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Beyond Response: Transcending Peer Feedback Through Critical Collaborative Assessment

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BEYOND RESPONSE:

TRANSCENDING PEER FEEDBACK THROUGH CRITICAL COLLABORATIVE

ASSESSMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Title: Beyond Response: Transcending Peer Feedback Through Critical Collaborative
Assessment

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Composition has long recognized a rift between good classroom pedagogy for the
instruction of writing and the institutional necessity of summatively assessing writing for
a grade. While the former is student-centered, process-oriented, often collaborative, and
increasingly constructionist in its approach, the latter is typically authoritarian and
positivistic.

Several pedagogies, such as contract grading and portfolio assessment, have
emerged to address the rift between the two practices. By delaying or de-emphasizing
grading, those pedagogies seek to help students stay focused on process writing and help
teachers remain free of the dirty work of assessment.

This dissertation contends that existing pedagogies have yet to truly reconcile the
rift between assessment and practice. Delaying or contracting grading does not unify
pedagogy and assessment into a single force. To truly unify pedagogy and assessment, I
propose *Critical Collaborative Assessment*, the process through which teachers help
students learn to assess from an institutional perspective through the use of whole-class
workshops, small groups, and individual peer-assessment.

The work begins with an analysis of peer response—the closest common activity
to CCA—and contends that while peer response excels as a collaborative exercise, it
ultimately falls short as a fully constructionist exercise. We can actualize peer response

as a more fully constructionist exercise by inviting students to meaningfully exercise the most authoritative language of the discourse community, i.e. grades.

Doing so not only unifies pedagogy and assessment, it also creates a situated learning environment in which students learn via practice rather than instruction, a post-process pedagogy in which existing hermeneutic moves are discussed, and an environment of disclosure where our academic identities are revealed. Furthermore, CCA, which must permit students to question the nature of assessment and institutional power, reinvigorates critical pedagogy towards pragmatic aims.

The later chapters offer an analysis of the existing research on other forms of peer-based assessment, as well as a detailed explanation of how CCA can be implemented in the classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tell me and I will forget.

Show me and I will remember.

Involve me and I will understand.

Teaching Proverb

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INTRODUCTION

I started teaching composition in 1992 at American University. A graduate student in the Literature department, I was given the opportunity to teach the introductory writing course for first-year students. As I had always wanted to teach, I brazenly leapt into the classroom with both feet forward, and given that it was my first time teaching, I have to say that I did at least a respectable job ... of teaching *literature*.

As a composition class, it was a train wreck.

At the conclusion of the semester, I sat down with a pile of student papers to discover that, on the whole, they were in no notable ways superior to the writings my students submitted months earlier. Having been groomed in "lit" with a focus on Chaucer and medieval studies, I cultivated students capable in literary analysis but not particularly savvy in the ways of composition. It would be erroneous to say that my student writers were devoid of improvement. However, to whatever extent their writing did improve, it was ancillary to the development of literary appreciation.

That realization struck me quite starkly, almost frighteningly, and it was catalyzed by the "Teaching Composition" course I took concurrently with my first semester in the classroom. Teaching Composition, which introduced me to Murray, Elbow, Flower, and a range of other theorists, suggested quite plainly that everything I was doing in my class was ineffective. However, it was not until I sat down with the final pile of papers that I truly realized how little composition I had taught.

The next semester would be different. Fortified with composition theory and supported by the knowledgeable, composition-minded faculty of AU's Writing Program, I established a course rich in composition practice, including peer response work, logic

and argumentation, personal narratives, and a wide range of "process" exercises. The course was, in a word, better.

But then came Carolyn. A student of mine, she walked into the communal graduate student office and sat herself down to begin what would be for me a naggingly troubling conversation. Carolyn, having met with her peer response group in class earlier that day, wanted to know what I thought about her paper. Still green in the ways of teacher-student conferencing and clinging to hopes about the magic of nondirective feedback, I turned the conversation back to her with a series of fairly thoughtful questions, and the two of us had quite a productive talk about her paper and the responses she received from her peer group. Then, just when I thought the conversation was over, just when I expected Carolyn to return her paper to her book bag and leave my office rousingly satisfied with the progress we made, she asked once again how I would grade her work.

The question was astonishing. Did she not know that she had an excellent peer response session earlier that day? Did she not know that I just quite elegantly engaged her in nondirective discussion about her paper? Was she entirely unaware of the composition theory in which our discussion was rooted? Despite my having done everything "right," Carolyn just wanted to know her grade and what she had to do to "fix" her paper to make it an "A."

In one sense, I can look back at that conversation and point to a series of things I could have done better beginning with the peer response exercises and ending with the way I engaged her in conversation. I was still finding my way as a composition teacher

(as I still am today), and did not construct the most effective combination of forces in my class.

In another sense, however, Carolyn still troubles me today. I think Carolyn troubles many composition educators. Or rather, I fear that the entire field of composition faces a Carolyn problem, i.e. a grade anxiety issue.

What I am suggesting is that Carolyn's astute concern exposes certain tensions in composition that we as a community repeatedly address but have yet to resolve. These tensions manifest between what happens in class while we teach and what happens outside of class when we assess. In the classroom, "good pedagogy" generally favors student-centered, collaborative learning—peer response groups, workshops, reflective practices, etc. "Good pedagogy" generally favors process-oriented instruction—prewriting, drafting, revising, etc. And "good pedagogy" generally values constructivist approaches to writing—understanding audience, disciplinarity, portability, etc.

Yet those values diminish when we leave the classroom and sit down with a cup of coffee and a pile of student writings requiring grades. Summative grading, as it has traditionally been exercised and still largely is exercised today, is neither student-centered nor constructivist. It is positivistic, individualistic, and non-heuristic.

Therefore, Carolyn's seemingly simple desire for me to instruct her in how to "fix" her paper for a good grade actually exposes four seething questions: First, to what extent is there tension between the student-centered nature of peer response and the teacher- or institution-centered nature of assessment? On the one hand, "good pedagogy" establishes that students often learn best when doing so through peer-based interaction. On the other hand, and despite emerging formative assessment exercises, we find that

summative assessment predominately or exclusively occurs as a non-interactive, non-collaborative experience by the teacher alone. In Carolyn's case, the student-centered nature of her learning did not address the teacher-centered nature of grading. But need those two forces be at odds? Can we find a pedagogy to harmonize them?

Second, and similarly, to what extent is tension between "good pedagogy" and assessment not only between student-centered and teacher-centered practice, respectively, but equally between constructivism and positivism? From a constructivist perspective, we teach students about the powerful role understanding audience plays when writing, and that meaning and meaningfulness do not exist independently of culture, context, and discipline. Meanwhile, summative grading remains essentially positivistic. The teacher, as institutional representative, assigns a paper or portfolio a grade. As such, does only one meaning-maker's meaning—the teacher's meaning—truly count?

Third, to what extent is there tension between the "good pedagogy" of non-authoritative comments offered by peer response groups and the authoritative comments offered by institutional assessors, i.e. writing faculty? While Carolyn might have been the beneficiary of useful, possibly even insightful feedback from her peer response group, she was not content with its responses because the group lacked the authority to assign her paper *the* grade that would count. Hence, and seemingly logically, she sought out that commentary that would most directly affect the final grade for her work, and all the non-directive, non-grading discourse I offered her failed to suffice in place of the brass tacks about how to "fix" her paper so that it would earn an "A." While many contemporary pedagogies offer ways to de-emphasize grading so that students focus on

their writing alone, does not the need to de-emphasize grades and grading only substantiate the very real tensions between assessment and "good pedagogy"?

Fourth, to what extent is the tension between "good pedagogy" and grading also a process problem? We expose students to *writing* as a process but we do not expose them to summative assessment as a process. Paraphrasing Brian Huot, we show students the process of how to create writing but not the process of how it finally and authoritatively is read. Yet if students do not know how their writing will be read (in the fashion of summative assessment), how can students know how to write? Should assessment earn equal recognition as a "process" the same way as writing? As the two are inextricably linked, should students be privy to each in relative measure? While exercises such as peer response groups attempt to reconcile the writing-process vs. assessment process tension, we only need look at the first three tensions to understand why peer response is not enough. To reconcile this problem, I suggest that we forge beyond it.

What the grading anxiety problem distills down to is that, as Brian Huot remarks, "we have yet to create in any substantive way a pedagogy that links the teaching and assessing of writing." Though we are making strides through portfolio assessment and other practices, composition theory has yet to unify pedagogical practices with grading practices. Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon (2000) proffer essentially the same claim: "Traditionally—and oddly enough—writing assessment has not been directly related to instruction" (p. 7), a fact they contribute to the irresolution between the constructivist nature of most contemporary writing instruction and the positivist nature of most traditional methods of assessment.

In fact, it seems that many of the major movements in composition emerged from at least a tacit recognition, if not outright desire to resolve, the aforementioned tensions between pedagogy and assessment. I will discuss three here, the first of which being Peter Elbow's "Teacherless Writing Class," which was motivated by Elbow's own negative experiences with being assessed. He writes, "I had another brash, first-time teacher, Jonathan Wordsworth, when I went to Oxford ... and I was still tender and needed praise. After five or six weeks of tutorials with him, I began to arrive empty-handed week after week because I couldn't write my essays" (1988, xiii). Elbow, it seems, suffered deep scars from the assessments he received from teachers, so much so that sabotaged his own Ph.D. studies at Harvard: "People had advised me, 'Just get the Ph.D. out of the way!' I barely managed to write my first semester papers, and they were judged unsatisfactory, and I knew things wouldn't get better. I quit in my second semester before they kicked me out" (1988, xv).

Is it any wonder, in face of such emotional scars from critiques of his work by faculty, that Elbow sought a teaching method "without teachers"? At the core of his experience appears to be that tension between writing as process vs. positivistic assessment. While Elbow's reactions to criticism strike me as somewhat overstated, one thing remains clear: he tapped into a sentiment held by a great many writers, students, and educators alike concerning the oppressive force assessment can have on student writers. The spread of expressivism and workshop-writing over the past thirty years is testament to that.

The second pedagogical method that seeks to address the tension between effectively teaching writing and effectively assessing it is contract grading, which

negotiates a predetermined amount of work with each student. Students who contract to achieve an "A" usually accept a higher workload and more rigorous set of evaluative standards than students who contract to achieve a "C." Depending on the particular method used, "A"-contracted students may have to produce more, longer, and/or better writing than their "C"-contracted peers. No matter the desired grade, contract grading dematerializes the problem of assessment for teacher and student alike because each party knows what the student aims to achieve based on how much the student does.

As Ira Shor (1996) describes contract grading in his own classroom, students are "guaranteed a 'B' for [their] final grade" if they meet the following criteria:

- if you meet the course requirements on lateness and attendance (read it carefully)

- if you hand in your assignments on time ...

- if your mid-process drafts are really mid-process ...

- if your final versions represent real revising or changing, not just correcting or touching up ...

- if your final versions are well copy-edited ...

- if all your assignments show two crucial ingredients—*effort* and *thinking*;

- if you hand in your journal writings on time ...

- if you show me that you are giving good feedback to others in the class ...

  (Shor, 1996, p. 99)

It is interesting that aside from wanting to see some "thinking," Shor deliberately excludes quality as a "B" criterion, reserving that for considerations surrounding an "A". He writes that "B" students "don't have to worry about quality in one sense of the word

(true excellence—whatever that is), but [they] do have to worry about 'quality' in another sense (substance)" (p. 100).

Shor's goal? To get students to stop focusing on grades and focus instead on their writing. By contracting a "B" that does not involve a significant application of institutional standards aside from "thinking," he strives to help students relax and focus on writing rather than meeting institutional pressures to excel. As he writes to them in his syllabus, "Frankly, I hope that you will just meet the contract for a B and take this as a chance to *forget about grades* for the whole semester," (p. 100, author's emphasis). In this sense, contract grading takes a good step towards helping students focus on process—how they write—rather than product—the institutional value of the final draft. To an extent, it allows Shor to work exclusively as the students' advocate rather than having to play the grader, as well. Furthermore, it allows Shor's students to work on constructing meaning rather than placating more positivist institutional standards.

We see a similar impetus to de-emphasize grades at work in the third and perhaps most prominent method of contemporary composition instruction: portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment typically involves what Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon refer to as "delayed assessment"—grading the entire portfolio at the end of the semester rather than individual papers along the way—the timing of which

> promotes revision by providing both time for revision to occur and motivation to revise, invites students to assume responsibility for their own learning by placing some measure of control over success into the student's hand, and generates a 'success now' atmosphere that helps students and teachers alike feel better about the learning experience. (2000, p. 34).

Or as Irwin Weiser (1992) puts it, delayed assessment through portfolios affords "instructors an opportunity to respond to student writing in progress, to offer suggestions for continued revision as well as praise for improvement, and to suspend the assignment of grades until students had the time to learn, practice, and refine new skills" (p. 90).

In similar fashion to other portfolio theorists (Gold, 1992, Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000; Lucas, 1992; Yancey, 1992), Weiser sees a dichotomy, if not outright opposition, between the ability to "learn, practice, and refine new skills," which are pedagogical aims, and "the assignment of grades," an institutional and bureaucratic practice not necessarily relevant to actual teaching. In fact, he quite plainly asserts that the

> major advantage of a portfolio evaluation system is that it allows students to put aside, at least temporarily, the paralyzing effect of grades and concentrate instead on improving their writing. As all writing teachers know, when students receive graded papers, the first thing they do is turn to the last page to see what their grade is. For many students, looking at the grade is *all* they do when a paper is returned to them. If they are satisfied with the grade, they see no particular reason to look at marginal or terminal comments. And if ... the grade is low, they simply find in it confirmation of what they already suspect: they cannot write. (p. 93, author's emphasis)

Weiser articulates what many writing instructors believe: the teaching of writing and the grading of writing cannot harmoniously coexist because grades impede learning by becoming the students' dominant, if not singular focus. Weiser feels grades also hold too

much potential for diminishing self-esteem.   As such, he advocates that we temporarily free students from the oppression of grades.

Yet students are not the only ones who benefit from non-grading practice. For teachers, Weiser writes,

> we can separate, at least temporarily, the two frequently conflicting roles assigned us by the institution: evaluator and instructor. Under the conventional evaluation systems, the teacher-as-evaluator role is dominant.... The grade becomes all-important in the student's mind, and the teacher is perceived as a grader. (p. 95-96)

Weiser's reference to the "two frequently conflicting roles" is important. We want to be an advocate for students and want them to believe we are on their side, yet that role can be impeded and even overshadowed by our role as assessor. Kathleen Blake Yancey and other theorists (Britton et al., 1975; Sommers, 1982) reinforce Weiser's position, reasoning that

> when *reading to grade* ... teachers shift their posture from one of 'inquiry reading,' in which the goal is to understand and respond as a reader, to one in which the goal is to explain and justify a formal, fixed, and critical assessment. These two reading processes are different processes, and portfolios can distinguish between them and between their functions. (Yancey, 1992, p. 111)

Thus, educators not only seek the means to free students from grading's oppressive nature, they also seek the means to read for the pure meaning making experience rather than as an institutional representative.

As the popular thinking goes, by separating the teaching of writing from the evaluation of writing, portfolios, as Sandra Murphy and Mary Ann Smith (1992) contend, "can integrate assessment and good practice" (p. 59). Yet is not the term "integrate" at least somewhat problematic? While portfolio assessment may allow educators the *temporary* freedom to respond as readers rather than graders, this hardly seems to "integrate" summative assessment—grading—and "good" teaching. It hardly seems to harmonize them. As we just saw certain authors state quite plainly, delayed assessment nevertheless reinforces the opposition between the teaching of writing and the grading of writing by keeping them apart and distinct.

All three of these methods—"teacherless classrooms," contract grading, and delayed portfolio assessment—are simply trying to resolve Carolyn's problem. The problem, as Huot and Hamp-Lyons pointed out, is that composition theory as a whole struggles to reconcile pedagogy and assessment. Therefore, devoid of a unified vision of grading and good practice, the portfolio movement's effort to delay grading might be the best available "resolution" to the conflict. Lacking a means of executing both ends simultaneously —"good pedagogy" and assessment—it seems sensible enough to keep them apart so that they do not interfere with one another. However, it should be noted that separating them hardly establishes confluence or harmony. In fact, the call for separation is an implicit acknowledgement of an inability to get pedagogy and assessment to work together.

Furthermore, portfolio work offers boons in other regards, such as (1) the prospect for students to self-reflect on their own work as part of the assessment process (Hamp-Lyons, 2000; Yancey, 1992), (2) the ability for teachers (and students) to assess each

student's writing process, and (3) the capacity for students to self-select those writings on which they will be graded. All of those offer heuristic value we should cherish rather than dismiss.

Yet returning to Huot's point that "we have yet to create in any substantive way a pedagogy that links the teaching and assessing of writing," might it not be worthwhile to seek out a pedagogy that truly unifies "good pedagogy" and assessment? Is it possible to envision a unified methodology that permits the boons of portfolio while eliminating the schism between teaching and grading?

After all, delayed-assessment practices such as portfolio systems have not gone without concerns. Portfolio work raises several important questions with respect to assessment: Namely, will delayed assessment help students produce better writing according to institutional standards? Or will not worrying about grades produce happier, more confident writers who are not effectively better writers in the end? Will we find ourselves facing a stack of student portfolios, as Sue Ellen Gold (1992) did, "hop[ing] to find at least a few pieces of quality writing" so that we can "justify the use of portfolios" (1992, p. 27). In other words, if we delay grading do we equally risk quality and/or rigor?

Or should we be concerned with institutional standards at all? As we see in contract grading and portfolio practice, as well as the expressivist movement, a powerful argument exists for (1) helping students develop their process regardless institutional standards; (2) helping students learn to love writing and connect with their words, and (3) helping students to become life-long writers. By many teachers' reasoning, if we can do that, we have done enough.

Yet the approaches above still set institutional standards at odds with good pedagogy. Such approaches sometimes force faculty to decide between helping students embrace writing and holding them to more traditional institutional goals. As do many educators, I find this conflict unpalatable at the very least, and utterly unacceptable in the final analysis. We will never teach writing as effectively as possible, and composition probably will not achieve respect as a discipline, until we reconcile grading and "good pedagogy." Otherwise, we will sacrifice instruction to meet institutional assessment goals, or sacrifice institutional assessment goals and the respect that comes with them in order to achieve succeed pedagogically.

As such, the question becomes as follows: where should we begin a formulation for unifying grading and teaching? The answer, I contend, is in collaborative learning, and more specifically in collaboration between teachers and students in the grading process. Building on Brian Huot's work ideas in *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment* (2002), the delineation between teaching and assessment can equally be recognized as a problem of student-teacher interaction, or more precisely, a lack thereof.

In *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge* (2002), Kenneth Bruffee writes that "education initiates us into conversation, and by virtue of the conversation initiates us into thought" (p. 133). For students in our composition classes, that means conversation about how to write well. Yet while "knowledge ... is something people construct interdependently by talking together" (Bruffee, 2002, p. 133), academia typically fails to involve students in discourse about what might be the most powerful construct within the academy: grades.

Some academics may readily object, arguing that effective teachers certainly do engage students in a conversation about grades. Yet such "conversation" is limited. We may define for students the standards against which they will be graded, e.g. offering them a rubric, and we may go to noble lengths to explain to students the grades they received, e.g. written responses on papers and student conferences, and we may even listen heartfully to individual student's grievances about their grades, but seldom do we *invite students to join with us in grading discourse.*

Note that I did not say, "a discourse *about* grading," which, though useful, maintains grading as something distinct from student practice. In other words, a discourse about grading may discuss why a paper already received a given grade but not discuss the grade a given paper should receive. Instead, and as an extension of Bruffee's collaborative theories, I mean that we must engage students in grading discourse, which means involving them not in the conversation *about* grading but in the conversation *of* grading. In effect, students and educators should grade interactively and dialogically.

For at least three reasons, this might sound like a radical proposal: First, it might seem as though such a practice would degrade rigor and standards. After all, inviting students into the grading process would seem to grant them license to award each other "A's". Second, it might seem to fly in the face of compositional measures to diminish the presence of grading the classroom, e.g. contract grading and portfolio assessment. Third, it might just seem downright impractical—a logistical nightmare.

Why Students Need Participative Assessment

As I hope to demonstrate, however, interactively grading with students will produce the opposite effect so many academicians sensibly fear. Rather than diminishing rigor, grading dialogically with students will elevate standards by acculturating students to the institution's expectations. I will delve into this point in much greater detail later on. For now, and building on Stanley Fish's point in *Is There A Text In This Class?* (1980) that "it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features" (p. 14), I argue that students struggle to understand and compose "good writing" primarily because they are not a part of the interpretive community that defines "good writing." Students do not get to *exercise* the language of that community—the language of grades. And students do not get to act as functionaries of that community—as graders. Relegated to being academic window shoppers, students cannot intimately understand and meet the interpretive community's expectations.

How Student Grading Works

However, by inviting students to participate in grading, we not only can show them how interpretive communities "produce meanings" but equally help them understand the meanings those communities produce. That said, and this point proves essential, I advocate genuine grading process discourse between students and faculty, which means two things: (1) constructing genuine—summative—grades that genuinely count for genuine papers; (2) helping students to understand the community's standards

rather than merely throwing them into the grading process without the necessary foreknowledge.

As I will advocate dialogic grading, the educator's role cannot be to create *some* interpretive community but rather to represent, insofar as any one person can, *the* interpretive community in which students, in seeking education, hope to gain approval. Thus, rather than calling for faculty to compromise standards by grading with students, educators should remain full representatives of the institution's standards. In essence, faculty already do represent those standards, which is why they are faculty, and all I advocate is that faculty bring their complete understanding of writing and rigor into open and honest discussion with students. Doing so in no way requires compromise; it does not require that faculty sacrifice even an iota of integrity with respect to assessing student work. It only requires that faculty invite students to be co-agents in the process.

Huot poses a similar idea, suggesting that faculty work with individual students through the writing *and* assessment processes. Yet this is where he and I depart, though I think we never disagree. Whereas Huot favors a more personal interaction with students that helps them to construct their own goals and assess their progress towards those goals, I favor acculturating students to the institution's pre-existing standards by working with students in large or small groups. I call for utilizing such discussions to collaboratively and summatively grade individual works by students in the class and/or group, thus turning the assessment of student writing into a pedagogical force.

Acculturating groups of students to institutional practices may raise concern from teachers who believe our job must involve the cultivation of independent thinkers: if all we do is teach students to apply the institution's standards blindly and without full

intellectual engagement then won't we have indoctrinated students rather than educated them? In response, we first should consider that more traditional and popular methods also indoctrinate students into institutional standards. Traditional grading methods—the teacher returning every paper with a grade—require students to write the way the institution expects while offering students only the most minimalist ability to interact with and reflect on institutional standards. Depending on their application, contract grading and portfolio assessment may do the same, at least to the extent that students want to exceed Shor's "B" in the former or are concerned with the institutional quality of their products in the latter. In short, to whatever extent students write to meet institutional expectations without engaging those expectations analytically and participatorily, students can be said to be indoctrinated because they write for the grade itself rather than the learning experience.

In contrast, and as Huot argues with respect to validity, by inviting students to participate in genuine grading discourse, and by inviting students to *question* institutional standards rather than apply those standards blindly, we can foster our students' consciousness about what the standards are, why they exist, and how they should be applied. If we create grading automatons then we failed. However, if we create thinking members of the discourse community then we achieve something far greater, provided those members can assess fairly and accurately. They can, and I will speak to that later on. The point, however, is that by grading with students we can take the field to a new fulfillment of Bruffee's ideas; we not only can create a collaborative learning environment, we also can create true collaborators.

Yet collaborating in grading discourse need not and should not contradict with focusing on process rather than product, nor with helping students write for the sake of writing instead of writing for a grade. With respect to the former, while the process of grading with students will prove heuristic in itself, it need not supplant classroom and portfolio work that focuses on process. The only change will be engaging with students in summative grading discourse about each other's work.

Furthermore, while it might seem as though such grade-focused discourse would force students to be more obsessed about grades, such need not be the case. As I will demonstrate, students obsess about grades not only because of the important role grades play but also because they mistake the grade for what the grade represents. As students typically do not fully understand institutional standards—they do not know what "good writing" is as the institution defines it—they take the symbol of good writing—an "A"—to *be* good writing. Were they to truly understand what writing well means, they would focus on writing well rather than focus on achieving the representation of good writing—the grade.

However, students will likely never fully appreciate institutional grading standards unless they engage those standards fully, which not only means exercising them in real-world, meaningful grading efforts but equally includes the right to question, critique, criticize and, with the teacher's consent, revise those standards in true critical fashion. Students must be taught how to bring their full intellectual engagement to the process of grading if they are to be transformed into better writers through it. Furthermore, if we are to educate them rather than indoctrinate them—if we desire intellectuals rather than automatons—then students must be *encouraged* to question in

every regard why the academy expects what it expects in terms of process, product, and standards.

Therefore, I propose that we adopt Critical Collaborative Assessment—the heuristic process of having students grade other students with us during class workshops and/or in small groups. My contention is that such a practice can reconcile the divide between assessment and "good practice" by turning assessment itself into a viable pedagogical force. Furthermore, CCA can unify a host of different educational theories, including but not limited to peer response, the "contact zone," critical pedagogy, post-process pedagogy, the "zone of proximal development," and social epistemicism.

Given that my proposed practice is rooted in social epistemicism and present peer response theory, chapter one—"Defining Peer Response and the Social Epistemic Paradigm"—will offer an overview explanation of each. This means discussing the value of peer response as popularly conceptualized in the field: (1) peer response fosters a social epistemic understanding of discourse; (2) peer response offers students a "live audience" for whom to write; (3) the presence of the "live audience" fosters authenticity in composition, and (4) so peer response facilities process-centric pedagogy.

Despite its various potential worths, peer response has not gone without criticism. To varying degrees depending on its methodology, peer response's shortcomings can include a difficulty in getting students to take the exercise seriously and, even if taking it seriously, to respond to one another effectively. I will address these criticisms, pointing out as I do so that they are more symptomatic of deeper problems than problematic in their own right. The problems do not emerge from peer response methodology, per se, but rather from an inherent conflict between peer response and the social construct.

Chapter one also will draw on theorists such as Kenneth Bruffee, Patricia Bizzell, Stanley Fish, Michel Foucault, Sidney Dobrin, Thomas Kent and others to define the social epistemic paradigm. In doing so, I hope to make three key points clear: (1) the social construct emerges through language use, (2) language use is a triangulative construct, and (3) the construct always involves a relation on power. Furthermore, I will explain why "good writing" cannot exist outside of a discourse community's assessment.

Yet while chapter one explains peer response and social epistemicism, and perhaps tacitly suggests harmony between them, chapter two—**"Peer Response vs. the Social Epistemic Paradigm"**—problematizes that relationship. While I want to make it clear that I support peer response work in its present incarnations, I nevertheless will contend that present incarnations of peer response are largely incongruent with social constructionism. The prevailing notion that peer response (1) is a social constructionist pedagogy and (2) helps students to understand the socially constructed nature of their environment ultimately contradicts the core power of dominant discourse. If grades embody the most authoritative, if not sometimes authoritarian discourse in academia, then excluding students from *full* interaction with grading discourse ultimately denies them participation in and opportunity for understanding the social construct to which we hope to grant students membership.

Equally, chapter two will assert that a student audience lacking the power of assessment ultimately falls short of meeting criteria for being a "live audience." Consequently, such student audiences short change students of fully authentic writing experiences.

As such, I will contend that peer response groups constitute something closer to "simulacra" of which Jean Baudrillard speaks in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), than to authentic experience in the constructionist sense, and students who embrace the simulacra can place themselves at greater risk for failing to enter the academic community than students who reject the simulacra *prima facie*. This is not, however, a holistic rejection of existing peer response practices, practices that do help students but that do so as a result of their collaborative force rather than of their constructivist force.

That distinction between collaborative and constructivist values emerges from the power of language. Drawing on Lev Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development," I contend that excluding students from exercising the interpretive community's dominant language—grading—relegates them to interacting with the interpretive community's standards as tools—extrinsic motivation—rather than as signs—intrinsic changes to their thinking process.

Chapter three—"A Social Epistemic Evaluation of Portfolios and Grading"—will problematize the delayed-assessment seen in portfolio pedagogy on some of the same bases discussed earlier in this introduction. It also will delve into the overall relationship between students and summative assessment.

More specifically, chapter three contends that educators cannot completely, and perhaps not even partially, read without assessing because they cannot temporarily excommunicate themselves from the discourse community whose standards they internalized in order to join. Simply, educators cannot temporarily take themselves out of a discourse community and/or stop themselves from thinking like members of a given discourse community. While we might be able to put aside surface grading concerns,

such as what exact grade a paper we are reading should receive, we cannot separate ourselves from the reading, writing, discussion, and kind of thinking we have engaged in order to join a discourse community. Just as scientist, for example, could not entirely disengage him- or herself from knowledge of the scientific method in order to read a scientific study without having to evaluate it, so can we not disengage ourselves from knowledge of "good writing" from a discourse community perspective in order to read it free of assessing it. Consequently, delayed-assessment amounts to a pretensive and disingenuous move that purports to offer students a more authentic writing experience but actually ignores the genuine academic construct in which exist.

However, the central tenet of the chapter is that grades function as a mediating device between students and the dominant discourse community. Consequently, we should engage students in the direct act of working with assessment so that they can engage the standards and conventions of the dominant discourse community directly. This is in stark contrast to delaying assessment, a practice, I contend, that only widens the gap between students and discursive standards.

That discussion leads to chapter four—"Dismissing Pretense"—which delves into three related theories. It starts with James Paul Gee's conception of *Situated Learning* (2004) as the necessary force in education, meaning that people learn best when involved in a full cultural experience rather than through an "instructed process" that we normally see in schools, e.g. lectures. Gee's point that learning best entails a more interactive experience leads into David Bleich's call for disclosure. Bleich points out that deep interaction ultimately requires understanding one another's "genres." Yet while genre disclosure ultimately leads to stronger communication and fellowship, it will not be

smooth road because bringing genres to the surface will cause "discomfort." As such discomfort emerges from pre-existing frictions, we can use discomfort to our advantage to foster teaching based on conflict, which is precisely what Mary Louise Pratt (1990) advocates in her "contact zone" theory. Building on these three authors, I advocate that true cultural learning (Gee), true "disclosure" (Bleich), and effective education through culture clash (Pratt) can be effectively invoked by inviting students into grading discourse and through disclosing our grading "genres" as educators.

Next, chapter five—"Critical Assessment in the Post-Process Paradigm" delves into how critical pedagogy invigorates peer assessment. Note that I do not advocate critical pedagogy for its liberatory aims, only its educational ones. If we take the core tenets of critical pedagogy—each person constructs meaning by naming the world; students should engage and question power structures; students and faculty should collaborate towards understanding—they all support the case for collaborative assessment practices. Only when students can engage dominant discursive standards, question those standards, and assess writing in their own right will they become fully conscious writers inside and outside the academy.

Additionally, chapter five explores post-process theory. If, as post-process theory asserts, "writing is public," then there is no better way to help students understand and learn from that fact than to encourage them to engage the public that exists in academe, that public being the dominant discourse community. If "writing is interpretive" then only by engaging the authentic audience of the dominant discourse community, and in watching their peers do the same, will students understand the nature of their interpretive acts as readers and writers. Lastly, if "writing is situated" then we absolutely must help

students understand and navigate their situatedness as it already exists in the academic institution rather than creating supposedly authentic scenarios in which students can feel situated.

Chapter six—"Existing Foundations for Peer Assessment"—examines the existing research on other collaborative and/or student-based assessment models. Largely, this chapter answers the question as to whether or not students are capable of applying assessment practices fairly, accurately, and constructively. Using existing studies, it argues that students can become effective assessors not only of their peers' work, but also of their own.

Chapter seven—"Critical Collaborative Assessment in Practice"—takes a step-by-step examination of how Critical Collaborative Assessment can be applied in classroom practice through class workshops or small group exercises. It also problematizes Critical Collaborative Assessment in terms of issues that might develop in working with the students.

All said, this entire book seeks to resolve Carolyn's problem. My hope is not that it would provide an answer to her question about how to "fix" her paper, nor that it would help her ignore the need to "fix" it, but rather that it will pre-empt the question so that it never exists at all.

Simultaneously, I hope to resolve the conflict in composition between "good pedagogy" and sound assessment. Returning to Huot's point that "we have yet to create in any substantive way a pedagogy that links the teaching and assessing of writing," I believe that we will never maximize, or perhaps even just fulfill our potential as a discipline reconciling the rift between the teaching of writing and the grading of writing.

Since students must understand how we—the discipline, the academy, the class, etc.—read essays in order to know how to write essays, then putting a greater onus on them to write than to learn how to read institutionally may be a perpetually problematic formula. On the other hand, if rather than seeing "good pedagogy" and assessment as being at odds we can instead unify their powers into a single positive force for teaching writing, then we should simultaneously clarify our role as teachers of writing and empower students as writers and "colleagues."

CHAPTER 1: DEFINING PEER RESPONSE AND THE SOCIAL EPISTEMIC

PARADIGM

Peer Response

I begin with a discussion of peer response for two reasons: First, because Critical Collaborative Assessment (CCA) will in many ways further develop (and simultaneously critique) peer response practices and theories. Second, and more importantly, because the popular conception of peer response holds that it functions in harmony with a socially constructed view of education. Yet while peer response may represent a greater understanding of the socially constructed nature of reality than more traditional or Current Traditional approaches to composition pedagogy, a deeper analysis ultimately problematizes the relationship between typical peer response practices and a socially constructed world view. Understanding the rift between peer response and social epistemicism will prove essential to understanding the impetus for Critical Collaborative Assessment.

That said, examining the relationship between peer response and social constructionism proves difficult if only because peer response takes so many different forms in so many different classrooms. For purposes here, peer response serves as an umbrella term for (1) any practice in which students respond to one another's writing, such as in small group conversation, through web-based discourse, in whole-class workshop format, etc., and/or (2) any practice where students exercise *formative grading*—grading that does not really count but serves heuristic purposes—but not *summative grading*—grading that counts towards the course grade. Thus, for my

immediate purposes, the only criteria for defining peer response is that students review each other's work in some fashion and that they do so without summatively evaluating one another.

Perhaps no one sums up peer response better than Linda Flower in "Cognition, Context, and Theory Building" (1989):

> Peer response places writing in a teacher-designed community of response. If we see writing as a social, context-driven event, this instructional move makes sense because it seems to enact our image of writing as a social, cultural process, happening within a classroom community. But what is happening to the cognition of individual students in this instructional context? … Many of the arguments for using peer response presume that …they create a live audience to which students can respond, which, it is argued, leads the individual to an internalized sense of how readers respond; and finally, they shift the emphasis in a classroom from product to process and from teacherly evaluation to writers' goals and reader's response. (p. 742)

In that one passage, Flower articulates several essential elements of peer response that will prove important to my discussion. She (1) points to peer response as a way to help students understand "writing as a social, cultural process, happening within a classroom community," and in doing so references the social constructionist or social epistemic paradigm on which peer response is based—a notion I will soon problematize.

(2) Flower's reference to a "live audience" brings up one of the most commonly mentioned foundations for peer response, namely that it helps students learn the

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imperative role played by readers—success in writing can be distilled down to the extent to which writers recognize, anticipate, and fulfill the needs of their audience. In "Revising Writer-Based Prose" (1981), Flower argued that student writers must transition from "writer-based" to "reader-based" prose, the former referring to writing that pleases the author alone, the latter being writing that holds true to the author's convictions but simultaneously and successfully communicates to the audience.

Flower hardly stands alone in advocating the "writer-based" to "reader-based" evolution. David Bartholomae agrees in "Inventing the University" (1985):

> Expert writers…can better imagine how a reader will respond to a text and can transform or restructure what they have to say around a goal shared with a reader. Teaching students to revise for readers, then, will better prepare them to write initially with a reader in mind. (p. 627)

Such a reader-based stance contrasts more traditional practices in which the student writer's only reader was the teacher, and clearly reinforces audience understanding as an essential element of the student writer's growth.

Clearly, considerations of the social construct and considerations of audience overlap. We cannot embrace socially constructed meaning and then deny the importance of audience any more than we can embrace the power of audience and deny that meaning emerges as a social force. Despite their interrelatedness, however, and at least for the purposes of this piece, I will exercise a distinction between (1) writing as a social process and (2) writing for an audience: The former will refer to more generalized factors in the construction of meaning, such as the greater discursive practices of the institution or

discipline. The latter, in contrast, will speak more to immediate, local interaction between writers and readers, such as in a peer response group.

In addition to Flower's points about the social construct and the live audience, her passage raises another important element of peer response work, that element being (3) authenticity—the idea that in order to learn to write well students have to write with genuine purpose for genuine audiences whom they can affect through prose. Whereas writing for the teacher alone is largely inauthentic insofar as the student holds no greater objective in mind than fulfilling an assignment, writing becomes more authentic when it requires students to engage a more meaningful, "real world" objective, such as authoring a newsletter that gets published to their peers. In doing so, student writers can accomplish more than achieving a grade; they can affect how their peers view the world. As the theory goes, peer response groups provide a similar measure of authenticity by affording students a miniature writing community to write for and, hopefully, affect.

Evelyn Shepard Wynn, Lorraine Page Catet, and Ernesta Parker Pendleton (2005) affirm this point by writing that

> workshopping and the peer group learning experience can be beneficial, particularly in large culturally diverse classes of varying skill levels. It allows participants to focus on the purpose of writing for particular audiences. Critiquing each other's writing enables culturally diverse students to strengthen lines of communication and forces interaction among students who might otherwise be content as passive learners. (p. 24)

Purpose, therefore, speaks to the intention behind writing, which peer response groups can highlight, meaning that student writers may feel a more *authentic* sense of *purpose* when writing for a more immediate group of peers than a more distant professor. While some theorists differentiate between authenticity and purpose, the two concepts sit close enough together for my purposes so as to refer to them as a single force.

Returning once again to Flower and unpacking her further, she touches one final value inherent to peer response, namely (4) its connection to process theory—we must not be concerned only with the end result of our students' writing efforts but more so with the process from which that final product emerged. Peer response, as the theory goes, brings about greater attention to process in that it (a) occurs at a non-terminal point in the students' essay development and thus affords students the opportunity to employ peer comments in revising the final product; (b) peer response encourages students to discuss process issues with other peers, and in so doing reflect on their own processes. For example, during peer response a student author might face questions as to why he or she organized the paper in a certain way, made a certain word selection, chose a given line of argument, etc. All such discussions raise the students' consciousness about why they do what they do and how what they do impacts their writing product.

Thus, Flower sums up four major rationales for peer response: social constructionism, audience, authenticity, and process. While I will problematize peer response later, I need to state quite plainly that it works. It simply helps students to write better. As for why it does so and whether or not it should be a preferred means of doing so, those are questions of another sort. Such questions aside, research supports peer response as a viable pedagogical tool for writing instruction.

Speaking to the research on peer response, Mittan's (1989) study demonstrates that peer review can increase students' confidence in that "by working together, students realize the similar problems and difficulties that their peers share and feel less isolated" (Mittan, as cited in Murau, 1993, p. 2). Similarly, Andrea M. Murau, referencing Mangelsdorf's (1992) study on peer response, reveals that "most of the students viewed the processes as beneficial, specifically to content and organization" (p. 2).

Flynn, McCulley and Gratz's (1982) study of sophomores in a biology class demonstrated that three groups that engaged in some kind of peer response activity, with or without the more traditional model analysis, wrote more successful reports than the control group that used model analysis alone. This held true for the group that only did peer response and did not do any model analysis at all.

Yet peer response has not gone without criticism. In "Peer Response: Is it Worth the Effort" (1994), Anne-Louise Pacheo outlines some the problems inherent in peer review practices. Quoting Gloria A Neubert and Sally J. McNelis, Pacheo notes that "many teachers grieved over the use of peer-response groups because they had difficulty getting students to respond effectively to one another's writing….The students, too, complained about the writing responses, saying that their peers rarely offered substantial help with their writing" (1994, p. 2). Other researchers, such as Anne Ruggles Gere and Ralph Stevens (1985), Connie Russell (1985), and Carol Berkenkotter (1984) remark on similar issues with peer response that generally contend with student comfort in the process and expertise over the material.

In response to such peer response problems, Pacheo offers valuable ideas for functionalizing peer response groups. She notes that the deficit in peer response efforts

often emerges from the method of implementation rather than the inherent nature of the exercise, and Pacheo subsequently contends that teachers must take up the charge of grooming students for peer response rather than throwing them into it unprepared, that they should "present students with clear-cut guidelines for their job as readers" (1994, p. 5). She also notes that teachers should offer written examples of peer responses and discuss those with the students before the peer response process begins. Such points prove compelling considering that this "sort of training made a measurable difference in the effectiveness of peer-response. 'Specific' comments increased from 28% to 60%, and 'vague' comments dropped from 19% to only 6%" (1994, p. 7). Furthermore, Pacheo uses Karen Spear's notion of "guiding group interaction" to advocate continued teacher-group interaction throughout the process (p. 8-9). Lastly, she contends that a major "difficulty for many instructors is the time factor…but one way to incorporate peer response into a tight schedule is to limit the scope of the groups: assign a particular item to be considered (e.g. 'adequate development') and break into groups for only 15-20 minutes" (p. 9).

While all of the above points represent real factors requiring attention when considering the value of peer response, they also limit concerns to those related directly to the implementation of the practice rather than the nature of the practice itself.

By contrast, other theorists have spoken to deeper-reaching issues. Murau speaks of how students view peer response work, the problems they attribute to it, and their concerns about having to present writing to their peers. Referencing Mangelsdorf's study, Murau notes that "77% of the negative reactions [to peer response] were concerned

with the limitations of their peers and lack of trust in their peers' abilities to critique the papers" (1993, p. 2). She also writes the following:

> Winder notes the students' 'fear of exposure of one's work to peers' (65), but also the sense of unease at having to give criticism. George notes that peer pressure establishes an 'unwritten code based on mutual protection [which] will inhibit honest, productive evaluation' (in Harris, 1992:48).

More than the methodological issues spoken of earlier that concerned how peer response should be implemented, these issues raise deeper concerns about peer response. Will students really trust one another to critique their work? Will students fear sharing their work with one another? And will students critique each other fairly and accurately?

Though important, my contention will be that despite peer response's success as a pedagogical tool, it is largely incongruent with socially constructed epistemology. In fact, the many questions above that problematize its efficacy, though important in themselves, essentially overlook, if not emerge from, the tension between peer response work and social epistemicism. Before engaging that line of reasoning, however, social constructionism itself requires definition.

Social Epistemicism

Determining the success of the relationship between peer response and social epistemicism first requires understanding social epistemicism itself. This proves difficult because social epistemicism, sometimes called "social constructionism," incorporates elements from many different disciplines. Therefore, I flinch at having to definitively define social constructionism, and therefore I will draw a composite sketch of it from

Richard Rorty's "normal discourse," Kenneth Bruffee's "knowledge community," Patricia Bizzell's "discourse community," Stanley Fish's "interpretative community," and David Russell's "activity system." While subtle distinctions exist between those theories, they commonly attribute meaning making and "truth" to a function of a socio-linguistic community rather than to positivism, i.e. Truth.

Perhaps Bruffee's article, "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge" (1986), offers the easiest definition of social constructionism:

> A social constructionist position in any discipline assumes that entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on are constructs generated by communities of like-minded peers. Social construction understands reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities—or more broadly speaking, symbolic entities—that define or 'constitute' the communities that generate them. (774)

From the social constructionist perspective, all knowledge is governed by such "symbolic entities," or in Fish's words, by "an interpretive entity, endowed with purposes and concern, [that] is, by virtue of its very operation, determining what counts as the facts to be observed" (1980, p. 8). Thus, "truths," "knowledge' and acceptable practice are regulated by those communities with the power to make such determinations. For example, the scientific community would not accept a scientific study that did not ascribe to the scientific method. To that community, if it does not follow the scientific method, then it is not "science," and it is the scientific community itself that holds the power to determine what is "scientific" and what is not.

Or more to the point, an English department would not recognize an essay comprised exclusively of geometric shapes—• • • • • • • —because to an English department a series of geometric shapes is not recognizable as "essay." In fact, a student could not rightly call a series of geometric shapes an "essay" because only the English department enjoys the power (and responsibility) to determine what "essay" is and what "essay" is not. Were an English department at a given institution to decide that a series of geometric shapes constituted "essay," then as far as the students in that department would be concerned, a series of geometric shapes would an essay make.

The crux of the point? "Essay" does not exist outside of how those with the authority to do so define it. Thus, within the context of a department that defines essay as a series of geometric shapes, an essay can be nothing more or less than a series of geometric shapes. Were the context to change, such as if the student submitted a series of geometric shapes as an "essay" for graduate school application to a different university, that new community immediately gains the power to determine if the student's submission is or is not an "essay."

Though I described it from a social epistemic perspective, the gatekeeping function of discourse communities resonates with David Bartholomae's, "Inventing the University." Bartholomae, in a complimentary point to those from Fish and Bruffee, argues that students cannot succeed in academia unless they embrace its discursive practices:

> To speak with authority [students] have to speak not only in another's voice but
> through another's code; and they not only have to do this, they have to speak in
> the voice and through the codes of those of us with power and wisdom; and they

not only have to do this, they have to do it before they know what they are doing, before they have a project to participate in, and before, at least in terms of our disciplines, they have anything to say. Our students may be able to enter into a conventional discourse and speak, not as themselves, but through the voice of the community; the university, however, is the place where 'common' wisdom is only of negative values—it is something to work against. (1985, p. 644)

Note that Bartholomae not only identifies clear distinctions between students and discursive conventions, but also between "common" thinking and that which the university considers "thinking," as well as between the disempowerment of students and the "wisdom" and "power" of those governing the institution. In doing so, he clarifies the problem of students as not one of their ability, per se, but rather of their ability *relative to* particular academic/institutional expectations. In other words, the problem students face comes down to this: we ask them to write an "essay" before they know what we mean by "essay."

James Paul Gee forges a similar point in *Situated Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling* (2004). Analogizing scholastic education to chess, Gee contends that you

aren't playing chess if you don't make legal moves. No one will recognize you as playing chess if you don't make legal moves.... When you are playing chess properly, that is, making legal moves, I will say you are acting out an *identity* as a chess player. Others recognize you as an appropriate chess player and you recognize yourself as being an appropriate chess player as well. (2004, p. 46, author's emphasis)

Thus, being accepted as a chess player means acting with the "identity" of a chess player. Returning the analogy back to formal education, Gee adds that a "child needs to know what moves he or she can make to get recognized as a 'good student'" in any academic situation" (2004, p. 47).

In "Cognition, Convention and Certainty: What We Need To know About Writing" (1982), Patricia Bizzell similarly contends that the difficulties students face in writing can be

> better understood in terms of the unfamiliarity with the academic discourse
> community, combined, perhaps, with such limited experience outside their native
> discourse communities that they are unaware that there is such a thing as a
> discourse community with conventions to be mastered. What is underdeveloped
> is their knowledge both of the ways experience is constituted and interpreted in
> the academic discourse community and of the fact that all discourse communities
> constitute and interpret experience. (p. 399)

Bizzell's use of "conventions to be mastered," which imply a contextualized set of practices rather than generic skill sets, clearly reinforces Bartholomae's position. Furthermore, Bizzell raises an interesting question as to whether or not students even recognize that disciplines come loaded with conventions, that joining a discipline means demonstrating fluency in those conventions, or that in Rorty's words, "mastery of a knowledge community's normal discourse is the basic qualification for acceptance into that community" (Rorty, as cited in Bruffee, 1984, p. 424). The great issue students might face, therefore, is simply recognizing that different disciplines invoke different

conventions, i.e. that their goal as students is to internalize discourse community standards.

None of the above implies that "normal discourse" practices are easily identified. To the contrary, and as Gee asserts,

> the games we play in "real' life are not like chess. The rules aren't always clear and they are clearer in some cases than others. People can disagree over whether certain moves are appropriate or not. Some people may think I write like an academic and recognize me in this identity. Others may not. And I and others might dispute the matter—might argue that academics can write in ways other people think they shouldn't. (2004, p. 47)

Gee's point about the complexity of the "rules" seems sensible if for no other reason than that were academic conventions perfectly clear and accessible, students would master them by the end of their first semester.

On the other hand, and at the risk of simplifying Bizzell's earlier point, students do recognize the imperative of garnering the teacher's approval. To be fair to Bizzell, students do not equate garnering the teacher's approval with the acquisition of discursive conventions rather than just "getting a good grade," but students certainly are savvy about the need to please the teacher and, by extension, the academy.

Thus, the social construct's power, as manifest through discourse communities, remains absolute. Whether students recognize it or not, becoming educated means manifesting, if not internalizing the discourse the dominant community recognizes as effective "discourse." However, and as Bizzell keenly recognizes, a tension emerges between the individual and the discourse community, a tension that creates a dynamic

through which each student must precariously balance discursive constraints with individual voice.

Motivated by that very tension, Peter Elbow, Donald Murray and other expressivist theorists sought to resolve, though not exactly reconcile, the tension between individuality and institutionality by rejecting popular convention. They recognized the potentially oppressive nature of discursive standards all too well. In fact, Peter Elbow spoke directly to the frustration he encountered in writing within academic conventions:

> I started out wanting to be a tweedy, pipesmoking professor of literature, but I got derailed in graduate school: my ability to write papers gradually ground to a halt and I had to quit before they kicked me out. I felt like a complete failure and never wanted to enter the academy again. But I fell into a teaching job and discovered that teaching was more fun than being a student. After five years I went back to graduate school. I wrote a dissertation about Chaucer, but my former inability to write and my study of myself trying to write again the second time around got me very interested in writing: especially in the inner workings of the writing process. (UMass Website)

According to Elbow, the incessant rules governing academic composition, particularly those dictating format, nearly drove him mad. He felt oppressed and unable to comfortably formulate his thoughts, much less express them.

He was not alone. Donald Murray (1972) speaks with similar contempt for rigid academic constraints, stating that the "student shudders under a barrage of criticism" and that "our [teachers'] attacks usually do little more than confirm [students'] lack of self-respect for their work and for themselves; we are as frustrated as our students, for

conscientious, doggedly responsible, repetitive autopsying doesn't give birth to live writing" (p. 3). Hence, Murray not only advocates process orientation over product orientation, but also advocates encouraging students to express ideas they find meaningful, ideas connected to, if not emerging from, their own lives.

Therefore, expressivism's freedom seems to offer a way out of discursive constraints. To the extent that it loosens more common academic writing conventions, it succeeds in diminishing the tension between the individual and the institution. However, it does not really resolve *the* problem of individuality and institutionality; it really only resolves *one* problem of individuality and institutionality, that being the challenges imposed by more traditional academic writing. As Laura Julier (2003) points out in "Re-theorizing the Role of Creative Writing in Composition Studies: Cautionary Notes Towards Rethinking the Essay in the Teaching of Writing," expressivism fosters tensions of its own: "speaking with 'I' in a substantive way (distinct from the mindless verbal tic of 'I think'), makes [students] vulnerable" (p. 8). While some students will appreciate opportunities to invoke the grand "I" of personal experience in their writing, others can find such "liberty" no less or possibly more oppressive than writing about something more distant. Quite simply, being required to introspect and reveal the "I" can be more intrusive than a requirement to write in some other convention or about some other topic.

In "Democracy, Pedagogy, and the Personal Essay" (1992), Joe Haefner raises just that idea:

> The point is that the essay is not inherently individualistic and subjective, and
> hence that its only place in composition pedagogy is as a model of 'writer-based
> prose.' In fact, there is no evidence that using personal essays as expressive

discourse does promote a spirit of democracy or egalitarianism in the writing or

literature classroom. Students may find some topics that speak directly to them,

but the personal essay often remains alien, a species of discourse imposed by the

institution. What matters is what uses we make of the essay in our courses, the

nature of our pedagogical assumptions. (p. 514)

Haefner's point in tow, while expressivism might successfully offer students relief from

the (seemingly) oppressive constraints of the more classical academic essay, it offers no

greater resolution to the constraints of academic discourse on the whole. Requiring

students to produce something "personal" and "authentic," though perhaps more

palatable and accessible to many students, poses no less a requirement than the

argumentative essay or research paper. Certain standards will exist for what the academy

deems a viable "personal essay," standards that still require the students to meet discourse

community standards.

However, it seems important to note that students do tend to appreciate the

expressivist writing more than more traditional academic forms. Thus, insofar as it

attempts to offer students relief from more rigid academic rules, expressivism succeeds.

To what extent it does so because it is inherently a more palatable form rather than

simply being a departure from traditional modes remains unclear.

The point, however, distills to this: dominant discursive conventions *always* exist.

Some might be more overt than others, and some may be more particular than others, but

students cannot be free of them as long as they are "students" because operating under

discursive conventions is what makes students "students." Yet students hardly can claim

uniqueness with regards to working under discursive conventions. As Flower states quite plainly:

> Purpose in writing is always a bounded purpose. Whether one is constrained by the assumptions of one's culture, the material realities of the publishing industry, the demands of one's job, or the terms of an assignment, purpose takes shape in a context that both demands and entices the writer to walk into the embrace of purposes that are in some sense not her own. And yet, within this ring of constraints, writers make critical choices at two levels. On one, they may choose to make some of these 'given' purposes their own (to embrace the goals of a course or an assignment as a statement of shared intentions) or to resist 'given' purposes or ignore chosen constraints. (1989, p. 750)

Unfortunately, Flower does not speak to *how* students may successfully "ignore chosen constraints" and still succeed as academic writers when their success depends on writing within academic convention. She does, however, reinforce the tension between individuality and conformity in academic writing, and she makes a good point that we need not hold social conventions and individuality as mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, when we consider contemporary thought on the power of genre, constraints on communicative forms simply cannot be avoided and, in fact, become absolutely necessary for communication (Foucault; Rorty; Bakhtin; Fish; Hymes). As Mikhail Bakhtin writes in "The Problem of Speech Genres" (1986), if "speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible" (p. 79). In other words, we can communicate only through

recognizable and acceptable forms. As David Bleich explains in *Know and Tell* (1998), texts "are located in culture through their genres—the groups of other texts with which they could be compared or associated" (p. 23). In fact, the way a "text" becomes a "genre" is "by virtue of people 'living' it among other people" (Bleich, 1998, p. 40), meaning that raw text essentially acquires the power to be accepted, and subsequently to influence, when it acquires cultural worth.

Yet discussion of genre should not imply rigid academic writing formats because, as Deborah Journet (1999) asserts, "genres are not static typological categories of textual forms but are socially constructed categories of rhetorical action and response" (p. 96). This does not make them entirely amorphous but does imbue genre with far greater presence than the rote five-paragraph essay, the latter being genre in the most traditional and rigid sense while the former refers to the adaptation of communication to any social construct.

In that former sense, genre holds nearly omnipotent power to govern the dialectic, and this brings Journet to ask the following two questions that pack particular relevance here:

> *Is composing most significantly a cognitive or a social process?* Genres function as both cognitive and social categories. They are cognitive because they embody the patterns of organization and typification that we use to make sense of and act within the world….But genres are also social because they are ways groups of people have agreed…to organize experience and create knowledge…..As we learn to typify situations, we also learn to construct typified responses—ways of acting and knowing within recurrent situations. (1999, p. 98)

Thus, while genres represent a social construct insofar as they almost exclusively pre-exist the writer—the "academic essay" exists long before our first-year students arrive—the individual expression of genre—each student's academic essay—emerges from an individual act of cognition. Hence the tension between individuality and institutionality ultimately produces a synergy that establishes communicative functionality.

That synergy is precisely to what Journet speaks in answering her own second question:

> *To what degree is composing best understood as the act of communities or of individuals?* Because genres represent socially constructed forms of typicality, they are property of communities, the patterns of social life operative within particular groups of people….That is, genres both constrain and enable rhetorical action. They provide the operative rules for behavior within particular social situations. (1999, p.100)

Genre possesses a dualistic and near intra-oppositional power. How we respond is in one sense constrained by the discourse community, but in another sense actually *enabled* by that community's constraints. We cannot exercise discourse in any way we see fit, such as in a series of geometric shapes, because that will not constitute communication; communication demands that we exercise a recognizable form. Thus, constraining discourse actually enables discourse.

Bakhtin discusses this very point in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) when referencing the forces that simultaneously invigorate and delimit speech: "Every utterance participates in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal,

stratifying forces)" (p. 272). This does not constitute a competition of forces insofar as one ever succeeds over the other, but rather represents the dynamic that literally makes all communication possible. He adds:

> Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward. Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. (1981, p. 272)

And since this occurs in "every utterance," we cannot artificially constrain our conception of genre to something as simplistic as an essay assignment. Rather, students have to learn the more generalized genre of academe, as well as that of their discipline, their class, the peer group, etc.

Bringing Bakhtin's point into composition theory, Journet points out that writing instructors recognize student difficulties in joining discourse communities:

> Research in composition has devoted attention to the challenges writers face as they learn genres of new discourse communities—including undergraduates who struggle to master 'academic discourse' as well as graduate students and professionals as they enter more specialized disciplinary communities. This research reveals how novice writers become enculturated into a discipline by learning to think and write within the context of its current problems and issues, as well as its accepted methodology, conventions, and discourse forms. (1999, p. 101)

Teaching, therefore, needs to a process of acculturating students into the social construct, if not also helping them understand that they exist within a social construct.

Yet this raises a particularly poignant issue for this discussion. Reviewing recently covered ground, the academy, like all social structures, involves the appropriate use of genre(s) for communicative competency, which means that we must in *some* fashion help students exercise disciplinary conventions if they are to succeed in the academy, and if we are to consider their essay to be what the academy also calls "essay," even as that definition varies by institution and class. Given Journet, Bakhtin, and similar thinkers, this acculturation is not only unavoidable, it is also profitable because without genre communication cannot occur.

Returning, therefore, to Bruffee's postulate that a "social constructionist position in any discipline assumes that entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on are constructs generated by communities of like-minded peers," the question concerns the means through which those communities are constructed, not to mention the mechanism through which they exercise their power. With that mind, three particular elements of social constructionism prove important to my discussion: (1) the social construct emerges through language use; (2) language use is a triangulative construct, and (3) the construct always involves a relation on power.

Speaking to the first point, that the social construction of the world emerges from and through language use, James Berlin writes in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" (1988):

> the real is located in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the
> observer, the discourse community (social group) in which the observer is

functioning, and the material conditions of existence. Knowledge is never found

in any one of these but can only be posited as a product of the dialectic in which

all three come together….Most important, this dialectic is grounded in language:

the observer, the discourse community, and the material conditions of existence

are all verbal constructs….For social-epistemic rhetoric, the subject is itself a

social construct that emerges through the linguistically-circumscribed interaction

of the individual, the community, and the material world. (p. 731)

As Berlin writes, even the "material conditions of existence" itself are "linguistically-

circumscribed." Yet while Berlin does not explain why this is so, Henry Giroux and

Peter McLaren (1992) do by offering that "while language is not the only source of

reality (clearly there is a non-discursive world outside of language), it is largely through

language that meaning is created" (p. 12). Thus, while material referents exist, any and

all understanding we construct about those referents, i.e. any and all *conception* of

"material existence," comes mostly through the use of language.

In fact, language plays such a holistic role in the construction of reality that it

would be incorrect to suggest any relationship between the two in which one precedes the

other. Continuing with McLaren and Giroux,

... language constitutes reality rather than merely reflecting it. Language in this

case is not conceptualized as a transparent window to the world but rather as a

symbolic medium that actively shapes and transforms the world. That is,

language is the primary medium through which social identities are constructed,

collective agents are formed, cultural hegemony secured, and emancipatory

practice both named and acted upon. (1992, p. 12)

The reason language "actively shapes and transforms the world" is that we cannot in any intellectual way know or understand the world except through language, which equally means that how we exercise language determines the nature of the world as we see it. And in a socially constructed view of reality, while "there is a non-discursive world outside of language," there effectively is no world aside from how we linguistically understand the world..

Therefore, as McLaren and Giroux continue to explain, our experience and the language we use are inseparable:

> If experience is largely understood through language, and language shapes how we see and act with and on the world, then it follows that experience itself does not guarantee truth since it is always open to conflicting and contradictory interpretations. That is, our experience is not some fixed or fluid essence, or some concrete reality that exists prior to language, waiting to be reflected by language. Rather, *experience is constituted by language*. (p. 16, emphasis added)

This relationship between language and reality—the inseparability of experience and language—proves essential to understanding the relationship between peer response work and social constructionism, which I will delve into in greater detail later.

For now, however, consider that peer response helps students understand how to relate to and affect the linguistically constructed reality of academe. When Thomas Kent writes in *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process paradigm* (1999) that "interpretation enters into both the reception and the production of discourse" (p. 2), he indirectly elucidates peer response. To whatever degree peer response functions, it does so not only because students interpret when receiving discourse, as in when reading other

student's essays, but also when *producing* discourse, as in when determining what to compose in their writing. Subsequently, peer response helps students understand how their writing/language will be interpreted by an audience, and more to the point, it helps student writers learn to interpret the audience for whom their writing is destined. Thus, "when we write, we interpret our readers, our situations, our and other people's motivations, the appropriate genres to employ in specific circumstances, and so forth. Therefore…we must possess the ability to enter into this relation of understanding with other language users" (Kent, 1999, p. 2). Kent's point about the need to cultivate a "relation of understanding" reinvigorates Flower's early point concerning audience—the more savvy students become at interpreting audience, the more successful writers they become.

If the first major point is that language governs the social construct, the next major point is that language use exists triangulatively. As we saw, Berlin referenced three major factors in the social construct, namely "the observer, the discourse community…and the material conditions of existence." In similar fashion to Berlin, Kent's "Externalism and the Production of Discourse" (1992) explains that "for each of us there are three sorts of knowledge corresponding to the three apices of the triangle: knowledge of our own minds [observer], knowledge of other minds [discourse community], and knowledge of the shared world [material conditions of existence]" (p. 65-66).

As David Russell (1993) explains, this triangulative construct not only plays a significant role in the exercise of language but also in its initial acquisition:

A seven-month-old child who has not yet learned her first words reaches in the direction of a spherical object and babbles. Her parent, seeing this, puts the object in her hands and says, "Ball! You want to play with the ball?" Sooner or later—usually sooner—the child learns that adults may play with her using spherical objects and that certain sounds ("ball") and certain activities accompany human interactions with such objects…. (p. 181)

This rudimentary example between child, parent, and ball demonstrates the overall triangulative relationship of which Berlin and Kent spoke, and it is a sister of Aristotle's classic "rhetorical triangle" between the individual, the subject, and the audience.

If we analogize it to the peer response group scenario, we find that the student author differs from the child only in the complexity of the linguistic task. Whereas the child must learn effective use of the term "ball" in order to communicate, the student author must learn to exercise language the peer group understands about a more complex topic (than "ball"). Hence, while its complexity changes, the rough triangulative construct essentially remains the same.

However, that language intertwines with experience and that language is triangulative does not mean that language is neutral and equitable. The third point, therefore, is that language always involves some exercise of power. In "Paralogic hermeneutic Theories, Power, and the Possibility for Liberating Pedagogies" (1999), Sidney Dobrin makes this point in reference to the child-parent-ball construct by arguing that the child's acquisition of "ball" is not value neutral. Dobrin states that

what Russell, Kent, and Davidson do not identify in the instance of triangulation is the moment of power. In the scenario of the child and the ball, moments of

power twist the triangle to result in particular effects: for example, the mother

determines for the child what discourse is to be used to define 'ball.' In other

words, a dominant discourse is established. (1999, p. 142)

Thus, the child adopts "ball" because of the "dominant discourse" that calls spherical

referents "balls." Yet while it seems reasonable to conclude that moving from a non-

linguistic state to a linguistic state ("ball") empowers the child to function more fully in

society, the question as to whether or not a student author is equally empowered by a

movement towards what a peer response group calls "essay" raises many more

complications to be addressed later.

For now, given that power plays a role in discourse, a necessary question follows:

who wields the power? The answer is discourse communities. Consider Fish's point that

the simple question, "Is there a text in this class?" as posed from student to teacher at the

first class meeting, emerges from and is constrained by the context. It (1) could be

interpreted as a question as to whether or not there is a physical written work or (2)

interpreted as a question as to the teacher's point of view on textuality. Fish argues that

neither reading of the question…would be immediately available to any native

speaker of the language. 'Is there a text in this class?'[1] is interpretable or readable

only by someone who already knows what is included under the general rubric

"first day of class" (what concerns animate students, what bureaucratic matters

must be attended to before instruction begins) and who therefore hears the

utterance under the aegis of that knowledge, which is not applied after the fact but

is responsible for the shape the fact immediately has. (1980, p. 307)

Put another way, Fish imbeds meaning in context. While version (1) might seem more reasonable on the first day of class, were the question asked after a discussion of textuality later in the semester then version (2) of the question would be more contextual, and more understood, than version (1). Furthermore, a teacher hearing the raw question "Is there a text in this class?" on the first day not only intuitively perceives the face-value of the question, "Is there a required book," but also may perceive other questions and statements that are embedded the raw utterance: "I don't want to have to do a lot of reading," "I prefer classes where the students create the texts," "I do not have a lot of money," "the syllabus is unclear," etc.

With that in mind, Fish contends that "the meaning of the utterance would be severely constrained, not after it was heard but in the ways in which it *could*, in the first place, be heard" (1980, p. 307), meaning that a reasonable teacher could not interpret the question as asking whether or not there is a final exam. However, if an existing interpretive stance existed for such a question—that particular institution had a long standing culture of referring to final exams as "texts"—then it could be understood as such. Regardless, the point about power in language use is clear: the conventions of the discourse community regulate how utterances can, "in the first place, be heard."

Fish refers to this phenomenon as "institutional nesting":

... if "Is there a text in this class?"[1] is hearable only by those who know what is included under the rubric "first day of class," and if "Is there a text in this class?"[2] is hearable only by those whose categories of understanding include the concerns of contemporary literary theory, then it is obvious that in a random population presented with the utterance, more people would "hear" "Is there a text in this

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class?"[1] than "Is there a text in this class?"[2]…[and] it is difficult to imagine someone capable of hearing "Is there a text in this class?"[2] who was not already capable of hearing "Is there a text in this class?"[1]. (1980, p. 308)

Therefore, "institutional nesting" not only constrains how we typically will hear utterances but the very ways in which they can "be heard," and the latter equally constrains the utterances a speaker can choose and still "be heard" by the greater interpretive community. This represents the power inherent to discursive communities.

In fact, according to Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1979), the inherent power of "disciplines" to enforce their "norms" is not merely substantial, it is absolute:

> The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline'. We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (p. 194)

As Foucault points out, however, disciplines' inherent and absolute power to govern must not be considered negative. Rather, the power inherent to disciplines simply is unavoidable, meaning that utterances cannot possibly be interpreted or uttered without existing in context.

Giroux and McLaren, referencing Foucault, affirm the same two points, both that discourse communities hold power and that their power does not problematize discourse. They argue that

> discourses are invested in material and institutional forms and governed by discursive practices which, after Foucault, refer to the anonymous historical rules that govern what can be said and what must remain unsaid, who can speak with authority and who must listen….Discourses locate history not in the register of a universalized truth, but rather in that of signifying practices. (1992, p. 15)

Such "signifying practices" bring us right back to Fish's point that "Is there a text in this class?" derives its meaning based on the context in which it is uttered *and* that it simply could not be uttered outside of context.

The power of disciplines or discourse communities, specifically with respect to their power to regulate discourse, becomes particularly important with respect to teaching students to write. That endeavor must involve more than merely educating students as to the mechanics of writing. Instead, it must involve helping students understand the discourse communities for which they write and, ultimately, how to write in ways that the discourse community can embrace as meaningful.

Even in the case of expressivist writing where an author might write purely for his- or herself, discursive conventions exist with greater subtlety but no diminishment of their power. An American writing expressively would remain entirely unaware of how cultural forces and other American paradigms affect his or her writing, including how writing in English affects the nature of utterances. The discourse community, though perhaps imperceptible, still governs even the most purely expressivist aims.

Returning to the earlier point, however, the critical factor here is that because discourse communities govern discourse, successful discourse requires sensitivity to the standards and requirements of the social construct in which one exists. For our students, this means that they must be able to write in such a fashion that the governing discourse community recognizes.

However, I want to note my own resistance to indoctrinating students to write in academic ways, i.e. for the academic community. I will discuss this at great length later on but for now suffice it to say that if we blindly indoctrinate students to write for the institution then we are exercising our power as a community in oppressive rather than educational ways. Therefore, we must avoid teaching students to just write for the academy and instead teach them to understand and engage institutional standards.

With that said, however, and given the social construction of reality and the gate keeping power discourse communities hold, students need to write for the academic discourse community if they are to succeed academically. In other words, they must meet institutional standards, which not only means constructing what the academy calls an "essay" (or "story," "poem," "analysis," etc.) but also what deems "good writing."

As many readers will be quick to recognize, institutional standards are not only difficult to define, they also vary. Educators and academics alike will disagree as to what "good writing" means. That is neither problematic nor does it pose difficulty to this point. Within any given composition classroom, the teacher will hold an understanding of what constitutes "good writing." While teachers from different classrooms may hold varying opinions on that issue, all their conceptions "good writing" fall within the greater university's conception of "good writing" or they would not be teaching within it. Put

simply, a teacher accepting a string of geometric shapes as "writing" would not survive long in most English departments. Furthermore, while each professor's understanding of institutional standards will vary, each of their understandings of the institution's standards is more enlightened than that of their students.

With that in mind, teaching students to write must in some fashion involve teaching them to do so in fashions in the discourse community will accept, or as Bizzell expresses in "William Perry and Liberal Education" (1984), "the ways of thinking that one must master in order to participate in a particular community" (p. 326). While doing so will involve a spectrum of possibilities, all possibilities will lead towards what the institution values.

Regardless of how a given community defines it, students must be acculturated to what Richard Rorty refers to as a community's "normal discourse," which is "the sort of statement that can be agreed to be true by all participants who other participants count as rational" (cited in Bruffee, 1984, p. 423). In "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind" (1984), Bruffee links normal discourse and writing by suggesting that teaching "normal discourse in its written form is central to a college curriculum ... because the one thing that college teachers in most fields commonly want students to acquire, and what teachers in most fields consistently reward students for, is the ability to carry on in speech and writing the normal discourse of the field in question" (p. 424). In fact, Bruffee goes so far as to assert that "mastery of a knowledge community's normal discourse is the basic qualification for acceptance into that community" (1984, p. 424). Given the power discourse communities hold, Bruffee's point seems largely inarguable. *As long as there is an institution, that institution will*

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have some standards by which it determines membership, and so we must help students

achieve those standards.

Even in the case of radical expressivist writing that disregards discursive

conventions while favoring whatever form or formlessness students want to use to best

express their ideas, some articulatable standard remains, even if it only requires that the

student produce something in writing, or something of a certain length, or that the student

can explain the rationale for the form(lessness) of the piece. A student in an expressivist

class who chooses not to express anything at all would fail the class, at least presumably.

In some form, then, certain standards will exist, and perhaps no one has

articulated the need to acculturate students to that standard more than David Bartholomae

in "Inventing the University." Bartholomae contends that to meet success the "student

has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we [those in the discourse community or

institution] do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting,

concluding, and arguing that define our discourse community" (1985, p. 623).

Bartholomae makes this case quite unapologetically and on behalf of the students'

interests:

> The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and
>
> he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience,
>
> as though he were a member of the academy or an historian or an anthropologist
>
> or an economist; he has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its
>
> language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal
>
> history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a
>
> discipline, on the other hand. (1985, p. 624)

Note that Bartholomae does not advocate the holistic subjugation of the individual to the community but rather notes that the individual must find "compromise" between personal belief and discursive conventions. Not all constructivist theorists agree. Foucault, for example, argues that the greater a person's acceptance by any community represents proportionate de-individualization (1979). Yet even Foucault acknowledges that a certain measure of de-individualization is unavoidable if people are to function within discursive structures, which is to say, if they are to function at all.

That is precisely Journet's point, her contention being that without discursive convention any and all communication remains impossible because

> academic disciplines exist within a complex set of commitments…that regularize disciplinary knowledge: for example, patterns of training, funding, institutional organization; common problems or representations of reality; preferred methodology, theoretical commitments about what constitutes acceptable discourse…constitute a discipline's genres: the acceptable 'representational' or 'thinking language' …that allow the production, as well as communication, of disciplinary knowledge. (p. 98-99)

Yet while Journet does an excellent job of pointing to the more abstract forces in disciplines that govern not only the communication of knowledge but the production of knowledge itself, i.e., that which will be accepted as "knowledge" by a given discourse community, the loftier nature of her discussion might foster the impression that discursive communities lack a more immediate power over text.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Every element of writing depends on the discourse community. Bizzell points this out by noting that

even something as cognitively fundamental as sentence structure takes on

meaning from the discourse in which it is deployed. For this reason, for example,

revising rules are notoriously unhelpful: they always require further knowledge in

order to be applied. We can't 'omit needless words' unless we have some

additional criteria for 'needlessness'" (1982, p. 397).

Or more simply, she asks, "How can we define, for example, what is 'extraneous

material,' when the quality of extraneous resides not in the material itself but in its

relation to discourse?" (1982, p. 405).

Thus, the success of something as rudimentary as any given sentence within any

given work remains fully contingent on the author's knowledge of the discursive nature

of the community to which that sentence is intended. Therefore, reality and truth, as well

as "successful writing," emerge from a social construction built entirely through the

exercise of language. Yet the emergence of that linguistic is governed by and interacts

with the discourse communities. As we have seen, there can be no "knowledge" without

a discourse community, and only that language which the discourse community accepts

will be considered true. Based on that line of reasoning, educating students *must* in some

fashion cultivate in them the ability to write towards disciplinary acceptance.

A student who successfully demonstrates the practices of the discourse

community, while at the same time maintaining individual thought, is a student who, to

use William Perry's words, becomes someone "we recognize as colleague" (cited in

Bruffee, 1984, p. 424). At first that seems like a bold claim because we never do see

students as colleagues. Yet that affirms the point rather than defeating it. The student

who can operate at the same capacity within the discourse community as the teacher no

longer falls under the heading of "student." While undergraduates never achieve this level of proficiency within the discourse community, graduate students do, just as I hope to do through this dissertation. Put another way, a Doctor of Philosophy in English who signed up for a first-year composition course would be rejected by the professor on the grounds that someone holding a doctorate is no longer a student.

What we see, therefore, are four critical factors of social constructionism: First, that it is governed by language. Second, that language use is triangulative. Third, that within the triangulative construct exists some exercise of power that governs what language can (effectively) be used and how it is interpreted. And finally that given the power of discourse communities within academic institutions, we need to empower students to write in ways the academy deems successful (whatever that may be within the given class, institution, and discourse community).

Returning to the relationship between peer response work and the social construct, at first glance it seems as though peer response groups serve the social constructionist paradigm quite well. Returning to Flower's original points about peer response, it certainly seems as though this "instructional move" *does* "make sense because it seems to enact our image of writing as a social, cultural process, happening within a classroom community." Equally, if peer response groups do foster understanding of audience, authenticity, and purpose, it seems reasonable to conclude congruence between peer response theory and social constructionist theory, especially since, as Anne Ruggles Gere argues (1987), "writing groups highlight the social dimension of writing. They provide tangible evidence that writing involves human interaction as well as solitary inscription" (p. 3).

Not only does writing hold a "social dimension" but, as Bruce Speck (2002) asserts, it is the teacher's role to guide students towards understanding how to best function within that social construct:

> As participants in a community of learners, students have the opportunity not only to share their knowledge with other students and to learn from their peers but also to hear how other students as members of a live audience respond to their writing. In fact, audience is one of the two focal points for discussing writing pedagogy, the other point being purpose. Professors have a responsibility to explain to students how to write for particular purposes and for particular audiences. (p. 14)

Thus, the professor's role as facilitator of "purposes" and "audiences" affirms the relationship between peer response and the socially constructed world.

To that raw connection, Bruffee makes a strong case for collaborative enterprises such as peer response as essential to helping students understand larger socially constructed conventions, i.e. discourse communities. He writes that

> our task must involve engaging students in conversation among themselves at as many points in both the writing and the reading process as possible, and that we should contrive to ensure that students' conversation about what they read and write is similar in as many was as possible to the way we would like them eventually to read and write. (1984, p. 422)

Note that Bruffee not only advocates a social construct—"conversation among themselves"—but also using peer groups in directed ways to train students to write "the way we would like them" to write. In this respect, Bruffee values peer groups not only for their collaborative power but also for the way they can mimic "a community that

approximates the one most students must eventually write for in everyday life, in business, government, and the professions" (1984, p. 422).

Though not in so many words, we see Flower, Speck, and Bruffee advancing the idea that students need to write for and within discourse communities.   The question becomes whether or not peer response groups do move students towards understanding the social construct/discourse community in which they exist, and whether or not peer groups help students produce what the discourse community would call "good writing."

CHAPTER 2: PEER RESPONSE VS. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST

PARADIGM

While aforementioned arguments (1) about peer response and writing as a social act, (2) about peer response and audience and purpose, and (3) about peer response and discourse communities, suggest that peer response embodies a social epistemic pedagogy, a closer examination of each will reveal peer response pedagogy and social epistemicism to be largely incongruent. It would be brash to suggest that peer response upholds no social epistemic values but while it does represent a more enlightened social epistemic pedagogy than more teacher-centered practices, it nevertheless fails to uphold social epistemic tenets in the final analysis. At the very least, peer response groups tap in only the meekest of ways the power of true collaborative enterprises toward the social construct.

That said, before I problematize peer response's relationship to the social construct, I want to affirm my belief in peer response as a viable pedagogical tool. I do not want readers to think that I holistically reject all things peer response. Such is not the case. Peer response pedagogy does embrace some elements of social constructionism insofar as it attempts to invoke conceptions of audience, discourse community, and institutional standards. However, I do not think it does so to the degree that popular belief holds, nor to the degree it could achieve if assessment were invoked as an integral part of the practice. In fact, in *some* ways, I do think peer response does more harm than good. Furthermore, my contention will be that the majority of the boons from peer response exercises come from its *collaborative* force rather than its *constructionist* force.

Admittedly, those two forces overlap. Despite their overlap, however, I fear that as a field we might have conflated the two forces into a singularity. While we might not have it yet, perhaps a true union of the two forces is our ultimate goal, and that is what I eventually propose. My hope is to build on both collaborative and constructionist ideas towards a stronger achievement of their ideals, one that move beyond mere response and into something more authoritative.

Having affirmed peer response, I will offer five specific though overlapping rationales that problematize peer response work: (1) the distinction between dominant and subordinate constructs; (2) the difference between peer response groups and genuinely "live" and authentic audiences; (3) the problem of peer response groups as simulacra; (4) the difference between peer response as a collaborative force vs. a constructivist force, and (5) peer response groups and the "zone of proximal development."

Speaking to the distinction between *dominant* and *subordinate* social constructs, peer response groups do constitute actual social constructs—they offer students a real audience, a heightened sense of purpose and a more authentic writing experience—*except* that they remain subordinate to the dominant discourse community of the disciplinary institution. The problem is that subordinate constructs do not hold summative discursive power; the dominant discourse community holds all of the (triangulative) power.

Simply put, the peer response group lacks the authority to functionally judge the worth of the student-author's work. Peer groups can offer feedback but the veracity of that feedback will be determined by the greater academic discourse community, which in most cases means its classroom representative: the professor. A peer response group can

function as *an* audience, yes, but not as *the* audience, and the difference between *an* audience and *the* audience is all the difference in the world, literally.

To be sure, that peer response groups lack summative power does not entirely defeat their worth. The process of presenting work to an audience and receiving feedback certainly demonstrates to students that (1) there are audiences, (2) that members of any audience will read their work differently, and (3) the general importance of writing for an audience rather than writing more selfishly. While Flower's earlier point that students recognize the need to write for the (audience that is) the professor remains true, peer groups unquestionably advance students' overall understanding of the power and nature of audiences as whole. Considering the three values above, peer response holds worth that might not be attainable without similar peer interaction. For that very reason, I do not advocate eliminating response altogether; I advocate moving beyond mere response into authoritative practices. As it would seem unwise to sacrifice the aforementioned boons of peer response, the question becomes as follows: How can we maintain the value of peer response while resolving its deficiencies?

As stated before, the first such deficiency is that peer response groups lack authoritative power. Functioning as an audience, a peer group could embrace an "essay" written in geometric shapes. As such, the student author, acting on feedback from that audience, could go on to submit that paper to the professor for a grade, only to discover that the professor rejected the "essay" in its entirety. To be sure, this represents an extreme example, if not an absurd one. Yet this is precisely what happens to lesser degrees in peer response groups all the time: The peer response group, empowered to assess but lacking the authority to enforce their assessment, i.e. summatively grade,

makes decisions about and offers advice on student essays with neither the peer group nor the author knowing how the discourse community (or its representative—the professor) will judge the same document.

In this respect, we see a similar situation to that of Schrödinger's Cat—a physics postulate that demonstrates the nature of *quantum indeterminacy* as follows: A live cat is placed in a metal box. Along with the cat, a small radioactive substance is placed on a quantum scale, which serves as a trigger device for a hammer that will smash a vial of toxin. If even a single atom of the radioactive material decays, the scale will register the change of weight and trigger the hammer to smash the vial of toxin, thus killing the cat. Because we cannot possibly know if the cat is alive or dead while the box remains closed, the cat exists in a superposition—it is both alive and dead until such time as the box is opened and the cat observed. What quantum indeterminacy explains is that the position or nature of quantum particles can change when observed, or rather than they can simultaneously exist in multiple states until observation.

A student author embracing comments from a peer group and modifying his or her paper accordingly, contends with the educational equivalent of Schrödinger's Cat. The student cannot know if his or her paper, as revised in alignment with comments from a peer response group, is "alive" or "dead" until such time as the professor, as representative of the greater discourse community, observes the paper. This is so because the true observer of the paper is the professor because it is the professor who is imbued with power from the discourse community to summatively evaluate the student's work. As such, a peer response group's comments are equally "alive" and "dead," which is to say equally "right" and "wrong" until such time as observed by the professor.

In fact, it would be erroneous to suggest that if a professor affirms a peer group's comment that the peer group would have been correct all along, just as it would be erroneous to suggest that if a professor rejected the peer group's suggestions the group would have been wrong all long. Until such time as the professor evaluates the paper, the peer group cannot be said to be right or wrong. It is neither and both. "Rightness" and "wrongness" literally *do not come into existence* until such time as the professor's observation and evaluation comes into existence, just like "alive" and "dead" do not come into existence until observing the cat. As we could not say that someone who claimed the cat died was correct before the box was opened to reveal the dead cat because the cat is in both states until observed, so can we not suggest that a peer response group was "right" before the professor evaluated the work because "right" and "wrong" co-exist until the paper is observed by the professor.

The problem for a student author, therefore, resides in the fact that a peer response group constitutes only a subordinate audience to the authentic audience, the authentic audience being the discourse community. Supposing the discourse community (professor) eventually will evaluate the work, the box remains closed around the paper throughout the peer response process, and the peer responders merely get to take bets at whether or not the cat is alive or dead. Effectively, the peer response group that comments on the paper never actually "observes" the cat; that privilege goes to the discourse community. All the peer response group can really do is to guess at the quantum state of the cat, which remains in quantum indeterminacy until such time as the professor opens the box.

It could be argued that the professor is not the final and authoritative judge. Supposing, for example, a student chooses to appeal a grade to a department council, the analogy extends such that the professor never really got to open the box either, a privilege then reserved for the department council who, as the new representatives of the discourse community, then get to evaluate the cat. Hence, only the highest authoritative power can determine the "alive" or "dead" quality of the cat or the "good" or "bad" quality of the paper.

To be fair to peer response groups, we hope they possess a more informed ability to assess a student's paper than Schrödinger does of his cat. Based on their education in the class and their knowledge of the professor, peer response groups, we hope, can make educated guesses as to the paper's state rather remaining completely blind to what is going on in the box. However, the peer response group's assessment of the paper's state never exceeds just that: an educated guess. Only the professor can authoritatively determine the paper's state and the peer response group, lacking the power of true observation in quantum sense and true evaluation—grading—in the educational sense, can not.

Therefore, while a peer response group may hold power insofar as their commentary can effect change in the paper should the author embrace the group's ideas, the peer group nevertheless utterly lacks power in the institutional sense. As only discourse community's can determine efficacy of language use, and only professors can determine grades, peer response groups effectively hold no power as power is conceptualized in the academic institution. A peer response group cannot assess a

paper's value (in the discourse community). Or simply put, a peer response group cannot open the box and look at the cat.

Let me explain by returning once again to Berlin's postulate that "the real is located in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse community…and the material conditions of existence." In the peer response scenario, two apices of the triangulated construct are clear: the "observer" is the author, and the author's essay constitutes the "material conditions of existence." Yet what of the "discourse community"? Insofar as the peer response group constitutes an audience within academia, we can safely equate that peer group to the discourse community, and insofar as they are one in the same, the peer response group can fulfill its roles in fostering audience, purpose, and authenticity. Members of the peer response group can embrace or reject the author's text to varying degrees, thereby providing the author with an understanding of how the isolated community of that one peer response group manifests cultural and standards and how to negotiate acceptance by the culture and standards while (hopefully) remaining true to the author's own convictions.

In another sense, however, we can *not* equate the peer response group to a discourse community because, in reference to Dobrin's point that in the "instance of triangulation is the moment of power," the peer response groups lacks authority to establish "*dominant* discourse." While the peer group holds the power to effect change in the paper if the author embraces its commentary, whether that change is "right" or "wrong" remains undetermined—Schrödinger's Cat—until the discourse community observes the paper. Thus, the peer group can determine what the peer group accepts but it cannot determine what the professor, the dominant discourse community, and the

institution ultimately will accept. This resigns the peer group to a subordinate role, leaving all of its judgments valid only within its immediate context but in educational indeterminacy—Schrödinger's Cat—until denounced or affirmed by the dominant discourse community.

Keeping in mind Fish's point that an "interpretive entity...determin[es] what counts as the facts," or in this case what counts as "essay" or "good essay," we must relegate ourselves to what strikes me as a deeper quagmire: if the essential quality of a discourse community is its ability to determine "fact" then *a discourse community that cannot establish a dominant discourse is not a discourse community.* This means that since peer response groups ultimately lack the power and knowledge to determine what the institution will accept, we simply cannot interassociate peer response groups with real discourse communities and, consequently, with fostering understanding of the social construction of knowledge as a whole, much less the specific cultural standards and practices of the dominant discourse community of the discipline and/or institution.

Does this mean that subordinate communities lack power entirely? Despite the boons of peer response I mentioned earlier, boons I still affirm, the short answer is nevertheless, "yes." Subordinate communities lack power. Returning to the student who appeals the grade on his paper to a department council, until such time as the appeal comes into existence the professor remains the dominant discourse community and, as such, maintains all of the power to determine the state of the paper. However, the very moment the appeal exists, the professor becomes a subordinate discourse community to the department council and immediately loses all authority to determine the state of the paper. Whether or not the council eventually affirms the professor's assessment of the

paper never returns the professor's power. Like a peer response group, the professor's

assessment becomes as Schrödinger's Cat—educational indeterminacy—until such time

as the council makes its ruling. At that point, it would be incorrect to say that the

professor had been right all along. Instead, the council is right (because the council is

always "right") and the professor's assessment is merely congruous with the council, but

not simultaneous.

However, an essential distinction exists between a professor and a peer response

group. While a professor actually possesses the discourse community's authority except

in the rare case of an appeal, *a peer response group never possesses the discourse

community's authority*. Thus, while a professor's assessment is rarely subordinated, a

peer group's assessment is *always* subordinate to the forthcoming professor's assessment.

Peer groups are established as subordinate to the professor and with the understanding

that they lack all summative power. Professors, on the other hand, enjoy summative

power unless appealed.

Conscious of this distinction, arguments for the value of peer response groups

acquire new meaning. For instance, when Flower asserts that "peer response places

students in a teacher-designed community of response," the emphasis that used to fall on

"community of response" now shifts to "teacher-designed." We see implicit in Flower's

own words a confessional concerning the inauthenticity of peer response, namely that a

"teacher-designed" community of response is not the *actual* community of response (the

institution), and it begs the question as to why we construct for students the former when

they already exist in the latter. In short, if students ultimately need to write in ways

embraced by the dominant discourse community—regardless of the particular nature of

its standards (expressivist, argumentative, legal, historical, thematic, etc.)—then writing for a group of peers outside that dominant discourse community cannot acculturate them to that dominant discourse community.

To be fair, we hope that peer response groups will help students move towards the dominant discourse because of the professor's participation and tutelage. It is not as if we establish peer response groups in place of or outside of composition classes and leave students to their own devices. Peer response group emerge within the academic institution, and therefore embody participants who possess some degree of understanding of the institutional definitions of "good writing." Furthermore, peer response groups function as part of a larger course design. Therefore, I do not want to cast this as a binary proposition. Peer response groups certainly achieve some functionality, and all their values as enumerated by Flower, Bruffee, Bizzell, etc. need to be embraced and maximized rather than disregarded.

That said, it equally remains true that the peer response exercise, in and of itself, still functions as an artificial, subordinate, "teacher designed" community fraught with Schrödinger's problem.

Ironically, this brings us back to Bruffee, who at once bespeaks the value of peer response while simultaneously delineating its inherent power problem: "To the extent that thought is internalized conversation, then, any effort to understand how we think requires us to understand the nature of conversation; and any effort to understand conversation requires us to understand the nature of community life that generates and maintains conversation" (1984, p. 421). Bruffee acknowledges that students must be able to engage the community to understand how that community "generates and maintains

conversation." To that end, peer response and collaborative learning theory serves an important role. Bruffee hopes to afford students mini-communities in which to practice their craft, conceptualize the idea that communities exist, understand that communities have standards, and ultimately learn to write with a community in mind.

Were peer response groups *the* communities instead of subordinate communities, they would function better. As subordinate communities, however, they do not permit students to write for and/or participate in the dominant community with *its* standards. Consequently, writing for a peer response group where there would be no eventual assessment of the paper by a more dominant discourse community, or where the peer response group held the power to summatively assess the work, would seem to manifest a greater fulfillment of Bruffee's objectives.

As such is typically not the case, need not we determine a way to extend Bruffee's collaborative theory so that it overcomes the problem of subordinated audiences?

Live Audience or Not?

The disempowered, subordinate status of the peer response group relative to the empowered, dominant discourse community animates issues of audience, purpose, and authenticity. To be circumspect, can we advocate peer response groups in the weak sense of social construction—insofar as they do offer students a sense of purpose, audience, and authenticity even though the peer response group ultimately lacks the authority of the discourse community—or must we reject them outright?

Can we, for example, roughly liken a student-author workshopping a paper in a peer response group to a professional academic conferring about a potential publication

with a group of colleagues? In one sense, we find both the peer and the colleague groups devoid of final authority over the worth of the piece in question. Any evaluation by student peer groups ultimately must defer to the professor's judgment; any evaluation by colleagues will defer to the editors of the journal. Both groups lack final authority. Yet I fear that the analogy terminates there.

Two fundamental distinctions between student peer groups and colleague groups make analogizing the two impossible: First, colleague groups already hold a general though varying understanding of the culture, practices, and standards of the discourse community they inhabit; that is what makes them groups of *colleagues*. Recalling Perry, we do not "recognize as colleague" our students because they cannot interact through the discursive practices of our community, but colleagues can and do. Colleagues by their inherent nature do understand and perpetuate the culture, standards, and practices of the discourse community. Whereas a student-author and the peer response group equally lack understanding of the conventions of the discourse community, academics and his or her colleagues—other academics—equally understand those conventions.

The second point is that while peer groups enjoy no power of authority, colleague groups do. Though groups of colleagues cannot predetermine the judgment of the journal's editorial board, *colleagues do comprise the final audience to which the journal will be published*. Being the audience for the journal, colleagues not only enjoy an informed appreciation of the journal's conventions but they also tacitly shaped those conventions over the years.

In this respect, colleagues constitute actual readers in both the indirect sense of being members of the discourse community in question, and in the direct sense of

generally being subscribers and audience members of the journal itself. While an academic author's future nevertheless rests in the final authority of the journal's editors, feedback from colleagues should be considered genuine and informed.

Student groups, by contrast, neither enjoy membership in the discourse community nor the privilege of being the eventual and final readers of the student-author's work. That holds true even in the case of the newsletter published to the class, the final or real audience for which—the audience with the power to assess it—being the teacher rather than the students. Effectively, students lack all power to judge the work in question, and they lack that power because they cannot employ that mechanism through which judgment occurs: the dominant and summative language of the discourse community.

Recalling Berlin's point that the triangulative "dialectic is grounded in language" and McLaren and Giroux's points that it is "through language that meaning is created," then when I say that peer groups cannot exercise the dominant language of the discourse community, I do not mean that they cannot verbalize terms such as "thesis," "organization," "tone," etc.; I mean that their verbalization of such terminology cannot construct meaning.

Anyone, for example, can respond through words to the student's question, "Is there a text in this class?" A fellow student, for example, could tell his inquiring peer that the class does, in fact, have a required text. The questioner could embrace that answer as truth or reject it, but either way the actual validity of the answer remains as Schrödinger's Cat until an authoritative answer comes from the professor because only the professor's language constructs the reality of whether or not the class has "text." If

the class involves an essay, for example, whether or not that essay constitutes "text" remains the determination of the discourse community, and the professor as its representative.

Similarly, while a peer group might be able to verbalize language of the dominant discourse community, they can do so only as verbiage, not with authority, and therefore not with meaningfulness. A peer group can use the term "strong thesis" with respect to a student-author's paper but bespeaking "strong thesis" does not make it so. Therefore, one fundamental problem of peer response groups, perhaps *the* fundamental problem, is the conflation of verbalizing dominant terminology with actual meaning construction.

We must liken the peer response group to William Lutz's (1996) three umpires: The first umpire says, "There are balls and there are strikes, and I call them as I see them" (p. 48). The second umpire says, "There are balls and there are strikes, and I call them as they are" (p. 48). The third umpire says, "There are balls and there are strikes, but they are nothing until I call them" (p. 48). And of the three, the third and *only* the third is correct. Once the catcher receives the pitch, the fans watching the game may exercise dominant language verbiage concerning "balls" and "strikes," but until that person invested with the power to exercise those words authoritatively speaks, the status of the pitch remains in question. Once the umpire speaks, the pitch's status is determined *and it is whatever the umpire says it is*. Until the umpire speaks, the status of the pitch remains in indeterminacy.

If, per chance, the umpire is over-ruled by another umpire then the pitch is whatever the latter umpire says it is. Thus, the umpire empowered with the authority of the institution gets to determine the social construct and meaning of the pitch. However,

until such time as the initial umpire's ruling is called in question, his power remains absolute. Once it is called into question, his power is nullified and the subsequent umpire's ruling becomes absolute.

Thus, the empowered umpire constructs the meaning of the pitch—ball or strike. By contrast, a great irony of peer response groups is that while they are exercised in order to help students understand the social construction of meaning, peer groups often represent more of a positivist view of knowledge than a socially constructed one. Teachers exercise peer response groups as if the second umpire is correct rather than the third, as if a pitch *is* intrinsically a ball or strike before the umpire calls it, as if students will help each other recognize a "strong thesis" as if it exists *a priori* of its assessment by the dominant discourse community, as if a "strong thesis" can be recognized by its own merits rather than through meaning making affirmed by the dominant discourse community. When a student asks, "Does my paper have a strong thesis?" only the dominant discourse community can determine the answer. Since peer response groups lack the authority to answer that question with authority—they lack the ability to construct authoritative meaning—they are implicitly determining whether or not there is something *inherent in the thesis itself* that is strong or weak, i.e. that they are assessing the quality of the thesis itself (as if the thesis has an inherent value) rather than *constructing* the value of the thesis the way the third umpire does for pitches. They *cannot* construct the meaning and value of the thesis so they often turn to the former, second umpire function whether they know it or not.

Consider, for example, when students receive mixed feedback from their peers. If two responders deem the thesis "clear" and two responders deem it "unclear" then the

student author often wants to know which reading is correct *as if correct exists independently of the audience's construction of meaning*. From a constructionist perspective, seeking positivist value is erroneous; the essay holds no intrinsic value outside how an audience reads it. But in this case, the student-author's desire to know which response is "correct" actually makes sense. "Good writing" *does* exist independently of the *peer* audience; it exists in the discipline's construct of meaning, which only the professor can determine. Hence, students explicitly or implicitly look to determine whether or not there is some inherent quality in the thesis itself that will make it meaningful to the discipline, i.e. the professor. In this respect—the search for positivist qualities the discourse community will embrace—peer response groups stand antithetical to social epistemicism.

Worse, if "experience is constituted by language," then an inability to *meaningfully* exercise language must at least partially denigrate experience itself. Mind you, in the most general sense all students at all times are making meaning through language, including during time spent in peer response groups, because such meaning making is unavoidable. In that respect, all students always engage a genuine experience of being authentic and "alive," of being in a college, of being in a classroom, of being in a peer group, etc. But not with respect to institutional discourse communities that determine the meaningfulness of an essay. If students cannot make meaning through the language of the dominant discourse (because they lack the authority to imbue the comment "strong thesis" with authoritative meaning) then they lack a genuine experience in the genuine *reality of the discourse community*. In other words, if experience comes

through meaning making but students cannot make meaning (within the discourse community) then their literal experience becomes degraded.

That is why I fear Flower and other researchers incorrect in their assertions that a peer response group constitutes a "live audience" of authentic readers. What makes an audience, such as a group of academic colleagues, alive is its capacity to offer meaningful, authentic language and therefore construct a genuine experience. The interaction between author, (authoritative) audience, and text formulate the triangulative dialectic that functionalizes the social construction of reality, including the "moment of power" that governs Fish's interpretive act. This is the true "human interaction" of which Gere speaks.

By contrast, a peer response group is not a live audience. It is, at best, a zombie audience. Lifelike but not living, peer groups can interact with the *verbiage* of the discourse community but they cannot exercise the essence of truly vital experience: meaning making. Huddled together, essays in their hands, rife with discursive chatter, they look like a discourse community and might even talk like one but if genuine language use constitutes experience then their inability to exercise language *functionally and purposefully*, to exercise the *meaning* in the words rather than the sound of the words, turns the experience of so-called "human" interaction pale, cold, and lifeless. While peer groups strive to offer authors a discursive experience, a discursive experience devoid of meaning is a degraded one at best, if it is an "experience" at all in terms of the discourse community.

This is precisely why Michael Reynolds and Kiran Trehan (2000) argue that "if self awareness, consciousness-raising or reflexivity are introduced into the assessment

process without power, authority and judgment-making being examined or changed, students have even less power than before" (p. 271). They also reference Ball, who makes a similar point, that placing students into artificial constructs of self-realization only results in complicating existing control techniques rather than fostering something more educational, much less noble. Unfortunately, I fear that peer response groups do exactly what Reynolds, Trehan, and Ball critique. While perhaps affording *some* greater understanding of and power in the social construct in the weak, subordinate sense, peer groups offer no greater empowerment for students in the strong, dominant sense.

<div align="center">Simulacra</div>

Therefore, based on the disempowered, subordinate nature of peer response groups, it is conceivable that a writing course that does not place students in "teacher-designed" peer response groups might offer a more genuine and empowered experience for students than one that does. Students in a traditional classroom, though perhaps experiencing difficulty in understanding that "writing is a social process" nevertheless fully understand their place in the institution and that they need to write in such a fashion that the teacher embraces. They might not know *how* to do so but they know that they need to do so. Though utterly disempowered, they entertain no illusions of empowerment. They exist in an authentic scenario of subordination to the institutional discourse community.

Peer response groups, on the other hand, offer students only the illusion of power, of being able to make determinations and construct meaning, of being accepted as colleagues, but "illusion" functions as the operative word. The same goes for so-called

"authentic" writing exercises, such as a newsletter that gets published to the class. This offers the (subordinate) illusion of authenticity within the (dominant) pre-existing context of the authentic academic discourse community. The teacher may allow students to write for one another *but as long as the teacher embodies the final, authoritative audience, there is little to no authenticity in publishing to peers.* Is it more authentic, therefore, to write for the zombie audience of fellow students who cannot evaluate the work with true meaning or for the teacher who can? Students in the newsletter scenario are not writing for their peers but rather writing "for their peers" in such a way that the *teacher* finds authentic. They are, in essence, writing for their peers ... for their teacher.

Or consider another example: Were students to write and send a letter, say a letter to a congressional representative, it would constitute an authentic experience insofar as the congressional representative served as the letter's sole audience. However, if the in-class success of the letter depends not on the judgment of the Congressperson but on the judgment of the teacher, then the Congressperson cannot be considered the authentic audience, nor can the experience of writing to the Congressperson be considered any more authentic a writing experience than merely writing a paper for the teacher. Authenticity depends on writing to an audience that holds the power to assess the work. Students writing "to a representative" but being graded by a teacher recognize the latter as their genuine audience (at least insofar as a grade for the course is concerned).

As such, despite the pragmatic criticisms of peer response seen earlier (Pacheo) and the thoughtful suggestions for making peer response more effective, the deep reason why peer response groups do not accomplish as much as we might like, and the reason

students do not engage the process as much they could, comes down to the fact that students recognize our hypocrisy.

The message we send to students through peer response groups contains the following "logic": "We faculty believe it important that you students (1) respond to one another's writing and, more importantly, (2) actually *listen* to the advice you offer one another because (3) you actually do have the ability to offer worthwhile, intelligent, and meaningful feedback to one another *except for the fact* that (4) we do not really trust you to evaluate one another's writing successfully, accurately, and meaningfully because (5) we still retain for ourselves the power to evaluate and assess—grade—your work by the standards of the discourse community we represent and to which you seek acceptance so (6) you actually should not listen to one another (though you should look like you do) because (7) your comments to one another may or may not align with the discourse community's assessment and (8) you have no way of knowing that until after peer response practice ends (Schrödinger) so (9) peer response work only re-affirms the truism that you do not really know what you are doing and that you are (10) just as disempowered as before.

Students who recognize this disparity between their dominant, empowered audience—academe—and their subordinate, disempowered audience—peer groups— rightfully lack seriousness with respect to the peer response process despite all of the boons mentioned earlier. Yet those students who recognize the disparity, though perhaps frustrated, do not incur the greatest risk. The greatest risk falls on those who embrace peer response fully and treat the peer response group as a Baudrillardian "simulacra" of the authentic academic reality.

Baudrillard's (1990) "precession of simulacra" spoke of the danger of taking a false construct, a façade, or "map"—as the reality it represents. Therefore, accepting the "precession of simulacra" means embracing "the map that precedes the territory…engenders the territory, and…today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map" (p. 1).

Furthering the analogy, a peer response group constitutes the map of the academic discourse community territory. Like any good map, it corresponds in certain ways to the territory itself. Just as a geographic map depicts a region called "Pennsylvania" when there is an actual region in the territory also called "Pennsylvania," so does a peer response group invoke the term "essay" as a representation of the discourse community's use of the term "essay." Unfortunately, while we all intuitively recognize that the map of Pennsylvania is not the geographic region of Pennsylvania, not all students recognize that a peer response group is not the academic discourse community.

Worse, students interacting with the peer response map cannot determine the extent to which it *actually* corresponds to the disciplinary territory, and the greater the conviction with which they embrace the map the more risk that it will lead them astray of the academic territory itself. The student-author who takes to heart the peer group's consensus that the essay is "clear" only incurs a higher risk of disillusionment when confronted with the potential discursive reality that the essay is not clear according to the institution—the only real arbiter of what "clear" is. In fact, the student who embraces bad advice—that which ultimately contradicts that of the institutional discourse community—from the peer response group will degrade the quality of his/her own essay.

By contrast, the student who considers the comments of the peer response group lightly, if at all, and then proceeds to engage the teacher as to questions of the essay's relative quality runs no risk of disillusionment and little risk of revising in ways in which the discourse community ultimately disapproves. This is exactly what Carolyn did; rather than embracing her peer groups comments, she sought out mine, knowing full well that only mine determined her grade.

It follows quite ironically, then, that the more wholeheartedly a student embraces the peer response process and the closer that student comes to accepting the peer group as the simulacra of the institution, the more we consider the peer response exercise a success even though it means that the student embraces the map rather than the territory. The student who truly authors a newsletter for his or her peers incurs a higher risk of conflicting with academic discourse standards than the student who writes the newsletter in a fashion the professor will find appropriate.

Remember, I am not suggesting that the peer group never aligns with the discourse community, only that the peer group's responses remain in educational indeterminacy until the professor affirms or rejects them—Schrödinger's Cat. Sometimes Pennsylvania is exactly where the map says it is. However, the Pennsylvania on the map is *never* actually Pennsylvania, and we cannot assess the accuracy of the map until we get to where Pennsylvania is supposed to be. By the same reasoning, sometimes the advice of the peer group correlates with the assessment by the professor. And other times it is close enough to be helpful. However, the situation is always that of Schrödinger's Cat.

Returning then to Reynold and Trehan's point that increased actionability without authority results only in more complex measures of control, we also can return to Foucault and his point that the easiest way to control a population is to have them embrace the control mechanisms so completely that they not only do not recognize them as control mechanisms, and not only enforce them amongst themselves, but even consider those controlling mechanisms liberating. Students who embrace the illusion that peer response groups are empowering, that peer groups represent a social construct, that they represent greater collegiality between the teacher and themselves, etc. and who attribute power to the peer response group rather than to the teacher who actually holds the power only affirm the teacher's power all the more. If the teacher still holds final authority but the student believes in the so-called authority of the peer group then the teacher's authority becomes disguised. As such, the teachers' power becomes harder to recognize and challenge.

Am I suggesting that educators use this control mechanism deliberately? Absolutely not. But does it affect the teacher-student dynamic? Absolutely so. It becomes a double-edged sword: students either recognize the falsity of their empowerment and resent it or they do not recognize it and become trapped by its illusory power.

Constructive or Collaborative?

Considering my points about zombie audiences, simulacra, and control mechanisms, the question emerges as to why peer response groups function as well as they do. After all, and as I detailed earlier, they do benefit students to varying degrees,

including with respect to the social construct. Yet given that students remain disempowered with respect to the discourse community, disengaged from the exercise of dominant language, and non-experiential with respect to authentic discursive practice, how do peer response groups foster positive results?

The answer comes from collaborative learning theory, namely that while peer response groups become simulacra facades of the deeper reality of the institutional discourse community, they nevertheless afford students the opportunity to work together towards determining the dominant discourse's conventions. In short, students do a better job of determining what the institution means by "essay" when working together than individually, and they do so for one of the primary reasons educators value collaborative learning—multiple heads are better than one.

Bruffee makes this very point, asserting that peer response work and all collaborative enterprises will amount to "the blind leading the blind" when we embrace a positivist epistemology, but not so when we embrace a constructivist one. In other words, peer groups cannot function when

> we insist on the Cartesian model of knowledge: that to know is to "see," and that knowledge is information impressed upon the individual mind by some outside source. But if we accept the premise that knowledge is an artifact created by a community of knowledgeable peers constituted by the language of that community, and that learning is a social and not an individual process, then to learn is to work collaboratively to establish and maintain knowledge of justified belief collaboratively by challenging each other's biases and presuppositions; by negotiating collectively toward new

paradigms of perception, thought, feeling, and expression; and by joining

larger, more experienced communities of knowledgeable peers through

assenting to those communities' interests, values, language, and paradigms

perception and thought. (1984, p. 427)

Thus, students benefit from collaborative learning because it places them in a context

where they can, or in fact must, "challeng[e] each other's biases and presuppositions" and

"negotiate[e] collectively toward new paradigms of perception, thought, feeling, and

expression" concerning what "good writing" is in general and what the discourse

community views as good writing in particular.

However, while Bruffee offers sound reasoning for collaborative learning, might

he incorrectly conflate the power of collaborative learning with that of socially

constructed knowledge? He rightfully rejects the Cartesian model of knowledge and

embraces the fact that knowledge is "created by a community of knowledgeable peers

constituted by the language of that community," but does not a cornerstone distinction

exist between (1) students working together and (2) students actually constructing

knowledge? While we should embrace Bruffee's contention that knowledge is created

through language by a community, we must not exercise care not to conflate

community[1]—any group of people using language, e.g. students—with community[2]—a

discourse community *empowered with the authority to determine acceptable language*

from unacceptable language, e.g. an academic discipline, department, program, teacher,

etc. Therefore, while communal language constructs knowledge, and while peer response

groups are language using communities, the authority to define "good writing" exists

outside the purview of peer response groups and exclusively in the purview of the

discourse community. Consequently, while student peer groups may work together to determine what "essay" already means to the dominant discourse community, they cannot work together to construct, determine, and/or establish its meaning. Thus, they can collaborate towards understanding how the dominant discourse community defines "good writing" but, as they are subordinate to that greater discourse community, they lack the power to construct an authoritative definition themselves. Therefore, they function as community[1] but not as community[2].

It appears as though Bruffee was semi-conscious of this issue. Returning to his passage, he ends by acknowledging that students must "assent" to the norms of larger communities, thus recognizing a distinction between community[1] and community[2]. However, I call him "semi-conscious" because to some measure he furthers the conflation of peer groups and discourse communities. Firstly, he uses the same term, "knowledgeable peers," for student groups and authoritative communities alike. But student groups are not "knowledgeable peers" in the same sense as authoritative communities—the latter holds the power for their knowledge to be authoritative, the former does not. Second, Bruffee gives the impression that working collaboratively somehow naturally transitions students into assessing as necessary, implying that practicing collaboration in the non-authoritative sense will make students collaborative in the authoritative sense.

Zone of Proximal Development

The issue concerning Bruffee and peer response groups distills down to an imperative distinction between the *collaborative* value of peer groups vs. the *social*

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epistemic value of peer groups. That distinction strengthens when viewed in the context of Lev Vygotsky's theories on psycho-educational development in *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (1978). Three of Vygotsky's points concerning the nature of learning inform this discussion of peer response vs. social constructionism, the first of which being the "zone of proximal development"—the gap between what a student can do individually vs. what the same student can do as part of a group and/or with instruction:

> When it was first shown that the capability of children with equal levels of mental development to learn under a teacher's guidance varied to a high degree, it became apparent that those children were not mentally the same age and that the subsequent course of their learning would obviously be different. This difference between twelve and eight, or between nine and eight, is what we call the zone of proximal development. It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (1978, p. 86)

Thus, the zone of proximal development means that students can achieve through groups that which they cannot achieve individually. Unlike Vygotsky, who stressed the importance of "more capable peers," Bruffee advocated peers of roughly the same educational and mental development. Regardless, the zone of proximal development supports the notion that while peer response remains problematic from a social constructionist perspective because it fails to establish an authentic audience, the

successes achieved through peer response result from its collaborative force. While students cannot always meet discursive expectations alone, they usually achieve more by working together. In short, by working collaboratively they better determine what it means to write as "colleague." This is because the "zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Included amongst those "functions" would be the ability to write in the academic institution, which students are cognitively ready to learn but not yet able to accomplish individually.

In fact, Vygotsky establishes a particular distinction between a student's "mental age"—individual cognitive maturation—vs. "developmental age"—what the student can learn through social interaction; "that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement" (1978, p. 90). Taking particular note of Vygotsky's point that certain processes "operate *only* when the child" interacts with others, further evidence emerges for the collaborative power of peer response work, and it begs the question as to whether composition theorists have largely mistaken the peer response's collaborative force as a constructivist one.

In fact, Vygotsky quite clearly recognizes the power of language and the nature of the social construct. He not only argues that "learning presupposes a specific social nature" (1978, p. 89), he also asserts that the "*acquisition of language can provide a paradigm for the entire problem of the relations between learning and development*"

(1978, p. 89, emphasis added). Not apart from social constructionists, Vygotsky recognizes the dominant role language plays in the construction of meaning, and more to the point, that language serves as the dominant mechanism through which cognitive development occurs.

Yet Vygotsky also demarcates a critical distinction between two different kinds of language use, and that demarcation proves imperative to this discussion of peer response. He argues that "language arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his environment. Only subsequently, upon conversion to internal speech, does it come to organize the child's thought, that is, become an internal mental function" (1978, p. 89). He clarifies that distinction between communicative language and internalized language through an example in which a child reaches for an object beyond his or her grasp. At first, the child might reach as a way of physically obtaining the object. But doing so also prompts a response from the child's parents, who, in seeing the child reach for the object, brings the object to the child. When this occurs, the child exercises reaching as a mere tool that prompts a response in the external world—parent brings object.

However, at some eventual point the child recognizes the relationship between him- or herself, the object, and the gesture, and at that moment the gesture moves from an unconscious action that stimulates a response to what we (and now the child) conceptualize as the symbolic and linguistic act of pointing. In other words, extending the arm takes on *meaning*. It ceases to be the physical act of "reaching" and transforms into the linguistic/communicative concept of "pointing." In essence, this seems like the move from the Pavlovian equation of bell-equals-food to a higher cognitive understand

that bell-equals-symbolic-representation-of-food, i.e. the word "food" is not food itself,

or in this case, reaching does not necessitate that the object will be brought but rather

signifies the socio-linguistic way of expressing a desire for it to be brought.

Overlaying Vygotsky on social constructionism, the evolution from reaching to

pointing, despite the same physicality exercised in each action, equally represents the

embrace of the triangulative construct. Rather than unconsciously reaching, the child

gains awareness of the "observer" (the child him/herself), the "material conditions of

existence" (the object), and the "discourse community's" conventions (extending arm

represents signal for it to be brought, i.e. pointing). The evolution from reaching to

pointing approximates the evolution we saw earlier in the child's acquisition of "ball" as

the term the discourse community uses for things that are spherical.

In Vygotskyan terms, the shift from reaching to pointing embodies the difference

between language used as a "tool" and language used as a "sign":

> A most essential difference between sign and tool, and the basis for the
>
> real divergence of the two lines, is the different ways that they orient
>
> human behavior. The tool's function is to serve as the conductor of
>
> human influence on the object of activity; it is *externally* oriented; it must
>
> lead to changes in objects. It is a means by which human external activity
>
> is aimed at mastering, and triumphing over, nature. The sign, on the other
>
> hand, changes nothing in the object of a psychological operation. It is a
>
> means of internal activity aimed at mastering oneself; the sign is *internally*
>
> oriented. (1978, p. 55, author's emphasis)

In the most rudimentary sense, therefore, the child who reaches for the object exercises that gestural "language" as a tool, whereas the child pointing to the object exercises that language as a sign. As Vygotsky explains, the

> internalization of cultural forms of behavior involves the reconstruction of psychological activity on the basis of sign [not tool] operations….The developmental changes in sign operations are akin to those that occur in language. Aspects of external or communicative speech as well as egocentric speech turn "inward" to become the basis of inner speech. (1978, p. 57)

Hence, the child will no longer merely reach for the "ball" or simply use "ball" as a way of achieving the object. Instead, the child will see the round object and think of it as "ball." When that happens, the external language and culture (as culture exists in language, and vice versa) literally changes how the child sees the world and how the child thinks. The child does not merely use English (or any other language) as a tool to achieve an end; English rather permeates the child's thinking—sign—so that the child sees the world through English.

This shift from tool to sign essentially affirms the Foucauldian concept of normalization discussed earlier. In stating that "internal speech and reflective thought arise from the interactions between the child [observer] and person [discourse community] in her environment [the object/material]" and that such "interactions provide the source of development of a child's voluntary behavior" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90), Vygotsky reinforces the idea that social discursive structures determine what is normal. When such actions become "voluntary" then the mechanism of control has shifted from

external to internal, which Foucault identifies as the highest form of control. In the Foucauldian and Vygotskyan senses alike, this is unavoidable, even necessary and beneficial because developmental growth cannot otherwise occur. Effectually, in order to learn and to function, we need to internalize discourse, and the discourse we internalize always will be the socially constructed, dominant discourse.

Combined, Vygotsky's three concepts concerning the zone of proximal development, the dominant role of language, and the shift in language use from tool to sign bring powerful repercussions to peer response and assessment issues. For better or worse, it terminates any hopes of reconciling peer response and social constructionism because it forces us to examine the connection between peer response work, discourse communities, and our students.

Vygotsky wrote that the "greatest change in the children's capacity to use language as a problem-solving tool takes place…when socialized speech (which has been previously used to address an adult) *is turned inward*" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 27, author's emphasis), i.e. when it transforms from a tool into a sign. As such, we have to question if peer response helps our students shift from tool use to sign use. In other words, if the acquisition of language as sign is requisite for traversing the zone of proximal development, such as from students to "colleagues," do peer response groups facilitate that process?

Surprisingly, it appears that they do not. Peer response groups encourage if not summarily relegate students to exercising language—writing, writing terminology, and discursive standards (such as the language of a rubric)—as mere tools rather than signs. Peer response work fosters "external," "egocentric" speech, speech/writing used "to

address an adult" or other discursive authority, but *not the internalization of the*
conceptions of discourse community standards. Since peer response groups do not
permit students to exercise the language of the dominant discourse community
meaningfully like the third umpire, the students encounter difficulty internalizing that
language use and/or understanding the standards and conventions that language
represents. Students who do not get to authentically use terms such as "strong thesis"
or "A" may never evolve from using writing as a tool to affect the external world—to
receive a good grade—to internalizing those discursive conventions so that they "come to
organize the [student's] thought," i.e. sign.

I am arguing, sadly, that most student writers roughly equate to the child reaching
for the object; they (1) write in order to achieve a grade and (2) do not really understand
the relationship between the nature of their writing and the grade they receive. How can
they given that peer response does not afford the authentic, authoritative, and meaningful
exercise of discursive standards?

Consider an admittedly simplified example of a student composing a thesis: The
student, recognizing that the professor requires a thesis, and recognizing that past theses
produced certain results, replicates a past thesis construction for the present paper topic.
The student undoubtedly sees that constructing such a thesis typically results in receiving
a good grade from a professor, just as the child sees that reaching for the object produces
the result of receiving it from the parent. Yet through such action the student has used
thesis as tool—to produce a result—rather than as a sign that has already affected the
student's internal cognition process. In other words, the student uses thesis to produce a
result—getting a good grade—but does not necessarily understand what thesis means

within the context of an academic discourse community. The student uses thesis because that is what is required, if not habitual, but the need for a thesis, the meaning of thesis, the function of thesis, the power the discourse community ascribes to thesis and *why*, does not pre-shape the cognitive process of the student. In short, "thesis" does not become an internalized driving force that affects the student's cognition prior to the professor's requirement of it or independently of the institutional standard. Were it fully internalized and conceptualized, the student would write more as "colleague."

None of this is meant to suggest it to be all or nothing. Internalizing a force as a "sign' does not eliminate external pressures, and Vygotsky acknowledges this very point, contending that the internalization of standards occurs in addition to rather than in place of a recognition of external pressures: "when speech is moved to the starting point of an activity, a new relation between word and action emerges. Now speech guides, determines, and dominates the course of action; *the planning function of speech* comes into being in addition to the already existing function of language to reflect the external world' (p. 28). Thus, internalization occurs "in addition to" the external function, but once language is internalized it nevertheless "guides, determines, and dominates the course of action." Yet without such internalization, language only "reflect[s] the external world."

Returning to the student-thesis example, whereas a "colleague" writes with disciplinary conventions not because it is required, per se, but because the *meaning* and value of those conventions has been internalized, the student enjoys no such luxury. "Thesis" for students does not "dominate" their course of action in the same internalized way. It has not affected their cognition. If it did, they would be closer to "colleague."

Case in point: As I write this, I do so with an internalized understanding of the genre the discipline considers effective writing, which means that I not only write this way to please the discipline (external) but because I have come to consider this kind of writing to be "good writing" (internal). I have internalized the disciplinary conventions such that what the discipline considers good writing and what I consider good writing are congruent. In fact, when I think about writing for academia, I think like the writing my reader sees in this document. By contrast, undergraduate students typically lack internalized disciplinary conventions and genre, if not entirely then certainly not to the same degree as me. Whereas students *use* disciplinary conventions (to get good grades and because we tell them those conventions are "good writing,"), colleagues *think* in disciplinary conventions.

It is interesting, therefore, that Journet, in advocating genre's positive power to facilitate discourse, associates genres to "tools" in the Vygotskyan sense rather than to signs (1999, p. 100). At first, as Journet insightfully asserts, students must learn to appropriate discursive conventions as tools rather than not at all. However, as long as students relegate themselves to tool users, they will never become colleagues. Instead, and as an extension of Journet's point, we want them to internalize those conventions as signs. Though not in so many words, Bakhtin affirms the sign imperative when specifying that genres should not only affect how we express thoughts—tool—but the very cognition that creates those thoughts to begin with—sign (1981).

That said, and returning to Bartholomae, Bizzell, Flower, et al. and their contention that we must help the student appropriate academic discursive conventions, we now have to examine to what extent such theorizing appreciates the distinction

between genre as tool and genre as sign. The tool-sign quandary is precisely the issue Brian Huot (2002) raises with respect to the role assessment plays in the communicative act of writing for the academy:

> Instead of focusing on questions involving the improvement of a piece of writing, students are often focused on what will get them a desired grade, whether they think the revisions improve the writing or not. Writing papers for a grade creates a role for the student in which assessing the value of writing is secondary or moot and the attainment of a specific grade is everything. (2002, p. 66)

Contextualized for this discussion, Huot raises the terrible problem that if students write "for a grade" then they are, nearly by definition, exercising discursive conventions as a tool—to produce an effect on the outside world.

> Huot sums this up quite poignantly:

> Further, grades contextualize the evaluative moment. Instead of focusing on the text, this kind of assessment focuses on students' ability to achieve a certain grade which approximates an instructor's evaluation of their work rather than encouraging students to develop their own assessments about what they are writing. For students, then, writing can become an elaborate game of getting the words right. (2002, p. 66)

Thus, as long as students focus on anticipating their instructor's evaluation instead of self-assessing their work, writing will always be about "getting the words right," which means that students remain relegated to tool usage.   In response, Huot suggests that we must teach students to assess their own work rather than establishing the kind of "evaluative moment" that encourages them to pander to the instructor.

Combined, Huot's and Vygotsky's work implies that we should not only want students to meet academic discursive standards but rather to genuinely, authentically think like academics (however that might be defined in a given course context). What we get now, by contrast, is writing towards academic conventions, i.e. writing for the grade. Students do not really think academically in terms of inceptive cognition. Instead, they artificially express non-disciplinary thinking through a "genre" the academy accepts.

Barbara Couture discusses this very problem in "Modeling and Emulating: Rethinking Agency in the Writing Process" (1999). She articulates the destructive power of what Albert Borgmann calls the "device paradigm"—the notion that we have mediated our experience and interaction with the world through literal or process technologies (Borgmann, as cited in Couture, 1999, p. 40). As Couture writes:

…we have treated writing more as a device than anything else. Writing is a tool to be used by our students to produce papers that show that they know and have learned, to write reports that back up recommendations with accessible facts, to articulate procedures that show how they have made judgments that follow practice accepted by engineers or social workers or other professionals. To help students produce these products, we teach them the rhetorical modes; the five-paragraph theme; the processes of prewriting, writing, and drafting; and perhaps even the techniques of tagmemic analysis, problem solving, brainstorming, or cooking and growing. These devices have all made the teaching and mastery of writing available to us, in much the way air ducts and temperature controls have put heat in our homes … [but] we need to deconstruct the powerful hold this 'device paradigm' has on our processes of teaching and learning.

Though using "tool" with a different but overlapping definition from Vygotsky, Couture elucidates the same problem. As she suggests, perhaps composition theory relies too heavily on "devices" that make "the teaching and mastery of writing available" to our students instead of simply affording students the right to *meaningfully* exercise language within the academic construct—to engage the function and language of colleagues. Tools such as the five-paragraph essay tacitly teach students that "good writing" is achieved through the exercise of prefabricated, rote mechanisms that enable them to write but do not make them writers in the fully desirable sense.

Instead, we need to help students understand that, devices aside, "good writing" in academia means being able to think as a "colleague," something they will learn much more easily when we afford them the means to interact with the discourse community through the meaningful exercise of (its) language.

As a means of helping students become collegiate writers, many theorists embraced peer response as the practice through which students could learn that writing is social and that it must conform to disciplinary conventions. However, as I have worked to demonstrate, to the extent that peer response achieves those aims it does primarily because of its *collaborative* nature rather than its constructionist force because a peer group remains a simulacrum of the authentic social construct that is the academic discourse community. Hence, peer response really does not bring students into the academy in social epistemic terms, though it does help them cross their zone of proximal development. As internalizing tools into signs first demands the engaging of dominant language, and as peer response does not allow students to engage dominant language authentically and meaningfully, then students cannot internalize discursive conventions.

To whatever extent they do internalize those conventions, which they do to varying degrees, they do so despite the constructionist simulacra rather than because of it.

This returns the discussion to Fish. If we recall his point that "the meaning of the utterance would be severely constrained, not after it was heard but in the ways in which it *could*, in the first place, be heard" (Fish, 1980, p. 307), then we see the tool vs. sign problem facing our students. The way a "colleague" hears and uses the term "thesis" is constrained by that colleague's presence in the discourse community; that colleague can hear/use "thesis" only in institutionally acceptable ways. That's why he or she is a colleague. Thus, the colleague's presence in the discourse community constrains and dictates his or her hearing/usage of the term *before* applying it to the external reality. The student can hear/use thesis in *unacceptable* ways, i.e. use "thesis" in ways that aren't "thesis" according to the discourse community, which is why "thesis" is a "device" to a student but a mode of thinking to a "colleague." In other words, the student's hearing/use of the term is not pre-dictated and governed by the discourse community. To varying degrees, "thesis" does not dictate how the student fundamentally perceives the academic reality, the nature of discourse, a subject matter, etc. And to varying degrees, *it does not change how the student fundamentally thinks, only what the student does.*

Returning then to the zone of proximal development and peer response as a collaborative force vs. a social epistemic one, some students eventually will cross the zone and transition from tool to sign. Such students represent those who excel and who, ultimately, become colleagues (figuratively if not literally). Yet remember Vygotsky's point that "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate *only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in*

cooperation with his peers." To the extent that they offer "cooperation with his peers," peer response groups help students cross the zone of proximal development. However, to the extent that language constitutes "environment," and to the extent that dominant discourse must be internalized through its *meaningful* use, peer response falters. Given the essential role that language plays in constituting experience, only when students can meaningfully and authentically engage the language use of the dominant discourse community, as in by summatively applying discursive standards, and only when they do so collaboratively with other students and in conjunction with a representative of the discourse community, will they cross the zone of proximal development and become academic sign users rather than academic tool users. With this in mind, students will cross their zone of proximal development more effectively, more deeply, and more quickly if we engage them in exercise of summative assessment.

The question, therefore, becomes one of how to functionalize peer response. We clearly want to maintain the collaborative benefits that help students cross their "zone of proximal development," but we also want a method that truly engages the full extent of the social construct. The answer comes in integrating peer response with assessment.

CHAPTER 3: A SOCIAL EPISTEMIC EVALUATION OF PORTFOLIOS AND
GRADING

As noted earlier, composition theorists such as Bruffee, Elbow, Bartholomae, Flower, and Murray long ago recognized the friction between students and the social construct of the academy. Expressivism emerged as one means of eliminating that friction, but not the only means. Portfolio-based assessment emerged as an additional resource with the following rationales: (1) By allowing students to choose their best works out of a greater number of papers written over the course of the semester, we ascertain a more accurate understanding of their ability as writers while also requiring them to engage in some measure of self-assessment. (2) By not assigning grades to work during the semester, we encourage students to set aside their concern for grades and focus on their process instead.

Expounding on such rationales, Huot speaks powerfully to the potentially oppressive impact of grades and to portfolios as a means of delaying them:

grading, even in a portfolio, freezes student work and teacher commentary. Ungraded but responded-to writing in a portfolio directs the articulation of judgment toward the evolving written product rather than at the student writer, giving students an opportunity to explore, experiment and compose across a body of work without receiving a summative evaluation of their effort. When teachers articulate their judgments with grades, students can feel that they are the objects of this assessment, since they ultimately receive the grade. In a portfolio context, grade-free commentary is targeted at the writing the student is still potentially

able to revise before he or she becomes the target of the assessment through grades. (2002, p. 73)

Huot's point that "students can feel that they are the objects of ... assessment" could not be more accurate—"objects" being the operative word. For some students, Huot's use of "targets" might even be more apropos. Why is this so? Because as I stated earlier, students become objectified targets because they cannot engage the dominant discourse of summative assessment. Relegated to being grade-ees and devoid of the opportunity to interact with and apply the language of discursive standards, students become the passive thralls of the dominant community's will. Unable to participate in the discourse, they are subjected to it and objects of its determination.

As mentioned earlier, portfolios emerged as a way to liberate students from the oppressive force Huot aptly describes. To whatever extent portfolios succeed in that regard, however, I fear it might be a Pyrrhic achievement. Though offering certain unquestionably valuable traits, portfolios, as they are presently endeavored, potentially take us more in the wrong direction than the right one. The problem is one of *pretense*. While portfolios purport to establish a more realistic scenario for students, one in which they can write for the sake of writing rather than for the sake of grades, the consummate effect generally is the opposite.

Portfolios are pretensive structures—meaning they at they are "teacher designed" and implemented. Like peer response groups, delayed-assessment portfolio pedagogy creates a simulacrum of the authentic social epistemic reality in which students exist. That authentic reality contains three simple parts: (1) students exist in an academic reality that (2) maintains certain standards and conventions, and (3) the authoritative, summative

assessment of students' success within that reality will come in the form of grades. Portfolios, though noble in intention and somewhat successful in result, overlay that construct with a simulacrum of it designed to be more "real" for the students than the reality itself. Such pedagogy attempts to construct a "genuine writing experience for students" in which they can write without concern for being graded, but in doing so portfolio pedagogy dismisses the fact that students *are* in a genuine construct with genuine practices and genuine standards, i.e. academia. And being a part of academia means being assessed by the dominant discourse community in the form of grades.

In light of the pretensive nature of delayed assessment, I disagree that it shifts the students' focus away from grades and towards writing as a pure act. Assuredly, some students genuinely put aside questions of grades, and perhaps all students do so to a certain degree, but such disregard for the presence of grading seems disingenuous. Delaying summative grading until the semester's end only veils two inescapable truths: First, that students will be held to discourse community standards in the end. Second, that the professor, as a representative of the discourse community, tacitly or explicitly considers grades in the process of commenting but simply does not reveal that cognition to the students.

I entertain no illusions that many educators would argue the contrary, that they do not consider an essay's grade in any fashion until the end of the semester. Though perhaps a personal bias, I hold reservations about the plausibility of excluding grades from consciousness at one moment only to invoke them in another. Supposing, however, that some educators read without *consciously* grading, they still cannot read without reading from a position of authority and knowledge. In other words, they cannot help but

read as a "colleague" in the dominant discourse community, and as such, *any and all judgments made of a work emerge from a perspective latent with the standards and conventions of that community.* Recalling that educators are "colleagues" *because* they have *internalized* discourse community standards and practices, they cannot de-internalize those standards and de-colleague themselves for the sake of reading a student paper.

As such, reading students' works from a perspective of standards and conventions but not revealing the authoritative language of that position—grades—ultimately does not empower students; it subjugates them. It constitutes a greater overt exercise of power than giving grades outright because the grade is, in effect, either assessed and not revealed or at the very least tacitly present and looming. Delayed grading essentially communicates to students that we really know (or could know) what the grade is but refuse to discuss it because we have made the decision *for* students that they should not be concerned about grades (even though, since grades produce repercussions, students have every reason to be concerned about them).

Some instructors, such as Xin Liu Gale (1997), even record grades for portfolio work but do not reveal the grades to students. Describing her process for assessing essays in portfolios, Gale writes:

And last, I did not put a grade on each of the students' papers, but for my own record I did grade ach assignment and its revisions to keep track of each student's progress. 'I'm not going to put a grade on each of your papers and revision,' I told the class at the very beginning of the semester. 'You're responsible for figuring out where you stand in the class by reading my comments on each paper

and by measuring up your writing with the descriptions on the Grading Criteria. I

will, however, be happy to help you with your writing in all possible ways. (1997,

p. 86)

In all possible ways, except perhaps telling them exactly where they sit in terms of

institutional standards. To be fair to Gale, however, she does offer students considerable

written feedback that students can then compare with the written "Grading Criteria." Yet

this seems to reinforce my point more than Gale's—short of slapping a letter on the top

of each paper, she effectively *is* grading her students and her students admit to being

comfortable about knowing what their grades are (1997, p. 86). This does not de-

emphasize the presence of grades; it only removes the letter.

On the other hand, supposing that certain educators can genuinely dispense of

colleagueship when offering response only represents a greater affront to students. To

offer students assessment that may or may not align with the final summative and

authoritative expression of approval or disapproval from the institution only reinforces

disingenuous values. If we encourage students to develop their work in ways that (may)

negatively affect their academic advancement—GPA—later on then we simultaneously

weaken their writing (by institutional standards) and undermine our trustworthiness. In

Gale's case, for example, I wonder what happens when a student interprets one grade for

his or her own work, only to discover later on that Gale discerned a much different grade.

Furthermore, S. J. Hamilton (1994) raises an excellent point in suggesting that

portfolio grading is "no panacea for anything; it can enhance the learning environment in

which it is used; it can maintain the learning environment in which it is used; or it can

contradict the learning environment. It does not, in itself, *create* a particular learning

environment" (p. 84). Thus, the mere presence of portfolios do not an effective classroom make.

Interestingly, even when portfolio pedagogy is applied well, it still can pose problems for students. William Thelin's (1994) research supports this point. Studying a teacher's response to student portfolio work, he found that students often avoid making the changes the teacher suggested. First, not knowing the summative assessment, the students experienced heightened anxiety concerning their portfolio, anxiety that inhibited their desire to take risks. Consequently, they favored more simplistic revisions that did not expose them to significant negative consequences. Second, there was a "basic inconsistency" between the nature of the teacher's comments and the standards by which the portfolio would be assessed (Thelin, 1994); and (3) the teacher's comments bore too many of her own political ideologies rather than remaining discourse community centered. Thus, portfolio work, in and of itself, will not help resolve the downsides of grades.

In light of these points, portfolios may help some students focus on their writing instead of their grades but create a different set of problems in the process. Yet that does not invalidate portfolios as a profitable pedagogy. It only means that portfolios do not necessarily resolve grading issues.

Therefore, what I am suggesting is that we dispense of the pretensive structure of delayed-assessment portfolios (and equally that of peer response), and instead engage students as close to the genuine nature of the social construct as possible. What we might find in doing so is that *students do not need to be liberated from grades, only from being graded*. Portfolios, seeking to help students not feel like "objects," only delay

objectification. The easiest way to stop students from "being graded" is not to delay grading them but to involve them in the grading, thus turning them from objects to participants.

To foster participatory experiences for students, we need to engage them in interactively exercising the language of the dominant discourse community. Given the nature of language in academe, that lexicon must encompass more than writing terms such "thesis," "organization," "clarity," "tone," etc. That lexicon, though inarguably essential to the composition class, is not the dominant language of the institution. The dominant language of the institution can be summed up in a single word: grades. With this in mind, we cannot discuss acculturating students to academic discourse and disciplinary conventions without discussing their lack of interaction with grades and evaluative language as the final expression of those conventions.

If we really want students to (1) acculturate to discursive standards, (2) interact with a "live audience", (3) write with purpose in authentic constructs, (4) internalize writing conventions, (4) make the transition from tool users to sign speakers, and (5) write more like a "colleague" and less like a student then our pedagogy must become inclusive with respect to authentically engaging students in the exercise of discursive standards. In short, if we want students to understand the socio-linguistic construct of academic, then we need to engage students in the meaningful (vs. simulated, i.e. simulacra) exercise of the language constructing those conventions. As Gerald Graff (1987) writes, "if there is any point of agreement...it is on the principle that texts are not, after all, autonomous and self-contained, that the meaning of any text ... depends ... on other texts and textualized frames of reference" (p. 256). Excluded as they are from

grading discourse, our students lack the context to understand how texts gain value in academia.

Remember, grades are not just a part of the discourse; grades are the most potent expression of the institution's authority and judgment. In Reynolds and Trehan's words: "Assessment…is not simply another aspect of the educational method. Its function in providing the basis for granting or withholding qualifications makes it a primary location for power relations. As Heron (1979) has argued: 'Assessment is the most political of all educational processes; it is where issues of power are most at stake'" (2000, p. 268). Reynolds and Trehan continue on to add that

> more than any other aspect of education, assessment embodies power relations
> between the institution and its students, with tutors as custodians of the
> institution's rules and practices. The effects of judgments made on individuals'
> careers, as well as the evaluation of their worth by themselves or by others,
> ensures that assessment is experienced by students as being of considerable
> significance. (2000, p. 268)

While it might hyperbolize the situation to suggest that every student cares about grades first and foremost, grades nevertheless represent (1) the institution's conclusive judgment of a student's effort with respect to establish standards and (2) the utmost assertion of the institution's authority. As such, any discussion of effort to engage students in the language of the discourse community will remain two-dimensional until the most authoritative language of that community comes into play.

Furthermore, while I contend that we can and should help students value education itself more than grades, for many students grades remain the foremost concern.

As Paul Black and Dylan William address in "Assessment and Classroom Learning" (1993), their research demonstrates that rather than being learning oriented, "students focus on getting through ... tasks and resist attempts to engage in risky cognitive activities" that might prove more educationally fulfilling but also might jeopardize their GPA.

Similarly, Kurt Wiesenfeld's (1996) study sheds some light on just how important grades are to students. Though anecdotal, Wiesenfeld notes that a full ten percent of the students in one physics class asked for their grades to be raised and that "many, when pressed about why they think they deserve a better grade, admit they don't deserve one but would like one anyway" (1996, p. 16). He adds,

> perhaps these students see me as a commodities broker with something they want—a grade. Though intrinsically worthless, grades, if properly manipulated, can be traded for what has value: a degree, which means a job, which means money. The one thing college actually offers—a chance to learn—is considered irrelevant, even less than worthless, because of the long hours and hard work required. (1996, p. 16)

Grades, therefore, do hold exceptional value for students because grades ultimately translate into the desired rewards of jobs and money.

Yet students are not the only ones with grades on the brain. As Robert J. Connors and Andrea A. Lunsford demonstrated through their research in "Teachers' Rhetorical Comments on Student Papers" (1993), composition faculty devote the majority of their comments to justifying grades to students. While such justifications can be partially instructive, the focus nevertheless falls on the symbolic representation of the essay's

characteristics—the grade—rather than on a discussion of the essay itself. As I will discuss later on, this only mediates the experience between teacher and essay, and between student and teacher.

Yet whether students and faculty perceive grades/assessment as important or not, the fact remains that grades embody the institution's ultimate assertion of its authority. Therefore, any suggestion that grades should be pedagogically de-emphasized strikes me as problematic because doing so neglects the social construct's inherent nature, a social construct in which we hold students to conventions and standards of an existing discourse community(s).

However, grades need not (and really cannot) be ignored in efforts to help students focus on writing. *The problem with grades is that they mediate the students' ability to experience the discourse community, which does not mean that we should temporarily put grades aside but rather that we should put an end to the mediation. Instead of considering grades a barrier to authentic learning, we should recognize that grades can function as the doorway to authentic learning.* To rekindle Kenneth Burke's term from *Terministic Screens* (1966), we should not allow grades to "deflect" reality by taking focus from learning onto its symbolic representation—grades—but rather should portal through the grades into the reality itself.

Note that I agree with the contention that effective teaching depends on getting students to care about their education (thinking, topics, the world, etc.) rather than the grades they receive. Yet that need not contradict my previous point if we consider the distinction between the pedagogy and the objective. Pedagogically, I do not see value in de-emphasizing grades because in the academic institution, whether we speak of them or

not, grades represent standards, power, and judgment. Any and all efforts to hide that fact from students only strike me as problematic. Students know that *if we really did not care about grades, we would not give them.* And students know that whether or not they pass the class, graduate, get into graduate school, get a good job, etc. potentially can depend not on the quality of their work, per se, but on the grades in their transcripts.

Yet that I will advocate a pedagogy that effectively puts grades out on the table for everyone to see does not mean that I want students to focus on grades. Quite to the contrary, if we acknowledge the elephant in the room and talk about it then we finally can move past it. Once students understand the standards and process of grading, they will not focus on getting the grade but rather on the qualities of effective writing because "A" no longer will be an abstraction. Instead, "A" will intrinsically mean the qualities of writing we value. Students will not be able to see "A" as a letter; they will have to see it in terms of qualities.

This returns us to Borgmann's "device paradigm" and requires that we become sensitive to Foucault's point in *Panopticism* (1984) that language, such as grades, constitutes "a type of power ... comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, gargets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology" (p. 206). Yet while grading always will function as a gatekeeping mechanism, it need not dominate, mediate, and "deflect" our students' experience *provided that we deconstruct the device.*

To perform the deconstruction, I draw on Andrew Feenberg's *Critical Theory of Technology* (1991), in which he argues that technologies do not hold power independent of their supporting social contexts, the "technical code" that functionalizes and regulates

them. Following Feenberg's thinking, the technology of grading holds no power expect within the supporting social context. Thus, building on Feenberg, Tim Peeples and Bill Hart-Davidson (1997) explain that "grading artifacts," such as assignments and rubrics,

> are only half of the technology of grading, the other half being the network of cultural, institutional, and personal values, rules, and decisions that make up the technical code of grade.... Seen in this light, the teacher's job of 'grading papers' amounts to participating in a number of arguments within and among the institutional frameworks in which she works and with any number of specific subjects: students, writing program administrators, other teachers, parents, etc. (p. 97, 98)

In light of Peeples and Hart-Davidson, we have relegated students to seeing grades as objects, artifacts, commodities, etc. *because* we have kept students from "participating in a number of arguments within and among the institutional frameworks." If students want the "A" just for the grade then it is because we have left them no option but to see grades as that which should be attained rather than that which can be understood.

Since understanding standards and conventions depends on understanding the institutional context, educators err in believing that students will understand an assignment or a rubric merely because it is handed to them. Rust's (2001) research demonstrates that merely publicizing criteria has minimal impact on students' writing. Harvey Woolf (2004) concurs, stating that we need to involve students in order for them to understand criteria because "it is the active engagement in the discussion and application of criteria that can help students to acquire a (deep) insight into the meaning of criteria and assessment more generally" (p. 488).

Unfortunately, such "active engagement in the discussion and application of criteria" seldom exists at all, and certainly not to the extent I suggest. Rather, given that students can directly access only some grading artifacts—the grade itself, a rubric, an assignment sheet, etc.—and that we grant them only minimal access to the "technical code" of "arguments within and among the institutional frameworks", is it any wonder that students do not fully comprehend what grades mean and the process through which grades emerge? The more students understand the "arguments within and among the institutional frameworks" from which grades emerge, the more successfully and more easily students will achieve those standards. While students will never fully appreciate the technical code in all of its complexity—they will not sit in on faculty conversations and administrative meetings—we can help them understand the technical code by exposing the process of grading and sharing with them as much of our understanding of the code as we reasonably can. This will help deconstruct the device, helping them understand the technical code that drives it.

Thus, I am arguing we should interact with students about discursive standards, discuss those standards, help students understand them, and once that is accomplished, *once students internalize conventions rather than exercise tools to achieve what they really do not understand*, then they will likely focus on their work rather than only on the grade itself. The next chapter will discuss this point at greater length.

That students need context to understand artifacts raises another point about including students in evaluative practices: codified grading practices only mediate the interaction between students and the social construct they need to understand and in which they need to participate. Irvin Peckham (2003) makes this very point when

explaining that "one codifies [reality] by abstracting significant details from the experience. A photographer codifies by tearing a moment out of the flow of time" (p. 231), just as grades codify by tearing an essay from its true social construct. In this sense, grades are not the discourse community's standards but an abstraction or "snapshot" of those standards—a two dimensional representation of the real three-dimensional socially constructed world.

For students, grades become a simulacrum of the social construct and students devote all their attention to the former because they cannot really understand the latter. How can students understand the construct when we do not engage them in the genuine discourse about disciplinary standards? As students enjoy little to no access to the authentic, three-dimensional, socially constructed discourse community, to the "arguments within and among the institutional frameworks," they misinterpret the pictures of that reality—the grades—to *be* the reality itself. Hence, an essay that receives a good grade *is* a good essay because the grade is good even though students may not, and probably do not, holistically understand what "good" means. Students embrace the representation of good because they cannot interact with the social construct that gives "good" meaning.

Continuing Peckham's snapshot analogy, if we only see pictures of Greece and never Greece itself then Greece will be to us as the pictures represent it. It is not that we will believe the pictures of Greece to be Greece itself; we recognize that pictures are not the reality because we know Greece exists outside of the pictures. However, our understanding of Greece will be as picturesque or paltry as the pictures represent because we hold no other point of reference. For students, the same holds true with grades. They

take the pictures of the reality to be the reality because they never get to see the reality itself.

Peckham continues to point out that we can make meaning about the world only when we engage it directly rather than engage its codifications:

> To read a scene (or life) critically, which is different from seeing it as an opaque reality, one has to decode it to get at the meanings underneath the opaque reality, or, as Langer might put it, to read the scene as a symbol rather than as a sign. When one sees the meanings underneath…one sees that reality is not simply "there" but is constructed by social forces… (2003, p. 231)

Yet for our students, the reality of grades *is* "simply 'there.'" Lacking sufficient interaction with the "meanings underneath" the grades—the language and social construct from which the grades emerged—students accept grades as reality itself.

This is why students "write for the grade." Students cannot directly access and interact with the social construct that gives meaning to grades—"arguments within and among the institutional frameworks"—because their access to the authoritative assessment by the discourse community is mediated by the simulacra of peer response groups, the pretense of delayed assessment, and snapshots of that construct rather than experience of the construct itself. (Students are part of the overall construct of academia, of course, but not of the collegial discussions within the discourse community that establish conventions and standards.)   As Huot asks on students' behalf: "Why struggle with assigning value to your work when it will be thoroughly and often mysteriously judged by someone else?" In other words, since students cannot engage the discourse

community's process and conversation that gives meaning to grades, and since the authoritative power still resides in grades, why should they bother to assess the value of their own work when it will be summatively judged by the discourse community that the students inherently recognize as the higher authority? Or more simply, since they will never actually take students to Greece, they might as well not bother trying to figure out what Greece really looks like based on the snapshots we provide.

None of this suggests it impossible for students to discern the traits of the social construct through the artifacts we provide. To varying degrees, students do learn what good writing is. However, their effort remains mediated through peer response simulacra, pretensive delayed-response pedagogy, and the codified abstractions of grades. This returns me to my point that to the greatest practical extent we should dispense of "teacher designed" structures that mediate the experience between the students and the practice and conventions of "colleagues" in the dominant discourse community. While some students eventually understand the construct through its artifacts, some never do. To the contrary, many abandon hope of truly understanding the construct and focus instead on getting the representations of discursive success: grades.

Returning to Huot's earlier point, this deepens our insight into how "grades contextualize the evaluative moment" and places students in the position of "getting the words right." Students not only want to "get the words right" because any assessment they make of their own work is (institutionally) meaningless, but also because lacking understanding of the construct, *students take the grade to be the construct* because it is the only, or at least the most powerful, representation of the construct they receive. While we associate a series of excellent essay qualities with the grade "A," for students

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"A" only, or at least largely, *signifies* excellence. Or rather, if a student's essay receives an "A" it must be an excellent essay because to the student it is the grade "A" that signifies excellence. As members of the discourse community, we approach "A" from the opposite perspective. "A" is not given to us; it emerges from us. We literally embody the factors that construct it.

This lends particular poignancy to Huot's point that students see papers as "mysteriously judged." Unable to participate in the construction of the meaning of the grades as "colleagues" do, and experiencing the construct only in mediated ways, grades emerge to students through a process the students do not see and never really understand. This sheds new light on Bizzell's previous point that students do not necessarily recognize the existence of discourse communities and the ways they function. Therefore, as students do not engage discursive standards, they take the representation of those standards to be the standards. But the picture is never the place. The map is not the territory.

As always, I want to be careful not to cast this as an all or nothing proposition. Grades do afford students some understanding of the social construct that generates the grades, and the more teachers commit effort to explaining grades the more students will understand discursive conventions. As Saddler (1987) points out, "Standards of performance which exist in teacher/tutor minds can never be fully and unambiguously expressed because if they are at all complex they are inevitably fuzzy. In order to improve on attainment students need to be given access to the 'guilded' knowledge which defines the quality of the expected performance" (p. 204*).* "Guilded" knowledge, such as the disciplinary language and thinking that generates grades, is precisely the issue, though

it need not be the problem. Such knowledge need not be "guilded" at all but it will remain so as long as we place grades in between the students and the discourse community.

Lad Tobin (1993) makes just this point, writing that "making the messiness of grading public is almost always healthy in a writing class. There is never a danger that grades will lose all meaning, because they are so deeply embedded in our culture and consciousness, but we can make them a little less threatening—to our students and ourselves—by exposing the process" (p. 69). "Exposing the process" is precisely the idea. When students see how a discipline comes to a grade, when they engage the otherwise internal considerations and deliberations that bring a grade forth, they will understand that grades are not arbitrary. In doing so, they not only will respect grades more but also understand the discipline's consideration of "good writing."

In essence, the goal is to merge assessment and education into a gainful singularity, and to forever eliminate the distinction between the two that Charles Schuster (1994) makes here:

> Teaching is hot; assessment is cold. Teaching constructs students; assessment deconstructs student writing. No matter how creatively we fashion our means of assessment, it will remain at odds with our disciplinary and pedagogical principles as long as composition is certification, as long as it is the primary means by which some are chosen—and some are not. (p. 323)

Insofar as we keep students excepted from the dominant discourse and assessment practices, Schuster is exactly right. Yet it need not be so. Assessment can be just as hot as teaching provided we involve students in it.

This explains why non-graded portfolio assessments are not the best answer to the right problem. Such assessments do not change the codified nature of grades, nor do they close the gap between students and dominant language/grading conventions. What such assessments do, and what they try to get students to do (to varying but limited degrees of success), is to *ignore* the problem of grades. Or to borrow a famous line from *The Wizard of Oz*, delayed assessment and codified practices command students to "pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!" We can tell students to ignore the issue all we want but neither telling them to ignore it nor actually ignoring it changes the locus of power—summative grades will be exercised on students. There is a man behind the curtain.

With that, a proviso: there is considerable movement now towards involving students in portfolio assessment (Yancey, 1998; Huot, 2002), especially in formative regards. Both Yancey and Huot see assessment as critical to the process, such as in the selection of texts to enter a portfolio, as well as written reflection about the portfolio itself. Without question, such moves help to close the gap between students and evaluation. However, to whatever extent such processes still exclude students from the summative evaluation of work by the discourse community, those processes then also keep students objectified and disenfranchised.

Liberating students from objectification distills down to dismissing pretense. Any and all efforts we exert to *create* authentic experiences for students disregard the existing

authentic experience of writing for academics within an academic institution and towards the aim of learning academic conventions. Not only need we not create authenticity, perhaps authenticity cannot be "created." Creating authenticity seems oxymoronic. This is not to suggest that faculty cannot assign different genres—personal essay, argumentative essay, business brief, court opinion, etc.—but that the authenticity of the experience remains located in students writing in the academic disciplines and to fulfill existing discursive conventions. With only the noblest of intentions, writing faculty have supplanted fabricated constructs for the real one, perhaps because they did not know how to involve students in the dominant discourse, did not see the need to do so, or simply did not want to relinquish their uniquely authoritative position.

As Michael Halliday (1978) asserts, however, "Any account of language which fails to build in the situation as an essential ingredient is likely to be artificial and unrewarding" (p. 29). Coupled with Huot's contention that assessment "practices need to be based upon the notion that we are attempting to assess a writer's ability to communicate within a particular context and to a specific audience who needs to read this writing as a part of a clearly defined communicative event" (p. 102), it begs the question as to why we do not simply engage students in the actuality of the event to the greatest extent possible without compromising pedagogical goals or institutional standards. Let us engage students where they are and contend together with the what's and why's of institutional standards.

Quoting David Russell, Joseph Petraglia (1999) makes this very point about the need to recognize situatedness:

David Russell elaborates a sociocognitive perspective when he argues that writing

entails participation in 'some historically situated human activity' that calls for

particular kinds of writing that 'cannot be learned apart from the problems, the

habits, the activities—the subject matter—of some group that found the need to

write in that way to solve a problem or carry on its activities'" (p. 58).

The great irony of writing instruction has been all the efforts to disregard the fact that

students *are* in a situation "that calls for particular kinds of writing" needed to solve

problems, such as how to write for the academic community, what are the conventions of

the academic community, and why the academic community has those conventions.

While I do not want to delve into particular pedagogy at this time, it seems

important to note that I am not suggesting that professors' relinquish any of their

expertise concerning writing and academic expectations. I neither advocate negotiating

with students nor compromising our standards. And while I always advocate

constructive interaction, I also contend that the only way this will work is if faculty act as

full intellectuals who engage students as full intellectuals, honestly (but sensitively),

critically (but instructively), and as real human beings interacting in a real situation.

I say this in the spirit of John Clifford and Elizabeth Ervin's point in "The Ethics

of Process" (1999) that "more than ever, we need to encourage writers to enact a critical

literacy that employs all sorts of processes: reading, thinking, interpreting, composing,

and critiquing. We need to encourage a dialectically literate environment that

foregrounds an interaction with a variety of texts" (p. 192). I recognize that many

academics will question whether or not students are up to this task cognitively,

developmentally, and emotionally, and whether or not this constitutes sound pedagogy,

and I will address those concerns in chapter six. Yet such concerns really only address questions of implementation rather than theoretical foundations. If what I have been arguing is sound in theory then we need to forge some way to implement it.

Reviewing the course of my argument, we find that (1) students need to employ the language conventions of the dominant discourse; (2) students need to cross their zone of proximal development; (3) students will accomplish (1) and (2) when they internalize dominant discursive standards as signs rather than utilizing them as tools. (4) Grades and assessment, in their traditional usage, mediate the interaction between students and the dominant discourse, and therefore (5) we should facilitate the appropriation of dominant language conventions by permitting students to interact with those standards.

CHAPTER 4: DISMISSING PRETENSE

The notion of dismissing pretense and engaging students more fully through shared assessment practices actually roots in much older composition and education theory. Returning again to David Russell, we only need recognize that students already exist in a situation "that calls for particular kinds of writing," one inherent with its own discursive practices. Consequently, the circumstance of students learning to write for academia not only constitutes an issue of cognitive development but equally, and perhaps more so, an issue of culture clash: students, not a part of academic culture but needing to be accepted (more) as a colleague, need to understand the cultural conventions of the institution(s) to which they seek acceptance.

In this chapter, I will delve into the relationship between students and the academic construct by building off of three theories—two new and one old. The first relatively new theory will be Gee's contention that learning is a cultural practice more than an instructed one. From Gee I will move on to discuss David Bleich's ideas concerning the need for increased "disclosure" in education, which will lead us a reinterpretation of Mary Louise Pratt's well-established theory of the "contact zone."

Gee

Gee approaches the fact that students must learn "particular kinds of writing" from a different but nevertheless illuminating perspective than others previously listed. He explains that learning is accomplished not through "instructed process" (p. 13), such

as what we typically see in schools where content is taught, but rather through "a cultural process" of interaction, one much better embodied by games:

> We have argued that for most people learning something like physics is an instructed process. However, physicists (masters of physics) long ago realized that if you want someone really to learn physics deeply in the sense of becoming a physicist then, sooner or later, you need to turn learning physics into a cultural and not an instructed process (or not just an instructed process). Why? Because it is clear that deep learning works better as a cultural process than it does as an instructed process. Most humans are not, in fact, very good at learning via overt instruction. For example, most young people would resist learning to play video games via lots of overt instruction—and for a good reason: instruction is a much less efficient process ... than learning to play video games via a cultural process (i.e. via becoming a member of the games culture). (p. 13)

"Becoming a member of the games culture" is *exactly* the point, and a point most contemporary composition theorists appreciate, though perhaps fall short of achieving. Peer response groups are an attempt to create the "games culture" of writing for an academic audience. Yet while correct in spirit, peer response groups fall short of involving students in the actual culture of academia, and for two reasons: First, peer response groups do not allow students to participate in the real grading "game," which is how the academy asserts its discursive authority and where its standards and practices ultimately play out. Second, peer response groups do not allow students to interact with a "master" writer—the teacher—in the process of playing the grading game. In other words, the final authority of the academy exists in "the grading game" and if we do not

allow students to play that game *with* us then they never really get to be a part of the culture. Hence, little to no cultural learning.

As Gee continues to ask, "What does it mean to learn physics ... as a cultural process"?

> Much the same as what it meant to learn cooking as a cultural process. Masters (physicists) allow learners to collaborate with them on projects that the learners could not carry out on their own. Learners work in a "smart" environment filled with tolls and technologies, and artifacts store knowledge and skills they can draw on when they do not personally have such knowledge and skills. Information is given "just in time" when it can be put to use (and thus better understood) and "on demand" when learners feel they need it and can follow it. Extended information given out of a context of application (thus not "just in time") is offered after, not before, learners have had experiences relevant to what that information is about. Learners see learning physics as not just "getting a grade" or "doing school," but as part and parcel of taking on the emerging identity of being a physicist. (p. 13)

Do not our students need to "take on the emerging identity of being" an academic writer, perhaps even an academic writing "master" such as a professor? Our goal is not to teach students about writing but rather to cultivate *writers,* writers who not only exist within the culture of the academy but also who become *members of that community*. As I noted before, when not fully members of the community, students can understand a raw definition of "thesis" but will not be able to exercise "thesis" in institutional acceptable ways until they appreciate and internalize the *cultural* understanding of thesis as it exists in institution, i.e. until they become members of the dominant discourse community that

defines "thesis" in the academy. Is this not exactly what Gee describes in terms of the need for cultural learning?

Simply put: "When people learn as a cultural process, whether this be cooking, hunting, or how to play video games, they learn through action and talk with others, not by memorizing words outside their contexts of application" (p. 39). While it might seem as though we do engage students in the cultural process of academia, we typically fail to invite them into the dominant "cultural process" of grading. Instead, and perhaps ironically, our typical non-interactive grading process forms a barrier with students on one side and our "culture" on the other. In this respect, we see delayed assessment through portfolios as a noble effort to eliminate that barrier (at least until it pops up again at the end of the semester). However, assessment need not become a barrier. Rather, I suggest that we use that "barrier" as a heuristic device: let students and faculty scale the barrier together.

In doing so, in inviting students into our culture and playing the grading game with them, students can achieve deeper meaning than they would otherwise. Gee further explains deep meaning by investigating the instruction of reading and demonstrates that merely reading, or merely being taught how to read through "instructed processes" such as phonics training, proves ineffective. Reading well, and the acquisition of the vocabulary that enables it, requires something more:

> Think a minute ... about good readers. They have large vocabularies, especially for the specialist texts they can read, but they didn't get these large vocabularies by reading alone, since even reading a lot, in and of itself, is not an effective way for a large vocabulary to grow. So how did they get these vocabularies? The

answer: they got these large vocabularies by having actually experienced the

"worlds" to which these words refer. (p. 40)

Unfortunately, as I have been arguing, students never get to experience the world for

which they are writing; they are part of the gross academic community but do not get to

play the games of the dominant members, much less *with* dominant members. Sure, we

afford students some glimpses and artifacts of our culture, such as symbolic

representations in the form of grades, but we do not invite them into our world.

Consequently, students do not acquire our vocabularies; they might learn the words

themselves—"thesis"—but not the deep meanings. Nor do they learn the deep skills.

Gee contends that "you cannot ... learn what words in biology mean if you have never

'played' biology (that is, experienced the situations in biology – situations involving

action or talk – in which the words apply" (p. 42), and I contend exactly the same point

for writing. In this case, however, "playing" writing does not just mean doing writing

any more than playing biology means reading a biology text. Playing writing means fully

interacting with expert professors and playing all the games those experts play.

In theory, Gee supports this contention by advocating that we engage students in

"model simulations" because such simulations "are what we use to give meaning to our

experiences in the world and to prepare us for action in the world. They are what we use

to give meaning to words and sentences" (p. 51). Gee continues to argue that meaning is

"not about general definitions in the head. It is about building specific game-like models

(wherein we can act or role-play other people's actions) for specific contexts.... Meaning

is not about definitions, it is about simulations of experience" (p. 51). In writing, not

only can we afford students "simulations of experience," but to a large degree we can

afford them actual experience as (guided) participants in the dominant discourse culture and its practices, i.e. games.

Perhaps a failure to engage students in the culture is where process pedagogy falls short. For all its value, teaching students about the writing process through instructed process, and teaching them to engage the writing process (through instructed process) does not involve students in "model simulations" of the culture to which the writing process is beholden. Students can prewrite, draft, edit, and revise until becoming bleary-eyed but unless they participate in the culture of writing and assessment in the institution, the "writing process" will be informational rather than deeply meaningful.

Thus, returning to Gee's point, the goal is to create "a *space* in which people interact," where students can have the experience of writers in academe (p. 77, author's emphasis). But students do not need the experience of being just any writers in the academe. They do not need to have the experience of being *student* writers. (Students already possess ample experience as student writers.) Students need to have the experience of being "master" writers—professors. Toward that aim, Gee speaks about the importance of "role playing." They need to "role play" through the culture so that they can understand and join the culture. As Gee points out with respect to learning science, students do not (only) need to be taught *about* science or even just to practice science. Rather, "students could be encouraged to take on identities of a certain sort, to see and think about themselves and their take-for-granted everyday world in new ways" (p. 61). Similarly, I contend that students need to "role play" through the experiences of writing faculty until students come to look at their own writing, that of their peers, and writing in general not from a student perspective but from a faculty perspective, not from

a novice perspective but from an expert perspective. Students need to play the games that faculty play, and the most authoritative game we play is the grading game.

As Gee suggests, the "bottom line is this":

If any variety of language is to be learned and used it has to be *situated*. That is, it has to be brought down to concrete exemplifications in experiences they have had (repeatedly, since learning is partly a practice effect). These experiences need to be guided by "masters" ... so that learners pay attention to the right things amidst the myriad flux of any experience and form good and useful generalizations. "Useful generalizations" here does not mean "general truths"; rather it means that the learners can form mental simulations based on their experiences—simulations that are useful for guiding future thought and action in the world, both individually and collaboratively. (p. 117, author's emphasis)

What is most incredible to me about Gee's point is its simplicity. Suggesting that students will learn best by interacting with "masters" in realistic, if not fully real, endeavors almost seems obvious. Almost. Yet the point that language learning must occur in fully "situated" scenarios has at least somewhat escaped composition theory, to say nothing of most classroom practices.

Yet Gee's point does not end there. While I do not want to diverge for too long from the core point that cultural immersion begets the best learning, I do want to at least touch a few other related points Gee raises concerning how culturally-situated learning occurs and how those points relate to interactive assessment with students. In truth, Gee lists twenty-five such points, plus eleven more that overlap with the initial twenty-five,

but while all of those points hold relevance for this discussion, their sheer number makes an all-inclusive discussion impractical. So I will touch on a few key points instead.

One such point concerns an "affinity space"—a fully functional cultural environment (p. 85). One characteristic of such a space is that "content organization is transformed by interactional organization" (p. 85). That is a high-powered way of saying that content changes based on the interaction of the players and designers, such as when video game designers modify or "patch" an existing game based on player feedback. Unfortunately, academia typically affords students absolutely no direct means of suggesting modifications to the standards and structures. I say "no direct means" because students do affect the construct indirectly to whatever extent an educator/institution modifies practices and standards based on what it discerns students as being able to achieve. In other words, a history professor who notices that ninety percent of the students failed the test, might rightly surmise the test to be difficult, or might recognize a need for change in pedagogy, or some semblance of the two. However, such changes are one-sided and consequently afford students little opportunity to interact with the construct.

Critical Collaborative Assessment, on the other hand, would afford students direct interaction with professors about the construct. If during a grading workshop, for example, a student points out a discrepancy between two pieces of language in a rubric, that act can result in a change of the rubric or, at the very least, a discussion of how to harmoniously interpret the two pieces of language so as to resolve the seeming discrepancy. While the faculty member has to remain integral with respect to his or her own standards, the student nevertheless got to directly engage the construct.

Consequently, the student not only will feel involved and valued, the student actually will be involved and valued.

Furthermore, that student analyzed language (in the rubric) in a meaningful way. The student pointed out the discrepancy because it mattered to that student, not only in terms of a grade but also in terms of whether or not the rubric itself made sense. By engaging the language directly, the student could understand its meaning—its force within the greater construct. The student acquired a deeper understanding of the language by engaging it in the exact culture and practice where it is used.

The second of Gee's points I want to touch on is that learning occurs best when "instruction is given 'on demand' and 'just in time'" (p. 108). Gee speaks extensively about the way video games, and especially video game tutorials, do not offer information until it is needed in the game itself. He explains that until playing a video game, he cannot really understand the manual. He understands that the manual offers him terms and strategies, but those have no meaning until the game is played. But "when you can spell out such information in situation-specific terms in the game, then the relationships of this information to the other hundreds of pieces of information the booklet becomes clear and meaningful" (p. 44). Gee likens this to geology. While he can understand certain geological terms "at some literal" level (p. 45), he has "no idea what the difference is between 'abrasion' and 'removal of weather material by transporting agents,' which [he] would have thought was one form of abrasion" (p. 45). The deeper meaning of those words can be found only in the culture of geology, i.e. amongst geologists.

As I have argued from a language and constructionist perspective, our students face exactly that problem with terms like "good writing," "thesis," and "A"; they can understand those terms on "some literal" level, but not as members of the dominant discursive culture. How can students develop such understanding when we do not interact with students in the final, summative, and authoritative practice that gives those terms life?

On the other hand, if we afford students information "on demand" and in a situated context, they will understand the deep meaning. When during a workshop a student *asks* how we define "clarity" and immediately sees the process we go through in defining the term while applying it to a paper, in context, when it summatively counts, that student begins grasping a deep meaning of clarity. Similarly, when an author sees students wrestling with his or her own paper's "clarity," and when that author sees other students offer transitions to improve the clarity and how those transitions would affect the grade, that student author learns about "clarity" in ways that abstract discussions of clarity in writing could not afford. When the class as a whole recognizes that they do not write clearly enough and then ask for explanation and instruction on developing clarity, that information comes in context and when it is required.

Furthermore, in my own classroom practice, I use CCA as a stepping stone into more traditional lessons on writing. Much in the way that Gee could consult the manual once having played the game, I offer lessons in response to the questions that emerge from students during grading workshops. Thus, I keep information "on demand" and when it can be immediately put to use. For example, I might delay a lesson on constructing a thesis statement until students, having graded papers that lack clear theses,

recognize the importance of a strong thesis and ask how to go about building one. At such time, my lesson becomes contextually valued rather than prescribed.

Building on the idea of what authors learn by seeing other students and the professor interact with writing in the grading process, the third and final point of Gee's I want to delve into is that of distributed knowledge. Gee asserts that students need to be able to interact with one another through formal and informal means to acquire deep meaning. In the computer gaming world, this might occur through discussion boards and online chat. What makes this successful, however, is that each participant's expertise is genuine. It all comes from players in the actual game who met with actual results based on their actions. Consequently, though not all advice is equal, all advice emerges from people involved in playing the game itself.

Contrast that against student culture in academe. To a certain extent, we do find similar forces at work. Students can, do, and should offer one another advice. Advice might take the form of how to study for a particular professor's exam or how to structure a paper for a different professor. However, while that advice comes from genuine players of one kind of game—the "I took professor X's course" game—it does not come from players of the grading game.

What if, instead, all students were proficient in the grading game? What if they could offer each other advice based on some earned measure of expertise in grading papers? What if the students in different classes could meet and *grade* a paper with some relatively common understanding of institutional standards and discourse practices? If students could do that then they could advise each other more as colleagues than as students.

I do not mean to suggest that all student assessments would be "correct"—in perfect accordance with the summative grade that will come from the professor or CCA group. Grades will continue to vary between different professors and different classes, much in the same way that two different professors could come to two different grades for the same paper. What I do mean to suggest is that students will become far more proficient at grading and advising each other if they play the grading game with faculty than if they do not. While faculty members themselves might not agree about a particular paper's grade, advice from all writing faculty is generally superior to advice from students. Similarly, advice from students who play the grading game with faculty will be superior to advice from students who do not. The former group will be able to read more like faculty, assess more like faculty, and possess deeper meaning of writing practice than their peers. Furthermore, even if we put the concept of "correct" grades aside, if playing the grading game ultimately elevates the level of discourse students can engage in about writing, and makes them more inclined to discuss writing, it would seem worthwhile.

More importantly, if we were to envision a first-year writing program in which all students taking a given course participate in grading with faculty, the compounding result would be impressive. Students from different sections could discuss interpretations of the same rubric, and could assess each other's work accordingly. Furthermore, first-year students could reasonably expect that sophomores—who would be at least *relatively* adept graders—would be able to offer somewhat authoritative advice about their work. Most importantly, the grading culture would extend beyond faculty and throughout the student body.

Therefore, the overall point from Gee for the purposes of this piece concerns the imperative of establishing a culture through which meaning emerges rather than relying on "instructed process" to convey information. Building on Gee's conception of culture as the dominant force of learning, I turn to David Bleich's conception of "disclosure." I referenced Bleich earlier with respect to genre theory, and his "disclosure" idea builds on genre as a means of improving discourse by encouraging people to become more conscious of the genres they speak, the genres other people speak, and how those genres emerge from experience and reflect world view. In simplest terms, if we can recognize that breakdowns in communication occur through conflicts between genres, and if we can seek to understand one another's genres, we can communicate all the better.

One example Bleich offers comes from a ninth-grade class's essays about Zora Neal Hurston's "Sweat" and "Story in Harlem Slang," and subsequent implications on the Anita Hill events. After reading essays from students, Bleich reflects:

> Ms. T and Ms. G [both students], both about fourteen years old when they wrote their essays, anticipated Anita Hill's point of view. With two white teachers, many black students, male and female, and several white students, male and female, in the room, these two students spoke up as women and as black women in ways we teachers did not anticipate. Both respondents observe the manipulative and "ugly" language of the men, who tried to bum a meal from a woman who would put them down. Both identify with the women who defeat men. Neither fears the teachers or the opinions of the other students. Two adolescents, without the public backing for their sentiments, and attitudes that

came a year later from Anita Hill, speak a language of informed membership. We

teachers were somewhat uncomfortable: we did not speak in that genre. (p. 118)

As Bleich recognizes, there are genres that people can recognize or "speak" only when

they are from certain groups or when they have certain experiences. In fact, Bleich's

point essentially suggests that each of us speak in our own genre, or in multiple genres,

and that we need to recognize what our genres are and, perhaps more importantly,

recognize the genres that enable us to communicate with one another.

Like Gee's conception of learning as culturally driven, Bleich recognizes that a

text "becomes a genre by virtue of people 'living' it among other people. Groups of

people 'live' text or language by reading, speaking, and recognizing it as having some

collective status. It is perhaps easier to see how language genres live when considering

instances of language in actual use" (p. 40). Meaning, therefore, must emerge through a

cultural and linguistic interaction. Unfortunately for students, the genre of grades, and

the standards those grades represent, are not "living," and unquestionably remain foreign,

because students do not get to participate in the "collective" experience of grades,

meaning that they do not see "instance of actual ... use." Yes, they do see the product of

those instances—the grades themselves—but not the practice, process, and discourse that

gives life to the genre.

Bleich recognizes the problem that the path to knowledge in academia is often a

one-way street:

many faculty members construe learning as being one-way: the faculty can teach

the students, but the students can't teach the faculty. This means that faculty may

tell students what counts as knowledge, but students may not tell the same thing

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to faculty members. Because of this imbalance, disclosure does not matter [or

occur] in such situations, since faculty members will not change in response to

students' differing politics of knowledge. (p. 124)

In one sense, I tend to disagree with Bleich's point: many faculty now do invoke more

student-centered pedagogies where meaning-making occurs as a collective process rather

than a hierarchical one. That said, the extent to which the hierarchical model still exists

is unclear, though it clearly still dominates post-secondary education. However, while

many faculty do invoke more student-centered pedagogies, that is not the case with

respect to summative assessment, where "faculty [still] ... tell students what counts as

knowledge."

Though not speaking to grading, per se, Bleich clearly recognizes the general

problem that education traditionally does not invoke a cultural process. He writes that

the "burdens of the teaching of writing conceived of purely as skill—the problems of

'generalized writing skills instruction'—are related to the authoritarian and didactic

contexts of pedagogy" (p. 24). In this we hear echoes of Gee, who similarly contends

that "skills" abstracted from the cultural context and immediate application within that

context are not learned efficiently, if at all. Bleich takes that same idea a step further by

suggesting that "academic tradition has separated thought from practice and has kept the

former in a higher status; this tradition has also kept the question of the social

memberships of students and teachers away from the study of language use and writing"

(p. 54), which strikes me as a critical point: Separating "thought" from "practice"

equates to separating "grades" as symbols from "grading" as process—students receive

the former but do not participate in the latter. Furthermore, "thought" and "practice"

remain distinct *because* "social memberships" between students and teachers are hierarchical and therefore relatively non-interactive. For this reason, Bleich asserts that "those who feel, or are, excluded often pretend membership" (p. 55), which strikes me as roughly equivalent to the process many students go through in writing. Not fully understanding our standards and practices, they write in ways that "pretend membership," meaning that they write like they think we want them to write even though they do not really understand it.

For Bleich, the problem is remedied by disclosure of genre. In order to acquire deep meaning, we have to write culturally:

> To understand that one reads and writes through and for membership is to transform language use from a highly individualized activity of self-regulation and self-enhancement to one less clear in method but more familiar in purpose: finding interests in common with readers, authors, and cultures different from ourselves, and identifying the membership, as well as the individual identity, of all. To study language use and literacy in this way is to reduce the need for pretending, and to increase the effort at identifying oneself in multiple senses. (p. 55)

Aside from its general sentiment, several points in that paragraph hold weight here. First, Bleich focuses on the imperative to "reduce the need for pretending," which strikes me as not entirely different from my call for eliminating pretense. Our goal in teaching writing cannot be to put students in situations where they subconsciously need to pretend. Rather, we need to engage them in real discourse and genuine practice.

Second, Bleich's point that a more enlightened pedagogy will be "less clear in method" speaks to the issue of engaging students culturally and through genre disclosure. As I read it, "less clear" does not mean more difficult; it means that crisply defined methods such as Current-Traditionalism, and perhaps even process pedagogy, will not suffice. Genre disclosure will be messier because genre fluctuates from situation to situation, as well as from person to person.

Yet like so many other theorists we've seen, Bleich sees grades as inhibiting disclosure from students, if not by faculty as well. While Bleich concedes to summatively assessing portfolio work at the end of the semester (p. 211), he also asserts that a "grade-governed pedagogy is particularly burdensome in learning to write and use our language" (p. 197) because judging "an individual text apart from its social context of production is inappropriate because the judgment communicates to the writer the false implication of his/her sole responsibility for the text" (p. 198). Yet by Bleich's reasoning, texts are always negotiated genres. Thus, the hierarchical and essentially non-negotiable nature of grading prevents true genre interaction between students and faculty, which returns us to the problem of pretending.

Rather than education via grades, Bleich asserts that the acquisition of disciplinary consciousness comes from genuine social interaction:

> ... we need to be surrounded by other people who are writing, responding, and growing with us. Like the speech acquired by infants, subsequent abilities with language demand the constant response of other writers and speakers.... To provide the best conditions in school for one's language to mature into interesting

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and useful forms means working in as full a social scene as possible—with others

in the classroom as interested parties and colleagues. (p. 197)

A call for such a "full ... social scene" overlays Gee quite poignantly. Improved

discourse—writing, speaking, or other—unequivocally requires genuine discourse.

As I hope to have established earlier, however, the hitch is that student readers are

not real readers by discourse community standards. Therefore, Bleich's call for genuine

discourse, though important, will not be fulfilled until students also participate in the

authoritative exercise of discursive standards—until they play the grading game *with* us.

In my view, Bleich's trouble with grading speaks to the symptom rather than the actual

problem. As previously discussed, grades are not oppressive—grades only represent

discursive standards that will always exist in any construct, though especially in the

power hierarchy of the university. It is our failure to invite students to join the discussion

and practice of grading that is oppressive.

Therefore, while Bleich advances shrewd points about the need to disclose genre

to and through "membership," he does not specifically address the need for disclosure

concerning grading. Bleich could not be more right that we need to foster genre

understanding and membership, and doing so absolutely requires that we exercise

"disclosure" about how we do the summative assessment work of the institution. If

anything, in the academic institution the most powerful genre is not race, class, or gender;

the most powerful genre is grading. As Bleich tacitly acknowledges by discussing the

problem grades pose, grades manifest a barrier between ourselves and our students (at

least as grades are typically exercised). And while many educators demonstrate their

willingness for "disclosure" concerning ethnicity, race, gender, and other social factors,

few have taken steps to disclose grading to students and invite their membership in that process. Whether this is because educators do not know how to involve students or because educators fear relinquishing authority remains unclear. While it seems reasonable to suggest it a combination of the two factors, I suspect that the former plays a greater role.

Building on Bleich's ideas, therefore, if we truly want students to understand us, and if we want them to feel included and embraced, if we truly want them to "invent the university," then it is not enough to put ethnicity, history, gender and similar genres on the table in plain view. In addition to those factors, we *also* need to disclose the dominant construct that separates them from us: grading. All I am suggesting, therefore, is that we discourse through the grading game with students, showing them how we do it, why we make the choices we make while doing it, where decisions are clear, where decisions are fuzzy, and what we weigh more or less heavily throughout. I suggest that we invite their participation, including the questions and comments about the process that come from students' individual and collective "genres." I do not suggest that we artificially or prematurely relinquish any authority until such time as students can appreciate and exercise discursive standards, but once they can do so I also suggest that we interact with them in modifying those standards. At all times, we should remain open to their perspectives, including what is fair and unfair. In short, I merely advocate full and complete "disclosure."

Bleich and I sit relatively close together on this point. He advocates "discursive genres of evaluation" that involve an eventual grade but where the preponderance of "grading" occurs through discourse (p. 199). Toward that end, he asserts that teaching

"language use, writing, and discipline without conflict for teachers or unwelcome oversight for students depends on our being able to install the social processes and genres of self- and mutual evaluation" (p. 217), and while he stops short of proposing the kind of interactive grading I advocate, he does suggest that the general path towards resolution involves more interaction overall.

For Bleich, however, the path toward resolution is not necessarily smooth. Quite the opposite, he advocates discomfort as a fulcrum of higher understanding and fellowship. Disclosing our different genres will shake out our differences, which though uncomfortable at first, ultimately leads to higher consciousness. As he writes in reference to the ninth grade class:

> Discomfort occurred because people placed or found themselves in the presence of an "other" who posed a challenge to their identities, as when Ms. X made the remark about the branch of the Jewish tree, or when Mike asked Jorge for his green card. Many may claim that such friction does not belong in class, but these instances show not that friction was deliberately brought in but that it was there by virtue of the student population, the nature of the course, the teacher, the immediate writing and speaking situations. These feelings are just there, and we who supervise classrooms can convert them into occasions for thinking. (p. 143)

"Converting" them is the key. As Bleich aptly points out, discomforts will exist whether we acknowledge them or not. Therefore, it is how we contend with them that matters. That applies not only to discomforts about social genres but equally to educational ones. Clearly, students experience "discomfort" about grades. Yet if we invite them into the

grading game, we can convert that discomfort "into occasions for thinking," understanding, and camaraderie.

With that in mind, Bleich contends that to "propose teaching the conflicts themselves is to suggest that classroom curricula should reflect the knowledge-making process, the transiency and contingency of knowledge" (p. 16). Though Bleich's point refers more to genre-clash than other factors, the general idea of teaching conflict is not in its infancy, especially in English.

Pratt

Using culture clash as a pedagogical engine already has foundation, especially once we recognize it as a re-contextualization of Mary Louse Pratt's (1990) "contact zone"—"social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in context of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery" (p. 4, Professing in the Contact Zone, Ed. Janice M. Wolff, pub: NCTE), or in writing classrooms. Given what we have seen of the socio-linguistic and cognitive differences between teachers and students, are not classrooms places where "cultures clash"? Students, vying to join academic culture, enter into exactly the kind of "highly asymmetrical relations of power" that Pratt advocates as a means of fostering discussion and understanding, a premise not notably different than Bleich's call for disclosure and discomfort as "occasions for thinking."

Building on Pratt, Bizzell spoke to this very point in the nineties in her essay "'Contact Zones' and English Studies" (1994), encouraging us to "organize English studies not in terms of literacy or chronological periods, nor essentialized racial or gender

categories, but rather in terms of historically defined contact zones, moments when different groups within the society contend for the power to interpret what is going on" (p. 483). I contend that writing classrooms already *are* contact zones where "different groups…contend for the power to interpret" what makes good writing. Granted, it is not much of a competition; the professors always win. But that's tangential to the issue.

When Fish argues that English studies should primarily be concerned with fostering understanding of the nature and power of discourse communities, and when Bizzell (1982) argues that "composition students should focus upon practice within interpretive communities—exactly how conventions work in the world and how they are transmitted" (p. 209), are they not, in effect, advocating that we use the writing classroom as a contact zone between the academic culture (and its understanding of "good writing"), as represented by the teacher, and the students' culture (and their understanding of "good writing")?

If we return once again to Bruffee and his point that "any effort to understand conversation requires us to understand the nature of community life that generates and maintains conversation" (1984, p. 421), then do we not see an equal imperative to engage students in conversation about "essay" and "A"? Such conversations must not be abstractions, either; they cannot amount to purely "academic" rabble about what "excellence" is and why theses are important. As Gee would contend, they need to be grounded in the real: real papers, real grades, real questions and concerns, and most of all, real people.

In doing so, and as Gee would argue, the focus of study does not become the student's essay, per se, but the culture that interprets that essay. As Graff argues, "the

unit of study should cease to be the isolated text (or author) and become the virtual space or cultural conversation that the text presupposes" (1987, p. 257), e.g. the academic community itself. In other words, students cannot possibly assess the grade for a peer's essay without asking questions about what academic standards are, how they are interpreted, on what basis they are justified, etc., and without engaging those standards themselves, intimately.

In the true spirit of Pratt's contact zone, in which "along with rage, incomprehension, and pain there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom" (1990, p. 17), where "no one was excluded, and no one was safe" (1990. p. 17), I am not suggesting anything utopianistic. Far from it, the peer assessment workshops will and should stimulate *constructive* conflict: constructive conflict between cultures, constructive conflict between the students' and the professor's interpretations of texts, constructive conflict between one student's interpretation and another student's interpretation, constructive conflict over how to interpret a rubric (if there is one), etc. Or if not constructive conflict then, more precisely, *instructive conflict*, for as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the entire exercise is in itself a heuristic.

Towards this end, Michael W. Apple points out in *Ideology and Curriculum* (1990) that "a basic assumption seems to be that conflict among groups of people is *inherently* and fundamentally bad and we should strive to eliminate it *within* the established framework of institutions, rather than seeing conflict and contradiction as the basic 'driving forces' in society" (p. 87). Such a sentiment seems comparable to John Trimbur's (1989) conception of "dissensus" in which "we need to see consensus…not as

an agreement that reconciles differences through an ideal conversation but rather as the desire of humans to live and work together with differences" (p. 476). Trimbur's vision of collaborative learning entails exactly what I describe here, an examination of the Bakhtinian heteroglossia, of Bleich's genre disclosure, and exploration of Gee's social practices and conventions.

As Trimbur rightfully points out, it "can be misleading…to tell students, as social constructionists do, that learning to write means learning to participate in the conversation and consensual practices of various discourse communities. Instead, we need to ask students to explore the rhetoric of dissensus that pervades writing situations" (1989, p. 471). Insofar as discourse communities are reconciliations of differences—heteroglossia—rather than unified bodies of "consensual practices," Trimbur makes a good point. We need to help students realize that interpretations can and do vary, that identifying "clarity" is a deep and complex task laden with questions of aptitude, expectation, convention, etc.

Therefore, just as Trimbur, in a manner of which Pratt and Bleich seemingly would approve, suggests that "we might begin the conversation in literature classes by talking not about how to read a literary text but rather how the students in the course have been trained to read literature and how their schooled reading differs from the way they read outside of school" (1989, p. 474), so might we begin composition class by discussing similar questions, by engaging students for who they are, where they come from, and where they presently sit.

As Thomas Kent asserts, doing so means putting onto the table everything we bring with us into the room:

in order to communicate, you must be somewhere, and being somewhere—being

positioned in relation to other language users—means that you always come with

baggage, with beliefs, desires, hopes, and fears about the world. What matters is

how we employ these beliefs, desires, hopes, and fears to formulate passing

theories in our attempts to interpret one another's utterances and to make sense of

the world. (1999, p. 4)

The same goes for a paper and discursive standards. As Kent suggests, therefore, we

need to engage students with all of their "baggage," including their baggage concerning

grades, standards, and authority. As I noted earlier, some trends in composition have

pushed in the opposite direction, towards encouraging, if not requiring (as if it is possible

to do so) students to set that baggage aside by delaying grading. Yet minimizing our

direct interaction with our fears and beliefs, and/or distancing ourselves from those fears

and beliefs, is not the same as grappling with them.

Grappling with "baggage" is not something for students alone. They are not the

only ones to come to class with "baggage." Professors do, too. As such, we cannot

reasonably ask students to face their baggage if we do not face our own at the same time,

and as positive examples for them to model. While this need not require that we expose

our personal selves to students, it does demand that we disclose ourselves to them as

representatives of the academic community. Susan Gabel's contention in "Some

Conceptual Problems with Critical Pedagogy" (2002) that "engaged pedagogy is a risky

proposition [because it] assumes shared vulnerability between teacher and students"

dictates that we must offer students our full professional selves and the baggage we carry

if we hope them to do the same (p. 179). Wynn, et al. raise this very point with respect to

how writing professors should contend best with culturally diverse students, suggesting that we must "disclose" our belief systems not only to increase our self-awareness but also foster a community in which they can be examined (2005). Equally so, it models for students the behavior we wish them to embrace.

In truth, though Wynn et al. refer specifically to more traditional conceptions of culture clash, the distinction between student culture and academic culture is culture clash enough. Following through with contact zones, dissensus, disclosure, and discomfort, we should engage students as representatives of the discourse community and effectively say, "This is how I see the academy as interpreting this essay. Here's why. How do you (students) see it? Why do you see it that way?" Or as Trimbur puts it, "'This,' we tell students, 'is the way we (English teachers, biologists, lawyers, chemical engineers, social workers, whatever) do things around here. There's nothing magical about it. It's just the way we talk to each other" (1989, p. 472).

From such disclosure, discussion emerges, perhaps instructive conflict, and also the potential for instructive confessions on our part: "Some faculty insist that thesis statements appear at the end of the first paragraph. There's a good rationale for it but I also have some reservations…." Or, "I am not sure if this point achieves our definition of 'supporting evidence,' and here's why…" In short, revealing our professional baggage means coming to students as we are, which sometimes involves relative certainty and at other times (often? always?) involves uncertainty. Yet it invariably involves concern, care, passion, hope, and a deep willingness to educate.

If we want a student to reveal to his or her peers that he or she submitted the paper uncertain of the thesis then we have to reveal to our students that academic conventions

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are not always perfectly lucid. It means that we must be willing to say things like this: "You know, I really love the tone of this essay. I just love it. I fear, however, that if we grade the essay too heavily on its tone instead of on its evidence (insert: style, depth, clarity, etc. depending on assignment), that the academy would not agree." In response, students may question why good tone is not enough and why the academy weights other factors differently. Far from being a problem, such questioning only creates potent teachable moments.

What might prove most amazing about this proposition is that many educators will find my call for candor and disclosure to be radical, extreme, or at least impractical, as if candor has become incongruent with education, as if we need posturing and pretense to educate fellow human beings, as if we will cease to garner respect as "that man behind the curtain" instead of the all-powerful Oz, as if our dignity requires unchecked authority, as if we will lose our students' respect if we cease to dominate them with grades. Yet as David Boud notes in "Assessment and the Promotion of Academic Values*"* (1990), "assumptions that learners are unable to make judgements undermine their capacity to do so." If we approach students with our full intellectualism and engage them as intellectuals themselves, they will appreciate our dispensation of pretense on their behalf.

What students will not appreciate once we engage them in the discursive act is the loss of their ability to excuse low grades as arbitrary, vindictive, personally motivated, or just plain inaccurate. They will recognize grading as a generally fair and well-reasoned process and gain an appreciation of how grades emerge. What they will appreciate far more, however, is that we engage them as real people in a real situation, to say nothing of their newfound understanding of academic conventions and how to write within them.

CHAPTER 5: CRITICAL COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT AND THE POST-PROCESS PARADIGM

Critical Pedagogy

Advocating that we share and analyze culture clashes and power relationships with students obviously ferries this discussion into the realm of critical pedagogy. As I noted in the introduction, peer assessment as I propose it must not result in mere acculturation. It should empower students towards liberatory and democratic aims. For this very reason, I call it Critical Collaborative Assessment rather than *collaborative* peer assessment because if students are to fully understand and engage social conventions then part of their evolution towards "colleague" must involve the questioning and critique of those conventions and their enforcing power structures.

This raises the question as to whether this pedagogy ultimately values humanistic aims—liberation and empowerment—over more traditionally educational ones—teaching writing skills—and while I am not entirely comfortable with a firm distinction between the two, I take care to note that this pedagogy sits concretely in the latter. Towards the aim of successfully teaching composition, critical elements are an ancillary but necessary factor. While democratic boons manifest along with educational ones, I would value this pedagogy even in the absence of the former. However, that educational and humanistic gains become confluent in this pedagogy ultimately suggests to me a certain rightness.

Furthermore, critical theory and peer assessment enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship. Critical theory supports peer assessment insofar as students need to participate in the language of the dominant discourse in order to become full citizens of

the culture and completely self-aware. Yet peer assessment also re-invigorates critical

theory, which has been criticized of late as being if not impractical, idealistic, and

politically burdened, then at least ineffective (Gabel, 2002; Wardekker and Miedema,

1997).

Speaking to peer assessment's foundation in critical theory, and returning now to

the contact zone and dissensus, Trimbur raises a compelling critique of collaborative

consensus, suggesting that we

> need to distinguish between consensus as an acculturative practice that reproduces
>
> business as usual and consensus as an oppositional one that challenges the
>
> prevailing conditions of production. The point of collaborative learning is not
>
> simply to demystify the authority of knowledge by revealing its social character
>
> but to transform the productive apparatus, to change the social character of
>
> production. (1989, p. 473)

As Trimbur points out with respect to consensus, while acculturating students to

dominant discursive conventions seems imperative, *that cannot be all we do.* We need to

empower them to question those conventions, and we need to do so for two reasons:

First, students who cannot question conventions, who must take them as rote, cannot be

said to fully understand them. Second, as critical theory suggests, every individual must

gain the right to "name the world" (Dobrin, 1999, p. 139), and without such praxis

students will be indoctrinated rather than educated, and disempowered rather than

empowered.

With that in mind, and before delving at length into critical theory, let me speak to

what I envision: Over the course of the semester, students will partake in teacher-guided

peer assessment practices. At first, these are teacher-directed and designed to critically acculturate students to dominant discursive conventions. (Critical acculturation means that students must be free to question the standards so as to understand them.) Eventually, as students become acculturated to grading standards and practices, they will be able to ask more intelligent, informed, engaged questions, *and eventually be able to challenge standards meaningfully*, i.e. as "colleagues." In effect, this means engaging standards as a literal or figurative text in much the same way that we engage essays as texts. It equally means that classroom, programmatic and institutional standards should be permitted to evolve to the extent that students *and* faculty determine it beneficial. As Bruffee stated, "we must teach practical rhetoric and critical analysis in such a way that, when necessary, students can turn to abnormal discourse [discourse that challenges existing discursive structures] in order to undermine their own and other people's reliance on the canonical conventions and vocabulary of normal discourse" (1984, p. 430). In other words, students should be able to question and challenge institutional standards, such as the language of a rubric and/or the practice of its interpretation, and they should do so by offering interpretations from their own perspective, interpretations the institution might at first and possibly in the end determine "abnormal."

Of course, students very well might challenge standards at the outset, as well. But in my experience such early challenges typically represent frail understandings of institutional standards, and often are merely disguised complaints, e.g. "Why does an 'A' have to be so hard to achieve?"

Eventually, the students voice the kind of savvy inquiries that we might ask amongst ourselves, inquiries concerning specific wordings within the rubric (if there is

one) or its organization; inquiries concerning how to weight different elements of writing, inquires concerning how to reconcile the tensions within a set of standards; inquiries concerning the relationship between assignment, grades, and genre; and yes, even inquiries concerning the standards themselves. Such inquiries eventually become the locus of real, meaningful, purposeful discussion and debate, not *between* the students and the teacher but *amongst* all the members of the class, teacher included. If the shift in power is to be genuine, such discussions must be able to influence the standards within the class, such as in changes to the rubric or standards.

However, *this in no way calls for the teacher to relinquish expertise and conviction.* There have been times when students have persuaded me—the appointed representative of the discourse community—that certain changes should be made to our standards. There have been times when I have not been persuaded. There have been times when a class has persuaded me that they can collectively reason well enough to simply vote on changes democratically, and there are times when they have not. However, to relinquish authority artificially, arbitrarily, and/or without full conviction does not constitute being a full human being who engages full human beings. Furthermore, students typically respect the fact that I have been appointed to uphold certain standards and conventions, that they are paying me to uphold those standards, and that conventions should not be trifled with nonchalantly.

Most importantly, reason prevails. I find it difficult to recall a time in my practice of peer assessment when the students and I remained at odds. Typically, I either persuade them, they persuade me, or more likely, we all discuss an issue until we resolve it consensually. More often than not, and increasingly so as the semester progresses, the

conversation does not occur as a dialectic with me on one side and the students on the other but rather as a communal conversation where students interact with each other. The idea is not to squelch dissensus, baggage, and critique but rather to reason through it collectively and constructively, and free of pretense.

Thus, students should be encouraged to engage the authoritative and summative language of the discourse community. Since the function of language in the discourse community returns us to the foundation of social constructionism—the ability of the dominant group to accept or reject language—we can see how such engagement can lead to empowerment and change. As Fish reminds us:

> The unfolding of [a new] interpretation will thus proceed under two constraints: not only must what one says about a work be related to what has already been said (even if the relation is one of reversal) but as a consequence of saying it the work must be shown to possess in a greater degree than had hitherto been recognized the qualities that properly belong to literary productions…. In short, the new interpretation must not only claim to tell the truth about the work … but it must claim to make the work better. (1980, p. 351)

Thus, if students do produce what we consider to be a stronger understanding of an essay, they will do so through the language of the conventional discourse, and if they produce a stronger understanding of the standards we exercise, it also will be through such language. Therefore, the capacity for students to invoke truly radical interpretations is, ultimately, negligible. That does not cripple change. It merely means that understandings too radical to persuade the discourse community will not be embraced by

the discourse community. A radical proposal embraced by the discourse community ultimately would no longer be "radical" at all.

That tension between authority and liberty actually exemplifies critical theory, which, despite a common misconception, does not advocate the relinquishing of authority to students. Paolo Freire states rather explicitly in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1987) that "without authority it is very difficult for the liberties of the students to be shaped. Freedom needs authority to become free. It is a paradox but it is true" (p. 91). And, "dialogue means a permanent tension in the relation between authority and liberty" (Shor and Freire, p. 102). Peckham affirms this same idea, writing that ...

> Freire consistently warns against intellectuals from privileged socioeconomic positions (i.e. the majority of university professors) who engage in a kind of intellectual charity in their mission for the oppressed. He also argues against teachers who abandon their expertise and responsibility as educators in some misguided Summerhillian approach to teaching. There are simply no easy answers to these [teacher] identity problems. Working them out is a part of the challenge of teaching. (2003, p. 230)

Specifically because we should not offer students "intellectual charity" and "abandon [our] responsibility as teachers," involving students in the application of discursive standards must not spur any compromise of our personal or institutional integrity if we want students to become genuinely powerful writers, thinkers, and academic citizens capable of acting in the face of adversity. And if we want them to be "free."

Concordantly, if we truly hold those aims as practical, if not also noble, then I think we have no choice but to embrace critical theory's basic tenet that the right and

personal authority to exercise language, especially that of the dominant discourse, is the primordial mechanism through which such agency can be attained (Freire, 1997; Shor, 1992; McLaren & Giroux, 1992; Frankenstein, 1992). This is why McLaren and Giroux contend that "a critical perspective demands that the very ideological process of language itself be interrogated" (1992, p. 25), meaning that educating students requires

> teaching them to read texts as languages constructed through the ordering of particular codes which may name and legitimate reality and social identities in specific ways. Students need to learn how to read not as a process of submission to the authority of the text but as a dialectical process of understanding, criticizing, and transforming. (p. 19)

"Text," of course, can refer to an essay, a rubric, or even more abstract con-texts such as an academic institution or a discourse community. Regardless, students need not just ingest conventions; they need to *digest* them, i.e. grapple with them, forge meaning from them, understand them, and even challenge them. And sometimes spit them out.

In short, the relationship between students and grading taps the absolute core of critical pedagogy; grading is the eminent factor dividing banking and problem-posing education, with the former referring to education whereby the "educator's role is to regulate the way the world 'enters into' the students…to 'fill' the students by making deposits of information" through language (Freire, 1997, p. 57). In Shor's conception, the banking method also "represents [students] as deficient, devoid of culture and language, needing to be filled with official knowledge" (1992, p. 32). In such a system, the "more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are" (Freire, 1997, p. 53).

While many professors exercise highly interactive pedagogies in their teaching of writing, involving classroom discussion, group work, conferencing, and written feedback to student essays, do we not typically see a banking methodology in academic with respect to grades and standards? We encourage students to discuss their work with us in terms of how to improve it but when it comes to grades we expect them to be receptacles in that (1) the standards we construct for "C" are what a "C" is, and (2) when we pronounce a particular student's essay to be a "C" then it is a "C" (if for no other reason than, like the third umpire, that is what we called it). *Recalling once again that grades constitute the most powerful language in academia, the banking of grade-language not only means that students cannot critically interact with and subsequently understand the standards, it simultaneously calls into question the extent to which students can critically engage any of their education. It asks them to critically engage the quality of their writing but not to critically engage the standards and practices through which their writing is assessed, as if the two are distinct, as if they can critically consider quality without critically considering the standards that define quality, as if they can write with critical thinking towards standards they cannot critically reason about, as if they can write reflectively towards standards about which we grant them no authentic ability to reflect.*

That bespeaks to why, when Marilyn Frankenstein writes in "Critical Mathematics Education" (1992) that "dominant language can distort people's ability to know reality critically" (p. 244), she refers to language's power to mediate experience. If we embrace the preformed language other people use, such as grades, and allow it to be deposited into us without critical inquiry, then we do not interact with reality directly but

interact instead with other people's language *about* reality. We do not engage discursive

standards; we only accept the teacher's symbolic representations of those standards. In

this same sense, Apple (1979) "argues that the labels used in educational settings work

against the development of critical consciousness by mystifying the situations and

relations which they describe, so that causality and complexity are hidden" (quoted in

Frankenstein, 1992, p. 244). Or as Kenneth Burke (1996) asserts, "even if any given

terminology [such as a grade] is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology

it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of

reality" (p. 45) Which is precisely what our students face. As previously discussed,

students are often, if not typically, mystified by grades, and undoubtedly lack intimate

understanding of the "causality and complexity" between their work, their grades, and the

discursive conventions of which the grades are representations. Hence, grades can do as

much to deflect the reality of discursive convention as instruct that reality.

For this very reason, McLaren & Giroux contend that "privileging practice

without due consideration of the complex interactions that mark the totality of

theory/practice and language/meaning relationships is not simply reductionist but also a

form of theoretical tyranny" (1992, p. 20). If "tyranny" is too strong a word, it is not so

by a significant margin. Granted, "tyranny" might seem extreme, but if the "causality

and complexity" between student work and dominant discursive conventions remains

mysterious and largely inaccessible to the students themselves then "tyranny" is not far

off, either. In essence, holding students to standards they cannot understand through

direct engagement, standards whose decoding requires a context and culture of which the

students are not a part and in which they typically cannot even participate, is tyrannical.

It safeguards the authority of the dominant group not through reason (though the standards may be reasonable) but through might.

Conversely, Freire's problem-posing pedagogy, when translated for purposes here, simply suggests that we engage students, and allow students to engage us, with real questions about the real contexts in which we interact, questions such as those about the nature of writing for a given institution, the institution's expectations, the rationale for those expectations, and so forth. Yet Freire cautions that we not only must do so authentically, but also within two constraints: First, a dialectic will not yield agency unless it permits action because when "a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*" (1997, p. 68). In essence, words without authority, words that are merely words, devoid of power, absent of *effect*, hold no meaning for the individual or for the society. This is the same point I raised previously with respect to peer response groups. They can exercise the verbiage of a rubric and institutional standards but as they lack the power to effectualize those words the way the Third Umpire can, the peer groups discourse is only verbalism.

Second, Freire contends that "while to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis [actionable]—is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it *for* another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words" (1997, p. 69). Similarly, participating in assessment should not be the "privilege of some few." That does not mean that the sole right to assess should be given to students, nor does it mean that students should be able to exercise standards outside the

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dominant discourse community. It merely means that learning to assess and engaging the *process* of assessment, insofar as that process constructs meaning within academe, should be afforded to all persons. Grades should have meaning for everyone, not just teachers.

Returning once again to peer response groups, we find them nothing if not "verbalistic" rather than acts of real praxis. They allow, no, they *require* students to exercise the banked-in, deposited language of the discourse community but to do so devoid of the power of turn that language into reality—for the grade to count—and to engage and reform the standards and methods of the discourse community. Peer response does nothing short of "privileging [the] practice" of interaction and response, i.e. writing for a community, without invoking the "totality" of the theory and the language. Hence, from a critical perspective, peer response is to some measure of application, if not entirely in theory, tyrannical.

Education need not be so hollow if, rather than imposing language on students without criticality, we simply relinquish pretense and invite students to be participants in the social construct. As so many non-critical theorists have suggested (Habermas, 1990; Piaget; Vygotsky, 1978; Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Bruffee, 1984; Flower, 1989), full individual actionability requires true engagement in the context and the discourse. Willem Wardekker and Siebren Miedema (1997) write simply: "Intersubjectivity is the prerequisite for subjective acting and understanding" (p. 55), meaning that we can only fully achieve our individual capacities by recognizing where we stand in relationship to others, just as students can only achieve full actionability by recognizing where they stand in relation to the institutional discourse community.

Wardekker and Miedema explain it further:

Any pedagogical theory is ultimately about the question of the quality of actorship to be acquired by the educated. For, unless cultural transmission is understood as a totally mechanistic and determined form of socialization (in which case only a bordercase of pedagogical theory remains), the aim of this transmission is always that the child learns to give meaning and act socially in an autonomous way according to her own judgment. Besides the acquisition of competencies, this asks for the development of personal identity: being aware of yourself as a continuously judging and acting person. Without this awareness, rational activity is unthinkable. (1997, p. 55)

Thus, if we embrace education's goal as one of cultivating individual actionability and autonomy, we must recognize that students will not develop autonomy until they can "give meaning and act socially in an autonomous way according to [their] own judgment." To accomplish that with students, we must realize that "individuals are produced through the clash of conflicting discourses and subject positions, critical pedagogy *can help us to critically interrogate those discourses*, allow us to develop a sense of 'critical agency'" (McLaren and Giroux, 1992, p. 19, authors' emphasis).

McLaren and Giroux hardly stand alone in asserting the importance of engaging "subject positions." Thomas Kent forges a similar point through paralogic hermeneutics in which

interpretation enters into both the reception and the production of discourse. When we read, we interpret specific texts or utterances; when we write, we interpret our readers, our situations, our and other people's motivations, the appropriate genres to employ in specific circumstances, and so forth. Therefore,

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both when we write and when we read, we must possess the ability to enter into

this relation of understanding with other language users. (1999, p. 2)

Yet this interpretive stance—"actorship," "critical agency," "intersubjectivity"—undoubtedly cannot occur when dominant language is banked into subjects, or if it does occur then it does so despite the banking model, if not in spite of it.

I hope it is clear, therefore, that a truly integrative assessment practice also roots in the educational, and to some extent the liberatory, elements of critical pedagogy. As noted earlier, critical assessment can also reinvigorate critical theory. Wardekker and Miedema explain that "critical pedagogy is now considered by many to have been a stillborn child that is interesting mainly for historical reasons. The very few remaining proponents of critical pedagogy are almost seen as relics of bygone times. In the postmodern era, its preoccupation with emancipation and the wrongs of society seems outdated" (1997, 52). And this might be true. I suspect that critical pedagogy fell victim to its own noble intentions. Its concern with liberating students, which often appeared to take precedence over rigorous curricular learning, cast it as a lofty notion towards some utopian democratic, if not perhaps a socialist society. While I contend that critical theorists simply held that students cannot really be educated if they do not first develop critical agency, the debate over critical theory's general aim is only tangential to this discussion. Ultimately, if we view critical theory not in the context of its political aspirations but rather through the immediate objective of teaching students to write more effectively and with agency, and if we view it through the lens of Critical Collaborative Assessment, it may not seem "outdated" at all.

Post-Process

Just as my integrative peer assessment pedagogy roots in critical theory, so does it gain foundation from post-process thinking. The post-process critique of process theory roots in two stances: The first is that we have transformed the notion that writing is a process (rather than a product) into a codification. We have transformed writing into "the process," and students need to understand "the process" as a subject matter rather than as a skill. Essentially, what originally was a descriptive statement about the nature of composing—writing is a process—now has become a prescriptive method students must follow—students *must write through "the process."* "The objectification of the writing process," Petraglia Writes, "permitted by empirical method provided a 'thing' that could be intact, and thus worthy of emulation, or broken, and thus in need of repair" (1999, p. 53). This codification of an action into a "thing" enabled writing teachers a concrete subject matter—the writing process, not much different than The Pythagorean Theorem—for their students to learn and against which to be measured, e.g. writing some or more drafts equates to learning *the* writing process and, in theory, becoming a better writer.

It is imperative to note, however, as Couture does, that "what we may have forgotten—or never understood—about the process movement as it was conceived by its founders in the early seventies, Elbow tells us, was that it reflected 'a burgeoning interest in the *experience* of writing,' in writing as a human phenomenon of knowing and learning" (1999, p. 38). Not everyone in the field translates writing processes into *the* codified writing process. However, it seems fair to say that "the writing process" has become a familiar phrase, to say the least, and that many instructors, institutions, and

even states have implemented rote process requirements that abstract the "experience of writing" into something formalized and directive.

So much so, in fact, that failure to follow "the" process can result in penalties. John Clifford and Elizabeth Ervin point out that following "the" process can be standardized so rigidly that "the darkest predications of Althusser and Foucault would be validated" (1999, p. 186). Ervin recounts her own compliance with this mentality:

> As a teaching assistant, I was advised by supervisors and more experienced peers to require students regularly to print out hard copies of their drafts, even if they did not need one for peer conferring, even if they did not normally revise on hard copies or preferred to revise onscreen, even if they had ethical convictions against wasting paper, even if they normally did not revise at all. The penalty for no drafts? A one-letter grade reduction. In implementing this policy, Heilker suggests, I became an enforcer 'of mandatory, institutionalized revision,' perpetuating the notion not only 'that there is one best kind of writing process' but also that students who are 'unable to refuse to revise [according to this process] … [should be] punished with lower grades in the hope that they will mend their ways'" (1999, p. 62)

We hardly can deem Ervin's experience uncommon. "Process pedagogy" has become the sacred cow of compositionists, with syllabi demonstrating our reverence for mandating that students engage "the" process of required prewriting, drafting, editing, and revision.

That sums up the first root of post-process pedagogy—the complaint that the process has become a codified and rote subject to be learned and method to be followed rather than a descriptive tool about the experiential nature of writing.

The second root stance of post-process pedagogy concerns the impossibility of actually identifying a process, or even a series of identifiable process*es*, through which an individual can compose. Gary Olson (1999) states that "process theorists assume that we can somehow make statements about the process that would apply to all or most writing situations" and are "attempting to systematize something that simply is not susceptible to systematization" (p. 7, 8). The complaint is not that composing lacks all elements we call "process"—most people do, for example, "prewrite"—but that the mere practice of exercises such as prewriting, drafting, and editing ignore what makes composing functional by nature.

Thus, As George Pullman (1999) elucidates, any effort to quantify composing results in a convenient, albeit thinner distillation that turns the composition classroom into

> a safe space in which to practice new conventions that have been abstracted from real practices and universalized for the sake of simplicity. The proposed solution is to analyze writing into its constitutive acts or parts with such accuracy that anyone who can learn to follow the procedures will be able to produce a good piece of prose. And the fundamental belief upon which the solution rests is that it is actually possible to analyze writing so thoroughly that some step-by-step procedure with universal application will emerge … (p. 27)

The consequence of taking the organic endeavor of composing and codifying it into "parts" is that it saps from the endeavor what makes it functional to begin with, much in the way drying a clay pot makes it functional in one very limited regard but takes from the clay those moldable qualities that made it functional in so many other ways. Sure, composing involves process-elements but following a process will not make one a strong writer. As Petraglia states, that writing involves multiple sub-processes is only "the right answer to a really boring question" (1999, p. 53).

Kent explains this best in *Paralogic Rhetoric* (1993) when reminding us that "knowing a framework or process is necessary but not sufficient for communicative interaction; knowing a grammar, for example, only prepares us to write or to read" but does not make us skilled at doing so" (p. 161). Kent continues on to explain precisely why process fails to achieve its aim of inspired composition with a socially constructed paradigm:

> (1) writing and reading are kinds of communicative interaction; (2) communicative interaction requires triangulation; (3) triangulation requires hermeneutic guesses about how others will interpret our utterances; (4) the process we employ to make our hermeneutic guesses cannot be codified; (5) consequently, no system or framework theory can predict in advance how our utterances will be interpreted; (6) therefore, neither writing nor reading can be reduced to a systemic process or to a codifiable set of conventions. (1993, p. 161)

Seen as such, process theory is merely the two-dimensional shadow cast by the three-dimensional act of composing because it has the silhouette of what we do when we write but none of the actual substance. "In other words," Dobrin writes, "process philosophy

seeks to codify the 'real' world, the things that make up the real world, and human understanding of that real world through an understanding of the process by which that real world is created" (1999, p. 135), even though that cannot be possible because understanding cannot be codified.

Post-process theory, therefore, embraces communicative acts as indulgently rich, complex, and unquantifiable. Such *paralogic hermeneutics* "argue that every moment of communicative interaction is singularly unique. Our acts of interpretation are not codifiable in any logical manner since discourse does not operate in any logico-systemic manner and never remains static long enough to develop concrete understandings of communicative interaction" (Dobrin, 1999, p. 140).

The overlay of post-process theory and social constructionism should be transparent. Post-process views all meaning making as triangulatively contextual and occurring through a dynamic flux of forces that we simply cannot resolve through an equation. It not only recognizes the individual, the subject, and the discourse community, but also the individual's facility with language, disposition, immediate emotional state, upbringing, perception of the community, perception of the "reality," etc. Hence, "the processes by which we name objects are not codifiable into any recognizable or identifiable process since access to the world, to objects, to each other is afforded through the randomness of discourse" (Dobrin, 1999, p. 141). Not only discourse, discourse communities.

Consequently, one prevailing post-process theory relegates composition to three essential assumptions: "(1) writing is public; (2) writing is interpretive; and (3) writing is situated" (Kent, 1999, p. 1), and it is specifically within these three sub-paradigms that

we find the connection between post-process theory and Critical Collaborative Assessment. I will contend with each sub-paradigm individually before speaking to their connection to Critical Collaborative Assessment.

As the name suggests, "writing is public" speaks to writing within a public sphere, or as Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch puts it in "Post-Process Pedagogy: A Philosophical Exercise" (2003), "writers must work toward communicating their message to an audience" (p. 133). With "audience" being the operative word, we need not stretch far to associate writing is public with pre-existing conceptions of the relationship between writers and readers. Simply, "writing constitutes a specific communicative interaction occurring among individuals at specific historical moments and in specific relations with others and with the world" (Kent, 1999, p. 1-2). However, the post-process conception of "public" extends well beyond the more linear process typified between writer and reader; "audience," in this regard, is too limited. Instead, the post-process conception of public speaks to a far more interactive and discursive relationship. Perhaps Reed Way Dasenbrock says it best:

> Networks of meaning, thus, are both inner and outer, including ourselves and others in a web. It is not that we have something unique to say stemming from our personal experience before we negotiate the public structures of meaning, but what we have to say forms as a response to that public structure, to what has come before us and what is being said and done around us. (cited in Breuch, 2003, p. 111)

In Dasenbrock's view, writers' ideas are not composed for an audience but equally are composed by it. I would not want to assert that this entirely exceeds more traditional

conceptions of audience but it does seem to extend beyond the more transactional conception popularized in "audience" discourse into something of greater girth.

That said, it resonates quite closely to Bruffee's earlier contention: "To the extent that thought is internalized conversation, then, any effort to understand how we think requires us to understand the nature of conversation; and any effort to understand conversation requires us to understand the nature of community life that generates and maintains conversation" (1984, p. 421). The parallels between post-process's conception of "writing is public" and social constructionism should be clear. Each see an understanding of discourse and discourse communities as the primary force in composing and understanding.

Post-process's second assumption—"writing is interpretive"—returns us to the earlier discussion of hermeneutic guesswork. Of particular importance, however, is how an interpretive view of writing reifies the break from process. In any exercise of interpretation, "we can always distinguish some sort of process that we employed," Kent writes, but "if we try to employ this process again, we can never be sure that it will work the way we want it to work. Of course, we will be better guessers the next time we write something in a similar situation; we will know what went wrong or right, and we will know the process we employed to produce a successful written artifact" (1999, p. 3), *but duplicating the process-steps will not duplicate the result*. At the risk of oversimplifying the point, that writing three drafts earns a paper an "A" in one class does not mean that duplicating that drafting process will result in equally successful work for another class.

Post-process theory's third point, "writing is situated," most easily refers to the writer's place not amongst other people—writing is public—but within a given context,

such as one's place within an academic institution. Situatedness concerns the roles we play and how our understanding of our roles, and the roles of others, shapes our communicative interaction. In short, "people cannot communicate from nowhere" (1994, p. 4), Kent writes. This is a concordant point to the "subject positions" of which McLaren and Giroux speak (1992, p. 7), and interestingly enough, Bartholomae's conception of "privilege":

> It is difficult to imagine…how writers can have a purpose before they are located in a discourse, since it is the discourse with its projects and agenda that determines what writers can and will do. The writer who can successfully manipulate an audience (or, to use a less pointed language, the writer who can accommodate her motives to her reader's expectations) is a writer who can both imagine and write from a position of privilege. She must, that is, see herself within a privileged discourse, one that already includes and excludes groups of readers. (1985, p. 628)

While Bartholomae's conception of "privilege" speaks more specifically to the impetus on the student writer to adopt a stance agreeable to the university, the underlying spirit coincides with situatedness in that the more students, or any writers, can appreciate the constructs that mediate communication, the more successful they will be. This means recognizing generalizable institutional and disciplinary conventions, macro and local cultural forces, rhetorical traditions, and the full multiplexity of countervailing forces. Though circular, the best way to understand it is as follows: situatedness for students means recognizing what it means to be "student," something they recognize in a weak

sense but, as discussed earlier, not in the strong sense of "critical agency" through direct and critical interaction with the dominant discourse community—grading.

Implementing Post-Process

With these three factors in mind, the question facing the post-process movement becomes one of how to teach writing. If we reject, or at least transcend, the process paradigm that invigorates most of our present pedagogy, how do we teach students not just to understand that writing is public, interpretive, and situated but how to effectually exercise those forces? Kent's infamous maxim that "writing and reading—conceived broadly as processes or bodies of knowledge—cannot be taught, for nothing exists to teach" (1993, p. 161) raised the ire of many compositions because of its seeming suggestion that writing cannot be taught at all. Yet I agree with Breuch's point that post-process theory in no way undermines our capacity to teach writing, rather it "encourages us to reexamine our definition of writing *as an activity rather than a body of knowledge*, or method of teaching as indeterminate activities rather than exercises of master, and our communicative interactions with students as dialogic rather than monologic" (2003, p. 120, emphasis added). No longer can we approach writing as a reified and codified process.

Instead, Breuch offers us conceptions of pedagogy based on "mentoring and tutorial approaches" in which we engage in "dialogue rather than monologue with students" (2003, p. 139, 141). Arguably, many compositionists would consider their pedagogy highly student-centered and dialogic already. But here's the rub: To whatever extent students cannot dialogue about "the" process—not about what it "is" but about

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whether or not it "is" to begin with—such pedagogies are not dialogic. In other words, if we teach students there is "a writing process" then no matter how much we dialogue within that construct, the teaching of the construct itself remains monologic. More to the point, if grades continue to remain something that we give to students, and considering the power inherent in the language of grading, as I hope to have demonstrated earlier, directing grading language at students is monologic. Hence, truly dialogic education is mutually exclusive with monologic approaches to "the" process and assessment.

With that same spirit, Dobrin recognizes the relationship between the teaching of writing and questions of power in and beyond the classroom:

> If we are to understand the moments of communicative interaction as being individually unique and as occurring in noncodifiable systems, then we must also identify how such notions of communication inherently set up particular moments of power and dominance in each communicative scenario and how those particular instances lead to recurring trends, recurring strategies that appear to create structure and oppression. (1999, 43)

Though from a post-process perspective, such a call for an appreciation of "noncodifiable systems" and an examination of "power and dominance" in communicative situations certainly sounds like critical pedagogy. However, Dobrin makes an essential distinction between critical pedagogy and her own proposition:

> if we are to accept this vision of paralogic hermeneutic theories, teaching students to become aware of oppressive discursive structures, such as academic discourse or other phallogocentric discourses, is less of a liberating pedagogical agenda than is giving students the opportunity to become more skilled in their own

hermeneutic guessing skills and being able to resist the twist of triangulation. As

Kent, Sanchez, War, and a few others have noted…students must become

participants in communication; they must constantly engage in developing the

skills needed to be adept triangulators. (1999, p. 144)

Just as I noted that peer assessment is critical in practice but not necessary liberatory in

objective, so Dobrin makes the same point with respect to post-process hermeneutic

dialogism: "the goal is not to aware students of their (supposed) oppression but simply to

develop their agency so that they can recognize—interpret—and navigate their

situatedness, which is in itself liberating."

Clifford and Ervin make roughly the same point concerning the cultivation of

agency as opposed to political ideology. They

agree that we should raise our students' consciousness, allowing them to

understand that they are not as free as they assume. However, the paths students

are asked to travel need to be more flexible, more focused on their awareness

rather than on political conclusions. Encouraging students to take responsibility

for their ethical decisions as readers and writers seems closer to the

antifoundational impulse that initially helped us all resist the formulaic process of

the early eighties. (1999, p. 191)

All of this call for critical agency is well and good, but how can it be achieved?

Clearly, initial efforts towards critical pedagogy fell short in widespread pedagogical

change, and post-process theorists, as I previously discussed, have yet to offer clear

pedagogical paths. As Dobrin expresses it,

the greatest challenge composition faces with paralogic hermeneutic theories is

finding ways in which these theories might create truly liberating possibilities for

pedagogies without systematizing either the theories or the pedagogies.

Unfortunately, that challenge seems beyond our grasp as our current conception

of the nature of teaching keeps us pinned under a rubric of system and process.

(1999, p. 146)

Dobrin's call for a higher pedagogical vision is summed up nicely by Breuch, who offers

with notable humility what seems like a remarkably powerful statement. If writing is an

indeterminate, Breuch writes, then "*teaching* is also public, interpretive, and situated—

another indeterminate activity" (2003, p. 143).

Calling for teaching to be an "indeterminate activity" is a powerful statement, and

I think we must ask to what extent process pedagogy emerged not just out of a desire for

a method of helping students learn writing, but also out of educators' desires for a

concrete method for teaching writing. But what does "indeterminate" teaching look like?

What is teaching that is "public, interpretive, and situated"? Towards this end, many

post-process theorists have offered responses but few, I think, have truly provided

answers: Petraglia, referencing work from Hart, Burks, Kaufer, and Dunmire,

recommends that we develop "rhetorical sensitivity" in our students, defined loosely as

the ability of students to recognize their situatedness and cultivate appropriate

communicative responses. This also resonates back to Dobrin's and Clifford and Ervin's

call for raising our students "awareness" of their situated positions and the role of

interpretation.

Olson, in speaking of Harraway's "cyborg writing," advocates something quite similar, a pedagogy ...

> that resists authoritative, assertive, phallogocentric writing practices; that foregrounds the writer's own situatedness in history and in his or her writing practice; and that make possible the very 'apparatus or the production of authority' that all writers tend to submerge in their discourse, an authority deriving in large part from the rhetoric of assertion. This is not to say that writers must reject authority, but that in a truly ethical and postmodern stance they must reveal how authority is implicated in discourse. (1999, p. 12)

This call for an interactive understanding of social dynamics through rhetorical sensitivity to and with authority echoes in Helen Rothschild Ewald's call for writing instruction to be "organized around discourse moves—including the moves to coherence, elaboration, and 'submission' (where writers 'submit' to the orthographic, graphic, and grammatical conventions of dominant/disciplinary discourses)" (1999, p. 128).

Therefore, what I am advocating is that we help students learn how to learn what the rules are, i.e. learn the "discourse moves." The goal is to help students understand first that they have joined a game in which there is an existing set of practices, and second to help them learn how to figure out those practices. Learning the immediate set of practices might actually be less important than learning how to identify the "discourse moves" in any discipline.

The key problem, however, is that few theorists offer something akin to a concrete classroom practice in which those moves can be learned within the true situatedness of academia. While Ewald advocates something akin to a "class-magazine

project" (1999, p. 130), and Breuch advocates writing-center-style conferences as the mainstay of pedagogy, little detailed discussion of actual pedagogical implementation of post-process theory emerges, which does not mean that it does not exist.

That said, we not only find Critical Collaborative Assessment well grounded in the post-process paradigm, it also seems to provide a classroom practice that achieves all post-process aims, which is not to suggest that it is the only possible or existing post-process pedagogy. However, it might even be true to say that a fully post-process pedagogy might not be possible if students cannot meaningfully dialogue about conventions, grades, and standards because without such interaction they cannot fully understand their situatedness.

In fact, if we return to post-process' three core sub-paradigms—writing is public, interpretive, and situated—we find that each theoretical founds Critical Collaborative Assessment and that Critical Collaborative Assessment offers a functional classroom practice for each paradigm.

In concordance with post-process theory, I agree that "writing is public," and I am advocating that we abandon pretense and let students write to the authentic audience of academia and to do so with the authentic purpose of understanding dominant discursive conventions. Unlike peer response groups and other "teacher designed" constructs such as newsletters to the class for whom the authoritative audience remains the teacher, the academy is an authentic audience, if not *the* authentic audience for students, because it holds authoritative power to assess. It is a form of the actual disciplinary audience, complete with the power to assess the work. As I argued earlier, peer response groups and other subordinated, teacher-fabricated constructs are not fully audiences from the

perspective of socially-constructed discursive power, and I see no imperative to endeavor students to write for such simulacra.

Furthermore, and in concordance with post-process theory's contention that "writing is interpretive," we should help students experience interpretive moves as authors and *discuss* the interpretive moves other authors make. Let us sit down with them, collectively, and examine the process through which they interpreted the assignment, the audience, the construct, the practice of writing, etc. Let them see how other student-authors engage those factors. Most importantly, let them see that placing a thesis at the end of a first paragraph, or exercising some other convention, does not make it "right" or "good" or "effective" but rather that meaning emerges through hermeneutics rather than such rote mechanics. Let them not just see *that* "writing is interpretive" but equally *how the dominant discourse community engages the process of interpretation* (and assessment). Let them also see *how* their peers' interpretations evolve over time, and let each student see how his or her own ability to interpret text as a "member" of the discourse community, as well as to interpret the requirements of the discourse community, evolve over time.

Last but not least, and in embracing the notion that "writing is situated," let us encourage students to engage the reality of their situatedness as it actually is rather than *creating* so-called authentic writing experiences for them. Together in classes, we should discuss "inventing the university" with our students. We should discuss discursive conventions and why those conventions exist. We should discuss studentship. We should discuss teachership. We should discuss the relationship between the two. We should discuss disciplinarity. We should discuss the goals and function of writing in

academe and beyond. We should discuss *their* goals in writing for academe. We should discuss the academy's goal for their writing. We should discuss the role writing plays in learning, and thinking, and reflecting. And we should do all of that meaningfully, which requires that we do not make it an "academic" discussion but rather one about our students' real situation, writing, and grades. We need not construct constructs to teach students about situatedness when they already are situated, so let's just discuss the situation and in doing so cultivate the very agency and "rhetorical sensitivity" post-process values, agency that will help students duplicate similar understandings in whatever new situations they encounter as writers and people. Consequently, when the students do encounter new rhetorical situations, such as having to write a real newsletter, they will possess the hermeneutic consciousness necessary for success.

The great irony of the search for post-process pedagogy is its inherent contradiction with post-process assumptions: if writing *is* public, interpretive, and situated by nature—whether we make it so or not—then we need not construct a concordant pedagogy so much as relinquish all the practices we have constructed that interfere with that reality. Yet as noted earlier, many theorists have tried to construct a post-process pedagogy that best approximates the public, interpretive, and situated nature of writing *that already exists within the academic context in which students find themselves.* They are in a public forum. Their writing is situated. They do make interpretive acts. All we need do as compositionists to fulfill the post-process objectives is to stop fabricating "realities" for students and be willing to engage them not just as they are situated but as *we* are situated, to let them see "the man behind the curtain."

Perhaps the closest practice to true post-process pedagogy is Huot's call for involving students in formulating assessment and meeting assessment standards on an individual basis. Huot's "instructive evaluation" is tied to the act of learning a specific task while participating in a particular literacy event.

> Instructive evaluation involves the student in the process of evaluation, making her aware of what it is she is trying to create and how well her current draft matches the linguistic and rhetorical targets she has set for herself, targets that have come from her understanding of the context, audience, purpose, and other rhetorical features of a specific piece of writing. (2002, p. 69)

Huot recognizes specifically what I am discussing here, or perhaps it is I who recognize what he has discussed, that "before students can revise rhetorically, they need to assess rhetorically" (2002, p. 68).

That said, while I do not consider mine and Huot's approaches antithetical by any standards, and while I appreciate his move towards empowering students by helping them set goals and assess those goals, our emphases differ with respect to the three root post-process assumptions. While I appreciate Huot's individual goal/assessment method as one path, a more communal approach to assessment might be more pragmatic for instructors facing large class sizes. It also will do more to engage students in the public forum, the interpretive turn, and their situatedness. The value of writing to an empowered and authoritative audience, being part of a community, and seeing hermeneutic processes at work will be invaluable.

All said, I am simply calling for a logical extension of Bruffee's conception of collaborative learning, one in which we involve students in the language of the existing

social construct, and one in which students get to participate in making meaning and constructing the discursive reality. As Bruffee states:

> Organizing collaborative learning effectively requires doing more than throwing students together with their peers with little or no guidance or preparation. To do that is merely to perpetuate, perhaps even aggravate, the many possible negative efforts of peer group influence: conformity, anti-intellectualism, intimidation, and leveling-down of quality. To avoid these pitfalls and to marshal the powerful educational resource of peer group influence requires us to create and maintain a demanding academic environment that makes collaboration—social engagement in intellectual pursuits—a genuine part of students' educational development. And that in turn requires quite new and perhaps more thorough analyses of the elements of our field than we have yet attempted. (1984, p. 434)

Similarly, as an evolution of collaborative learning to modern goals, I contend that truly fulfilling Bruffee's collaborative objectives still "requires quite new and perhaps more thorough analysis ... than we have yet attempted" as a field. It requires that faculty and students engage in assessment together, not in any way artificially relinquishing our authority or expertise, but rather helping students to become authoritative.

With Bruffee in mind, and looking back to the entire argument hereto, Critical Collaborative Assessment can take us a long way towards resolving any seeming conflicts between collaboration, social constructionism, assessment, post-process theory, and critical pedagogy, and hopefully offers a holistic vision that unifies education with formative and summative assessment. In fact, I take it to fulfill several of the CCCC (1995) position statement on composition instruction:

First, writing is always learned and used most effectively in environments where

it accomplishes something the user wants to accomplish for particular listeners or

readers within that environment....

Second, language is by definition social....

Third, reading—and thus, evaluation, since it is a variety of reading—is as

socially contextualized as all other forms of language use....

Fifth, writing assessment is useful primarily as a means of improving learning....

Sixth, assessment tends to drive pedagogy....

Eighth, the means used to test students' writing ability shapes what they, too,

consider writing to be.

Tenth, and finally, there is a large and growing body of research on language

learning, language use, and language assessment that must be used to improve

assessment on a systematic and regular basis. (CCCC, 1995)

I hope that my prior discussion of the theoretical grounds for Critical Collaborative

Assessment helps readers to view those CCCC imperatives for writing as imperatives for

Critical Collaborative Assessment as well.

Supposing, however, that Critical Collaborative Assessment is theoretically

sound, it only raises the question as to whether or not CCA really holds enough power as

a heuristic to teach students to write better. The answer to that question, as the next

chapter will argue, is yes.

CHAPTER 6: EXISTING FOUNDATIONS FOR PEER ASSESSMENT

Whereas in previous chapters I sought to establish the theoretical foundation for Critical Collaborative Assessment, I intend to use this chapter to review existing research on peer assessment practices. My goal in doing so is not so much to analyze the various peer assessment methodologies and studies already in existence but rather, and perhaps more simply, to answer the question as to whether or not students possess the capacity to assess each other meaningfully, validly, and reliably. Hence, having established my rationale for peer assessment, it seems important to dismiss those critiques that "it is all well and good in theory but lacks pragmatism" and that "students just cannot handle assessment's rigor." The truth is just the opposite; according to the existing studies, peer assessment is quite pragmatic, especially for its formative values.

Before proceeding into that discussion, however, I need to offer three caveats: First, as many studies of peer assessment emerge from Europe and Australia, the use of the term "tutor" may appear in place of the synonyms for "professor." Unless otherwise noted, "tutor" will not refer to peer mentors but rather to faculty.

Second, I need to establish one essential distinction between CCA as I propose it and existing peer assessment practices: the existing studies focus on limited and isolated instances of peer assessment—taking students through a short-term process of peer response that (1) may or may not involve introducing them to the assessment process and (2) may or may not involve pre-existing standards, and that (3) typically does not involve long-term practice and coaching. Given the truncated nature of the peer assessment

methods being studied, it is perhaps surprising, even to me, that students do succeed in peer assessment.

Third, existing research on peer assessment is somewhat limited, not more so in composition than in other disciplines but at least equally so. To offer a relatively comprehensive examination of the essential issue of peer assessment itself, I will move somewhat freely between studies on peer assessment in composition, peer assessment of writing in other disciplines, and even peer assessment of tasks other than writing. While assessing in any discipline will require attention to discipline-specific elements, the core question of whether or not students can learn to assess from an institutional perspective does not vary. In other words, while assessing writing may entail certain specificities that assessing a lab project does not, the root of constructivist assessment does not differ.

The evidence supports this conclusion. In "Student Peer Assessment in Higher Education: A Meta-Analysis Comparing peer and Teacher Marks," Nancy Falchikov and Judy Goldfinch (2000) studied 48 existing studies on self- and peer-assessment and found "no clear differences in validity of peer assessments in terms of the subject area in which they take place" (p. 315). As I will speak to in greater depth later on, the differences in peer-assessment success emerge from contextual factors such as student expertise and the clarity of the grading criteria rather than disciplinarity. Therefore, while I will make an effort to stay focused on composition when possible, I will not hesitate to speak to peer-assessment in other contexts because all research on peer-assessment appears equally informative, at least for the general purpose of determining whether or not students can, on the whole, assess effectively.

An Overview of Collaborative Assessment Research Findings

That said, my call for CCA exceeds the desire to involve students in assessment for only a limited time or within a very limited scope. Rather, I assert that *assessing with students should be a central pedagogical force in the teaching of writing*, a practice that should be ongoing throughout at least one semester, something I will speak to at greater length in the chapter to follow. The process of acculturating students to discursive standards sufficiently for them to apply those standards to other students and, eventually, in self-assessment, cannot be viewed as a depreciated portion to a pedagogy. The stakes are simply too high. As I have previously argued that one of the dominant obstacles students face in becoming successful writers is that of appreciating assessment standards and processes, helping them overcome that obstacle must become a driving force of composition pedagogy. Therefore, and as discussion of the existing research will demonstrate, I contend that the shortcomings of peer assessment as presently understood can be minimized if not remedied by implementing lengthier and more involved peer assessment practices.

That said, it is easiest to begin an examination of peer assessment research with Keith Topping's (1998) meta-research on the issue. In "Peer Assessment Between Students in Colleges and Universities," Topping analyzed a total of 109 studies on peer assessment published between 1980 and 1996. Of those studies, Topping found that "forty-two articles were considered purely descriptive and anecdotal, while 67 (62%) included outcome data gathered in an orderly research process" (p. 250). While Topping's investigation studied peer assessment as applied to a variety of products— essays, hypertexts, presentations, multiple-choice questions, and other professional and

academic skills—I will focus primarily on peer assessment as related to essays. However, I should note that as the outcomes for peer assessment do not appear to vary based on product, I will touch on other products as immediately relevant. Furthermore, as I ultimately view peer assessment as a stepping stone to self-assessment, the latter to be discussed in future research, I will touch on self-assessment as needed.

The central question for my efforts concerns the relative reliability and validity of peer assessment. Speaking directly to those issues, Topping notes that of

> 25 studies comparing teacher and peer marks or grades, 18 (72%) reported
> acceptably high reliability, often expressed in correlation coefficients, percentage
> agreement, or measures of central tendency and variance, sometimes with
> indication of statistical significance ... A tendency for peer marks to cluster
> around the median was sometimes noted ... (p. 257)

That 72% of studies record "acceptably high reliability" seems a strong endorsement of peer assessment, especially considering the relatively limited nature of the students' training and practice in assessment before undertaking the exercise. In other words, when foisted into peer assessment with relatively little preparation—"relatively" as little to the full semester of practice I propose—students still scored acceptably in accordance with tutors 72% of the time. (I think it worthwhile to wonder, by the way, as to what the tutor vs. tutor correlation rates would be.)

Peer, Tutor, and Self-Assessment Reliabilities

For example, in Nancy Falchikov's (1986) study entitled, "Product Comparisons and Process Benefits of Collaborative Peer Group and Self Assessments," educators and

students collaborated in formulating the criteria by which an essay would be assessed, "an essay marking schedule ... was drawn up, using student wording," and each essay was subject to self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher assessment (by a single teacher) (p. 150-151). Falchikov found that in "60.6% of the cases there was acceptably low variation" between peer and tutor marks (p. 152). Of particular note, however, was

> a tendency for peer group markers to over-grade [grade higher] in comparison
> with tutor markers. In 60.6% of the cases peer group overmarking was
> observed.... Not only do peer group markers tend to overmark in comparison with
> the tutors, the mean amount of overmarking is higher than the mean amount of
> undermarking (9.65 marks compared with 7.31 marks). (p. 152)

Thus, students had a tendency to afford each other slightly higher grades, which does not strike me as surprising for two reasons: First, it is likely that students were somewhat uncomfortable with the responsibility of grading and consequently erred towards more lenient grades rather than harsher ones. Second, it is likely that since most students think their own writing to be satisfactory, they would see their peers' writings to be satisfactory as well.

Interestingly, however, Falchikov's study revealed a higher correlation between self-assessed marks and tutor marks than between peer-assessed marks and tutor marks (p. 151), and equally found a tendency in self-assessment towards undermarking rather than overmarking, 57.1% vs. 42.9% respectively (p. 151).

Yet not all studies found self-assessment more reliable than peer assessment. In "Peer, Self and Tutor Assessment: Relative Reliabilities," Lorraine A. J. Stefani (1994) found peer-assessment *more* reliable than self-assessment. In Stefani's study,

A peer and self-assessment procedure was presented to two first-year

undergraduate classes within the context of writing a report of a laboratory

practical project ... The students themselves drew up the marking schedules which

they felt appropriate for the task. This was done by a class representative

negotiating with the rest of the students until the class was satisfied with the

scheme. . . . All of the reports were assessed by the tutor, but these marks were

not initially released to the students.

Depending on their class, students were then given seven days to self-assess or peer-

assess.

Stefani found that "the peer assessment figures suggests that the students mark

within a more restricted range than tutors," characterized by less deviation from the

mean. Referring to the reprinted table below, Stefani notes that

Peer assessment is more stringent than tutor assessment within the lower mark

range and slightly less stringent through the rest of the range. However, the small

differences in the means and the reasonable agreement between the numbers of

students within each quartile indicate ... that the general ranking within the class

shows good agreement between peer and tutor assessments. This is further

highlighted with a correlation coefficient between peer assessment and tutor

assessment of $r = 0.89$.

Table 1: *Tutor Versus Peer Assessment—Comparison of Means and Standard Deviations.* (Stefani, 1994)

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Tutor Mark	63	74	12.01
Peer Mark	57	74.4	10.7

Thus, Stefani affirms Falchikov in that students and tutors can align successfully when grading. The results for self-assessment, though not quite as aligned with tutor marks, are also compelling, as Table 2 (Stefani, 1994) suggests.

Table 2: *Tutor Versus Self Assessment - Comparison of Means and Standard Deviations.* (Stefani, 1994)

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Tutor Mark	80	75.3	10.1
Student Self Mark	80	72.7	9.3

Stefani, therefore, found a closer mean between peer-assessed and tutor marks than self-assessed and tutor marks. It would seem unwise, however, to favor Stefani over Falchikov, or vice versa, as neither appear conclusive as to whether peer- or self-assessment proves more reliable. What the studies collectively suggest, however, is that peer-assessment can prove reliable, especially, "given the lack of training in peer and self-assessment experienced by the two classes of students" (Stefani, 1994).

Furthermore, as I did before, Stefani comments on the insular nature of the exercise, noting that

> it can be argued that introducing students to self and peer assessment early in their academic career and using the mark summatively as well as formatively will engender a sense of responsibility in students such that by the time that the grading and ranking of students becomes a crucial matter, for example in the final year of undergraduate training, students will be well accustomed to the procedures. (1994)

My point exactly. As I propose, using peer assessment as a pedagogical force rather than an isolated assessment tool could and should acclimate students to the process and standards of the institution.

Building on Stefani's work, a similar study by Graham Mowl and Rachel Pain (1995), as reported in "Using Self and Peer Assessment to Improve Students' Essay Writing: A Case Study from Geography," took 53 students through a one-hour assessment workshop before having them engage self- and peer-assessment. Mowl and Pain found that "on average the self assessment marks were the most generous and the anonymous peer assessors were the least generous" (p. 331), even relative to tutor marks. Mowl and Pain add that their "results in part support Stefani's observation that students tend to be conservative markers: they mark themselves within a more restricted range than the tutors" (p. 331).

Table 3: *Difference in Means Between Tutor Marks and Peer Marks*

(Mowl and Pain, 995)

Quartile Group	Tutor Mark	Peer Mark	Difference of Means
48-55	52.4	54.6	2.2
56-60	58.0	59.3	1.3
61-65	63.2	54.6	-8.6
66-72	68.3	60.4	-7.9

With respect to reliability, Mowl and Pain spoke to the success of the exercise as related to reliability:

> it could be concluded that this exercise was unsuccessful, in that self and peer assessments seemed to produce some spurious and inconsistent marks when compared to those of the tutor. It should be pointed out however that similar variations might be found between three sets of tutor marks for the same essays. (p. 332)

With that in mind, I actually find Mowl and Pain's overall results encouraging rather than discouraging. Though perhaps not always reliable in their own right, Table 3 demonstrates that the difference in tutor vs. student means per quartile group is not radically different, especially given the limited training for students in peer assessment. In fact, Mowl and Pain ultimately conclude that the "research shows that even with subjective methods of assessment such as essays, students *are* generally capable and conscientious self and peer assessors" (p. 333, emphasis added), though they assert that

the summative value of peer assessment must be approached with "some caution" (p. 333).

A similar conclusion was reached by George Marcoulides and Mark Simpson (1991) in "Evaluating Student Papers: The Case for Peer Review." The authors required students to assess their peers' anonymous term papers in a business class, the instructions for the assignment having been gone over in detail weeks before, and the evaluation criteria having been provided by the authors. The papers were collected, redistributed, and re-assessed by the same group of students a total of three times.

The authors found that that peers, on the whole, could be responsible evaluators of student writing:

peer ratings of writing samples were not a large source of error variation (1.87%). In addition, peer reviewers were consistently rank-ordering student writing samples, as evidenced by the small variance component of the rater by student interaction (28.97%). This provides evidence that peer reviewers are not prejudiced or biased evaluators.

As Marcoulides and Simpson are right to point out, relative reliability does not necessarily equate to accuracy because

consistent grades are not necessarily "fair" grades. Thus, these results would be meaningless if students assigned uniformly high or low marks to all papers. For the present sample, however, the data suggest that just the opposite trend was at work. The range of grades for the sample was between 9 and 20, and the sample standard deviation (among all grades) was 2.24. These figures compare with an average standard deviation of 1.2 for grades on the same paper.

Thus, while Marcoulides and Simpson do not speak directly to the issue of grade centralization—small distribution of scores—as discussed in the studies above, their study does suggest a willingness by students to grade across a reasonable distribution.

Furthermore, Marcoulides and Simpson acknowledge that merely examining the reliability of peer-assessed grades is not enough. Some relative reliability to tutor grades needs to be determined. As such, the each instructor randomly selected five papers to grade, and in "four of the five papers, the instructor's grade was within 1 point of the mean of the three student grades. In a fifth case, the instructor's grade was 2 points higher than the mean." This data certainly would be more compelling if the instructor graded a larger number of the papers. Nevertheless, despite such a small sample, it still speaks to peer-peer and peer-tutor consistency that advances the plausibility and pragmatics of peer assessment.

<div align="center">Factors That Affect Reliability</div>

As mentioned earlier, "Student Peer Assessment in Higher Education: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Peer and Teacher Marks," by Nancy Falchikov and Judy Goldfinch (2000) is similar to Topping's meta-research work cited earlier on, but (1) it is more focused on quantitative analysis of the relationship between peer and tutor marks, (2) considers an additional 12 studies on issues of reliability, and (3) it explores the "relative importances" of variables such as differentiations "between individual assessors, pairs, and groups" (p. 289).

That said, Falchikov and Goldfinch's results were compelling with respect to reliability. They found that the

mean correlation over all the studies was 0.69, indicating definite evidence of agreement between peer and teacher marks on average. However, an *r* value of 0.69 indicates that less than half of the variation in peer marks is associated with variation in teacher marks. The mean effect size excluding the unusual study is -0.02, not significantly different from 0. Even when the unusual study is included, the new mean of 0.24 is still not statistically significant. This also supports the conclusion that peer marks agree well with teachers' marks on average. (p. 314-315)

Of course, Falchikov and Goldfinch study marks across a range of disciplines, not writing alone. That raises the question as to whether writing poses particular challenges to assessment that makes it less accessible to peer assessment. However, Falchikov and Goldfinch found "no clear differences in validity of peer assessments in terms of the subject area in which they take place" (p. 315), which contradicts an earlier study that associated stronger self-assessment to tutor correlations with sciences than social sciences (Falchikov and Boud, 1989).

In agreement with other studies (Falchikov, 1986; Stefani, 1994), Falchikov and Goldfinch found that it is not the discipline that affects peer-assessment reliability but rather the infrastructure of the assessment exercise. Not surprisingly, for example, "student familiarity with, and ownership of, criteria tends to enhance peer assessment validity" (p. 315), a point that supports my contention throughout this work that students do not really understand institutional expectations. When given the opportunity to help articulate expectations, however, we see students become more adept in their application.

Interestingly, Falchikov and Goldfinch also found that peer assessments "which require marking of several individual dimensions appear to be less valid than peer assessment which requires a global judgement based on well understood criteria" (p. 315), which I frankly find surprising. I had expected students to be more successful when grading was broken down into smaller categories, and so I wish the authors offered some greater explication to the finding.

Also interesting, "there is no evidence to support the superiority of multiple peer ratings over ratings by singletons" (p. 315), and that peer assessment "carried out on advanced level courses is no more valid than that conducted on introductory courses, in general" (p. 315). All of that information seems important to understanding peer assessment, and yet as the existing studies are fraught with variation in the nature of the peer assessment method applied, it seems difficult to draw hard conclusions.

On the other hand, all of the studies mentioned here ultimately support peer-assessment as viable summative tool depending on its means of implementation. Clearly, there are factors that affect its success, but those factors, e.g. student familiarity with criteria, do not diminish the overall conclusion that, even with little training, students can assess with seemingly reasonable correlation with educators. As I advocate peer-assessment as a staple pedagogical force, it seems reasonable to expect that with more training students can become increasingly proficient at assessment.

Problems with Peer-Assessment

None of research above is meant to suggest peer assessment to be free of complications. Some of the most interesting work problematizing it has occurred in

psychology concerning the peer review of self-directed peer groups. In one particularly interesting study, "Peer Evaluation in Self-Managing Work Groups," Richard Saavedra and Seog K. Kwun tested "whether an individual's relative performance in a work group served as a basis for anchoring and adjusting the performance assessment of peers" (p. 451). The authors hypothesized that

> outstanding performers had an informational advantage in peer ratings because they know what is actually possible in terms of extraordinary performance and they know who occupies the lowest position in the performance distribution on the bases of a contrasting comparison. . . . Nonetheless, they may be motivated to preserve their own relative and earned advantage by discriminating among the performances of group members and maintaining equity in the group. (p. 451)

The essential question, therefore, is whether or not higher performers assess better because they hold an inherently superior understanding of the disciplinary expectations. In other words, the authors want to know if the expertise required to excel equates to the expertise required to assess, a question that will also prove important to my discussion of CCA.

To answer it, Saavedra and Kwun studied 36 groups consisting of 178 undergraduate and masters business students involved in self-managing workgroups. To limit social motivations, "appraisals were not to be used to provide feedback to group members or to a group as a whole" (p. 452), but were used only for confidential, summative purposes. The study revealed that "outstanding contributors were more discriminating evaluators than average contributors, and the direction of the means indicated that outstanding contributors (*M = 1.14)* differed from below-average

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contributors as well (*M = 0.58*)" (p. 454). In fact, in a second part to their study, Saavedra and Kwun concluded that "outstanding contributors are more discriminating evaluators than average or below-average contributors even when the evaluator is asked for a self-rating" (p. 456), which suggests a willingness to hold themselves to high standards.

This greater capacity for outstanding contributors to evaluate is not surprising. Saavedra and Kwun theorize that it emerges because "outstanding performers may be more competent and experienced group members, allowing them to both perform and rate performance more effectively" (p. 459). This is congruent with D. Royce Sadler's (1987) conclusion that "one of the conditions necessary for the intelligent use of feedback is that learners know not only their own levels of performance but also the level or standard aspired to or expected" (p. 196).

Saavedra and Kwun's research dealt with work groups but supposing the same trend holds in a composition context—an untested point but one that seems to follow suit—then stronger writers will be more effective peer evaluators. From one perspective, this undermines peer assessment because it suggests a lack of overall reliability—a group of weak writers will not assess as well as a group of strong writers. From another perspective, however, it affirms my call for tutor-involved peer assessment until students gain functional understandings of assessment criteria. Supposing that any given teacher will be the strongest writer in the class, the importance of the teacher to norm assessments early in the course becomes even more important in the light of Saavedra and Kwun's conclusions that stronger performers are stronger assessors.

Thus, peer assessment devoid of expertise by peer or tutor will likely be less successful than peer assessment (initially) guided by an expert reader. Unfortunately to date, the extent to which an expert reader—a tutor—can over a long period of time teach even less-capable students to assess remains untested, though I anticipate it as a point for my own future research.

Until such time, peer assessment must be troubleshooted in other regards, especially since it comes with certain baggage. For example, in "The Importance of Marking Criteria in the Use of Peer Assessment," Paul Orsmond and Stephen Merry (1996), who studied first-year biology students engaged in a presentation, cited three particular reservations:

> First, a minority of students treated the exercise in a rather cavalier manner causing annoyance to other (mostly mature) students. Second, some students were skeptical about how meaningful other students' marks could be. Third, a number of students felt 'unqualified' to mark the work of their peers and were reluctant to do so.

Such concerns obviously represent the students' own concerns about reliability and validity in peer assessment, and I believe we should be encouraged by them. Rather than vaulting into peer assessment with cavalier bravado, students rightly approach it with a healthy measure of skepticism not only with respect to their peers' assessments but equally with respect to their own ability to assess their peers.

Orsmond and Merry stand in good company with their findings. Liz McDowell (1995) quite similarly discovered that students held reservations about their abilities to provide substantive and worthwhile feedback, and wanted tutor involvement in the

assessment process as a safeguard against peer fallibility. Other researchers also

discovered a reluctance to place the ominous responsibility of peer response on students

alone (Davies, 2000; Searby and Ewers, 1997). Fortunately, as I will demonstrate in the

following chapter, collaborating with students in assessment rather than leaving it to their

devices can prove relatively easy and rewarding.

Clare Brindley and Susan Scoffield (1998) point out yet another problem in "Peer

Assessment in Undergraduate Programmes," citing that "it was difficult in the students'

view to avoid personal bias, i.e. they often felt more favourable towards their friends"

(1998). However, while the students were concerned about bias, "in the sample as a

whole, collusion was not a problem. Indeed, the HND students were surprised by the

success of the assessment, as they had anticipated that 'over-marking' by friends would be

a major issue."

The Cultural and Formative Values of Peer-Assessment

As will come as no surprise to any educator, especially those regularly facing

stacks of student papers, students also found time a dissuading factor for peer response,

especially if it entailed significant commitment outside the classroom (Davies, 2000;

Orsmond & Merry, 1996; McDowell, 1995). And in Mowl and Pain's study, some 67%

of students reported finding peer assessment "difficult" (p. 333). Yet students' negative

feelings concerning the time investment required for assessment is not without certain

perks. In "Assessing Self- and Peer-Assessment: The Students' Views," Stephanie

Hanrahan and Geoff Isaacs (2001), who studied 244 students' self- and peer-assessments

of 1500 word essays, found that peer-assessment helped students "develop empathy with

lecturers/tutors" (p. 62). One student remarked that "it gives you insight into the difficulty tutors experience in assessing students. It is easier to relate to them as well" (p. 62), and another "felt sympathy for the instructors who had to mark large numbers of assignments" because, as the student adds, "it must be quite disheartening" (p. 62). Mowl and Pain, in a similar vein, reported that 45% of students believed peer assessment offered them a higher understanding of assessment's rigors (p. 333).

Furthermore, while the emphasis of my discussion for this chapter focuses on the summative questions of assessment, it would be foolhardy to disregard the evidence of peer assessment's formative value. Mowl and Pain, for example, report that 64% of the students in their study "felt that the assessment procedure would help them to write better essays in the future" (p. 333). Searby and Ewers also report that peer assessment fostered reflection amongst students as to course expectations (1997), and other research suggests that peer assessment helps students adopt responsibility for helping their peers learn and succeed academically (Orsmond & Merry, 1996).

Returning once more to work by Falchikov, she uncovered equally if not more compelling information about the formative force of peer assessment: "It appears that students feel that the system of self assessment makes them critical (94.1%), makes them think more (91.2%), makes them structured (79.4%), and makes them learn more (58.8%)" (1986, p. 155). Stefani's research revealed similar findings. She noted that of the students engaging peer- and self-assessment,

almost 100% of the students said that the scheme made them think more, 85% said it made them learn more and 97% said that it was challenging. These

responses were given despite the fact that 100% of the students said that it was more time consuming and over 75% said it was hard. (1994)

Of course, perhaps a greater question than whether or not the students *believed* peer assessment beneficial is whether or not peer assessment actually improved their writing skills. Unfortunately, the research on that question is sparse. Perhaps the only evidence comes from Mowl and Pain, who rightly asked, "did the students improve their essay writing skills and subject knowledge by having to assess their own and each others' essays?" (p. 332). In response, they offer a rousingly uncertain conclusion: "The fact that the profile of tutor marks was considerably higher than might be expected for a class of students at this level ... might be taken as evidence that [self and peer assessment] improved essay writing" (p. 332). While Mowl and Pain seem correctly tentative in their conclusion, "considerably higher" student marks seems like an encouraging conclusion nonetheless.

Perhaps stronger evidence comes from Berry O'Donovan, Margaret Price, and Chris Rust (2004). In "Know What I Mean? Enhancing Student Understanding of Assessment Standards and Criteria" the authors invited 300+ first year, undergraduate business students to a 90-minute "marking workshop" on two "exemplar assignments" (p. 332). Write the authors:

> Our findings (replicated for 3 years) show students who undertake this optional marking workshop demonstrate a significant improvement in performance compared with those who do not, even though base line comparison of the performance of the two groups, undertaken prior to the intervention, shows no significant difference in performance (Rust *et al*., 1993). Since the start of the

project we have tracked the performance of two cohorts of students in assessment

tasks with similar criteria undertaken at least a year later and demonstrated that

the improvement sustains at a significant, if somewhat diminished, level. (p. 333)

That increased familiarization with assessment criteria can spark such a dramatic

improvement in student performance despite the brevity of the workshop only strikes me

as encouraging. It prompts us to consider what more extensive assessment exercises

could do to stimulate student performance. Extensive interaction between teacher and

student in assessing work is exactly what I propose with CCA.

Peer-Assessment and the Social Construct

Looking back to the formative and summative factors covered in this chapter, it

should be clear that peer response can offer plausible reliability, a host of formative

boons, and its fair share of pragmatic difficulties. However, the evidence at least

suggests that we can overcome the complications where necessary, such as by providing

more extensive tutor-student interaction in preparation of peer assessment, and that

despite concerns about its time consumption and reliability, students nevertheless find the

enterprise valuable on the whole.

That said, the greater obstacle facing peer assessment has little to do with

immediate questions of reliability and implementation, and more to do with the social

constructionist forces raised earlier in this dissertation. While I find much of the above

research concerning the reliability of peer assessment encouraging, the cornerstone of the

issue is as follows: we cannot merely give students assessment criteria, nor permit them

to construct criteria, and expect their interpretation of those criteria to resonate with those of the discourse community. Stating standards does not make them so.

O'Donvan *et al*., (2004) make this plainly clear in reflecting on their own efforts to turn assessment criteria translucent:

> Initially, we thought making assessment criteria and standards transparent and understandable to staff and students alike could be achieved fairly simply through the development and application of explicit school-wide assessment criteria and grade descriptors. A criterion assessment grid (rubric) was developed that plotted commonly used assessment criteria in matrix format against grades, resulting in grade descriptors that detailed acceptable performance for each criterion at each grade. . . . despite our best efforts, on their own, the explicit assessment criteria and grade descriptors failed to transfer meaningful knowledge on assessment standards and criteria to students. Difficulties encountered, first, in the clear and precise *articulation* of marking criteria and standards and, secondly, in the *accurate receipt* of this understanding by relevant participants undermined the effectiveness of the project. (p. 327)

From a social epistemic perspective, we should be anything but surprised that manifesting a rubric fails to manifest uniformity of interpretation and dissemination, which would require that rubric to possess positivistic power in a positivist world. Instead, as Sadler (1987) argued in "Specifying and Promulgating Achievement Standards," the interpretation of any criterion will always remain contingent on context, the people, the cultural interpretation of language, etc..

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Requisite contextualization also applies to faculty. As reported in another study by Price and Rust, "The Experience of Introducing a Common Criteria Assessment Grid Across an Academic Department" (1999), the authors tried to standardize assessment practices through a department-specific rubric (though it was not adopted by the entire School of Business). They discovered that "although it appears that the grid helps to establish consistency in comparing the work of students within a module, it has failed to be sufficiently detailed to establish a common level of requirements across modules" (p. 141). The authors found that it facilitated standardization for individual teachers, as well as increased teacher-student communication within modules, but accomplished little towards a department wide commonality. For that to occur, the authors believe that a "critical mass"—enough people to standardize the practice—is required (p. 143).

From a certain perspective, the lack of homogenous faculty interpretations of criteria summons into question an earlier point of mine, namely that faculty represent a larger discourse community. That faculty within a given department and discipline will inconsistently interpret and apply otherwise identical criteria could indict my supposition that students will gain greater understanding of a discourse community by partaking in assessment with individual teachers. Would becoming fluent in one professor's interpretation undermine a student's achievement in another professor's class? Quite possibly. However, that remains no more or less true whether or not CCA takes place because students will have to meet individual professor's expectations one way or another in order to succeed academically. On the other hand, to whatever extent a professor does represent a discipline, greater familiarity with his or her standards and interpretations should draw the student further into that discipline. In other words, while

professors within a discipline will differ in their interpretations of student work, every professor, by expertise and authority, theoretically represents the overall discipline far more than any given student. Thus, while a given discipline or department will hold faculty with a spectrum of beliefs, all of those beliefs construct contribute to constructing the discipline and department. Student beliefs about the subject matter, by contrast, do not construct the discipline at all; if student beliefs did so then faculty would be studying from students instead of it being the other way about.

Furthermore, speaking speculatively, I ultimately expect that widespread CCA within a department and/or university would only (1) catalyze the discussion of standards between teachers and students, and (2) further catalyze the discussion of standards between faculty. The former should theoretically result from the latter because as students dialogue with faculty members about standards and interpretations, faculty likely will be forced to reconsider and discuss department-wide, discipline-wide, and university-wide expectations amongst themselves.

Such speculations aside, just as establishing explicit criteria does not unify faculty, it equally does not intrinsically help students understand disciplinary expectations. Berry O'Donovan *et al* (2001) in "The Student Experience of Criterion-Referenced Assessment (Through the Introduction of a Common Criteria Assessment Grid)" came to similar findings about how students viewed criterion-referenced assessment. As one representative student stated, "I mean 'address them comprehensively' what do you mean?" (p. 79). That student clearly seeks the contextual understanding needed to interpret criteria as does the teacher. Unfortunately but not

surprisingly, the offered criteria also failed to facilitate feedback to students and teacher-to-teacher marking consistency. In result, the authors conclude that

> Developing a shared understanding of assessment criteria and standards requires a multifaceted approach. Accordingly, an assessment criteria and standards framework encompassing both tacit and explicit knowledge transfer processes involving verbal descriptors, exemplars, imitation and *practice* appears to be worth pursuing. Such an approach seems to be sought and suggested by students as they struggle to find firmer footing. . . (p. 83, emphasis added)

Moving students towards that higher understanding of criteria through the means suggested, particularly through "practice," is precisely what I advocate. As Effie Maclellan (2001) states in "Assessment for Learning: The Differing Perceptions of Tutors and Students," "a conception of formative assessment that focuses on the teacher's role but discounts that of the learner is increasingly being understood as incomplete" (p. 316). Stating advice, such as in writing a response to a student's essay, only whispers in comparison to engaging students in formative assessment practices. Maclellan, in seeming agreement with Huot's statement that students cannot improve if they cannot assess, adds that "if students are not actually monitoring and regulating the quality of their own learning, feedback of itself, regardless of its degree of detail, will not cause improvement in learning" (p. 316).

What seems clear, therefore, is that peer assessment will not function without "practice" because students cannot understand standards and expectations without engaging them. Perhaps Woolf's (2004) succinct words put it best: "Criteria assume meaning only when used" (p. 488).

Alternative Assessment vs. Traditional Assessment

Woolf's statement achieves even greater potency when viewed in relation to Kay Sambell, Liz McDowell, and Sally Brown (1997), "'But is it fair?': An Exploratory Study of Student Perceptions of the Consequential Validity of Assessment." The authors studied 13 case studies on assessment, focusing on interviews with students concerning their perceptions of assessment, and discovered that students typically do not perceive traditional assessment methods as "fair," i.e. valid. The authors speak to how the "idea of the exam" governs students' perceptions of what they have to learn and how learning should be undertaken, i.e. how students conceptualize the nature of assessment largely dictates how they go about their education. In the case of traditional assessment, students believe that it

> contaminates [interferes with] their learning, and this has a dramatic potential impact on their learning behaviours. The "normal" assessment approach appears to them to legitimise poor learning. The strict separation, in the student's mind, of assessment and learning helps to fuel this belief, because assessment is seen predominantly as a summative tool, and measurement is something which happens after learning, predominantly, if not exclusively, for the purposes of certification. (p. 366)

In essence, students tend to perceive traditional assessment purely as summative, and as such, see getting the "right" answers or producing the "right" product as more important than meaningful learning.

By contrast, students found alternative forms of assessment, including but not limited to peer assessment, distinctly more valid. The authors recognize that the students' reactions may in part emerge from the relative novelty of alternative assessment (p. 366), but nevertheless note that the

> idea of novel assessments, like the "idea of the exam," exerted a powerful effect on students' views of what is required when it comes to assessment, and hence on the kinds of learning behaviour deemed appropriate. . . . Students generally believed that their learning had been enhanced under conditions of alternative assessment ... (p. 366)

Therefore, that alternative assessment can radically shift students' perceptions of and approaches to learning, to say nothing of what students report deriving from their learning experiences, seems a powerful endorsement of alternative assessment pedagogy.

Peer Assessment Conclusions

All said, the research seems to offer fairly positive findings on the viability of peer assessment. While the research reveals some variation between teacher and peer markings, as well as a student tendency to slightly overmark, such discrepancies ultimately seem minor. Given that students typically were afforded little or no training in assessment, and given that they often did not have familiarity with criteria, variations between teacher and student grades hardly seems surprising. Even with little training in assessment, the deviations between peer and teacher assessments was so slight that all of the researchers listed considered peer assessment viable.

More interesting, I think, are the factors that affect the efficacy of peer-assessment. Saavedra and Kwun's findings with regards to stronger students being stronger assessors makes a great deal of sense, and speaks volumes to the importance of the teacher's role in CCA. The teacher's expertise proves essential to ferrying students towards stronger understandings of assessment criteria. Not only that, teacher presence also helps alleviate the students' concerns about their own ability to grade fairly and effectively, concerns I take as encouraging because they speak to the students' desires to be responsible in the practice.

Given the students' grievance that traditional assessment "contaminates their learning" by emphasizing the achievement of the grade over the process of the learning, it not only seems as though alternative methods in general demand our attention, but that a an educational method that could harmonize pedagogy with assessment itself would be particularly valuable. And if we desire further support for alternative assessment methods such as peer assessment, we may need to look no further than formative boons such as students' self-reports about thinking more and learning more. Or perhaps the cultural boon of having students appreciate and sympathize with the laborious process and difficulty of grading would even be enough in itself to justify collaborative assessment practices.

Yet in a very different sense than the practical questions of effectiveness, the crux of the chapter for me returns to Woolf's maxim that "criteria assume meaning only when used." Given the formative values students see in alternative assessment—learning more, thinking more, appreciating standards more, etc—and given that faculty and students alike cannot understand criteria except through application, the core premise that grading

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mediates the student experience with the social construct stands affirmed. If we truly want to cultivate students into "colleagues" and help them understand and join the discourse community, the research shows that we must in some fashion help them explore assessment.

CHAPTER 7: CRITICAL COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE

Given that I have made a pedagogical argument, all of the aforementioned theoretical foundation for CCA, though perhaps useful in itself to help us reflect on existing practice, nevertheless means little if CCA cannot be exercised in the classroom. It seems imperative, therefore, to conclude this work by offering pragmatics for implementing CCA.

CPA essentially involves an extension of collaborative and process pedagogies, or at least some combination thereof. While varying means of implementing CCA will be discussed, the more generic nature of the approach entails leading workshops with students during which a single student's essay is graded. The idea is to foster a relatively and increasingly egalitarian discussion of how assessment occurs and what we value as teachers, students, and institutions when assessing. Depending on the particular method, CCA requires some time commitment, though as I noted before, CCA is itself pedagogical, meaning that it can supplant or support other pedagogies rather than having to be implemented in addition to them.

While there are more methods than what follows, the forthcoming should afford answers to such essential questions as the following:

- How does a CCA class work?
- What is the role of the students?
- What is the role of the professor?
- How is power shared and transferred?
- How do we help students accept the premise?

- How do we help students accept the responsibility?

- What happens if students interact unconstructively, or worse, unethically?

- Do students feel as though it is a privilege or a burden?

- Does the process become monotonous?

- How does it integrate with other teaching practices and/or lessons?

In addition to classroom-driven questions, programmatic and institutional concerns also hold relevance. For example, how can we justify the practice to a program director, department chair, or dean? What happens if a student appeals a grade? Who is ultimately accountable for the grades? Can this work on a programmatic or even institutional scale?

I will attempt to answer all of those questions and address ancillary concerns, but it strikes me as wise to note that a discussion of pedagogical implementations could be a book unto itself. There are so many methods and encompassing questions that all I can do presently is proffer something foundational. That said, I can address the major concerns and beat a path for anyone possessing concerns about CCA's pedagogical viability or reservations about its institutional ethic, especially for those interested in adopting CCA for their own teaching of writing.

Specifically, this chapter will offer a pedagogical overview of the process, beginning with the important role rubrics play in CCA. I'll then discuss three different methods for implementing CCA in the classroom—whole-class workshops, in-class group work, out-of-class group work. Next, I'll provide a discussion of how CCA helps students transition to self-assessment. Finally, I will discuss students' concerns about CCA, as well as programmatic and institutional issues.

Pedagogical Overview

On the first day of class, I tell students they will grade their own writing at the end of the semester. I say this knowing full well that I will require it and that they will be well equipped to do so after a semester of Critical Collaborative Assessment. I see self-assessment as the eventual goal because it is the ability to be self-critical that ultimately signifies (1) that students have internalized their understanding of institutional expectations and can examine their writing from the institutional perspective, and (2) that they have acquired the ability to continue improving their writing through self-directed efforts (which does not mean that they do not need teachers).

In response to my announcement about self-grading, students typically think I am joking. But then I tell them that they will actually be grading one another all semester and that the grades they assign one another will count. Knowing that the prospect of being graded by their peers intimidates—okay, terrifies—many students, I immediately buffer that statement by telling them truthfully that the peer-assessment process is typically one of the most well-reviewed aspects of my course, and that they will learn things from the grading process that I cannot teach them otherwise. I note that the process will be constructive and that we are all in this together. Typically, I find that once students hear that other students have reviewed the process favorably, most trepidation ceases ... at least until the first workshop roles around.

One other element of my course structure that supports the peer-assessment process is the opportunity for rewriting. I would encourage anyone exercising CCA to adopt a liberal rewriting policy because it relieves a lot of pressure on the students. As

graders, it means that while the grades students assign count, the author can nevertheless revise the work—the implication being that a bad grade need not permanently tar the author's grade for the course. As writers, it means that students get to use what they learn from their peers, as well as when grading, to improve. Thus, my rewrite policy is simple: students can rewrite all of their major assignments as often as they want until they receive the grade they desire. (Such a policy requires standards high enough to ensure rigor throughout the semester.) That particular policy works well for my pedagogy, though I have restricted the number of rewrites in the past and that can work as well. I am certain that other policies allowing for and/or encouraging rewriting can work effectively. Prohibiting all rewriting, however, strikes me as problematic regardless of whether or not CCA is in use.

Finally, I do find it useful to offer a mock workshop or two before the formal process starts. I usually use a paper or two from a previous semester and take students through the exercise as if the actual author were in the room. This familiarizes students with the process itself, the class dynamic, their role as peer graders, and most importantly, the standards of the institution.

Rubrics

I find it useful in CCA to grade papers by the same criteria throughout the semester, meaning that we use the same rubric from start to finish[1]. As I tell the students, this means that grades typically start lower and climb higher as students become familiar with the rubric and as student writing improves. In other words, at the start of the

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[1] As I will discuss later, I actually permit students to refine the rubric mid-semester, but that relatively minor shift in standards does not change the overall premise of holding students to a generally consistent standard throughout the course.

semester they are graded by the standards I expect them to reach at the end of the semester, standards that represent my understanding of overall institutional expectations for their writing. I take great care in making students aware of this because it means that I initially grade them on skills I do not necessarily expect them to possess. As I communicate to students, it takes a semester to teach them all they need to know to succeed *and that is why I allow them to rewrite their work as much as they desire.*

More importantly for purposes here, if we want to invite students to understand institutional standards, it seems unwise and even unfair to change those standards during the course of the semester. Instead, I hold them to the institutional standards from the start, and maintain those standards throughout. Subsequently, students always know what it is they must achieve in order to excel in the course.

Different courses may require different criteria. For example, I use one rubric for a course built on expressivist writing (personal memoirs) and a second rubric for a course on researched/argumentative writing. If I am teaching both modes of writing in the same semester, I typically use the same rubric for both modes but swap out one or two categories as necessary. However, I typically find that the switch from expressivist writing to researched/argumentative writing is the only one that requires a change of rubric, if at all. Depending on the instructor's interpretation of expressivist writing, one universal rubric could be used for both modes, such as if the professor believes the expressivist writing should make a point like an argumentative piece does, albeit through different means.

The point, however, is that the same rubric should be used for as many different assignments as possible, and the rubric should be as representative of an institutional

expectation as the instructor, program, or college can articulate. This helps students contextualize expectations by teaching them that the "same" standards always need to be interpreted within the context of different assignments. Thus, we can assess an assignment that requires secondary research and an opinion-based assignment by the same rubric, even when that rubric cites the need for evidence. As students learn, "evidence" will mean something different depending on the inclusion or exclusion of secondary research.

Will students find this difficult to appreciate at first? Definitely. Will they know how to interpret "evidence"? No. And that is exactly why we need to expose students to those difficulties and help them to understand how the institution interprets the same concept differently depending on the assignment. As I will discuss more later, students appreciate it when I sympathize with the fact that grading can be unclear. They appreciate it when I explain that grading takes time to understand. And they appreciate the eventual understanding that emerges.

Figures 7.1 and 7.2 offer two rubrics I used recently. Both were generated in collaboration with the students. In perfect candor, I possess mixed feelings about generating rubrics with students. Given their lack of understanding of university expectations, students typically produce shortsighted rubrics that do not hold writing to a high enough standard for my taste. In my experience, working with students during class to establish an effective rubric consumes a great deal of time—several weeks—and I do not find it profitable to devote that much time to the exercise.

On the other hand, permitting students a role in constructing the rubric fosters an active classroom where students' ideas are valued. Furthermore, by constructing the

rubric, students become more intimately familiar with the standards they will apply later on in the course. Finally, involving students in rubric construction obviously serves the heuristic value of catalyzing their consideration of what the university really expects, something many never consciously considered beforehand.

Thus, while sometimes I do not invite students to participate in constructing the initial rubric at all, I do often involve students to a limited degree. Yet whether I do so or not, by grappling with the rubric's language/standards in grading papers throughout the semester, students gain the familiarity with disciplinary standards required for them to excel in the course.

The two rubrics here, for example, emerged by placing students in groups and providing them with a blank version of the rubric(s) below. I then required the students to fill in all of the categories, and/or add or change categories as desired.

After each group composed a rubric, I took the rubrics home and synthesized them into one rubric for all of my course sections that semester. I am honest with my students about the fact that I feel as though my presence in the rubric is very important given my role as institutional representative. Similarly, I am honest about why I feel it essential to use one rubric across all of my course sections, so that we hold every student that semester to the same standards. Students generally seem amenable to both of these points.

On a side note, I do find an initial tendency amongst students to create relatively easy rubrics. As I mentioned earlier, they often do not really understand the institution's conception of rigor. Not only that, some of them frankly want the easy "A". In response, I make it a point to explain before the exercise that the worth of their college degree will

	Meaningfulness & Interest	Depth & Detail	Clarity & Organization	Style	Tone	Correctness
A (98) (95) (92)	Regardless of my personal experiences, I feel a connection with this *piece*. I understand the author's point and find it thought-provoking. I appreciate the risks this author takes and do not want the piece to end.	I find the topic appropriate to the length and find that I vividly share the author's experience because of the use of detail. I feel all elements are carefully selected and serve a purpose. I find the complexity to enhance the memoir.	I follow this memoir easily and transition effortless from point to point. I find the structure deliberately and thoughtfully enhances the impact of the paper.	I find successfully varied sentence structures that enhance the presentation of the experience. I find fluid yet concise prose that does not call out for more editing.	I find a deliberate use of tone/mood that enhances the meaningfulness of this piece. I enjoy/appreciate the tone; I would want to read more works from this author.	Error Free.
C (78) (75) (72)	Putting my own past experiences aside, I see how this is meaningful to the author but do not find the *piece* meaningful. I feel the author risks some vulnerability but not enough to leave an impact on me.	I find this more of an overview or summary than a carefully selected account because the topic and/or selection of elements is inappropriate to the length. I find this more generic than personal/specific and wanting of more complexity.	While I follow the piece, it takes effort on my part to do so. I would like to see greater attention to transitions. I find all of the events related but not deliberate enough in their organization to enhance the impact of the piece.	Generally speaking, I find the sentences clear but would like to see more complexity and variety, and/or greater attention to editing. While the prose is generally clear, I do find wordy or awkward passages.	While the tone is not inconsistent with the meaning, I do not find a deliberate use of tone/mood in the piece.	Looking at the piece as a whole, I find errors that are distracting and/or make the prose more difficult to understand.
F	I do not any intellectual or artistic value present.	I find this too vague to appreciate or understand.	I cannot follow this piece and/or its theme.	I cannot understand the majority of the prose.	I find the tone offensive and/or antithetical with the meaning.	Errors prevent me from understanding this piece.

Figure 1: Personal narrative rubric.

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	Thesis & Argument (20%)	Reasoning & Logic (20%)	Evidence & Support (20%)	Organization (15%)	Prose Style & Tone (15%)	Correctness (10%)
A	I find this thought provoking and stimulating. This makes me reconsider, if not change my viewpoint. I find this to be a credibly original idea. A/20, A-/18	I find this complex and fully logical. I find successful responses/concessions to fully developed counterarguments. A/20, A-/18	I find sources effectively analyzed against one another and synthesized into a gestalt. A/20, A-/18	I find a seamless progression of ideas that build on one another. I find the structure to enhance the argument. A/15, A-/14	I find sentence variety and tone that enhances the argument. This is a consistently enjoyable read. A/15, A-/14	Error Free. A/10, A-/9
B	Fully argument, not list. I find that all of the paper develops the thesis. I find an element of originality in this argument. B+/17.5, B/17, B-/16	I find the paper logically contending with the complexities of the issue. If there is illogic, it is isolated. I see this argument responding to counterarguments but they are few and/or under-developed. B+/17.5, B/17, B-/16	I find all of the argument developed and supported by relevant evidence. B+/17.5, B/17, B-/16	I easily transition from one point/paragraph to the next. I easily see how all points relate to the thesis. B+/13.3, B/12.8, B-/12.4	The prose involves successfully varied sentence structures, strong diction, and effective concision. The tone helps hold my attention. B+/13.3, B/12.8, B-/12.4	The majority of the prose is error free. Existing errors are typographical in nature. B+/8.8, B/8.5, B-/8.2

Figure 2: Research/argumentative writing rubric.

C	I find a clear and specific thesis—single controlling argument. I find that this is more argument than list. The majority of the paper develops the thesis. C+/15.5, C/15, C-/14	Despite fallacious logic that weakens the argument, I find the majority of this argument logical. I do not find the argument contending with the complexities of the issue. C+/15.5, C/15, C-/14	I find the majority of the argument developed and supported by relevant evidence. C+/15.5, C/15, C-/14	I find a majority of the points connected but I have to work at the transitions and/or I find a majority of points related to the thesis but I have to work to make the connections. C+/11.8, C/11.4, C-/10.9	Despite some awkward/wordy passages, I find the prose clear. I find appropriate diction. I find the tone consistent and appropriate. I would like to see more fluidity and sentence variety. C+/11.8, C/11.4, C-/10.9	Though not distracting, the prose contains spelling, verb agreement, syntax, or grammatical errors. Proper MLA format for documentation and citation. C+/7.8, C/7.5, C-/7.2
D	While I find a theme or topic, I do not see a thesis—single controlling argument. Or I see multiple potential theses present. D+/13.5, D/13, D-/12	I find consistency within a theme but no discernable logical progression of argument. I find assumptions and/or fallacious logic that undermine the overall thesis. D+/13.5, D/13, D/12	I find thematic information but do not see it used as evidence toward an argument. D+/13.5, D/13, D/12	I find information developed around a theme or I find myself confused as to the structure of the argument and/or relationship between points. D+/10.3, D/9.8; D-/9.4	It takes effort on my part to understand the prose, which I find difficult to read. D+/10.3, D/9.8, D-/9.4	I find errors that are distracting and/or degrade the meaning of the prose. Improper MLA format for documentation and citation. D+/6.8, D/6.5, D-/6.2
F	I find no discernable theme or thesis in this paper. F/11	I find this irrational or alogical—a list of information. F/11	I find this unsupported and/or lacking information/understanding. F/11	I find this a list of information and/or cannot follow the argument. F/9.0	I find that I cannot read this paper/understand prose. F/9.0	I find this unreadable and/or uncited and undocumented. F/5.5

Figure 2: Research/argumentative writing rubric continued.

depend on the caliber of the students who graduate. If the students graduating cannot write well, the value of the degree decreases. If the students who graduate write exceptionally well, the value of the degree increases. This discussion typically accomplishes a great deal towards spurring them to create rigorous standards. If and when the standards emerge weak, I modify them accordingly. At least at first, some students gripe at seeing standards elevated. Yet once I explain that weaker standards will diminish the students' capacity to excel in other courses that require writing, they typically appreciate, or at least begrudgingly accept, the rationale for keeping standards rigorous.

As I noted before, I do not believe it *necessary* to involve students in rubric generation. While doing so offers benefits, it also costs class time. Furthermore, if a core rubric were to be used across all course sections in a college, or even across an entire program or campus, involving students in generating the rubric would prove entirely impractical, though I do believe students should be represented in revising the rubric from year to year.

Ultimately, rubrics will vary based on course and institution. I do not submit my rubrics as necessarily exemplary ones; I am certain that individual teachers, programs, and colleges will want to construct their own to more precisely reflect course and/or institutional objectives. However, I do find two elements important in successful peer-assessment rubrics: First, standards should be based on reader success; they should be "I"-based even if not phrased that way. Looking to the "organization" category in Figure 2, the grade depends on how much work the reader must do when transitioning from paragraph to paragraph, and from point to point. All of the categories depend on the

reader's experience with the piece rather than more vague and objective statements, such as "this work is clear." "Clear" is very hard to determine, but as a group of readers we can say that we had an easy time or difficult time, and thus can form an understanding of clarity based on our personal and collective experiences reading the text.

Second, I find it valuable for all of the categories to reflect universal writing concerns. The research writing rubric (7.2) could be used for a writing course, a history course, a philosophy course, etc. While the assignment and subject matter will change, the desire for clarity of expression, specificity, evidence, logic, correctness, etc. does not. Using a skills-based rubric rather than a disciplinary one helps students extrapolate what they learn in my class to all of their other classes.

We use the initial rubric until mid semester, around which time I ask students to revisit the rubric and suggest changes. While we do not set out to change the difficulty-level of the standards, we do set out to clarify them. I do this because after using the rubric for half the course, we inevitably discover the imperfections in its wording. As I discuss with the students, perfect rubrics do not exist. Rubrics always contain gaps, inaccuracies, and minor conflicts. Rubrics can always be clearer. So we set out to clarify the criteria without changing the overall standards. I do this even with rubrics I present to the class because it invariably improves the articulation of the standards while simultaneously helping students feel invested in the course.

Students typically welcome this opportunity. Aside from minor changes in the wording, Figure 1, which is the final version of one course's rubric, initially contained a category for "Flavor" and a combined category for "Tone and Style." The "Flavor" category allowed students to assign the work whatever grade they desired based on each

student's own experience with the piece. I intentionally listed that category because I wanted students to feel individually valued during the grading process. However, several groups forged compelling arguments that "Flavor" was too arbitrary, so we eliminated it. Similarly, students contended that one could write with effective style but with a problematic tone, and vice versa, so we broke the one "Tone & Style" category into two. Ultimately, I think both of the revised rubrics here, as well as most rubrics revised by classes at mid-semester, are improved versions of the initial rubrics.

Speaking candidly, while I always work hard at constructing effective, rigorous rubrics, and while some certainly are superior to others, some of the particulars hold less importance than (1) making sure the rubric is rigorous, (2) making sure it represents institutional standards, and (3) involving students in interpreting and applying the criteria.

Whole Class Discussion

With rubric in hand, the question becomes how to run CCA. One way to approach doing so is to begin with whole-class grading workshops and then transition students into grading groups, grading pairs, and then to even allow them to self-assess. Regardless of the format, the goal of every workshop is multifold: (1) Allow authors to witness the process of how we assess their work and why we make the decisions we do, (2) allow authors to receive the indirect feedback that comes in the form of comments we make amongst ourselves (but not to the author directly) while discussing and grading the work, (3) allow authors to receive direct feedback in the form of suggestions, (4) allow authors to question and interact with the group, and (5) grade the work in question.

If using whole-class workshops, every student signs up for one or two workshops, the number of workshops being contingent on class size. To safeguard the students' anonymity, I typically ask students to produce a codename first and to use that codename on the signup sheet that I pass around the room. Each student chooses from pre-determined dates when workshops will occur. As such, I make it clear to the students that I award some bonus course participation points to those who volunteer for the first workshop. I also make it clear that there are pros and cons to early vs. late workshops: an early semester workshop affords students a lot of time to implement the class' feedback, but that advice will not be as strong as advice from a late-semester workshop when students have become skilled in the process. Unfortunately, late-semester workshops afford less time to implement feedback offered. Ultimately, I think it balances out in the end.

I also hand out a list of workshop policies (see Figure 3), and discuss how the process works before we do it. Touching on a few key points, each author must submit anonymous—codename only—copies of his or her paper the class *before* his or her workshop. They can do so by catching me outside the room before I enter, leaving them in my faculty mailbox, or just discretely putting them on my desk in the classroom (which is what most students end up doing).

1. **Submitting your writing for your workshop:**
    a. A sufficient number of copies for the class (and one for me) are due the class *before* your scheduled workshop (If your workshop is on Tuesday, 2/15, copies are due no later than the start of class on Thursday, 2/10).
    b. You are welcome to get me papers by bringing them to office hours, by placing them on the shelf with my name on it diagonally across from my office, by catching me on my way to class, or by leaving them on the desk at the start of class. Obviously, the first two options will do the most to secure your anonymity.
    c. Only your codename and the course section should appear at the top.

       d.   You are welcome to single space papers, widen the margins, and make double-sided copies so as to cut down on copying costs, but your paper must be complete, including a "Works Cited" page.

2. **Failure to submit papers on time** will result in full letter grade deduction from your class participation grade. The severity of this penalty is based on the fact that an entire class discussion is predicated on your essay! Without your essay, we cannot have the discussion! Therefore, *do not wait until the last minute to make copies! It is your responsibility to leave enough leeway to permit for broken copiers, flat tires, fire and brimstone, etc. If you cannot attend the class before your workshop, you are still responsible for submitting papers on time.*

3. **If you cannot attend your workshop** then please work it out with me *in advance* and we will make every effort to reschedule your workshop for a different date. However, *please* make every effort to attend your workshop as re-scheduling is difficult at best.

4. **You are welcome to remain anonymous throughout your workshop**. I will open the floor to your participation approximately two-thirds of the way through. Not participating in your workshop will not adversely affect your class participation grade. However, participating in your workshop can positively affect that grade. As this exercise is about learning, those who get the most out of it typically engage the class with specific questions.

5. **If you choose to participate**, you are more than welcome to ask for clarification on points raised, express your goals or "what was on your mind" when writing, ask for assistance in strengthening your paper, etc. Typically, more specific questions are the most successful. Please avoid questions that can be answered with a "yes or no" response, e.g. "Was my prose clear?" A better version of that question would be, "Which passage had the most successful prose and which paragraph had the least successful prose?"

6. **Please use constructive language**. We all have plenty to learn. *We are all here to help one another!* Repeated use of harsh language or criticism will severely impact your class participation grade for the course and/or may result in your being asked to remain silent. Please phrase all responses in the "I"-based for format. "I found myself getting lost in this passage" makes a sound, personal statement, and it is much more author-friendly than, "This passage is difficult to follow."

7. **Positive comments are welcome and encouraged!** Because we all want to know what we need to improve in our writing, workshops tend to gravitate towards critical commentary. Yet praise is just as useful! We must make sure our authors know what works well and what to build on! "I found point X very convincing because of this particular piece of evidence …"

8. **Always remember these words:** "If criticism is earnest but false, disregard it. If it is foolish, let it give you laugh. If it is true, learn from it."

Figure 3: Workshop policies.

I find it valuable to get authors' papers to the students on the class before the workshop so that the students can compose some questions and responses before arriving in class for the workshop itself. Depending on the class and/or institution, I sometimes find it useful to require students to write letters (without grades) to the author before coming to class because doing so gets the students thinking about the work and stimulates discussion during the workshop. I sometimes collect and grade the letters before

providing them to the author. While I have never run workshops by reading the papers in the same class as the workshop itself, I suppose that could work depending on class time.

Once in a circle or semi-circle, I typically start the workshop by offering just two minutes to review the paper in question before calling for "initial reactions." We then discuss the paper without consideration of grades for about 10-20 minutes. I will ask students all sorts of questions, mostly asking if they agree with one another's comments, but also probing questions such as the following: What is the center of gravity of the piece? If you had to cut something, what would you cut? What would you want to see expanded? Which passage has the most/least successful prose and why? Where were you most/least interested? If we were going to reorganize the paper, in what order could we put the paragraphs? Where is the argument strongest? What is the thesis? What is the strongest/weakest point the paper makes? Etc. Obviously, many questions are paper-specific, relating to the specific construction of ideas within it.

Workshops typically run 20-45 minutes, requiring more time earlier in the semester than later. Obviously, this means that CCA does demand considerable class time unless opting to have student groups assess papers outside of class, which is possible. However, it is well to keep in mind that CCA is itself a pedagogical force. It does not take time away from teaching writing because it is heuristic in its own right. I do not find it profitable or even possible to effectively workshop a paper in less time and more usually is not necessary. There are times, however, when workshops run long, typically as a result of passionate discussion.

In the whole-class format, time restrictions prevent every student from receive a workshop on every paper. In other words, if 25 students must complete three papers

each, that would result in 75 workshops—far too many to occur in one semester. Consequently, I afford each student only one or two workshops (class-size depending). When this is the case, I require that all students meet the due date for each paper (regardless of the date of the students' workshop date). If paper #1 is due on September 15, everyone must submit paper #1 on September 15. Those students *not* receiving a workshop on paper #1 will be graded by me alone. I will respond to and grade those papers as I would normally. I will not grade and/or respond to those students receiving a workshop on paper #1; they will have to wait until their workshop for a grade. The same holds true for papers #2 and #3. Therefore, as I do it, students must submit a completed paper to me along with their peers regardless of the day on which they are distributing papers for their workshop.

The reason I do not grade and respond to papers being workshopped is that I do not want to create any discord between my opinion of the paper and the class' deliberations. Were I, as the institutional representative, to grade a paper before its workshop, it would undermine the workshop entirely because my voice certainly would speak louder than the combined voices of all the other students.

In the whole-class workshop format, the author sits in the room anonymously and listens to the discussion. I do not permit the author to participate in the workshop but if called on accidentally, he or she has permission to offer a non-descript response that will not sway the discussion in a particular direction but also will safeguard the student's anonymity. For example, an author might say, "I kind of agree with Jane but I'm not really sure" or "I'm sorry but I just did not get a chance to read this today." While this

might make them appear lazy, it does so only temporarily because most authors reveal themselves at the workshop's end.

After we discuss the paper, we turn attention to the rubric. Early in the semester, we move category by category. We begin each category by reading the language for "F" first and then seeing how high up the rubric we can go. Typically, I find it useful to ask questions like, "can we use "D" language for this paper? No? Ok, does "C" language apply to this paper? It does. Ok, does any "B" language also apply?" We try to determine if the paper is entirely in one grade or in between two grades, and then which grade is more accurate. If both "B" and "C" apply but more "B" holds greater relevance than "C," then the paper probably earns a "B-" in the given category.

Generally speaking, we have to reach a class consensus on the grade, but I allow each student to individually write down a grade for each category, permitting a one grade-step variance, and then either I or the author will average all of the grades together after class. However, early in the semester, I often make it policy that the average grade from the class only counts for minority percentage of the paper grade, and I allow that percentage to increase as the semester evolves. Thus, for the first two weeks, student grades might be worth only 25% of the total grade for the paper, with my grade for the paper being worth 75%. By the end of the semester, those percentages reverse, and sometimes I do not grade the paper at all. In truth, as long as I moderate discussion in the early goings of the semester and require consensus, it also works perfectly well to allow students 100% of the grade—a grade I moderated and with which I agreed within the boundary of one grade-step.

For lack of a better word, early comments from the students reflect their limited understanding. Students typically inflate grades dramatically because they do not really understand our expectations. As noted earlier, I am not shy about imposing the voice of the institution but I typically seek out ways that do so without confrontation. For example, after receiving many different responses as to the paper's thesis, students will then want to rate the "thesis" highly despite a lack of consensus as to exactly what that thesis is and where it appears in the text. Thus, I'll ask leading questions: Can we all agree on the thesis? Does the thesis direct the entire paper? Does the paper argue a single idea? Etc. When the students answer "no" to all of those questions, I will explain that my job is to fairly enforce the rubric, and if they speak of the thesis as they have been then they have to assign it a "D" or "F". They cannot, in essence, have multiple interpretations of it and also find it clear. Thus, I tell them that they can re-assess their interpretation of the piece or assign it a lower grade.

Similarly, I make it clear that one of my chief roles is to make sure the rubric is interpreted as homogenously as possible throughout all of my course sections. Consequently, I will explain that a given criterion means a certain thing (unless students can offer a stronger interpretation, of course). I do not say that the paper achieves that criterion or not; I merely clarify the nature of the criterion for the students and then allow them to see if the paper meets that criterion.

In other words, while I will put my foot down when necessary and outright disagree with students, I much more frequently attempt to play the role of interpreter. I serve as the intermediary between the students and the rubric/institution. In fact, while I freely admit that I affirm university standards, I also state that the need for a clear thesis

or for a thesis to accomplish certain ends is not *my* policy, per se, but rather that of the institution. By doing so I alleviate my role as the bad guy, as the one imposing certain standards, and therefore facilitate my role as interpreter and ally rather than adversary.

During workshops, I also keep track of course participation. Typically, I keep notes on the back of every paper regarding who speaks, what they say, and what grades the paper receives in each category. Of course, I have been implementing CCA for a long time, so it is not difficult for me to both run the workshop and track course participation. When I started CCA, I devoted all my energy to running the workshop and made notes about course participation later the same day.

At the end of workshop, I ask students to tabulate their individual grades and write a short response to the author. Depending on the rubric's format, tabulating can mean averaging the grades for each category into an overall grade, or it can mean adding the value of each category to arrive at a final number that equates to a grade.

While they write, and without speaking to the author directly, I ask the class if the author would like to join the discussion. "We'd love to hear from AuthorCodename right now if he or she is willing." In all my years of running peer-assessment workshops, only a handful of authors have chosen *not* to break anonymity, which I take to be a fair indicator that the process is constructive rather than abusive. Once revealed, I encourage the author to ask questions of the class regarding how to improve the work, and I also ask the author if he or she found any of the grades disagreeable. After listening to how and why the class arrived at the grades, authors almost invariably find the grades fair and understandable. Why? Because when an entire class of students agree about why a paper was difficult to follow it becomes exceptionally difficult to believe the contrary.

If the author reveals him/herself, I ask the students to hand all of the gradesheets to that author, and ask the author to email me the combined average of all grades received. As I have a record of the grades myself, I know that the grade must fall within a certain boundary, and so I typically do not encounter any problems with students giving themselves more favorable averages than earned. I also require students to keep all grades they receive and produce those grades if required. On the other hand, if the author does not reveal himself or herself, I collect the gradesheets and invite the author to drop by my office to pick them up.

Early in the semester, I play a handily active role in the workshops, but I try to decrease my presence more and more as the semester evolves. After about a month of workshopping, I become increasingly silent and will start workshops by telling students that I will no longer run the show. I will participate minimally, if at all. While I might help keep the discourse moving smoothly by choosing who speaks, I will not engage the discussion itself unless I personally feel passionately about a point. I try to help the students reach consensus by reflecting back what I hear, e.g. "Joe suggests this category is a B because ..., but Jane suggests it is a C because ... Who is more right?" If they reach consensus on a grade to which I object, I make my objection clear, explain my rationale, and then ask them to persuade me and/or ask if they are persuaded. The better they become at grading, the less frequently I have objections, and the more frequently they persuade me when I do.

Group Grading

After running whole-class workshops for half the semester or more, I move students into group-based grading. Doing so not only offers variety to peer-assessment, it also places a greater responsibility on the students to grade independently of the teacher. Furthermore, though not directly related to CCA, small groups also change the participation dynamic; students who feel uncomfortable voicing ideas in the whole-class format often become much more active in group work.

To construct the groups, I typically break the class into groups of four-to-six students and each group grades the same paper, just like in the whole-class workshop. Group grading works better if the author breaks anonymity from the start, so I typically discuss it with the author ahead of time by email, or sometimes I give the author the option to join a group but play a nondescript role in the process. If the author intends to remain anonymous, I typically make groups larger rather than smaller so that the author can remain nondescript. Fortunately, the vast majority of the times, authors are comfortable with non-anonymous workshops, and they use the time to walk around the room, listen to the different groups, and to engage the groups with questions and discussion. Similarly, by the time we begin working in groups, the students appear quite comfortable with discussing the work in the presence of the author.

When first doing group grading, I ask each group to discuss the work but not grade it. Then we rejoin as a class and grade the paper collectively after hearing each group's general response to the work. A little later on in the semester, I ask the groups to discuss *and* grade the paper collectively, coming to a *unanimous* decision on each grade. Then we come together as a class and come to an overall consensus on the grades.

Eventually, I invite the groups to discuss and grade each work. We then might discuss the grades as a class but I remove the obligation for the class to reach consensus, and the author receives an average of the grades from each group.

While this is anecdotal, I find the groups remarkably homogenous in their assessments by the last month of the semester. In my classes in spring, 2007, five groups of four-to-five students all assessed a paper between a B+ and an A-. For another paper, all of the groups found the "Meaningfulness and Interest" category at the C-level, but all of the other categories to be high B or A quality. In other words, the groups did not just arrive at roughly the same grade; they typically assigned similar grades within each category.

While group grades typically align, there are anomalies. For example, one semester I had a paper that sparked a wide range of grades from the groups. Groups arrived at very different reads of the paper, and so we had to get back together as a class and hash it out. There have even been isolated occurrences in the past where I had to put my institutionally-authoritative foot down and assign a grade when the groups were radically divergent in grades. However, these are exceptions more than the rule, and I think it fair to say that there have been many times in my own career when I was not certain how to read a particular paper. I believe student groups should enjoy the same liberty.

In the final stage of the group process, I like to move students into grading in pairs, thus moving more and more responsibility from the group to the individual. When students grade in pairs, I assign more written response than when they do so in groups, thus ensuring that authors receive substantial feedback.

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Self-Assessment

Ultimately, I see the goal of all peer-assessment as helping students move towards self-assessment. My final assignment of the semester is to self-grade either their final paper or their full portfolio. They must do so by submitting an essay that analyzes their own work and justifies a grade for it in each category. I tell them that if I find the grade fair—if they persuade me of it—then they will get whatever grade they assign themselves.

By the time the end of the semester rolls around, I find students well-equipped for that task. Certainly, there are some students who either truly believe their writing is better than it really is, or who try to tweak the system in their favor. However, most of the students grade themselves quite accurately, and many students even grade themselves lower than I do. They do so because they become accustomed to viewing writing critically, which means analytically but not necessarily negatively. As such, and as the saying goes, they become "their own worst critics." Interesting, those same students typically produce the best writing.

Yet I am not really interested in the exact accuracy of the grade as much as the quality of the self-analysis. I want to see how well students understand the institutional standards, and how well they view their own writing through that lens. I make it very clear to them that their self-analysis will be graded and that a strong self-analysis can positively affect their overall course grade.

Alternative Group Method

An alternative method I have used involved group work almost exclusively. Similar to the group work above, I broke students into "grading groups" at the beginning of the semester and consistently held each group responsible for grading the work from another group. I configured the paper distribution in a round-robin so that no two groups graded each other's work, thereby minimizing the risk of back scratching, e.g. Group one graded group two, group two graded group three, group three graded group one. The same groups graded each other through the semester.

Students would distribute their papers to grading groups on specified dates, and the groups would have one week to return papers to the authors. Over the course of that week, I met with each group outside of class for thirty-to-sixty minutes, grading at least one paper with them. I required each group to email me grades for each paper so that I could approve their grades before the papers were returned to the authors. If we had disagreement on grades, we met and discussed the matter until we reached resolution.

Each student grader had to write one response letter to each of the student authors. Thus, if group one was grading group two, and group two had five members, then each member of group one wrote five letters, one for each author in group two. One peer author had to discuss the overall grade but the rest could discuss whatever aspects of the paper the group believed to be most helpful for the author. While I did not grade the papers themselves (though I read them all and approved the grades from the groups), I did grade the response letters from each grader. I would require each grader to print out two copies of each response letter, one of which would go to the author, one of which would go to me. Thus, every student receive (1) a grade on his or her paper from the peer

group and (2) a grade on his or her responses to other authors.   I used a rubric similar to that in Figure 7.4 for assessing the response letters.

I have found that this method works best if I require students to meet outside of class for an hour at a time. We grade at least one paper together and then I send them off to grade the rest on their own. However, it also works by affording class time for grading and by meeting with one group at a time while the rest of the groups discussed the papers on their own.

What I like about this method is the increased student-teacher interaction facilitated by meetings with the smaller groups, as well as the amount of writing students have to do in response to papers. Combined, those two elements potently affects their learning, not only because we interact more but also because *writing about grading demands that students clarify for themselves and articulate the rationale for their grades, especially when they need to articulate specific ways to change the paper/process to better meet the demands of the rubric*. On the downside, however, this approach can be more time consuming, and it does not allow for full-class discussion. Obviously, a hybrid between the whole-class grading and the group-to-group grading could be envisioned by beginning with the former and emerging into the latter.

I should reiterate, however, that it is imperative that the grades students generate for one another actually count. As graders, students need to be empowered or else they will fall into the Schrödinger's Cat problem all over again, meaning that students will not take grading seriously if they know a faculty member will supersede their authority. The exercise of the discourse community's standards must be meaningful and authentic if

students hope to understand those standards and, eventually, gain acceptance by that community.

Furthermore, as authors, students need to feel as though their peers are a *genuine* audience, meaning an audience empowered with the authority to make decisions. If authors realize that their peers hold no power and that the professor is the true audience—the one with the authority to grade—then they will ignore their peers entirely and will not learn to write from a discursive perspective.

Writing a strong response letter involves more care and effort than anything else. If you devote the time to it you should find them rewarding not merely with respect to your grades, but also (and more importantly) with respect to what you learn about writing. I suggest you follow these four rules in proceeding:

a. *Exercise sensitivity*: Remember that you are writing to someone who has devoted considerable time, effort, and emotion to their work. Not only should you phrase your comments constructively, you also should note those aspects of the paper that deserve praise, or at least compliment. Use "I" or "we" centered statements—statements discuss your *reaction* to the paper rather than the paper itself. "I found myself confused by your introduction" reads more constructively than "Your introduction is confusing." Grades will be lowered for harsh remarks.
b. *Be specific*: Don't hesitate to quote the paper or *at least* make *specific* references to it. If something confused you, demonstrate through the author's own language how and why it did so.
c. *Offer Alternatives*: Remember to be forward looking by demonstrating what the author can do when rewriting. This could involve offering a revised version of one of the paper's paragraphs, or discussing some researching methods, or offering some suggestions as to how they might revise or develop their thesis, etc. Remember your responsibility to teach the author to write a superior paper. Use your objectivity about their work and insights from your group's discussion to help the author improve.
d. *Discuss a limited number of points*: Typically, it is better to develop just one or two points/examples in *exceptional detail* rather than merely touching on many different ideas.

A	B	C	D	F
Excellent. The "A" makes a particularly insightful point that offers	*Above average*. This letter offers thoughtful and important insights into the workings	*Satisfactory*. This makes a point(s) of notable value but the letter's author should devote	*Passing*. While this meets acceptable standards, it does so only in the most	*Failing*. Any response letter meeting any one of the following criteria will receive

resolution to an issue in the paper. It typically addresses the writing process and makes specific references to the paper. It also offers specific examples of what the writer can do to improve and what improved writing/reasoning will look like.	of the paper. Unlike the "A" letter, however, it probably doesn't delve into the process and/or detail as much as it could, but it still discusses important issues at length and provides well-reasoned ideas for future efforts. One or two of the four bullets above might require additional attention.	additional time to considering what is most important about the issue and/or how to articulate it more effectively. The letter's author should devote notably more attention to the bullets above, most often to number two.	minimal regards. Insights will hold only minimal importance and/or relevance, and probably are developed insufficiently, weakly, or unclearly. Nevertheless, the author receiving this letter should find it at least somewhat useful.	an "F": Lacks notable insight, Lacks notable development, Under one page, Insensitive, Lacks details, Unclear.

Figure 4: Response letter grading standards.

Student Concerns: Privilege or Burden?

Students quite reasonably voice reservations when entering into CCA. They not only voice fairness concerns but also express concerns about their ability to be effective graders of their peers' work. To be candid, when I started CCA about ten years ago I initially did not expect the latter reservation from students. I imagined that students would leap at the opportunity, that students would instantly appreciate the power to assess. Not only that, I also imagined that students would view my participation in the process as a hindrance rather than asset. I assumed they would not want me to interfere with their deliberations. But I was wrong.

While students initially express concerns that they will be assessed unfairly and constructively by their peers, concerns that diminish as soon as they experience the process for the first time, I actually hear more frequent and passionate concerns about the

responsibility placed on them to be effective assessors. The first time I ran CCA exclusively with the small group format (not starting with whole-class workshops), I actually had a student in tears because she felt so burdened by the need to assess fairly and accurately. I should note, however, that her emotional state was entirely my fault because I had withheld from the group my own sentiments about the paper in question, i.e. I did not provide enough teacher *disclosure*.

Thus, I generally find that students welcome my participation in the process. They want the process to be fair. They want it to be constructive. They want to grade papers accurately. As both authors and graders, they take comfort in the fact that I will not allow unfair grades to manifest.

Consequently, answering the question concerning whether CCA is a privilege or a burden really comes down to the infrastructure on which it is built, or more specifically, to two essential factors: support and time. Speaking to the former, as long as students do not feel thrown into the process absent of necessary guidance, they do not feel too great a burden. Students need to understand how the process will work before it occurs, such as through a mock workshop on a mock paper, and their responsibility should be increased incrementally rather than suddenly.

On a side note, I also have used CCA as a dialogic pedagogy in which I challenged students over the course of a semester to figure out how papers should be assessed. In essence, the objective of the course was not only to write papers but to figure out how to assess them, and in doing so I intentionally offered students little assistance along the way. However, students understood that the question of how to assess writing was an integral part of the course itself, and I offered them class time and

readings on composition to determine how to approach assessment. While they were somewhat nonchalant about the process at first, all of that turned around when they graded the first round of their own papers and realized that there might just be more to assessing well than merely putting a grade at the top of a page. I should note that none of the early grades counted because they obviously were not equipped to assess at the time.

Time is the second major factor in students' appreciation of CCA. As it can be time consuming depending on the particular method—meeting in groups outside of class and writing letters to every author can prove remarkably rigorous—students can become bitter if they find themselves doing a lot more work than their peers in other classes. I know that from experience. Thus, I try to balance CCA with the institutional culture, often by devoting class time to it rather than requiring work outside of class, and also by delimiting the amount of other reading and writing assignments accordingly.

I also know, however, that because students find CCA rewarding, they actually will accept relatively higher workloads as along as they find themselves meaningfully learning from the effort. In other words, if they find that grading their peers and writing responses truly improves their writing, they will endure, even embrace those tasks despite the workload.

<center>Variety vs. Monotony</center>

As with any repeated classroom practice—lectures, discussions, presentations, etc.—CCA can run the risk of monotony. The surest cure for this is simply good writing. When we encounter strong papers, the workshops often become more lively and interesting. However, as consistently strong writing is an unrealistic expectation, especially earlier in the semester, other tactics become important.

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As a means of keeping the whole-class workshops fresh—monotony is a smaller concern in the group format—I vary the nature of the discussions. Here are just a few examples: (1) I'll ask how the paper compares with an object, such as a candy bar, thus prompting some more abstract thinking. I'll only use that for the discussion portion of the workshop, not for the grading, but it does stimulate students to approach the work in unique ways. (2) I'll ask students to debate the work, assigning one side of the room the role of prosecutor and the other side the role of defender. (3) I'll start with a silent workshop where each student writes an initial thought about the work down on an individual piece of paper. I'll ask every student to pass his or her paper to the right and ask them to comment on the first student's remark before passing it to the right again.

I use all of those methods as different discussion prompts and generally do not allow any of these techniques to alter the grading process. They simply keep the process fresh.

Teaching the Discourse Community

I mentioned earlier in this work that I allow CCA to organically generate traditional, or at least more traditional, lessons. Building on Gee and Lave & Wenger, I find that students learn better when lessons come at the moment the students need and/or ask for them.

For example, both of the rubrics included in this chapter require varied prose in order for a paper to earn high marks on style. Early in the semester, I do not offer the students training on how to vary their prose. However, after we collaboratively grade a handful of papers that do not meet the standard for varied prose, students invariably ask

what such prose would look like and how to accomplish it. "Excellent question," I respond. And then I ask them if they would like a lesson on it when we have a break in the workshops. They say "yes" with what is for me always an surprising amount of enthusiasm. Rather than imposing the lesson on varied prose on them as something *I* think they need to learn, it becomes something *they* desire in order to succeed. The need pre-exists the lesson.

Yes, the need for students to vary their prose always pre-existed the lesson insofar as they cannot do it when they enter the course. But the students did not know that. Only after grading a number of papers with monotonous prose do the students truly come to see that a paper full of sentences nearly identical in length and structure becomes boring. Personally and professionally, I find that one of the most powerful elements of CCA. Allowing students to see student writing from a teacher's perspective, especially when reading large numbers of papers, shows students things about writing they would not otherwise perceive. Until they have to read a variety of papers and become bored/enthralled by the style, and can compare relative success of different styles, they do not fully appreciate the role style plays. More to the point, until charged with the responsibility to summatively assess one style against another, and all styles against the institution's standards, they never really understand how to delineate one style from another. Once seeing writing from a teacher's perspective, students recognize why the university considers varied prose (thesis, evidence, logic, etc.) important, and also realize that they may be under-equipped to meet the (now understandable) desire for varied prose. As such, they ask me to help them.

On its surface, this might seem manipulative, even unfair. Grading students by expectations the students do not fully understand and cannot initially achieve might appear counterproductive to education. However, my point all along is that academia does exactly that all of the time. Most students do not know what we mean by "thesis." More to the point, they cannot fully understand what we mean by it until we involve them in exercising "thesis" from the perspective of the dominant discourse community. It follows, therefore, that my practice of involving the assessment process and allowing that to generate lessons and questions is reasonably fair because it (1) shows them more explicitly what the university expects, and (2) offers them lessons on meeting those expectations based on what the students themselves realize they need. Furthermore, because I permit students to revise throughout the semester, (3) it does not hold students to the grades they earned when their understanding of disciplinary conventions were frail.

Put another way, I have tried (as have so many other instructors) to offer lessons on varied prose, theses, evidence, etc. *before* students realized the need for them, outside of collaborative grading exercises, and independently of what the students felt they needed at the time. While other instructors may achieve remarkable success by doing so through their own pedagogies, I have not found that those lessons "stick" nearly as well as when they emerge from the students' own desires or self-perceived needs.

Thus, when the course begins I already have prepared a plethora of lessons on different writing topics that await the students' desire for them. When the desires emerge, I mold the lesson to the class by integrating it into previous discussions, and even by working with papers we already graded. I am certain that most other educators tailor lessons similarly, but my point is simply that while assessing in itself will teach

students a great deal about writing, CCA ultimately need not supplant (more) traditional exercises. Instead, CCA aims to bring students into fuller membership within the discourse community by allowing them to share in the process of articulating and applying standards.

Portfolios

Just as CCA can supplement existing lessons on writing, so can it supplement a portfolio-based process. Students can still write a variety of pieces during the semester, and while, depending on the CCA method, all of those pieces might not be workshopped, all can be included in a final portfolio. Students can then reflect on, and in my case summatively assess, their own portfolios just as they might in any other portfolio-based class.

The difference comes in how students arrive at the final portfolio, which in this case means having been involved in CCA throughout the semester, thus well-positioning the students to examine their work from an institutional perspective. Such an examination need not replace more personal reflections about their works, such as which is most meaningful to them or from which they learned the most. Rather, the personal, the institutional (student), and the institutional (professor) can function harmoniously.

Programmatic and Institutional Concerns

As I mentioned earlier, one of the essential elements of CCA simply is candor. I try to make it very clear to students early in the semester that I need to function as a representative of the institution, and that while I want students to excel in the course, I

also need to uphold institutional rigor. Thus, I run early sessions quite authoritatively, and I tell students ahead of time that I will do so. I explain that I will be the ultimate determiner of the grades based on my experience, *but that I am open to discussing and always happy to explain why I assign the grades I do*. I do not pretend that grading is an initially equal effort because the objective is to help students understand how the institution interprets their work and why it does so.

In my experience, students tend to appreciate this candor. They are rightfully insecure about the responsibility of grading one another, as well as of being graded by their peers, and so they typically value my authoritative presence as teacher.

Yet disclosure also means being candid about all aspects of grading, such as when I am uncertain about a grade, when I find the grading criteria unclear, and even when I am having difficulty articulating a point. Students love to see me excited by an aspect of a paper, just as they respect it when an element does not reach or impress me. Yet the more I engage students as real human beings capable of uncertainty, the more they tend to appreciate me. None of us have to pretend that writing is easy, that grading is easy, or that answers are always clear. While I always maintain a constructive tone, I also always try to engage students with full honesty and full humanity, even while wearing the hat of the "institutional representative."

What proves most difficult at times is simply being most human—keeping a truly open mind and even changing my opinion when persuaded by the students. While I am under no imperative to change my opinion unless genuinely persuaded, I must remain genuinely open to students' comments. That requires that I am secure enough in my position and knowledge that I can admit it when students raise points I had not

considered. At times, particularly when I first started using CCA, the impulse to posture for students proved powerful, albeit detrimental. Showing that we can be persuaded not only models appropriate behavior for the students, who should be open to being persuaded themselves, but also humanizes the "teacher" and fosters a stronger sense of communal togetherness.

Is This Process Ethical?

It seems reasonable to ask whether or not a program director and/or dean would find peer assessed grades legitimate. As I tell my students, however, since my name goes on the final gradesheet, I have to believe in every grade I write down or I am sacrificing my own integrity and ethical responsibilities. Thus, while the means of arriving at the grades involves student interaction, I do not allow any objectionable grades through my gate. The end result, therefore, must be a body of grades I believe in just as much as if I assigned them on my own. The process of arriving at the grades involves CCA; the validity of the grades cannot change. Furthermore, at least as far as administrative concerns exist, the final ownership of and responsibility for the final grades is mine.

Students understand this. I make it clear that my name has to sign the gradesheet at the end of the course. However, the entire premise of CCA is that we can form a community with students, if not invite them into our existing discourse community. Hence, students and I agree on grades far more than we disagree. Even when disagreeing, students hold a greater appreciation for the difficulty of grading and my overall institutional responsibility.

How are Grade Appeals Handled?

I seldom encounter grade appeals. In fact, over ten years I have encountered *far fewer* appeals through CCA than when I graded papers on my own. However, if a student does find his or her grade objectionable, we either discuss the grade as a class, with the group in question, or in a one-to-one conference. In the class-based format, I will usually field and rectify appeals on my own if only because it proves so cumbersome to bring the issue back to the entire class. For group-based grading, I might act as a go-between, or we will all have a sit down. If a student appeals a grade beyond the course, which has not happened to me, I must take responsibility for the grade and explain its rationale. Doing so might seem complicated given the CCA process. But while the process for grading was dialogic, my own rationale for any grade remains firm, meaning that I can justify any grade on its merits no more or less through CCA than with more traditional methods.

How Do Students Interpret Different Grades from Different Students?

In the class-based format, there are times when all of the students simply cannot agree on a grade. Some students might find a paper clear while others might not, and despite discussion, we cannot come to consensus. At first, this seems problematic because the author always wants to know "who's right." Depending on the issue, we often resolve the problem through further discussion, ultimately allowing the stronger view to prevail.

However, it is sometimes the case that neither perspective holds full rights to the truth. If clarity is in question, for example, I explain to the author that he or she wrote in

such a way that a certain percentage of the class could follow the paper, while a certain percentage could not. As the professor, I cannot force one group of readers to find a piece clear or unclear, and if both sides raise well-reasoned points, it seems foolish to become the authoritarian. Instead, I explain to the author that he or she needs to find a way to express the paper so that all of the students can follow it, not just a percentage of them. Thus, if both sides are well-reasoned, it is not that one is right and the other wrong but rather that the student wrote well enough to reach some students but not all students. As reaching all students is the eventual goal, that author needs to reconsider his or her writing to increase the percentage of students who find the clarity acceptable.

In a recent semester, while I was being observed by another faculty member for departmental evaluation, the class could not reach consensus about whether or not a paper had a thesis (one of the few times that has ever happened with respect to a thesis, so by Murphy's Law it had to happen while I was being observed). We must have discussed that issue alone for nearly half-an-hour. Some people could make an excellent case for a thesis while others made an equally strong case against one. It got to the point where I even asked the observing faculty member her view on it, and she could not decide one way or the other. Thus, I allowed those who found a thesis to grade it one way, and those who did not to grade it another way. Once again, neither side was right. The student wrote in such a way that some people discerned a clear thesis while others could not discern a clear thesis.

At first, students find this uncertainty frustrating. They want to know the "right answer" but for me that only affirms the notion that they perceive grading as positivistic—"right" answers exist apart from the audiences and discourse communities

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that formulate those answers. In time, however, students come to value the percentage idea because they realize that they can be successful to varying degrees, that writing is not an all or nothing gambit, and most importantly that *audiences and communities construct "rightness."*

Academic Integrity

Over the years, I have encountered a few problems with academic integrity with respect to students assigning grades that papers did not really earn, or at least trying to artificially raise a grade for a friend. These cases are rare and I contend with them like any other violation of the academic integrity code. In fact, I explain to the students early in the semester that *intentionally* assigning unfair grades, be they high or low, is as much a violation of the academic integrity code as plagiarism, and that I will exercise no restraint in pursuing disciplinary action. Most students understand this and appreciate it, and proceed accordingly.

Disclosure and Discomfort

For some faculty, the greater questions might not be about the logistics of implementing CCA but rather what it calls upon us to offer of ourselves. First, is it even possible for us to articulate our standards and processes for grading? Second, if we can articulate it, might doing so amount to exposure more than disclosure?

Speaking to the former question, I initially found it difficult at points to articulate to students the rational for my standpoint on certain papers and how I weighed different elements of writing into cohesive vision. Give Bob Braod's (2003) work in "What We

Really Value," I am not alone. Broad uses Dynamic Criteria Mapping to record and analyze the way faculty discussed students' papers during summative exercises, and the results rather clearly demonstrate that individual faculty members face difficulty in articulating their positions.

However, while this poses a facial problem, it seems inarguable that as writing faculty we *should* be able to clearly articulate our rationale for any assessment of student work. Students not only deserve as much but if we cannot do so then I think we must ask ourselves if grades can ever be justified, if not justifiable. In fact, I think there's an argument that teachers who are unwilling to crystallize their grading process and share it with students are exercising a move of power rather than one of education. Thus, CCA can prove itself an essential heuristic process for teachers as well as students, meaning that accepting the responsibility to articulate to students our assessments only will strengthen our own understandings of our own processes.

Personally, I find that I can now much more clearly articulate what I value in student writing than I could prior to engaging in CCA. I am certain that some part of my evolution comes from more years in the classroom, but a majority of it undoubtedly comes from explaining my views on grading to students and dialoging with them about writing.

Returning to the second question concerning whether sharing our grading process equates to disclosure or exposure, some faculty might well feel exposed by opening themselves up to students as I suggest. Unshielded the process from students can be intimidating. After all, it can reveal to students when we are uncertain about our judgments.

However, I think students implicitly recognize that a willingness to disclose the grading process bespeaks confidence rather than insecurity. A willingness to bring the process out into the open suggests that we know what we're doing, whereas keeping the process in the shadows suggests the opposite. Furthermore, my experience suggests that students respect the reasoning process, which means that they do not mind if I vacillate between two views of an essay provided I explain exactly why I am having trouble with my decision.

We only cross the line from disclosure to exposure, therefore, when we really do not know what we are doing, which does not prohibit uncertainty. It only prohibits a lack of expertise. Students can respect the fact that assessment can be complicated but they cannot and should not respect assessment when it is arbitrary and capricious. If assessment is arbitrary, it will be exposed as such. However, if it is reasoning but complex, then we can disclose that to students without fear.

Critical Collaborative Assessment on the Programmatic and Institutional Level

As of yet, I have not seen CCA implemented across an entire writing program, much less across a university. I think such a prospect is exciting. It would require a common rubric across the program, and perhaps even across the college, though faculty obviously might modify that rubric within their individual courses. However, the prospect of producing a body of students fluent in a relatively common understanding of institutional expectations and able to engage in discourse with writing and non-writing faculty alike is an exciting one. While I acknowledge my bias, I can only imagine how

this could elevate not only the writing of individual students, but also elevate the discourse about writing on a campus as a whole.

Furthermore, and perhaps most valuably, developing a university-wide rubric would open discourse about writing and university expectations across the campus! Non-writing faculty would have to learn to articulate their interpretation of standards, especially when encountering students who can discourse about writing effectively, even with respect to university expectations. Campus-wide CCA equally could foster grade-norming sessions between faculty of different disciplines, all of whom could come together to understand and agree on what constitutes "evidence," "effective prose style," "strong thesis," etc.

Of course, a program-wide or university-wide rubric would need to evolve, not only because standards should be revisited over time, but also because students should have the right to question the standards and how they are described. In a programmatic or university-wide system, this might require written suggestions and/or student representation on the university-wide rubric committee.

Secondarily, program- or institutional-wide CCA would mean that students could do more to help one another write effectively. Having gained some fluency in assessing writing by the program-wide or university-wide rubric, and generally familiar with the more tacit university expectations, sophomores, juniors, and seniors could help first-year students with their writing from an increasingly authoritative position.

On the other hand, we need to ask if CCA might be more available to some institutions than others. While CCA can function in any individual classroom, teachers facing large classes might find it more challenging than teachers with small classes.

Furthermore, smaller institutions might be more ready to change than larger ones, and institutions with more affluent populations might find students more responsive to discussion-based, relatively egalitarian pedagogies. In this regard, however, CCA does not seem to bring forth any new problems. Differences between institutions always affect the implementation of new pedagogy, especially pedagogies that rely on student-teacher interaction.

Overall, CCA would increase the discourse about writing on a campus. It would never mean that every faculty member will interpret every paper identically, but it would move us towards a unified vision of quality writing, and more importantly, it would move us closer to a campus-wide *writing culture*. Given all of the educational values of CCA, students emerging from such a construct not only would be some kind of writers, they would be some kind of people.

AFTERWARD

I started this work by talking about Carolyn. She did not know how grades emerged and despite a host of nondirective feedback, she really only wanted to know what grade I would give her work and how to make it an "A."

Though in a highly simplistic manner, Carolyn articulated a major issue facing composition, namely that, as Huot has argued, "we have yet to create in any substantive way a pedagogy that links the teaching and assessing of writing." Instead, what we see in contemporary composition is that sound pedagogy and assessment are often viewed as at odds with one another. That is so true that many popular approaches to composition attempt to separate the two practices entirely, such as by delaying assessment through portfolios or formulizing assessment through contract grading.

Yet those practices do not reconcile Woolf's point that "criteria assume meaning only when used." Consequently, all efforts to remove grading from the discussion, to delay it, contract it, and diminish its presence only equally diminishes the meaning criteria have for students. As I hope to have shown, if acceptance into and understanding of a discourse community depends on the language of that community, an inability to functionally engage that language prevents the desired acceptance and understanding. Thus, since the language of grading is the most authoritarian, if not authoritative language in the academic institution, if we do not involve students in the exercise of assessment language, they will never fully understand the criteria through which they are assessed.

That is why peer response offers what is largely false promise. While I happily agree that peer response holds value for students, its value comes from its collaborative functions rather than its constructionist functions. By working together, students certainly can achieve a greater understanding of the discourse community and writing practice. Yet while peer response is a collaborative endeavor, it is not fully a constructionist endeavor. Since student responders lack the authority to summatively apply discursive standards, they cannot be said to be a real or "live audience." Peer responders, as different from peer graders, are a simulacra—a false discourse community that may or may not be in alignment with the authoritative community that is the professor and the community he or she represents.

My point is not that peer response is a fruitless exercise, only that its constructionist fruitfulness is diminished by the absence of students' authentic exercise of assessment. Grading, in other words, is the missing link that can fully functionalize peer response.

In fact, I assert that collaborative grading has been the missing link in a great deal of composition theory and practice, and that it can be the unifying link in the composition field. Sure, that's a bold claim but not if we consider how many forces grading can unite. Not only can peer assessment more fully functionalize the constructionist aspects of peer response work, it also can reinvigorate critical pedagogy not for political aims but for pedagogical ones by encouraging both teacher and students to openly investigate disciplinary criteria and standards. From a Vygotskyan perspective, CCA can help us move students from tool users to sign users. Furthermore, CCA can bring the "contact zone" to vitality not as a place to discuss a clash of foreign cultures but of a place to

understand and perhaps even reconcile the clash between student culture and institutional culture. CCA can establish a situated learning environment where students learn through practice rather than didactic instruction, where information comes to them in response to their questions and needs rather than preceding those needs, and where learning becomes a matter of cultural understanding rather than instructed ideas. CCA can foster an environment of disclosure, but rather than disclosure of personal or cultural genre, disclosure of teachers' understandings of institutional genre. CCA can offer a functional post-process pedagogy where students learn through and about being situated, public, and interpretive.

None of the above debilitates process pedagogy, expressivism, argumentation, research writing, active learning, student-centered education, teacher authority, academic rigor, writing workshops, or just about anything else we see in current practice. All it does is offer another step we can take towards unifying what seem to be competing philosophies of composition. When we invoke CCA, the dichotomies break down. We need not decide between process vs. post-process, critical pedagogy vs. institutional standards, constructionist vs. rigorous, etc. And we need not choose between teaching writing and assessing it. We can teach and assess at the same time. We can use assessment to teach, just as we can use teaching to assess.

My greatest fear is that what I have proposed here will seem radical. Perhaps in one sense it is radical insofar as inviting students to participate in assessment is a notable departure from previous practice. However, in every other sense, all I am really suggesting is that we dismiss the pretensive structures we have created to teach composition. Teacher-designed audiences, peer response groups, assignments that foster

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"real world" writing, pedagogies offering prescribed methodologies absent from contextualizing them—all of those distract students and teachers alike from where we are. We are in a context. Our context has standards and practices. Students have a real audience—the institution. Students have a real purpose—joining the institution. Let's meet students where we all already are, and talk with them as we are, and share with them our understandings and uncertainties, and explore with them the discourse communities that govern them, as well as the institutional practices that govern all of us. Let's do so openly and honestly. We do not have to create meaningfulness. We do not have to pretend to be all knowing. We do not have to purport that succeeding in the institution is not a worthwhile enough goal to which students should aspire.

Of course, work still needs to be done. The existing research on peer assessment offers evidence that students can aptly engage grading, but true research on CCA as applied through a semester remains undone. Clearly, we need to see if CCA fosters stronger understanding of and ability to achieve academic standards, not to mention the formative values found in other forms of alternative assessment.

More importantly, I think we need to see what CCA can accomplish on a programmatic level, if not a department-wide or college-wide application. The eventual goal is not merely to create a classroom full of criteria-savvy students, but rather a campus culture built on a dialogue concerning assessment practices, standards, and language.

In conclusion, I am reminded of these words by Buckminster Fuller: "When I am working on a problem I never think about beauty. I only think about how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong."

As such, I hope to have achieved something beautiful. I hope that Critical Collaborative Assessment does more to simplify our job as writing instructors than complicate it, and that it shows how magnificent our interaction with students can be if we dismiss our fears about our authority and allow them into our world.

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