual views of students and composition theory, and so forth. In Bishop’s study, teachers “re-theorize” the seminar materials as they apply them to their classrooms; for change to occur, there must be some congruence between the graduate seminar’s image of a model writing classroom and the needs and desires of teachers. In addition, Bishop argues that teachers need a high tolerance for ambiguity, as well as for theory, new practices, and students.
Christine Farris (1996) explores the ways that new composition instructors construct theories of composition in the interplay between the theories of discourse that new TAs bring with them to the program and the theory of discourse that they encounter in that program. Rather than attempt a developmental explanation for teacher change, Farris argues that learning to teach is a continual process with no predictable sequence of stages through which every teacher passes on her way to some kind of culminating stage. Farris shows TAs in the process of struggling with and against a curriculum built on Donald Murray's views of the writing process. What results for these TAs are theories of composition that are shaped in and by their encounter with Murray's theories.

Work by Elizabeth Rankin and Nancy Welch shows the researchers themselves to be struggling with and against "theory." Elizabeth Rankin's conversations with five new teachers of college writing, Seeing Yourself as a Teacher (1994), is as much about her own ambivalence about what counts as theory in the academy, as it is about the students she interviewed—an observation that comes from one of the participants in her study. Rankin argues that it is not only TAs who must struggle to see themselves as teachers; many professors she knows have similar struggles. Nancy Welch's "Resisting the Faith: Conversion, Resistance, and the Training of Teachers" is a troubling personal narrative about a writing program that seemed to accept only one view of learning and teaching. Rather than argue for any particular theory of composition instruction, Welch calls for "an understanding of the growing critical
consciousness and pedagogical change that arises from resisting, not embracing, a faith” (338).

“Resistance” is a key term in Richard Lane’s 1995 dissertation, **Docility and Resistance: A Genealogical Analysis of Composition Discourse and the Preparing of Teachers**. Lane describes an antagonistic conflict between expressive and socially oriented approaches to teaching writing at the university where he did his study. Lane suggests that “student/teacher subjectivities prior to training were primary elements in the resistance and confusion produced during the teaching of the socially oriented approach” (7) that was, in the year he gathered data for his study, was the experimental alternative to Murray’s *Write to Learn*, a book that had been at the heart of the writing program’s curriculum. Lane’s own sympathies, as he makes clear, are with a critical “transformation of discourse, rather than the empowerment into discourse that is typical of expressivist approaches” (8). In Lane’s view, power can and ought to be viewed as dangerous and generative, even while recognizing power’s potentially negative and repressive effects.

Two other dissertations place TA education squarely in institutional and disciplinary contexts: Catherine G. Latterell’s *The Politics of Teaching Assistant Education in Rhetoric and Composition Studies* (1996) and Nancy Peterson’s *Passing As, Passing Through: Literature-Trained Graduate Student Writing Teachers and the “We” of Composition Studies* (1995). In her analysis of commonplace narratives that emerged in a survey of 15 years of professional discourse on TA education, Latterell found powerful popular images of teachers: heroic men and nurturing women (15) in
narratives that relied on religious metaphors and imagery. In her survey of TA education curricula at 36 universities which grant doctoral degrees in rhetoric and composition, she found two major approaches: skills-based (what works) and self-reflection. Finally, on the basis of interviews with four TA educators at different universities, Latterell contends—persuasively—that TA education needs to extend beyond one course and one person’s responsibility, that it is necessary to strike a balance between practical issues and theoretical frameworks (106), that TAs need “a language for teaching writing” so that they can articulate to themselves and to others what they do and why, and that writing programs need to provide opportunities for TAs to “realize and deal with the complexities all teachers encounter as they put their pedagogical philosophies into practice” (107). Latterell advocates the participation of other faculty members and experienced TAs in the TA education process, largely as a way to helpfully de-center the authority of any one writing program administrator. Significantly, she stresses the need to understand the ways that TAs and writing program administrators can knowledgeably reproduce and maintain writing programs through normative practices and knowledgeably negotiate changes in those programs.

Peterson calls attention to the ways that composition studies tends to represent writing teachers as a much more coherent group than it really is. There is, Peterson argues, no unified “we” in composition studies: the books and journal articles that compose the field’s professional discourse do not and cannot adequately represent any specific writing teacher. In particular, Peterson points out, not all writing teachers feel themselves to be part of the “we” of composition studies that is addressed by
compositionists: “the field has been comprised historically of practitioners who are more likely to teach writing than to write theory” (29). As a result, the “we” that publishes in composition has little access to the lore, the practices, of the majority who do the teaching. And a significant portion of that majority is made up of literature-trained graduate students. TA narratives are at the core of Peterson's study, given her explicit desire “to see the study of experience as the construction of knowledge instead of the discovery of truth” (68). For Peterson, as for me, “narrative is the vehicle by which experience becomes meaningful” (69). In these autoethnographic literacy narratives, school becomes a “recursive contact zone through which [TAs] try to pass as both students and teachers” (110). This contact zone is in “the philosophical intersection of writing practice and literary perspectives” (109). Literature students, Peterson contends, are used to dealing with texts as artifacts, not with texts in process. Peterson insists that, given the likelihood that they will continue to teach composition long after graduate school, all graduate students need “less ‘training’ and more education in composition studies” (238).

That graduate students might resist an education in composition studies, particularly its theoretical components, is not particularly surprising. Indeed, although graduate students in English Studies must come to terms with the various strands of postmodern theory that characterize the field, for many graduate students the initial introduction to those theoretical perspectives is unsettling, even threatening, and there is often a strong resistance to theory in general. Douglas Hesse has noticed this, and in “Teachers as Students, Reflecting Resistance,” he suggests that new teachers resist
composition theory in ways that parallel the resistances of first-year writers. Specifically, Hesse claims that many new graduate students in his composition theory course tend to reject new texts out of hand by appealing to common sense or closely held beliefs about literature and writing. Hesse's essay is not very sympathetic to the plight of graduate students, and in any case he does not explore the possibility that his graduate students are resisting composition in general, rather than theory in particular.

In fact, evidence suggests that many graduate students are acutely aware of the prestige attached to "hard" theory. Kathleen Boardman (1993), for example, reports that when stories among new TAs were an official part of a teacher preparation program that she studied, TAs were skeptical about the authority and reliability of the local knowledge represented by stories, while others sensed that some stories were preferred over others. In her dissertation (1992), Boardman observes TAs in the process of resolving, as teachers in a new (to them) writing program, what counts as relevant experience and practice. Much as Farris does, Boardman argues that the TAs in her study were not initiated or converted; rather, they negotiated and invented their roles in an active process that included struggles with resolving the opposition between "soft" stores of personal experience and "hard" academic theorizing.

Recent studies of TA education have thus emphasized that teaching identities are negotiated and that those negotiations are never quite finished. In that sense, my own study largely confirms the findings of Bishop, Farris, Rankin, Latterell, Lane, Peterson, and Boardman; indeed, their work has been enormously useful in my understanding of TA education. My aim here is not to argue that any of these
researchers somehow "got it wrong"; rather, I have turned much of my attention, as these writers do not, to the ways that TAs, in the process of negotiating their ethos as teachers, ultimately recompose the writing programs in which they work.

Methodology

I chose participants for this study by asking for volunteers. My hope was to achieve a balance of gender, field of study, and degree program. Of the five new TAs who participated, two were men: Julian, a PhD student in rhetoric, and Aaron, an MA student in literature. Three were women: Emily and Kristin, both MFA students, and Sarah, an MA student in the ESU Division of Comparative Studies. One graduate student, Lynn, plays a central role: as a new TA and MA student, she participated in a pilot study for this project; she also makes an appearance as a PhD student in literature, a peer mentor, and a (soon to be) WPA. Because I wanted the perspectives of the First-Year Writing Program staff, I asked if they would volunteer for the project. Sue, a rhetoric and composition student in the master’s program; Marie, a rhetoric and composition PhD student; and Mark, a literature PhD student, all agreed to participate. In addition, the director of the First-Year Writing Program also agreed to participate—both by granting interviews and by allowing me to act as a participant-observer in her English 781 course.

The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board granted exemption status for this research prior to the interviews; copies of the exemption approval notification are available upon request. Copies of the “Consent for Participation in Social and
Behavioral Research” and of the written information about the project that I provided participants are in Appendix B. As promised in the information sheet about the project that I gave to all prospective participants, I have given pseudonyms for all of the participants. I have also given the university a fictitious name, since to use the actual name of the school would compromise Eve’s anonymity. To be sure, it would not be difficult to discover the name of the actual school. However, the First-Year Writing Program at “Enormous State University” is, in these pages, a fiction constructed by me in collaboration with the study participants. Further, those participants are, in my textual representations of them, in some sense fictional characters. I have not invented their words, but I have indeed appropriated them for my own ends. My representation may, or may not, strike readers familiar with the school and program as somehow “true,” but only in a limited sense—a small truth that evokes the flavor of familiar scenes. In any case, as a researcher-writer, “Enormous State University” works for me as a distancing device, a way to make the familiar strange. I invite readers to do something similar: to make the familiar strange by (re)imagining the social, disciplinary, and institutional locations in which they negotiated, and continue to negotiate, their ethoi as teachers, writers, administrators, and students.

The primary data for this study come from three sources: Interviews with participants; the writing that participants did in English 781, the required graduate course in the theory and practice of teaching composition; and participant-observer notes from English 781. Other sources include many of the texts associated with the
First-Year Writing Program: course texts for English 110, a teacher’s handbook for the course, and a packet of readings that new TAs receive the summer before they begin teaching. Of all of these, the writing that TAs do for English 781 is the most important source of data. TAs gather this writing—teaching narratives and philosophies and reading/teaching journals—in portfolios that they introduce with a cover letter. As I will explain in chapter two, I read this “data” as a collection of narratives. Accordingly, I rely extensively on narrative analysis, a method that Manning and Cullum-Swan describe as “rather loosely formulated, almost intuitive, using terms defined by the analyst” (465). This process, however, is not as haphazard as Manning and Cullum-Swan suggest. The process, at least for those trained in literary study, is remarkably similar to a close reading that traces broad themes and recurring images in order to build an interpretation of the text or texts at hand. I ground my interpretations in the discourses of composition studies and the First-Year Writing Program, and I offered all participants the opportunity to read and respond to my representations of their narratives and ideas. In several cases, a participant’s response to early drafts helped significantly to extend and complicate my thinking.

In other words, I had the good fortune to construct knowledge with the study’s participants. Just as the negotiation of teacher identity is a recursive process, so too are the acts of researching and writing. Norman Denzin suggests that the researcher-writer is a bricoleur who fashions meaning out of ongoing experience. “As a bricoleur,” Denzin writes, “the researcher uses any tool or method that is readily at hand” (“Art” 501). In Denzin’s view, writing up the research is an act of
interpretation, or storytelling, in which the researcher-writer looks for emergent designs and understandings, with an emphasis on "socially constructed realities, local generalizations, interpretive sources, stocks of knowledge, intersubjectivity, practical reasoning, and ordinary talk" (502). This orientation, which Denzin describes as poststructural, acknowledges that the "Other who is presented in the text is always a version of the researcher's self" (503). My methodological aim in this study of multiple "Others" as they are constructed in, and in turn reconstruct, various disciplinary and institutional discourses, is to construct multiple versions of myself—as researcher, writer, teacher, administrator, and reader.

The interchapters function, then, as ways to demonstrate and openly acknowledge my own continuing self-revision as researcher-writer-teacher-administrator-reader. In these essays I represent myself as a writer who attempts to continually recompose my understanding of reading, writing, and teaching. As the title of the second interchapter has it, I am "reading against myself." At the same time, these essays attempt to lay bare—and at times figure out—my own assumptions, biases, and locations as the writer of this study, and to do so in the same form—critical autobiographical writing—that I rely on for my primary data. Put another way, the essays allow me to "come clean" in ways that suggest change over time and thus go beyond the static labels of, say, white, middle-class, heterosexual male. Richard Miller writes that "all intellectual projects are always, inevitably, also autobiographies" ("Nervous System" 285); the interchapters allow me to make that autobiography explicit.
I am thus acutely aware of postmodern claims that the researcher is not, as Fontana and Frey point out, neutral, unbiased, or "invisible" (372). In a methodological essay on interviewing, Fontana and Frey describe what they call "postmodern interviewing," which features an awareness that methods of data collection and techniques of reporting findings influence all studies; the postmodern goal, they suggest, is to make the researcher's own assumptions and premises as clear as possible (368). Accordingly, in interviews I tried always to use "polyphonic" interviewing techniques in which the "voices of the subjects are recorded with minimal influence from the researcher," rather than collapsing them together and reporting them as one (368-69). Thus, I have worked to include long excerpts from interviews and TA literacy narratives in all of the case studies in an effort to report multiple perspectives and discuss differences in points of view (369). Because I do not depend on close linguistic analysis of oral speech, I edited, for the sake of readability, the transcripts of those interviews.

I argue in Chapter Two that the genre of literacy narrative invites the researcher to engage in a degree of "interpretive interactionism": a search for epiphanies, for those moments that leave marks on people's lives and have the potential to create "transformational experiences for the person" (Denzin, Interpretation, qtd. in Fontana and Frey 369). Thomas Newkirk, however, argues that writers and readers of case studies and other ethnographic-influenced research reports need to read with caution. In "The Narrative Roots of the Case Study," Newkirk argues that the case-study researcher "usually tells transformative narratives, ones in
which the individual experiences some sort of conflict and undergoes a qualitative change in the resolution of that conflict” (134). Such accounts, Newkirk believes, strike readers as true or convincing to the degree that they reenact cultural myths. Newkirk argues that the danger here is that in reenacting such myths, we become trapped in our own narratives (147). His solution for this problem is “polyvocality”: an effort to allow discordant voices into the account, “voices that will complicate the moral judgments that readers will make” (148). Without some form of resistance, Newkirk suggests, “it is difficult to see how readers can avoid the seductiveness of deeply rooted and deeply satisfying narratives that place us in familiar moral positions” (“Narrative” 149). Although some TA literacy narratives contain elements of epiphany, they all tend to move in the direction of negotiation and revision rather than toward transformation.

By quoting long stretches of TA literacy narratives and interview transcripts, I foreground the participants’ voices; by weaving fragments of my own teaching-researching-writing narrative between the chapters, I foreground my own position as researcher. These moves, however, have dangers of their own. In “Still-Life: Representations and Silences in the Participant-Observer Role,” Brenda Brueggemann argues persuasively that qualitative researchers who take seriously the call for self-reflection run the risk of turning their studies into only and simply mirrors of their own experience: “... self-reflexivity, turning as it does on issues of representation, risks turning representation into a solipsistic, rhetorical position in which the researcher
(self) . . . usurps the position of the subject (the other). For in being self-reflexive, we turn the lens back on ourselves, put ourselves at the center of interpretation” (19).

In asking questions about what difference it makes who researches, writes about, and represents “‘subjects’ in composition research,” Brueggemann is clear about opening a Pandora’s Box that she does not necessarily intend to close (17). Putting oneself, instead of the “Other,” at the center of qualitative research reports, is one problem that flies out of that Pandora’s Box; another, related problem, Brueggemann argues, is that if researchers choose to put the “roles and representations” of their subjects and themselves under scrutiny, they “cannot possibly be the chimeric, both/and, distanced yet near, objective yet subjective, participant-observer” (19). This is so, she writes, “because, in order to be reflexive in our roles and representations as qualitative researchers, our frames must always be ready to shift; they cannot be contained in any of these entities” (19-20). Brueggemann suggests that qualitative researchers learn how, in Michelle Fine’s phrase, to “‘work the hyphen,’ traverse the terrain of what is ‘happening between’ participant and observer, learn to negotiate the ‘zippered borders’ of our various roles and representations” (20, quoting Fine 70). Note the “betweens” that Brueggemann conjures up; it is between analytical frames, researcher and subject, representation and self-reflection, that a researcher constructs his or her ethos.

Those “betweens” are particularly complicated in this study, which reports on an institutional community—the First-Year Writing Program—with which I have a long and intimate acquaintance. I began my graduate work as a master’s student in the
autumn of 1993, when the then-new English 110 debuted. In the following autumn and for two years after that, I was a participant observer in three different sections of English 781, each one taught by a different director of the First-Year Writing Program. I was a graduate student writing program administrator for two years, a peer mentor for three, and was a co-editor of *Writing Lives*, the composition reader for English 110. This heavy investment in the writing program means that one of my critical concerns is, as Beverly Moss has said about researchers who study communities of which they are members, to account for how my position as researcher changes how I see the community and how the community sees me ("Ethnography and Composition"). My familiarity with the writing program presents a significant challenge as I attempt to make the familiar appear strange. However, at the time I gathered the bulk of the data for this study, I was no longer a peer mentor or WPA, there was a new program director, and I was in some respects an "outsider" in relation to the group of new TAs who began teaching English 110 in the autumn of 1997. I would also suggest that there are advantages to studying one's own institution; in particular, as Richard Lane argues, the role of researcher is never "without baggage" (15) and, like Lane, I have the advantage of "having an understanding of the context and players of the study" (15). And, as a Department of English "insider," I may have been more likely to learn about institutional conflicts than would an "outsider" (23).
The First-Year Writing Program in Institutional and (brief) Historical Contexts

All undergraduates at Enormous State must satisfy a first-year writing requirement, and English 110—first-year composition—is the course that most students take to satisfy that requirement. Some students place into basic writing courses taught by the staff of the Writing Workshop, some enroll in ESL composition courses, and others qualify for various honors courses. It is the “common” version of English 110, however, that occupies my attention in this study, since it is primarily with the discourses in which the course is embedded—and that it generates—that the participants in this study begin to compose their identities as teachers. What follows is a brief historical introduction to English 110 and the First-Year Writing Program texts that support it: The First-Year Writing Handbook: A Teaching Resource, compiled by the staff of the First-Year Writing Program; Writing Lives, the course reader; and Rethinking Writing, the course rhetoric.

The summer before they arrive at Enormous State, new TAs receive a thick packet of photocopied readings titled Starting Places. This packet includes welcoming remarks from Eve and the WPAs, selected essays on composition studies and literacy studies, an introduction to the course they will be teaching, samples of student writing, and graduate student literacy narratives and teaching statements. They also receive an assignment that asks them to begin drafting their own literacy narratives, which will in turn be used in peer response sessions during the workshop and, eventually, become one of the major assignments for English 781, the graduate course in the theory and practice of teaching composition that most new TAs are required to take.
As the acknowledgments in the handbook indicate, "it is by no means the first collection of materials prepared to assist teachers new to the First-Year Writing Program. This current document represents the program's constant evolution of curricula and pedagogies." Indeed, the people listed in the acknowledgments cover five years, from the first version of a significantly restructured course in 1993 to the then-current version. Twenty-nine names are listed for the first four years, along with six TAs who contributed significantly to the 1997 version and the six people who edited that edition.

In 1993, the Annotated Syllabus, as it was called then, had been composed in one summer by a team of six graduate students and the writing program director. A departmental review committee had called for curricular revision of English 110; "The Syllabus," as most people referred to the course that year, was the result of that call for change. The syllabus included, for each unit, "one essay prompt, weekly goals and activities, discussion questions, assignments for reading/writing logs, suggestions for collaborative activities, and brief indications of how the four units relate to one another." The first version of the current course was "the result of collaborative efforts," explored "current critical issues in English studies," integrated "reading and writing assignments toward purposeful inquiry," and was "structured recursively so that later assignments build on the groundwork of the previous inquiry." The course asked students to "investigate at different sites the relationships between communities and individuals, particularly as these relationships are negotiated or inscribed through language." Accordingly, the first unit asked students to write about their own learning
and language histories, the second focused on a community that students are or have been members of, the third looked at an academic community, and the fourth asked students to critically examine a sample of their own writing. "The goal of the course," the director wrote, "is to challenge students to understand the (often invisible) ways in which language carries community values; the ways in which it excludes some individuals or groups and includes others; [and] the ways in which one's sense of self is shaped by community language, values, and practices."

The people who constructed the first version of the "new" English 110 expected and hoped that those who taught the course—that is, the new TAs for the 1993-94 academic year—would construct the course in their own particular ways. While all TAs were required to teach in the "spirit" of the Syllabus, "variations from class to class" were "desirable because they indicate the students' and teachers' active engagement with the course projects—their tailoring the course to their own interests and needs." In fact, the writing program staff explicitly invited TAs to teach the course "with a critical eye toward improving it. While we are confident that the syllabus offers a challenging approach to first-year English instruction, we also know that the syllabus will improve once it is informed by the experience of those who teach it."

Many TAs enthusiastically took up that invitation to critical response. The first syllabus, for example, contained detailed essay prompts, weekly goals and activities, discussion questions, assignments for reading/writing logs, suggestions for collaborative activities, and indications of how the four units related to one another.
The annotations for the first day of class covered more than three single spaced pages; the annotations for the second week—two class meetings—covered more than seven pages. Although most of the activities were described as "suggestions" and, just as important, would provide a much-needed support for novice teachers, many TAs believed that they had to attempt to "cover" everything, as if they were following a recipe. In an effort to avoid the appearance of a course that demanded a lock-step approach, the "Annotated Syllabus" gradually evolved into a handbook that contained sample essay prompts and syllabi as well as more extensive discussions and rationales for peer response, drafting, and leading class discussions.

The handbook that the TA participants received in the Autumn of 1997 also looked more professional than the first version. Those who constructed the first version of the new course had only three months in which to put together the annotated syllabus and the photocopied packets of course readings; after four rounds of revisions, the graduate student WPAs and the assistant director had more material and time to work with. The result was a handbook that benefited immensely from four years of collective experience in teaching the course. Fifteen pages were devoted to designing the course, including sections on integrating reading with writing, peer response, conferences with students, revision, teaching personae, and evaluating and grading student writing. Another 25 pages or so provided sample outlines, goals, activities, and lesson plans for each unit. In addition, nearly 20 pages were devoted to policies and procedures: placement, supplies and office machines, teacher absences, plagiarism, the writing Ombud, and such additional resources as the Learning Skills
Program, the Office of Disability Services, access to computing facilities, and so on. Much of this information had appeared in the original annotated syllabus; by 1997, the handbook had been organized in ways that took into account the suggestions and needs of four “generations” of English 110 instructors.

The course had also undergone several revisions, but its focus was much the same as in 1993. “Literacies” had replaced “language and community” as the key term, but the aims were similar: to combine reading and writing in a course that asked students to explore “the ways a student’s sense of self and others may be shaped by language, communities, and their literate practices.” Students still wrote about their personal learning and language histories—those essays had been called “literacy narratives” since the third year of the course’s existence—and students still investigated academic discourse conventions. A third unit, added after the first year at the suggestion of several teachers, asked students to understand and write about “public” literacies, especially the rhetoric of advertising, television, movies, and so forth.

The course reader had changed, too. In the summer of 1993, the writing program staff came close to adopting Bartholomae and Petrosky’s *Ways of Reading*. This would have made sense, given the fact that much of the course was inspired by Bartholomae and Petrosky’s *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts*. Ultimately, however, the director and her assistants decided to gather their own set of readings. *Ways of Reading* was too long for a quarter system and, more importantly, the writing program staff wanted to tailor the readings to their course, rather than to Bartholomae and
Petrosky's. Accordingly, they assembled a photocopied packet of readings and worked them into the annotated syllabus.

Such a system had severe drawbacks. It took considerable time to get copyright permissions each quarter, there were not enough readings to provide some choices for teachers and students, and the photocopied packets did not carry the same kind of authority that a "real" book would. Thus, in the second and third year of the course, the writing program staff turned to custom publishing; what resulted was a composition reader, without apparatus, entitled *Writing Lives, Composing Worlds*. Part way through the third year, it dawned on the writing program staff that they could work much of the annotated syllabus into the text and, perhaps, negotiate a deal with the custom publisher to get a small cut of the proceeds from the sale of the book. Any money made in this way, they reasoned, could be used by the First-Year Writing Program for professional development programs.

In the midst of talking to custom publishers, St. Martin's offered to publish the reader as a nationally marketed first-year composition reader. The offer was too good to turn down, and the writing program staff—myself included—worked feverishly in the spring of 1996 to prepare the book: working discussion questions from the annotated syllabus into the reader, writing brief autobiographical sketches of the authors, writing additional essay prompts for each unit, and adding "writing before reading" questions before each selection. In addition, they composed an introduction that included advice on drafting, revising, editing, peer response, and critical reading. We called the book *Writing Lives*.1

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While the handbook and reader for English 110 maintained a recognizable continuity, the choice of a rhetoric for the course was a different matter. In the first year, the program adopted *The St. Martin's Handbook* (Lunsford and Connors). Few TAs liked the book. The next year, the staff tried *Work in Progress* (Ede). Many TAs liked it; many did not. In the third year, *A Writer's Repertoire* (Gong and Dragga). Almost no one liked it. The third edition of *Work in Progress* got a tryout in the fourth year, with no more success. And in the year of this study, *Rethinking Writing* (Podis and Podis) was the rhetoric. Once again, nearly universal dissatisfaction. In every year except the first, a separate handbook was included. By the end of the 1997-98 academic year, however, the writing program staff had succeeded in custom publishing *The Writer's Companion*, a text that drew on previously published work from several different sources; the book would serve as the course rhetoric as well as a resource for students. Thus, students and teachers could find information about the goals, activities, and grading methods used in English 110; descriptions of other first-year writing courses (e.g. ESL, basic writing, honors, Extension Center, Saturday, and Evening courses); class policies, placement procedures, and student evaluations of instructors; and contact information for the writing programs Ombud, the Writing Center, and so on. The goal was to make available to students much of the same information about writing in the university that new TAs would receive.

This brief historical sketch suggests that, at least since 1993, English 110 has been under continual revision. Teachers' suggestions regarding course readings, essay prompts, and even entire units have been taken seriously and, quite often, adopted by
the three professors and graduate student WPAs who have directed the program since
the first version of the "new" course. In spite of this continual revision of English 110
and its texts, however, in the eyes of many new TAs the course often appears to be
static. In fact, the one constant theme of the course has been an insistence on
integrating writing and reading in a sustained inquiry into language and community.
The attention to reading consistently leads some TAs to wonder if they are teaching a
reading or a writing course—as if reading and writing could and should be neatly
separated. At the same time, the First-Year Writing Program's insistence on
considering the politics of writing; the ways that language carries, reflects, shapes
values and beliefs; and the interplay of the social and the individual, makes many TAs
nervous.

Like the graduate students who teach most of the sections of English 110, the
course moves in many directions. The literacy narrative assignment, for example,
seems like familiar territory to many MFA students, but the absence of several models
of "good writing"—that is, belletristic writing—annoys many TAs, and not just MFA
students. The attention to critical reading and writing that characterizes the second
and third units (on academic and popular literacies) appeals to many TAs—very often,
the same ones who find the literacy narrative assignment thoroughly unacademic and
therefore questionable at best. The course just won't stand still, it would seem. To
make matters more complicated, no one associated with the First-Year Writing
Program will tell TAs exactly how they are to teach English 110.
English 781: Theory and Practice of Teaching Writing

I will have much to say about the role that English 781 plays in the negotiation of teacher identity at Enormous State, but its place in the First-Year Writing Program deserves a few words here. Nearly every graduate student in the department takes English 781, with the exception of PhD students—three or four each year—who have had similar graduate course work and teaching experience at other universities. TAs enroll during their first quarter of teaching, which means that in any given year a handful of graduate students who received fellowships in their first year do not enroll until their second year in the graduate program, when they begin teaching English 110. Because there are, on average, 40 new TAs each year, the course is split into two sections with a common syllabus. The Director of the First-Year Writing Program always teaches the course, along with another graduate faculty member in the rhetoric and composition program. On several occasions each quarter, the two classes meet together for presentations by various members of the rhetoric and composition faculty and, often, representatives from the ESL composition program.

Perhaps the best way to explain the course is to first describe what it is not: it is not exclusively a course in composition theory, nor is it simply a methods course. Professors who teach the course certainly want to prepare TAs to do an effective job of teaching English 110; to that end, they seek to, as the syllabus described it in 1997, “familiarize students with the critical issues surrounding writers, readers, and the meaning of texts within the institutional and disciplinary boundaries of composition studies.” The goal is to help TAs build a theoretical framework for working out such
issues as “defining academic discourse and establishing appropriate classroom authority.” At the same time, TAs have the opportunity to talk about “issues that are particularly vexing for new instructors: developing writing assignments, establishing grading policies, responding to student writing, and meeting the needs of a diverse student population.” English 781 thus serves as an introduction to teaching a particular course—English 110—and as a brief introduction to composition studies that provides a foundation for all of the composition instruction that graduate students do at Enormous State.

Written assignments include teaching philosophies and teaching narratives, journal entries in which they reflect on their teaching in the context of course readings, and oral presentations. In 1997, the presentations were on topics selected by small groups of students; as a supplement to the presentations, they prepared annotated bibliographies of readings not included on the syllabus. Out of the written work they did for the quarter, students constructed portfolios that included the teaching narratives and philosophies, selected journal entries, and cover letters that reflected on the writing and teaching they had done that quarter. These portfolios, which bear a family resemblance to literacy narratives, are featured prominently in the next chapter (“Two Lives”).

Before 1993, English 781 could not do much more than focus on teaching English 110. It met once a week for two hours, carried three credit hours, and was a pass/fail course; other graduate courses, in contrast, meet twice a week, carry five credit hours, and students receive letter grades and graduate reports. Beginning in
1993, TAs signed up for five hours—three for the course, two for peer group meetings. It was still graded pass/fail, but by 1994 English 781 met twice a week and carried five hours of credit. By 1997, English 781 carried all of the trappings of any other graduate course. The goal was to begin the difficult work of establishing composition—both its theory and its practice—as scholarly work in the minds of new graduate students. In chapter four ("The Human Barnyard"), I will explore the need to represent composition as a serious academic discipline, as well as graduate student and departmental resistance to taking the teaching of writing seriously.

**Graduate Student Administrators: WPAs and Peer Mentors**

Along with the development of a radically revised first-year writing curriculum came revisions in the roles of graduate student writing program administrators (WPAs) and the creation of small peer teaching groups, led by experienced TAs (peer mentors). The construction of initial version of the current English 110 curriculum was a thoroughly collaborative effort, as have been the subsequent revisions. Indeed, in the Autumn of 1993 the six WPAs who had worked feverishly the summer before to put the course together had prominent roles in the pre-quarter workshop—in both its design and implementation. They also served as peer mentors for small groups of new TAs who met weekly during the first quarter.

Several new TAs took seriously the invitation to participate in revising the course. In what would become a familiar pattern, several new TAs began to participate in ongoing talks about revising the course: choosing new readings,
reviewing prompts, and contributing to Starting Places. They also applied for positions as WPAs and peer mentors and, in those positions, contributed to the program after their first year. WPAs found themselves working long hours each summer to revise the annotated syllabus (later the handbook) and, for two springs and summers, worked on the custom published reader. But after that first year, WPAs no longer—with one exception—also worked as peer mentors. I will explain that one exception in the second interchapter, “Location as Ethos.”

In the autumn of 1993, it quickly became apparent to the six WPAs that the peer mentor position needed to be separated from the WPA position. Peer groups, they believed, needed to be places where TAs could freely criticize the First-Year Writing Program; they could not do this if WPAs were also peer mentors. To be sure, the peer groups were designed primarily to attend to some of the practical aspects of teaching that the pre-quarter workshop and English 781 did not have time to address. At the same time, the peer groups were meant to foster a collaborative spirit among new TAs by demonstrating that learning to teach is best accomplished by working with other teachers. Beginning in 1994, peer mentors received independent study credit for their work; by 1996, they were being paid a small stipend. By 1997, the peer mentors and TAs worked together for the entire year: weekly meetings in the autumn followed by Professional Interest Groups (PIGs) in the winter and spring.

While the WPAs in this study reported that one of their motivations for seeking the position was the perceived opportunity to work closely with new TAs, the separation of the peer mentor and WPA position has assured that peer mentors, rather
than WPAs, are more likely to develop close working relationships with new TAs. WPAs still have the responsibility for developing and revising curricular materials, and they continue to be highly visible during the pre-quarter workshop. At the same time, peer mentors are representatives of the First-Year Writing Program and, accordingly, are expected to support its aims. But, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four, peer mentors have far more freedom than WPAs to work the hyphen of graduate student-administrator.

#

This brief history of the First-Year Writing Program suggests its continual composition and recomposition. In the case studies that follow, I argue that the teaching lives I report on are in a similarly endless process of revision. The role of revision in the negotiation of teaching identity was driven home to me by Sarah, one of the participants in the study. After reading a draft of Chapter Two, "Two Lives," she said that she found herself to be a resistant reader—not because I had misrepresented her, but because she hardly recognized that earlier version of her teaching self. What is more, she said, the selves that she constructed for Eve in English 781 and for me in our interviews differed from each other and, indeed, from the teaching selves she constructed for friends and family. I have often wished that I could create a way of writing that would accurately capture the fluid nature of the visions and revisions of teaching selves that I report in this study. The best that I have been able to do, however, is to "read" my subject(s) through different theoretical and
critical lenses to call attention to the limits of any one perspective to provide a fully satisfactory account.
CHAPTER 2

Two Lives

"We've got two lives, the one we're given and the other one we make."
—Mary Chapin Carpenter, "The Hard Way"

In a recent essay, Marcy Taylor and Jennifer L. Holberg review 50 years of professional literature (with a focus on College Composition and Communication) in order to argue that as a genre, "stories of the graduate experience could all appear, in the words of Ken Macrorie in the December 1964 issue of CCC, as 'chapters in a book I would title Tales of Neglect and Sadism' " (608). The tales are a familiar part of graduate student lore: inadequate preparation, poor working conditions, and lack of respect. All too often, Taylor and Holberg add, institutional documents name graduate teaching associates (TAs) as "other" or "staff," thus effectively rendering them invisible (610) or, at times, as a "problem" to be solved through more "effective" or "efficient" training. And when graduate students name themselves, it is as victims of oppressive systems; as a result, graduate students become "visible to themselves only as powerless" (615). In this way, TAs participate in their own oppression by assuming the role of victim—rather than hero—in autobiographical accounts of teaching writing. Taylor and Holberg hope that their story of conflicted graduate student
identities will engender multiple, even competing responses; this essay is one such response. My aim here is not to tell a competing story, since I find their analysis largely convincing. Instead, I want to provide a view from elsewhere, one in which TAs, in the autobiographical narratives they write about the teaching and learning of literacy, become visible to themselves as teachers who do not name themselves as powerless victims.

Central to my argument is the notion that we compose our various selves—our teaching, writing, working, playing, loving selves—primarily in stories. As Anthony Paul Kerby argues in Narration and the Self, it is "as a character in our (and other people's) narratives that we achieve identity" (40). The self, he insists, "is essentially a being of reflexivity, coming to itself in its own narrational acts" (41). Because the identities created in these "narrational acts" are sustained in a "network of social communication and praxis," a person is thus a "being of semiosis" that interacts extensively "with other acting bodies and the products of semiosis—speech, texts, art works, and meaningful action generally" (101). It is in the social milieu, and nowhere else, that selves are constructed—that is to say, narrated. And yet, some (although by no means all) writing teachers are suspicious of stories. Stories are "soft," stories are for children, stories—"personal narratives" in composition classes—are what one has to move "beyond." But if autobiographical narratives are indeed central to the process of identity construction, then such narratives offer one possibility for reshaping our understanding of individual agency at a time when some are pronouncing the death of the author and claiming that we do not so much speak as we are "spoken by" powerful
institutional and disciplinary discourses. My goal in this chapter, then, is to explore the possibility of locating individual agency in a socially constructed self that is capable of re-accenting institutional, disciplinary, and cultural discourses. It is precisely this kind of agency that TAs must attain, and that writing programs must foster, if TAs are to compose themselves as powerful agents of change, rather than as powerless victims.

This exploration proceeds through case studies of new TAs whom I will call Aaron and Sarah. While my focus here is on the writing that Aaron and Sarah did in English 781 and on my interviews with them, other "voices" necessarily appear: Eve Wagner, as their professor for English 781; the institutional "voice" of the writing program, as represented by the core curriculum that Aaron and Sarah must teach; and the work of various composition scholars that informs their writing. This writing, gathered in the portfolio they constructed for the course, includes a cover letter, teaching journal entries, a teaching narrative, and a teaching philosophy. It is in these portfolios that Sarah and Aaron weave together autobiography and critical analysis in order to construct—that is, to narrate—versions of their teaching selves.

These portfolios bear a family resemblance to literacy narratives: stories that, as Janet Eldred and Peter Mortensen describe the genre, "foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy" (513). Although Eldred and Mortensen have in mind literary works like George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion, their definition applies to autobiography as well. Thus, Richard Rodriguez's Hunger of Memory and Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera may be understood as literacy narratives, as may 46
several influential books in composition studies, including *Lives on the Boundary* (Mike Rose), *Voices of the Self* (Keith Gilyard), *Bootstraps* (Victor Villanueva), and *The Peaceable Classroom* (Mary Rose O’Reilly). Autobiographical literacy narratives also show up with some regularity in the pages of journals such as *College English*. Even when Richard E. Miller, in "The Nervous System," complains that the personal narratives of Jane Tompkins, Nancy Sommers, Linda Brodkey, and Lynn Z. Bloom do not help him "to think about the interplay between personal experience and academic training" (267), he launches his argument in an essay that begins with an account of his father’s second suicide attempt and includes a description of how writing a poem provided him with "the material for a revision of both [his] professional and [his] personal circumstances" (273). Rather than argue against all uses of autobiography in academic writing, then, Miller urges compositionists to imagine a pedagogy that works against the binary opposition of "personal" and "academic" that he finds in the essays he critiques. In composition studies, then, the autobiographical narrative has made the leap from the personal essay assignment in first-year writing courses—the assignment that is all too often thought of as preliminary to "real" college writing—to theoretical debates in professional journals.

When composed by academics, literacy autobiographies testify to "arrival" as a teacher and a scholar; and in every case, the writer’s construction of ethos is central to the narrative’s persuasiveness. That is, literacy narratives—which might be understood as case studies of the self or as "autoethnographies"—are persuasive to the extent that the writer is able to locate his or her critical autobiographical account in
deeply rooted narratives of individual and cultural transformation, which in turn place readers in familiar moral positions (Newkirk “Narrative” 135). ² Mike Rose’s Lives on the Boundary, for example, recreates several familiar figures and scenes of literacy teaching and learning: the inspiring high school English teacher who awakens in his students a love of language; impassioned arguments against oppressive schooling practices fueled by the quasi-medical language of remediation that Rose suffered from; the working class boy (Rose himself) who overcomes great obstacles on his way to success; and the metaphor of education as embrace—as either smothering or enabling. Indeed, the book’s chapter titles—“Entering the Conversation,” “The Poem Is a Substitute for Love,” “Literate Stirrings,” “Reclaiming the Classroom,” “The Politics of Remediation,” and “Crossing Boundaries”—are themes that appear, in whole or in part, in Bootstraps, Voices of the Self, Linda Brodkey’s “Writing on the Bias,” Brenda Jo Brueggemann’s “On (Almost) Passing,” and several other narratives that argue, implicitly or explicitly, for the power of literacy to transform individuals and societies. The generic conventions of the literacy narrative, then, invite the graduate students in English 781 compose literacy autobiographies that testify to their “arrival” as teachers and scholars and that construct “literacy” as an agent of change.

This is not to say that literacy narratives invite only heroic tales of individual triumph and beneficial cultural change. I noted in the preceding paragraph that Rose’s metaphor of education as embrace captures the potential of that embrace to enable and to smother; other writers pay similar attention to the ambiguities of literacy’s consequences. In Hunger of Memory, for example, Richard Rodriguez eloquently
explores how his acquisition of a high level of literacy in Standard English came at the expense of Spanish, his native tongue. Victor Villanueva (in *Bootstraps*) rejects Rodriguez’s argument that fluency in English requires the relinquishment of one’s native tongue. As Villanueva has discovered from his own experience, the highest level of literacy in Standard English will not prevent Rodriguez or Villanueva himself from suffering the effects of racism. And in “On (Almost) Passing,” Brenda Brueggemann repeatedly reminds her readers that she is always “passing”; rather than testify to arrival, she invokes continual movement from and towards.

Nevertheless, much writing about literacy casts literacy as the agent of always beneficial change, as a powerful source of individual and cultural transformation. In “Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture,” for example, Beth Daniell notes that work by Jack Goody and Ian Watt, Eric Havelock, and Walter Ong argues that the development of phonetic alphabets and the kind of literacy that followed are what made abstract thought—and thus science, philosophy, and history—possible. These are, as Daniell notes, versions of the “Great Leap” or “Great Divide” theory of literacy, in which the move from oral to literate culture results in cognitive changes that are, if not the sole cause, then an important contributing cause in the appearance of abstract thinking that marks a sharp departure from the “poetic” and “mythic” thinking characteristic of oral cultures. Daniell also notes that such scholars as Harvey Graff (*The Legacies of Literacy*), Brian Street (*Social Literacies*), and Elspeth Stuckey (*The Violence of Literacy*) have argued that the effects of social inequalities and oppression complicate commonplace assumptions that the acquisition
of literacy leads directly to improved social and material conditions. Finally, in the work of Paulo Freire, Daniell sees what has been for many scholars and teachers a compelling grand narrative of literacy as a tool for liberation. As a corrective to both Great Divide and Freireian models of literacy, Daniell calls for more “small” narratives that examine literate practices in their specific historical and cultural contexts.

The narratives of literacy outlined by Daniell inform literacy narratives like Lives on the Boundary. Given the widely held belief in the transformative powers of literacy, the genre of literacy narrative invites authors to argue for the power of literacy to change individuals and societies. Of course, an invocation of “change” usually carries with it the implicit assumption that the change under consideration is a good thing, one that all right-thinking people will assent to. Daniell, however, warns us to “be careful of literacy narratives that make us feel good, not just those narratives that explain away social injustice . . . but also those that cast some of us in the role of ‘hero[es] of liberty’” (401). At their best, literacy narratives explore what is gained and lost in the acquisition and performance of literacy. In so doing, they extend and complicate our understanding of the political, social, and ethical consequences of literacy.

Thus, while the genre of literacy narrative may invite heroic stories, it also allows writers to bring the heroics into question. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I noted Thomas Newkirk’s call for “polyvocality” in case studies. Recall that polyvocality, in Newkirk’s view, enables qualitative researchers to allow
discordant voices into the account, "voices that will complicate the moral judgments that readers will make" ("Narrative" 148). It is possible to see in Sarah’s and Aaron’s narratives the polyvocality that Newkirk advocates, insofar as their constructions of teaching identities are negotiations between and among several discordant “voices.”

There are indeed transformative narratives in these case studies; but Aaron and Sarah, in their portfolios and in interviews with me, usefully and provocatively complicate the commonplace narratives of conversion and resistance that characterize so much of our understanding of how new TAs construct teaching identities.

**Literacy Narratives in an Institutional Context: New TAs and Teacher Training**

“Literacy as transformation” emerges as a central theme in TA literacy narratives. Consider, for example, the concluding sentences of Sarah’s portfolio cover letter:

> In my narrative, I use the image of the fool, as explorer, to illustrate how I perceive myself as a teacher and a person; I think it is applicable to bring that image to myself as a writer and as a teacher of writing. It is this same fool who uses writing as a form of self-exploration and discovery, and who encourages my students to do the same. In true accordance with the mythological fool, I entered this quarter unaware of where my journey would lead me; I honestly believe that I have come out with an experience and wisdom that I would not otherwise have gained.

This excerpt echoes the expressivist notion of writing as self-discovery—as a journey that leads a writer and, in this case, a teacher, to otherwise unavailable wisdom. In other words, we might read Sarah’s narrative as a familiar story of transformation, of self-reinvention.
Self-reinvention may be, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue in their introduction to *Getting a Life*, one of the key components of the American dream and thus a motivating cultural myth. Historically, they note, writing autobiography “testified to arrival in ‘America’ and the achievement of an ‘American’ identity” (5), and they add that personal “histories—in all their varieties—serve as individualized testimonies to getting a 'successful' life together (however success is defined) and/or to the failure of self-remaking in terms of the dream” (6). Smith and Watson emphasize that “this telling and consuming of autobiographical stories, this announcing of, performing, composing of identity becomes a defining condition of postmodernity in America.” (7 original emphasis). In Smith and Watson’s view, we take up the identities that are culturally available and, in so doing, place ourselves into the slots that have been prepared for us. That is, we must match our stories to the institutions and occasions—church, hospital, school, government bureaucracy, graduate seminar—that compel us to tell our stories. In other words, we assume our places as actors in known scripts, and then act out the roles demanded of us by the various institutions that require us to speak some version of our autobiographies: in the cases I am considering here, the demands of a graduate seminar that introduced new TAs to the theory and practice of teaching first-year writing.

Sarah, Aaron, and their peers were acutely aware of their lack of experience and expertise as teachers and desperately wanted a script to follow. But rather than present new TAs with a teaching script that they could perform with relatively little reflection, Eve insisted that the TAs construct their own scripts out of the many, and...
often competing, scripts about teaching and learning literacy that they already knew and that they were encountering, usually for the first time, in the readings for the graduate seminar and in the first-year course they were teaching for the first time. It was with stories that Eve invited her students to begin.

At the close of the pre-quarter workshop, a faculty member in the rhetoric and composition program asked the group to construct metaphors for teaching. In the assignment sheet that Eve handed out on the first day of the seminar, she invited TAs to consider building a teaching narrative from the central image or metaphor that they wrote about during the workshop. Regardless of the direction they took, Eve wrote in her prompt, students needed to “relate and reflect upon past teaching and/or learning experiences that have had significant impact on your understanding and image of yourself as a teacher of first-year writing.” Eve further required students to “articulate (explicitly or implicitly) your assumptions about and expectations for teaching first-year writing.” As was the case with the literacy autobiography they would be assigning to their students in the first-year course, the TA narratives had to illustrate assumptions and expectations through example and/or storytelling. “Tell a story,” Eve was saying, and at the same time make that story do the critical work of articulating one’s assumptions and expectations about teaching first-year writing.

The second extended writing assignment was a teaching philosophy. This assignment, “although related to the teaching narrative in subject, differs from that earlier narrative in that it reflects much more specifically on this quarter’s experiences in [the first-year composition course] and [the seminar] in the construction of a
working philosophy of teaching first-year writing.” Note that there is still an invitation to storytelling, to synthesize all of the work that students have done in the pre-quarter workshop, in peer teaching groups, in their own classrooms, and in the seminar itself as they “begin to establish a professional teaching portfolio.” These portfolios are one of the means by which the students in English 781 constructed representations of themselves as reflective teachers.

TAs, then, were asked to construct teaching/scholarly selves by entering into several dialogues at once: with composition studies, with Eve, with their peers, with their own histories as literate beings, with their students, with cultural images of teachers and students, and so on. And, of course, not just any self is possible here. Eve described the teaching philosophy as a “working philosophy,” a phrase that suggests the provisional nature of these texts. Put another way, Eve prompted TAs to represent themselves not as stable subjects but as the malleable selves privileged by college composition instructors. I am borrowing the idea of a “malleable self” from Thomas Newkirk, who in *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* writes that in order to construct “this subjectivity, the student writer needs to negotiate convincing ‘turns’ in the writing, shifts from rendering to reflection that point to the ‘significance’ (a key word in personal essay assignments) of the experience being rendered” (“Performance” 12). As Newkirk describes it, the turn creates a dramatically satisfying “before and after” movement, “provides thematic weight to the essay,” shows a mind making sense of experience, has a “confessional urgency,” and shows the writer moving to “higher moral ground” (“Performance” 13-14). This pattern
operates in several widely anthologized essays, Newkirk argues—essays that “dramatize learning . . . illustrate the possibility of personal growth, and . . . celebrate, indirectly, the heuristic power of writing. Writing is the hero of writing.” (“Performance” 14 original emphasis). To see writing as self-discovery or even self-transformation, Newkirk writes,

is an invitation to construct the self in a particular way; a self in a state of ‘suspended conclusion,’ open to change, with everything—even our ‘most certain beliefs’—on the table. This self is malleable, not exactly fluid, but open to transformative moments that can occur when experience is contemplated in the relative tranquility of writing (14).

The “malleable” selves I will be considering here must negotiate between the teaching selves that Sarah and Aaron sense is called for by the writing program and the teaching selves they wish to construct. The teaching selves that TAs narrate contain all of the characteristics of the personal narrative that Newkirk outlines: dramatic before and after moments, thematic weight, sharp minds at work, confessional moments, and movements to high moral ground. But even as Aaron and Sarah sometimes heed the generic call for transformative moments, they ultimately replace transformation with negotiation.

**Case Studies**

In preparation for a day devoted to personal and academic writing, the students in 781 read the exchange between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae that appeared in *College Composition and Communication* in 1995 and is included in *Cross-Talk*. Because this exchange figures prominently in the TA narratives I am considering in
this chapter, before turning to this chapter’s case studies I want to describe their positions in some detail.

In “Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow,” Bartholomae thinks of “the pure and open space, the frontier classroom, as a figure central to composition as it is currently constructed. The open classroom; a free writing. This is the master trope” (481). The corollary to the frontier metaphor is a desire for institutional, cultural, historical, and academic spaces free of the influences and pressures of institutions, cultures, history, and the academy (481). This desire, Bartholomae believes, is expressed in Elbow’s work (although he grants that it may not be Elbow’s desire).

Bartholomae frames the debate this way:

> Should we teach new journalism or creative non-fiction as part of the required undergraduate curriculum? That is, should all students be required to write in the first person, narrative or expressive genre whose goal it is to reproduce the ideology of sentimental realism—where a world is made in the image of a single, authorizing point of view? a narrative that celebrates a world made up of the details of private life and whose hero is sincere? (486)

His answer, of course, is an emphatic “no.” Although Bartholomae believes that writing teachers can indeed make their students feel like Authors, he calls this a pleasant lie. The figure of the author is under attack “in all other departments in the humanities,” (487) he asserts, and he finds sentimental realism “a corrupt, if extraordinarily tempting genre” (488). Instead, Bartholomae “would rather teach or preside over a critical writing, one where the critique is worked out in practice, and for lack of better terms I would call that writing, ‘academic writing’” (488). Teachers, in
the scene of writing that Bartholomae constructs for his readers, “manage substations in the cultural network, small shops in the general production of readers and writers. We don’t choose this; it is the position we assume as teachers” (483). If we want to be more than managers, we must make the classroom “available for critical inquiry, for a critique that is part of the lesson of practice” (483). The author, in other words, is dead, and students in required undergraduate writing courses should not be told otherwise.

Peter Elbow, on the other hand, insists that the author is alive and well. In “Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals” Elbow argues that “there is a conflict between the role of the writer and that of academic” (489). Academics, in Elbow’s view, are readers; writers, well, write. Further, “readers and writers have competing interests over who gets to control texts,” he claims; it is “in the interests of readers to say that the writer’s intention doesn’t matter or is undefinable, to say that meaning is never determinate, always fluid and sliding, to say that there is no presence or voice behind a text; and finally to kill off the author! This leaves the reader in complete control of the text” (492). To be sure, Elbow sees himself as both academic and writer and hopes that his students will view themselves similarly, but it is only “when other courses in the university make writing as important as reading” that Elbow will “respond with a comparable adjustment and give reading equal spotlight in my first year course” (492). However, even English departments, in his view, tend to make reading more important than writing: “The only course that tends to make writing central is the one course that most English faculty don’t want to
teach” (492). Elbow knows that he is setting up binaries here, that his figure of the writer may be too “romantic,” but he refuses to give up what he sees as helpful in the role of the writer as he constructs it (499).

The sharply contrasting views of the student writer offered by Bartholomae and Elbow took on a curious life of their own in English 781. In an effort to localize expressivist and social constructionist pedagogies, Eve suggested that MFA students might find some familiar views of writing and writers in expressivist views of writing, while literature students might see in social constructionist pedagogies familiar strains of the theory they were encountering in literature seminars. Eve’s intention was not to assign creative writers and literature students to particular categories; rather, she was simply providing one way to begin thinking about the differences between the two rhetorics. Some students, however, thought that Eve intended to set up clear boundaries between MA students (i.e. literature students—readers, in Elbow’s terms) from MFA students (i.e. “real” writers). I suspect that the TAs who felt this way were reproducing a version of the dichotomy between readers and writers that Elbow lays out in his essay. As I will argue in the following case studies, both Aaron and Sarah found themselves siding with Elbow.

Aaron: “Who . . . are . . . you?”

“The initial panic involving my status as ‘teacher’ has proven to be quite healthy. I arrived here with little sense of identity, and I’ve had a great deal of room to create one through my practical experiences in the classroom. The writings in Cross-Talk have been useful in this identity construction, as well, for they’ve pointed out why the practical experiences are useful and what those experiences actually mean. As my role of teacher has become more and more defined, my students’ roles as learners have
also changed. Everyone is supposed to have an identity, and it’s difficult to fit these identities together in a classroom situation, but I’m beginning to understand how this situation works.”

—Aaron

Aaron is an MA student in literature for whom identity, as the passage above makes clear, was a central issue during his first quarter. His narrative, I will show, demonstrates quite nicely Smith and Watson’s contention that autobiographies testify to getting a successful life together. His testimony to arrival is, to be sure, cautious: he writes of attempted articulations, “schizophrenic” products, evidence of being a fraud, a general sense of anxiety and vulnerability, and embarrassment about his preoccupation with his own identity as a teacher. Throughout his portfolio, he struggles to work the hyphen of literary critic-writing teacher in an effort to locate himself in composition studies—even as he consistently makes it clear that he is not a rhetorician or a compositionist.

Thus, the first two sentences of his portfolio cover letter announce themes that recur throughout the portfolio:

After having looked back through my learning journal entries, my teaching narrative, and my teaching philosophy in preparation for this letter, it’s become embarrassingly clear to me what my focus has been during my quarter in English 781: me. I’ve learned a good bit about some of the debates in rhetoric and composition from the readings in Cross-Talk, but the debates I’ve found most intriguing have been related to the teacher’s sense of personal identity in the classroom.

There are some obvious reasons for Aaron’s preoccupation with identity. For one thing, English 781 began with a day devoted to “Naming Ourselves,” the first text students read for the course was Elizabeth Rankin’s Seeing Yourself as a Teacher, and
even before the new TAs arrived on campus they had an opportunity to read the graduate student teaching philosophies and literacy narratives in *Starting Places*. In addition, "self-reflection" had been a key term in the writing program for more than four years by the time Aaron arrived.

All of these calls to self-reflection conflicted with the academic identity that Aaron brought to the program. Note the consternation that Aaron expresses near the end of his cover letter:

> Looking back through my work this quarter has been a disconcerting and rather painful process. I've done relatively little personal writing in school, and I've used far too many "I's" this quarter (two in this sentence alone) than I'm (aargh—a third!) comfortable with. I'm a literary critic. Part of my job is to keep the spotlight off of myself and on other writers as much as possible.

Keeping the spotlight off of himself becomes a recurring theme in Aaron's portfolio, particularly in his teaching narrative, "Rhyme and Reason." Using Carter Beauford, the drummer for the Dave Matthews Band, as an example, he constructs an extended metaphor of the teacher as drummer. Teachers and drummers lead "a group of people while trying not to step on toes or inhibit creativity." A drummer, Aaron writes, "drives each tune as a whole, but he is often the most invisible member of the band. He's the leader, but he appears to be content hiding behind his set and hiding his voice behind Dave [Matthews']." Teachers, like drummers, set and keep the beat; teachers, like drummers, have "to be sensitive to every change and act accordingly."

Aaron explicitly connects his preference for keeping the spotlight off of himself to his work as a student of literature. In an e-mail message to me, Aaron
wrote, "I'm a critic. I don't focus my writings on myself, though I've found (with a guilty sense of hypocrisy) that this is the very writing I'm asking my students to do... I write about other people's work, not my own work. And certainly not myself."

This sense of "hypocrisy" appears in other places in his portfolio. In an early journal entry written in response to Donald Murray's "Teach Writing as a Process not Product," Aaron notes that the "whole conception of writing as a process is one that I have heard before, but I (as a writer) don't think I actually practice writing as a process." That is, Aaron does not recognize his own process of revising a paper as he goes along as just that—a process. This is a result of his own experience with teachers who did not invite revision: after a teacher grades a paper, he writes, "there is never an expectation that I will actually go back to it and rewrite it." The papers he has written in the past were, in essence, finished products, and he doesn't see himself as "a participant in 'writing as a process.'"

Even though his experience as a student has provided him with few, if any, models for teaching writing as a process, Aaron is not at all opposed to teaching writing as a process; indeed, he finds it quite useful. However, he writes, "I do feel like I'm some sort of hypocrite. If I don't approach writing in distinct revisional steps, why should I expect my students to approach their own writing this way?" He adds that at least "we're using the processes of revision in 781, so I'm not a complete hypocrite (at least, not for this quarter). I guess I'll see what real revision looks like, as I figure out what exactly it is that my students are going through when I tell them to turn in drafts one, two, and three." Although Aaron will continue to name himself as a
literary critic, that particular scholarly identity finally proves to be of little use in the construction of his identity as a writing teacher. For help, he turns to Peter Elbow, Maxine Hairston, and his own students.

"One Identity—to Go, Please"

Aaron's teaching philosophy—"One Identity—to Go, Please," begins with a scene of writing. He finds inspiration in one TA's teaching philosophy in Starting Places, in which the writer (an MFA student who later became a graduate student WPA in the First-Year Writing Program) gives up the struggle to construct a teaching philosophy based on "the writings of theorists who'd spent many more years grappling with these issues than he had." Aaron does not, like the writer whose work inspires him, go to a coffee shop; instead, he bundles up against the chilly November air and goes for a run. "Surprisingly, I wasn't cold at all. It felt good. The writing would come in time. Everyone has his/her own approach to beginning the writing process, and this was mine. This was me. This was who I am. My identity began to come into focus." With that newly achieved, or perhaps renewed, sense of identity, Aaron turns to another metaphor, this time from Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. The Cheshire Cat, Aaron writes, "looks down at Alice and smoothly releases the inquisitive phrase, 'Who... are... you?' The question is a good one—an important one, and one which has stayed with me throughout most of my life." Aaron links the question of who he is in the classroom to who he is in other roles. In his teaching narrative and journal entries, he names himself, time and again, as a literary
critic. While this identity is apparently secure, it does not, as I have suggested, prove adequate to his construction of a teaching identity. In his teaching philosophy, however, Aaron does not mention his identity as a literary critic.

Instead, Aaron gives us a story of transformation. Upon first learning that he had received a graduate teaching associateship, he was “frightened beyond belief.” He had never taken a teaching class, but in six months he would be “standing in front of a classroom—stuttering, sputtering, and stammering as if I actually had something to say.” So uncertain was he that he tucked away the acceptance letter, “almost too embarrassed by my uncertainty to tell anyone about my ‘good news.’ In less than six months, I’d be teaching writing. Whatever that meant.” However, Aaron believes that the “initial panic” proved to be quite healthy. He arrived at Enormous State, he writes, “with little sense of identity,” but the program provided him with enough room to create one through his “practical experiences in the classroom.” Cross-Talk, too, was helpful, since the readings “pointed out why the practical experiences are useful and what those experiences actually mean.” And, as he began to define his role as a teacher, he came to a clearer definition of his students’ roles as learners.

As I have already indicated, Aaron places his experience in the context of the whole quarter. At the beginning, he was uncertain; his teaching narrative, he notes, “was littered with unanswered questions that left me feeling more beleaguered than I’d been at the end of the prequarter workshop. . . .” Aaron cites his narrative as an illustration of where his thinking of what a teacher does began: “[My students] expect the obvious: the graded papers, the roll calling, the lecturing, etc. They expect the
things that make teachers teachers. But that's just the problem. What is a teacher, and what makes us what we are?" Clearly, a list of administrative tasks cannot answer Aaron's question; for answers, he turns to his experience in the classroom—to student voices, especially. Here is the pivotal scene:

Oddly enough, many of my questions were answered by one of my students in class. I'd gotten to the point where the direction in which the class was heading was shaky, and I was feeling guilty for bringing these 21 students along for the ride. 'Where are we going?' I asked at the beginning of class. 'What is the point of all the things I've been asking you to do? Is this a writing class?' Everyone sort of looked around, and I was beginning to suspect that my fears were, in fact, founded, when one of my more vocal students raised his hand.

'Yeah, it makes sense,' he said. 'You get us thinking about stuff, and we write about it. You don't beat us over the head with grammar, and that helps us write better. You read our stuff and tell us how we can improve. It helps.'

That last sentence is, I suppose, the most significant part of what the student said.

As Aaron tells it, it is almost as if his students have given him permission to name himself as a teacher, to believe that what he is doing is helping students. I should note that Aaron's opening scene of running, his reflections on the initial panic he felt at the prospect of teaching, and the story quoted above take up most of the first three pages of a seven-page essay. The student's comment prompts him to wonder what he had been looking for in the definition of "teacher"; his conclusion is that he was "thinking of teaching as lecturing, because this is the type of classroom" that he had spent his undergraduate years in. English 110, he finally realizes, demands a different way of teaching, one that affords little room for the lectures that he sat through as an
undergraduate and that the students in his class generally experience in other classrooms at Enormous State.

Aaron has in mind, of course, teaching writing as process, as what Murray calls "the process of discovery through language... It is the process of using language to learn about our world, to evaluate what we learn about our world, to communicate what we learn about our world" (4). In other classrooms, Aaron's students tell him, "they are passive observers... a few students have told me that they enjoy being able to fade into the background. This disappearing act simply cannot happen in my classroom." In his teaching narrative, remember, Aaron uses the metaphor of teacher as drummer, as one who can, once he has set the beat, fade into the background. But by the time Aaron writes his teaching philosophy, images of fading into the background have been transformed: the background is where students cannot go in Aaron's class. In Carroll's story, the Cheshire Cat disappears, leaving behind his grin; but Aaron does not follow him.

Instead, Aaron finally feels confident enough to locate himself in a particular place in composition studies—expressivism. In the debate over who controls writing, Aaron sides with Elbow over Bartholomae:

Elbow chooses to let his students see themselves as writers without disillusioning them about who's really in control, and it's a decision that I buy into. There will be time enough for them to find out who really carries the title of 'author,' and I think it's more beneficial than harmful to encourage my students to trust the validity of their writing. For one quarter, at least, I think it's harmless to call my students authors and to have them do the same for themselves.
Along with this decision to encourage his students to see themselves as writers—as authors, even—comes Aaron’s acceptance of “the labels” that have been assigned him. “I’ve become comfortable with ‘teacher’ because I can accept that there are things that I teach.” He teaches writing as the process of discovering what we know about the world and communicating that vision to others, and he encourages his students to see themselves and each other as writers. With this growing confidence in himself as a writing teacher comes the confidence to critique the 110 curriculum, particularly *Writing Lives*.

“Although I’ve now accepted my role as a teacher,” Aaron writes, “there are facets of this role that I’m still not entirely comfortable with.” Although he believes that *Writing Lives* is useful for generating discussion, he laments what he sees as a “very biased text that encourages a semi-revolutionary way of looking at the world.” He grants that most texts are biased, but he often finds himself coming into direct conflict with many of the readings: “I almost get the feeling that, in the program at ESU, we’re encouraged to take an extremely liberal agenda into the classroom, and I’m worried that bringing any agenda into the classroom may inadvertently take away a student’s own sense of identity.” He agrees with Maxine Hairston’s assertion that a rising tide of leftist writing instructors are using “required writing courses as vehicles for social reform rather than as student-centered workshops designed to build students’ confidence and competence as writers” (660). Along with Hairston, Aaron argues that “real” diversity emerges from the students themselves; his own goal is “to reach beyond the constraints of either political ‘side’ in an attempt to let the students retain a
sense of who they are.” It would be almost cruel, Aaron writes, to tell students leaving home for the first time “that everything they’ve ever believed in is untrue (this view may be exaggerated or outdated, but I sometimes feel that this is the world-view that I’m portraying).”

There is evidence to support Aaron’s contention that the First-Year Writing Program leans to the left. Although Writing Lives includes essays by politically conservative writers like E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and Allan Bloom, essays by Paulo Freire and bell hooks have always resonated more fully with the social constructionist bent of English 781. Eve and other professors who teach the course invites TAs to construct, collaboratively, knowledge about teaching; a search for ultimate truths does not figure into the work of the course nor, for that matter, English 110. As it turns out, all of the TAs in this study shared Aaron’s concerns and, in doing so, found an ally in Hairston. Other TAs, I suspect, found other parts of the program to resist. Graduate students are, after all, aspiring critics of one kind or another. The point is that Aaron’s resistance, quite apart from questions of whether the program has a leftist agenda, plays a key role in his construction of a teaching identity.

Near the end of his teaching philosophy (and of his first quarter of teaching), Aaron is clear about the success of the teaching identity he is building; he is, he writes, “beginning to discover a strange sense of comfort in my place in the classroom.” When the Cheshire Cat whispers his question once again, Aaron answers, “‘I’m a teacher, sir.’ That’s what I do.” Just as he finds comfort in his teaching identity, he hopes that his students “have found a writing identity, whether it’s the previously
unexplored identity of ‘author’ or simply the personal identity that they’ve discovered through their narrative reflections.” His own identity, he writes, was constructed from “the bits and pieces that I’ve been exposed to both in front of and within the classroom, and it’s been well worth the effort. I like what I’m doing, and I believe in what I’m doing, and I can’t wait for next quarter so I can start again with a fresher, more informed beginning.”

Note that Aaron himself points to the contingent nature of his emerging teaching identity. There is a sense in which he testifies to arrival when he writes that he has accepted the role of teacher. But he has not arrived at any kind of final destination. Rather, he looks forward to the next quarter, when he can begin again. Thus, by the end of his first ten weeks as a teacher and graduate student, he has begun to negotiate his ethos in conversation with peers, students, and composition theory. His metaphor of teaching as drumming evokes another generic possibility for the literacy narrative: a steady composition and recomposition of ethos that is truer to the rhythms of teaching and writing than are the dramatic heroics conjured up in movies like Dead Poets Society. And even though Sarah casts her literacy narrative in heroic terms, she also works to negotiate her ethos in terms of variation and revision rather than of transformation.

Sarah: “The Fool’s Journey”

Sarah’s journey to the first-year writing program did not follow a straight line from undergraduate work to graduate school; in fact, her academic “home” at
Enormous State was outside of the English department, although still within the same college. Her scholarly interests include folklore, philosophy, and religion, all of which she studies through the lens of critical cultural studies. Even before she began teaching in the writing program, Sarah ranged widely, both in her schooling and geographically. As an undergraduate, her primary interest was in Chinese history and philosophy, but she earned a degree in history because she found the best teachers in the history department. Lacking the language background to apply to graduate programs in East Asian Studies, she took a year off, thought about secondary education, and enrolled in a university in the Western US to begin studying education. Sarah left after a semester when she decided to pursue her interests in cultural studies.

Given her own wanderings, it isn’t surprising that Sarah uses the image of the mythological fool to embody her beliefs about teaching and teachers. In ancient myths, Sarah writes in her teaching narrative, the fool “was the ‘blessed one,’ a hero and a traveler, like Odysseus, Hercules or Dionysus. The fool may not know exactly where she’s going, but she has the faith and courage to take the unknown path. At the end of the journey, she is rewarded with wisdom and experience.” Teaching and teachers, in Sarah’s teaching narrative, also have something of the mythological about them. Here are the opening lines of her narrative, “A Fool’s Journey”:

When asked to define what a “good teacher” is, I find that no choice of words can adequately convey what my mind seems to instinctively know. I believe the reason for this is that, for me, a teacher is not necessarily someone who stands in front of a classroom and educates students; teaching is not an occupation, nor can it be defined in such narrow constructs. Instead, there are those individuals who are endowed with a gift for educating, for guiding others on a quest for knowledge. This gift, this unique ability, is not taught in college, nor
can it be found in books; it is a way of being. My inability to separate
the teacher from the person has in large part to do with my family, and I
find that being a teacher is not always a choice, but an inevitable
conclusion. I, myself, have struggled for several years trying to decide
the career I wish to undertake, but in the end, it seems as if I have no
choice; the road always leads me back to teaching.

The images and metaphors that Sarah introduces here resonate throughout her
portfolio and in my interviews with her. Teachers are “endowed with a gift for
educating”; they guide others on “a quest for knowledge.” Such a gift cannot be
taught in colleges or found in books, since it is “a way of being.” The teacher and the
person are not separate, and one becomes a teacher not because of a career choice but
as the result of an “inevitable conclusion.” For Sarah, to become a teacher is to take
her place in a family narrative that positions her as a teacher in a long line of teachers:
her father, several aunts and uncles, a grandmother, and two sisters have all been or
are currently teachers, and one great-uncle was a Jesuit priest. Even if she does not
teach for a living, Sarah imagines that whatever she does will have elements of
teaching—of education and guidance.

However, her family’s influence is as daunting as it is inspirational:

One would think that all of this tradition, this encouragement [from her
family] would boost my self-esteem and self-confidence; in a way, I do
feel privileged. Yet, I feel this inordinate amount of pressure. What if
I’m not a good teacher? This question becomes especially difficult
when I find that I myself cannot even define what a good teacher is.

Members of her family were “ecstatic” when they learned that she had been awarded a
teaching assistantship. Teaching is “in your blood,” they told her; her aunt said that
Sarah had in her “those traits of a natural teacher.” So much tradition, so many
expectations—no wonder Sarah feels pressure. In her teaching narrative, she works to relieve that pressure in two ways. The first is through humor: "Either my aunt and the rest of my family are correct and teaching will come naturally to me, or family reunions will never be the same again." The second move is a return to the organizing trope of the fool’s journey. As she contemplates the road before her, she asks, "If I’m not a successful teacher, then what am I?" This is, she writes, a frightening question because she wants teaching "to be my way of life; I have found, very often, the things that are the most dear to us, our most precious dreams, are never tested, because we are afraid of losing them." It is at this moment, in the last paragraph of her narrative, that Sarah transforms the potentially debilitating pressure of family tradition into a source of strength as she prepares to "continue my journey one step at a time." Teaching, then, becomes a "journey into the classroom as a fool, not just because it gives me faith, but also because it is a part of who I am."

To be sure, Sarah’s relatively confident cover letter, teaching narrative, and teaching philosophy gloss over the ways in which her family’s faith in her “natural” teaching ability works against Sarah nearly as much as it reassures her. For a day or two, Sarah was able to hang onto the notion of the natural teacher. In her second journal entry, for example, she reports that a student decided to stay in her class because she smiled and spoke with students, rather than at them, and that this made the walk to the classroom worth it (Sarah taught in a building located in a corner of the campus far removed from most other classrooms). Sarah notes that one student’s
remarks do not make her “dynamic, effective, or the ultimate teacher, i.e. Dead Poets Society.” She does claim, however, that those remarks
tell me that I am being myself; I thoroughly enjoy my students, regardless of whether they are exemplary, and if the image my students have of me is that I love to laugh, that I love to listen and that I love to ask questions, then it is close to my own image, not of who I am as a teacher, but of who I am as a person. And in the end, I know that how I see myself as a teacher is inexorably connected to how I see myself as a person.

The one thing she can do naturally, Sarah believes at this point, is connect with her students by speaking with them, rather than at them, and in that conversation, she believes, she can influence lives—especially by teaching her students to ask, “Why?” She admits that when she thinks of good teachers, she thinks of those portrayed in movies, along with those she has had as a student. She doesn’t expect to positively affect every student, but she does think “that most people can name a teacher who affected their lives.” Sarah wants to be that kind of teacher.

Sarah’s narrative takes a predictable turn as conflicts with students and class sessions gone awry challenge her heady idealism. In an excerpt from an entry written a couple of weeks into the quarter, Sarah writes:

Why am I a teacher? Do I want to be a teacher? This whole thing is like a seesaw for me, up then down, up then down. If I feel like I might actually have the whole thing balanced, one of my seemingly stable ideas takes a dive off the other end and I’m slammed onto the ground. I want to get off, but it just keeps going up and down.

In sharp contrast to the week before this, she feels “completely unconnected” to her students. Two students are late with assignments, one of them hasn’t contacted her
about it, and the situation frustrates her because now she must confront them. “I don’t
know if I’m taking it personally,” she writes, “like it’s an affront to me, but more like I
must be an ineffective teacher, I don’t communicate well.” To be an ineffective
teacher is her greatest fear, and stories from other TAs do little to ease her anxiety: “I
hear stories from other TAs and I make the mistake of projecting. I say to myself, ‘my
class isn’t like that’ or ‘my students didn’t talk about that, it must be that I’m not
doing something right, I must be ineffective.’” In her next journal entry, Sarah tries to
rein in the expectations she has for herself:

My paranoia seems to have abated; I’m trying to be less critical of
myself, trying not to get caught up in the idea that I need to be a great
teacher. I think that I need to come to terms with an inherent
contradiction in my beliefs. On the one hand I realize that I need to
learn how to teach, that I will only become better through experience;
on the other hand, I have this pressure to be a “natural” at the whole
thing. I brought this topic up in my teaching narrative; I come from a
family of teachers and I have been told numerous times that it’s in my
blood—I have to be good at it.

The image of the fool and the hope that teaching really is in her blood give Sarah the
confidence to step into the classroom, but her experiences there immediately challenge
her “stable ideas” of the “natural” teacher and lead her to see teaching as something
learned over time—indeed, in Sarah’s view good teachers never stop learning.

Sarah suggests much the same thing in follow-up interviews conducted after
her second and third quarters of teaching. In the first interview, conducted after her
first quarter of teaching, she describes teaching as a performance that she has to
prepare herself for; in addition, she notes, “the greatest teachers I’ve ever known view
themselves as students too.” There is, she says, “so much I want to learn about before
I profess to be a teacher.” A teacher knows something about the subject, and learns it through long preparation as a scholar—a learning process that does not end once she steps into the classroom. In our second interview, conducted after her third quarter of teaching, Sarah continues to wrestle with the concept of a natural teacher, but this time she articulates what this might mean. “I’m not proposing that you’re either a natural teacher or you’re not, you either walk into the classroom and you have it or not,” she said. What she does propose is a set of attributes characteristic of teachers she has admired: the “gift of just loving to learn and then never feeling like they’ve learned everything” and the ability to “develop this relationship with students of this kind of mutual respect . . .” Because the ability to develop such a connection with students is so intangible, Sarah says, “it seems like it’s just natural.” Sarah is not sure that she’ll ever be a completely successful composition teacher, in large part because her scholarly and teaching interests lie outside of English departments. Nevertheless, she says, “I still can go into the classroom and somehow feel this affinity with the students.”

In fact, Sarah’s allegiances lie primarily with her students, rather than with any particular discipline or institution. Is it more important, she asks in a journal entry, that a student leaves my class able to write an effective essay for her anthropology course next quarter (which she’ll probably forget about by next year) or that a student discovers that she has found a way to express herself that is part of who she is? I realize that we live within a structured society here at [Enormous State]. There is this ‘greater good’ that needs to be met. But for me, this ‘greater good’ is intangible, a great sucking machine, that exists not for the students who make the university possible, but for the administration which controls it. I would prefer to believe that I owe my salary to the students in my class, not the powers that be.
Although Sarah is herself a cog in that "great sucking machine," her assertion of the critical need for students to find ways to express themselves accords in some respects with Kerby’s position. "I am," Kerby writes, "for myself, only insofar as I express myself" (41). It will come as no surprise, then, that Sarah identifies most closely with expressivist theories of composition.

Contending with Composition

Sarah’s teaching philosophy, “Coming Full Circle: A Reflection on Exploration and Expression,” begins with question from one of her students: “Why do we need to make an argument?” She wants this to be a question with a simple answer—“don’t most purposes for writing involve articulating an opinion?” Instead, Sarah gives the student practical reasons that include getting a business loan and attracting customers. Near the end of the quarter, however, the student still doesn’t argue or analyze ideas well, and Sarah wonders if his writing will improve at all. “Over the quarter,” she reports, “I have seen him struggle to find words, to develop his own writing style. Perhaps the only thing that he will leave with is a belief in the importance of revision; that would be my hope. Maybe he won’t.” Sarah thus opens her teaching philosophy with a difficult scene of teaching: a teacher talking not with a student who challenges a teacher’s authority in any dramatic fashion, as with, say, a racist essay or an account of disturbing behavior, but rather the student who questions the importance of writing itself.
By the second page of her teaching philosophy, Sarah is hinting at the turn to come. After recounting her anxiety upon learning that she would be teaching—"If I couldn't even explain my own writing, how in the world was I going to teach a class full of students how to write?"—she writes that she initially found some relief from that anxiety in the course curriculum. The course's "focus on critical thinking and issues of diversity . . . seemed to suit me," and the student-centered classroom, "portfolio method of evaluation and promotion of cultural awareness were all pedagogical theories that I believed in." This program, she thought, "seemed to give me a strong foundation from which I could work." At first, as she designed her course around the readings in the course reader and began the quarter, she thought she had an ally in David Bartholomae, who in "Inventing the University" insists that writing teachers ought to be showing students how to work with difficult material and to make academic arguments. But she soon began to question Bartholomae's position.

This turn begins when Sarah writes that by asking students to analyze texts and formulate ideas, I thought that they would find expression for those ideas in writing. Yet, as the first few weeks passed, I realized that my students needed help discovering how to express their ideas, structure their papers and improve their grammar and diction. I needed to teach writing, and I needed to figure out how.

Bartholomae might say that this is his goal, too. After all, he argues in "Inventing the University" that first-year students need instruction in learning to write as academics do—in the habits of thought and turns of phrase that characterize academic discourse. Students cannot learn such moves, he argues, without immersion in that discourse, an
immersion that includes reading and writing in response to difficult texts. Academic reading and writing, for Bartholomae, are inextricably intertwined.

Sarah, however, implies that reading and writing are separate and, given the emphasis in English departments on reading, necessarily separable—an argument that Peter Elbow makes in his debate with Bartholomae. For Sarah, with the realization that she “needed to teach writing” came that realization that “I couldn’t teach writing; as much as I would have liked to, I did not have the skills for instructing a class on organization, leading a grammar lesson or lecturing on diction. Writing instruction was only effective for me on an individual basis” (emphasis added). I see here an echo of Sarah’s statement in her teaching narrative that writing is an individual journey toward self-expression, and it turns out that teaching writing, in this view, takes place most fruitfully outside of classroom spaces, in conferences with individual students. In those conferences, Sarah writes, “I began to see [my students] as individuals, as writers with their own styles, experiences and issues. With this new perspective, I learned that most of the students lacked faith in their writing.”

And so Sarah turns to Elbow, weaving him into her narrative and argument: “I wanted to show [my students] that they each had a unique voice, that they could find expression through the power of words; I developed a sense of the ‘conflict between the role of the writer and that of academic’ (Elbow 489).” In his debate with Elbow, Bartholomae argues that, given the post structural critique of the romantic author, writing teachers do their students a disservice when they ask their students to re-create that figure. For Sarah, however, the expressivist construction of the author, romantic
or not, is the best way she knows to help her students, as authors, “to believe in their writing.” Sarah finds reason to believe in the figure of the author for several reasons, not the least of which are her own purposes for writing. Although she considers herself an academic, writing exists for Sarah “far beyond my academic career. I envision writing as a form of exploration, a journey to seek out the person within.” This journey, undertaken through writing, “allows for self-expression” and it is the “reason I want my students believe that they have something to say, that they have a place in the on-going conversation of life.” Like Elbow and other writers, Sarah testifies to “knowing things that they haven’t been able to get into words (Elbow, 494).” This is, of course, the stuff of expressivist pedagogies.

Sarah knows this. She would not be surprised if others placed her in James Berlin’s Neo-Platonist or Expressionist camps (“Contemporary Composition”), but she resists that naming. For one thing, she shares a belief in the value of deconstructing social values and of “providing an awareness of cultural diversity.” She agrees, along with the New Rhetoricians, “that the writer is an interpreter and that any piece of writing is affected by audience and social context.” Even so, she holds to a belief in the possibility “that knowledge exists which defies definition, beyond our construct of language. It is this knowledge,” she writes, “which can be discovered from within; that which defies definition is found in each individual’s truth.” Sarah recognizes, too, that this commitment has implications for her authority in the classroom. She argues that if “every individual must find their own truth, it is crucial that I attempt to put my own authority in question. The only true authority I have over
my students is that which they invest in me.” It is her students’ respect, not fear, that she wants to earn. As a result, she reports that she encourages students to take chances, “to disagree with my position and to find their own voice, separate from mine, ‘even if that means I must sometimes look on helplessly while they believe something I wish they would abandon’ (Elbow 508).” In the narrative of her turn from Bartholomae to Elbow, Sarah does indeed come full circle—to the image of writing as exploration and of the teacher and writer who has enough faith in the process of writing to begin a journey of self-exploration.

Resisting the Writing Program

In landing on Elbow’s side of the personal vs. academic writing “debate,” Sarah, as I have noted above, follows Elbow in separating reading and writing. However, this is not the only, or perhaps even the most important, move that Sarah makes. In choosing Elbow over Bartholomae, Sarah is making a choice between two distinct “voices” in composition studies. A closer and equally powerful “voice” is that of the curriculum she is required to teach. It is in the tension between her commitment to writing as self-expression and her understanding of what she calls the writing program’s political commitment that Sarah feels her beliefs to be under the most pressure. Specifically, she sees in the first-year writing course reader an advocacy of a feminist, leftist politics, as expressed in essays by bell hooks (“Confronting Class in the Classroom), Ellen Louise Hart (“Literacy and the Lesbian/Gay Learner), and Paulo Freire (“The Banking Concept of Education”). Although she identifies with these
politics, Sarah, like Maxine Hairston, does not want to force her students to adopt her political views: “I felt that I was being told,” she writes, “that if I wanted my students to seek the truth through critical thinking, I must, as Charles Paine advocates, ‘accept the role of manipulator’ (qtd. in Hairston 661)”. The problem for Sarah’s students, she claims, is that they have, “for the most part, limited experience with and knowledge of philosophical and ideological arguments; it seemed detrimental to persuade them that feminist and leftist perspectives are the right perspectives.” For Sarah, the nature of political argument “is to not just discredit the opposing position, but to deny its right to existence; among my fellow GTAs, I had the impression that if I didn’t agree with promoting the program’s political agenda, I was a right-wing fascist, interested only in preserving the status-quo.”

Sarah does not go into specifics here; she does not outline what, exactly, the writing program’s political agenda is; she tells us only that she “began to feel like a renegade” because she wanted to “focus solely on student writing.” In her portfolio cover letter, Sarah “confessed” to Eve that, in the seminar, she chose a peer response group that she knew would not

be offended by my position on bringing politics into the classroom. I don’t like to be antagonistic and I thought that some people might take my position personally. I also know that I have a tendency to do the same, and I wanted the comments to focus on how I wrote, not necessarily on what I wrote about.

Fully aware of her own sensitivity to conflict and tension, then, Sarah decides to remove as much tension and conflict as possible from her writing classroom so that no students will feel ostracized or silenced. Her own critique of the writing program goes
largely undeveloped beyond her charge of a "political agenda" that might hamper student writing, and her own sense of diplomacy, perhaps, leads her to claim that "most individuals, fearing an attack on their beliefs or being ostracized, will fall into silence. For myself, I find that I am concerned about voicing my opposition to the political framework of the course, and this paper, in itself, is, at best, a tenuous exploration of those issues."

Of course, Sarah's primary audience is Eve, who is both the course instructor and the director of the writing program—reasons enough for Sarah to be as diplomatic as possible in her critique of the curriculum. Still, regardless of Sarah's worries about Eve taking punitive action, she argues for her own vision of writing and teaching as self-exploration without attempting to discredit other possible positions. This is not about politics, Sarah implies; it is about how one lives a life. In her cover letter, she writes, "I find that [my teaching philosophy] applies not just to the writing classroom, but also to the way I approach much of my life." In her philosophy, Sarah attempts to find common ground for her own position and that of the program's:

[My philosophy] may run in some part contrary to that of the First-Year Writing Program, yet I believe that both our intentions are to educate the students. For me, it is just this divergence of opinion that makes the world so unique, and that I welcome into my classroom, not as a political argument, but as perspectives that should have a forum for expression. Providing that forum while attending to my students' needs as writers is a balancing act which I have attempted to manage this quarter.

Sarah's celebration of "divergence of opinion" is evidence of her good faith struggle to find a position for herself in a writing program that, in her view, expects teachers to
advocate a particular political agenda. That Sarah happens to agree with the politics she detects in the course readings is, for her, beside the point; Sarah refuses to bring any overt political agenda into the classroom with her. To do so would be to compromise the ethos that she wants to develop as a teacher—an ethos located in a desire to provide a forum for differing perspectives without encouraging the agonistic rhetoric that she rejects. To be sure, one might argue that all teaching is inevitably political. By “political,” however, Sarah has in mind attempts to persuade others to adopt a particular set of beliefs and values. Teachers, she believes, ought not insist that their students change their politics. In any case, the point I want to make here is that the journey of the mythological fool enables Sarah to locate her emerging teaching identity in a narrative of the self that begins to bridge the gap between her personal and family history and the narratives of literacy that she encounters as a graduate student and teacher.

**Coming Full Circle**

By her own account, Sarah does not undergo a transformation. Remember, she titles her teaching philosophy, composed near the end of the quarter, “Coming Full Circle”; in her portfolio cover letter, she writes that in reading over her journal, she sees not a progression of ideas “but rather an increased articulation of beliefs that already existed. In other words, I don’t think that my ideas on writing and teaching have changed, but both [the first-year writing course] and [the seminar] caused me to look at them in ways I had never done before. As a result, I have had to formulate a
new way of articulating my beliefs.” What has happened here, I believe, is not so much a transformation of the self as it is a revision of the self. As Sarah puts it, she looks again at her ideas about writing and teaching. This “looking again” occurs in several moments of her narrative, most notably in her efforts to locate herself in a family narrative and in her critical encounter with composition studies and the curriculum that she was required to teach.

After reading an early draft of this essay, Sarah told me that she liked the idea of a “revised” self. In fact, she emphasized the notion of revisions; after writing something, she often changes her perspective and immediately wants to rewrite. Indeed, she described herself as a resistant reader of this text—not because she found it inaccurate but because she would not write and say the same things now that she did two years ago. Sarah’s thinking resonates with that of Richard Miller, who argues—in the essay I cited earlier—that one effect of a rhetorical education ought to be the replacement of “a sense of destiny with the vision of an uncertain future” (285). However, “replace” is not quite the right term here, since Sarah’s belief (as she expressed it in her narrative) that her family history destines her to a life of teaching operates as both a source of strength and as something to resist. That is, her narrative allows Sarah to negotiate between a family-generated pressure to fulfill her “destiny” to become a teacher and her own uncertainty about her future as a teacher—an uncertainty already present when she entered the classroom. Thus, rather than exchange two apparently contradictory narratives, Sarah composes a teaching identity...
that allows her to occupy a negotiated space between those narratives. In this way, she continually fashions and re-fashion a teaching identity.

It is in that re-fashioning that Sarah becomes visible to herself as a teacher. And unlike the tales of neglect and abuse that Taylor and Holberg cite, Sarah’s narrative begins and ends with an assumption of individual agency. This is not a “free” agency. Although she criticizes what she sees as the curriculum’s leftist bias, attends to the voices of her students, and works to situate herself between and among competing theories of composition, Sarah does not see herself as possessing the kind of agency that is capable of re-shaping the writing program, let alone the discipline of composition studies. In fact, she notes that many TAs, after two quarters of teaching the writing program’s curriculum, feel so programmed by that curriculum that when they have more freedom to alter it, they find it extremely difficult to do so. Even as Sarah begins to appropriate the discourse of composition studies as it is spoken at Enormous State, she is herself appropriated by, spoken by, that discourse.

In short, Sarah resists my claim that she has the agency to re-accent institutional, disciplinary, and cultural discourses. Nevertheless, I would argue that Eve provided the institutional and disciplinary space for Sarah and her colleagues to engage with composition theory and practice as graduate students/teachers performing critical self-reflection and as writers/readers who bring with them perspectives from other places. Sarah may indeed be “spoken” by the institutional/disciplinary discourse of the writing program, but it is not a monolithic discourse. Thus, in the process of narrating one version of a teaching self—a version she believed to be “scripted” by the
writing program—Sarah articulates a teaching identity for herself and creates a "self" that she sees as appropriate for those who supervised her teaching. In this way, she negotiates the borderlands between the personal and the academic as she constructs and revises a teaching self.

"We've got two lives, the one we're given and the other one we make," sings Mary Chapin Carpenter. By now, it should be clear that the process of ethos negotiation involves more than two lives—or, at least, more than two identities. Aaron and Sarah both struggle to bring the language of composition theory into contact with their more familiar lives as students and writers; their ethoi as graduate student-teachers begin to emerge only when they have gained enough familiarity with composition theory to begin weaving it into the teaching selves they narrate. Interestingly, it was in their teaching philosophies, rather than their teaching narratives, that Sarah and Aaron relied more heavily on narrative. One obvious reason for this apparent paradox is that, as teachers who had been teaching for only a few weeks, they had very little teaching experience to narrate. This obvious point highlights the element of time in the negotiation of ethos. It takes time, after all, to learn how to teach effectively—and no amount of advice prior to act will sufficiently prepare new teachers for the task at hand. Aaron and Sarah's ability to construct academic arguments, to locate themselves in a critical discourse, was one condition for their admission to graduate school. It is their ability to locate their academic, personal, and
familial selves in narrative—that is, in time—that enables them to negotiate their ethoi as teachers.
INTERCHAPTER

Wrestling with my Father: A Literacy Narrative

In one of my earliest memories, my father and I stand in the late evening shadows that envelop the porch of our house in Denver. He turns toward the house to shield a match as he lights a cigarette. Reflected in the flare of the match I see his face in profile, his crew-cut, a strong shoulder. I am three years old, and my father is a giant whom I regard with a mixture of love and fear. The cigarette lighted, we both turn to look across the street at the school playground that draws me to it with the promise of swings, slides, and monkey bars. It is a place I can visit only in the company of my parents.

Of course I eventually go to school, and of course it is without my parents. And before I am finished with public school, I have turned partly away from my parents, learned to be independent, as they hoped I would. But none of us knew how school, how reading, would quietly and imperceptibly turn me away from home.

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The first books I remember reading were library books. They had a particular smell and feel to them—paper, glue, dust, and the crinkle of plastic dust jacket
protectors. Aside from the physical sense of the books, library visits took on a ritualized form that entailed certain responsibilities. I had to treat the books gently, read them with clean hands, and never check out more books than I could read in two weeks. Checking out the books seemed to formalize this contract: although my mother kept my library card in her purse, she gave it to me so that I could present it with my chosen books to the librarian. To the explicit rules regarding library privileges I added the requirement to read every book I checked out, from beginning to end, a rule that now seems like a corollary to good table manners, polite behavior in the company of adults, and learning how to follow the rules in school. Because I was eager to please, it wasn’t hard for me to follow these rules.

Nevertheless, my voracious reading seemed to have little connection with school or church. We must have read stories and written something in elementary school, but school always seemed to be about multiplication tables, spelling tests, and making the most of our time on the playground. Church was worse: a place where I always felt a vague anxiety. My mother confined my brother, sister, and me in stiff clothes and shoes and deposited us in Sunday School, where the teachers illustrated Bible stories with paper cut-outs of biblical figures on a felt board. Both school and church were, above all, about getting the right answers, about behaving ourselves, about Truth. The stories that I cared about seemed to have no place in those rooms presided over by solemn adults.

In short, reading became an escape from the everyday world of rules and regulations. Perhaps because the worlds I encountered in books seemed freer and far
more interesting than just about anything except football, stories began to take an increasingly important place in my imaginative and intellectual world. To be sure, my parents were delighted that I read so much and did so well in school. But books meant something else to me, something mostly separate from both school and my family. At the very least, I made a sharp distinction between the books I chose for myself and the reading I was assigned in school. The real reading was what I did outside of school, curled up on the living room couch while the rest of the family talked, prepared dinner, or did whatever it is that families do. I simply didn’t pay attention to such things.

In fact, I began to sense that reading could get me out of a lot of things I didn’t want to do, like set the table or hang out with company. Perhaps because I was a boy, it didn’t seem all that critical that I learn how to cook or clean or otherwise pay serious attention to household chores, aside from the requirement to make my bed and put my dirty clothes in the hamper. While a strong element of traditional gender roles was at work in my family, I suspect that my parents indulged my reading primarily because they saw a connection between my time with books and my success in school. My father’s stories supported that hunch.

It is my impression now that unless he was reprimanding me or teaching me how to do something like throw a baseball or split wood, he spoke primarily in stories. I listened carefully to his stories, usually the same set told again and again. That fathers tend to repeat their stories is no doubt a cultural cliché. And that those stories are meant to be lessons is equally common. But with my father I could never detect
the slightest hint of self-aggrandizement or exaggeration. More important, he refrained from drawing a “moral” from any of the stories. He loved to describe a job he once had at a nursery, where he and his buddies worked hard and fast at constructing crates, transplanting flowers, and loading trucks. His sports stories were my favorites: becoming a good high school pitcher just at the point when he thought he was stuck in place as a third-string catcher, or lifting weights and struggling to learn the wrestling moves that would complement his growing physical strength.

What most strikes me about these stories, now, is their paradox and irony. He was a star pitcher, but he always reminded me that he was blown out in the state playoffs; he loved team sports and liked winning, but he preferred to play with his boyhood friends in summer leagues rather than on better teams composed of his high school teammates. I came to understand these stories as cautionary tales: while he was having some small success as an athlete, he was neglecting school. He never saw the point, never applied himself. Yet he never said straight out, “Don’t you make the same mistake, son. I paid for it down the road, and I don’t want you to end up like me.”

I suspect that his intention was to teach by example. I was never sure if the stories had a message—I never even thought about lessons. It was enough to hear the stories, perhaps because he seemed happy to tell them and to have me hear them. That he was unhappy in general was an easy inference. Many evenings at dinner, he sat silently at the table, glowering at his plate. When things at work were particularly bad, he would rail against the stupidity of the temporary employees he dispatched to
various jobs or complain bitterly about the demeaning treatment he received at the hands of his boss. I remember him gunning the car out of the driveway on a Saturday afternoon when he was called away in the middle of a backyard cookout—the boss had called, and he had to go to the office. At an early age I resolved to find work that I liked, to avoid the unhappiness that plagued my father. If I say that my father’s stories were meant as warnings to avoid his fate, what I really mean is that I interpreted them in that fashion.

And like a good New Critic, I never asked my father what he “meant” in those stories, what lessons they held for me, what his themes and symbols were and how I should understand them. In particular, I never asked why he had to be so unhappy, or why he didn’t find a better job or return to college. It may be that I thought I already had the answer: he had three kids and a wife to support, and any sacrifice was worth it if it meant keeping food on the table, a roof over our heads, and clothes on our backs. I had no grounds on which to argue that point; after all, I was the oldest of those three kids. But I also, in the arrogant idealism of youth, came to see my father as a failure. When he told his baseball stories, or any stories for that matter, he often paused for a moment and looked down at his hand, the one that wasn’t holding a gin and tonic, and clenched and unclenched that hand. It seemed to me that the telling of stories was a way of explaining to himself and to me his own missed chances and wrong turns—all the chances that had slipped out of his powerful hands.

It was a particular kind of reading that led me to such a conclusion. In junior high, a friend convinced me to join the Science Fiction Book Club. He had already
loaned me a copy of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, books that hooked me on fantasy stories. The science fiction book club, in 1975, offered cheap hardback copies; every month, the club promised, many of the selections would be available for $2.98 or less. The lure of book ownership, particularly of hardbacks, proved irresistible. My friend already had several shelves full of hardback science fiction novels, all of them the same size because the Science Fiction Book Club produced books in standard book club editions. When the introductory offer of four books for a penny (plus postage) arrived, I was excited beyond words. For the first time, I owned books. These were mine, not the library’s. Because I got to keep these, my bedroom could eventually begin to look like a library.

Best of all, these books were dangerous. Books that contained “explicit” language and situations were clearly labeled as a warning to parents, who had to sign the orders I sent in. However, the order blanks were separate from the catalogues, so it was a simple matter to ask Mom to sign the form and send it off. She never read the descriptions of the books, and I never showed her or my father the catalogues. And I asked my Mom to sign because I suspected Dad might ask about the books. Naturally, I routinely ordered the books with warning notes.

In this way I began to construct an intellectual life that was mostly hidden from my parents. They were generally pleased that I read so much and that I did so well in school. That was, after all, the purpose of all those trips to the library. What my parents probably did not know was that a lot of the science fiction I was reading was hardly as tame as my father’s old copies of Hardy Boys mysteries. Of course, I don’t
know that my parents would have objected to the books I was ordering. Nevertheless, my sense that I was defying my parents, that I was engaged in activities they might not approve of, was what mattered. This was my teenage rebellion, carried on quietly while I read late into the night. It hardly seemed necessary to confront my parents on this issue. Perhaps I assumed that I had understood my father's stories perfectly and, because I understood the stories, I had understood the man and, consequently, could dismiss him from what I took to be a more interesting world. But that is all hindsight, an attempt to understand the "larger" meaning of my reading.

At the time, it was the form and content of the stories that captivated me. The "hard" science fiction, the stories that were mostly about futuristic technology, were usually boring unless they included a lot of space battles. It was the stories by writers like Harlan Ellison and Ursula K. LeGuin that captured my imagination. For a long time I admired Ellison's rage and iconoclasm. LeGuin, at first, didn't seem nearly as spectacular. But her stories and novels began to grow on me, and I gradually came to admire her way of building quiet little short stories and novels that gradually struck me with enormous force. I eventually came to see Ellison as little more than a verbally gifted juvenile delinquent with all the subtlety of a sledge hammer. But the work of LeGuin and others like her forced me to look at the world in ways that made me glimpse the potential of stories to change how I thought about myself and the world. Before, I had read simply for entertainment; from this time on, I read to construct an understanding of the world and my place in it.
I did not know how to talk to my father about any of this, at least not directly. However, there were ways to talk about such ideas indirectly. By the time I was in high school, my father and I often argued about politics and other burning issues. Both of us seemed to take these debates as opportunities for play. We argued late into the night, from opposite corners in the kitchen. I always took the side of romantic idealism, of Thoreau and Emerson, authors I had yet to read but who, when I encountered them in college, sounded like old friends. My father always took the side of pragmatic realism, of someone like Castiglione, a sixteenth century Italian whose Book of the Courtier was a widely read manual for those in the service of princes. My father never read the book, but he would have understood Castiglione perfectly; like that long-dead Italian, my father argued that sometimes you have to eat some crow. I exaggerate, of course. The point is that those long debates taught me how to argue, how to adjust and complicate my position with examples, logic, and counter arguments. More important, our playful talks prevented me from completely dismissing my father, for they showed both of us that he could play my games too.

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One night near the end of my senior year in high school, my father and I began wrestling in the kitchen. For years he had delighted in tormenting me, my brother, and my sister by setting us on top of the refrigerator when we were small children, or by tickling us unmercifully as the three of us tried to hold him down. Later, when he was teaching me how to wrestle, I would nearly weep in frustration as he slowly pulled me from his back and ground me into the carpet with a half-nelson. Eventually, I quit
wrestling, both in high school and with my father. But for some reason, we wrestled that night.

Something was different. My father seemed as strong as ever, but I had grown four inches beyond his height and had the advantage of leverage. He grabbed the back of my head and curled his arm, so that the sides of our heads touched. With his other hand he tried to hold my wrist, but for once I could twist out of his grip. My mother squawked in alarm before she left the room: “You two be careful—watch out for that chair—oh, I give up.” We barely heard her. I felt strength rising in me and I knew, as we angled for position, that I could take him down. And I think he knew it, too.

He grunted a little in surprise, then he chuckled. Again he tried to hold my wrist and again I twisted out of his grasp. He tried to grab a leg, but I was too strong for that move. For the first time in my life, I felt like his physical equal. And then we paused, laughed in relief, and stood up straight. We both let the moment pass without commenting on what had just happened. For me, it was enough to know that I could take him down, that I could make a real match of it. He stretched, smiled, and said, “You’re growing up, son. I can’t push you around anymore, can I?” He went off to bed and I stood for awhile alone in the kitchen, trying to understand the significance of what had just happened.

I wanted to figure out why I held back when I had a chance to beat him, or at least to take him down. At the time, I thought that I was being kind. For all my unexpressed anger at my father’s decision to stick with jobs that seemed to waste his considerable talents, I was fiercely protective of him. If others could treat him
shabbily, I at least could refrain. He was my father, and I had no real desire to beat him at anything, to take away his physical advantage when I assumed I had the intellectual advantage. But I’ve come to read the scene differently. Perhaps he was simply testing my limits, seeing how strong I had grown, trying to discover if I had learned to believe in my own strength. Seen in that light, my earlier reading seems like an effort to deny my father’s complexity, to reduce him to a story to be explicated—as little more than the flip-side of the disdain I sometimes felt toward him.

In the years since that wrestling match, I have had ample opportunity to revise my reading of both that scene and of my father’s stories. I, too, have stayed too long in jobs that I hated and that made me nearly impossible to live with. I, too, have had time to examine my own missed opportunities, wrong turns, and limitations. But at that time, poised on the boundary between high school and college, I thought I would be exempted from human frailty, if only I could learn how to read well enough. Books had the answers, I foolishly thought, that my father had missed.

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When my parents took me to college at the beginning of my freshman year, I thought I was taking the first concrete step toward creating a fully satisfying life. After seeing me settled, we walked outside, where my mother hugged me and cried a bit and my father shook my hand. I was impatient for them to leave, and I felt faintly embarrassed by my mother’s tears. In the years since then, I have often wondered if my father regarded my entrance into college with mixed emotions: pride at his son’s
success, tinged with regret at his own decision to leave that same campus twenty years earlier, after only four quarters. I wish now that I had asked them to stay awhile longer. I imagine spending an hour or two alone with my father: we would speak plainly to each other, my father and I. We would talk easily about the Broncos’ chances that year, perhaps, or about what the future might hold for us. But this is wishful thinking, an idle exercise in “what if” history. On that September afternoon, I turned away far too quickly, thinking that all I needed to learn was before me, that I could close the past like a book and place it safely on a shelf where it need never trouble me. I thought, in short, that I had “succeeded,” that I had found a way to avoid being like my father.

But I was already like him. I tell the same stories again and again, in various forms, always trying to figure out how to get them right this time, to explain to myself how I came to be who I am in relation to my father. Finally, I have come to understand that in my last wrestling match with my father we were holding each other up—that we were trying to tell each other that in spite of our reluctance or inability to voice our mutual disagreements, let alone our doubts and disillusions concerning each other, we could still struggle together and in that struggle find love and understanding. I suspect my father knew this long before I did. Perhaps if I had succumbed less completely to the seduction of stories, I would have known it sooner.
CHAPTER 3

Zones of Familiar Contact

"The word has a history and a memory. In selecting and using a word, a speaker often unconsiously de-emphasizes or ignores some voices and attends to others, but all the voices remain present because all are part of the linguistic and ideological genealogy of the word. Each time a person constructs his discourse, he decides which voices to acknowledge, which ideologies to privilege"
—Kay Halasek, *A Pedagogy of Possibility*, p. 6

During the first couple of meetings of English 781, Eve explains that she expects TAs to make at least two entries each week in their teaching journals. The entries should bring together reading, class discussion, and teaching. Bring the voices together, Eve urges. It is in the teaching journals, Eve suggests, that TAs can begin to engage the cultural and institutional heteroglossia as they think about the teaching narratives and philosophies that they will write during the term. At the same time, the First-Year Writing Program's listserv fills with talk about teaching: first-day stories and gender issues, for example. Get on the list, Eve urges; join the conversation.

Eve's invocation of heteroglossia is an appropriate way to set the scene for a chapter that takes a Bakhtinian look at the dialogic relationship between new TAs and the First-Year Writing Program. "Heteroglossia," writes Kay Halasek, "is the natural
chaotic state of languages as they exist in the world; dialogism is the organized manner in which these various languages interact” (9). The languages of most immediate concern to me in this chapter are those of the First-Year Writing Program and of the three new TAs whose case studies I will present here. But each of those languages is itself composed in a “web of interindividual and intertextual dialogue [that] forms a complex network of statement, response, and restatement . . .” (Halasek 5-6). The curriculum of the First-Year Writing Program, for example, is a complex response to and restatement of various voices in composition studies. And the portfolios that TAs compose in English 781 are written in response to the English 110 curriculum, the composition theory they read in English 781, the words of colleagues and students, cultural representations of teachers, and the possible responses of Eve and others—including me as researcher—in mind. In these portfolios, I will argue, TAs restate and reaccentuate the words of others. In this way they make those words their own even as each word “remains always someone else’s as well” (Halasek 6).

Out of the heteroglossia, then, the TAs in this study construct their portfolios. These portfolios—these utterances that are completed when someone responds—are given form by what Bakhtin calls speech genres. If I say that “literacy narrative,” for example, is a speech genre, I mean that these narratives are shaped by the expectations of the writers’ audiences, who complete the utterance—the narrative—when the audience answers the narrative in, say, peer response groups or in writing. The audience expectations that define literacy narratives as a speech genre are both textual and human: the deeply held cultural narratives of transformation that I explored in
Chapter 2, cultural images of reading and writing, students, colleagues, teachers, and so on. Just as we assimilate language “in the forms of utterances and in conjunction with these forms . . . We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing others’ speech, we guess its genre from the very first words . . .” (“Speech Genres” 78-9).

Bakhtin further notes that speech genres are given to us, not created in a completely free way; speech genres have a normative function, and therefore “the single utterance, with all its individuality and creativity, can in no way be regarded as a completely free combination of language . . .” (80-81 original emphasis). As a result, the assimilation of utterances—the English 110 curriculum, the discourse of composition studies, etc.—involves a creative appropriation of others’ words. All of our utterances are filled with others’ words, and these words have varying degrees of otherness or “our-own-ness” and these “words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate” (89).

The effort to reaccentuate the words of others often involves considerable struggle. In their efforts to assimilate the English 110 curriculum and the composition theory that new TAs encounter in English 781, new TAs occasionally construct both of those discourses as authoritative. The authoritative word, Bakhtin writes, is located in distanced, lofty spheres that do not allow for familiar contact: “it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with
its authority already fused to it” (“Dialogic” 342). Internally persuasive discourse, on the other hand, is
tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own word’; it is discourse that is half ours and half someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words . . . . It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts (“Dialogic” 345-46).

Internally persuasive discourses struggle with other internally persuasive discourses, so that our “ideological development is just such an intense struggle among various verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions, and values” (“Dialogic” 346). The apparent “contradictions” in Sarah’s literacy narrative—recall that she imagines learning as both a journey to self-discovery and resists that notion that she has changed in fundamental ways as a result of what she has learned in English 781—might thus be more productively read as traces of her struggle with two internally persuasive discourses.

Of course, Sarah, along with the rest of the TAs in this study, are also struggling with the relatively “alien” discourse(s) of composition studies in general and the English 110 curriculum in particular. In Bakhtinian terms, the First-Year Writing Program curriculum functions as a centripetal discourse. That is, it is a unifying language force with which the sometimes “decentralizing centrifugal
language forces” of new TAs struggle (Halasek 8). This does not mean, however, that the First-Year Writing Program is an authoritative discourse. As Halasek describes it, an authoritative discourse is “so powerful, so commanding, that it inspires only adoration and respect, and thereby functions as a centripetal force that maintains the status quo” (122). There is no question, Bakhtin writes, “of choosing [an authoritative discourse] from among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact. . . . It can be profaned. It is akin to taboo, i.e., a name that must not be taken in vain” (“Dialogic” 342).

However, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Eve issues to new TAs an explicit invitation to bring composition studies and the English 110 curriculum into a zone of familiar contact. There is, after all, no other way for TAs to assimilate and reaccentuate those discourses. Still, the First-Year Writing Program does function as a unifying force that provides common ground for entering the conversation of teaching; in that sense it is a centripetal discourse. In addition, the English 110 curriculum is a prior discourse, a given that TAs must acknowledge. And in their struggle with that given and often alien discourse, it is not unusual to hear new TAs express opposition to the curriculum in terms of parody or sacrilege, as if they were resisting an authoritative discourse by taking its name in vain. One TA in this study, Julian, about whom I will have much to say a bit later, described himself as undergoing a “crisis of faith”; he chose Julian as his pseudonym in honor of a fourth-century apostate. Another TA, Lynn, speaks of her refusal, as a peer mentor, to always “toe the party line.” And still another TA describes herself and a friend as coming to feel themselves
in the theoretical and political minority and therefore thinking it best to remain quiet in the larger group.

However, Eve, the WPAs, and the peer mentors are quite clear in their refusal to offer new TAs any “authoritative discourse” that TAs can simply swallow whole. Instead, the writing program staff insists that new TAs handle the discourse of the program: question it, test it, argue with it, and so on. Yes, it is a prior, “alien” discourse that the program is imposing on TAs. But from the perspective of program administrators it is an internally persuasive discourse; as such, it is fluid and open, rather than static and calcified. Indeed, numerous internally persuasive discourses have left their traces in the curriculum: personal essay assignments that echo expressivist theories of composition; writing prompts that ask students, in the manner of social epistemic rhetorics, to account for the social and institutional construction of classroom discourses; there are essays by Paolo Freire, Mike Rose, and bell hooks, as well as by Richard Rodriguez, Allan Bloom, and Eve D. Hirsch. There are suggestions of the Bartholomae and Elbow debates about academic vs. personal writing, whiffs of Michel Foucault, and a taste of cultural studies. In peer teaching groups, peer mentors help new TAs negotiate their locations in relation to the curriculum, sometimes disagreeing with what they see as the First-Year Writing Program’s “official line.” And in English 781, TAs receive not instruction in methods but an insistence that they contend with the voices they’re hearing all around them and, in that struggle, begin to articulate the theoretical grounds for their teaching practices—and, just as important, to rely on practice and experience as they
interrogate theory. Finally, as I noted in the Introduction, English 110 and the administrative structures of the First-Year Writing Program have gone, and continue to undergo, revision—a revision that depends on the voices of new TAs.

New TAs, too, including those just a few months removed from undergraduate work, bring with them their own sets of internally persuasive discourses: former teachers who serve as exemplars, assumptions about the value of critical reading and writing, beliefs about the purposes of a college education, political views, and so on. Imagine contending discourses, internally persuasive and alien, struggling within the consciousness of TAs much as they struggle in the more public scenes of curriculum guidelines, graduate seminars, and scholarly journals. The point in turning to Bakhtin for this analysis is to lay bare at least a few of the discourses on teaching and learning that are in constant conversation—and struggle—with each other in this particular writing program and, as I will suggest, in composition studies as a field. Let’s take a look, then, at the internally persuasive discourses with which TAs are struggling. As I have already suggested, these discourses come from a number of different sources; my intention here is to trace their outlines in TA portfolios and interviews with an eye toward understanding the chorus of voices that are contending for TA attention.

Lynn: “I want to be all my favorite teachers”

“It’s terrifying to be up in front of the class feeling inadequate. I realize that concern is self-involved. I should be focusing on them—it’s just so hard to get beyond my own fear.” —Lynn
The teacher whose discourse I will consider first is Lynn, a first-year M.A. student. The teaching journal she kept during her first quarter as a teacher and the teaching philosophy she wrote near the end of that quarter both reflect an extraordinary awareness of the influence of other voices. As reflected in these documents, her concerns as a new teacher were not so much with the Syllabus, for which she was grateful, as with establishing a teaching persona and style. Again and again, she measures her work as a teacher against the often daunting examples of two former professors and her peers, on the one hand, and on the other hand against the oral and written responses of her students. Lynn represents her first encounter with teaching as an often difficult struggle to construct a teaching persona. In Bakhtinian terms, her journal and teaching philosophy show her to be deeply engaged in assimilating various “alien” discourses in order to perform the speech genre of teaching; that is, she struggles to teach in ways that match the sometimes conflicting styles of former professors and of the composition scholars she encounters in her reading. At the same time, other voices influence her deeply: those of her peers, her students, and writing program administrators. All of these voices mingle in her writing; for the sake of description and analysis, I will separate them, beginning with the internally persuasive discourses of two of her undergraduate professors.

The examples of the two influential professors turned out to be as troubling for Lynn as they were helpful. One of the professors, Virgil, "had a relaxed and informal demeanor... He offered the knowledge he had and stepped back, allowing his
students to take it or leave it." Lynn writes that the approach worked well for her as a student. The other professor, Carol, tended to be more academic than Virgil, guiding her students by suggesting critics for them to read, commenting on their sources, and pushing them to back up opinions with research. She encouraged discussion and dissent in the classroom, while seldom defining her own position. This tactic often frustrated me as we worked on my honors thesis together, but, I realize now that it made me a stronger student in the long run. Carol and Virgil took very different approaches to teaching, but each had a positive affect on me. My question was—how could I take aspects of these approaches and apply them to my 110 classroom?

Lynn's description seems nearly Bakhtinian, particularly when she writes elsewhere in her teaching philosophy that "In my rosy-hued dreams I became a composite of my favorite professors; reality was a slap in the face." This desire reveals an awareness that learning to teach involves creatively assimilating and reaccentuating forms that are given to her, although Lynn would probably not describe the process in Bakhtinian terms. Further, she is painfully aware of the struggle involved in assimilating the styles and voices of others. When she tried to be as relaxed and informal as Virgil, she felt that she appeared to be somewhat incompetent, or at least disorganized, in the eyes of her students. When she took an approach
similar to Carol’s, she felt smoother, more confident, and more challenging. However, 
when she turned questions back to students and asked them what they thought about a 
reading or about an essay draft, she sensed their frustration. In fact, she empathized 
with her students, since she had recently experienced her own frustration in a pre-
quarter workshop in which writing program administrators used the same methods.

Lynn assimilated the voices of Carol and Virgil in a number of ways. She 
began holding conferences at a local coffee shop. This move had a number of 
advantages: it allowed her to adopt the relaxed demeanor with her students that she 
saw Virgil using, and it helped her to assimilate two other strands of voices: those of 
her peers and her students. Or, perhaps more accurately, it was a conscious attempt to 
distance herself from the voices (more precisely, the ears) of her peers and thereby 
allow a little room for her own emerging teaching voice. More precisely, Lynn had to 
get some distance from the imagined words of her peers. For example, in a journal 
entry she writes that she was more comfortable talking to students in a coffee shop 
than in her office because in the office, “people are always around and I worry about 
how I sound. Am I saying the right things? Will someone think I’m a bad teacher?” 
Her decision to hold conferences in a coffee shop is a creative assimilation of Virgil’s 
voice and, at the same time, it is a strategy for avoiding the possible censure of her 
peers. That this censure is “only” imagined and probably unlikely to occur is beside 
the point. As anyone who has taught knows all too well, the voices of other teachers 
are always with us, even when we are otherwise alone with students in an office—a 
luxury that TAs at Enormous State do not have.
I do not mean to suggest that Lynn was running away from her troubles. Rather, the move to the coffee shop made her more comfortable and this, she believes, made her students more comfortable. In fact, her journal reflects a deep and abiding concern about how her students are reading her—and how she is reading them. Early in the quarter, before collecting the first essay, she worries that some of her students seem over confident and that this overconfidence might be a result of her being “too nice.” This is because she has worked hard to put students at ease by being reassuring; however, she plans to grade the first essay harder than the others, and fears that if she seems too nice, she will be setting up her students for a fall. She writes that a lot of these questions come from a desire to be liked. Childish. Very true, as well. I can’t get around the fact that I want them to relate to me. I want to be all my favorite teachers. It’s not so easy. Their classroom manner, which I took as a natural part of them, must have come from years of experience. Will I feel even one degree closer to that image of the ‘good’ teacher I want to be when the quarter ends?

This is a pressing concern for Lynn, and it comes in part from her desire to build positive teaching relationships with her students. As worried as she is about her teaching persona, she is equally concerned about her ability to “read” her students.

These worries about her teaching persona and its effect on her students appear everywhere in her writing. For example, she writes in her teaching philosophy:

As Connors and Glenn [in The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing] point out, one of the two most important traits in a teacher is
competence. They maintain that if a student believes you ‘know your stuff . . . they will put themselves in your hands and give you a chance to be their teacher’ (24-25). I knew a display of confidence was necessary if I wanted my class to trust my abilities.

However, Lynn was in a situation analogous to that of the first-year students described by David Bartholomae in “Inventing the University”: she was required to speak a discourse—“teaching composition”—without fully knowing how to do so. She was acutely aware of this, as when she wrote in her teaching journal that she desperately needed a “toolbox” of teaching strategies. By the end of the quarter, she has begun to creatively assimilate the voices of Carol and Virgil. In leading class discussions, she kept her strong opinions to herself as Carol had, and gave students “a certain amount of information” and then encouraged them to “interpret the material from their own experience.” As a result, “several students commented on how much they valued the opportunity to voice their opinions without fear of reprisal.” Virgil’s voice emerges in the decision to hold conferences in a coffee shop as well as in her use of informal writing assignments, which both allowed her to get a firmer grasp of each student’s writing style and, just as important, to know them on a relatively personal level.

Lynn’s teaching philosophy, written near the end of her first quarter of teaching, reflects a much more confident voice than the one that appears early in her journal. One reason no doubt has to do with audience; she is writing the essay for a graduate course and therefore must assume a more confident, authoritative voice. This is to say that location and genre, taken together, make both meaning and ethos. Thus,
Lynn's growing confidence is an indication of her emerging belief that she can, some
day, become the kind of teacher she wants to be. A significant part of her
confidence—that is, her ethos—has come from her assimilation of various
composition scholars. I've already mentioned Connors and Glenn; Muriel Harris and
Roger Garrison also proved to be important, although for different reasons.
Significantly, Harris' article provides her with a way to subvert the Syllabus, or at
least what she takes to be general expectations of writing teachers. In her teaching
philosophy, Lynn is drawn to Harris' argument in *Teaching One-to-One* that verbal
comments should be used in place of written comments since written comments will
set an agenda that verbal comments somehow avoid:

> It all made perfect sense, but the idea still seemed revolutionary to me.

No written comments at all? This went against everything I had
thought about being a teacher. It was my responsibility to stay up all
night and painstakingly mark papers, wasn't it? I was afraid of
abandoning this 'traditional' model of composition instruction, but, I
felt that I had to try Harris' approach.

She describes the student drafts that result from trying Harris’ approach as successful.

In Bakhtinian terms, Harris' words have become internally persuasive for Lynn.

On the other hand, she is quite capable of critiquing those scholars with whom
she does not fully agree. Garrison’s description of a course (in “One-to-One: Tutorial
Instruction in Freshman Composition”) in which students write continually on topics
generated completely by the students themselves holds some attraction for her,
particularly since his classroom is so writing intensive, but she questions whether
"important gains can be made in this area [at the level of ideas] without challenging
course content... Is remaining safe inside one's own beliefs and interests an impetus
for intellectual growth? Isn't intellectual growth an essential part of improving
writing?" At the end of her first quarter of teaching, Lynn leaves the question open,
which is to say that she does not completely dismiss Garrison.

Lynn is equally capable of subjecting the English 110 curriculum and English
781 to criticism. The first journal entry was an assigned "Reflections on the syllabus"
(of English 781). She has some trepidation about the amount of reading required in
the course, mixed with a sense of comfort:

I feel like I don't know what I'm doing in the classroom and maybe
these assignments will give me some grain of knowledge to get me
through. I need this class. It's terrifying to be up in front of the class
feeling inadequate. I realize that concern is self-involved. I should be
focusing on them—it's just so hard to get beyond my own fear.

I have already described some of the ways that Lynn gets beyond her own fear,
including a use of composition theory and an ongoing struggle to assimilate the
teaching styles of former professors. However, one of the first steps she takes in
getting beyond her fear involves a small act of subversion. Early in the quarter, she
reads to her students a piece from Sandra Cisneros' House on Mango Street, a piece
that does not appear in the course reader but that she particularly likes. It goes well,
and she begins thinking about adding other pieces of her own choosing: a lecture by
Leslie Marmon Silko, an essay by Min-Zhan Lu (which she sees as more effective than a student essay in the reader), and James Baldwin's essay on Black English rather than bell hooks. Lynn's scholarly interests include writing by Native Americans, Chicano/as, and African Americans. With these writers she is on familiar ground, and the piece by Cisneros goes well in class. In other words, Lynn uses writers she knows well (that are internally persuasive) to bolster her confidence and demonstrate her authority as a scholar.

When Lynn talked to me about using different readings in the winter, I (as a WPA) recommended (as she records in her journal) that she add a few readings of her own but stick with the majority of the ones in the reader. I thought that teaching the course twice, without making substantial changes, would provide her with a more accurate assessment of the course readings and writing prompts. But I was also motivated by complicated administrative concerns. Nearly all first-year students are required to take English 110, and as an administrator I had a responsibility to see that those who teach the course were doing what the course calls for. Put more bluntly, as an administrator in the First-Year Writing Program I spoke a more or less authoritative discourse. My position required me to urge teachers to stick to the course, by and large, and I was likely to resist those who would resist the course. In addition, I had (and have) strong opinions about how reading and writing should be integrated in a composition course. These strong opinions are reflected in an interview with Lynn at the end of her first quarter—an interview in which I embody one of the alien
discourses struggling for hegemony in Lynn’s consciousness. What follows is an excerpt of that interview.

Lynn: I would like to teach the set-up of the five-paragraph essay . . . thesis statement, topic sentence—you know, go through and talk about that . . . . then . . . I would like to present them with a lot of different [strategies]: you can put your thesis statement at the end if you can do it well and make it work and you can do different things in this class . . . . I know how to do those things [as a writer] without thinking; I don’t have the tools to start telling them [how to do it].

Vic: Have you actually seen a five-paragraph essay in any scholarly journal you’ve read?
Lynn: No, but they’re not trying [laughing]. . .
Vic: Have you seen it, have you seen it in a magazine? Any essay in Harper’s or The Atlantic?
Lynn: No, but they’re not in Harper’s—I still feel like sometimes this argument veers away from, from what’s real life for them.
Vic: Have you seen it in a business letter? In any document?
Lynn: I’ve seen it in an essay at the end of a psych class, I’ve seen it in, in every essay that they’re going to have to write, to get out of here with good grades, to, do you know what I mean? to get . . .
Vic: As an interviewer, I think that I’m starting to argue with you.

In the second Interchapter (“Reading Against Myself”), I will explore the implications of a researcher arguing, as I do here, with a research participant. The point I want to make here is that the excerpt demonstrates some of the voices with which Lynn struggles: the authoritative voice of an administrator in the First-Year Writing Program and of at least one strand of composition studies (that is, “expressivism”), both made concrete in my words here; the authoritative voices of yet another strand of composition studies (what one might call “current-traditional”) made concrete in Lynn’s desire to teach some form of the five paragraph essay; and the voices of her students, to whom she feels immediately and deeply answerable.
It is important for Lynn to resist my authoritative discourse and, by extension, that of the First-Year Writing Program as it is objectified (if not calcified) in the Syllabus. But resistance, while necessary, is not sufficient: for Lynn to construct a satisfying ethos, she must negotiate between the same discourses that I have been exploring in this chapter. In fact, Lynn never resisted the general goals of the First-Year Writing Program. Following Bakhtin, perhaps I should say that Lynn’s efforts to construct a teaching persona and style take place in the context of a multitude of competing voices. As a centripetal discourse, the Syllabus provides a common “language” that new teachers struggle to assimilate, along with all of the other voices they bring with them to, and encounter in, the classroom. This is how she begins to make the course her own and to teach in ways that creatively reaccentuate the words of others. For Lynn, at least, this is an often painful and, at first, terrifying struggle.

Here is one of the final entries in her journal:

So it’s over. I have taught one full class from beginning to end and I am still sitting here. I remember the first day of the quarter. I was so traumatized by being in front of the class that I didn’t think I could go back. Those first two weeks were incredibly difficult. Every day I would sit in 881 with a growing knot in my stomach. I would try to collect my thoughts as I walked from there to Derby. It was like a horror film—the walk down the hall to the door of my class would take forever. I don’t think I have ever experienced anything like the sheer terror of those times.

Lynn began the quarter with “rosy-hued dreams” of becoming “a composite of my favorite professors”; as the above quote so eloquently demonstrates, “reality was a slap in [her] face.”
However, by the end of the quarter she has constructed a teaching persona based on an idyllic image that grounds her in a particular place and time:

Funny that now I am not sure when that feeling disappeared. At some point I began to look forward to going into the classroom. . . . A day that still stands out was the Wednesday that we had class on the Oval. The sky was so blue and everything seemed perfect. Everyone was attentive and involved in the conversation. It felt so good to be leading a discussion of a text. How long had I waited to do that?

Lynn has substituted her reverence for others' teaching personas with an image from her lived experience as a teacher, and this image is able to hold up in the bright light of day. The image may be idyllic, but it is also distanced from the immediate confines of the classroom and perhaps, by implication, the authoritative voice of the syllabus. At the very least, she locates herself in a spot of her choosing in an act—taking students outside—that always feels like a small subversion of the authoritative voice of school.

**Julian: “Call it a crisis of faith”**

“OK, so let’s sum up thus far: ambivalence about profession, uprooting my life and moving to Enormous State, emerging political convictions that don’t readily correspond to the current intellectual and pedagogical landscape of the humanities, and unrelated personal problems. Christ Almighty, Victor, is it any wonder I should be having a crisis of faith?” —Julian

I would very much like to remain in the pastoral realm that I have constructed for Lynn. However, Lynn’s story is just a little too good to be true, as she pointed out to me when I showed her a draft. In her view, I was much too “nice” in my description; she did not feel nearly so confident as I made her out to be. Lynn’s own voice will appear again, in other chapters, to help complicate and resist the
romanticization of her experience. First, though, I turn to Julian, who helped me to understand just how seductive and potentially dangerous my representation of Lynn’s first quarter is.⁶

Julian is a Ph.D. student who is new to the program but who arrived with three years of teaching experience and course work in composition theory. While Julian’s teaching experience saved him from the first-time anxieties that plague new teachers, his confrontation with the discourses he found in the program resulted in an intense ideological struggle. The following is from Julian’s teaching philosophy:

What is it about us writing teachers anyway? Why do we feel such a driving need to convert the masses? Writing teachers, as a species, seem to believe quite deeply in the life-altering importance of what they have to offer. “Everyone should learn to write,” we plead. “Everyone must learn to write.” It’s an easily justifiable stance for which we can marshal a variety of supporting arguments. We invoke the “argument from academic need,” telling our students that the writing skills they practice and develop in our classes will serve them well in the later (“more important”) classes they take in their majors. We invoke the “argument from socioeconomic need,” telling students that the ability to write clear, cohesive, error-free prose translates into better jobs, quicker advancement, higher pay, greater respect, whiter teeth—in short, the good life. At a level of greater abstraction, we may invoke the “argument from democratic need,” telling students that developing writing skill will empower them as citizens in a participatory democracy. Underlying each of these arguments is the assumption that writing skill is some sort of seed within them that our teaching and their practice will serve to nurture, a seed that will take root and grow and flower and then we’ll all walk off hand in hand into our paradise on earth.

But what if we can’t do that? What if factors beyond our control—a student’s background, a student’s lack of interest, the short length of the term—make it impossible for us to see any real growth in most of our students? All too often, the idealistic hopes of our discipline—the goal that critical pedagogues term “liberatory learning”—are dashed upon the rocky shores of reality. Goals go unaccomplished; little real difference is made. Naturally, we can’t admit this. The university has invested in the English department, after all, with the understanding that we can do what we claim—teach students to writer better.
I quote Julian at length for two reasons. First, the passage illustrates his tendency to leaven his argument with wry humor. Second and equally important, these two paragraphs sum up Julian’s struggle to come to terms not only with the curriculum he was required to teach, but his own philosophical and political position in composition studies and, indeed, in English Studies as a whole. But I’ve begun in the middle of his discourse; let’s unpack this fragment.

Julian is picking up on, and playing with, a larger discourse, or commonplace, about teaching—what another student in his section of 781 called the “change a life desire.” The student who coined the term immediately qualified it with the claim that it’s ludicrous. And yet, that desire and its attendant religious overtones are key elements in a discourse that is central to Julian’s struggle (and, as we will see, it also makes an appearance in the thinking of other TAs). The religious overtones appear immediately in the section I’ve excerpted above: “a driving need to convert the masses.”

The “faith” that Julian calls into question is signaled by the presence, in Writing Lives, of the “banking concept of education” chapter from Paulo Freire’s The Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Julian describes that chapter in terms that sound more like authoritative discourse than internally persuasive discourse:

“So, what are we supposed to be doing... turning our students into revolutionaries?” Aaron asks.

A class discussion in English 781 about critical thinking and the teaching thereof has touched off some unexpected responses. Freire has been invoked—in English departments, “Freire,” like “Foucault” or “Derrida,” is invoked just as “Father” and “Holy Ghost” might have been invoked in ages past—which means that we’re venturing into the outskirts of critical pedagogy, which means we’re entering the
neighborhood of the political classroom. Which means that some teachers—like Aaron, like me—are going to start feeling a little uncomfortable with where we’re headed. Which means that we’re going to be branded conservative. Which means we’re rearguard.

There are echoes here of Bakhtin’s description of authoritative discourse as the word of the fathers, as a word that must not be taken in vain. Although it is tempting to suggest that Julian is treating “Freire” as an authoritative discourse, it seems more accurate to suggest that he is struggling with what he himself calls “the currently dominant ideology” of composition studies. And “dominant ideology” does not necessarily mean the same thing as “authoritative discourse.” The point here is that Julian is struggling with a discourse that, for others if not for him, is an internally persuasive discourse.

Julian uses “Freire” as shorthand for the leftist, liberatory ideology that he understands as the dominant ideology of both the English 110 curriculum and composition studies in general, and it is with that discourse that he struggles. At the same time, he struggles with what was once, for him, the internally persuasive discourse of the teaching effectiveness. In the beginning of his teaching philosophy, Julian describes his first few years of teaching composition as “making sense”: he knew what he was supposed to be teaching and believed that he saw his students making progress. This once internally persuasive discourse of the efficacy of teaching is what Julian comes to question in his teaching philosophy, when he outlines the arguments marshaled in support of composition in order to call them into question. Julian’s “crisis of faith,” then, is in Bakhtinian terms a struggle for hegemony between
competing discourses. At the heart of this struggle is a desire to locate—or perhaps to construct—a space for himself in the profession.

Julian describes this struggle as a challenge to “move this crisis back to its etymological meaning—a ‘decision,’ in the original ancient Greek.” This decision is a matter of ethics: “What is our ethical stance when teaching writing? Most importantly what do we owe to the students in our classroom, and how do we make that decision?” This question appears often in Julian’s teaching journal entries, where one can easily trace his struggle to find allies to enlist in the cause against a curriculum that he sees as forwarding a Freireista agenda. For example, Julian uses Smith’s 1997 *College English* article, “Students’ Goals, Gatekeeping, and Some Questions of Ethics,” to help him articulate the ethical questions that have become central for him. Indeed he quotes Smith at length the question of “what do teachers owe their students—what . . . is teachings ‘ethic’?” (Smith 308), a question that Julian describes as particularly thorny and one that teachers rarely address to their students because, for those who are teaching for political, material change in the status quo, they would discover that their students “seek not to resist but to join an elite” overclass (Smith 304).

Julian insists that teachers must “consider realistically both the means and the ends of our pedagogy, and these means and ends are going to be shaped by us, but more importantly by our students and even by larger ‘audiences’ who will be indirectly served by our teaching outcomes.” His argument, however, does not lead him to a wholesale rejection of critical pedagogy, for he writes that “at the same
time—and here’s the nagging part of the whole thing—I do suspect that critical pedagogy can be a positive force.” Ironically, perhaps, he cites Eve’s own critical pedagogy in English 781 as an example of how her “critical pedagogical strategies” have helped him “to question and focus my own thinking.” So, he concludes by wondering if his central concern here is with how he believes critical pedagogy is handled in English 110: “read the ‘baking concept’ excerpt from Writing Lives and build a teaching philosophy around it. Is a required writing course—a course that students don’t have the opportunity to decline—the proper place for this type of instruction?” Julian’s answer, of course, is “no”; it is not ethical to require students to engage in a critique of dominant ideology, especially if many students are seeking a secure place in that hegemony.

There are some gaps in Julian’s argument, as Eve gently notes. In a marginal comment, Eve asks, “I wonder on what data he [Smith] bases his assumptions [that most students seek only to join the elite overclass].” Eve further suggests that Smith and possibly Julian miss the opportunity “students have for turning the ‘cultural’ eye toward practices that aren’t part of the hegemony. (This is a reversal of Freire, et al., but it suggests that critical pedagogies can themselves be questioned.)” I am not as interested in the particular gaps in Julian’s reasoning or the specifics of Eve’s response as in the process of negotiation that those gaps make possible. Note the chorus of voices that sound here: Julian’s focus is on Smith, but he also cites Kurt Spellmeyer and Maxine Hairston as he develops his line of reasoning. And, of course, Eve’s voice sounds here, too, as she notes her reasons for agreement and disagreement with Julian

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and those he cites. In her last comment, she invites Julian to continue developing his critique: "critical pedagogies can themselves be questioned." We can see here an instance of Julian contending with several internally persuasive discourses—that is, discourses that he finds internally persuasive, as well as the discourses with which he is contending—in the space of fewer than two single spaced journal pages.

Bakhtin argues that the importance "of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous" ("Dialogic" 348). Our own voices, our own discourses, come from other discourses, other voices that we sooner or later struggle to liberate ourselves from. The process is still more complex because other, alien voices struggle for influence within our consciousness, as they do in the wider social milieu. Julian has begun to negotiate what was once, for him, an internally persuasive discourse: the belief that writing teachers can help their students to become better writers, that such improvement will be noticeable, and that it will well serve students, teachers, universities, and thereby the wider society. It is this belief that Julian parodies in his teaching philosophy—"Are You There, God? It's Me, the Writing Teacher"—and in his teaching narrative, where he plays off the image of Gabe Kotter (the central character in the television show "Welcome Back Kotter") to illustrate his own end of illusion about what a teacher can, and cannot, do.

In fact, parody is Julian's most striking tool. Consider the "memo" that begins his teaching portfolio:

Proposed scenario for Scenarios for Teaching Writing, second edition "Rafe Feels Discouraged"
Rafe McCabe has been teaching first-year composition and basic writing for over three years. Generally speaking, his performance as a teacher has been fairly well-received, both in terms of student evaluations and recognition from his superiors and colleagues. Sadly, however, Rafe often finds himself plagued by nagging doubts. After these three years, he is beginning to feel a creeping sense of futility in his role as teacher, and he is feeling less effectual now than he did in his first year of teaching. On the worst days, he even considers alternate career paths as, say, a corporate shill, a pool shark, or a barber.

Issues for Discussion
- What does Rafe know that we don’t?
- Would you rather be a corporate shill, a pool shark, or a barber? Why?

Julian is well aware of his audiences. *Scenarios for Teaching Writing* was a required text for English 781, and his choice of that text to parody is thus appropriate. He showed it to members of his peer group and it got, he reports, the laughter he expected. Eve, too, was taken by the parody, so much so that she used it the following year in English 781. Curiously, her students did not laugh. I had similar experiences at conferences when using the Rafe memo in presentations. Without a shared context for the humor, it does not work.

At the beginning of this Bakhtinian exploration, I pulled back from describing the writing program as an example of a distanced, authoritative discourse that TAs must either accept or reject in whole. However, a writing program, particularly one with a common curriculum within which new teachers must work, does act centripetally. To reiterate: any required curriculum is an alien discourse that is given to—imposed upon—new T.A.’s, who must in turn answer that imposition with their own “discourses,” their own values and beliefs, in order to make that course their own.
In the "Rafe Feels Discouraged" memo, Julian “answers” the discourse of the writing program with laughter—and laughter, Bakhtin writes,

> has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation.” (“Dialogic” 23)

I am wrenching Bakhtin’s work out of context here, particularly in relying on a citation from an essay that describes the epic in much the same terms as Bakhtin describes authoritative discourse: distanced in time, closed, static, dead. Once again, I want to insist that the First-Year Writing Program does not intend for its word to be accepted or viewed as an authoritative, epic discourse. At nearly every turn, the writing program staff engages new TAs in a critical conversation with them, with the curriculum, with composition studies, with their students, with their own assumptions and beliefs about teaching.

Nevertheless, for the five years that I have been observing the program—as a new TA, as a graduate student WPA, as a peer mentor, and as a qualitative researcher, new TAs have consistently described the program’s theoretical and political stances as distinctly liberal, even leftist, with the presence in Writing Lives of “The Banking Concept of Education” from Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed serving as the symbol for those politics. Curiously, the presence of essays by politically conservative writers like Allan Bloom and E. D. Hirsch, Jr. do not invoke charges that
the writing program is too conservative. It may be that in the absence of an explicitly named dominant discourse (and it matters little, finally, whether one categorizes it as "authoritative" or "internally persuasive") TAs often invent such a discourse and then proceed to resist it. Or, perhaps more accurately, TAs, without exception in this study, always find something to resist. This is, of course, news to no one.

Moreover, this is a necessary resistance that makes negotiation possible. Without both resistance and negotiation, the writing program would have no chance to continually re-examine its assumptions and practices, and TAs, too, would not reap the benefits that come from struggling to locate themselves in the community of teachers and scholars. Julian's laughter is thus play for mortal stakes. I might add that such laughter, like all comedy, especially satire and parody, runs the risk of being misunderstood or, perhaps, misrecognized. In Julian's teaching narrative—"Thanks for Everything, Mr. Kotter"—he invokes movies like Dead Poets Society and Stand and Deliver (in accordance with Eve's suggestion that he do more with cultural images of teaching—a suggestion that Julian found helpful) before settling on the comedic figures of Gabe Kotter and the sweat hogs of Welcome Back, Kotter as touchstones in his narrative of "the end of illusion" concerning teaching. After a first-day experience of "stage-fright," Julian writes: "I realized that I was going to have to go home and rethink this whole damn thing. Mr. Kotter never had it this hard."

Eve resists Julian's comedy. In her endnote, she writes, "I wonder whether either Olmos or Williams might have worked just as well or better. They're less comedic and therefore perhaps more substantive in their application." Perhaps Eve is
correct, but for Julian comedy is a potent weapon for resisting what he sees as the
liberal bent of the academy. It is that dominant ideology, everywhere apparent to him,
that takes on almost palpable shape in the form of the course he is required to teach.

At the end of winter quarter, he wrote a letter to me that contained the following
passage:

As you may have already surmised, I’m pretty conservative politically. I haven’t always been so, but in the last year or so I’ve found myself more drawn to conservatism as a political position. I guess that there’s kind of an identity issue at stake here, too, although I don’t tend to think in those terms that much. But as I’m trying to figure out what my own political and philosophical convictions may be, I guess it’s kind of easy to see how that might feed into this crisis. After all, English departments aren’t the most natural habitat for conservative types these days, and so I’ve had to do a lot of thinking about how I fit in. Right now, I don’t. Is there a place for a “conservative intellectual” in an English department? (I recognize that many people would see “conservative intellectual” as an oxymoronic construction, so don’t bother pointing that out).

As this letter suggests, Julian is trying to make a home in an unwelcoming
neighborhood. Seen in this light, the turn to Mr. Kotter and especially the Rafe
McCabe memo represent almost a kind of gallows humor.

In fact, Julian’s explanation for Rafe McCabe comes in a post script to the
cover letter for his English 781 portfolio:

P.S. I’ve always thought that, in any given class, if a student turned out one piece of writing that he or she really liked and was proud of, then some progress had been made. For me, that one piece was my scenario parody, ‘Rafe Feels Discouraged.’ I’ve enclosed it here as a sort of cover page to the portfolio materials. One of my peer respondents thought that I should turn it in as my teaching philosophy, but I’m not that kind of gambler.
Eve’s response? “You made the right choice, I think.” I don’t want to create the impression that Eve is an insensitive reader. Rather, I am suggesting only that as the dominant discourse with which Julian is wrestling threatens to overpower him, he resorts to laughter in order to demolish fear and piety. If his preferred mode is comedy, the figures portrayed by Williams and Olmos will not serve his ends so well as Gabe Kotter.

In this account of Julian’s struggle to re-shape his teaching identity, I have asserted that the community identity of the first-year writing program as dialogic and dynamic. While I would like to be able to claim that a dialogized writing program is infinitely capacious and accommodating, even of conservative intellectuals, there are in fact limits to the program’s openendedness. Julian’s story resists the happy story I want to tell. After his first year in the PhD program, he took a leave of absence. He found a good job with a company near his home and has no plans to return to graduate school.

Kristin: “Borrowing Stories”

I want to conclude this chapter with a case study of Kristin, an MFA student who came to the graduate program after working, as she writes in a teaching journal entry, “for a long time in jobs I didn’t have my heart in (real estate financial analysis, in the research department of a ‘Wall Street’ brokerage firm) . . . .” Kristin was not in the section of English 781 that Eve taught, nor was she a member of the same peer teaching group as Sarah, Aaron, Julian, and Emily (who appears in Interchapter 2).
However, she asked to participate in this project, and her significant contribution is, I will argue, a reminder that a new teacher’s dialogic encounter with the discourses of composition studies and writing program curricula is not always a moment of crisis, trauma, or sheer terror. In that respect, my reading of Kristin’s portfolio counters my tendency to look for and dwell in narratives of high drama and life-altering transformation that highlight agonizing, dialogic struggles.

I do not mean, however, to suggest that Kristin does not engage in a dialogic struggle. In fact, her portfolio cover letter makes her struggle explicit:

My greatest challenge in writing ‘Teaching Better Writing’ [her teaching philosophy] was in appropriately using the language of rhetoric/composition theory. The theories and terms for describing them are still new to me, so I don’t yet feel confident using them. I fretted when I drafted this philosophy that my tone was too ‘informal’; I recalled you [the English 781 course instructor] commenting one day in 781 that the philosophy was a ‘formal academic exercise.’ Yet because I was writing about my opinions and experiences, my natural voice, albeit with its ‘informal’ tone, seemed most natural. Your comments on my draft and Professor Wagner’s comments in peer responding reassured me that my voice was appropriate. I also feared that the parts of my philosophy draft which addressed it applications in my classroom read too much like narrative; my reservations were assuaged by your comment on my draft which encouraged me to expand my descriptions of students’ reactions.

Kristin begins to use appropriately the language of rhetoric/composition theory when she starts to appropriate that language and to make it internally persuasive.

Paradoxically, perhaps, she can appropriate that language, that discourse, only when she first allows herself to be appropriated by it.

That moment of appropriation comes when Kristin reads Bartholomae’s “Writing with Teachers.” In a teaching journal entry dated October 15—the third
Kristin writes that when she reads the essays in *Cross-Talk*, "I have trouble accommodating all the theories of how students compose and theories about how to teach writing when I'm still figuring out much more mundane matters of teaching," including, especially, how to deal with students who either don't do the assigned reading or refuse to read carefully. Those "mundane" concerns, however, are probably why Bartholomae's essay "spoke" to Kristin "more than any other reading in *Cross-Talk* so far." She does not agree with everything that Bartholomae says, but Bartholomae's claim that "there is no writing without teachers" (481) sets Kristin to thinking about the informal writing she assigns her students, her own teaching response journal, and what she's learned in a fiction writing workshop.

Kristin is not completely comfortable with reading her students' informal writing assignments. "If I had a bunch of students who I knew were like me and would write whether or not I assigned it, then I could skip the whole WN [Writer's Notebook] deal in the first place, or else assign informal writing prompts in class to get them thinking about topics to explore for their essays." Her students, however, are for the most part not like her; "most people do not figure things out by expressing thoughts and ideas in writing and feel absolutely comfortable with that concept." As a result, a "WN" is due at the beginning of each class, and she also begins each class period with ten minutes of informal writing. And because these Writer's Notebook entries count for 25% of her students' grades, she feels justified in reading and responding to them. Although students have told her that they like the assignments, she still worries that their knowledge that she will be reading and commenting
"changes their content or affects it somehow—I write differently for myself than for others."

Indeed she does. Kristin has no problem with the teaching journal she must keep for English 781, but, she writes, “I censor stuff and I don’t use swear words which I do use when I write in my own personal journal—but that’s the nature of the assignment.” The issue of writing differently for herself than for others also surfaces in the work she does for a fiction workshop she was enrolled in the same quarter she took English 781:

I thought, did I not hear [the teacher’s] voice as I wrestled all weekend with the story I eventually decided not to bring to workshop tonight? (It’s my day to turn in manuscripts—the first time this quarter—and that was a bit nerve-wracking to prepare for.) [The teacher] has some definite ideas about what should and what should not be in a story, what is prose vs. writing, the use of flashbacks (he says NO), etc. I’m learning a lot from him. In theory, I think it’s counter-productive to think about peoples’ reactions when I draft a story—constantly contemplating audience constipates creativity and can generate insincerity and bland prose. I know that [the teacher’s] opinion is not the end-all, be-all. Yet it was there as I worked and worked for hours and hours on the story I ended up not bringing.

Bartholomae thus prompts Kristin to revise her earlier claim, expressed in a meeting of English 781, that her creative writing was not academic. She would be writing stories anyway, she said, and in any case the nature of a fiction workshop was somehow non-academic. “Yet [my fiction] is academic writing, in at least some ways, if I’m bringing a story to a class in which I’ll get a grade and if I’m using knowledge that I learn from the class to shape and edit my stories.” That Bartholomae’s essay prompts Kristin to see the academic aspects of creative writing is evidence that she has
allowed herself to be written by, to be appropriated by, a particularly powerful voice in composition studies.

It is a willing appropriation. Because "Writing with Teachers" so interested her, Kristin picked up a copy of Bartholomae and Petrosky’s *Ways of Reading* and read the preface and introduction. She is particularly taken by Bartholomae’s ideas about getting students to approach readings by “engaging in a sort of conversation with them.” Kristin had no doubt that students should read published essays and stories, but she had trouble connecting that reading “to what [students are] supposed to be learning, trouble understanding why I think reading is important for them. I have trouble articulating this general sense of what is valid about reading in a writing class. I think Bartholomae and Petrosky articulate it well” (emphasis added). Kristin quotes extensively from the Preface to *Ways of Reading*, as well as from the introduction to students; I take this as an indication of just how powerful Bartholomae’s and Petrosky’s influence is for her. In effect, Bartholomae’s and Petrosky’s words become Kristin’s, and it is in this sense that she is appropriated by that language.

But Kristin engages in a bit of appropriation of her own. In the journal entry with which I’ve been working here, Kristin begins with a scene from her life as a creative writer. A student was leaving the office of Kristin’s adviser just as Kristin arrived, “a girl who had her head bent forward so her long hair curtained her face.” This student had failed to get into one of her adviser’s upper-level undergraduate fiction writing workshops; this student, a science major, “really likes to write,” but, Kristin’s adviser tells her, “she’s just not writing good stuff.” One source of this
writing problem is in the student’s reading habits: “fluff like romance novels.” The professor sent the student away with a copy of “Jane Eyre and something by Anne Tyler . . . . She’s not going to be able to write well if she doesn’t read some good writing.” It is this scene that prompts Kristin to write about Ways of Reading. She makes it clear, before turning to Bartholomae and Petrosky, that she does not agree with everything that Bartholomae has to say in “Writing with Teachers,” particularly his dismissal of personal writing (i.e. “sentimental realism”). Kristin, however, is a practical theorist; rather than expend energy in choosing sides in the Bartholomae/Elbow debate, she takes—appropriates—what she can use from Bartholomae and turns it to very specific teaching purposes.

That Kristin begins with a scene from creative writing is characteristic of her persistent efforts to make her own reading and writing selves inform her emerging teaching self. In an entry written in response to Rankin’s Seeing Yourself as a Teacher, for example, Kristin uses Rankin’s claim that “if I can’t be me in the classroom, then I’m cheating both myself and my students” (112) to speculate on her own nervousness on the first day of class:

This comment made me think about how I wore a skirt and pumps and pantyhose on the first day of class and remembering that made me cringe, a little. I don’t know where my brain was. A few years ago yeah, I was a pantyhose kind of woman; I worked in a place where all the women wore pantyhose. . . . My pantyhose average before my first day teaching was every six months. Definitely not me. So—did I cheat my students? Well, I may have cheated them by presenting myself as Mrs. Professional instead of the real me: Mrs. Jeans, Sneakers, and Ponytail—and I cheated myself by not wearing the clothes I find most comfortable. I know that being oneself in the classroom is way more than wardrobe decisions—but I think my first day experience is a good lesson.
In her entry in response to Bartholomae and Petrosky, Kristin narrates a version of her earlier reading self in an effort to imagine her students' reluctance to read as writers. She reports that in a writing workshop she took one summer at NYU, the instructor encouraged her to start reading as a writer, “but I resisted that idea at first. I'd been reading for enjoyment for most of my life and I thought that being critical of a text would spoil the reading for me. I didn’t want to have to work while I read; I just wanted to enjoy.” Nevertheless, she tried reading as a writer, and was “delighted to discover” that reading as a writer did not spoil reading for her; rather, “it made reading more enjoyable, because I was seeing so much more than just a story told by words on a page.”

Kristin does not assume, however, that all of her students will be as willing as she is. In fact, to teach English 110 is to experience, as Kristin notes, “the tribulations of teaching a required course.” She looks forward to teaching an undergraduate fiction workshop. She thinks that it’s going to be fun because it’s an elective; students won’t be there without at least a modicum of interest . . . . I wanted to take creative writing when I was an undergrad, but it was not offered. I also was afraid of admitting my secret passion for writing, so I did not hang around the English Department [at Berkeley] finding out what sorts of on- and off-campus resources there were for People Like Me Who Aren’t English Majors But Secretly Like to Write.

But even as Kristin imagines the pleasures of teaching creative writing, she continues to take her work as a first-year composition teacher very seriously. She is committed, as her interest in *Ways of Reading* makes clear, to motivating all of her students “to
engage with the readings as I’d like to.” However, she isn’t sure that this is a reasonable expectation; she cannot, she writes “make the students do anything.” Nevertheless, she thinks that “it’s important for me to let my enthusiasm show, because it’s genuine enthusiasm, and I think reading and writing are important.”

Reading and writing are important, in Kristin’s view, for several reasons. Reading like a writer, remember, is a source of pleasure for her; she wants her students to share in that pleasure. Reading and writing are also sources of power, and sharing that power is one of the themes of her teaching philosophy, “Teaching Better Writing.” Bartholomae and Petrosky’s influence is apparent here, too; Kristin writes, “In the preface to Ways of Reading, Bartholomae and Petrosky write, ‘If we allow students to work on powerful texts, they will want to share the power. This is the heady fun of academic life, the real pleasure of thinking, reading, and writing’ (ix).” The degree to which Ways of Reading has become an internally persuasive discourse for Kristin is evident in how thoroughly she weaves it into her own teaching philosophy. Just as important, she takes the idea of “sharing the power” and extends it to comment on what she sees as the heart of her teaching philosophy: “my desire to ‘empower’ students to succeed in their college career.” Students who succeed in her class have demonstrated the ability to “write well (clearly and articulately).” This is, she believes, a “key skill for students, no matter their majors, to have.” The responsibility for acquiring that skill is, Kristin insists, shared between her and her students: “I strongly believe in treating the students like the adults they are, giving them responsibility for their performance and learning.”

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In focusing so intently on Kristin's teaching journal entries, I have largely ignored her teaching philosophy and teaching narrative. In those documents, Bartholomae's voice is by no means the only one. In her teaching narrative, for example, Kristin describes how her father, sister, brother-in-law, and husband—all of whom either are once were teachers—each taught her something about what teachers do. She also makes productive use of teachers who were not helpful: her Rhetoric 1A and 1B TA at Berkeley, who was so distant and "cold" that Kristin was afraid to seek individual help; from this TA, she learned that "it is important for a teacher to demonstrate an interest in the student as an individual and to present oneself as approachable and willing to help." In a series of character sketches, then, combined with scenes from her own classroom, Kristin "borrows stories" in order to begin fashioning a teaching identity that both acknowledges the voices from which she has learned and that fits her own sense of self.

Kristin is thus "written" by composition theory and "spoken" by many of the voices that are all around her: professors of creative writing and of rhetoric, family members, former teachers, colleagues, and students. But even as those voices resonate in her writing, she shapes them to her own ends—all the while keeping her students and colleagues in mind. What do her students need from English 110? What are her colleagues doing that she might learn from? Individual agency emerges—in Kristin's portfolio and, indeed, all of the TA portfolios I have considered thus far—in those moments when TAs begin to talk with and back to the voices that speak in and through the portfolios. Kristin—strikingly—manages to negotiate several points of
correspondence between fiction writing and composition theory without insisting on, let alone worrying about, achieving complete correspondence between the two. And while she notes difference, she does not make of that difference any sort of hierarchy in which one discourse is privileged over another. In this, as I will make clear in the next chapter, Kristin is a somewhat unusual inhabitant of the “discourse” of English Studies.
INTERCHAPTER

Reading Against Myself

"... common platitudes proclaim that data speak for themselves, that the researcher is neutral, unbiased, and 'invisible.' Data reported tend to flow nicely, there are no contradictory data and no mention of what data were excluded and/or why. Improprieties never happen and the main concern seems to be the proper, if reflexive, filing, analyzing, and reporting of events. But anyone who has engaged in fieldwork knows better..." (Fontana and Frey, 372).

"Reading Against Myself" could be an alternative, or "shadow," title for this dissertation. In this interchapter, I want to suggest the process of turning to, and away from, the research that has gone into this dissertation. Almost from the moment I began to plan this project, I often found myself hesitating. I worried about conducting research in a writing program with which I had close ties. I worried about how to represent localized versions of the disciplinary tensions between composition, literature, and creative writing. And I worried, especially, about how I would represent the teaching lives of the TAs who agreed to participate in this study. Obviously, I stopped finding reasons to turn away from the research and, finally, turned to it. The participants were enthusiastic, there was plenty of data, and I had hesitated for so long that it became too late to develop another project.

However, one worry remained, and it took me a long time to confront it: what would happen if I found myself writing about a TA whose portfolio troubled me? My
aim had always been to read TA portfolios with as much generosity as possible, with
an eye toward understanding how they negotiated teaching identities and constructed
ethos. In effect, I wanted to emphasize the intelligence, self-reflection, and passion
that I found in their writing. And so I was surprised to find myself resisting one of
those TA portfolios. It came from Emily, an MFA student fresh out of college. In my
initial reading of her portfolio, I found myself increasingly troubled. I was reading
against her work—reading ungenerously, carelessly, irresponsibly. I avoided
arranging an interview with her, avoided re-reading her portfolio, even, at times,
avoided Emily. This essay explores the impropriety of my initial reading by reading
against that earlier researcher self of mine; it also serves as an apology to Emily.

#

I wrote the following entry in my research journal on January 30, 1998:

Already, I worry about a TA—Emily—whose 781 materials have me at
a loss. Something selfish about her (indeed, she writes, in more place
than one, of being a selfish student, and of grounding her approach to
teaching in that selfishness). In her teaching philosophy, she writes that
she wants to tailor the course to her students’ needs and goals, to allow
them ‘the opportunity to be exceptional.’ But she doubts if they’re
ready for that—I can’t articulate it yet, but there are tons of
contradictions, just in the few pages I’ve skimmed. She wants her
students to teach her something in their writing, to not only give a
damn but make her give a damn. That is what she writes in the first
paragraph of her teaching philosophy, although later she writes that she
doesn’t have goals for them, other than getting them to set their own
goals (even if the goal is just to get by?)

There are two things to note briefly here. First, I construct Emily as a selfish teacher;
as I will demonstrate, that construction runs counter to her own construction of her
teaching identity. Second, I see an embarrassing eagerness to actively search for and
then pounce on whatever contradictions I find in Emily's portfolio. In what follows, I
want to do a "double reading" in which I re-read those responses in order to account
for some of the ways in which my own biases as a teacher-student influenced my work
as a reader-writer.

When I moved beyond skimming to a more careful reading, I became
decidedly ungenerous. Early in her teaching philosophy, for example, she writes
about echoing, without realizing it at the time, one of her undergraduate literature
professor's proclamations that the only way to get an "A" on a paper for his course
"was to, in his own words, teach him something." Although at the time Emily did not
believe that she or any of his students could succeed in teaching him anything, she has
"a great deal of respect for this grading policy; I want to believe in it and use it. I want
to proclaim out loud to my students: 'Not only will you have to give a damn, you'll
have to make me give a damn, too.'" In order for her own students to receive what
Emily calls "acclaim" for a journal entry, they have to "fascinate, intrigue, or
downright inspire" her.

While she had at one time been concerned with giving her students "the right
to mediocrity" by allowing them to take the class less seriously,

if that's what they to do for whatever reason at this time and place. The
class may not be important to them. Now I think I understand they will
find a way to do that no matter what. I just can't let it get to me. But
what I have to try extra hard to do is allow my students the opportunity
to be exceptional.

Here is my annotation: "How are students figured here? So much of this is about
what Emily needs/wants." That initial observation does not hold up at all: Emily

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understands that English 110 specifically and writing generally may not be important to her students, and resolves not to let it get to her. The clear implication is that the class is not only about Emily. That is, she knows that some students will choose mediocrity; nevertheless, she resolves to “try extra hard” to provide opportunities for her students to be exceptional. What I at first glance took to be a self-centered construction of the teacher turns out, in a more generous—and I think more accurate—reading to be a clear willingness to respect her students’ desires.

There are other examples of my ungenerous reading. Emily writes, “It took me nearly four years of college to figure out that I am responsible for the way I’m educated. This is my first goal for my students. . . . I want them to take the initiative and responsibility necessary to make all of their learning experiences useful and meaningful to them.” My initial response? “Expecting a lot—that they do in one quarter what took Emily four years—and, an assumption that these kids don’t have any goals—yikes!” At another place in her teaching philosophy, Emily summarizes Janet Emig’s “Writing as Learning” in order to articulate part of her own teaching philosophy:

Rather, the most important difference is that in reading and listening, we actively create or recreate the meaning of the words. In writing and talking, we originate the meaning. . . . What I appreciate about Emig’s insistence on pointing out what some may say is the obvious is that her distinctions helped me to understand the importance of and activity involved with each language process. In my composition classroom, I would like to constantly involve each process: reading should inform writing; writing and conversation should illuminate reading; listening should occur out of respect and interest.

In the margins, I sniped, “But in what sense are we ‘originating’ meaning?”
Why was I so harsh, so ungenerous? The last lengthy excerpt from Emily’s teaching philosophy might serve, particularly in the last sentence, as an eloquent summary of one of the First-Year Writing Program’s primary goals: to help students see how reading, writing, speaking, and listening are all parts of the larger process of meaning-making. I also find it curious—disturbing, even—that I reacted so negatively to Emily’s desire that her students take responsibility for their own learning. I share that goal; most of the teachers I know do, too.

In fact, many of the themes that emerge in Emily’s portfolio also appear in Sarah’s, Aaron’s, and Julian’s. In Emily’s cover letter, for example, there are echoes of religious language:

I believe completely in the phrase, ‘I just wanted to get everything down.’ I believe in utilizing the option of later subtracting and adding to a piece, or just chucking the whole thing. I believe in writing as a ways and means of communicating, not only with others, but with myself, because there are ongoing debates within my mind, ideas I have not yet expressed fully, and transitory moments of clarity and insight which writing helps me preserve.

These sentences, each beginning with “I believe,” could work quite nicely as articles of faith in the writing process movement. Sarah writes about such moments frequently, and much of Aaron’s work in English 781 is a struggle to achieve something like a commitment to the articles of faith that Emily lays out so eloquently. Julian, too, writes—albeit ironically—about questions of faith, of belief.

There are other similarities between Emily’s portfolio and the portfolios of other TAs in this study. Like Lynn, for example, Emily wrote about influential former teachers. For Emily, the central figure was a dance teacher named Jane, who
took everything every student had to say seriously. She instantly gave respect and therefore validation even to half informed, half completed thoughts. She knew, above everything else, that things just need to get said, get put out there, and then we could arrive at something. But we didn’t have to sound brilliant when we spoke, we just had to speak.

Jane challenged her students by refusing to give guidelines for instructions for assignments and exercises. “As a college sophomore going into an academic class with her for the first time,” Emily writes, “I was terrified by this. I was terrified by rumors one could not get an ‘A’ in her class.” Emily notes that Jane never seems to feel guilty about the confusion that her prompts produce in her students, nor does Jane ever seem “embarrassed for the craziness others perceive. Instead, she forces her students to jump in, start their journey, and just go, trusting they will find a way to get where they need to go, and they will find out where they need to go when they get there.” That last sentence, with its invocation of learning as a journey that requires faith in the process of the journey, resonates with Sarah’s image of the holy fool.

Like Sarah, Emily wants to invite her students on similar journeys of self-discovery. To be sure, Emily does not claim that Jane’s influence was “nearly as spiritual or life affecting as it may seem. These were little lessons we were learning.” But Emily does claim Jane as a model, “as a teacher, artist, visionary, and leader.” She admires the degree to which Jane was willing to give up control in order to teach her—and other students as well—“how to learn, how to take responsibility for starting my own journey. She relinquished that responsibility to me.” But even as Emily articulates her desire to do the same thing for her students, she knows that some students will not be ready to benefit from such strategies. This is troubling for Emily;
nevertheless, she affirms her desire to mimic Jane’s “ability to take away safety nets and, through removing all other options, make her students move forward in whatever they are setting out to do.”

Even as Emily strives to articulate what might be understood as a decidedly romantic view of teaching, she grounds her teaching philosophy in the world of school. On the subject of grades she is remarkably candid and practical:

It may be evident that I unashamedly operate (as I always have) in a world of grades. The system has served me well, and I choose to continue to operate within it, using it to my own as well as my students’ advantage, rather than pretending it doesn’t exist, putting a sheet over its head for an entire quarter, and then snatching the sheet off at the end like a magician revealing some mold or fungus that has been festering there for ten weeks.

Emily is writing here of using portfolio grading. Her first time out, she did not tell students what their grades were likely to be; for the next quarter she resolved to give her students more regular progress reports. After all, she writes, “I am already classifying [their work]. Ideally, I probably should not be ranking or rating it yet, but I know I am, and if I am, it is unfair of me to not share that with my students.” By the end of her first quarter of teaching, then, Emily has begun to articulate a teaching philosophy grounded in a self-reflective awareness of herself as a student, an acknowledgment of those teachers who have most profoundly influenced her, and an understanding of the differing needs of her students.

Why, then, was my initial reaction to her portfolio so negative? A comment I made in the margin of Emily’s teaching philosophy provides a hint. Emily is writing about the literature professor who said that “A” papers had to inspire him:
[The papers] wouldn’t only (or even) have to be technically proficient. They just had to enlighten, amuse, fascinate, teach, tell something important, that’s all. And not something important to the teacher, but something important to the student, because they could write a paper of this magnitude in no other way. Like Elbow (“Being a Writer” 498), I ask why prompts encourage the student writer to write for an audience with more expertise than them. I will refuse to give my students topics on which I am the authority, or topics for which I have already imagined the perfect essay in my head.

My comment: “Elbow, as I would expect from an MFA student.” There is dismissal in that brief comment, as if I am saying, “What can you expect from those people?” Emily is, in fact, an MFA student—a young poet, only 21 when she began graduate school. But Aaron was also young, and he also found much to like in expressivist pedagogies; why didn’t I dismiss his work? Or, for that matter, any of the other TAs who identified with Elbow? As my third interchapter makes clear, my own teaching has always been informed by Elbow and other expressivist theorists. Given that, my urge to dismiss Emily out of hand seems very odd indeed.

The problem, however, is not with expressivism; rather, my negative reaction to Emily’s teaching philosophy is rooted in how I construct myself as a reader and writer. In my own literacy narrative—the first interchapter—I construct myself as a reader; my writing self is conspicuous by its absence. Even as I critically “read” how my life as a reader shaped my relationship with my father, I still manage to make myself into a hero of reading. Emily, however, foregrounds her writing self, particularly in her portfolio cover letter. “I have let myself become sloppy,” she writes; “I have let myself become a sloppy student and a selfish writer. I have allowed myself to create drafts that lacked unity, clarity, and focus. I have, I think for the first
time, really participated in the drafting process and honestly utilized my workshop opportunities.” Her goal as an MFA student, she reports, “is to never bring in a piece of finished work to a workshop, to never bring in any piece of writing that does not have room to change or possibilities left in it.” Emily thus announces herself as a writer who is willing to take what she has learned, in English 781, about “the drafting process,” and make it part of her working life.

What is more, she knows that she is asking more of her colleagues than they may be willing to give, as well as condoning in herself behavior that she probably would not accept from her students. The actual “contradictions” in Emily’s portfolio are the ones that Emily herself highlights: the differences between herself as a writer and her students as writers, for example, or between the messiness of writing and the school rewards that go with neatness. I suspect that what annoyed me had nothing to do with those “contradictions” and everything to do with Emily’s announcement that she had allowed herself to become a “selfish writer.” That proclamation touched my own fear: the fear of calling myself a writer of any kind.

Kay Halasek, in A Pedagogy of Possibility, suggests that I am not alone in that fear. Halasek argues that compositionists have almost universally and unquestioningly accepted the notion that “the students in expository writing classrooms are ‘writers,’ that these classrooms constitute ‘communities of writers,’ and that coming to voice in those communities means coming to voice as writers” (46). One problem with this assumption, Halasek notes, is that it requires students to assume the identity of “writer” even when they “are unwilling or unable to imagine (or choose)” that identity.
To make things even worse for students, Halasek reminds us, the “notion of ‘writer also carries with it so many cultural, social, moral, and political assumptions that students often find it difficult to define themselves as writers even secondarily.” Halasek is writing primarily about undergraduates, but the same is true, I suspect, for many—maybe even most—graduate students and even faculty members.

In sharp contrast to Emily, it is only with the greatest reluctance that I would define myself, even secondarily, as a writer. Even so, these dissertation “interchapters” are in one sense a way of defining myself, if only implicitly, as a “writer”—as opposed to a “scholar” or a “researcher.” Put another way, these interchapters are a way for me to engage in a kind of resistance—to write essays that feel non-academic and then slip them into a dissertation, that most academic of academic forms. Thus, in the interchapters I imagine myself to be resisting the same academic discourse that dissertations produce and reproduce. This move feels risky—but the risk is only imaginary. My prospectus committee, after all, had to approve the idea of these interchapters. I suspect, then, that my initially antagonistic response to Emily’s willing construction of herself as a writer was a projection of my own fears about defining myself as a writer.

Had I been paying more careful attention, Emily’s portfolio would have shown me how my dismissive labeling of her as an MFA student—“Elbow, as I would expect from an MFA student”—reproduced the same rigid disciplinary boundaries between literature, MFA, and rhetoric and composition students that I usually find
myself resisting and of which Emily herself is fully aware. Note this excerpt from one of her journal entries:

I guess I don’t know how my writerliness or creative writing comes into play in the 110 classroom. I get the feeling that it shouldn’t exactly enter in. I’ve heard someone joke: ‘Shhh, don’t tell, the MFA’s are doing something bordering on creative writing in their classrooms.’

But all writing is creative. Just as all writing is personal. It’s just that we often go to great lengths to not name the creative or personal as that, or to disguise it when it is happening.

And if I had been paying closer attention, I could have let Emily herself guide me to a more generous reading. I want Emily to have the last word here, since her description of her own reading practices has been so helpful in teaching me how to conduct qualitative research:

I am, as you [Eve] told me, a reader who engages at points of agreement, not disagreement. And it is hard to confess that to a class, a generation, that is consumed with being subversive, focused on iconoclasm. I hope I do not border on sentimentality when I read. I think others take out a lot of hostility on texts that seem to sit apart from themselves, or, they also make sure the texts sit apart from themselves. . . . Even when I hold things up to the light, magnify and examine them, I don’t look for faults, I look for crevices in which even more has been stashed, I just look for more and more.
“Indeed, if the history of educational reform may be made to teach us a lesson, it is this—that sustainable educational ventures have always worked within local, material constraints and that, more often than not, they have papered over their involvement in such bureaucratic matters with rhetorics that declare education’s emancipatory powers. To pursue educational reform is thus to work in an impure space, where intractable material conditions always threaten to expose rhetorics of change as delusional or deliberately deceptive; it is also to insist that bureaucracies don’t simply impede change: they are the social instruments that make change possible.”

—Richard E. Miller, As if Learning Mattered: Reforming Higher Education (9, original emphasis)

“A day that still stands out was the Wednesday that we had class on the Oval. The sky was so blue and everything seemed perfect. Everyone was attentive and involved in the conversation. It felt so good to be leading a discussion of a text. How long had I waited to do that?”

—Lynn

In the case study of Lynn in the last chapter, I argued that when she takes the students in her English 110 class outside, she “locates herself in a spot of her choosing in an act—taking students outside—that always feels like a small subversion of the authoritative voice of school.” Notice, however, that she engages her students in discussion of a text, rather than of their own writing. The difference is important, for it signals a move toward the scene of literature and away from composition. And in departments of English, it is the scene of literature, not of composition, that offers the
most power and privilege. I do not mean to suggest that Lynn herself makes such a distinction between literature and composition; she thoroughly integrates writing and reading in all of her teaching, and she will make an appearance in this chapter as a peer mentor and a graduate student writing program assistant in the First-Year Writing Program. Rather, my purpose here is to highlight the writing program’s location in a department of English, where the scene of literature surrounds, complicates, and challenges the authority of those who administer that program.

Thus far, I have positioned the First-Year Writing Program and, by extension, composition studies, as the powerful, centripetal discourses with which new TAs must contend as they construct their ethos as teachers from positions not traditionally considered authoritative. In this chapter, I will argue that, like new TAs, the First-Year Writing Program occupies cultural and institutional spaces not traditionally considered authoritative. As a result, those associated most closely with the program—the director, her three graduate student assistants, and the experienced graduate students who work as peer teaching mentors—must construct their ethoi as administrators in an institutional and disciplinary milieu that often constructs composition teaching as, variously, good experience in teaching a “service” course, as merely a way to fund graduate study in literature, and—at worst—as an intellectually suspect enterprise to be escaped as soon as possible.

These constructions of composition teaching are, of course, familiar commonplaces with roots in the historical place of composition in departments of English. In “Language Is Sermonic,” published in 1963, Richard Weaver locates
“composition” in ways that I have just suggested and, at the same time, links composition with rhetoric:

Beginners, part-time teachers, graduate students, faculty wives, and various fringe people, are now the instructional staff of an art [rhetoric] which was once supposed to require outstanding gifts and mature experience. (We must note that at the same time the course itself has been allowed to decline from one dealing philosophically with the problems of expression to one which tries to bring below-par students up to the level of accepted usage). (1045).

Weaver does not use “composition” as a term, but his description of the course and the status of the “fringe people” who teach it neatly captures composition’s, if not rhetoric’s, traditional place in American universities. His lament about rhetoric’s fall from the heights of academic status contains a hint of how composition would seek to attain academic respectability: in books like Edward P. J. Corbett’s Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (1965) and James Kinneavy’s A Theory of Discourse (1970), college writing teachers began to identify composition with the ancient and powerful tradition of rhetoric and in that identification sought to establish a discipline that would be on an equal footing with literary studies in departments of English. To a considerable extent, this approach has worked, at least in writing programs that have redefined the pedagogical location of “composition” as a course “which tries to bring below-par students up to the level of accepted usage” to one “dealing philosophically with the problems of expression.” A higher degree of academic status has been achieved in other ways, too; while such influential composition theorists as William Irmscher, Linda Flower, Art Young, David Bartholomae, Erika Lindemann, Toby Fulwiler, Lisa Ede, and Peter Elbow earned PhDs in literature (see Bizzaro 723)—
very few graduate students in English departments could earn PhDs in rhetoric and composition in those "olden days"—PhDs in rhetoric and composition have proliferated throughout the land in the last twenty years.

Training programs for TAs who teach composition have also improved considerably. The "tales of neglect and sadism" that Taylor and Holberg analyze (see chapter one) seem, in the context of the current state of the art of writing program administration, stories drawn from the bad old days of the graduate school experience. At Enormous State, as well as at many other universities, the TA training program is nothing less than a fully theorized introduction to teaching that aims to help new TAs begin to construct fully theorized frameworks for all of the teaching that they will do in their careers. And regardless of the theoretical positions to which new teachers find themselves drawn—expressivism, critical pedagogy, social constructionism, etc.—first-year writing courses function as college level work rather than as a way to winnow out underprepared students. In short, composition studies has acquired, at places like Enormous State, all of the trappings of a powerful disciplinary discourse: a PhD program, well-published and highly regarded faculty, and a sophisticated first-year course with an equally sophisticated TA training program to support it. Seen from this angle, the First-Year Writing Program seems like a local example of composition's "arrival" as a discipline.

But if composition's efforts to identify with the ancient and powerful tradition of rhetoric have resulted in higher status in departments of English, it has not escaped its continuing identification with a negatively feminized underclass. As Kenneth
Burke argued, one need not examine "identification" too closely before encountering its "ironic counterpart: division" (23). And division, as Burke noted, is what brings rhetoric into "the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counterpressure, the logomachy, the onus of ownership, the War of Nerves, the War..." (23). This chapter, then, will take us far from pastoral scenes of reading and writing and even of dramatic crises of faith. Instead, I will enter the human barnyard of English department politics that maintain and reproduce deep divisions between composition and literature.

Indeed, "division" is a key term in the historical context of composition's creation in American university departments of English. As Robert Connors argues, those who teach composition constitute an underclass that the inhabitants seek to escape from as quickly as possible. In an echo of Weaver's lament about the decline of rhetoric, Connors notes that by 1900, instead of being sought by students, "rhetoric courses by the early twentieth century are despised and sneered at, and their teachers have fallen from the empyrean of named chairs to the status of permanent underclass—'composition teachers': oppressed, ill-used, and secretly despised (55)." Connors finds the source of rhetoric's fall in the Germanic influence on the creation of the American university system, as well as in a shift from oral-based to writing-based rhetoric—that is, composition. While rhetoric found a home in speech departments, Connors argues, there was no home for it in English, where German philology was easily grafted onto literary history (63). Without PhD programs to lend rhetoric
intellectual legitimacy in the new American university, rhetoric, as “composition,” became the drudge work of a permanent underclass whose workers—surplus PhDs, graduate students, women, and a handful of heroic figures like Fred Newton Scott—were crushed under the burden of reading and responding to hundreds of themes a week.

Connors suggests that rhetoric, due in large part to the establishment of its own PhD programs housed in departments of English, has gained in academic stature in recent years. Nevertheless, he fears that “too many rhetoric PhDs have been willing to blunt their own perceptions and act as the overseers of oppressive and pedagogically indefensible composition programs” (78). These rhetoric PhDs, Connors claims, have forgotten “the despair that a four-and-four composition load can induce once one has fought free of the web via a rhetoric PhD” (78). In other words, Connors worries, even rhetoric PhDs, once they rise from the underclass of non-tenured composition instructors, “will continue to use the variety of stratagems and arguments long since developed to avoid teaching writing as much as they can. And the work will continue to fall to a structurally necessary underclass” (79).

I find Connors’ historical analysis fascinating, but I am struck by how the terms “rhetoric” and “composition” function in his argument. Connors links “rhetoric” with the “empyrean of named chairs” that fell out of favor in the new American university, despite the best efforts of Fred Newton Scott and his students. “Rhetoric,” in its diminished, department-of-English form, becomes “composition,” a term that denotes an underclass. In Connors’ narrative, “rhetoric” re-emerges as an
academically respectable discipline via the establishment of PhD programs in rhetoric. Academic respect equals PhD equals "rhetoric"; "composition" and "PhD" don't seem to belong together in Connors' formula. Rather, rhetoric PhDs are the ones whom Connors charges with the mission of rescuing their less fortunate colleagues from the "despair" of teaching four composition courses each term. Tellingly, Connors himself identifies teaching composition with drudgery: "The fact is, as everyone knows who has taught both, that composition is harder and more energy-consuming than literature to teach well" (79 original emphasis). To teach literature is easier, that is, because "it is not required, it attracts upperclass students, and has infinitely variable content . . ." (79). Implicitly, teaching composition—understood as first-year writing—must be less enjoyable than teaching literature precisely because composition is required, attracts underclassmen, and has a finitely variable content. Connors thus reinscribes "composition" as the poor relation of the older, much more prestigious and respectable "rhetoric." It is customary to speak of "rhetoric" and "composition" together, in the same breath, as equal partners. That it may be problematic to do so is suggested by Susan Miller.

In "The Feminization of Composition Studies," Susan Miller argues that in spite of, or rather along with, the efforts of compositionists to raise their discipline to a status equal to that of literature, composition—its teachers, students, and scholars—embodies a complicated set of contradictions. Miller pays close attention to those contradictions:

Learning to read and write, we easily acknowledge, assures the continuation of our civilization. Our most 'civilized' and powerful
citizens—college graduates—must be confident, fluent producers and equally skilled analysts of discourse. But we are also accustomed to confessions that composition teaching, and composition research, are not something that ‘regular’ (meaning powerful, male-coded, theoretical) faculty do. (42)

Miller contends that literary study, like composition, once had very real associations with a “soft” study of vernacular literature and language (43). In Miller’s account, which here agrees with Connors’, English fairly quickly attained status as a “hard” discipline by emphasizing “its new departments’ attachments to philology and to traditional methods of teaching classical language and literature . . .” (44). Miller, however, is more explicit than Connors about how “composition” functioned in the new American university. Composition, Miller argues, was “divorced from the old college curriculum in classics . . . and defined for the first time as preliterary (or preprincipled), not as a part of rhetorical education for those already entitled eventually to ‘speak.’” (45). It became, she writes, a “place that the ‘best men’ escape from . . .” (45). Composition thus very quickly found itself contained in the imaginary and sometimes actual basement of English departments, where it began to function as the “symbolically essential way to verify the social and moral credentials of those admitted to the university.” (45).

As both Miller and Connors point out, teaching composition has historically been “women’s” work—quite literally. In fact, literacy in general has been “women’s work.” But Miller goes a step further than Connors by situating composition in a more general cultural “call to identity.” That is, the figure of the composition teacher “is overloaded with symbolic as well as actual functions”:
the teacher is a nurse who cares for and tempts her young charge toward ‘adult’ uses of language that will not ‘count’ because they are, for now, engaged only with hired help; she is, no matter what her gender, the ‘mother’ (tongue) that is an ideal/idol and can humiliate, regulate, and suppress the child’s desires. But she is also the disciplinarian, not a father figure but a sadomasochistic Barbarella version of either mother or maid. (48)

This complicated teaching identity is not confined to university departments of English. As Miller points out, even as many composition teachers work in a kind of ad hoc relation to security and status, they “are given overwhelming authority by students, institutions, and the public, who expect even the most inexperienced ‘English teacher’ to criticize and correct them, even in settings entirely removed from the academy” (49).^ Composition teachers and researchers may seek to refigure their own identities by repudiating “mechanistic teaching and its regulatory practices,” but culturally they are called, by deeply held cultural images and expectations, to the very identities that they seek to resist.

Both Miller and Connors point out that composition teachers and researchers—rhetoric PhDs in Connors’ argument—are likely to reinscribe oppressive hierarchies in their efforts to attain for their discipline equal status with other academic disciplines. But while Connors insists that “rhetoric PhDs” must engage in bureaucratic and political battles that will gain for writing teachers some security and status, Miller suggests that compositionists might “represent the negatively ‘feminine’ field as irrefutably counterhegemonic, not as a victim stuck in webs of compromise” (51). In Miller’s view, composition ought to be a culturally designated site for teaching all students (as is the case already at Enormous State and many other places) thereby
functioning as a force for empowering, rather than "for repressing or 'correcting,' the
discursive power of the majority" (51). Rather than simply engage in a fight for status
that is likely to end up supporting the same oppressive hierarchies that created and
contained "composition" as a subordinate, distaff underclass, Miller argues that the
field might "enjoy a different, if not 'new,' identity, precisely as a culturally
designated space for political action" (51). That is, Miller imagines composition
teaching and research as sites for political resistance that would call into question
"common sense" assumptions about "good writing," continue to work across the
boundaries of established fields, and engage in "active resistance to the exhausted
social situations that produced both its negative feminization and 'traditions' that
should have become cultural embarrassments long ago" (52).

As Miller no doubt knows, it is relatively easy to critique the cultural,
disciplinary, and institutional histories and structures that have confined "rhetoric" to
an academic underclass and negatively feminized "composition"; it is much harder, as
she points out, to "overcome what we take to be hierarchical dominance" when such
attempts "often sustain the hierarchy, the 'means of production,' in which ideologies
install us" (51). One concrete example of this difficulty appears in an essay by Amy
Goodburn and Carrie Shively Leverenz, titled "Feminist Writing Program
Administration: Resisting the Bureaucrat Within."

Goodburn and Leverenz provide an admirably self-reflective narrative of their
experience as graduate assistants involved with a major restructuring of a large first-
year writing program at a large, publicly-funded state research university. The authors
report that while they were eager to share in the responsibility for “revising the
curriculum, revamping TA training, and reconceiving program policies and
procedures,” their feminist dream of “nonhierarchical collaboration and shared
leadership was often lost sight of in the ensuing struggles for power, authority,
ownership, and control” (278-79). Goodburn and Leverenz were particularly
disturbed to find within themselves desires for more traditional forms of authority—
indeed, they note that bureaucratic, hierarchical administrative structures are so
pervasive that it was difficult for them to avoid expecting and even desiring “the very
kind of administrative structure we were seeking to transform” (279).

For Goodburn and Leverenz, “dialogic collaboration, shared leadership, and
diverse sources of authority in policy making, curriculum development, and teacher
training” (280) are specifically feminist practices that they set in opposition the
hierarchical, bureaucratic, and thus patriarchal structures of the academy. However, as
Richard Miller argues in As if Learning Mattered, “bureaucracy” has always been a
devil term when used by academics. Indeed, the cultural images that go with
“bureaucracy” and “bureaucrat” evoke red tape, uncaring government functionaries,
and, more specifically for academics, those duties—committee work, program
administration, and so forth—that stand in the way of the promise of a life of the mind
far removed from any taint of bureaucracy. One of Miller’s central arguments is that
all academics are, in many respects, bureaucrats, if by “bureaucratic work” we include
such tasks as grading (i.e. sorting) students, making tenure and promotion decisions,
serving on committees (e.g. graduate studies committees, which are always concerned
about admissions), writing letters of recommendation, and, of course, program administration. Bureaucracies, in Miller’s view, “don’t simply impede change: they are the social instruments that make change possible” (9). There is, quite simply, no way to operate outside of the bureaucratic systems that define academic lives. Thus, while I share Goodburn and Leverenz’s desire for collaborative writing program administration, I want to suggest that we need to embrace the bureaucrat within by figuring out what kinds of bureaucrats we can and want to be, given local conditions.

At Enormous State, then, a thoroughly collaborative and dialogic writing program rooted in feminist principles similar to those advocated by Goodburn and Leverenz is still—regardless of, or perhaps in addition to, whatever else it may do—a bureaucracy. Furthermore, it cannot escape its identification with the work of sorting students through placement procedures and grading, its location in rigidly structured academic hierarchies, and the ways that writing program administrators are constructed by TAs, the history of composition, and the scramble of departmental and institutional politics. It is in this “human barnyard” that the staff of the First-Year Writing Program construct their ethos.

Locating the First-Year Writing Program

Before turning to the case studies of Eve and her assistants, I want first to map the material and symbolic terrain of the First-Year Writing Program. In a purely physical sense, the writing program occupies a prominent place in the English department’s main office. Eve has her own office next to that of the Vice-Chair of
Rhetoric and Composition. The assistant director's office is next to Eve's, and next to that office is one shared by the three graduate student WPAs. On the other end of the main office, separated by mailboxes and the desks of department secretaries, are the offices of the department chair, his administrative assistant, and the other Vice-Chair of the department. Judged solely by the amount of physical space devoted to it, then, the First-Year Writing Program has a considerable presence within the department. Furthermore, their time in the First-Year Writing Program is the one experience that virtually all graduate students have in common. MFA students gather routinely for readings, students in various fields (rhetoric and composition, medieval studies, folklorists, etc.) often form reading and writing groups, and all MA students take a comprehensive exam at the end of their second year in the program. Everyone, however, teaches first-year writing—in the first year for most students, in the second-year for those who receive a fellowship for their first year in the graduate program. There are other teaching positions available in writing and literature, but everyone begins with English 110.

But the First-Year Writing Program's status within the Department of English is in inverse proportion to the space and time devoted to it. Students are admitted to the graduate program solely on the basis of their promise as scholars or creative writers, and that admission comes with an appointment to teach English 110. Thus, English 110 is, in a sense, a universal requirement for graduate students, just as it is for first-year students. Many, perhaps even most, graduate students are interested in teaching, but their aim is to teach in their areas of study. That is, after all, what they
have seen their undergraduate professors doing and what they see the graduate faculty
doing. In fact, it is a rare sight to see an Enormous State English professor, other than
the director of the program or a member of the rhetoric and composition faculty,
teaching English 110. Assistant professors, in their first few years in the department,
occasionally teach an honors section of English 110, and professors—but not graduate
students, regardless of experience and ability—have an opportunity to teach a first-
year writing seminar for undergraduates with exceptionally high AP scores. Virtually
all of the nearly 200 sections of first-year writing offered each year are taught by TAs
or part-time lecturers.

These “fringe people” are crowded together in offices that contain as many as
ten desks, many of which TAs must share; except for assistant professors, who share a
large office with another assistant professor, all faculty members have their own
offices. Most of the TA offices have no windows to the outside; all faculty offices do.
TAs do not have keys to the main office, where their mailboxes and the department’s
copy and work room are located, nor do they have keys to the building; faculty
members have keys to both. Each TA room has one computer—a castoff from the
latest faculty or Computers in Composition and Literature program upgrade—to be
shared by everyone in the room; each faculty member has his or her own computer. In
1995, TAs finally got phones in their offices, thanks to the director of the First-Year
Writing Program; the event was widely regarded, among TAs, as a minor miracle. To
put it mildly, then, TAs receive conflicting messages. On the one hand, they are
urged, by those who run the writing program, to develop professional teaching lives by
constructing teaching portfolios and developing theoretically informed teaching philosophies; in other words, they are urged to see themselves as teachers. At the same time, the material resources afforded to professors—ample office space, individual computers, keys to the building, rooms with windows—are unavailable to TAs and part-time lecturers. The message here is that TAs are first and foremost students.

These conflicting messages mean that WPAs—graduate students and faculty—must contend with a departmental culture that tends to value literature over composition and research over teaching. In effect, TAs receive two messages. From the department as a whole, the message is, “You are here as a student. Your ‘real’ work is as a scholar (or creative writer). We want you to teach well, but the teaching is secondary.” From the First-Year Writing Program, they hear, “Your work as a teacher is as important as your work as a student. Indeed, teaching and scholarship are connected in important ways. Indeed, your English 110 teaching is connected to all other teaching you’ll do.” Thus, in a department of English that boasts one of the largest and most respected composition and rhetoric programs in the nation, composition scholars often find themselves searching for academic respect within their own department. As the following case studies will suggest, the battle between composition and literature for the hearts and minds of graduate students is nowhere more evident—to graduate students, at least—than in the First-Year Writing Program. At the same time, the following case study of Lynn suggests that my telling use of war metaphors suggests more about me than it does some graduate students.
Barnyard Case Studies

Lynn

During her second and third year in the graduate program, Lynn was a peer mentor. In the first quarter, peer mentors meet weekly with small groups of new TAs to talk about a number of issues: leading class discussions, responding to and evaluating student writing, syllabus design, and so forth. After the first quarter, peer mentors lead professional interest groups (PIGs) that address the continuing professional development of new TAs. These groups plan workshops that further explore many of the same issues that arise in the first quarter. In addition, the groups often hold workshops on topics like using media in the writing classroom and using literature in composition courses. Only rarely do WPAs also work as peer mentors; while peer mentors are in fact representatives of the First-Year Writing Program, part of the function of the peer groups is to provide a semi-confidential, but still public, site in which new TAs can talk about their frustrations and difficulties as new teachers. Of course, the small groups also help to foster a spirit of collaboration between and among new TAs and the writing program staff. That is, the peer groups are one way that the writing program enacts its conviction that learning to teach well is a necessarily social, collaborative process.

Lynn is a PhD student in literature with a primary interest in Native American literature. Although she is a "literature person," she had, by the autumn of 1997, become a committed member of the First-Year Writing Program. Rather than
perpetuate the historical divisions between composition and literature that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, Lynn has always sought to bring graduate students from all fields of English Studies into passionate conversations about teaching literacy. In addition, from Lynn’s perspective the First-Year Writing Program in general and the peer groups specifically serve as an introduction to graduate school at Enormous State:

[As a peer mentor] I really think more than anything I wanted to help ease people . . . into this new experience . . . . And that was over all my driving reason for getting involved in the peer mentor program. And, I see that more holistically than just about writing instruction. Like when I see my job as peer mentor, although it’s through the First-Year Writing Program and that’s where most of our focus is, I really see it in a larger context of helping [new TAs] get used to ESU, for those of them who haven’t been here, and you know, grad school, and I try to be a resource for all of those things . . . it seems to have been the role that the First-Year Writing Program has been playing all along . . . .

For Lynn, all of teaching, whether it takes place in a composition or literature class or in a peer group, is about establishing personal relationships. In order to understand how Lynn sought to construct her ethos as a peer mentor, then, I need to revisit, and in a sense reread, the ways that she constructed her ethos as a teacher.

As Susan Miller argues in “The Feminization of Composition,” a “teaching place” is already prepared for Lynn: a place composed of cultural expectations of the teacher of first-year composition that include, often contradictorily, the roles of caregiver and taskmaster, nurturer and gatekeeper. For most new teachers, especially women, the question of authority looms large, particularly if, like Lynn, they choose to inhabit a borderland characterized primarily by a continuing tension between the personal and the professional. She sees teaching as a dance, a metaphor she has
borrowed from a bell hooks essay, "Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process."

Here is how Lynn describes hooks' influence, two years after her first quarter of teaching:

In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks talks about teaching as a dance, she talks about eros in the classroom... The dance for me is a very emotional relationship with my students, with my class as a whole and with students individually—I hear people say that they don't want to hear anything personalized from their students, and I'm the opposite, you know, I tell them, 'Talk to me.' Last quarter I had a student who was suicidal, who I had e-mail me all the time, who really talked to me—and it can be scary sometimes.

This kind of teacher-student relationship can be scary because, as Lynn says, a "passionate pedagogy" can step over what she calls "traditional boundaries." Lynn suggests that students expect teachers to be masculine, which is to say that while it is permissible to be entertaining, emotional displays are off-limits. For a teacher to cry in the classroom, as Lynn has done, is thus to transgress a boundary. She has noted that many students will react to strong emotion in the classroom by "pushing away" or with mockery. Thus, she often relies on small groups and individual conferences, where class clowns have no audience to entertain. I do not mean to suggest that Lynn's commitment to a passionate pedagogy comes at the expense of intellectual rigor. Rather, intellect and emotion are inseparably intertwined for her. Here is how Lynn describes it:

I feel like I'm just so invested in my class that way that I can't separate it; it's a relationship... maybe the easiest or cheesiest thing I could say is that I want them to like me—it's the same thing that so many people say—because I care so much about them, and it's a relationship, and it means so much more than walking into a classroom and giving
an assignment. There’s just so much involved for me, but when I make
the connections with my students, they work harder for me.

That is why hooks’ talk about eros is so compelling for her, and why she is willing to
take some emotional risks in her teaching: in hooks, she sees someone working to
heal the splits between emotion and intellect, body and mind, mind and spirit. Lynn
suspects that her own refusal to ignore eros in the classroom is misunderstood by
many of her peers as “touchy-feely” and unprofessional, particularly since many of her
colleagues are themselves unwilling to seriously discuss desire, anger, and fear in the
classroom.

Lynn sees teaching identity as thoroughly gendered because, she said, “women
have to work a lot harder to hold attention [particularly as ‘entertainers’]. I think a
man for the most part walks into a room and [automatically has] more authority.” At
the same time, Lynn notes that hers is not the only possible feminist pedagogy. By
way of example, she describes a colleague whose courses she had been observing as a
peer mentor:

This winter I’ve been in some really good classes, observing Kim, who
can be goofy, too, when she gets to know her kids, but she’s a lot
harder and a lot more hard-edged than I am. But that’s just not what I
wanted as a teacher. There’s nothing wrong with that, but I want to
have a relationship with my kids and I feel like that’s the way, for me,
that’s the way I get through [to my students].

To be sure, Lynn wants the teaching dance to go her way,

And so when it doesn’t, like for this one particular student, he’s just
confronting me to hear himself talk, because he’ll confront anybody,
you know, not just the authority figure; but that’s just his way, and it
can be very emotionally draining for me because I'm just so invested in my class that way that I can't separate it, it's a relationship.

It is this same commitment to establishing personal relationships that Lynn brought to her work as a peer mentor.

In her first year as a peer mentor, Lynn was successful in her attempts to blur the boundaries between personal and professional, in large part because the new TAs in her group were also seeking personal relationships. That first group, Lynn reported, "saw me as a mentor, in the kind of role that I was thinking of playing, and they called me about a lot of different things." But in her second year as a peer mentor, the members of her group constructed her role, and thus her authority, very differently:

This year it was interesting because the dynamic was very different and there was one TA who saw me as a mentor for everything, it was almost overboard for me . . . and then there were other TAs in the group who saw [the group meetings] as a commitment they had to fulfill, and I was the person who was enforcing that commitment.

Although Lynn still saw the relationship as positive, she said that "it was a different feeling than I’ve ever had before . . . I was seen as an authority figure who was fulfilling a role for the department, and that was the end of my connection—in my perception, that was the end of almost all my connection with them" (emphasis added). Lynn wanted to speak, and to be heard as, simply an experienced peer rather than as an authority figure in the department; the TAs in her second group resisted that construction of ethos, either by taking Lynn’s invitation to establish a personal relationship too far, or by insisting that she assume a purely professional role. In short, she was granted more authority than she wanted.
This authority has several sources. One source comes from the academic hierarchy: in her first year as a peer mentor, Lynn was a master's student, and she was more easily able to construct her authority entirely from the fresh memories of her own first year of teaching. In her second year as a peer mentor, she had just become a PhD student, and she suspected that the implications of that rank played a part in how others constructed her authority. She could still work to turn the attention of the TAs in her group away from herself in an effort to use her authority to enable a new teacher to be successful in the classroom. Her aim was to seek power with, rather than power over, the TAs in her peer group. However, part of her job included observing new TAs in the classroom and writing observation reports. And while these reports were understood to be tools for helping TAs to improve their teaching, it was and is impossible for Lynn to escape the overtones of evaluation that accompany the acts of observing and writing. Here is how she describes her predicament:

[teaching observations] entail a level of critical honesty that I'm not comfortable with... and this year I had a couple of observations where I just didn't know what to do. There was no place to start, they were so problematic. So, that totally undermines what I've set myself up as as a peer mentor. You know, to feel like it's my responsibility to be critical. And I'm not good at it, it's hard to do it, and so—but, and that is power over, and it's expected in very different ways. It's a power that I have and it's a power that the program expects me to have and to use for productive reasons, you know? I mean our job is to the [English 110] students as much as it is, in the larger department sense, as much as it is to the TAs.

Lynn would prefer to write observations or talk with TAs in ways that emphasize her common experience with them, to say or write, "These are the places that need work," and "I've had the same problem." Her worry, however, is that by spending so much
time reassuring a new TA, the TA “comes out feeling better, which is what I always want, but that may not be appropriate for the situation.” However, there is no escape from the obligation to evaluate—an obligation that stems from the writing program’s responsibility to ensure that students in English 110 have competent teachers.

Lynn’s recognition of this authority explains why, although she prefers to work with small groups of students, with new TAs she finds herself more comfortable with assuming authority in “larger settings.” She imagines that as a WPA in the pre-quarter workshop she will feel more comfortable with authority. That is, she can say in front of 45 new TAs that they will need to do certain things on the first and second days of class, or that they will need to use a certain style of peer response. This situation, Lynn notes, “is the same with my students, exactly. I’m very good at standing up and saying, ‘These are the rules,’ and they think I’m a total hardass, you know. But then, if they come and sit down with me and really push me, then I start to change.” And while Lynn says that some of these authority issues are “endemic to these types of positions,” she also insists that “much of it is, ‘Who am I? Who is in the position?’ You or somebody else would deal with it differently, and so it’s personal—it’s the same issues that people are going to face in these positions. But: So much is who you are.” In short, Lynn is learning to negotiate between who she is and who the department, the writing program, and other TAs want her to be. Her ethos as an administrator will emerge in the process of that negotiation.

Part of Lynn’s authority also comes from her time and investment in the program. When she began her graduate career, the writing program was in its second
year of a major restructuring. She had been a peer mentor before peer mentors were paid for their work, and she had a longer institutional memory than the two WPAs with whom she would work. Ironically, however, at the very moment that she is prepared to assume the presumably greater authority that goes with becoming a WPA, she feels that her experience and authority as a peer mentor is being undermined by Eve: a graduate student with fewer years in the program than Lynn—who was, in fact, in her peer group as a new TA—has been designated as the peer mentor liaison for the summer,

which is great, because he needs to learn [about the peer mentor program], to become a part of that. But my initial reaction when told that—because first I was told summer and fall—was not positive. I was like, here I sit with all this experience and knowledge, I finally feel like it’s coming to something, and then all of a sudden I’m not going to be involved, I’m not going to be a voice in this? I mean, you can’t be as involved in this position, in the writing program as a whole, as a WPA and peer mentor, and continue to be involved more than one year without a very personal investment, without feeling like—authority!

Lynn’s feeling on first hearing that she would not be closely involved with the peer mentor program was, first, “I have something to offer and you’ve decided, without discussion, not to utilize that?” As Lynn notes, both the WPA and peer mentor positions carry with them significant amounts of power; at the same time, she is quick to add, the WPA position, in the eyes of new TAs, carries with it more apparent authority. At the same time, Lynn suggests, peer mentors have more room to maneuver—more autonomy—than WPAs.

As a peer mentor, Lynn reports, she “didn’t always toe the party line.” When a member of her peer group asked, “Do we have to do this?” her answer could
sometimes be, “Well, we ‘have to.’ We’re ‘supposed’ to, but I don’t. It’s your classroom. Do what works, or what you want.” As a WPA, she suspects, she will not be able to do that: “You’re too tied to the program, to the curriculum. I’m already feeling that. I would never say things that I said as a peer mentor, as a WPA. I have to learn to deal with the bureaucracy, and to come to some peace with my place in it” (emphasis added in last sentence). As Lynn suggests, the authority, the ethos, of WPAs is constructed in large part through their identification with the First-Year Writing Program. It is to the graduate students who worked as WPAs during the year of this study that I turn now.

“The Authoritative Triumvirate”: Marie, Mark, and Sue

The three WPAs I interviewed for this study had differing motivations for seeking the job. Marie, a PhD student in rhetoric and composition, had “very practical reasons for wanting the job.” She was unsure about seeking a tenure-track position, and saw the WPA position as a chance to “see what it was like to have an administrative job but still have close ties to teachers” and curricular development, “just to see if it’s something that I could do in the long run.” At the same time, she had

always been impressed by the fact that graduate students at Ohio State had so much autonomy in those positions; I mean from the outside they really do look as though people are, really have, not necessarily control, but they’re really taking an active part in what goes on a daily basis in the program, and they seemed to me to be very knowledgeable, and they seemed to be people who you could go to to talk to if you had problems with your teaching.
Mark, a PhD student in literature, took the job for some of the same reasons as Marie; he wanted to be involved with curriculum development and gain some administrative experience. As a fellowship student Mark had not taught in his first year in the graduate program and, as a result, felt as if he had been “slightly on the outside.” It was not until his second year in the graduate program that Mark had an opportunity to teach and he discovered that, in his words, “I felt, I think, somehow more invested than I might have felt otherwise. I really felt invested in some of the changes that were going on, so I thought it would be a good time to [be a WPA].”

Sue, an MA student, shared many of Marie’s and Mark’s motivations. For Sue, the job was also a chance to “get to know people, and a chance to sort of make my way through the department a little bit more.” As a rhetoric and composition student, she also wanted to be in on decisions about “how are we training our teachers, what kinds of priorities are we setting for the program, and that was really exciting for me to participate in.” In short, Sue said, she wanted “to get to know the program and the people in the program and to sort of ‘make my mark,’ shall we say? In some ways, I mean just to do something that I would have a little more mobility and visibility in the department, because I didn’t want to get lost.”

Although the WPA position provides graduate students with a considerable degree of visibility in the department, Marie, Mark, and Sue reported that the position did not carry nearly as much autonomy as they expected. Or, perhaps more accurately, they did not have the sort of autonomy they expected. Sue pointed out the highly collaborative nature of their work together: while they all had opportunities to
work on individual projects, "I don’t feel like I did it alone in any way, but at the same
time I was given certain things to do, or we decided as a group who would do what,
and then I was left to do that work. And that felt really good to me, to have that
support and have that collaboration . . . . I think that actually we did have a lot of say
in what happened." At the same time, Marie said, questions of autonomy arose at
surprising times,

I mean more when I needed less, less when I needed more, but I never
felt—I always felt that the two people [the director and assistant
director] in supervisory positions to us, they never treated us like
supervisors, they always made every decision a collaborative decision,
or at least I felt like every decision was collaborative, like I really could
say anything I had to say without fear of repercussions.

Mark thought in terms of autonomy changing over time, from month to month during
the course of the year. On the first day of the pre-quarter workshop, he felt a "certain
anxiety about those responsibilities, but the feeling of responsibility was really an
enormous sort of sense of freedom in some ways." By the end of the year, however,
he had a different kind of anxiety:

I really wanted to try to make connections and try to play things 50
different ways at once, Mark kind of peer mentor, Mark WPA, Mark
friend, and certain versions of my identity sort of dropped off after the
pre-quarter workshop when I realized with this batch of people, I
couldn’t really be friends the same way I would be if I was just an
instructor.

Sue also thought that the WPA position would be a “great way to make
friends,” which she imagined as one of the perks of the job. “Boy, was I wrong,” Sue
said:
I’m right now in the middle of a very problematic situation with one of the new TAs from last year. Because we’ve now switched from TA, WPA to colleagues in a class. And it’s a big problem. And it’s all because of authority issues. When I was a WPA, I had the authority to say certain things about this person that I didn’t like, professionally, that affected this person’s life, in some ways. But, and I mean I’m not at all uncomfortable about how I spoke up about that, because I feel ethically that that was the right choice to make. However, to say that there were no repercussions from that would be completely untrue.

Along these same lines, Sue mentioned a note that the three of them received immediately after the pre-quarter workshop; the anonymous writer called them the “authoritative triumvirate.” They joked about it, Sue said, but their feelings were hurt. They had tried very hard during the workshop, Sue said, to “run a good workshop and to be friendly and I didn’t want to come off as this dictator of the first-year program.”

Thus, despite their best efforts to exercise power with, rather than over, new TAs, at least some of the TAs insisted on constructing WPA authority as more authoritarian than the WPAs themselves wanted.

In fact, all three WPAs spoke of stepping into a role that was largely constructed by others and in which their accustomed roles as teachers were inadequate. Mark, for example, said,

And what fascinates me about that [“authoritative triumvirate” letter] is I had completely sort of reconstructed my identity in front of people because I couldn’t use my teacher identity. Because my teacher identity is very much kind of over-enthusiastic, and I temper that with self-deprecation and with these kinds of things, and you can’t do that when you’re speaking in an administrative position, so in the pre-quarter workshop when I found myself standing in front of people, I often felt like part of an authoritative triumvirate because I felt uncomfortable self-deprecating on the part of the First-Year Writing Program . . . .
Sue said, "I felt in some way that there was a construction that I sort of step into, that I didn’t realize until I already had the suit on." What is more, the three of them planned and ran most of the workshop, which put them in the difficult position of having to conduct a workshop, for the first and only time, in a room full of their peers. As Marie put it, "That was a time, more so than any other time, where I felt like I wanted less autonomy. Not less autonomy, but I wanted [Eve and the assistant director] to take a much more active role in the planning and implementation of that workshop and I felt like I had entirely too much power.” To the credit of Eve and the assistant director, they did in fact become more involved with the workshop—evidence, Sue said, of their ability to adjust and respond to the needs of WPAs and TAs.

The WPAs’ relations with their graduate student colleagues was complicated by the unique nature of the WPA position. While they noted some similarities with teaching the first time—the anxiety and uncertainty in particular—they highlighted the significant difference that as WPAs, they were working with peers. Sue, for example, felt more equipped to teach English 110 than to assume the role of WPA, largely because she could build her authority as a teacher on a greater knowledge of writing, her experience as a tutor, a difference in age, and the institutional authority that comes with teaching. But as a WPA, she was working with colleagues, and this, she said, was what really shook me. I didn’t know that I knew more than any of those people in that room. In fact, I thought, here I am probably knowing less than a lot of the people, and ultimately that’s not necessarily true, because I knew more things about pedagogy and curriculum, perhaps, than someone who’s never done it before, but at the same time, that was very nerve wracking. To feel that I was suddenly the person who was supposed to have the answers. And the thing that I remember saying so many times during that pre-quarter
workshop, "Well, we can’t tell you how to do that, you have to figure that out.” And I hate that, you know?

Mark pointed out that when he taught for the first time, he came in with specific images of teaching gleaned from his years as a student, watching teachers. But coming in “cold,” as an administrator, he had few cultural images on which to draw. “Your sense of administration,” he said, comes from like watching St. Elsewhere or something [laughter], you know? I mean, if you’ve never done it before. So you come in, you have this sort of, you’ve seen Judge Judy [laughter], you’ve got like this half-assed sense of what you’re supposed to be doing in this job. Like I said, I had to adjust my persona to an administrative persona, which is a different kind of persona for me.

This persona—what I would call ethos—feels, he notes, very “calculated”:

you have to be very calculated about when you step in and out of your administrative voice, like you have to say, “And now I’m not speaking for the program, I’m speaking for me” kind of thing when you’re talking to somebody in the hall. And people know that and they get comfortable with that, I think, but at the same time, people who haven’t done that sometimes don’t know that, and you end up looking like you’re talking out of both sides of your face or something in this weird kind of way, and I think that’s something that’s very strange to negotiate. I’m all for self-reflexivity, but it gets to be—you get so embedded in these kind of, you know, “Well now I’m speaking as”—well, what the hell am I speaking as anymore, I don’t know.

Mark did not feel like he was contradicting himself in the hall; rather, he wanted to emphasize that not all of his opinions about teaching, when talking to TAs, were “administrative.” This made, he said, for an “interesting” complication in his relationships with new TAs.
Marie wanted TAs to visit her frequently, which would have allowed her to play the role of mentor. When an experienced TA asked her to visit a 110 class as a representative of the program, it felt like the highlight of her year. But then, she said, it all kind of backfired on me. Because I had one or two people who . . . I thought got kind of a little over dependent on me and it got to the point where I was like, OK, now I’ve gone into mommy mode a little too much and I want to back away from that. So, you know, it was like I was always torn between wanting them to need my help, and then wanting to be able go to the bathroom by myself, or to get a cup of coffee without people sort of trailing me in the hallway . . . . I guess that’s a very similar thing that happens in my classroom, I want them to come conference with me so much, and then I complain when they’re calling me every single day to set up conferences.

It was the peer mentors, Marie said, who got all of the good stuff:

I was so resentful of that, you know, like the whole year I just couldn’t get over the fact that I wanted to be the peer, and I didn’t get to be the peer, I got to be the mom, I got to be the person who made copies for someone for free because the machine was broken and I knew the code and I was their best buddy if you made copies, but, you know, I didn’t get that person coming to see me because they were having some serious problems with the curriculum and they trusted me enough to tell me about it, and that’s what I wanted.

Sue, on the other hand, did not find that new TAs constructed her as “mommy.”

Instead, she once came under attack from some peer group members when she visited them to explain the evaluation process. The experience, she said, “was a nightmare. I got attacked and it was horrible, I couldn’t believe it.” She had expected a chance to get to know the TAs better and that the visit would be “fun”:

I wasn’t there to tell them what they had done wrong, in any way, and they totally perceived me as the person who was there to give them the business, and that was so uncomfortable for me, and that’s when this complication with this one TA started. Is that, you know, she was all.
pissed off that she had to use a rhetoric and I then found out she wasn't using it and telling us she was and for me, that was a line for me that I was not willing to ignore. For someone to deliberately—and I'm probably going to have to strike this from the record, but for someone to deliberately lie on a First-Year Writing Program document, their syllabus, to do something else, to me just crosses a professional line that I couldn't in good conscience ignore. And because of that it completely, you know, what I thought was going to be a fun time for me to get to know people just turned into me being this, I don't know, administrative talking head. In trying—and even beyond that, with another group, just trying to really find out why they didn't like the rhetoric or whatever, it turned into this defensive position where they were really attacking me.

Regardless of the particular ways in which they attempted to construct their roles as administrators and colleagues, the WPAs consistently found their roles constructed for them by the expectations of the TAs with whom they worked. Even when they clearly signaled shifts in persona, from administrator to graduate student, many TAs would not or could not respect that shift. “I have a lot less control over that than I thought I would,” Sue said: “I mean, that was already sort of decided before I walked into the room and that was what was difficult about it.”

TA constructions of the WPA role(s) took place, of course, in a specific institutional and cultural context. Marie said—and the others agreed emphatically—that “almost any problem I could attribute to authority issues or something like that, I would have to say I would directly relate back to bureaucratic, institutional issues that were beyond our control.” During that year, there was some friction between peer mentors and WPAs; the peer mentors resented being handed tasks on what felt like the spur of the moment during the workshop, but since the department did not allocate enough money to allow the peer mentors to be paid for their time over the summer,
there was no way to ask them to be involved with planning the workshop. Each WPA worked for a hundred extra hours during the summer—about ten hours a week beyond the usual 20 hour commitment for the position—in order to revise the teacher handbook and plan the workshop; they were paid for half of that time and given the other half in “comp” time. Sue found the comp time insulting as a professional—an insult, that is, from the department, rather than Eve—and Marie noted that the comp time “completely changed the dynamics of the [WPA] office and made it impossible for us to do the work that we had been assigned to do, because in any given quarter one of us was out teaching, one of us was taking comp time, and then one poor, bitter soul was left to do all the rest of the work.”

Institutional limitations worked in other, more insidious ways, particularly in relation to the importance that new TAs placed on their work in the First-Year Writing Program. When Sue noted her impatience with TAs who don’t, for example, use peer response in their classrooms, Marie said,

Again, the department doesn’t back us up on that. Think about how you’re treated as a TA when you come into this department. The implicit message is your scholarship comes first, everything else you do is a way to pay the bills so that you can do the scholarly work. And then they go to the pre-quarter workshop, and they get completely different messages and no one ever really stands up and says to them, ‘By the way, this is a public institution. Your paycheck comes from the taxpayers. The taxpayers are sort of in this place politically, in this place geographically, in this place socio-economically. That has something to do with our curriculum and that has something to do with how and why we ask you to teach in a certain way.’ And I think we should be much more explicit about that.
Sue pointed out that “the fact that the English department hires TAs separate from the First-Year Writing Program makes a big difference because as a TA you don’t get hired by Eve or anyone in that position. You get handed this associateship sort of out of nowhere, you know?” Said Marie: “It’s just sort of a shame that [the director of first-year writing] doesn’t get to really make the decisions about who’s teaching what and when they get to teach it.”

That Eve lacks the power to hire instructors, along with the fact that virtually all graduate students are required to teach first-year writing before any other course, works to diminish the authority and status of the First-Year Writing Program. Teaching English 110 becomes a rite of passage that TAs must “endure” before teaching second-year writing (English 367), creative writing, or literature. As Sue notes,

when you get to teach 367, there’s a lore surrounding that about well, now I’ve graduated, or I’m being rewarded, I don’t have to teach in the first-year program anymore. Now I’m in 367, or I’m teaching 200-level, I can do whatever I want. And I’ll tell you, I mean just from talking to people who are not teaching in the first-year program anymore, some of them just, I’m like, well what are you doing about peer response, what are you doing—nothing, nothing is happening there and that is frightening to me.

The perception that TAs can do whatever they want outside of English 110 comes, Sue believes, from the first-year program’s status as “the only program that’s really directed and—I’m going to get in trouble here, but—I mean that is really solidified in a certain way with particular goals and really tries to administer and to teach, to instruct their TAs about pedagogy.” This problem, Sue believes, “has a lot to do with
the department and the way that it's structured.” It is a view shared by all three WPAs.

Indeed, the First-Year Writing Program's clearly articulated structure stands in sharp contrast to most other teaching programs in the department, except for the Writing Workshop and the Computers in Composition and Literature program. Those who teach in the first-year program must take a graduate course in the theory and practice of teaching first-year writing, as well as participate in regularly scheduled professional development programs. However, graduate students wishing to teach English 367 need only attend a brief orientation session, produce a course description, and attend one workshop each year. No graduate course in the theory and practice of teaching advanced composition is offered, let alone required. PhD students must work with a professor in an undergraduate literature course before teaching literature, but this experience varies widely and, in any case, there is no programmatic structure to organize this experience for graduate students. Graduate students who want to teach basic writing, ESL composition, or business and professional writing must complete graduate courses in those fields. But relatively few graduate students take these courses. The only fully articulated teaching program that most graduate students will encounter is the First-Year Writing Program.

Marie suggests that

there are serious ramifications to this idea that the 110 training becomes a sort of introduction to departmental life, an introduction to grad school, and introduction to teaching, when really all it's supposed to be doing is introducing people to how to teach the damn course. This one course. We get this tremendous responsibility to do things that should
Marie notes that there are many good literature, linguistics, and folklore who are rarely called upon to talk about teaching “except when we do one of these brown bags and bend over backward to invite them to come . . . . You know, it’s not always about teaching writing, it’s about teaching lots of different things.” Marie’s dream is that one day there would be a departmental TA workshop that “would introduce people to discourse about pedagogy, featuring lit. people, creative writing people, linguistics people, folklore people, rhet/comp people.” In this dream, new TAs would be interviewed in order to figure out where they might best be placed as teachers—that is, in literature, composition, folklore, and creative writing. In that way, she suggests, all program directors would have greater control over hiring. Of course, all of the WPAs know that Marie’s dream exists in the realm of the improbable: her proposal would cost more money than the department has available, particularly given its emphasis on graduate training for research.

The larger point I want to make here is that Marie, Mark, and Sue describe their ethoi as administrators in ways that emphasize negotiation. Mark, in particular, describes how his administrative persona changed according to time and location, and all of them noted the considerable extent to which TAs constructed their roles for them. In “Ethos as Location,” Reynolds turns our attention to a socially constructed ethos as it appears in written texts; Mark’s witty descriptions of continually shifting personae, Sarah’s anecdote about resisting a “mommy” persona, and Sue’s sense of
ambush during a peer mentor meeting in which she was constructed as the administrative “heavy” all point toward the ways that ethos is negotiated in everyday institutional life. Indeed, Mark’s use of “persona” is telling: as James Baumlín points out, “persona”—a latin word—may have its etymological roots in the Greek prosopon, “visage” or “mask” (xii). And just as we encounter cultural “scripts” for constructing our autobiographies, so too do we find masks—personae—ethoi—waiting for us when we step into any institutional role. Although Erving Goffman, in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, suggests that the social masks that we cannot help but wear end up becoming a part of our faces, Marie, Mark, and Sue suggest that we may alter those masks even as they alter us. However, alterations in the available personae—that is, ethoi—require practice over time and continual negotiations with not just “discourses” but those “others” whom we encounter in the halls, meeting rooms, and classrooms of the university.

Eve: Seeing and Being Seen

When Eve walks into English 781, she resists the sometimes considerable temptation to tell students what to think. Her larger concern is “to leave the responsibility and the right for someone else to decide what he or she thinks.” While new TAs usually respect such a position in principle, in practice they often want someone to tell them how to teach. Nevertheless, Eve resists her occasional urges to step up on a soap box; TAs, she says, may “think they know what they want, and they ask for what they want, but what they don’t understand is what they think they want is
not what they need.” One of her aims in English 781, then, is to complicate rather than clarify. Here is how Eve explains it:

I think people expect... 781 to clarify, and I think it complicates. And in many ways I intend for it to complicate... What [781] does is complicate on a theoretical level, and if one works through one’s theoretical principles or understanding, then that eventually becomes a clarifying move.

This does not mean that Eve never talks about specific teaching strategies, let alone that she never talks about her own history as a writing teacher or her current theoretical and pedagogical principles. But this moment does not arrive until midterm, when she senses that her students have begun to practice theorizing what they do, at which point those “tips” can be grounded in a shared theoretical and pedagogical context.

Eve intends for that context to extend beyond English 781 to the classes that TAs will teach later in their careers. This is a relatively recent development. For years, English 781 was a three-credit, pass/fail course that met once a week. By 1995, however, it had become a five-credit, graded course complete with graduate reports. It was during this time that English 781 took on a larger function than simply preparing students to teach English 110. It became, Eve said, a way of introducing graduate students to a “life-long teaching of writing” by providing “larger structures and principles from which to then move from that course to other ones. To decide how to teach.” English 781, Eve insists, is “not a teacher training course, entirely. I mean, it’s not a theory course, either. But it really is a course that... attempts to introduce [graduate students] to the act of teaching through the other conversations that are
currently going on in composition.” As it turns out, many students are surprised that composition deals with many of the same issues that literature does. She reports that it is rewarding to hear that she has succeeded in showing at least some graduate students that “teaching composition isn’t just a matter of amassing a certain number of skills and then applying them in the classroom.”

There is more to directing the First-Year Writing Program than teaching English 781, of course, and as the director of first-year writing, Eve is acutely aware of how she represents her work and of how that work is perceived by others. She speaks in terms of relationships with four different groups. The first group includes people outside of the university: high school teachers, other community members, and so on. The second group includes students in the first-year writing program, both students in her own sections of 110 and students who see her on purely administrative matters. The third and fourth groups—university faculty and staff outside of the department, and faculty members and graduate students inside the department—constitute a set of paradoxes and ironies that I want to explore in this section.

Eve senses that in meetings with administrators in other departments, “people listen and I think often are persuaded by my—I mean, there’s some power to my language and to what I say.” For example, when people in the College of Arts and Sciences wanted to prioritize enrollments in the college so that students could take 110 in the first quarter, Eve pointed out that students in engineering and the hard sciences might be shut out of classes. In her response to the proposal, Eve said that she needed
to be certain that schedulers in the other colleges did not mind if their students were

not in 110 the following autumn. Eve said,

And they stopped, they didn’t go any farther, they polled everybody in every college at the University, and then came back to me and said, “Yes, they all said it’s OK.” So they stopped doing—and they didn’t just say, “Oh, don’t worry about it,” or, “We’ll deal with that if it occurs”—they stopped what they were doing and they did what I asked them to do. And that feels pretty good. Because it doesn’t always happen in this department.

In some ways, then, Eve has more power to influence administrative decisions outside of the department than she does inside her own department, where she does not have the authority to hire the teachers who work in the program that she directs. Eve senses that many faculty members within the Department of English think that her only role as director of first-year writing is to train teachers.

Because Eve senses that her administrative work is seen as purely pedagogical, she makes public relations within the department a priority. She works to get on the agenda for English Department Council meetings to say, in effect, “here’s what’s going on in the First-Year Writing Program.” Otherwise, she fears, department faculty “are going to continue in their misunderstanding of what the program is, and what my job is.” Eve sees a bit of irony in the fact that while her mother understands better than many faculty members what Eve’s work as a writing program director entails. Even worse, in her opinion Eve suspects that many of her colleagues regard her work in much the same way that a colleague of hers in graduate school regarded composition. When this aspiring literature scholar learned that she was studying rhetoric and composition, he said, “Oh, you can’t possibly tell me that what you want
to do with the rest of your life is teach first-year writing.” Eve had meant nothing of
the sort; in fact, she did not want to spend the rest of her life teaching nothing but first-
year writing. Still, Eve said, “his comment was one that obviously showed that he
thought that the work was a menial task, it was not something that any person in her
right mind would want to do.” Eve sees a similar perception in the Enormous State
English department:

I think that’s still the perception here, and it’s really amplified when it
comes to administration. You know, it’s only marginally better, I
mean it’s only marginally less—what’s the word I’m looking for?—repugnant to administer a program than it is to have to teach in it. I’m
one step up on the—food chain?—but it’s still below all the other stuff
that’s going on in the department. You know, literary work, I mean
[teaching composition] sits below teaching literature, which is a more
“intellectual” enterprise than directing the program.

In Eve’s view, the work of directing the First-Year Writing Program is not seen as
being on an equal footing with directing Undergraduate Studies, even though that
position carries with it no responsibility for curriculum development or teacher
training.

Paradoxically, the First-Year Writing Program is used to the department’s
advantage in certain circumstances. That is, many faculty members are happy to claim
in its own publicity efforts that the program is one of the best in the country. When I
interviewed Eve, the department as a whole had just won a university teaching award
that carried with it a substantial amount of money for teaching effectiveness programs.
The department had failed to win the award in the previous year; reviewers told the
department, or department members inferred, that one reason they did not win the
award was because so much teaching in the department is done by graduate students. In its second attempt, then, the department featured the First-Year Writing Program on the first page of its proposal as it argued, successfully this time, for the high quality of teaching done by everyone in the department. But while the program makes for good public relations material for the department, Eve argues, "there's not a whit of belief, I think, among the faculty members [aside from members of the rhetoric and composition faculty] here that it's really intellectually worth keeping. It's worth keeping because it gives our graduate students jobs."

As Eve points out, because graduate students teach almost all of the sections of 110, faculty members do not have to. She also senses that teaching 110 is, from the perspective of some faculty members, "a step toward other work that the graduate students will be doing. After 110." In fact, Eve says, "despite the prominence of the first-year program in [the department's application for the teaching award] and in those presentations that we gave those visitors [who decided which department would receive the award], not a single dollar of the money that the department was awarded goes to the First-Year Writing Program." This, even though Eve had written two detailed proposals (one of which, Eve notes, came from Marie) that called for some of the award money to go to the First-Year Writing Program. When I suggested that the First-Year Writing Program had been a good wife, Eve immediately explored the possibility of the metaphor:

You don't pay her, right? You don't give her an increase in pay, you don't recognize her, you assume that the work gets done, and it's only problematic if it doesn't. You know, if somebody else has to be bothered with it, for example, if the students leave 110 and come to 367
or, worse, come to 398 [a course in critical writing required of all English majors], and they can’t write, what’s to fault? First-Year Writing. Or if they come to 367 unprepared, it’s because 110 didn’t do its job. So if the kids are misbehaving, it’s the wife’s fault.

Eve does not, however, see herself as a “composition wife” or as a victim; rather, she sees herself engaged in what she calls a “battle on two fronts.”

The first front is related to day-to-day concerns: control over budget and hiring, the designation of 781 as a graduate course on a par with other graduate courses, and so forth. The other front is about what Eve calls re-education, beginning with graduate students and new faculty members being introduced to the course in a serious manner. She notes, approvingly, that several new literature faculty members either came from schools with strong rhetoric and composition programs or have expressed a strong interest in teaching expository writing; all of these people, she reports, have done quite well in teaching honors sections of 110. Change may occur at what Eve calls a “glacial pace,” but she believes that faculty perceptions of the first-year program can, and gradually are, changing for the better.

One key component in changing faculty perceptions depends on the director herself. “I think it’s very important for the director to be a tenured person,” she argues:

And I think it helps even more if the person is a tenured person who has an active research agenda. Because then I think that it says, “This person isn’t taking the job because she has nothing else to do. . . . A person who doesn’t have an active research agenda is seen as someone who, as I said, maybe doesn’t have anything better to do. But a person who has an active research agenda and maybe has a profile in the—and I’m not there yet, I think maybe in another year, if my book is well-received, there’ll be even more importance, which says, “This person is
recognized in the field and still wants to direct this program even though she doesn’t have to for a raise or for some sort of status in the department."

As Lynn, Mark, Sue, and Marie all report, Eve is committed to and largely succeeds in enacting a feminist vision of collaborative administration. Along side that vision, however, is a commitment to improving the department’s perception of the work done by the first-year program. This commitment requires an engagement with the barnyard squabbles of academic politics and public relations. I’ll give Eve the last word for this section:

And [a prominent record of research] can’t help but shift, even if only at the speed of glacial change, some perceptions in the department. And how people represent to themselves the work of the First-Year Writing Program. And so I’m taking, whenever I can, the time to keep the word circulating, to say things, to let people know.

Conclusion

During nearly seven years as a graduate student, I encountered nothing like the kind of condescending remarks that Eve received when she told her graduate student colleague that she was studying composition. Unlike Sue, I never felt personally attacked when I worked as a peer mentor or WPA. In fact, many of my most satisfying experiences as a graduate student have come from collaborating with colleagues in literature and creative writing, as well as composition and rhetoric. Like Eve, I see reasons to believe that perceptions about the intellectual worth of first-year writing programs are shifting for the better. Still, as Eve, Lynn, Mark, Marie, and Sue make clear, the disciplinary ethos of composition studies is constructed in an often
tense negotiation between compositionists and those in literary study. Those negotiations are not unique to ESU.

Wendy Bishop, for example, writes about waiting in the Atlanta airport to board a plane for the MLA convention. A woman says to Bishop that she must be going to MLA; Bishop replies that she is, the two exchange university names—“like members of a secret society”—and the woman, an 18th century literature scholar, asks Bishop what she teaches:

‘Rhetoric and Composition and Creative Writing,’ I said.  
‘Oh,’ she said . . . ‘Why are you going to MLA?’  
‘They let some of us in now,’ I said. (309)\(^{10}\)

Apparently, old assumptions about and attitudes toward composition as the place that the best “men” (and now women) escape have a way of hanging around, and compositionists learn early in their graduate school careers to recognize, if not to expect, such attitudes from their colleagues in literature. That those who study composition are right to be wary is evident from Terry Caesar’s *Conspiring with Forms: Life in Academic Texts*. In a chapter titled “Croaking About Comp,” Caesar asks, “Can it actually be true that no one who teaches comp tries to write about how empty it is as a subject or even how it gets more theoretically empowered as it gets more empty?” (72). Caesar reports that he is not teaching “comp” at the time of writing his book, and that he hopes never to teach it again. For Caesar, “Composition theory . . . is the sign for hundreds of sections taught by hundreds of instructors reading thousands of essays on what TV commercials mean, or whether women should participate in combat, or my first erection, or what if you were a tree” (72).
There is no way to know if Caesar’s view of students and writing teachers is representative of the discipline as a whole—and who would conduct a survey to find out?—but it is a familiar view, a still-current disciplinary commonplace.

Seen in the context of the case studies in this chapter and of books like Caesar’s, the relatively public complaints that new TAs direct at the Enormous State First-Year Writing Program—that TA training is too theoretical, that the program leans too far to the left, that there are not enough models of “good” writing in the course reader, that writing program administrators will not give them a “straight” answer about how to teach writing—arise in response to the writing program’s desire, embodied in its curriculum and professional development programs, to be taken seriously as an intellectual enterprise. That is, the First-Year Writing Program challenges new TAs to understand composition—as a discipline and a teaching practice—as an intellectual endeavor on a par with the reception and production of literary texts. Despite resistance from some graduate students and literature faculty members, the case studies give reasons to hope that composition, at least at Enormous State, is gaining respectability, if only at the pace of glacial change.

Indeed, Marie, Mark, and Sue—after talking at length about the frustrations of the job—made a point of saying that they did not have a bad year. Marie had wanted to see some shifts in how we talked about prompts and prompt writing, the relationship between prompt writing and evaluations, and that got done. . . . to me it’s a huge revision to be able to say to people, “There are not standard prompts, you are writing your own prompts, we’ll give you models, but you’re not expected to teach your course exactly the same way as another person does.
Mark highlighted what he had learned as a teacher:

I kind of hoped coming into it that it would help my teaching a little bit, but instantly, I think from the moment we had to punch out these fictitious sample syllabi with the rhetoric embedded in them, from that moment on I think that I thought about my teaching in ways that I never did just through teaching.

Sue emphasized the curricular changes they had managed to implement, including a rhetoric that is more firmly embedded in the curriculum than ever before, earlier planning of the pre-quarter workshop, and showcasing reading and writing together; we're constantly trying to emphasize how this is connected to writing . . . we’re trying to make it less about three units in topical ways than we are about the writing instruction that goes on, which I think is an incredible improvement.

I would add that, in the last six or seven years, the First-Year Writing Program has steadily attracted graduate students from literature, composition, and creative writing. Literature students who have worked as WPAs have consistently found tenure track jobs, and, in fact, it is often the case that none of the three WPA positions is filled by a composition student. In this respect, at least, the First-Year Writing Program functions as a site where graduate students—and faculty members, too—begin to heal, rather than to deepen, the divisions between composition, literature, and creative writing.
INTERCHAPTER

The Difficulty of Writing “I”

(As will be immediately clear, this essay began as a talk for English 781. In April, 2000, I presented the version that follows at the College Conference on Composition and Communication in Minneapolis. From the moment I received the invitation to speak to the graduate students in English 781, I planned to use some version of the essay as a dissertation interchapter. I considered yet another revision, but the piece stands well enough on its own. I have, however, used pseudonyms for the teachers and students I write about in this essay.)

On November 30, 1999, I walked into a classroom to speak to approximately 40 new TAs at a joint meeting of the two sections of English 781. The professors who were teaching the course—Eve Wagner, the director of the First-Year Writing Program at Enormous State, and Barbara Burke—had invited me to talk about my dissertation project. Since the graduate students in the course had been working on their literacy narratives, I decided to embed any talk about my dissertation in a fragment of my own literacy narrative. I directed my English 781 presentation very specifically to the people who would be in the room that day, which made the job of revising for a conference paper difficult. Barbara suggested that I simply provide the context for that talk and then invite the audience members to imagine themselves as new TAs in that classroom.
The suggestion seemed like a good idea, but I couldn’t make the writing work; perhaps you could have imagined yourselves as new TAs at Enormous State, but I could not imagine delivering the same talk again. So I have composed, from scraps of that talk, a version of the story I told those TAs last November. It is a version of the same story I have been telling myself and others for years now. It begins like this:

Once upon a time, I was a high school English teacher.

In my first year, I had four preps, five classes, and five separate classrooms scattered throughout the three floors and two wings of Greeley Central High School. For an “office,” I had a decrepit study carrel and a battered green file cabinet in the third floor teachers’ lounge, the only place in the building where teachers could smoke. I didn’t smoke. If I arrived early enough in the morning, I could find the principal on his knees, clutching a Bible and praying. One morning in basic composition, Ken Burgess asked Jeff Seidler to singe his neck hair; Jeff obliged. Early in the quarter, Christine Martinez, a student in my junior developmental language arts class, told me that the ghost of her best friend’s mother was haunting the family. How could they make the ghost go away, she asked me? And on the first day of Spanish I, Shannon Feighny asked if I was the teacher. When I said, “Yes, I am,” she said, “You don’t look old enough to be a teacher!”

As a new teacher, I was assigned to teach “developmental” and “regular” sections of language arts and composition. Teachers with more seniority—that is, everyone else—got to teach the college prep courses. Each fifty-minute class period seemed to stretch into infinity as I struggled to keep my students quiet and in their
seats. I did try to teach Jeff Seidler and Christine Martinez to write tidy little five-paragraph essays and to analyze literature in New Critical terms—this is what I knew from undergraduate English and methods courses—but Jeff and Christine and the rest of my students would have none of it.

Six or seven weeks into that first semester, a more experienced colleague who probably sensed my frustration loaned me a copy of Ken Macrorie’s *Telling Writing*, suggested that I try out some of his ideas in the writing courses I was teaching, and then talk to him about my experience. I took the book home and read most of it in one sitting. It hit me with the power of revelation. Tell the truth—not Truth with a capital T, but small t truth, the truth that emerges in details carefully chosen. Insist that students write about what matters to them and read the work aloud in a circle where other students respond helpfully and honestly. Work with telling details and, above all, write as if the writing mattered. Sentimental realism? Bartholomae would probably say so. Romantic? Undoubtedly. But while I looked young enough to be charged student prices in the high school cafeteria, I was old enough to recognize that Macrorie’s principles might get my students to care about writing.

The next day, I tried a freewriting exercise in my basic composition class. Most of you know the freewriting drill: keep the pen moving so quickly that the good ideas can slip past the internal editor. Don’t think about spelling and punctuation; just let the writing flow; something true and telling will come. For ten minutes, the room was quiet—a significant achievement in itself. Better still, some of the writing showed flashes of honesty, clarity, and telling detail. When I made photocopies of a
few of the papers so that we could see and hear the writing, my students and I were enthralled.

I asked my students to write more, I began writing with them, and we kept reading and responding to each other’s work. I took my colleague’s advice and began reading Peter Elbow and Donald Murray. It seemed to me, and to my students as well, that they were getting caught up in the pleasure of word play, of writing about what mattered to them for readers who wanted to read their work. My writing classes became workshops that began with free writing and progressed through rhythm, sound, metaphor, organizational patterns, editing. I paid obligatory attention to academic forms, but it was stories I craved—essays that shuttled between the personal and the public. Nothing seemed more boring to me than the school writing that I had done as a student and that I thought I was supposed to teach my students how to do.

"Writing means making things large," the novelist Christa Wolf writes in her novel The Quest for Christa T., and it seemed to my students and me that in our essays we made our lives, and each other’s lives, a bit larger. This is not, of course, easy; on what Wolf calls the “long and neverending journey toward oneself,” it is difficult to write “I,” since to write “I” is to risk committing ourselves to a once and for all definition of the self. Christa T. prefers movement to the goal, ambiguity to iron definitions, imagination to adaptation and conformity. My aim in teaching, I now understand, has always been to invite students to begin the hard work of continually composing and recomposing their lives.
Then I came to Enormous State. I expected to work with professors and graduate students who were as excited about Elbow, Murray, and Macrorie as I was. Instead, I learned that there is a name for the composition pedagogy I had embraced; that name, of course, is expressivism, and I quickly learned that expressivism is naive, old hat, maybe even dangerous. The experienced PhD students who had helped to design the first-year writing course I was teaching tended to sneer at my heroes, as did many of the writers I encountered in the pages of *College Composition and Communication* and *College English*.

In "Modernism and the Scene(s) of Writing," for example, Linda Brodkey suggests that expressivist pedagogies reproduce—to the detriment of students—the scene of the solitary writer in a garret removed from the world, waiting for inspiration to strike; James Berlin, in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," argues that expressivism, in its privileging of the individual, prevents collective action and is thus easily co-opted by the commodity capitalism against which expressivists rebel. And in "Writing with Teachers," David Bartholomae asserts that at a moment when postmodern theories of subjectivity have declared the death of the author, it is unethical to encourage students to engage in the corrupt sentimental realism that he finds in expressivist pedagogies and creative non-fiction. It seemed that as a high school teacher, and perhaps as a new teacher of college composition, I had failed to immerse my students in critical reading, that I had ignored class issues and prevented my students from engaging in collective resistance against oppression, and that I was
misguided in my efforts to encourage my students to discover and write in their authentic voices.

I took these attacks personally, and as an act of resistance I turned to what I eventually learned is called “creative non-fiction.” In the teaching philosophy I wrote for English 781, for example, I constructed a fragmented narrative that jumped back and forth between scenes of high school and college teaching in an attempt to compose a teaching and scholarly self that would simultaneously gain a hearing from my social constructionist colleagues and remain true to my expressivist roots. For a course in teaching basic writing, I wrote an essay that struggled mightily against the post structuralist theory that I was encountering at every turn; and in my first CCCCs presentation, I described myself as an unreconstructed expressivist as I narrated a version of the story I have just told—a story that featured, and still features, the collision between my expressivist faith and Berlin, Brodkey, and Bartholomae, whom I thought of as the Killer B’s. And almost hesitantly, I began to write essays about the mountains and rivers of the Rocky Mountain west, where I grew up. Such writing, I believed, would allow me to keep the most important parts of myself safe from the Killer B’s.

I don’t mean to imply that the experience and knowledge I brought with me to Enormous State was at all denigrated by professors and experienced graduate students; rather, I fairly quickly understood that I had a lot to learn and that much of the learning involved struggling with a disciplinary discourse that was not yet my own, and that often felt like a threat to who I was as a teacher. In that struggle, how I saw
myself as a teacher and a writer began to change. And the more I struggled, the more I began to sound like, well, the Killer B's.

In some respects, my situation was similar to that of the basic writers whom Bartholomae describes in “Inventing the University,” in that I had to, as Bartholomae puts it, “appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse” (Villanueva 590). That specialized discourse was, of course, the disciplinary discourse of rhetoric and composition. Almost without realizing it, I became ever more deeply immersed in that discourse: For two years I worked as a graduate student writing program administrator in the First-Year Writing Program, for three years I was a peer mentor, and in one quarter I was a TA in English 781. I even co-edited the composition reader, Writing Lives, that all new TAs had to use at Enormous State. In short, I came to sound like—and to occupy the positions of—some of the graduate students whose theoretical and pedagogical positions I had once so strenuously resisted.

But while the story of my high school encounter with expressivist theories of composition relies on deeply embedded cultural narratives of transformation—it is, after all, a conversion narrative—the story of my graduate school encounter with social constructionism is about revision: about negotiation, boundary blurring, and the continual composition and recomposition of a scholarly, teacherly, writerly self. Not a single, unified self existing prior to language, but a self constructed for and by particular occasions. A self always subject to revision, in negotiation with my students, colleagues, professors, and the discourse of composition studies.
It is in this series of negotiations, I think, that teachers begin to compose, and then recompose, their ethos as teachers. I have in mind here again Nedra Reynolds’ expanded definition of ethos that relies on the word’s denotations of “accustomed places” and of the haunts and abodes of people. At the center of my dissertation are the portfolios that TAs construct in English 781. These portfolios include literacy narratives, teaching philosophies, reading responses, and teaching journal entries; the TAs bring Bartholomae, Brodkey, and Berlin into what Bakhtin calls a zone of familiar contact with their own stories about learning to write and to teach writing. In this way, they begin to locate themselves in various strands of composition studies, in the First-Year Writing Program at Enormous State, in their classrooms, and in their individual histories as literate beings. In this act of locating themselves in and between competing discourses, they compose their ethos as teachers. Chinua Achebe says it best: “People create stories create people; or rather, stories create people create stories.” I would add that stories create places create stories: schools and classrooms, various theoretical positions in composition theory, and the often uneasy relationship between composition and literature in departments of English.

Location, location, location, real estate agents say; everything depends on location. Writing literacy narratives—indeed, any form of creative non-fiction—has been my attempt to invent a university that I can live in, caught as I am between expressivism and social constructionism. My teaching voice, to paraphrase Wendy Bishop, still tends toward expressivism; but that expressivism has a decidedly social constructionist accent. That is, I want to tell stories, but I can no longer claim that
those stories and the arguments I attempt to weave into them are wholly of my own making, let alone that I am engaged in a “free” writing. Rather, I tell the stories that I am compelled to tell—compelled, that is, by a combination of my own desires and the expectations of my teachers and friends, who are sometimes one and the same person.

I felt those desires and expectations acutely last November, standing as I was before a room full of new TAs, in the presence of two members of my dissertation committee, less than a month before job interviews at MLA. I was about to talk about “ethos,” and the problem, I said, was “how to locate myself as a speaker in this room. That is, what ethos am I to construct? Am I to impart whatever particles of practical wisdom I have gathered in the process of writing a dissertation? What sort of authority do I have? My name is on the syllabus, part of a guest list that includes two prominent rhetoric and composition scholars. And if I’m on that list, it would seem that I might be ‘old enough,’ in university years, to pass as an authority of some sort—the authority that comes, in part, from sitting through 781 five times (once as a student, three times as a participant observer, and, last year, as a TA for the course).”

My answer was to describe the doubled “you” I imagined in that room: “you,” TAs and “you,” Barbara and Eve. When I write for Barbara and Eve, as I was certainly doing then—always the student, yearning for their approval—I can position myself with the “we” that includes graduate students, the biggest “you” in the room that day. I am, for a bit longer still, a graduate student; Eve and Barbara are my teachers. From the moment I met them, they have treated me as a colleague, so far as it is possible to do so in a teacher-student relationship. Nevertheless, I still sometimes
feel as young as I did on that day fifteen years ago when Shannon Feighny told me I looked too young to be a teacher.

In their introduction to *Getting a Life*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that in the United States, autobiography has testified to arrival, to getting a successful life together. Literacy narratives written by academics, testify to the author's arrival as a teacher and a scholar. Think, for example, of Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*, Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps*, and Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self*. I suppose we expect the protagonists of literacy narratives to tell us ultimately reassuring stories about the personal and academic success that results from the acquisition and performance of literacy. If we do not believe this, how can we do our work?

When I spoke to Barbara's and Eve's students last November, I hoped to be able, soon, to write myself into an academic literacy narrative of arrival in which I could say "I" as part of the "we" that includes professors of rhetoric and composition. Like the TAs in my dissertation study who opted out of the academy, I learned that I could not compose an academic self. The problem, for me, is not that the academy resists creative non-fiction; in spite of Bartholomae's objections, there seems to be plenty of room in English departments for those who want and need to blur the boundaries between "composition" and "creative non-fiction"; so much room, in fact, that people like Wendy Bishop, Victor Villanueva, and Keith Gilyard can be elected as chairs of CCCC.
Rather, my problem was one of ethos, of location: in writing those essays about western mountains and rivers, I ended by writing myself out of the academy and back into the mountains I left ten years ago for the medium-sized Midwestern city where ESU is located. The writers I prefer to read had something to do with this, too: Gretel Ehrlich, Rick Bass, Terry Tempest Williams, and Scott Russell Sanders reminded me of just how important particular landscapes are to my mental, physical, and spiritual health. I also suspect that my own ambivalence about settling into the hyphens of college teacher-researcher-writer communicated itself in subtle ways to interviewers at the western schools to which I applied—and even to the conference planners of the 4Cs, who dropped the “I” from my presentation title.

This summer, I will move back West and attempt to reinvent myself as a high school English teacher, in a place where I plan to get firmly and happily stuck between the hyphens of Rocky Mountains, clear rivers, broad valleys, and big sky.
CODA

"In those days, I was trying to write my dissertation. Before you become a professor, you have to write a book which is so boring that even you cannot bear to read it over. Once you have done this, you are free to write as you please, but can't."
—Mark Helprin, "A Vermont Tale"

The epigraph for this final section evokes my ambivalence about the genre of "dissertation." I first read Helprin's short story more than 15 years ago, when I had yet to seriously consider pursuing a PhD. Helprin's words rattled around in my mind for years; in the final throes of dissertation writing, they provided a strange sort of comfort. I suspect that the fear of writing a book so boring that even I could not bear to look at prompted me to see what I could do about resisting the dissertation genre, which I tended to lump with the worst of "academic" writing: author-evacuated, coldly impersonal, more concerned with the theoretical than with the practical. At the end of writing this study, I found myself resisting the conventions of conclusions that summarize findings and suggest directions for future research. My resistance was similar to the difficulties that Kristin encountered in writing her teaching philosophy for English 781:

In fiction, reiterating my important points can earn a slash—indicating delete!—through the final paragraph(s). If I haven't demonstrated my point in the story, the ending is not the place to do it. . . . I understand that academic writing has different aims than fiction writing, yet
constructing tidy summary conclusions is difficult because it feels ‘false’ to me.

I was always after stories, and the best response to a story, I like to believe, is another story. In that sense, this dissertation is a story about teaching stories. At the same time, I have worked to read this “story” critically, to understand it through theoretical frameworks. This is thus a dissertation about how genre influences ethos. Recall Nedra Reynolds’ argument that ethos, “like postmodern subjectivity, shifts and changes over time, across texts, and around competing spaces” (Reynolds 326). This single text demonstrates how ethos and “postmodern subjectivity” shift and change within a single text. Narrative is necessarily concerned with time, the separation of interchapters from chapters evokes multiple genres and therefore texts, and the invocation of theorists like Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae has pointed to at least some of the contested spaces within composition studies. In short, I have taken as my models books like Mike Rose’s Lives on the Boundary, Mary Rose O’Reilly’s The Peaceable Classroom, and Victor Villanueva’s Bootstraps.

Clearly, I am fond of stories. At the same time, I am also fond of theories. For me, the tension in writing this dissertation has been between the competing impulses of story and theory. As a storyteller, I resist the urge to explain; as a theorist, I turn compulsively to analysis and critique. The result is a tendency to make sharp distinctions between story and theory; a more profitable direction is to see them on a continuum, as strategies for negotiating ethos. Time, text, space, Reynolds reminds us; these are the components of ethos. To this trio I add audience. To be sure,
Reynolds and, for that matter, all postmodern theorists, pay attention to audience, if by "discourses of power" or "academic conventions" or "social realm" one means "audience." But to say that writers, teachers, and researchers negotiate ethos by locating themselves in time, space, and particular texts is to imply that one's audience is similarly situated and similarly capable of change. Negotiation, after all, connotes the settlement of a matter through conference, discussion, and compromise. "Negotiate" also means to successfully travel along or over, as in negotiating a turn in a road.

Attentive readers will have noted that I tend to use "ethos" and "identity" as nearly interchangeable terms. I initially settled on ethos as a key term because questions of authority, moral character, and ethics are so firmly attached to cultural and disciplinary images of the teacher. Most new teachers at Enormous State—perhaps most new teachers everywhere—begin negotiating their teaching identities with calls for practical advice. "Just tell me what will work," they plead; "I'll worry about theory later—if at all." But in each case I have presented here, new teachers were invited—if not compelled—to ground their teaching practices in theory; and in their struggles to locate themselves in the theoretical discourse, they inevitably couched their narratives and arguments in ethical terms. Thus, as James S. Baumlin notes in his introduction to Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory, any consideration of ethos entails a consideration of a number of terms that range beyond such familiar rhetorical terms as logos and pathos: "...persona, voice, author,
authenticity, and sincerity. Even selfhood, as a category, comes under question” (xvii).

In effect, the graduate student-teachers in this study “earn their rhetorical authority by being responsible—by stating explicitly their identities, positions or locations, and political goals” (Reynolds 330). Reynolds uses as epigraphs Adrienne Rich’s “Notes toward a Politics of Location,” in which Rich locates herself by street address, city, country, continent, hemisphere, Earth, solar system, and universe; and James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, in which Stephen Dedalus locates himself by class, college, city, county, and so on up through the universe (Reynolds 325). She also approvingly cites Cinthia Gannett who, in the first chapter of a book titled Gender and the Journal, devotes “three full paragraphs” to outlining some of the personal and social factors that have influenced her research (332). Reynolds sees this move, along with Gannett’s weaving of italicized passages from her own journal into the text of the research report, as undertaken in “the spirit of disrupting the dominant academic discourse” (332).

A similar spirit informed my desire to include personal essays—the interchapters—in this dissertation. Although I did not imagine that I would be disrupting “the dominant academic discourse,” I did have in mind some kind of resistance to the very genre of the dissertation specifically and to academic discourse in general. I saw a similar desire at work in Elizabeth Rankin’s study of new TAs, Seeing Yourself as a Teacher. That is, Rankin explicitly resists academic theory. As she puts it one of her own interchapters, “At some point during the course of this
project—I don’t even remember when—I typed out a six-page rant about "theory."
(82). Rankin does not resist "theory" so much as "Theory": theoretical language "and
the conventions of academic discourse that dictate the dropping of names at crucial
points in the conversation" (83).

However, sharp dichotomies between the theoretical and the practical, as well
as the academic and the personal, obscure the very notion of a negotiated ethos. So
too does the notion that including italicized passages of a personal journal throughout
an academic text, or weaving "personal" essays between the chapters of a dissertation,
somehow "disrupts" a dominant discourse. Gannett’s book was published by an
academic press—the State University of New York Press; this dissertation, by
definition, is an academic project. Far from disrupting academic discourse, I have
sought to write my way into it. Like a new TA at Enormous State who resists some
aspect of the English 110 curriculum, my own resistance was necessary but not
sufficient for establishing my ethos as a researcher and a writer. Only through
negotiation—with study participants, committee members, other graduate students, a
disciplinary discourse—can one’s ethos begin to emerge. The interchapters, after all,
make the argument that my rhetorical authority, my ethos, is negotiated in
conversations (and debates, too) with the words of others.

As usual, Bakhtin offers a way to think outside of the dichotomies that I have
outlined above. In Toward a Philosophy of the Act, he develops the notion of
answerability in opposition to Kant’s ethical imperative, which claims that we should
make ethical judgments as if we did not exist, or at least as if those judgments could
be applied to anyone at any time. Such an “ought” (as Bakhtin calls it) is symptomatic of objective culture and the theoretical world. This “ought” does avoid relativism, but it also produces a split between the worlds of culture—art, history, and science—and of actual lives. Objective theoretical systems are abstractions of actual experience and exist independently of individual lives, unless those systems can be made answerable to actual individuals. Bakhtin writes that it is impossible for anyone to live in a theoretical world, that we are “essentially and fundamentally non-existent” in the theoretical world; indeed, we are unnecessary in that world (9). For Bakhtin, the problem is to make the world of theory answerable to the actual world.

I once thought that my central aim in this dissertation was to make composition theory answerable to the actual lives of graduate student-teachers. Indeed, when I first began planning this study, some graduate students suggested that the discipline needed to hear such stories. But it is, at best, presumptuous to speak for others. And in a text authored by a single person, it is impossible to claim that the voices in this study speak for themselves: from the moment I began writing—indeed, from the moment I began formulating questions—I began to appropriate the voices and the written words of my “subjects.”

Eventually, I understood that I could not make composition theory answerable to the teaching lives of actual TAs; they did that themselves, and with each other, in English 781 class discussions, in peer groups, in their classrooms, and in their literacy narratives and teaching journals. As I have emphasized repeatedly in this study, in TA literacy narratives graduate students locate their teaching practices in and across
particular strands of composition theory and, in the process, blur the boundaries between current-traditional, expressivist, and social epistemic theories of rhetoric. In their struggles with those classifications, they provide evidence to support Kay Halasek’s contention that variations of this paradigm—all of which appeared in the 1980’s in the work of James Berlin and others—“do little to promote dialogue among the categories they articulate” (17). In English 781, Eve introduced those categories to students in order to help them begin to think about where they might locate their teaching practices. She suggested that MFA students, for example, might find expressivist theories most familiar, and that literature students might recognize in social constructionist pedagogies elements of the critical theory that they were encountering in literature seminars. Despite Eve’s caveats, however, some participants in this study claimed that Eve had marked clear boundaries between MFA and literature students.

The problem here is that, as Halasek notes, the triadic paradigm of composition studies has tended to promote the ascendancy of one school: the social epistemic, or social constructionist (18). In fact, this study has itself been informed by that paradigm—with the difference that I have constructed a binary between expressivism and social constructionism. Related to this binary is another: the “personal” and the “academic,” in which I implicitly—and, I have come to believe, inaccurately—equate expressivism with the personal and social constructionism with the academic. My construction of this binary comes, in part, from my own experience as a teacher and scholar of rhetoric and composition. Certainly, the last interchapter would suggest
that I was predisposed to read with that binary in mind. I often think of this binary in terms of an eternal struggle between philosophers and poets. Recall that Plato would, in his ideal republic, expel the poets. Poets and poetry are dangerous, he warns us; we may be seduced, our reason clouded, by the rapturous language of the poets. In my most uncharitable moments, I think that the champions of post structural theory in literature are philosophers who, like Plato, are suspicious of—maybe even afraid of—poems, novels, and stories.

At the same time, the new TAs in this study also felt the effects of the disciplinary divisions between creative writing and literature, between poets and philosophers. Sarah, for example, ultimately names herself as an expressivist; Emily notes that MFA students sense that they must be quiet about any English 110 assignments that look like creative writing; Julian and Aaron question and ultimately reject the leftist political agendas implicit in many social epistemic rhetorics; and Kristin must find a way to construct an acceptable academic voice when all of her training as a fiction writer tells her that such a voice is "false."

This is not an isolated phenomenon, peculiar to the First-Year Writing Program at Enormous State. Others who have written about TA education note the same divisions between expressivism and social constructionism, and personal and academic, that have preoccupied me in this study. In Richard Lane's dissertation, a socially informed rhetoric is the "experimental" curriculum that threatens teachers who have grown accustomed to a curriculum driven by Donald Murray's Write to Learn—a book that, incidentally, becomes a source of difficulty for some new TAs in
Christine Farris’ *Subject to Change*. In Kathleen Boardman’s “A Usable Past,” stories of teaching experience are seen by some new TAs as “soft” and intellectually suspect—as signs of weakness. I do not mean to suggest that any of these writers are setting up killer dichotomies; rather, the teachers about whom they write, like the participants in this study, must negotiate teaching identities in institutional contexts and disciplinary discourses that all too often insist on the dichotomies that I have been outlining here. These are the discourses that TAs are given, and that they must learn to speak. That is to say, they must make those discourses in some sense their own.

When I think of what I imagine to be the antagonism between poets and philosophers, I like to hope that rhetoric provides a common ground, a point of contact, between poets and philosophers. This is to say that rhetoricians might enable a synthesis of the poetic and the philosophical. But rather than argue that synthesis is the exclusive province of rhetoric, I suggest that all writing is profoundly rhetorical, that creative writers, literary critics, and theorists of all sorts might consider drawing on the resources of all genres. This would allow writers—and teachers—to draw on the rich linguistic resources available in the heteroglossia in which we are immersed. If one takes seriously Bakhtinian notions of dialogism, then what we need is heterogeneity rather than synthesis—a point that Halasek makes throughout *A Pedagogy of Possibility*.

It is to heterogeneity that I am drawn in TA portfolios. In Kristin’s portfolio, particularly, I see a new teacher who works hard to find correspondence between what she knows as a fiction writer and what she know she must do in academic—that is,
expository—writing. "The application of my fiction composing process to the process
of composing my teaching narrative and philosophy was not completely
correspondent," she writes. "My theory and philosophy describe, not create, a
character (me) and situation . . . ." While one could argue that Kristin does, in a sense,
create a character in her teaching narrative and philosophy, the point I want to make
here is that Kristin acknowledges and honors the differences between genres and
processes without privileging any particular one in any theoretical or political sense.
This move, I think, makes her construction of ethos particularly successful: she
locates herself in the "betweens" of fiction writing and composition theory in ways
that enable her to take what is useful from, say, David Bartholomae, without
expending her energy in the debate between expressivists and social constructionists.
Kristin thus makes composition theory answerable to discourses that she finds
internally persuasive and, in the process, makes of Bartholomae's work another
internally persuasive discourse. Not all of it, of course; she does not take him or leave
him. Rather, she appropriates some of his words for her own ends.

She is not, after all, an aspiring compositionist. Nor, for that matter, are most
of the participants in this study. As I noted in the literature review, both Nancy
Peterson and Catherine Latterell argue that adequate TA education requires continual
mentoring and the participation of experienced graduate students and faculty
members. The First-Year Writing Program at Enormous State provides just such a
thorough education. In Chapter Four, I argued that the First-Year Writing Program's
efforts to make composition teaching an intellectually respectable activity in the
department are, in the views of the writing program staff, sometimes countered by implicit messages from other members of the English department. These messages suggest that the "real" work of the department—graduate students and faculty alike—is in research, not teaching. I often feel the same way, but I also know that such feelings lead to unproductive, as well as unfair, characterizations of "literature people."

To be sure, composition (and creative writing, too), in American university departments of English at least, continues to functions as the Other by which literary studies defines itself. That "othering" tends to make of composition a scapegoat; but in my own identification with composition, I have found it hard indeed to avoid making literary studies into the Other—and thereby engage in a bit of scapegoating of my own. The TA portfolios recall me to my senses, however, for I find in them a good faith negotiation with the cultural, disciplinary, and institutional voices with which teachers and writers must contend as they construct teaching lives.

All that I have said thus far has implications for TA education. In the literature review, I noted Catherine Latterell's argument that TA education needs to continue over time, strike a balance between practical issues and theoretical frameworks, and that TAs need "a language for teaching writing" so that they can articulate to themselves and to others what they do and why (Latterell 106). This study supports Latterell's contention; I would add that the element of time is particularly crucial, particularly if TAs are to locate individual agency in a socially constructed self that is capable of re-accenting institutional, disciplinary, and cultural discourses. When she
read an early draft of Chapter Two, Sarah said that she did not think of herself as having much influence on the First-Year Writing Program. She probably did not, at least not directly; but graduate students like Lynn, Marie, Mark, and Sue certainly did have an influence. They were responsible, after all, for designing and running a prequarter workshop, developing course materials, revising teacher handbooks, and so forth. Only by engaging the pedagogical and theoretical discourses that constitute the First-Year Writing Program were they able to begin re-accenting those discourses.

Time is also central to striking a balance between practical issues and theoretical frameworks. While no amount of course work can adequately prepare new teachers to step into the classroom with their ethos fully formed, the fact that new TAs take English 781 at the same time they begin teaching makes it extremely difficult for them to attend to theory. How, they justifiably ask, will composition theory help them to establish their authority as a teachers, design effective writing prompts, facilitate peer groups, and respond effectively to student writing, when there is no time to absorb that theory? To ask new teachers to begin acquiring a language for teaching writing at the same moment they begin to teach writing makes a mockery of teacher education. As Ward Hellstrom put it more than 15 years ago, "We do not take our profession—which is teaching—as seriously as either plumbers or electricians do theirs. If you think I exaggerate, ask yourself whether you would care to have your house wired by an electrician who had been through [only] a three-day orientation program" (Hellstrom 28). TA education at Enormous State, as I have argued throughout this study, involves far more than a three-day orientation program. But at
the time of this study, the Department of English had never been willing to pay TAs to attend a summer orientation during which they would also take English 781. TAs who begin teaching in the Fall of 2000 will be the first group of new TAs to take English 781 several weeks before the Fall term. This change required negotiation, of course, and is evidence that how others perceive the work of composition scholars and teachers is indeed changing for the better.

The group of new TAs who begin teaching at Enormous State in the Fall of 2000 will be given a language for teaching writing, and they will encounter that language sooner than all of their predecessors. But they will not be told exactly how to teach writing. Instead, they will have to make that language their own by giving it their own accents. If they are at all like other TAs who have taught in the program, they will find something in the curriculum and in composition studies to resist, including, especially, the refusal of the writing program staff to provide them with proven recipes for teaching writing. I suspect that the First-Year Writing Program staff can help turn that resistance into negotiation by articulating, as explicitly as possible, the many and often-contradictory ways that the program locates itself and is located by others: its place in the Department of English; its mission in the university, a land grant institution with obligations to the citizens of the state; the theoretical frameworks of English 110; the theoretical conversations and debates in composition studies; and a sense of who their English 110 students will be, and where they come from. Such moves—ones that any writing program ought to take—would demonstrate to new TAs the complexity of the task they are facing and, at the same time, invite
them to begin the ceaseless work of making theory answerable to practice, and practice answerable to theory.

In many ways, this dissertation has been an autoethnography that took seven years to complete. Like all autoethnographies, it tells a critically self-reflective story of the self in the presence of others. In writing it, I have composed and re-composed teaching, researching, and writing selves that, even in the final draft, refuse to stand still. Instead, I write and read both with and against the selves that I construct in this study, in response to the voices of others: study participants, friends, family, teachers, students, writers. In responding to those generous voices, I have finally been able to construct a writing and teaching self that is happy, finally, to write and teach in the expressivist and social constructionist “betweens” of composition theory and pedagogy.
NOTES

1 For a full discussion of the creation of *Writing Lives*—including an exploration of how market expectations shape publisher demands on textbook editors and an analysis of how taking the book to a wider audience influenced our work—see Garnes et al.

2 Linda Brodkey, in *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only*, notes that Francoise Lionnet coined the term “autoethnography” to describe a genre of autobiography that accounts for the dynamic nature of the socially constructed singular self. See pp. 27-28.

3 Certainly, the advent of literacy had a profound influence on the shape of human societies; however, Havelock’s *The Muse Learns to Write*, Ong’s *Orality and Literacy*, and Goody and Watt’s “The Consequences of Literacy” might be the sort of texts that Cy Knoblauch has in mind when he argues that “definitions of literacy are also rationalizations of its importance. Furthermore, they are invariably offered by the literate, constituting, therefore, implicit rationalizations of the importance of literate people, who are powerful (the reasoning goes) because they are literate and, as such, deserving of power. The concept of literacy is embedded, then, in the ideological
dispositions of those who use the concept, those who profit from it, and those who have the standing and motivation to enforce it as a social requirement” (74).

Lynn will make further appearances. She participated in the pilot study for this project, and since that time has worked as a peer mentor and a WPA.

Lynn was a new TA in 1995, when English 781 was numbered 881.01. I should note as well that Eve was not her teacher.

Why, if my representation is too romanticized, would I keep it? For one thing, it nicely demonstrates the power of that image—that is, its power to insinuate itself into studies that hope to criticize such images, or “discourses.” Further, to describe a narrative as “romanticized” is not, thereby, necessarily to discredit it. Indeed, Julian’s own story (as filtered through me) will demonstrate the power of such romanticized notions of teaching to lure teachers into the business in the first place. Besides, a romantic representation is no further from, or closer to, the Marxist utopias lurking in the writings of social constructionists like James Berlin.

I suspect that every English teacher, from middle school on through members of graduate faculties, has been told by someone—acquaintances, friends, colleagues, even family members—that he or she will have to “watch” his her language around them. Even recently, my brother and sister have said to me: “I’ll write to you, but please don’t correct my letters.”

The English 367 program has, since the time of these interviews, been more fully articulated.

Her book was published shortly after this interview. It received rave reviews.
On the day I drafted these pages, a brochure arrived in the mail from MLA. It advertised "Nine Books That Belong on Every Graduate Student's Bookshelf."

Included were A Literary Research Guide, Translating Literature, and the MLA Style Manual. Two books—Introduction to Scholarship and Redrawing the Boundaries—contain a chapter each on composition. From the MLA's point of view, "every" graduate student in the modern languages, apparently including those in composition and rhetoric, need separate volumes devoted to literary research and translation. A couple of chapter son composition and rhetoric, apparently, is all anyone really needs. No one, apparently, really needs anything about teaching—especially teaching composition. "They" may have let a few of "us" in, and even publish a few of "our" books, but there is apparently no pressing need to encourage anyone to listen to "us."
Teaching Narrative

—–’s address at the close of the Pre-Quarter Workshop proves a useful point of departure for the teaching narrative, the first extended writing assignment in 781. Keeping in mind your exploration from that day, draft a personal teaching narrative in which you relate and reflect upon past teaching and/or learning experiences that have had significant impact on your understanding and image of yourself as a teacher of first-year writing. A personal narrative perhaps similar to the essay you wrote in response to your own first essay prompt during the pre-quarter workshop, the teaching narrative should articulate (explicitly or implicitly) your assumptions about and expectations for teaching first-year writing. Because the assignment assumes the narrative mode, the text should also illustrate those assumptions and explorations through example and/or storytelling.

Look to your exploration from the pre-quarter workshop to determine whether you may begin your work on this narrative from that earlier piece and its central image or metaphor, focusing on constructing from (or against) it a teaching narrative. Drafts of the narrative are scheduled for peer review on Monday, October 6; please bring five copies in addition to one for yourself. Final drafts are due as part of the final portfolio on Wednesday, December 10.
Teaching Philosophy

The teaching philosophy (or teaching statement), although related to the teaching narrative in subject, differs from that earlier narrative in that it reflects much more specifically on this quarter's experiences in 110 and 781 in the construction of a working philosophy of teaching first-year writing. (For examples of other teaching philosophies, please turn to Starting Places.) In this assignment, you may focus on a single issue or theme (e.g., authority, collaboration, the relation of reading and writing) or take a broader look at your assumptions about writing instruction as they present themselves in daily classroom activities, teaching methods, response to student writing, etc. Designed to synthesize selected aspects of your thinking over the quarter and to help you begin to establish a professional teaching portfolio, your statement on teaching may draw on all of your work in 781 (e.g., teaching/learning log, teaching narrative, class presentations, short writing assignments) and peer groups, the pre-quarter workshop, and any other reading or writing you did as you prepared to teach 110. You must also incorporate into the statement—which is a more “academic” exercise—explicit references to the readings in 781 and/or other external sources in composition studies research and scholarship. Drafts are scheduled for peer review on Monday, November 24; please bring five copies in addition to one for yourself. Final drafts are due as part of the final portfolio on Wednesday, December 10.
Class Presentations

As your syllabus indicates, groups leading class discussion “will design seminar activities around the day’s readings and lead class members through the activities and discussion.” Your activities and/or discussion should focus on the section from Scenarios you’ve been assigned as well as related theoretical issues and their practical consequences for you as teachers. You should plan to use the entire class session. Think of this presentation as a teaching event in which your goal is to engage your classmates in a conversation about the readings, scenarios, and their teaching. You are free to use handouts, transparencies, etc. or to assign (brief) additional readings.

Due no later than one week after the presentation is a collaboratively written process statement from the group that looks retrospectively at the presentation as a “teaching event” and articulates how this “teaching event” affects how you assign and evaluate students’ class presentations in your own courses. The report, approximately two-three pages, should address the experience of your collaboration as well as your experience teaching your classmates.

Your group must read four to five essays in addition to those on your syllabus and turn in an annotated bibliography of those sources. You will give classmates copies of those annotations, as well. Finally, you are required to meet with us [i.e. the instructor whose section the students were enrolled in] at least a week before your presentation.

Teaching/Response Journals

An important aspect of our course is the connections we make among our course readings, class discussions, and classroom practices. The teaching/response journal represents an opportunity for you to explore those connections in writing. You will be expected to write at least two entries per week that deal with issues/questions that emerge from the readings, class discussion, and/or your teaching. Each entry should
explore some connection between the three areas listed above. We are interested in seeing you articulate a relationship between theory and praxis, between talk about (and scholarship about) teaching and classroom practice. While we are prepared to give you some flexibility with your entries, we discourage entries that only recount the events of your class on a given day. We ask that such an account be grounded in the readings.

We will read selected entries in the teaching/response journals throughout the quarter, but you will be asked to choose three to five entries at the end of the quarter to place in your portfolio.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

E 781, "Introduction to the Teaching of First-Year English"  MW 1:30-3:18  
Autumn 1997

Eve Wagner (University 043)        Barbara Burke (College 304)
Office: Rhetoric 408               Office: Rhetoric 361
Office Hours: 12:30-1:30 MWR       Office Hours: TBA
Phone:                             Phone:
E-mail:                            E-mail:

BRIEF STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES:

E 781, "Introduction to the Teaching of First-Year English," introduces new teaching assistants to composition studies—its theory, research, scholarship, and pedagogy—as a means of preparing them to teach E 110. The course aims to familiarize students with the critical issues surrounding writers, readers, and the meaning of texts within
the institutional and disciplinary boundaries of composition studies. Because the best preparation for teaching must include understanding current disciplinary conversations, we will examine within the theoretical framework provided above such issues as defining academic discourse and establishing appropriate classroom authority. At the same time, the course will address on a more practical level issues that are particularly vexing for new instructors: developing writing assignments, establishing grading policies, responding to student writing, and meeting the needs of a diverse student population.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

REQUIREMENTS, PAPERS, EXAMS:
Throughout the quarter, students will be asked to compose a range of written assignments, including (but not limited to) a teaching log, teaching narrative, short writing assignments (e.g., sample writing prompts), and teaching philosophy. Small groups of students will also lead one class discussion and prepare relevant activities and materials for that presentation (e.g., class exercises or short writing assignments, annotated bibliographies). The final portfolio (which will include drafts and final versions of the narrative and philosophy as well as selections from the log) will account for 70% of the final course grade. The class presentation (including materials prepared for that presentation and the summary of the work) will account for 30% of the final course grade.
SYLLABUS

9/24 COURSE INTRODUCTION

9/29 NAMING OURSELVES
   Seeing Yourself

10/1 NAMING THE PROCESS
   CT: Murray (3-6), Emig (7-15), Perl (17-42),
      Gorrell (97-103)

10/6 THE PERSONAL ESSAY
   CT: Haefner (511-23),
      Rose (525-47)
   WRITING WORKSHOP
      "Seeing Yourself as a Teacher"
      Narratives

10/8 NAMING THE DISCIPLINE
   CT: Berlin (233-48), Bizzell (735-42)

10/13 NAMING STUDENTS
   CT: Bizzell (297-306, 365-89),
      Rose (323-63)

10/15 PERSONAL/ACADEMIC
      WRITING
   CT: Bartholomae (479-88),
      Elbow (489-500), Bartholomae & Elbow (501-509)

10/20 GROUP DISCUSSION #1:
      Writing Assignments
      Scenarios (1-17)

10/22 THE ACADEMY
   CT: Delpit (565-88)
      Bartholomae (589-619)

10/27 WRITING (AND) CLASS
   CT: Villanueva (621-37),
      Brodkey (639-58)

10/29 GROUP DISCUSSION #2:
      Readings in Comp. Classes
      Scenarios (18-33)

11/3 RHETORICAL SITUATION
   CT: Sommers (43-54), Ong (55-76), Ede & Lunsford (77-95)

11/5 GROUP DISCUSSION #3:
      Responding
      Scenarios (34-62)

11/10 GRAMMAR, USAGE, STYLE
   CT: Hartwell (183-211)
      Witte & Faigley (213-31)

11/12 GROUP DISCUSSION #4:
      Grammar
      Scenarios (63-77)

11/17 COLLABORATION
   CT: Bruffee (393-414),
      Myers (415-37), Trimbur (439-56)

11/19 GROUP DISCUSSION #5:
      Classroom Discourses
      Scenarios (78-99)

11/24 WRITING WORKSHOP
      Teaching Philosophies

11/26 CONFERENCES
      Portfolios

12/1 TEACHING, IDEOLOGY,
      AND EPISTEMOLOGY
   CT: Shaughnessy (289-95),
      Berlin (679-99), Hairston (659-75)

12/3 FOCUS GROUPS:
   Course Design
   Scenarios (100-46)

12/10 PORTFOLIOS DUE

226
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

I consent to participating in (or my child’s participation in) research entitled:

**Composing Ourselves: Ethos and the Negotiation of Teacher Identity**

*Andrea A. Lunsford* ____________ or his/her authorized representative has
(Principal Investigator)

explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected
duration of my (my child’s) participation. Possible benefits of the study have been
described as have alternate procedures, if such procedures are applicable and
available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information
regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full
satisfaction. Further, I understand that I am (my child is) free to withdraw consent at
any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me (my
child).
Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ___________________________ Signed: _________________________

(Participant)

Signed: _________________________ Signed: _________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her Authorized Representative) (Person Authorized to Consent for Participant - if required)

HS - 027 (Rev. 3/87) - - To be used only in connection with social and behavioral research.
Composing Ourselves: Ethos and the Negotiation of Teacher Identity

Information for Participants

**Purposes and Benefits:** I am interested in studying the contexts in which graduate students learn to teach composition. I am particularly interested in the stories we tell each other and ourselves about what it means to teach college composition. How does the First-Year Writing Program shape TAs? How do they shape it? How do graduate students balance the often-competing demands of being graduate students and being teachers? How do individual expectations about teaching, as well as prior experiences as readers and writers, influence teachers’ perceptions of composition theory and practice? If you participate in this study, potential benefits include:

- a further opportunity to talk about teaching with colleagues
- the possibility of proposing conference papers and, perhaps, of publishing together
- the opportunity to participate in a research project that I hope will provide our profession with a deeper understanding of how graduate students construct their identities as teachers and scholars.

Specifically, I am asking you to agree to:

- share the portfolio and teaching log that you write for English 781 (for those who are enrolled in the course)
• one 30-60 minute tape recorded interview during the Autumn Quarter of 1997 and one 30-60 minute tape recorded interview during the Spring Quarter of 1998. You will be free at any time during our interviews to ask that I turn off the recorder. I will provide you with copies of interview transcripts and give you the opportunity to review them and to delete, or add, anything you wish. Tapes will be erased one year after the interview date.

Confidentiality: Your name will not appear in any report of this study, and all quotations will be pseudonymous. If you are enrolled in English 781, the work you produce for that course will, obviously, have been seen by the instructor, but by no one else without your consent. I am not planning to observe your classes unless you invite me to do so. Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Goodburn, Amy and Carrie Shively Leverenz. “Feminist Writing Program Administration: Resisting the Bureaucrat Within.” *Feminism and


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