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MUTUALITY AS A MEANS OF OVERCOMING STUDENT RESISTANCE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Title: Mutuality as a Means of Overcoming Student Resistance

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Mutuality practice in the composition classroom attempts to create equal subject positions between teachers and students, mitigating the effects of dominant power structures inherent to an authority-driven classroom while showing teachers that their students are fully capable, though fledgling, members of an academic community. Understanding how those mutuality practices create and maintain equal subject positions currently falls under the theoretically broad category of critical pedagogy and requires further study to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This dissertation observed mutuality practices in the composition classroom, specifically those related to classroom dialogue, writing assignments and the ways in which those assignments gathered response, tying those elements together to further theoretical knowledge of why such practices are effective and how they are used to mitigate negative student resistance. Using participant observations, focus groups, brief interviews, course assignments and syllabi, this study has been designed to incorporate feedback from both teachers and students as they cooperatively craft meaning (Wallace & Ewald, 2000) in the composition classroom.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

No one will argue that teachers and students should respect each other. As students we have all suffered through classes, syllabi, or teachers that were indifferent to our needs. When looking back on these classes, our memories are not positive, however improved our disciplinary knowledge might have become. When, as Ira Shor says, education is done *to* us instead of being conducted *with* us (p. 67) , we understandably resist, struggle, and become frustrated, wishing the teacher could be more empathetic to our experiences, more accepting of our skills, and more accommodating of our backgrounds. In those classes where mutual respect *was* established, however, the air was often charged with enthusiasm. We were energetic, dynamic, and lively. What were the differences between those classes lacking respect and those in which we felt welcomed? When we began our professional careers, I imagine many of us looked to the teachers that we respected as models when we designed our courses, hoping our pedagogy would fall on the humane side of the spectrum (hooks, 1994) . Classes run smoother, discussions are more productive, assessment is easier, and teaching is simply more enjoyable when relationships built on reciprocal respect have been achieved.

Decades of theorists promoting critical and expressivist pedagogies, from Freire to hooks to Giroux to Murray to Elbow to Moffett, have argued that such respect is essential to the liberation of the student and is necessary toward exposing normalized modes of discourse that perpetuate long-standing hierarchies of authority. Authority exerted by the teacher, for instance, can prevent student liberation, critical reflection, and

social change. An integral part of critical pedagogy that isn't spoken of as frequently as liberation is the concept of respect. Mutual respect is a key component in developing, celebrating, and encouraging student voice, both figuratively as a writing metaphor and literally as an oral component of student agency. Courses using dialogue, writing, and communication as vehicles by which students are exposed to disciplinary knowledge have special potential toward creating these mutual relationships because the critical examination of language is a way of making meaning, and, as Bourdieu (1993 p.1) has pointed out, a way of earning cultural capital.

This study examines first- and second-year writing courses whose teachers are charged with the dissemination of disciplinary knowledge and the promotion of critical thinking. No one will argue that teachers and students should respect each other, *but how is it accomplished*? What responsibilities do both parties have in ensuring its achievement? What real benefits does critical pedagogy's practice offer a class's social, disciplinary, and academic dimensions?

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation aims to theorize the practices of teachers who actively seek to establish equal subject positions between themselves and their students. Such theorizing lies in the domain of critical pedagogy, which is often criticized as being either impractical for its idealism or not within the domain of composition as concepts like social justice touch only tentatively on effective writing and grammar mechanics. Stanley Fish, who has argued against critical pedagogy, tells us:

> We are not expected to be preachers, political agents, gurus, spiritual advisers, both because we have not been trained in these tasks and because, given the arena

> of our performance (a classroom two or three times a week for a quarter or a semester), it is more than unlikely that we could bring about the effects they aim for. (2009 p. 103)

In place of a critical, problem-posing pedagogy, Fish argues for a return to composition's disciplinary base, namely, sentence-level rhetoric. Gwen Gorzelsky has similarly catalogued some of the controversies in critical pedagogy, explaining how students' expectations for a marketable and profitable education can lead to pedagogical resistance when issues external to class subject (race, class, identity, gender, power, etc.) are raised. While I agree with Fish that compositionists are neither responsible for politically motivating their students nor are they trained to do so, I find no reason why both critical problem-posing education cannot or should not coexist with sentence or paragraph-level rhetorical concerns, despite the financial objections raised by Gorzelsky. Assuming that teachers can and should inject political, social, economic, or racial issues as part of a course's goals and reading materials/discussions while simultaneously attending to writing concerns may seem overreaching. This study takes as a given the ability of teachers in all disciplines to tackle everything at once—form and content. The basis for this comes from my experience with critical pedagogues as a student as well as my success with the practice of problem-posing education as a teacher. I imagine more teachers have similar experiences. It can be done, however difficult it may seem on paper.

Beth Daniel explains one reason why critical pedagogies sound better on paper than they do in practice: "[By] the world's standards, most of the students who enroll in the classes we teach – especially in private colleges and large state universities – are not

oppressed. They are not Freire's Third World adult illiterates, and our job is not now, if it ever was, to recruit for a leftist revolution" (1999 p. 401). Though our students are likely not under a fascistic thumb that prevents them from achieving literacy, there are still social problems that we need to address. Critical pedagogy can, if practiced effectively, lead to more engaged, less resistant students. The problem, though, is that while some teachers are capable of effectively implementing critical pedagogy, similar attempts and practices by other teachers prove unsuccessful for no discernable reason. Critical theory is insufficient. We cannot uniformly apply best practices to specific contexts. However, we can theorize the common threads of effective practice as teachers and students craft equal subject positions, a phenomena Wallace and Ewald call "mutuality." This dissertation aims to discover what similarities those effective practices possess that, hopefully, can be modified to fit other teaching contexts and ultimately reduce student resistance.

There are many benefits to understanding how mutuality is enacted. Beyond the obvious gain in contributing to a corpus of effective teaching practices, sharing narratives of successful moments in teaching gives others the opportunity to reflect on and modify their behaviors in order to create more humane connections with their students. For instance, an integral part of mutuality is the acceptance of resistance from students with the intention of negotiating the causes of that resistance. How often do we hear teachers commiserate in the lounge over a disobedient student, often without exploring the reasons for that disobedience? How often do we compete with other teachers by retelling students' excuses for handing in work late without reflecting on the purpose and construction of what we've assigned? Too often we frame these discussions as student

deficiency. The problem lies in the student, never within the teacher. While not all instances of student resistance will be rooted in passive rejection of course curricula, expressions of resistance (i.e., handing in work late, repeated absences, refusal to participate, choosing not to read for class, surface apathy) are easier to engage, uncover, and remedy when approached through respectful dialogue. Understanding where resistance originates and how teachers can overcome it will lead to more productive students and more fulfilling classroom interactions. Taking this view implies that the problem of resistance is neither out there nor within. Rather, resistance is a mutual concern.

When mutuality is achieved in and out of the classroom as students see college as a safe place where they are both socially and academically supported by those with power, it is commonly believed that student retention will increase. When interpersonal communication develops relationships between teachers and students, when students feel that they are no longer attending class for a degree, for credit, or as a requirement for a future career, they can begin to see their experiences in college as more than just the construction of knowledge, but as the construction of relationships that contribute to their sense of self, their sense of purpose, and their growth as academics. When teachers view their purpose as more than the replication of disciplinary information and instead see teaching as an opportunity to celebrate the inherent humanity of the learning environment, resistance may be overcome.

Additionally, this dissertation aims to theorize the practice of mutuality in order to be applicable to other fields beyond composition. Wallace and Ewald claim that mutuality is especially applicable to rhetoric and composition classrooms in that the uses

of language and rhetoric create an awareness of discourse and how discourse contributes to reified power structures and that "the argument for the centrality of rhetoric in the academy matches an assumption that seems basic to classroom teaching: simply put, there is an intimate connection between language and knowledge making" (2000 p. 1). Composition, of course, is not limited to using Freire's banking concept and instead may find themes and outlets through mutuality to engage students while simultaneously staying true to the demands of the discipline. In discussing new speech genres, which I'll discuss later, Wallace and Ewald assert that "there is neither a single definitive description of new speech genres for alternative pedagogy nor one model for others to follow" (2000 p. 35). However, if we apply this lack of definitive applicability to alternative pedagogy as a whole, there should, hopefully, be patterns that emerge that may bring us closer to a workable definition or model that, with modification, can be contextualized to a specific writing course.

Research Questions

1. What kinds of dialogue (discussion and written response) help teachers achieve mutuality?
2. What kinds of writing assignments help teachers achieve mutuality?
3. How do we know when mutuality is present, and once achieved, does mutuality overcome student resistance?

Operational Definitions

The concept of mutuality as a component of critical pedagogy can be seen as an attempt on the part of teachers to create mutually respectful relationships with their students. Mutuality, like much of critical pedagogy, is easier to write about than to

accomplish. Wallace and Ewald's definition of *mutuality* in *Mutuality in the Rhetoric and Composition Classroom* "can be understood as teachers and students sharing the potential to adopt a range of subject positions and to establish reciprocal discourse relations as they negotiate meaning in the classroom" in order to reach the goals of a critical pedagogy (2000 p. 3). Their definition implies a fluidity of identity necessary to adopt that range of positions, one that I'll argue requires a continually maintained relationship between teachers and students. In addition to Wallace and Ewald's definition, I choose to define/refine mutuality as *the practice of teachers treating their students as teachers while simultaneously viewing themselves as students*, or to put it as Freire articulates it, "teacher-student with student-teachers" such that "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (2008 p. 80). Shifting these relationships requires a dismantling and repositioning of authority structures in the classroom wherein teachers genuinely believe that they can learn from their students, a learning that goes beyond the trite platitudes that can accompany superficial abdications of power. For mutuality to be genuine, teachers must also see all students, from undergraduate basic-writing students to published doctoral candidates, as fully capable of contributing to any endeavor. Disciplinary demands and curricular constraints can remain responsibly attended with mutuality.

Practicing mutuality does not require teachers to relinquish all authority, nor does it give students free reign of the class. After I asked students in a research writing class when their paper should be due, one student replied, "You're the teacher, you make the rules." I explained that I wanted them to have a say in those rules, to which the same

student said, “If *we* made all the rules, it would be chaos.” My response, I believe, accurately summarizes mutuality in practice—“I’m not asking you to make *all* the rules,” I said, “but I do want your say in making the rules that affect all of us.” Mutuality asks teachers to account for students’ subjective lived realities in crafting the rules on the assumption that students will bring needed perspectives that must be accounted for dynamically.

Mutuality practices fall under the larger category of *critical pedagogy*, which, according to Richard Miller, tends to break down when we examine the true intentions of students who have been exposed to an overt politicization of the classroom without regard for their opinions. For Miller, teachers who promote liberation and freedom for their students often under the guise of relinquishing educational authority fail to do so accurately by falsely attempting to hide their institutional positions (Reynolds, 1998), but the “students, however, never forget where they are, no matter how carefully we arrange the desks in the classroom, how casually we dress, how open we are to disagreement, how politely we respond to their journal entries, their papers, their portfolios. They don’t forget; we often do” (1998 p. 18). Critical pedagogy, liberation, consciousness-raising, the honest questioning of power, and student empowerment are all slippery, tricky, and elusive goals in a composition classroom. Part of the purpose of this dissertation is to discover what common themes of practice and interaction are present among effective critical pedagogues.

There seems to be a disconnect, however, between teachers who extol the virtues of Freire and Giroux, claiming to practice critical pedagogy though they, as Donald Macedo writes in the introduction to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th*

Anniversary Edition, "often sloganize Freire by straitjacketing his revolutionary politics to an empty cliché of the dialogical method" (2000 p. 17). Dialogue is not enough. However, a modified use of dialogue, what Wallace and Ewald (2000) call *alternative speech genres*, consists of three parts:

> 1. Students must have "more than their traditional one-third of conversation turns in a classroom discussion and…[must be able to]…speak in ways other than direct responses to teachers' inquiries." (p. 34)
> 2. Students and teachers must "share control of basic classroom tasks and the initiation and elaboration of topics." (p. 34)
> 3. "[T]here must be indications of reciprocity in evaluation. If students' contributions remain the focus of the majority of the evaluative discourse moves, then students will quickly learn that the game has not really changed that much." (p. 34)

Enacting alternative speech genres and critical pedagogy in the classroom cannot simply be the act of raising awareness in students of how power structures affect their lives, of how students implicitly reinforce those power structures, and of how language can be used to dismantle those power structures. The practice of a truly liberating critical pedagogy, according to Freire, requires "trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiqués, monologues, and instructions" (2008 p. 66). The practice of critical pedagogy, then, is in need of critical reevaluation (Gorzelsky, 2009 p. 64).

Another stated purpose of critical pedagogy involves the accommodation of student agency as part of a course's structure and function. *Student agency*, commonly seen as the ability of a student to exercise authority with a teacher, is further complicated when incorporating mutuality. Wallace and Ewald make an important distinction between student agency and *interpretive agency*. They consider student agency as the freedoms available to a student including the choice of how class speech is conducted, what topics will be written about and who is given authority in the classroom (including when a research paper is due), while interpretive agency consists of the subjective evaluation of knowledge created by students as they make meaning (2000 p. 102). To fully respect one type of agency requires us to respect the other. We may allow students to choose the topics of their writing assignments, but without acknowledging the subjective positions from which they make those choices or how their backgrounds shape their ideas and instead steer students toward a deceptively objective position we had in mind from the beginning removes the possibility of students critically evaluating their choices. The interpretive agency of the student, what might arguably be considered the actual mechanics of thinking, must be invited by teachers if students are to feel welcome in expressing their ideas and is, according to Wallace & Ewald, "the first step in breaking the teacher-as-subject and student-as-object roles of traditional education" (2000 p. 100). The trouble and necessity with this, as Wallace and Ewald explain, is that, "…the expression of students' interpretive agency must be, at least to some degree, uncontrollable by the teacher and will be perhaps dangerous at times" (2000 p. 100). Traditional teaching practices may shun this danger, but mutuality welcomes it as it encourages students to express themselves.

When those ideas expressed by students become a source of conflict, *resistance* ensues. Counterintuitive to what we might feel, conflict and resistance are useful and necessary elements of the learning process. In reference to mutuality, resistance becomes a productive way for students to voice objections and gain power through the use of language. Teachers aiming to achieve mutuality should be encouraged to entertain those objections to show how "responding to oppositional discourses becomes not only the *teacher's* problem when evaluating papers or leading discussions, but also *each participant's* problem when responding to others in the class" (2000 p. 16). Resistance, then, flows not only from students to teachers, but also from teachers to students and reciprocally between students. Robert Brookes gives us another way to look at resistance with his adaptation of the sociological concept of underlife, claiming that "people are assumed to attempt to develop the best defensible portrait for themselves in social interactions" (2002 p. 41). The portrait of resistant students may first appear disruptive, problematic, and unproductive to class, and while students may have those intentions in mind, it is these points of conflict that, if handled appropriately, can lead to discussions that not only show students how their opinions are valuable as members of their learning community, but also as a strengthening source of feedback to a course's architecture. Students who complain about the length of a paper or the quantity of reading required on a syllabus express a concern that requires a response. Responding to an objection such as a burdensome work-load provides teachers with an opportunity to either justify their pedagogy, often hidden in the cracks and undisclosed to students, or to realize that the page length of the final paper may in fact be too much for the purpose of the class. This study argues that mutuality is a powerful tool in the negotiation of contextualized student

resistance. If we see resistance as a context-constructed projection of identity, as Brookes suggests, then acknowledging resistance is a way to acknowledge the interpretive agency of the student. Also, if resistance, when thoughtfully engaged, allows teachers to renegotiate power with students, then each outburst or apathetic shrug becomes a chance to open a potentially productive dialogue.

Significance of the Study

We seem to be chasing last semester's students when we design a course. Curriculum meetings discuss which assignments to use, which books to adopt, which practices to employ, but even successful meetings are still chasing the past. Teachers in curriculum meetings ask each other how to engage students next semester in a summarizing essay, because this semester's students felt the assignment was unnecessary. We remove the public speaking component of a research project for the next semester, unsure why our morning students detested the speeches while our afternoon group's presentations were mature and impressive. When we chase the past, we deny the context of the present. Next semester's students have an entirely different and wholly unique set of experiences, backgrounds, skills, and needs. Assuming the population of a school is stable enough to implement general changes to a course, problem-posing education would insist that such generalizing may neglect the unique contexts of the new students. In short, critical pedagogy must *reinvent itself* at the start of each semester. Mutuality offers a theoretical opportunity to contextualize each semester's assignments and interactions through problem-posing education for teachers to reset their understanding with each new class.

This study is necessary because student populations, departmental constrictions, and university settings are constantly shifting, forcing teachers to routinely reinvent their practice in order to adapt. Failure to do so can lead to teacher burn-out wherein experience is overshadowed by stagnant practice. Adaptation is necessary in the treatment of students because how we express respect today may not be acceptable tomorrow with another person. We would like to believe that the human condition is constant enough that we can discuss the logistics of student-treatment as though a student is a student is a student. Discourse that homogenizes students, however, paves the way for homogenized curriculums, which in turn decontextualize classrooms and assume a standard student for a standard set of learning outcomes. An understanding of mutuality offers a means by which teachers can keep up with and welcome change.

Teachers cannot simply promote the liberating power of language as a means toward Freirian liberation while concealing the power of their own teaching authority. A complete abdication of authority, however, can prove equally unhelpful as a completely student-centered, anarchistic classroom in which students are given free reign would prove equally difficult. We need a balance of power, one that refuses to hide behind insincere questions and cunning performance plays, and one that, according to Patrick Bizzaro, "must overcome the tendency to give in to time-worn and out-moded arguments of authority-by-privilege, since the most effective approach to a student text will probably require us to employ critical methods we do not ordinarily apply to our own works" (1993 p. 8). Kumaravadivelu addresses this concern when he speaks of how students' "unwillingness to prepare for the class and to participate in class discussions appeared to me to be a form of passive resistance" (2001 qtd. in Pennycook p. 129). I've

often heard teachers complain about students who show up late to class, hand in late work, and generally refuse to engage with the course material, materials that have been specifically designed by the complaining critical pedagogue to promote an understanding of the means of resistance. In those cases, we tell students to question authority, so long as it's not *our* authority. Robert Brookes' concept of *underlife*, in which students craft identities for themselves that best fit the academic situation, may be misinterpreted as ignoring disruptions or disengagement. Brookes counters this, telling us that "no matter how jokingly, students are actively connecting ideas in the classroom to their own lives outside the classroom, and are discovering ways in which classroom knowledge seems useful even when (or especially when) it isn't used for classroom purposes" (2002 p. 43). One of the main goals of mutuality, then, is to reduce or understand student resistance that is commonly seen as counterproductive but may instead be a result of a poor relationship.

In addition to managing student resistance, a pedagogy focused on mutuality attempts to increase student agency. In her analysis of Wallace and Ewald, Gwen Gorzelsky claims that "valuing students' agency as interpreters of texts and ideas" (2009 p. 65) is of primary importance in achieving mutuality. While this can be seen most clearly in classroom discussions and in the ways teachers handle dialogue with their students, virtually all levels of instruction and interaction present opportunities for students to exercise their agency, interpretive or otherwise. Classroom discussions, assignments, assessment, peer relationships, teacher-student conferences—each step taken by a teacher as part of a course design— has an effect on students and holds potential for establishing mutual discourse. And every effect on students, every

interaction, presents another opportunity to build a relationship, to increase agency, to understand resistance, and to foster mutual respect.

Lastly, students are not the only beneficiaries of a greater understanding of mutuality. Teachers' job satisfaction increases as classes become more productive and as more humane interactions are established with students (Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008) . If education is meant to be a transforming experience, positive in how it expands our humanity, strengthens our communication, reinforces democracy, etc., then viewing students as capable contributors to academic discourse places teachers in the role of learner, thereby allowing them to enter dialogue with their students.

Scope and Limitations to the Study

The context for this study creates inherent limitations to the generalizing and theorizing nature of this dissertation. The two classes I observed were taught by a tenured and a temporary faculty to observe the distinction in the administrative freedoms each was allowed in the construction of their courses. Wallace and Ewald are sympathetic to this point, acknowledging it in their own study: "Certainly, those of us who teach writing and rhetoric courses as tenure-line faculty (or who prepare graduate students to do so) often have more freedom to design the kinds of courses that we see fit without the immediate pressure of any formal outcome assessment" (2000 p. 26). Enacting the kinds of alternative pedagogy, or even attempting to experiment with classroom practices beyond what department standards impose, is difficult for non-tenured instructors who may be forced into traditional modes of teacher-centered class structures by departmentally-established curricula.

Another limitation rests in the nature of being a participant-observer. This study is not attempting to see how mutuality occurs in natural settings, but is concerned with how mutuality can be achieved, how teachers and students are aware of such relationships, and how those relationships affect/are affected by student resistance. That I will be participating in the daily classes of the courses I observe changes the environment I am studying, and this may change what normally would occur in these classes. Teachers may react differently knowing their responses may find their way into these pages. Students may adopt altered identities knowing that what I observe in class as well as their participation in focus groups will be recorded. Additionally, since my participants will be aware of the scope of the study, knowing that I will be examining critical uses of pedagogy, course architecture may be changed. Similarly, I discussed with students the concerns of mutuality—namely, power, authority, agency, resistance, etc.—and this awareness might heighten their reactions to classroom interactions. However, since the study focuses on *how* the phenomena of mutuality can be achieved and not on how mutuality is *naturally* enacted, my intrusion in the research site does not detract from the study. I look at my participation in these courses as an alchemist would during an experiment: I am not hoping to catch lead spontaneously transforming into gold on its own; I am actively seeking the change and observing the results. I would add that such intrusion, consisting of my willingness to participate in classes, disclosing the purpose and scope of the study to the participants, and soliciting their input throughout the semester with focus groups and interviews represents an attempt to create mutuality within the study and that if I withheld information from participants under the guise of scientific objectivity and neutrality, I would be disconnecting myself from the research

environment. An inclusive dialogue involving the methodology of this study (to be discussed further in chapter 3) is a fitting component of what mutuality strives for.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter 1 sets the stage for the discussion that follows, introducing the core concepts of mutuality, critical pedagogy, resistance, and student interpretive agency. Chapter 2 orients the reader to the ongoing conversation regarding critical pedagogy practices, their origins, and justifications. Critical pedagogy practiced and examined in different contexts will be examined with the intention of drawing parallels between these cases and the present study. Mutuality as a concept will be further defined within the context of this study, as well as the three main focal points of Wallace and Ewald's study – course architecture, resistance, and interpretive agency. Chapter 3 will discuss the context of the study and will explain how data was collected during class observations, including the brief mini-interviews held with teachers after each class, and the focus groups that were conducted with students. This chapter will also explain why these methods of data collection were used and how they appropriately answer the research questions listed above. Chapter 4 will discuss the results of those observations, focus groups, and interviews. Chapter 5 theorizes the common themes between the classes observed, noting moments of effective teaching and practice. This chapter will also discuss the future of mutuality pedagogy and additional paths that research should take.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

> The separation of objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when analyzing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism. On the other hand, the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality. Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship. (Freire, 2008 p. 50)

Critical Pedagogy, Mutuality, and Respect

A discussion of critical pedagogy, of which mutuality is firmly rooted, would be sorely lacking without initial grounding in Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which outlines the levels of power in the classroom and the ways that teaching can either humanize or dehumanize the teaching subject through the use of that power. Freire's views on the subjectivity and objectivity of teaching subjects harmonize with a view of pedagogy that rests on a spectrum between liberation and repression.

Freire argues against education that repressively prohibits students from naming their world. For Freire, teaching that is based on prescription "represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness" (2008 p. 47) and is dehumanizing. Teaching that imposes top-down knowledge from teachers to students is a kind of linguistic violence, a form of oppression, and a means by which dominant ideologies (held either by teacher/administration/curriculum) are imposed,

reinforced, and maintained. While mutuality is considered a critical pedagogy for its concern with power structures and democratic participation, it should not be pigeonholed as an enforcer of a liberal political agenda that many students will reject as a disguised, well-intentioned form of alternative form of oppression.

Mutuality as a function of critical pedagogy, from Freire's perspective, asserts an alternative that relies heavily on dialogue and on the ability of both parties to name, construct, and transform their world. Transformation for Freire, as well as other critical pedagogues like those forwarded by Henry Giroux, comes at a price—critical reflection, which demands students and teachers become uncomfortable with their previously held beliefs such that all topics are open for discussion and evaluation. As I will discuss later, these uncomfortable positions can generate resistance, both on the part of the student and teacher. Acknowledging and discussing that resistance is one of the most productive aspects of mutuality for evaluation. For Giroux (2007), this evaluation allows students "to come to terms with their own power as critical agents; it provides a sphere where the unconditional freedom to question and assert is central" (p. 1) and is similar to what has been described earlier by Wallace & Ewald (2000) as the interpretive agency of the student. Doyle and Singh (2006) explain the connection between language and meaning-making: "[I]ndividuals construct meaning out of language and practice. That is why it is so crucial for teachers to work with, and build on, the knowledge experiences that students have" (p. 27). To make meaning, language must be involved, and if language is involved, so is the human experience that contextualizes that language which is rooted in the lives of students; these points of association are tied together in the teaching context of the composition classroom.

This relationship between language, critical thinking, politics, and meaning-making is what makes critical pedagogy so prevalent in composition and so avoided in what are typically seen as information-delivery disciplines where the critical evaluation of students' lived experiences is thought to be excludable, say, as in a calculus course. Perhaps one of the reasons why that calculus course avoids the practice of critical pedagogy is that critical pedagogy demands an examination of class, race, identity, and political power that some calculus teachers would view as being outside the natural realm of their discipline.[1] Mutuality instead posits the critical aspect of the teaching rely not on the overtly political in the conventional sense (race, class, etc.), but on the hierarchical structures of classroom authority that place students as vessels as opposed to competent discussants.

Critical pedagogy's class, race, and identity concerns relate to mutuality's concern for a more democratic distribution of power as modeled in the classroom, although mutuality is more focused on the learning community, examining how authority and power between teachers and students construct a microcosm of economic, racial, and identity issues in the classroom environment. In this sense, mutuality could be thought of as an evolution of critical pedagogy, localizing critical pedagogy's concerns within the classroom context. The implication here is that mutuality must be present for critical pedagogy to exist. Mutuality is able to explore these critical cultural identity issues should they be organically raised via basic classroom interactions.

Some of the basic functions of the classroom in which power can be shared—the construction of course syllabi, policies, assignments, discussions, written response, and

[1] I would argue that issues of class, race, identity, and power are within the realm of *all* disciplines by examining the ways knowledge in those disciplines is created, who uses that information once accepted, and toward what ends.

evaluation—require a restructuring of the typical student/teacher relationship which commonly defaults to the teacher's authority as a distributor of guarded knowledge. The co-construction of these basic class functions instead acknowledges the student as an equal subject position by inviting feedback as these class functions are both created and implemented. In other words, a pedagogy based on mutuality will see teachers and students discussing these class functions as an open-ended dialogue where all parties seek mutual and cooperative gains.

Goals of Mutuality

Mutuality's goal is to essentially redefine the standard relationship between teacher and student—elder commands tyro—to a relationship of peer support. I choose to use Wallace & Ewald's definition of mutuality in that the essential goal is the treatment of the student-teacher relationship as an equal subject position. For teachers, this requires the dismantling of years of pedagogical tradition and the supplanting of the ego in favor of democratic participation. For students, this requires accepting the uncertainty that arises when they are asked to make decisions, decisions that place them at the center of their educations. These goals are difficult but not impossible.

Students hopefully benefit from an appropriately practiced mutuality-based classroom in that the independence of the thinker—a thinker who is capable of critically evaluating and generating knowledge—is a valued member of the group; at least as far as western models of education are concerned. Students from non-western cultures that place little emphasis on standing out, questioning accepted truths, or resisting centers of authority may find difficulty in participating in the mutuality-based classroom, perhaps to the point of paralysis. I should note, then, that these students may choose to engage with

course architecture, discussions, and assignments in ways that may *seem* resistant because of their *non-resistance*. Because non-western definitions of respect may require compliance with authority, students that are comfortable with authoritative learning who have been trained to accept education as a passive act may simply nod in agreement when they'd prefer to question.

Mutuality works for teachers in that conceding part of their authority to students opens the doors to a more honest conduit of communication regarding their teaching. When teachers respect the feedback of students *during* the process as opposed to *only* soliciting feedback through end-of-semester evaluations, teachers are able to reevaluate their practices on-the-fly, possibly rearranging assignments and syllabi as needed. This process can be exhausting. Creating a community where students feel safe enough to engage in professional critique of their education can increase resistance in ways that many teachers find uncomfortable. Teachers new to mutuality may have difficulty accepting that their teaching is not functioning as intended, that they talk too much or too little, that their questions are leading or misleading, that students don't appreciate their politicizing of the classroom or their performative attempts at neutrality, that they are, in short, possibly not doing the job they thought they were. However difficult the short-term ego-swallowing may be, I assert that mutuality works for teachers in the long-term in that, as with all practiced skills, listening/accepting/responding to students' opinions gets easier; mutuality creates a stronger bond of mutual respect, smoother classes, and effective practices.

As mutuality relates to teacher development, experience, and expertise, the responses of newer/younger teachers with mutuality might range from a natural

acceptance of mutuality's goals to a self-defensive rejection. Beginning teachers introduced to mutuality may be able to relate their own lack of professional experience to the learning taking place in their classes. The struggles of first-year students with the new skill of college writing run parallel to struggles of fledgling graduates practicing the new art of teaching. These new teachers may modify their architecture, the way they interact, and the way they handle conflict differently when they are made aware of everyone's aligned goals.

Alternatively, beginning teachers who find themselves unsure of their authority or expertise with their subject may react defensively to student-inclusion as a way to reinforce their newfound position and save face by adopting a more discipline-heavy pedagogy which may result in "Because I said so" moments. Mutuality training for these teachers may initially be difficult as we ask them to step away from the combative stance regarding their students' abilities toward one of cooperation. Their resistance to mutuality, I would suggest, should be handled the same way student resistance is negotiated, which I'll discuss in greater detail later. And despite what media archetypes like John Houseman's character in the *Paper Chase* may have shown us, student discipline through obedience is not the standard by which we judge good teachers. There are worse things for teachers than admitting ignorance or changing their minds when confronted with difficult questions.

Professionally established teachers, those with tenure, or award-winning pedagogues may similarly resist mutuality under the argument that everything is working fine. These teachers, once settled into a safe routine, need to realize that teaching, if it is to be transformative, can never be safe and should always be a challenge for everyone

involved. I imagine these teachers who may see little gain in shifting their practices will be so entrenched in their beliefs that any deviation will be met with resistance. I would remind them that their students change each semester in both profound and subtle ways; course architecture that denies these changes a specific and adaptable context, however effective, might simply reproduce the teacher's ideal student instead of allowing each student the space to grow in ways that make sense to the individual.

On a practical level, mutuality increases teacher engagement with the ideas of students, showing teachers that those students, while new to the academy and its rules, bring with them a range of subjective experiences that can contribute to a body of socially constructed knowledge. In short, mutuality helps teachers understand that they can learn from their students—and not superficially as a sentimentalized proverb, "I teach them, but I like to think they teach me." This practical knowledge comes when teachers, through assignments and discussions, solicit those background subjective experiences as a way of making meaning through academic work. Learning how my students hunt or select the right tuxedo for customers or what competitive cheerleading means or how drug use has affected their families—reading and discussing all of these does more than increase my knowledge of trivia— brings me closer to their named world and helps me understand them, connect with them, communicate with them on a level beyond the standard student-teacher relationship.

I believe mutuality works effectively toward these described ends because I've been on each side—first as an unmotivated undergraduate student in traditional authoritative classes, then in mutually respectful classes, then as a motivated graduate student in both kinds of classes, then as a fledgling teacher operating as an authoritative

teacher, and now as a respectfully-aware teacher attempting to motivate others. The prodigal student returns, so to speak. I *was* the student I now try to reach. As I'll discuss further in chapter three, my own experiences using mutuality to overcome resistance have shown, thus far, that mutuality is an effective method, although by no means a magic bullet. Acknowledging the positions I've worked through in academic evolution has given me a perspective on how seemingly disinterested students respond to an education we expect them to navigate as we shift through our roles.

The roles of teachers and students are in constant flux; teachers can act as guides, sages, moderators, secretaries, hosts, parents, friends, dictators, politicians, poets, preachers, ideologues, wranglers, lion tamers, comedians, performers, etc. while students can act as sponges, respondents, congregants, puppets, inmates, children, friends, guests, an audience, a chorus, etc., all the while shifting between sets, characters, and relationships as the environment demands. Perumal (2008) rightly insists that because these role shifts are so common, student resistance is inevitable as increasingly complex demands are placed on their classroom identities. When they aren't sure what role is expected of them, they're struck with a kind of identity paralysis that may manifest as resistance. The typical relationship in a banking classroom, one in which the student absorbs information delivered by an authoritative teacher who is seen by both parties as being the only one with the power to create knowledge, limits teaching potential, increases demands on students and therefore, increases student resistance. One important benefit of mutuality theory is a decrease in student resistance by broadening the potential set of relationships available to teachers and students not commonly seen in the banking

relationship. While these shifts still place challenging demands on students, mutuality allows those shifts to take place on the students' terms.

Instead of looking at critical pedagogy through this typical student-to-teacher relationship, scholars have recently approached the dynamics of teaching using relationships that are common to life outside the classroom, but alternative when applied to teaching. Joanne and Leonard Podis's *College English* article "Pedagogical *In Loco Parentis*: Reflecting on Power and Parental Authority in the Writing Classroom" shows how teachers can adopt a parental role in their teaching. *In loco parentis,* or, "in place of the parent," constitutes a conscious decision on the part of administrators and faculty to operate as parents to their students, whether the students' parents have sanctioned this role or not, and is "traditionally focused on regulating curfews, dormitory visitations, and campus dress codes" (2007 p. 122), though Podis and Podis extend the idea further to the teacher-student relationship. The controversy surrounding the concept is whether or not teachers have the right, the obligation, or the ability to function, in whatever capacity, as parents to their students. Whether we acknowledge our role as temporary substitute parents or not, our teaching methods constitute a type of parenting that can be classified, according to Podis and Podis, as either patriarchal and authority-driven, feminist and nurturing, or some combination of the two. Ultimately, Podis and Podis advocate for the third hybrid teaching approach which includes "respectful welcoming, democratic mentoring, and exemplary influence" (2007 p. 138) as key elements. I will now describe those elements and show how they are related to and interact with our previous conception of mutuality.

The three elements of Podis and Podis's parental metaphor—respectful welcoming, democratic mentoring, and exemplary influence—reinforce longstanding characteristics of critical pedagogy, which, I'll argue, is ultimately rooted in a concern for mutual respect. Respectful welcoming, described by Podis and Podis as "listen[ing] carefully to students as individuals" (2007 p. 136) can take shape through the speech genres described by Wallace and Ewald. Respectful mentoring can also be achieved through the construction of supportive assignments, what Wallace and Ewald refer to as the reconceptualization of course architecture. Assignments that are, in part, constructed *with* students instead of *for* students, "student-initiated writing projects," (2007 p. 136) according to Podis and Podis, are one way to promote respectful welcoming, which is necessary for the second component of the *in loco parentis* prescription—democratic mentoring. We may argue that *all* teaching is a form of mentoring, but Podis and Podis distinguish a pedagogy of parental mentoring as a process in which "wisdom, guidance, and authority" (2007 p. 136) are no longer the sole property of the teacher to be passed on to the student, but instead, are shared reciprocally. To connect this to our previous concept of mutuality, we can see democratic mentoring as being linked with students' interpretive agency because without the sincere acceptance on the part of teachers that their students can contribute to knowledge, a two-way mentoring relationship cannot be established. The third category of Podis and Podis's parental model consists of what they call *exemplary influence*, which asks teachers not only to practice what they teach, but to exemplify their writing for their students. Podis and Podis rightly claim:

> Writing teachers who write and who teach writing from a sense of their own immediate struggles…have the power to influence and motivate their students in a

> way that is likely to elude traditional *in loco parentis* instructors who rely on the power of their parental positions to cow their charges into compliance with the rules and regulations of their composition or English studies classes. (2007 p.137)

We can show exemplary influence by explaining to students our own trouble with writing, our successes *and* our failures. In my own teaching, I'll often show my classes a poor paper I wrote as an undergraduate. The paper is liberally decorated with critical comments and branded with a C- on the final page. My intention when I pass this paper around is to show them that writing is difficult for everyone, that no one is born writing perfectly, and that if the author of that C- drivel on Kate Chopin is now teaching them how to write well, there is hope for everyone.

Another alternative relationship explored as a focus for critical pedagogy and, indirectly, mutuality, comes from the guest-host relationship described in Janis Haswell et al.'s "Hospitality in College Composition Courses," in which the authors look to cultural traditions of hospitality (Homeric, Judeo-Christian, and Nomadic) and apply them to composition instruction. Haswell et al. "treat hospitality not as a theory but as a social or cultural praxis—complex, tacit, risky, and treacherous, therefore in need of analysis, conscientization, and caution," (2009 p.708). Hospitality becomes more than bringing in cookies for your students. Using three cultures as models for hospitality, we can see how the metaphor can be applied to the classroom. Thinking of hospitality as a metaphor for composition instruction is useful because it fosters an exchange of gifts for bonding between parties; in the case of composition, these exchanges can come in the form of discussion or written information. Thinking of students as temporary travelers who visit us for fifteen weeks to share knowledge is another way to establish mutual

respect, a respect that Haswell et al. examine through the cultural lenses of Homeric, Judeo-Christian, and Arabic traditions. Haswell et al. delineate the three versions of hospitality, the third of which is particularly useful in defining and practicing mutuality:

- In Homeric culture, "hospitality is a ceremony helping bind temporary allies against a common enemy" (2009 p. 712).
- In Judeo Christian culture, "hospitality is a spiritual and radical equality lacking in Homeric hospitality: no soul is less than any other in the eyes of the Lord" (2009 p. 713).
- In nomadic culture, "information is exchanged, helpful in each other's future wanderings, a form of gift exchange. The essential difference from Homeric and biblical hospitalities is that the status of the nomad host and nomad guest is more easily reversed" (2009 p. 713).

The exchange of positions in nomadic hospitality directly mirrors the basic definition of mutuality proposed by Wallace and Ewald, namely, the practice of establishing equal subject positions between teachers and students. A similar sentiment is expressed by Haswell et al. when they write, "Essential to the transformation is a single axiom: classroom practices will be pursued *because* they are hospitable, not hospitality will be allowed *if* it supports classroom practices" (2009 p. 718).

Classroom Discussion

> [T]rue dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not

> separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved (Freire, 2008 p. 92).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be using Freire's concept of dialogue as it applies to classroom discussion, though this limiting application should not be taken as a rejection of the complexity of dialogue in relation to meaning-making as an intellectual enterprise outside the classroom. The crux of Freire's critical pedagogy and use of dialogue relies on what he calls an authentic education, which "is not carried on by 'A' *for* 'B' or by 'A' *about* 'B,' but rather by 'A' *with* 'B,' mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it" (2008 p. 93). Authentic education requires a simultaneous acceptance of our knowledge's deficiency and the faith that both parties are capable of contributing equally to that knowledge, a faith that both groups, though separated by necessary distinction, can benefit through mutual cooperation of intellectual inquiry.

One well-established model of intellectual inquiry, namely the Socratic method, can show us a way of viewing mutuality for types of classroom dialogue, what Wallace and Ewald call *speech genres*. What I refer to here as *Socratic mutuality* attempts to cross Plato's dialectic with Freire's conception of dialogue by emphasizing the use of perpetual dialogue as a primary vehicle of inquiry and the acceptance of our own ignorance played out through skepticism. Establishing equal subject positions means we are constantly shifting between the roles of teacher and student. When accepted naively, Socrates offers a great example of someone who was simultaneously teacher and student, of someone who genuinely sought answers to difficult questions and whose only intellectual confidence lay in asserting his ignorance. When taken skeptically, however, the Socratic

tradition has teachers act, at best, with deceptive ignorance, and at worst, with smug condescension. Karen Kopleson approaches this perceived dilemma by viewing classroom dialogue in composition instruction as a cunning performance in neutrality that removes the teacher's opinion from the discussion, thus allowing students to focus on their own engagement with course content (2003 p. 126). My assertion regarding Socrates' methods, as well as we might know them from Plato's writings, is that if we were to accept Socrates naively, i.e., to act with a sincere belief that our discussants were teaching us as we teach them, then the Socratic method becomes an immensely usable mode of dialogue as well as a powerful way of looking at our own interactions.

In the post-process era of composition, one that is simultaneously defined by what it rejects of the process movement as much as by what it expands on (Berlin, 1982), Kay Halasek gets to the heart of the matter: "dialogue has replaced writing as a process as a defining metaphor for the discipline" (2003 p. 112). Post-process notions of dialogue are sensitive to the multiple voices that constitute constructed knowledge. Those multiple voices can take the form of speech or writing. *Perpetual dialogue*, as I define it throughout this section, is sensitive to these relationships, but is unsatisfied with all utterances, demanding more answers, which leads to more questions, which leads to more unsatisfying utterances. Perpetual dialogue is restless for discussion, hungry for exchange, and addicted to the socialization that occurs during speech acts.

Perpetual dialogue, not to be confused with argument or dialectic, brings us together. For Mikhail Bahktin, the relationship that dialogue creates between speakers is at once linguistically intimate and communally unavoidable because "each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other.' [We give ourselves] verbal shape from

another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which [we] belong" (2001 p. 1215). Perpetual dialogue acknowledges the interactions between speakers as a means to building interconnectedness within a community. This interconnectedness occurs because dialogue is not only a tool to promote critical thinking, but also an important factor in our socialization. Kenneth Bruffee's "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind" makes this function of socialization explicit, telling us "The first steps to learning to think better, therefore, are learning to converse better and learning to establish and maintain the sorts of social context, the sorts of community life, that foster the sorts of conversation members of the community value" (2003 p. 421). Spoken dialogue or written dialogue that retreats from conversation and, therefore, socialization, devolves into monologue and is disconnected from society (Reilly, 2011). And while monologue may have its uses as an intellectual exercise, it does little to further the conversation or our human connection. In short, we are less human when we ignore the social factors attending conversation. Perpetual dialogue views conversation and writing as ongoing and never-ending.

The grand perpetual dialogue is not only conducted through spoken conversation, but also through writing. Post-process notions of dialogue have emphasized the communality of writing, as described by Marilyn Cooper in "The Ecology of Writing:"

> The system of interpersonal interactions is the means by which writers regulate their access to one another. Two determinants of the nature of a writer's interactions with others are intimacy, a measure of closeness based on any similarity seen to be relevant—kinship, religion, occupation; and power, a

> measure of the degree to which a writer can control the action of others. (2006 p. 189)

We come to know categories of intimacy through our relationships, relationships that are brought into focus through our uses of language. Issues of power that separate and marginalize are unavoidable, but treatable. Perpetual dialogue in mutuality attends to power by inviting an attitude that imagines all discussion members as both simultaneously students and teachers. This relationship continually shifts based on who is currently making an utterance. When others speak, we treat them as teachers and assume for ourselves the role of student. When others write, we treat their work as though written by a teacher and assume for ourselves the role of student. This does not, however, prevent us from exercising our institutionally granted authority in commenting on student writing or entering grades at the end of the semester. The goal here is not to develop an *illusion* that we are equals, but to empathize with our students as though we were *their* students. If we embrace this, with practice, the relationship between teacher and student blurs the longer the dialogue lasts; the shifting of positions becomes internalized and we acknowledge the potential of all discussants as intellectual authorities equal to our own.

In the classroom, the notion of perpetual dialogue in writing has already been used for decades. Vandenberg et al.'s critical introduction of *Relations, Locations, and Positions* explains that "A commitment to the notion that writing is always the product of a dialogue with self and others—a process—came to animate a particular conception of writing process; the 'social turn' seemed to underscore the value of prewriting, drafting, and revising by encouraging students to do these activities together" (2006 p. 3). Peer review workshops, then, which will be discussed further in future chapters, contribute to

the exchange of ideas, to a sense of community, and to dialogue. Another look at Bruffee shows how writing "always has its roots deep in the acquired ability to carry on the social symbolic exchange we call conversation" (2003 p. 422). Writing is not monologue if it is read because the written word speaks to us, awaiting our response through comment, review, and response. Donald Murray offers a suggestion as to *how* we can get students to participate in the written dialogue of drafting, revising, and peer review: "First by shutting up. When you are talking [they aren't] writing. And you don't learn a process by talking about it, but by doing it" (2003 p. 5), a sentiment echoed by James Paul Gee (1989 p. 19). I should distinguish here that perpetual dialogue does not mean perpetual chatter, and in that regard, Murray is right in telling teachers to shut up—let students do the talking/writing, for they are fully capable. However, perpetual dialogue takes the position that the talking/writing *is* the *doing*, insofar as we are able to develop our ideas through interaction.

Writing that is sensitive to mutuality is not dialectical in a binary sense of *either/or*, but dialogic in the inclusive sense of *both/and*; speakers do not work to convince or persuade, but to explore and discover. Though by the nature of written rhetoric it may be unavoidable to persuade or have elements of persuasion, the ultimate goal of writing in a classroom sensitive to mutuality should not be persuasion or argument, which Patricia Bizzell, in discussing the traditional western academic persona of which Socrates fits, says, "Not surprisingly, the persona is argumentative, favoring debate, believing that if we are going to find out whether something is true or good or beautiful, the only way we will do that is by arguing for opposing views of it, to see who wins. In this view, only debate can produce knowledge" (2006 p. 73). Viewing dialogue

as a competition, one in which victory is seen as swaying opinion, is incompatible with mutuality because it assumes a combative stance regarding knowledge as a commodity—rightness and truth are seen as objects to be wrestled from opponents (Lynch, George, & Cooper, 1997). Ann Berthoff, referring to Socrates, says, "What must supplant the pedagogy of exhortation is a 'pedagogy of knowing' because 'unless and until the mind of the learner is engaged, no meaning will be made, no knowledge can be won'" (2003 p. 330). If we attempt to engage the mind of the learner through a paradigm of attack and defense, of victory and defeat, then the learner is conditioned to see understanding as a binary and the process of reaching understanding as agonistic—"I'm right, therefore, you're wrong." The middle-ground and the layers of common bond are ignored in favor of either/or propositions. Perpetual dialogue, however, is not a competition; the interconnected nature of the writing/speaking community is benefited by the intimacy of dialogue and the understanding that we are brought closer through mutual exploration. No one loses, and everyone wins.

A common trick of Socrates, evidenced in the *Gorgias,* shows Socrates luring his opponents into further discussion via a claim to ignorance: "I assure you I myself do not say what I say as knowing it, but as joining in the search with you; so that if anyone who disputes my statements is found to be on the right track, I shall be the first to agree with him" (p. 125). However sincere Socrates is when he makes these kinds of statements is arguable, but the practice is repeated frequently enough that it has commonly been called the Socratic conceit. Tom Albritton offers a modern example of the Socratic conceit in "Honest Questions and the Teaching of English" by confessing, "I have begun recognizing ways in which I tease my students into the 'right' answers during class

‘discussions,’ ways in which I profess beliefs disguised as facts disguised as rhetorical questions disguised as real questions” (1992 p. 91). Albritton’s article focuses on how teachers can manipulate students during classroom discussions with insincere or leading questions. Insincere questions used in the Socratic conceit posit the teacher as a kind of puppet-master, feigning humility so as to lure opponents into exposing weakness. This is also referred to as the *Socratic game*. In contrast, mutuality asks you to stop playing, to genuinely believe you and your students are searching together as peers. You don’t have to pretend to give up your authority, you don’t have to abandon the rules, you just have to sincerely question everything.

Getting a paycheck doesn’t mean we must remain ignorant of our ignorance. To facilitate our ignorance, to *revel in its possibility*, teachers need to fill a particular role in class dialogue. Rebecca Moore Howard gives the following advice:

> When teachers ask questions to which [they] already know the ‘right’ answers, class discussion is hardly collaborative; instead, students are performers. But when the teacher gets conversation started and then acts as secretary and synthesizer class discussion can be very collaborative, indeed…Avoiding summative remarks like ‘good answer’ constitutes yet another important technique for facilitating whole-class collaborative discussion by casting the teacher’s role as that of facilitator rather than judge. (2001 p.58-59)

We have three roles described above here: secretary, synthesizer, and facilitator. The secretary listens, the synthesizer coordinates, and the facilitator encourages additional responses. I’ll add another to this list—explorer. The explorer relies on students for

support while the group embarks on a cooperative journey. All of these discussion roles (both in speech and writing) are welcome as part of a pedagogy that values mutuality.

Mutuality also requires us to *genuinely believe* that we don't know, to only ask questions that we don't know the answer to and to treat whomever we speak with as partners seeking to understand together. What many teachers fail to recognize during classroom discussions is that most students have very fine-tuned bullshit detectors that naturally resist leading questions. Glenn and Goldthwaite (2008) explicitly argue for leading questions when they tell us, “You must be able to sequence those questions so that potential answers will continue toward the issue you want to explore” (p. 61). To continue the metaphor, the assumption here is that the teacher has already conducted an exploration of the issue, returned with insight, and now seeks to guide students back to the promised land. In mutuality, an issue under exploration must be mutually unexplored. Anything else points toward the arrogance of the teacher whose guarded knowledge is parsed out once students answer questions “correctly” and in the right order. Freire tells us, “Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own?” (2008 p. 90). Without an acceptance of our own ignorance, of the imperfectability of knowledge, the questions we ask in dialogue become less helpful. Albritton gives us a useful guideline in determining which questions should be asked of students: “One kind of question which seems particularly honest is one whose answer neither the teacher nor the students know” (1992 p. 91). If we find it difficult to imagine a useful set of questions to ask, if we can only think of questions that would be entirely too complex to ask our students, if we

assume there is nothing our students know that we do not, then it is here where skepticism can provide clarity by asking us to perpetually reevaluate what we know, value, and believe.

A healthy skepticism in regard to questions is intended to increase the vigor of dialogue as we constantly fine-tune our ideas, ideas that may later be discarded completely if we become too complacent in their acceptance. Laszlo Versényi's book *Socratic Humanism* focuses on the distinction/conflict between Socrates and the Sophists and is helpful here in establishing a rationale for dialogic skepticism. Though Versényi supports the moral objectivism pushed by Socrates, an objectivism that post-process scholars would find incompatible with social constructionism and skepticism, Versényi's rationale for dialogic skepticism provides a justification for the reevaluation of ideas. Versényi admits that "there is hardly a dialogue that does not arrive at solutions to the problems discussed. These conclusions are negated at the end merely to prevent [students] from uncritically accepting them instead of going through reflection that would make them [their] own" (1979 p. 118). If we are truly to believe, as Socrates famously says, that "all we know is that we know nothing," then the answers we settle on today must be questioned again tomorrow. As an example, I begin the first day of each semester asking students "Why learn to write?" I have a vested interest in asking because without consensus between myself and the students on the justification for the course, on why we'll be spending fifteen weeks together, the semester may be fraught with resistance. I find students' answers are similar from class to class, but if I don't ask, I risk falling into a dangerous complacency that I fear will lead my teaching into absolutism. My reasoning behind this is simple—each group of students is different, just as I am a

different teacher in each course. If I don't reopen the discussion, I'm afraid I may settle into an answer that may be contextualized for a previous group of students. Asking each new group of students why we should learn to write allows me to restart my thinking at the beginning of each semester. In mutuality where perpetual dialogue is employed, the answers change, but the questions remain the same.

Once writing teachers have established and internalized the nature of discourse as a cooperative act, we can then turn our attention toward the kinds of written assignments that will mirror those ideals.

Writing Assignments

Before discussing the kinds of assignments that promote mutuality, it's important to first examine the kinds of assignments that, while largely successful in their particular goals, may work against the kind of mutual respect and critical partnerships that mutuality-based assignments will generate. Richard Larson (1994), for instance, has criticized the kind of research assignments that students perceive as "typical," claiming that virtually all writing requires some forms of research, whether that entails critical-self reflection of personal experiences, interviews, observations, or the common methods of academic research, i.e., the scouring of libraries for books, journals, and internet sources. While not arguing against research in itself, Larson makes the case that our initial presentation of an assignment (verbally or in writing) signals to students how writing modes differ in rhetorically fundamental ways that may inadvertently appropriate student meaning. Teachers' presentations of a "research paper," distinguished from, say, a personal narrative or argumentative position paper (both of which, Larson argues, require varied methods of research) that require a distinctly separate set of skills can homogenize

the kinds of writing that students produce. In short, for an assignment to exist as a function of mutuality it is critical that the assignment's presentation include the possibility of student interaction beyond the rote reproduction of standardized modes of discourse solicited by the teacher (Bizzaro, 1994).

Additionally, assignments that include combative metaphors direct students toward a combative rhetorical approach. Anson et. al's *Scenarios for Teaching Writing* (Anson, Graham, Jolliffe, Shapiro, & Smith, 1993) includes a sample argumentative assignment that uses the following phrases as directives, "you must marshal your facts…outmaneuver your opponent…the more ammunition you have…shoot down these objections…your weapons include…" (p. 7), which, when viewed through the lens of mutuality, intimates an attitude of knowledge domination rather than cooperative knowledge construction. An assignment example like this tells us that the language used to describe the assignment as well as the purpose of an assignment can contribute to a student's agency in creating a piece of writing that they can take responsibility for rather than mimicking an ideal imagined by the teacher.

Pedagogy conducive to mutuality practice will incorporate feedback from students before, during, and after an assignment's construction. While some initial assignments in a semester might necessarily be constructed with the teacher alone, this does not limit those teachers from soliciting feedback and input from students as the assignment progresses or after it is assigned. The underlying principle, as explained by Wallace & Ewald, is that "[d]esigning a course architecture that enables mutuality in student writing involves nothing less than overcoming the implicit, pervasive exclusion of the students from knowledge making in traditional American educational practice"

(Wallace & Ewald, p. 69). Assignments that promote mutuality, then, must account for students' inherent ability to contribute to knowledge as well as their ability to strengthen and/or clarify the function of the assignment. As I'll discuss later, one effective way for teachers to value the inherent meaning-making skills of their students is to create assignments *with* their students.

Mutuality-based writing assignments in a composition classroom invite students and teachers to work collaboratively toward a communally created, shared, and recognized set of knowledge. In opposition to a teacher-delivered set of assumptions, the social-constructivist nature of mutuality, as I said earlier, assumes from the first day of class that students are capable of contributing to the knowledge of the course, that they are capable of positively affecting change in course content, and that they are capable of teaching the teacher as well as their peers. The collaborative nature of mutuality is *not* a feel-good escape from traditional teacher responsibilities, though this level of collaboration is often rejected in the academy because, as Rebeccca Moore Howard writes, "the entire educational institution predicates its judgments on individual performance—collaborative writing pedagogies seem foreign and fraught with peril" (2001 p. 62). Collaborative writing, then, is mistakenly viewed as a kind of intellectual welfare in which a workload is disproportionately carried or lessened through cooperation. The roots behind such distrust, as Howard points out, lie in a staunch American individualist mythos that assumes conflict and competition are more productive and challenging for students than cooperative, egalitarian collaboration. In offering her set of guidelines for constructing collaborative assignments, assignments that

I consider compatible with mutuality, Howard shows how such cooperative assignments *are* conflicted, competitive, challenging, and collaborative.

Using perpetual dialogue as a guiding principle for assignment construction can also lead to mutuality. Ira Shor (1992) argues for the contextualizing of student assignments and allowing students to self-select topics. While self-selected topics are not a new idea, they do promote mutuality in that they are rooted in students' relevant experiences and are shown that their choices have academic merit. Students who have been acclimated to the passive acceptance of course content delivered without their input might understandably *mis*understand the purpose of self-selected writing topics and express anxiety over the new choices they are asked to make. Teachers cannot assume that all students are secretly longing for intellectual freedom and that they will jump at the opportunity to exercise that freedom. However, the alternative—in which passive students perpetuate their own educational oppression through inaction—is too great a disservice to ignore. Sensitivity to past experience is necessary, then, to show the value of a students' interpretive agency. This is an outcome of a transformative education.

A stronger source of mutuality in assignment construction would involve a dialogue between students and teachers *before* the paper is assigned. While the teacher may bring an initial idea and structure for the assignment, a skilled and inviting dialogue with and between students as to the purpose, goals, and assessment of such co-authored assignments would show students that their input in the architecture of the course is valuable, that their participation in the academic discussion is valuable, and that their abilities as thinkers in a democratically structured culture is valuable. This is not to say that assignments given to students without student input are oppressive or unfairly

teacher-centered, but assignments that incorporate the suggestions of students can be a powerful step toward mutuality.

Holliway's (2009) examination of how writing assignments allow students to make sense includes the APA's *learner-centered principles* (Lambert & McCombs, 1998), two of which I draw our attention to as being complimentary to mutuality:

1. [S]tudents can constructively engage their past experiences in new learning situations if [the learning situations] are meaningful.
2. Learning occurs best in environments where the students are respected and where positive interpersonal interactions are fostered. (Holliway, p. 448).

These principles can in fact be applied to disciplines beyond the composition classroom, which has generally held a monopoly on personal writing assignments. However, in the composition classroom, writing assignments that are designed to encourage students to draw from their past experiences as a means of creating meaning and accomplishing course goals are conducive to the practices of mutuality theory. These two principles must work in conjunction with each other: a writing assignment that solicits students' personal lived experiences must necessarily be carried out with mutually respectful interactions between teachers and students—teachers who assign such writing are implicitly respecting their students' capacity for knowledge-creation, thought this respect must also be made explicit (as I will discuss in Chapter 5). Instead of directing student writing toward disconnected and possibly irrelevant material to which students are unwilling or unable to relate, writing assignments that invite personal knowledge show students that their lives outside the classroom are potential sources for academic work. Additionally, when students are asked to use what they already know, they can be asked

to think critically about *how* they know what they know, which opens discussions and further writing on the socially interactive nature of constructed knowledge, which lies at the heart of mutuality's epistemology.

An important factor in determining whether an assignment engages students' life experiences is whether or not the assignment is focused on and crafted toward an actual audience beyond the class. What Ede and Lundsford (1984) might refer to here as audience addressed should not be taken as a preoccupation with audience, but that such an audience is included in the construction of the assignment. While a limited audience for an assignment, e.g., only teachers and/or students, has an appreciable benefit as an intellectual exercise, an assignment that is designed to extend beyond the classroom shows students that their writing does not die once it is handed in for a grade. Erika Lindemann's (2001) examination of assignments echoes this argument when she tells us, "If we want students to produce meaningful writing, we must design meaningful assignments, tasks that encourage students to use writing to act" (p. 219). I turn to my own teaching for an example of this kind of assignment in which I ask students to examine a campus problem that has affected them while researching a reasonable solution that the university could feasibly implement.

This problem-solution assignment is redesigned with students each semester so that the problems they choose are feasibly within the scope of the university's ability to solve them using the students' detailed suggestions. Students write letters addressed to individual faculty or administrators, which can include the university's president, property manager, or head of campus security. The letters show students that their writing has weight beyond a course requirement. The work that students conduct while

interviewing experts, surveying students, and researching alternative solutions shows them that they are capable of affecting change with their writing, even if, at their least effective, the letters only serve to generate awareness of important issues. The problems they choose to write about are rooted in their own experiences. The audience for their letters consists of other faculty, friends, coworkers, and school administrators—although briefly described here, this is an example of a place-based assignment.

As a development of the post-process movement, place-based pedagogy and its subsequent assignments seek to situate students, their environments, experiences, and the interconnected workings of their writing as a unified and dependent whole (Cooper, 2006). Assignments that follow place-based pedagogies will resist the geographical conformity that comes from intellectual disconnections. Claude Hurlbert (2006), in criticizing composition textbook manufacturers for being guilty of this, says "Textbooks offer a no-geography. A no-place set out to take the place of place. A no-place that pretends to the status of everywhere" (p. 353). When textbooks and assignments are designed without acknowledging the inherent knowledge and experiences of students or of their possible contributions through generic mode-based writing, mutuality is ignored. Instead, assignments can be designed with an eye toward teaching various modes of writing while simultaneously showing students that their input is valuable. Hurlbert describes an assignment that counteracts the potentially insensitive effects of textbook assignment conformity by inviting students to "write short books about what they are burning to tell the world" (2006 p. 356). Book topics range from personal tragedies, explorations of hometowns and histories, and critical self-reflections; in short, the books offer students the chance to reevaluate their identities and places in a specific,

understandable, and relatable context. This book assignment, similar to the assignment used by Weathers in my observations for this study, "create[s] space for students to write locations in which to stand, to see, and from which to move" (Hurlbert, 2006 p. 356) and will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, including my own teaching experiences in using the assignment in my classes.

Assignments found in textbooks must be, by definition, more generic than localized assignments in that they attempt to satisfy the needs of a larger audience of teachers and students. Take, for example, the personal assignment guidelines found in *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*, whose "Remembering an Event" description includes the following checklist:

"The event should

- take place over a short period of time (preferably just a few hours);
- center on conflict (a personal struggle or an external confrontation);
- disclose something significant about your life;
- allow you to portray yourself in a way that you feel comfortable sharing with your instructor and classmates;
- reveal complex or ambivalent feelings (rather than superficial and sentimental ones);
- lead readers to think about their own experience and about the cultural forces that shape their lives." (Axelrod & Cooper, 2010 p. 42)

When student writing is encouraged to create similar thematic elements like this assignment, teachers should not be surprised to find writing that either fits the model so well as to be bland or writing so forced into the model's characteristics as to be

rhetorically loose. Assignments like the one in the *St. Martin's Guide* provide pre-made structure to a class that beginning teachers may find comforting—after all, if an assignment has been included by a large and respected publisher, it must be useful. A mutuality-based writing assignment will instead look to customizing and blending the needs of the academy with the personalized needs of the individual student; this of course cannot be accomplished through generic and broad one-size-fits-all writing suggestions.

We now turn our attention from the way an assignment's purpose and construction are created to the discussion that results from the product of those assignments, either as a draft, workshop, email, or final graded version of writing.

Writing Response

> Teacher evaluations and even grades themselves can serve as an integral part of creating mutuality in student writing in that they provide occasions for teachers and students to negotiate what are acceptable contributions to disciplinary knowledge as it is continually being reconstructed in classrooms. Balance is critical. (Wallace & Ewald, 2000 p. 89)

The third focus of this study is on writing response, which generally consists of comments on drafts of papers, as well as written evaluation, roughly defined here as the assigning of grades to written material which may or may not include justification for those grades. Possibilities for mutuality are present at all levels of interaction, particularly with student writing, which differs from classroom discussions in that writing responses are indelible comments, unflinching and unmoved (Elbow, 1985). Comments are powerful in that they can isolate or engage students as they linger on a page after the class has been dismissed. To illustrate this, imagine a lonely student staring dejectedly at

a stationary and vague “awk” written in the margins of a page. Now try to imagine how quickly that comment might be clarified during the free-flow of immediate feedback present in verbal interactions either in class or in an office-hour conference. The “awk” mark, no matter how long the student stares, remains the same “awk” mark, signaling an issue yet unable to clarify what the issue might be. Just as teachers have only the students’ written words sitting stationary on the page to decipher meaning and provide an appropriate response, so too do students have the handwriting of the teacher as they, often without training, attempt to make meaning from teachers’ comments.

Too often, assignments are constructed without an eye for how response will be handled, either between teachers and students or student-to-student response. In these instances, responding to student writing is taken for granted, as if the assignment itself is the variable for student-teacher interaction while the evaluation of the assignment will be carried out as it always has been. Bizzaro (1993) offers a way out of the traditional structure by looking to the students’ *meaning* instead of the teachers’ *expectations*, because:

> “[a]fter all, if meaning in student texts is no longer seen from one perspective only…we will no longer be able to say to students, as we seem to have said, whether implicitly or explicitly, for so long, ‘I, the teacher, am an exemplary reader. Your job as student is to please *me*. If I can’t be moved by your text, you better take my advice on *how* to move me’” (p. 7).

The balance that Wallace & Ewald refer to earlier is indeed critical, although critical pedagogy in general and mutuality practice specifically has yet to find it. T.R. Johnson and Shirley Morahan (2002) reinforce the importance of written response, listing it as the

most important factor in “students’ concepts of themselves as writers” (p. 351). The marks/comments/questions teachers place on student papers, whether in red or black ink, create an indelible record of interaction between author (student) and audience (teacher). A critical feature of response lies in this reciprocal nature of evaluation, i.e., when we evaluate students, students evaluate us based on our evaluations.

Responses that comment too broadly or conversationally run the risk of showing students that their work is already acceptable which may ignore the need for improvement or revision. Conversely, responses that focus too specifically on what was and wasn’t working for the teacher run the risk of having students play the grade game in which their anxiety for a perfect score causes them to view academic work as an economic proposition—where they will avoid an investment of labor (experimenting with new expressions, valuing revision, expanding voice, etc.) if they deem the return (“Will this increase my final grade two points or three?”) to be too small. Perhaps knowing that either extreme is ineffective is an effective prevention, but research on response and evaluation in critical writing courses suggests other usable alternatives, most notably Bizzaro (1993), who offers the following as the foundation by which to respond to writing:

> First, we must see that the chief purpose for a class in writing, poetry or otherwise, is to enable students to determine meaning as readers and writers (including as readers of their own writing) in various ways…This reassessment may require us to respond to what seems to be our students’ underlying request: that we spend less time telling them what they should do when they write and more time showing them who they can be. (p. 13)

The traditional approach to response, in which the teacher's comments are prescriptive in nature, limits the dialogic possibilities with students and their writing while reinforcing the hegemony of a teacher's authority.

Responses that limit discussion or *merely* mark grammar and surface-level mistakes direct student revisions and ways of thinking about writing to mirror what the teacher wants; the dialogue of written response is silenced in these cases. Nancy Sommers's (2002) "Responding to Student Writing" examines how teachers' comments end discussion by appropriating students' texts. Sommers claims that many comments on student drafts can offer conflicting messages that, in effect, tell students what the teacher wants instead of provide a means to develop what students want or need to say, or what Richard Fulkerson has referred to as "modal confusion, mindlessness," which is when "classroom methodology which implies one variety of value judgment [is used] when another will actually be employed" (1979 p. 7). Sommers's solution is "to have what is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and enrich each other" (2002 p. 359). If the kind of perpetual dialogue discussed above is being employed in the classroom then written response should engage students in a meaningful dialogue that perpetually questions the meaning and message of the text instead of leading students toward what the teacher wants the student to write (Welch, 1998).

The unfortunate habit of marking grammar on early drafts while simultaneously offering global corrections (i.e, "develop this more") "represents also the failure of teachers' comments to direct genuine revision of the text as a whole" (Sommers, 2002 p. 355) as students are often unable to distinguish the hierarchy of necessity between a misplaced comma comment and an "awkward, reword" comment. The fault of these

ingrained practices, of teachers' comments that provide a minimum of discussion with students' texts, may rest entirely with the teacher. In examining the reason behind unhelpfully shorthanded responses, we must acknowledge the logistical limitations of teachers who are forced to read hundreds of pages of text in a matter of days. The reason for curt and limiting comments may lie with the quantity of pages that teachers must read. As composition class caps rise, so do the number of papers coming to teachers that need to be read, marked, commented, responded, and/or graded. When some teachers have upwards of 25 students per section and 4 sections per semester it shouldn't be hard to imagine teachers cutting corners on response, especially if they hope to spend at least twenty minutes (Morrison, 2005 p. 7) per paper. A possible solution to this dilemma could be to tap into a resource that every class has—students—through the use of peer response workshops.

Peer workshops are certainly not a new practice, but their use can be overlooked and underutilized as a way to engage students in mutuality. Response workshops, when practiced effectively, can reduce the time needed by teachers to respond to student drafts. Teachers are unable to appropriate a students' meaning from a written text if other students are engaging with the material in responses. The possibility of students appropriating meaning from other students' texts, I imagine, is limited due to the levels of power and authority that students may have, though concerns over gender, class, and race may lead some students' comments to dominate the work of others. However, the meta-cognitive abilities of students are exercised as they interpret, evaluate, respond, comment, praise, and criticize student-writing during workshops, and this benefit cannot be overstated.

Students who are more concerned with the grade we assign on the last page of their papers should not prevent us from discovering new ways to engage with students through written response and comments. Perhaps the fault in the traditional model lies with *our* comments, not with *their* reaction. An alternative to the traditional model, according to Bizzaro (1993), asks teachers to use a reader-response model which

> will require that students determine who they want their texts to address and that teachers relinquish some power in examining those texts. Rather than reinforcing their readings . . ., teachers must willingly submit to the text, participating in the development of the reader summoned by the text and evoked, knowingly or unknowingly, by the author. (p. 67)

Of course grades matter, of course they're important to students, but traditional response reinforces the notion that the teacher's opinion of the writing is what ultimately counts; an opinion based on the class's perception of final objective authority: the teacher.

One way to subvert this authority, if such a thing as self-subversion is possible, is to gear written response as a critical dialogue between students (Welch, 1998) . Andrea Muldoon's answer is to solicit students' responses to her written evaluations, allowing students to reject her comments so long as they are able to provide a reason in writing (2009 p. 69). What makes this practice conducive to mutuality is that the student is given the option to deny the authority of the teacher. In the typical model of written response, the teacher marks the paper and the student makes corrections based on those marks with little recourse to reject a suggestion unless the student approaches the teacher in person, which, for many students, may be prohibitively stressful. A teacher may tell students that they should ask for an explanation if any paper marks or comments are unclear, but this is

not the same as offering an option to reject a suggestion. Unless given the explicit opportunity to reject a comment, first-year students may believe that they lack the authority to decide what is best for their writing. Without the option to challenge, resist, or discuss written responses with teachers on a mutually respectful level, comments and questions designed to engage students in dialogue become monologue—questions in the margins, thoughts and reactions from the teacher become static and carry an authoritative weight that most students feel compelled to "correct." For example, if a teacher reading an essay on political engagement thoughtfully responds to a student by writing in the margin "Good point, but what about the media's role in this?" the student may feel forced into broadening the scope of the essay when doing so might compromise the student's intended argument. An important component toward mutuality in written response, then, invites and engages student resistance, partially to further dialogue and partially to give students ownership of their writing by giving them more control over the revision process.

Though not explicitly calling for mutuality practice, Mezeske's (2005) approach to written response involves increased peer review workshops,. Peer review encourages interaction and places students in a somewhat temporary role of teacher, showing them that their input in the writing process is valued. In discussing the creeping problem of increased class sizes, Mezeske's solution has students sharing the burden of a teacher's reading load while also cooperatively engaging in dialogue. Assignments that are read and responded to without grades provide opportunities for students to take chances, experiment, and play with language that they might not otherwise do with the pressure of graded assignments.

One possible range of comments, first described by Lees (1979), later examined by Horvath (1994), includes the following: correct, emote, describe, suggest, question, remind, assign—the last of which Lees and Horvath claim are the most useful and the comment that I will discuss in depth later. I draw your attention, however, to the *emote* possibility, which Horvath quickly dismisses by saying that it "[invites] the view that teacher responses are the irrelevant 'crackpot reactions' of one reader," (1994 p. 208) though I see it as an important function in establishing mutuality among readers and writers. The *emote* comment, when used as a formative response and not as a summative evaluation, allows teachers to respond directly to the rhetorical effect the text has had on them, offering a position that shows students that their teacher is a human being rather than an evaluative machine that merely processes words and assigns grades. An example of a seemingly innocuous *emote* comment might be, "I love this part, very funny." A simple comment like that not only encourages students, but shows them that their writing has affective quality with their readers. Where the *emote* comment humanizes the relationship between teacher and student, the *assign* comment attempts to engage students more fully in a dialogue of purposes and future possibilities. Comments that *assign*, as it is defined by Lees (1979) and Horvath (1994) "[use] what has been said already to discover how to say something new" (Horvath, 1994 p. 208), which, when functioning best, should not be used as criticism, but as a way to build upon and strengthen the writing that already exists.

Perhaps one way to approach appropriate written response is to examine inappropriate response, or responses that restrict dialogue, limit engagement, present contradictory suggestions, impose meaning, usurp papers' intentions, and restrict

mutuality. Kristie S. Fleckenstein's "Bodysigns: A Bodyrhetoric for Change" gives us an excellent example of how teachers can appropriate the meaning of a student's text unknowingly and even with the best of intentions. Fleckenstein (2006) explains how a student refused to revise a paper based on Fleckenstein's comments that asked the student to address a larger audience of potential career women. In response, the student wrote an email to Fleckenstein, telling her, "First, I don't want to write what you want to hear. My audience is not you. I'm not about to turn this into a totally feminist paper" (2006 p. 340). Examining this example, Fleckenstein shows us that the view of teachers as liberators of their students' consciousness assumes for teachers the position of previously liberated, of unchanging and without need for transformation. A more mutually-beneficial set of written responses would not push, guide, or lead students into revising for a position more agreeable to the teacher's, but would instead seek clarification of the student's position.

Discussing critical pedagogy and mutuality is helpful to our understanding of teaching and composition theory, but its discussion is far easier than its implementation, practice and verification that it is functioning as we hope. What follows in the next chapter is a description of the methodology for this study that attempts to qualify the critical practices of composition teachers through participant-observations. What elements of mutuality are present in these classes? What elements of the other theories presented in this chapter are present as well? Based on observations and first-hand accounts of students' and teachers' experiences, this study hopes to put a concrete face on what can typically be an ambiguous theory of teaching and of teaching writing.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

That was always a sign of a dumb rule—"Because I said so." (George Carlin)

Mutuality in My Teaching

My position as researcher comes from a pedagogical imperative—a desire to better understand my students as well as a need for my students to better understand me. One area of teaching in particular, student resistance, has been discussed in terms of motivation (Mendler, 2000) (Crone & MacKay, 2007) (Lippman, Bulanda, & Wagenaar, 2009), and mutuality (Gorzelsky, 2009), though the connections require further examination as they relate to dialogue and assignments. In order to determine what kinds of dialogue and writing assignments are used to achieve mutuality in a composition class, we first need a working definition of what mutuality is. Mutuality in this dissertation is defined as the phenomenon that occurs when a reciprocal relationship is built between teachers and students based on respect and understanding that allows for shared subject positions.

Before I discuss and justify the methodology for this study, I feel I should explain my experiences with mutuality to give practical examples of what I've described in the previous chapters, to show that these experiences enable me to spot mutuality as it occurs in other classes, and to explain what effect those occurrences have had in my own classes.

As the first written assignment for a sophomore-level research writing class I assigned students to choose and humorously analyze a comedic text that they chose

outside of class[2]. As the assignment progressed, we spent a day discussing how I would read and comment on their work by co-constructing a grading rubric. In small groups and as a class, we named and described the primary and secondary elements of the paper[3]. During the construction of the rubric, I gave two suggestions: (1) that they should analyze their subject's humor and (2) that their writing would attempt to be funny; students discussed and created the rest of the list and accepted my suggestions. The class was given roughly a month to write the initial draft of the paper. During that time we went around the room telling jokes and examining what made them funny, we read Sedaris and Vonnegut essays; we discussed funny commercials using the room's computer projector. A week before the paper was due they brought in their drafts, read each other's work, and gave extra copies to me which I returned with comments. They were initially worried that their writing, in keeping with the purpose of the assignment, would not be funny; it was. As I read their final papers, however, I was concerned that the summaries of their chosen works lacked analysis, which, based on our rubric, was a primary concern for the assignment.

After I handed back the papers, a student felt that I had graded the class too harshly on their lack of analysis. After discussing the rubric that we had created as a class, it became clear to me that while we were working on the assignment in the weeks prior, I had placed too much emphasis on the rhetorical moves they could use to make their reader laugh but not enough explanation on how to analyze. On the day I gave back their drafts, I mentioned that their papers needed more analysis instead of summary, but

[2] A television program, book, movie, comedian, character, joke, etc.
[3] Primary elements included global concerns like organization, clear thesis, and an analysis of the text's humor, while secondary concerns included mechanics, proper MLA/APA documentation, and a minimum number of research sources. This practice was adapted from Bizzaro's Primary Trait Scoring in *Responding to Student Poems.*

this comment was buried at the end of the list. The rubric included analysis as a primary trait, but my teaching assumed this skill as a given. As a compromise and with much discussion, I allowed students to revise and resubmit their papers if they chose[4].

I believe this was an instance of mutuality in that we constructed the rubric for the assignment together. Their voices were included in how I evaluated the product. I respected their opinions and gave them the opportunity to shape the purpose of their writing. One cooperative action, however, cannot build the relationship necessary for mutuality. As I'll discuss later in Chapter 5, mutuality is a persistent and recursive act that, like other social interactions and relationships, requires continual attention and care. If I felt the co-constructed rubric was empowering students, it would have been wrong of me to assume that that would be enough to create a shared subject position. When they became distressed with the way I assigned grades, I listened to their concerns and realized after offering my position that we had not yet reached a level of communicative understanding[5]. In this case *I* was resisting their objections as they rejected my grading. My decision to invite revise-and-resubmits showed the class that I was willing to listen to their concerns and that my decisions were not finalized, foot-stomping mandates—that it was not outside the realm of possibility for me to reevaluate my position and share authority. I could have instead allowed students the chance to grade themselves based on the rubric they had created, but I feel that may have been *too* student-centered by giving them *too* much of my authority; as a relationship, mutuality is not intended to be completely student-centered, aiming instead to share subject positions equally.

[4] Every resubmission was a significantly stronger piece of writing once we spent additional time examining what textual analysis entailed.
[5] We were still in the 3rd week of the semester in a class that met at 8:00 am.

Another clear instance of mutuality emerged in another class when I asked first-year basic writing students to answer a short questionnaire regarding a rough draft of an assignment that they were about to turn in. One student rather bluntly but non-confrontationally said, “I don’t feel like doing this. I don’t see the point.” I was taken aback at the freedom he felt he had in expressing his resistance. Instead of responding with an answer attempting to reinforce my authority, something along the lines of “Do it because I said so,” I explained that the purpose of the questions was to help me better understand what they thought of their own writing so that I could tailor my comments to what they felt were their strengths and weaknesses instead of appropriating their texts to my standards. The student thought for a moment, nodded, and said, “Okay. That makes sense,” and answered the questions thoughtfully. This interaction, particularly his acquiescence, is not typical of my experiences with mutuality, but it does show the possibilities of creating understanding when resistance surfaces. Had the student *still* rejected the justification for the questionnaire, I believe mutuality would *still* be present in that the goal of mutuality is not agreement, but understanding. Compliance is secondary to communication.

Data Collection

The content for this study involves critical pedagogy practices as they respect the contributions of all participants, inviting new participants into the discussion, and questioning the sources of where, how, and why certain participants’ contributions are more valuable than others’. Since mutuality invites participants to work cooperatively in the construction of knowledge as opposed to a top-down delivery system of information, the methodology for this study is inclusive of the persons, theories, and phenomena

observed. Additionally, because this study ultimately seeks to discover the ways, if any, in which mutuality reduces, manages, or overcomes student resistance, data was collected at the contact point of interactions between students and teachers—the classroom—where dialogue and assignment descriptions take place most often.

Purposive survey and follow-up interview

In order to see teachers and students in action, to see how they interacted in discussions and with writing, data collection for this dissertation consisted of two case studies of classrooms with teachers who, by means of a purposive survey, were determined to employ practices consistent with what we know about how mutuality might be used in the classroom (see Appendix . Each case study consisted of participant observations of composition classes for one semester. Participant observations were chosen as opposed to non-participant in order that I might experience the teaching method first-hand as the class was conducted. As the teachers engaged their classes in various activities, I would participate and respond as though I were a formal member of the class, whether in free-writing activities, small-group discussions, or peer review workshops. This study's focus on shared authority and co-constructed knowledge prevented me from gathering data from a privileged and disconnected space set off from the class, i.e., sitting in the corner and jotting notes after asking participants to ignore my presence. Yet my presence would still be known and my interpretations limited if I had closed myself to the possibility of learning through the experience of participating. Because mutuality asks for a blending of teacher and student roles, i.e., teachers thinking of themselves as students and treating their students as teachers, I felt it was appropriate

to further complicate those shifting positions by adding my role as researcher to that relationship.

The teachers I chose to observe may not have been aware that they were practicing or attempting to practice mutuality. They may have been critical pedagogues with student-centered teaching practices who were either unfamiliar with the term or had naturally engineered their courses to create more equal subject positions between themselves and their students. In order to determine which professors used practices similar to what Wallace & Ewald (2000) define as the basic theoretical foundations for mutuality—the use of alternative speech genres, the incorporation of student needs in the construction of course architecture, and the valuing of students' interpretive agencies—as a means of creating knowledge, a brief purposive survey was distributed electronically to all teachers of first- and second-year writing-intensive courses at a mid-sized liberal arts college in Pennsylvania called the Milford Academy[6]. This survey (see Appendix A) was designed to be as brief as possible while simultaneously soliciting enough information about prospective teacher participants' teaching practices such that a pool of "information-rich" applicants would be available for observation.

Respondents (2) to the survey whose answers showed promise of exhibiting mutuality were selected to take part in a brief semi-structured introductory interview in which their survey answers were questioned further in order to narrow the pool of potential teacher participants. Questions during this introductory unstructured interview focused on the teacher participant's use of in-class dialogue, assignment construction, and student written response/evaluation methods. Teacher participants' answers that I judged to be sufficiently congruent with mutuality practice as defined above were invited

[6] The names of all participants in this study, including the name of the school, are pseudonyms.

to take part in the study, which primarily consisted of allowing me to act as a participant-observer in one or more of their first- or second-year writing courses.

Courses for this study included a section of College Writing (101), a first-year core curriculum course, and a section of sophomore-level Research Writing (202), also a required course. These classes were chosen because for many students starting their careers in higher education, first- and second-year courses may be their first experience with student-centered university teaching practices, and as such, the impressions they develop over the course of their first semester are valuable for study. Other possible writing courses that were not studied, including literature courses, upper-level advanced composition courses, and all graduate courses offered at Milford Academy, should consider these courses for future research. I would assume upper-level students and graduate students have more experience with higher education and may react differently to mutuality practice than the first- and second-year students examined here. Additionally, teachers might expect more autonomous critical engagement and potentially less resistance from advanced students taking courses they have selected in their majors and this may be reflected in the teaching practices of those courses.

Participant Observation of Class Sessions

Mutuality explores and welcomes equal subject positions working in collaboration to create knowledge "and to establish reciprocal discourse relations as they negotiate meaning in the classroom" (Wallace & Ewald, 2000 p. 3). To parallel this concept within the methodology of this study, I have acted as a participant in the classes I observed. My participation, however, was limited to whatever the teacher participants found acceptable, including but not limited to (a) participation in classroom discussions,

(b) reading and responding to student writing during in-class workshops, and (c) carrying out some of the writing tasks assigned. I attended as many classes as each teacher participant was comfortable with in an effort to establish my presence as a regular function of the class. The goal was for the professor and students to see me as a natural and consistent fixture. Becoming a familiar presence in the students' minds was also a factor in choosing to visit each class as this familiarity hoped to increase the willingness of students to attend the focus group interview as well as their candor with responding to the focus group's discussion as they aided me in my research.

The reasoning behind participant observations in this study is rooted in a social-constructivist belief that knowledge is contextually created and shared. Social-constructivism, therefore, provides the theoretical framework of this study's methodology. Schwandt's (2007) definition of social constructivism, which includes "the belief that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge" (Schwandt) directly mirrors the acceptance of students' interpretive agency by Wallace & Ewald (2000 p. 127). Additionally, because mutuality accepts knowledge created by students and teachers working collaboratively, it is fitting that these observations were participatory in nature to reflect the work that is done in mutuality-based classes. With approval from teacher participants, I operated in these observed classes as a natural function of the course and participated in group discussions and assisted teachers during their peer review workshops. In short, the methodology for this study was designed to reflect the theory under investigation.

Since mutuality is based on a relationship between teachers and students, a relationship that presumably takes time to develop, one or two class visits would not have

shown the emergent patterns of this phenomenon, nor would such a brief time allowed me to interact with the class's students beyond an introductory level. After receiving permission to attend and observe these classes by both the teachers and their students, I attended every session for the semester to immerse myself in the class's environment. The frequency of class visits naturally provided a larger data set of observations, interactions, assignments, activities, and discussions that, when analyzed, provided patterns of the phenomenon of mutuality. By being a part of the course's activities, I was better able to come closer to the actual experience of being a student in the class, of interacting with the students and teachers that might not have been possible had I chosen to observe the classes from a "fly-on-the-wall" position, a disconnected approach which I found would have been a disservice to a study which has, at its heart, the dialogic exchange of ideas.

After each class visit, I wrote notes regarding the day's events, the activities assigned, and included interesting interactions that showed a developing or degrading relationship between teacher/students and/or students/students. Any observed instances of resistance were also recorded, though, due to the scope of the study, these were limited to overt resistance—open criticism of course architecture, habitual absences/lateness, failure to complete assignments, etc. Subtler forms of resistance—sighing, daydreaming, off-task behaviors—while pertinent, were too complex to systematically categorize and/or analyze while simultaneously participating. As such, notes regarding student resistance often described the "feel" of the class's attitude. My ability to accurately gauge the atmosphere of the class is based on my experiences as a higher education student (9

years) and as a college teacher (6 years). Notes were written immediately *after* the class instead of *during* for two reasons:

(1) my observations would have been hindered if my attentions were split between recording the events and participating in them, and

(2) my presence as a researcher, while made explicit to the students, may have distracted students if I was constantly recording their actions; notes taken during class may have unduly influenced student behavior.

While the lag between observing the event and recording it may have created data gaps, (i.e., I may have neglected to recall an interaction that took place at the beginning of class and not write it down for later analysis when the class ended seventy-five minutes later) these potential gaps would hopefully be filled, checked, and verified via the remaining collection methods, namely, post-class debriefings with teachers, student focus groups, and teacher interviews.

Post-Class Debriefings

To supplement my notes and observations, I debriefed with the teacher at the end of each class session for a few minutes, discussed what was supposed to happen in class, what did happen, and what successes and failures were found. At these informal and brief meetings, I discussed with the professors how they felt about the class, what intentions they had for the day's activities, and what they might do in the future to modify their practices. These brief unrecorded interview sessions helped supplement my own observations as I recorded the responses of teacher participants immediately following the class session. These miniature interview sessions are not a new idea, and in fact, Freire describes a similar method that I have applied:

> After each observation visit, the investigator should draw up a brief report to be discussed by the entire team, in order to evaluate the preliminary findings of both the professional investigators and the local assistants. To facilitate the participation of the assistants, the evaluation should be held in the area itself. (2008 p. 112)

These immediate debriefings ran the risk of inviting hasty comments from teachers as immediate responses lacked the perspective that thoughtful, critical self-reflection can provide. While this lack of perspective may have limited the scope of responses, it accurately reflected the feelings and raw response of teacher participants. To counter this lack of perspective, a semi-structured focus group was conducted with teacher participants that I will discuss later.

Focus Groups and Interviews

These personal observations were supplemented, in part, with separate focus group interviews conducted with students and teachers in order to reinforce and/or adjust my perceptions of the class. I should note that focus groups involving students *and* teachers at the same time were *not* conducted as the daily workings of the class should have provided enough examples of how both groups interacted with each other. Separate focus groups and interviews (i.e., one for teachers and another for students) provided a forum to discuss matters that were not brought up during the semester. A description of the questions used in these semi-structured discussions can be found in Appendix B (student focus groups) and Appendix C (teacher interviews).

Focus group meetings with 3-4 students were held when convenient for the students after mid-terms to give students ample time to experience the majority of the

class and its workings. These meetings were audio recorded and transcribed in order to maintain the accuracy of participant responses. Having spent a semester interacting and listening to these students speak, it was easy for me to pick out individual speakers while transcribing their words. Transcripts of these meetings excluded information not pertinent to the study, including but not limited to talk external to the classroom environment.

These focus groups were kept confidential from the professor, both in terms of who agreed to participate and what answers were given. During these focus groups, I asked students to tell me about their experiences in the classroom, with questions pointed toward the relationship they felt they had with their professor. I questioned their understanding of *student agency*, their ability to affect change pertaining to class functions, and asked them if they felt they had been able to exercise their agency during the semester, including whether they felt their voices had been heard. I asked them whether they found the course assignments helpful, how they felt while writing them and what they felt they've achieved by writing them. I asked the students about the professor's grading and assessment policies and whether they felt they were accurately and faithfully applied. I also asked whether they had developed academic relationships with each other, how they felt during peer workshops, and whether peer feedback had been helpful for them. I asked them how they interpreted and/or possibly benefitted from the responses of their peers and the teacher. Additionally, I asked if any of these factors were not present throughout the semester and what they would have liked to change about the class, what objections they had, how they were able to express objections, and what outcome occurred when those objections were expressed.

Lastly, end of semester interviews were conducted with the teachers whose classes I observed. Questions were reflective in nature, asking professors what their intentions were during the semester, how they felt the semester went, what the strengths of their practices were, and what areas need room for improvement regarding their relationships with and perceptions of their students. I asked how and where they felt mutuality was present or lacking in their teaching as well as how they knew such instances had occurred. I also asked teachers to explain how they knew certain moments were successful teachable moments, how they were able to assess the efficacy of their assignments, and how they might be able to replicate those moments with future class sections.

This study will hopefully contribute to the ways teachers can deal with, learn from, and overcome student resistance. Mutuality, when used as a pedagogical tool, may offer techniques for understanding student resistance while simultaneously strengthening the relationship teachers have with their students. Additionally, mutuality may show us why students resist certain assignments and give ways of creating assignments to stave resistance before, or understand resistance after, it occurs. Though resistance is not something to be avoided entirely and should not be seen as a failure on a teacher's part, this study will provide the groundwork for teachers to capitalize on that resistance by showing how practical concerns related to teaching can be implemented in their own composition classes.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Dr. Weathers's ENGL 101 – College Writing

In the fall of 2009, I was a doctoral student in a class taught by Dr. Weathers[7], an experienced, tenured white male professor at the Milford Academy. I found Weathers to be a personable, positive, and student-centered teacher genuinely concerned with the welfare of his students; in short, he was practicing mutuality before I had been exposed to what that word meant. Based on my experiences in his class as well as the high praise he received from other professors, graduate assistants, and students regarding the singular assignment he uses in his 101 classes which I will discuss below, I included Weathers in the list of initial participants when searching for possible mutuality-driven teachers. Though I had seen Weathers active in a graduate course, I wondered if he was able to maintain the same level of enthusiasm and care with undergraduates. As he would later report on this enthusiasm for his work, telling me:

> "I love teaching, I love my job…not only do I construct an ethos of caring, just being there with them helps me construct an ethos of caring. It's the greatest job, I love it. [H]ow many people do you know in your life love going to work? I love going to work. Okay, you know, other than the stuff that isn't mutual to use your term, that is, committee work and all that…that's hardly ever mutual."

In the summer of 2010, I solicited Weathers for his participation in the study and my participation in his ENGL 101 College Writing section(s) during the upcoming fall semester. He tentatively agreed on the condition that I would attend every class and further stipulated that after introducing myself, my study, and its purpose, I would not be

[7] Names in this study are participant-chosen pseudonyms.

able to observe if *any student* refused my participation; consent had to be unanimous. Weathers told me that his reason for these conditions was due to the sensitive nature of students' topics, telling me in a personal email that "[t]oo often our students have people coming and going out of their lives. Since they tend to write about stuff that's important to them in my classes, I would want you to be a stable and reliable presence" (Weathers, 2010b).

Weathers asked that I first attend class on the second day of the semester, so that he would have an opportunity to introduce himself, the course, expectations for their writing, etc. before introducing me, with their permission, as a common element in class. I was therefore unable to observe the impressions made by both Weathers and his students on the first day. Weathers was scheduled to teach three sections of 101 that semester, and I initially approached his third section. Near the end of the class, Weathers allowed me to explain my study, its purpose and scope, as well as what my role in class would be if permitted to attend. Near the end of class, based on Weathers's stipulations, slips of paper were handed to students who were instructed to vote *yes* or *no* on whether I should remain for the semester. Weathers and I left the room for roughly ten minutes to allow students the chance to discuss what they had been told and cast their ballots without our presence. As students left the room, they handed Weathers their vote slips, which were counted and tallied. Of the roughly twenty-eight students, there was one *no* vote.

I was disappointed with the results, but asked Weathers if it were acceptable to observe one of his other two sections using the same voting procedure as above. Weathers agreed that I should attend his 2nd class of the day and present my study. As I

introduced myself and the study, I stressed to the students the importance that their anonymity would be protected and that the focus of my observations was not on the content of their writing but on their interactions with each other and with Weathers. With this class's introduction, I closed by telling them that I would not read anything they didn't want me to read, I would not write about anything they didn't want me to write about, and that anything I did write about that featured them would be given to them for their approval before it was finalized and submitted.

As per the voting procedure above, Weathers and I left the room and students voted. Students handed their votes to Weathers who counted and tallied them. This time, the vote was unanimous in favor of my staying the semester. From that point on, I attended every class and met, however briefly, with Weathers at the close of each class to discuss the day. Close to the end of the semester, I solicited student participants for an audio-recorded focus group meeting which consisted of four students aged 18 to 20, including: Abby, an international white female; Trey, an African-American male; Airy, a white female; and Lucia, a white female. Weathers, his graduate assistant Liza, and all students registered for the class signed an IRB informed consent protocol in which I ensured the protection of their identities.

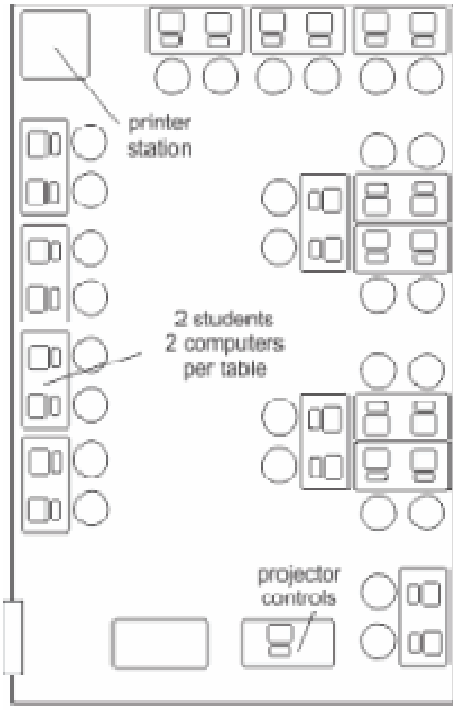

Figure 1. Weathers's Classroom Layout, student chairs shown as circles

The class met in a computer lab with twenty-eight computers, including a workstation

at the front of the room with projector controls and a document reader (see Figure 1). Weathers and his graduate assistant Liza rarely used the computer workstation's projector or document reader functions with the notable exception of a brief presentation by Liza on the use of desktop publishing techniques as students formatted their books near the end of the semester. On writing days, most students used the school-provided computers or brought their laptops.

Book Project

Weathers asked his 101 students to write a fifteen page book written in portions using peer review workshop sessions. Though the book is the focus of the course, it is broken into portions to prevent a student's grade being based entirely on one piece of writing. The first half of the book and the completed manuscript are each given equal weight (20%) as portions of the final grade. Additionally, students write a foreword for another student's book toward the end of the semester after they have had a chance to read and respond to other manuscripts. A response portfolio, consisting of students' workshop response papers, is also included in the final grade evaluation. Lastly, an effort grade is assessed by Weathers based on a student's participation, questioning, eagerness to contribute, etc. These five portions (half book, full book, foreword, portfolio, and effort) are given equal weight in final grade assessment. The book project forms the main crux of the class and its syllabus description reads:

> You will be writing a short book this semester. *So, what are you burning to tell the world?* The book should begin with one specific event, located in one specific time and place. The subject matter can then be explored from there…Imagine that you have been written into a history that you were not meant to read. Suppose this

> history is a story that has an agenda that is hostile to your needs. Imagine the effect this history has had on your identity, your experiences and your future. Now imagine that you are to write your own history—not a history of your whole life, but of one time or event. What different story will you tell about yourself and life? For your semester-long project you are to write this story. Not only the history that has been written for or about you, but the narrative you are to write for yourself. It will contain what you know and, perhaps, what you wish you never knew. It is the story you will pass on to the future, and it will contain the stories you hope are told years from now. And, most of all, it will be the truth. (Weathers) (emphasis added)[8].

Having years of experience with this assignment, Weathers told me the impetus for the assignment's creation came from a professional discussion with a colleague in which Weathers reports:

> [W]e thought about ourselves and we said, "What is it that we like to do as writers? If we don't want to waste their time, what's something that we could offer that they would find an appropriate venue? What could we give them that would encourage them to articulate and explore the meanings they need to articulate and explore?" And we said "Hey, we write books, maybe they want to write books," because there's a sense of accomplishment in seeing a book.

The initial instruction for the book project, according to his students, is open-ended and generated by the topic selected. As Airy puts it, "He gave us some instruction, but basically all he said was you're going to write about what you're burning to tell the world

[8] An analysis of this section will be included in the next chapter.

and just let us go with it. So we worked to assume what we were supposed to do and we did and explained it as we went."

When choosing topics for these books, students typically write about traumatic, damaging, or abusive events in their lives. Not all texts produced in this class focus on troubling experiences, though the content is generally of a deeply personal nature. In response to the sensitive nature of their book topics, students reported the following during the post-semester focus group:

> ABBY: "The next time we came to class (the 2nd day) we were sitting in a circle and everyone was telling a story and I was kind of last and we had all these horrible experiences and I really had no clue –"
>
> LUCIA: "Mine was a roller coaster of experiences cause I just wrote about my relationship with [my friend's mom] pretty much and the rest was just characters."
>
> AIRY: "I couldn't think of anything that I wanted to tell anyone so I just thought about something I could write a book on."
>
> ABBY: "[Weathers asked] what are you burning to tell the world? Well, I don't have to tell anyone anything."
>
> AIRY: "Anything I could have picked probably would have been cliché."
>
> ME: "Why?"
>
> AIRY: "A lot of people were writing about deaths in their family and I could have [written] my dad died when I was four, I could have [written] about it, but enough people were writing about that kind of thing and I wasn't really burning to tell anyone about it because everyone else probably heard stories just like it."

Though not explicitly rooted in traumatic writing, many students chose traumatic events to write about. I would approximate roughly one-third of the class did *not* write about trauma and some of the books expounded on hobbies, employment histories, and friendships. However, two-thirds of the class *did* write about traumatic events, e.g., family illness, sexual assault, parents' divorces. Weathers' only directive to students in selecting a topic is that they write about they are "burning to tell the world."

A class of this nature necessarily requires students to exercise a level of vulnerability with a teacher they may not know in an unfamiliar room full of first-year students they may have just met. Weathers's ability to quickly establish that level of comfort was evident in the topics selected from his students, many of which included traumatic events. I was unable to observe precisely what Weathers did/said during the first week of the class to establish this security, but if his behavior for the rest of the semester is any indication, his positivity and compassion would have contributed to this level of student comfort. As one student reported, "I always told my roommate 'I have English today and I'm actually getting pumped about it' and I'd go to class and be in a good mood. Even if I was in a bad mood [he'd always ask] 'Why are you in a bad mood?' and he just kind of forced a happy mood on everybody. He was just too upbeat. Like on a natural high." In response to the nature of mutuality and how Weathers had been able or unable to achieve that level of respect, students also reported:

> AIRY: "If you're gonna be miserable to the class then the class isn't going to be very positive to you and I think that he makes us happy to be there so it all just works out. The work is fun."
>
> TREY: "He actually cares about you."

AIRY: “Yeah, he cares about your work, he cares about even our health it seems.”

When I asked how students knew he cared about them, they responded with a simple indicator—he knew their names:

> TREY: “I have five classes. I think two of the professors actually know my name.”
>
> AIRY: “Yeah, most of them don’t know. [Weathers] notices when someone’s missing and he gets concerned. Like when Brandon broke his arm [over the weekend], he made him come to the front of the class and explain and when [Abby] had a game he had [her] come up and tell us all where [she] was going to be and everything. Like a family.”

From the beginning of the semester, Weathers made it clear that the books produced in the class should have an intended reader in mind. On more than one occasion, the class would discuss who they would be sending their books to. Many students who wrote about family experiences chose parents as the primary readers of their books. This sensitivity toward the rhetorical situation was not limited to one or two relatives, however. Mid-way through the semester, Weathers wrote the following on the board:

> 1. block communication / open communication
>
> 2. force our views on others / speak the truth and work for understanding
>
> 3. cause anger or suffering / inspire happiness, hope, resolution & healing
>
> A. Which?
>
> B. Why?
>
> C. How does/will knowing this change your writing of your book?

He then asked students to think about the impact their books would have once released into the world. This personal reflection showed students that their books may at some point fall into other people's hands, that what they had written for a specific intended reader may find its way into a new audience's hands and that once there, their books had the power to impact the thinking/feeling of those readers in ways the students should be aware of.

Free-Writing

The bulk of Weathers's seventy-five minute class sessions fell into two categories: free-writing and workshops. On free-writing days, students were allowed the full class to work on their books. Whether on the room's computers, on their own laptops, or by hand, students were given the freedom and time to write as needed. The first of these free-writing days was the second day of the semester after students had thought of, chosen, and openly discussed the topics of their books. As Weathers told me prior, "This is a writing class, so we get them writing." Devoting class time to the act of writing shows students its importance and contrasts the paradigm of other classes and disciplines in which the *doing* of the discipline is conducted elsewhere.

During writing days, Weathers, his graduate assistant Liza, and I would bounce between students, answering questions ranging from basic mechanical concerns as well as larger issues, e.g. "What do you think of this paragraph," "How should I start this chapter," "Am I doing this right," "Does this look good?" In many instances, Weathers would draw everyone's attention to an individual's question and answer it for the class's benefit. During these free-writing days, I was struck by how motivated students were when given the opportunity to work unimpeded by lecture or planned activity. In

opposition to my own previous instruction, which included solutions to expected writing problems, these free-writing days gave Weathers's students the opportunity to construct their own problems. These full-session days felt like a writing center in miniature, with Weathers, Liza, and I acting as tutors offering brief sessions with students over immediate concerns as they emerged in their writing. My participation as teacher's aide during these classes was not too far removed from the typical behavior of other students, who would often ask other students to read a page or paragraph as they wrote. My participant-observation in this regard leaned more toward teacher than student, but was asked for by Weathers during my second visit where Weathers told students that I was available to help them if they needed/asked.

Infrequently, students would use the computers for email, facebook, etc., and when Weathers would see this his immediate response was not reprimand. Instead, he would ask the student if they needed help with their writing, how many pages they had written, how they felt about what they had written. Weathers's method of dealing with resistance in this manner was highly conducive to mutuality practice. Airy's story below shows an example of this:

> Even if [he] wanted to say something serious, he wouldn't be mean about it. You could tell he did get kinda frustrated sometimes [and] he did want to say something but he wouldn't. One day he came over and he said, "Airy, let me ask you a question, did you do any work today?" But he was nice about it and I explained to him, I said "I'd rather just do my work in my room. I talk to people here and it's not useless talking, I get help and stuff and then I go back and write," and he said, "Oh, okay," and then he left—he didn't keep it up.

I explained to Airy that I had a similar experience while I was a student in his class, telling her that I felt I was more productive in solitude than in a room with intermittent conversation. Airy continued, “It seemed like he doubted me at first but then he knows I always turn my stuff in on time and I got a good grade on my book, so obviously I wasn’t lying so he wasn’t gonna keep it up.” The “keeping it up” that Airy refers to includes what students may consider some professors’ *in loco parentis* habit of nagging students until they see compliance. During all my observations, Weathers resisted this urge to nag when students were not compliant, though he did not shy away from approaching students and asking about their progress, what they might need, or what difficulties they were facing.

Some students complained that the environment was difficult to write in, that the smaller conversations and visual distractions of a classroom weren’t conducive to their particular writing process. Thus, some were not as productive as others during these free-writing days; however, the majority of students met syllabus deadline requirements for major assignments. The seventy-five minutes devoted to in-class writing was a successful use of time for at least 75% of students by my observations, as was their use of Weathers, Liza, and myself, as students reported:

> TREY: “If we were getting confused about what we were writing, if you wrote something that you didn’t feel comfortable with or confident, you could call him over and [he’d] read it and [say] ‘Well this is a good start, but could you add this or how would it change your meaning if you did that?’”

AIRY: "And sometimes he wouldn't even wait. If you didn't want to be bothered, he'd come over and [say] 'Hey, how are you doing' and if you said 'Good,' he'd [say] 'Okay, good,' and he wouldn't push it."

Peer Workshops

In addition to free-writing days, each student was given a workshop. After signing a schedule indicating their day, students were required to bring copies of one full page of their book—any page they were working on that they wanted the class to read and discuss. Weathers, Liza, and I were also included in these workshops and were given copies of students' pages. Workshops were usually conducted the class session after the pages had been distributed so that everyone had a chance to read, comment, and photocopy the pages in advance. In a seventy-five minute class, up to three workshops could be held, giving each student roughly 25 minutes of class time for comments and round-table discussion. During these workshops, Weathers sat with the students in the circle[9], listening, nodding, smiling, and occasionally asking clarifying questions for the commenter.

Before the first workshop, Weathers discussed how everyone was to respond to these pages by introducing the key phrase/question: "How would it change your meaning if you…?" or with its acronym, HWICYMIY. Weathers instructed students to include at least four of these comment-questions in advance, noting that some could count double if phrased properly, e.g., "How would it change your meaning if you moved X to Y and added more about Z in that same paragraph?" During the beginning of the semester, however, a number of comments addressed during the workshop discussions neglected the key phrase—these students were quickly corrected, initially by Weathers, and later, as

[9] Closer to an ellipse due to the room's shape and the computer pods.

the semester continued, by other students. Some students who did not use the key phrase were not corrected and some students' comments were pushed further by Weathers, e.g., "When you say you liked it, what did you like about it?" Weathers elaborated on his role in soliciting responses and comments from students, saying:

> "I suppose I could push harder for more critical, deeper levels of thought and critique. Maybe I should stop people more when they're talking [and] say, why don't you think about what you just said now and go deeper, take what you're thinking to a deeper level than abstraction. I often don't do that because I want the students to take authority for responding but maybe that's authority I could more fully prepare them for by helping them see that whatever critique you have of a text, there are always other layers beyond it if you take the time, but of course, taking the time to break through would require a longer class period…Nice metaphor. He used really nice metaphors. Swell. So what? Yeah, that's a line you have to tread, cause you can also push someone into rather deeper levels of abstraction and push them into shutting down too, so each student you have to treat with a degree of care and observation."

Weathers justification for the structure of these comments told the class that it was difficult to be offended by a critical comment when phrased as a question, especially when it was acceptable for the author to disagree, which happened on a number of occasions. This paradigm for written response used by Weathers's comments on student texts is mirrored in this response model for peer workshops.

On the day of a student's workshop, the class sat in the round, or at least as close to an ellipse as was possible (See Figure 1). Weathers teased out the students sitting in

the computer alcove stations and encouraged everyone to get into what became a long oval so that everyone could see each other. Weathers would then invite the writer to the front of the room, usually to sit on the front table or move their chair. Some students were hesitant to place themselves at the center of attention in this way, and while Weathers encouraged them to sit in front, he allowed students to stay where they were if they objected.

With workshop pages ready, each person in class would tell one of the four minimum comments they had written on their page prior to the class. Weathers, his graduate assistant Liza, and myself would also participate and offer one written comment. Authors were asked not to speak or respond during this time and instead would often take notes on the other students' comments and subsequent discussions, jotting notes on their page. Weathers told us that the reason for this temporary silence was to ensure that each student would be given a chance to say something. Additionally, Weathers told me that if a writer was offended by a comment and anxious to defend, staying quiet until the end was an effective safeguard as most students would forget what they were upset about by the time everyone had spoken. This rule was not absolutely enforced as some authors briefly responded to comments occasionally. After everyone had offered a comment, the author was given the floor to respond to the class. Workshops ended when the author was finished responding to comments, commonly by thanking the class.

This paradigm of written response was mirrored in Weathers's comments on individual student writing for graded assignments (pages submitted for workshops were not graded), including the use of the "HWICYMIY" phrase. As workshops were conducted, I noticed a few times where students would openly disagree with Weathers's

comments, and observed his reaction to be more accepting than defensive. Because of his authority, however, I asked students whether they found his comments to be directives disguised as questions:

> ME: "Did you ever get the feeling that when he gave a 'HWICYMIY?' comment that he was asking the question or did you get the feeling that this is what he's telling you to do—in the form of a question?"
>
> TREY: "A mixture of both, because when he says, 'HWICYMIY?' it gives you insight in what he may see as what you could write. He's not telling you you should fix this, this is what you have to fix, but he shows the different sides. You can sit and contemplate if I reworded it to this, how would it change if I kept it the same and nine times out of ten usually what he says helps."
>
> AIRY: "[I]f you didn't change it, I think by the time you published your book he would know that that's how you wanted to keep it because when I turned in my first half of the book, I didn't change some of the stuff and I still got an A on my book."

The method for ensuring each student had made a comment to the author varied from day to day. In some cases, Weathers would call on students in a random order, students would volunteer their comments, students would call on other students after they had addressed the author, a student who had made a comment would toss a toy to the next speaker. On one occasion, Liza brought in a bag of chocolates and gave one to a student after a comment was made. This change of speaker order and the apparatus used to choose speakers appeared to me to be Weathers' attempt to keep the system fresh, both for his sake and the students'. Weathers reinforced this idea when he said, "[H]ow I run

discussion changes as a response to the ergonomics of the classroom. Every class is different. You have to keep post-process clearly in the front of your thinking at all times. Every context is different; therefore, you've got to create a new discourse for that context." Having used this assignment for years and likely conducted hundreds of these kinds of workshops, these minor changes to who-spoke-when, while not reinventing the workshop, provided a change of pace.

After all comments were heard, the writer was given time to address the class, respond to concerns and questions, provide details that were not mentioned, defend their writing, elaborate on what was to come, ask the class where the piece should go, and finally to thank them for their comments. At the beginning of the semester, before students had grown accustomed to how these workshops would be handled, authors seemed unsure of how to respond to the class as a whole when they were eventually allowed to speak. Weathers would suggest, at the very least, a thank you to the class which the author would oblige. As the semester progressed and students knew what to expect from these workshops, the author's response to the comments grew into longer discussions; students would joke more frequently, and perhaps more telling, would divulge where the piece was going instead of holding back by claiming that they didn't want to "ruin the ending" or wanted to keep it a surprise.

Additionally, Weathers required students to write a brief endnote at the bottom of each workshopped page, consisting of a personalized message from one author to another. Based on the endnotes I had read and the comments of students during workshops, endnotes were positive and usually encouraged the author to keep writing, e.g., "This is interesting, I want to read more," "The dialogue sounds realistic."

Students were receptive to these peer workshops, though there was a brief period of acclimation as students became familiar with the process. Trey reported how he experienced this model of peer response:

> TREY: "When you first got there you didn't know anybody, and I don't like when people tell me stuff with my writing, but throughout the year, it got easier and I enjoyed it a lot because through reading other people's stuff you get to know a little bit about them, about their style of writing—and when they give you feedback [you] understand that they're doing this to help you…I know in high school I hated it, when teachers would tell me something I kinda took it to heart, but now I understand."

Airy, having a similar experience, offered her explanation as to what was effective about these workshops, saying, "None of my other classes actually require us knowing each other so I think that helped too, we actually worked in a group…We all knew each other a little better near the end and we knew what each other's books were about, and if it's something we're burning to tell the world it's obviously important about our lives." Weathers was intent on having students know each other's names, and twice during the semester asked students to stand up and call out other students' names. As I'll discuss later, these community building exercises helped increase student comfort with written response which in turn reduced resistance toward the workshop process.

Student Resistance

While discussing the nature of student resistance, Weathers clarified how he sees resistance in his teaching:

> WEATHERS: "I probably don't encounter a great deal of student resistance, but there are a whole lot of reasons for that, one of it is the pedagogy, another reason is the fact that, I suspect, I'm a white male who's been here almost thirty years, you know, I'm a piece of the furniture at this point. Students who might be geared towards negative resistance, not just positive resistance, might be less able to access an avenue for resistance because I'm so established here and because I am an older white male. I do think my pedagogy because it inspires, or at least it attempts to inspire dialogue or rests upon the concept of dialogic interaction and negotiation. There's less need to access avenues of negative resistance."

When asked to clarify his distinction between *negative* and *positive* student resistance, Weathers said, "Negative resistance is destructive, I'm not going to do this work, I'm going to try and disrupt this class. Positive resistance is, no, I'm going to write this *my way*, or your suggestion is not the one I'm going to follow to get my work done."

From Abby's perspective, her resistance manifested as a response to the nature of the assignment. Abby, a second-language writer who had studied English since elementary school, described the book project as "just another assignment," and saw no difference in its purpose from other coursework she had done in the past: "I liked the book I was writing but it was just an assignment. I was thinking about it during the day but I was thinking about it as much as the proofs that I had to solve for math class." Later, Abby told how she felt her writing had not improved through the course, reporting:

> "In the beginning of the semester, [Weathers] was sure our writing was going to be improving…I don't know. My grammar improved, my commas, I think, just my commas, because that's the only comment I got. I don't think that's the only

grammar problem I have, but that's the only thing that got marked. I still don't think I'm a great writer. I don't see how he contributed to my writing that much."

Although resistant to the pedagogy of the book assignment and critical of Weathers's teaching, Abby's resistance never manifested negatively during class. Her comments during workshops were thoughtful and accurate; her performance during free-writing days was productive. Her reaction during the focus group here indicates a positive resistance, though she disagreed with Weathers's methods and perhaps expected more instruction on mechanical concerns, other students disagreed with her assessment of the course. Trey offered his evaluation after Abby, saying, "He made me a more confident writer because I was writing what I felt like."

Weathers made a connection between his dialogic pedagogy and the low levels of resistance in his classes, saying,

> "[S]tudents are talking constantly to me, to each other, they're responding to their own writing, they're telling me what grade they think they should get and why they should get it and analyzing the writing that way. There's a lot of dialogue, a lot of language going back and forth, and if you have the avenues of dialogue open there's probably less reason to access the power of negative resistance, what's the purpose? If people are talking, communicating, negotiating, working on meaning, why go there? Some people will out of personal pain or personal histories; their needs will drive them there, but even many of those people can fall into a dialogue when it's happening in the classroom at least and not always, there are some students who simply resist negatively no matter what you do."

My observations of Weathers class showed a positive and upbeat teacher, as Airy said, "He was always in a really good mood and he always seemed to actually care and he was always really encouraging." Weathers attitude toward the class was one of genuine affection and concern for their well-being as students and as people. As students entered the room, he would say hello to each by name, continuing previous conversations or asking how a game went, what happened over the weekend, or how their writing was doing. If a student entered with a grumpy or low demeanor, Weathers would ask if everything was okay. From my perspective as a participant researcher I was excited to go to his class, much like many of his students, as we knew the kind of welcoming atmosphere in store for us. This positive atmosphere, no doubt, contributed to what I found to be a classroom with no observed signs of negative student resistance as described above.

While my observations showed a cohered class that had established a mutually-respectful community of learners, Weathers discussed in interview that this is not *always* the case, though the impression I received was that my observations were *usually* the case. Weathers admits, "I've had many more years to have this happen, but I've had a couple classes here at Milford where I didn't want to be there because I had the luck of the draw of the registrar, some really bad eggs who were just determined to be nasty and they soured the classroom experience for everybody." Weathers attributed my observed section's low-resistance / high-mutuality environment to his 34 years of teaching experience:

> WEATHERS: "[I]t takes a lifetime to learn to do it…I'm not the greatest teacher in the world, but I'm a really good teacher and it's just because some people are

born to certain professions. Other people can train themselves to do the job well. I don't reach every student, my ethos isn't right for every student, I lose students all the time, we all do, but…my ethos in the classroom…[is] a caring ethos. I care about the students until they teach me not to, and then I try to let go of the caring because it'll kill you if you don't, you carry too much of that inside you."

ME: "You said until they teach me not to."

WEATHERS: "They disappear, stop coming. I care about that person too, but if the student [says], I'm dropping the class because I got other things I gotta do, I don't have time for this, you want too much, you want a book, I can write four essays over in another class. I have to let go of that. I've got enough to care about right in front of me without caring about what's beyond my control; you've got to be zen-like about it."

When I asked whether he was conscious of any behaviors or dialogic moves he was making that would reduce resistance or increase a class's willingness to express their concerns for a class, he offered a similar response:

"[Y]our demeanor, your classroom presence, your ethos—will tell them if you're going to listen to them or not. If someone overplayed their openness that could shut them down in various ways; they could be annoyed by it, they could feel intruded upon by it, they could feel like they're being set up. I don't do anything specific, I just respond when something comes up…they know when they're getting lip service. They probably know [it] faster than [we do]."

Brad's ENGL 202 – Research Writing

Brad, my second participant, exhibited high levels of mutuality based on his answers to the purposive survey described above and was contacted for inclusion. Out of four respondents to the survey, Brad's answers were the most in tune with this study's definition of mutuality, to wit: students have an *equal* amount of talk time with the teacher; opportunities are *often* provided for students to dialogue with each other; student suggestions are *often* used when creating assignments and constructing rubrics; students are *often* allowed to choose their own writing topics, and student feedback is *often* solicited as part of the written response process. Additionally, Brad's own research focused on mutuality-minded teaching, particularly as a function of written response. A few times throughout the semester, including during the first two weeks where I was not yet present, Brad discussed his views on mutuality and let the class know exactly what he was trying to accomplish with such a pedagogy. He later reported:

> "I think it also helps too, just to tell them what we're doing and why we're doing it. Why? What's our motive? Once they realize the motive is this idea of mutuality and we're trying to create these transactional relationships with them and create meaning together, once they hear all of that and know there's a kind of method behind what we're doing and that we're not just pulling it out of the sky, then I think they're on board. I thought the group you sat in [on] was really interested in the idea, this idea of mutuality and decentralizing my authority as a teacher and opening it up . . . I think you have to keep reinforcing it over the course of the semester. I'm always reinforcing it and showing them that I really care about what they think and I guess repetition in that respect is useful."

An untenured white male in his late twenties, Brad had been assigned four sections of a sophomore-level research writing class in the spring of 2010. Brad was eager to participate in the project and his only stipulation for my participation in his class was that I would begin attending after the second week of the course to allow him to "establish a rapport" with his students. As with Weathers's class, these rapport-building meetings may have held a wealth of information as these teachers made and took initial impressions; I respected their decisions, however, to begin my observations when they were comfortable. The class met in a room with chairs attached to desks lining the room, allowing most students to see each other. As with Weathers's case study above, all students in Brad's class agreed to my presence and signed an informed consent form.

Freewrites

Brad began most of his classes with a ten minute freewriting topic. Students were encouraged to write continuously for five minutes after which every student went around the room discussing what they had written. Topics were chosen by Brad and usually related to the class's current writing assignment, e.g., during the weeks in which students researched their future career paths, freewrites asked students what they would do if they had unlimited money, or what celebrity would play them in the movie of their lives. The discussions generated from these freewrites often linked students' answers to their current assignment—unlimited money pointed some

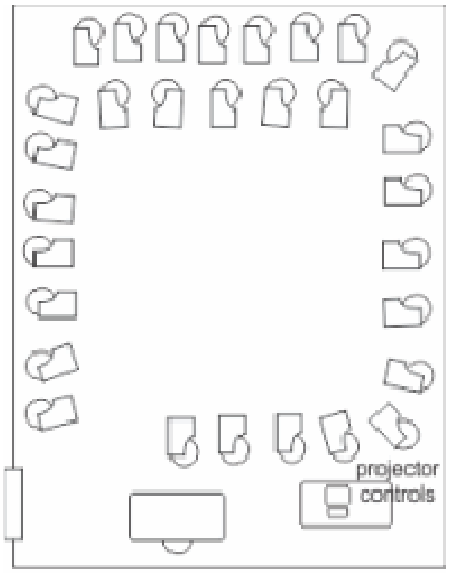

Figure 2. Brad's classroom layout, students' desks lining the edge

students toward new career choices, while celebrity casting choices asked students to envision a life worthy of a big-budget biopic. Though I participated in the daily freewrites,[10] I did not write the three-part assignments that were included in the syllabus, yet found these freewrites helpful as daily reinforcement and reflection of my career.

Brad later explained his reason for using the freewrites, telling me:

> "I think freewriting is paramount for the way I teach because from the first day of class till the last day of class I want all my students to be heard. Having them do a quick freewrite and share it, I think, is a great way for them to get to know each other, share ideas, learn from one another, and if they are stumped on something and it involves an assignment it gives them an opportunity to hear what somebody else is thinking and maybe get an idea. I always use that early on as a tool to get students participating in class and just talking because some students are a little more shy than others and I think [it] builds class community. But, you have to have them share the writing. I don't think you're going to get the same benefit if you have them do the freewrite and then you don't talk about it or if you just call on a few people to share theirs or if you ask them to volunteer."

The students who participated in the focus group for this case study, Ericka, Cody, and Max, had mixed feelings about the freewrites:

> MAX: "[The freewrites] really did help get your paper going, get the ball rolling on a paper, like the one we had to do—break down into five sentences—the sights of your town, the smells of your town, the sounds of your town, that would really get you thinking about . . . why does it always smell like chicken during the summer?"

[10] For the record, I'd like Ron Livingston to play me in the movie adaptation of this dissertation

ERICKA: “I liked the freewrites, but I hated everyone reading them out loud…I had a [previous] class where we had freewrites and [the teacher] would grade us on those and I liked it, it’s a good way to start being able to write, but I just didn’t like going around the room and sharing it. I felt like a freewrite is kind of a journal entry.”

CODY: “I liked having to share them, because it forces you to open yourself up to the group. I feel like if you don’t at least try to share your true feelings, if you alter it then you’re kind of shorting yourself out for the experience. I thought it was fun, gets you to be less concerned about being judged because obviously you’re not always going to have the best ideas so if you say something that people could consider stupid, you’re not the only one who wrote something stupid.”

Having taught a 202 in the same room the semester prior, I explained what I had experienced in terms of soliciting student response in a room of that size with a similar chair layout; because the desks lined the edge of the room, the central open space created a kind of stage—any student response, then, became an ad hoc public speaking event, one that I found hindered students’ willingness to respond, at least in the beginning of the semester when students were unfamiliar with each other. Students I spoke with preferred the rounded layout of the chairs; Max reported that the chair layout “allowed us to really talk to each other and bounce around ideas and joke with each other and become more comfortable.”

Apart from the freewriting exercises in class, the three main writing assignments that semester were themed around students’ future professional careers. Brad explained

the three assignments, his reason for choosing them, and how he would change the assignment's structure in the future:

> [T]he three papers I have—Where are you from? Where are you now? Where are you going? I used it the first semester I taught and it's because I never taught the course before and I was wondering, "How am I going to get students to come up with ideas and be able to do research and get interviews with people?" I was trying to think of essays that would help that along and what I found was they'll do it anyway, but they'll be way more interested if they can just pick what they want to write about and I don't need to give them so much structure. I think . . . sophomore[s] and junior[s] still need to focus on how to write a research paper, but the topics I just want to let them discover for themselves and use the freewriting I do at the beginning of class as a way to discover their own ideas rather than discover the ideas that I want them to discover.

What's interesting about Brad's choice of words here is that he felt he wasn't giving his students enough freedom in their choice of topic selection. Yet, one of the first responses Cody gave during the focus group was, "I really liked [the class and Brad's] allowance for freedom [and] the ability to basically choose my topics within the set boundaries." The "set boundaries" Cody refers to here may be the overall theme of the three assignments as they relate to students' careers or students' majors, though Cody later goes on to explain how he felt comfortable expanding those boundaries in his choice of topic for the third assignment/presentation in which he reports:

> [T]he last paper we did, we were supposed to do a paper on our career choice and then do a presentation on it, my paper wasn't about music eduction, it was about

> how interactions with people, whether good or negative kind of lead you to your path in life [and] make your decisions for you in a sense and I was exploring that as compared to everyone else [who] wanted to do just their topic for career paths . . . It's more interesting to research something you want to know about than find the reasons to prove [what you already know].

Dialogue

A useful technique Brad uses as part of his mutuality-minded teaching involves the active soliciting of student feedback at regular intervals during the semester. Brad says, "I call them my check-ins . . . where we just stop and we talk about what's going on, how they're experiencing the class so far, what they like about it, what they don't like about it, what they're uncomfortable with, what they love that's going on, just so they know that I care about their feedback." Check-ins can be tricky, however, as students may not be willing to share disagreements with a teacher, either verbally or in a public setting. Teachers conducting these response feedback sessions may mistake silence from their students as compliance. Responding to this, Brad reported:

> I did a check-in . . . and I got a lot of feedback, but it was all positive, but I didn't notice that they were resistant to offering me negative or positive feedback, it's just that there's a good vibe in these classes. I find freshmen to be more open to [giving feedback] once they realize it's an open forum and they're relaxed and they know what kind of teacher you are and they know that they can speak their mind[s] and it's okay . . . [Students] sometimes get to the point where they're a bit jaded and [they'll say], "Yeah, you're saying this, but you know what? I've been

through this before and it's gonna come back and bite me on the ass." Once they get that first true reaction from you then they know whether it's okay or not.

From my perspective, Brad showed himself to be the kind of teacher who valued the agency of his students. Cody reflected this sentiment while discussing the class as a whole, saying "[H]e didn't try and push ideas on you, he let you make your own. . . He's testing out his ideas on us. He didn't say 'This is how it is, this is how it needs to be done, this is the only answer to the problem.' He gave us the ability to choose our own path as long as we had a good enough reason to do so." Later, the other students agreed with Cody on this point regarding whether Brad had provided students with a say in the way things were run in the classroom, "More than other classes, I mean, obviously at the end of the day he's still the teacher, so what he says goes, but it's nice to have your opinion at least considered."

Students' opinions were considered, according to Max, who describes his interactions with Brad that mirrored student responses in Weathers's class regarding name recognition:

> I like Brad. I went to his office hours a couple times, it was just a real down-to-earth conversation. We didn't always talk about the class, we'd talk about music and movies and stuff and he really wanted to connect with all his students to get to know them all and that really helped the class a lot, the fact that he knew your name, as opposed to a lot of teachers who [say], "Well, this is just another student, I'll have him for fifteen weeks and I'll never see him again." [Brad] really does care about each and every single student that walks into his door . . . [H]e went out of his way to know everybody's name and when you walked in the

> first day he shook your hand and said "I'm Brad." It's really breaking down the traditional professor-student barrier of "I'm Dr. Brad," [as] opposed to a first name basis you automatically feel a little bit more personable and connected with the teacher.

One of the techniques Brad used to connect with his students was to play music throughout class. Using the computer station at the front of the room, Brad often played music through an internet radio station, with genres ranging from classical to contemporary pop. Students responded also reported efforts Brad made to relate to his students:

> MAX: "I think overall the class was really laid back and it was a really joking class that helps you learn and feel more comfortable in the class . . . He also had music playing a lot, always had his Pandora station up, which was a little distracting for me."
>
> ERICKA: "Yeah, I think it was distracting . . . In the beginning it was distracting, but I liked it."
>
> MAX: "It helped create more of a relaxing atmosphere, especially when . . . he had on classical music that studies have shown to be a more relaxing type mood I thought it was pretty cool cause a lot of teachers are just cut and dry."

During my participant observations in the class, like Ericka, I found music with lyrics to be distracting at first, particularly during freewrites. And also like Ericka, I grew accustomed to hearing the music in the background.

Written Response

Based on Brad's research on responding to student writing, I was anxious to see how his application of mutuality was taken by his students. Part of Brad's written response took a dialogic approach using Nancy Welsh's sideshadowing technique where students, before submitting drafts, write comments and questions in the margins of their text to responders. Additionally, Brad had students write a brief letter to their intended or imagined readers. Brad explains:

> [Students] have a question or a directive or a statement for the reader and we use these for peer response and I use them for myself and then [students] have three questions for the reader, and the responses they get are supposed to speak to the questions and the statement, so if [a] statement is 'I'm trying to create an air of sadness' and their response is 'Well, I wasn't feeling that, this is what I was feeling,' [then] the way that we know what they're trying to create is through their letter to the reader.

Brad's emphasis on what students are "trying to create" was mentioned a number of times in class and during my interview:

> I'm teaching them how to offer commentary through reader-response criticism and showing them how to do that by giving that kind of commentary myself. So there's the idea they have in their head and they're writing it on this paper and they're going to turn it in. My question to them [is always] 'What type of reader are you trying to create?' And if my response to [their] paper is not the reader [they] wanted to create, then what do [they] need to do to create that reader . . . not 'How are you trying to please me as the teacher,' [and] I think there's a big difference.

The commentary Brad says he uses to model a reader-response approach for his students involves student-reflected language. As Brad puts it, "[W]hen I ask questions, I use language that they've used in their paper . . . I'm asking something particular to that line. 'You said in your essay that your brother was sick . . . How did that affect the rest of your family? Was it difficult being put in the role of caretaker for him?" This dialogic approach to student feedback was new for most if not all of Brad's students, and some were confused with the method:

> ERICKA: "What was up with us writing in the margins? We would just go through the paper and pick out parts we didn't like or didn't know how to figure out how to say and we would just write it in, then he would comment on a way to help us through that part."
>
> CODY: "I know when he did that for me, I didn't always follow the suggestions exactly but it led me into another thought process to help solve the problem. So it's usually helpful commentary, I guess . . . Basically, I think it could be all considered good criticism. He can say what some people would consider harsh things, like you need to revise your thesis . . . Obviously [I thought] it's crappy or it's unclear, but he said it nicely to the point where you know he was just trying to help you, he wasn't just saying you're ignorant.[11]"

Brad was also aware of the difficulty some students had in accepting and effectively giving reader-response feedback, telling me that students would often respond, when reading other students' work, to grammatical and mechanical concerns, both of which Brad had asked students to steer away from. Brad also reported seeing less comments that reflected the language used by the author. Brad reported greater success with this method

[11] Cody later added, "I like that he didn't use red pen. That was nice."

in his subsequent classes, and attributed this recent success to how the class viewed themselves as being part of a community. Brad categorized some of the responses students would give each other:

> Some [comments] were sparse, they weren't as involved, you know that go-to phrase, 'Oh, this is really great, I wouldn't change a thing.' I was doing something wrong in that instance . . . it was just modeling for them and getting them involved in why it's important to offer feedback like that and give reader-response. I didn't make it clear enough. . . I think I had good intentions but I didn't take the time to really unpack this idea for them and explain to them why it's important . . . that my goal is not to appropriate their work, it's to encourage the paper they want to create. And why is that important? Well, it's important because this is your idea, this is your paper, this is your creation; it's not mine to tinker with. I'm just supposed to encourage you to revise and improve it.

Student Resistance

Much like Weathers's class, I observed no instance of public negative resistance. My visits and experiences showed a group of students engaged with the course material. Interactions with the teacher, on a personal level, were about as positive as any educator could hope for. After each class, a handful of students would approach Brad with questions about the next assignment, or have brief conversations about a book or movie they enjoyed that they wanted to share with Brad, or discuss what they did over the weekend.

An interesting instance of possible resistance occurred mid-way through the semester in which a student had inadvertently said "shit" while sharing her freewrite for

the day. She student stopped, wide-eyed as the class looked to Brad to see how this would play out. Brad smiled and told the class, “Hey, this is a safe space.” The class exhaled and laughed, seeing how that kind of language wouldn’t be an issue for Brad, though if it was, students reported later that Brad wouldn’t have mentioned it to the class as a whole:

> CODY: “One thing I liked was he didn’t really penalize you. [H]e did, but he didn’t make a big deal out of it . . . and he never [confronted] you in from of the whole class, he kept it aside and separate . . . [H]e showed you respect instead of thinking you were lesser . . . I don’t like when teachers call students out in the middle of class.”
>
> MAX: “I think if the student is late, the professor [says], ‘Ah, nice of you to join us finally.’ Whereas like every day Philip would be late and [Brad] would joke about it, ‘If it weren’t for those shoes, I’d be penalizing you right now.’”
>
> CODY: “That’s a decent example right there. I’m pretty sure Philip had something that caused him to be late every day that was probably pre-discussed. [Brad] wouldn’t yell at you in front of the class. Problems should be dealt with privately.”

Though Cody mentioned Brad’s practice of pulling a student aside to discuss a class issue, I saw no instances of this while waiting after class to debrief with Brad and so no indication that his conversations involved any reprimand or handling of resistance, either positive or negative. However, it is possible, since my observations did not extend to personal email correspondence or office hour conferences, that Brad had discussed student behavior at other times.

When I asked Brad about any issues of student resistance, he reported that some students were hesitant to accept the added responsibility that mutuality-based teaching placed on them as learners:

> "I've noticed [that] freshmen [are] not used to having control over the process, so it takes a little bit more time for them to buy into this wonderful thing you're selling them which is, 'You get to decide on things, you have a voice. It's okay, you can tell me if you don't like this.' They're a little bit like, 'Wait a minute, aren't you just supposed to tell me what we need to do and we'll do it and we'll please you and get a grade and that'll be it?" The hardest part is that some [students] still want that and sometimes they have the excuse that they're not creative enough to come up with an idea or, 'I don't want to develop this on my own. Why can't you just tell me what to write about and I'll give you a great paper on it.'"

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

> "Surely we are incomplete as teachers if we are committed only to what we are teaching but not to our students, or only to our students but not to what we are teaching, or halfhearted in our commitment to both." (Peter Elbow)

Evaluation

The teachers in this study both exhibited high levels of mutuality as defined by Wallace & Ewald (2000), including the use of dialogue moves that increased student-talk time, course architecture that respected the lived experiences of students, and written response protocols that valued students' interpretive agency. Additionally, if we include the criteria that mutuality is a living relationship between teacher and student, one that needs constant care and reciprocal attention, we can see that these classes were rich with mutuality-minded experiences that contributed to low levels of student resistance. When resistance occurred or when students disagreed with the course architecture constructed by the teacher, students were made to understand the *reasons* behind such pedagogical choices. That Ericka or Sophia were unsatisfied with some aspects of their respective classes does not preclude the possibility of mutuality. I want to stress again that mutuality does not aim for compliance, but understanding by creating space for dialogue. For example, Ericka did not want to share her freewrites, but she understood why Brad asked students to share. Though she disagreed, she continued writing and sharing. Openly negative/hostile student resistance was not present in these classes as a result of mutuality. While this is not mutuality's primary goal, it is nonetheless a welcome effect.

Both teachers showed a sincere concern for the well-being of their students as intellectual partners and as people accomplishing common goals. Teachers' brief conversations with students before/after a class may seem insignificant as a means of connecting with students, or, at worst, may be used as a rote method for systematically building rapport; but, when these conversations are handled with sincerity and genuine curiosity, talking with students about non-class related matters had a tremendous impact on how students saw teachers. Students in these classes viewed Weathers and Brad as respectful and compassionate, similar in need though different in authority.

An example of this level of respect comes from Weathers's stipulation that all students in his class agreed to my presence. This showed, I believe, a remarkable level of consideration, and one that initially scared me. If any student, who, for any reason, did not understand my project, did not agree with its purpose, or simply disliked me, I would have missed out on an important experience. While I had initially planned on attending every class out of a desire to increase my set of observable data, Weathers's response showed me his concern for his students as *people* and not simply participants involved in a study. Weathers was within his right as steward of his classroom to unilaterally agree to my participation/presence without the student's consent. If that were the case, students could have refused participation and *not* signed the IRB Informed Consent Protocol, though this would only prevent me from observing and discussing those particular students and would not have barred me from entering the class. In short, by allowing students to choose whether I participated or not, Weathers was exhibiting mutuality *before* the study began, to wit: Weathers's briefly explained what he did on that first day

I was unable to observe, telling me that he "put the whole class in a circle from the very beginning. [Students] learn who each other is and make new friends."

Student resistance, teacher resistance, and moments of conflict or confrontation were nearly non-existent. I did not systematically observe any private interaction between the teachers and individual students, such as during an office hour conference, but my observations saw no outward negative resistance on the part of students or disciplinary action on the part of the teachers. My observations showed two smoothly-run, maturely-handled, and intellectually-stimulating classes. Student feedback from Weathers's workshops as well as the time spent in Brad's class where students co-constructed a class grading rubric for an upcoming speech presentation gave students the ability to express their opinions and more importantly, see how those opinions shaped writers' decisions and their teacher's grading respectively.

I attribute the low resistance in these classes to the strong sense of community and high level of student agency present. Students were comfortable to speak with each other and with the teacher. Students were invested in the topics they chose to write about. When their writing was evaluated, it was done with respect for their intended purposes. In short, student resistance was low because there was little

What Kinds of Dialogue (Discussion and Written Response) Help Teachers Achieve Mutuality?

The kinds of teacher-talk used by these teachers reflect the way they feel about their work as educators, i.e., both teachers expressed a high level of job satisfaction:

> BRAD: "I sometimes come in here and I sit down and I just laugh because I can't believe [I'm] getting paid for this because it's fun."

WEATHERS: "[Teaching] is the greatest job, I love it. Seriously, how many people do you know in your life [who] love going to work? I love going to work." The question of whether they love their jobs because they are excellent teachers or if they are excellent teachers because they love their jobs remains; what was clear to me was that their enthusiasm for what they do is infectious, both to myself as a participant researcher and to their students as beginning and intermediate writers. Students in these classes were aware of their teachers' job satisfaction and responded positively. Students would often leave these classes with significantly *more* energy than they entered with.

Weathers's and Brad's dialogue in class was positive, energetic, and amiable. Conversations relating to students' personal lives were common, as were uses of humor. These teachers were more than paid employees providing a service to paying customers—they were friends with their students, students whose names they knew. Part of the relationship required for mutuality-minded teaching, then, necessarily requires teachers to know the names of their students. Brad reinforced this, telling me that he "learn[s] all of [his] students' names by the second class and engage[s] each of them before and after class." The act of learning names may seem a simple and obvious component that can often be overlooked by teachers, but according to my participants, it is *never* overlooked by students.

Another overlooked aspect of the student-teacher relationship involves the student-*student* relationship. Students in these classes knew *each other's* names and not by haphazard luck. Both teachers offered ample opportunity for students to interact with each other and learn about each other. This was achieved partly from the choice of assignments which, in both classes, involved writing topics that dealt with personal

information from the author—creative non-fiction narratives in Weathers's class, and place-based/career oriented research in Brad's class. Brad's students were randomly grouped in short discussion/activity work almost on a daily basis, giving students the chance to interact, while Weathers's workshops gave the class a chance to get to know each student, one at a time. As a function of mutuality, the importance of community cannot be overstated; and these classroom communities cannot be achieved without first knowing its contingent members, both as professional peers and personal friends.

Dialogue in these classes also provided students with an opportunity to speak as professionals. Speaking to this level of professional discussion, Brad reported, "I make it a point throughout the entire semester to talk to each and every student, each and every class session. Also, I share my writing with them, as well as my life." By sharing his writing with his students, Brad exemplifies the skills students practice during peer workshops, essentially treating students as peers of his work. The workshops conducted by both teachers, particularly Weathers, gave students a chance to respond using language that reinforced the importance of the authors' intended meanings. Verbally during those open workshops or in writing as part of student or teacher response, the language of respectful reader-response criticism allowed student writers the chance to make their own choices in their writing. Though Weathers and Brad are more experienced writers than their students, the language used when responding to student writing assumed a level of student potential that never demeaned, patronized, or relegated students to a lesser position

In discussions of assignment deadlines, room layout, whether the class should be held outdoors or not on a pleasant day, grading policies, etc., both teachers responded to

students and allowed the class, to a certain extent, to create the course's framework. Many levels of course architecture were decided democratically in group discussion, including upcoming class activities. Ultimately, Weathers and Brad had the final say in these situations, and while mutuality does *not* aim for a completely student-centered classroom in which the teacher abdicates *all* authority, students responded positively to the choices they were allowed to make.

What Kinds of Writing Assignments Help Teachers Achieve Mutuality?

Assignments that focus on self-reflection, both on a personal and professional level show students their ability to generate credit-earning work through their lived experiences. These assignments implicitly and explicitly provide students with an outlet to express their interpretive agency, regardless of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliation, etc. Expressivist writing assumes we are all, at some level, experts on who we are. Expressivist, personal, or creative non-fiction assignments do not guarantee mutuality, nor does their exclusion prohibit the possibility of mutuality; however, when course content can be linked to student experience through assignments, mutuality is *more likely* to occur. In Brad's case, where students conduct examinations into their professional futures, some students may have a stronger background in a particular profession, but it is assumed that they are all capable of filling these knowledge gaps if they are fully invested in a topic they have chosen. Including the personal as a foundational aspect of assignments could, if not handled properly, lead to self-absorbed writing that ignores the external exigencies of the class and subject. Students may, if left to write in a vacuum of complete autonomy, ignore the subject matter of the writing with which the personal is intended to buttress. While this was still a possibility in Weathers's

and Brad's classes, I believe the dialogue moves and methods of written response in these classes mitigated the danger. Writing was shared frequently and responded to with respect to the author's intentions. In Weathers's case, students were frequently urged, both in discussion and in a self-evaluation questionnaire, to consider the potential readers of their books, which would include at least one person outside the class—usually a family member or friend—as well as the possibility that their work might travel to another continent.

In Weathers's classes, students' willingness to divulge where their stories were going during workshops—their comfort at revealing the ending of their books—showed me that these authors were thinking of themselves as a community working with unfinished pieces instead of as performers whose "trick" would be spent once they discussed their story. This willingness to look forward and discuss possibilities suggested that students were comfortable with each other, that they were comfortable with the nature of the responding process they had become familiar with in workshops. This also points toward an awareness of a larger audience for their books. Weathers on multiple occasions asked students to tell the class who/where their books would be delivered when completed—that students were less concerned with "giving away the ending" and more concerned with creating a better book that would be read outside the class showed how they saw the assignment as something that, as Weathers said, "wouldn't die in the classroom."

In Brad's classes, assignments consisted of three self-reflections involving research toward their intended career paths, including what led students to their choice of major, what they were currently doing to accomplish those goals, and what their lives

would be like once they had succeeded. The personal expertise of students was shared with the class as students engaged in research to further develop, shift, or reinforce the choices they had made as developing adults. The assignment was helpful in creating mutuality because students were shown that what they cared about was valuable in conducting the work necessary for the class's subject. Student agency was respected as students chose their topics. Brad expressed concern during our interview that he should have allowed *more* freedom for students to choose the kinds of writing they would like to create though his students reported this same level of freedom as being one of the reasons they enjoyed his class. How students and teachers perceive the reach of their respective freedoms, then, is complicated by what students imagine a liberating pedagogy (e.g., "a laid-back teacher") to be. Brad later responded to this perception, telling me, "At the time I was still trying to figure out mutuality, so it was difficult for me to gauge how much guidance to give. In retrospect, I believe there was a nice balance between the requirements of each assignment and my students' freedom within those requirements."

The impressions I received from students during activities, interactions, and conversations with Brad showed reciprocal affection and warmth. While everyone worked toward class objectives, discussing elements of an assigned reading, clarifying documentation mechanics, or explicating the message of a music video, the impression I received was this this was a community of learners who enjoyed each other's company as colleagues, friends, and professionals. This leveling of the relationship between teacher and student was a vital factor in the work done by students, as they reported:

> MAX: "[H]e acts our age . . . [I]n a lot of cases students are scared of their teachers because [teachers] come off like, 'I have my PhD and I'm this and I'm

that and you can't ask me a question or else you're [stupid],' and Brad is like, 'No, just ask me a question.' First day he said, 'Call me Brad,' and that really set the stage for the whole class."

ERICKA: "I think [his teaching] works for an English class where you're writing, you're sharing your paper with him for us to know that he's a cool guy . . . because you're writing, and I find writing is really personal and I don't want to give it to some professor that I'm intimidated by or I don't really know anything about . . . especially if [another professor] doesn't have an understanding of the students. Either [the teacher is] not going to understand the writing or [won't] care about it as much. I felt like [Brad] was caring."

CODY: "I think him acting, getting to the level as us—interaction-wise—and allowing us to actually like him instead of being intimidated by him allows us to make us want to work harder, because I hate writing papers, I've only ever been able to write papers for two teachers because they allowed me to express how I wanted and didn't criticize or make me feel like I was [stupid] so I think being more likable, more relatable makes people work harder for you."

ME: "[G]oes against Machiavelli. It's better to be feared than loved. You're saying – "

CODY: "[F]ear is a good leader, but fear does not create loyalty. Respect is – "

MAX: "Respect is power. Fear is not power. He had our respect, he had everybody's respect."

Mutuality-based assignments must do more than encourage personal writing or allow students to select topics. If not, then the incredibly complex task of designing

fulfilling, stimulating, and producing assignments would take minutes, require minimal revision, and put textbook manufacturers out of business. The connective thread between Weathers's and Brad's choice of assignments includes the possibility of external existence, i.e., the assignment is designed partly for the intellectual exercise of writing practice, partly for the dialogic exchange of the personal—but also includes the possibility that the writing has additional meaning outside the classroom. In Weathers's case, the book assignments were, according to students, delivered to a friend or relative when the class had ended. To a lesser extent, Brad's assignments allowed students to explore their professional futures.

Both Weathers and Brad, however, initially selected and designed their assignments without student input. On the surface, mutuality would oppose a choice like this if the teacher rigidly stuck to the assignment regardless of student input. However, Weathers reported various ways in which he had modified his book assignment over the years based on student response, e.g., both a letter of intent and book proposal were included at one point but were later removed as students told Weathers that they were more interested in writing the books instead of writing *about* the books. Similarly, Brad's decision to increase student choice in what they wanted to research instead of limiting them to their major/career paths was based on student feedback. Ideally, assignments in a mutuality-minded classroom would involve teacher and student input at the assignment's inception; however, time constraints and departmental/contractual demands for pre-semester syllabi might preclude this possibility. The kinds of assignments we are left with—ones that are initially generated by the teacher and then modified after the fact by student response—chase the past. The alternative, creating a democratically-generated

assignment from scratch for each class each semester may be asking too much, considering teachers have roughly fifteen weeks to accomplish a nearly unlimited set of goals. Given those limitations, we can make our assignments more effective by soliciting feedback from students before, during, and after, such that modifications to those assignments can be made for both the current and future sections.

When the assignments are ready for evaluation, the ways teachers respond to student writing can have an enormous impact on the mutuality level of the class. Critical pedagogy, in creating a more democratically structured class, has often been charged with being "soft" on grades. The common argument is that critical pedagogy, by alleviating the authority-burden of teachers in creating a student-centered classroom, may loosen writing standards because personal/expressive writing is too subjective to be judged. In response to this, Weathers said, "I've never heard that the writing is too subjective to grade. I focus on the craft of writing with students, not the grade-value of their experiences." Brad similarly reported that "[he has] not run into any issues with students questioning [his] grading methods." According to these teachers, their grading methods are conducive with mutuality in that they provide an avenue for students to dialogue with their teachers during the evaluation process. In Weathers's case, the self-evaluation forms used before graded material is turned in allows students to explain what they felt about their own writing before Weathers makes an evaluation: "Students self-evaluate their writing. I then evaluate it. I compare the two. I assign a grade and meet with the students to discuss grades and revisions."

In Brad's case, the avenue for student feedback comes in the form of sideshadowing (Welch, 1998) as well as a detailed grading rubric. He explains,

My grading process involves two essential features: 1) a clear, detailed assignment sheet with a rubric designed either exclusively by me or with my students and 2) the use of Sideshadowing (this technique asks my students to insert their voice into the margin of the paper, offering me a detailed commentary of their writing). When grading, I refer to the rubric, while considering their individual comments.

Additionally, Brad uses an extended revision policy as a way of arbitrating disagreements with potentially unsatisfied students, as explained in his syllabus:

REVISION POLICY:

No doubt, revision is an essential part of the writing process; therefore, if you are not satisfied with a particular grade, you are permitted and encouraged to rewrite any of your essays. The rewrite option is not available for homework assignments or papers that were turned in late. If your revision deserves a higher grade than you originally received, the new grade will replace the original one. In order for a rewrite to be accepted, it must be turned in within one week of the original paper being returned to you. To receive credit for a rewrite, you must turn in the following:

- the original paper with my responses
- the revised paper
- a separate page explaining, in detail, why you made the particular changes

If any of the above criteria are not met, the rewrite will not be accepted.

The underlying principle used by Brad's Sideshadowing and revision policy is similar to Weathers's use of a self-evaluation questionnaire in that both allow students to take

ownership of their meaning with their writing. A guiding practice of mutuality, then, in regards to written evaluation , would be actively questioning students to make clear what they intend with their writing such that the evaluator has less opportunity to impose meaning and thereby close communication.

Once Achieved, Does Mutuality Overcome Student Resistance?

When considering whether or not mutuality reduces student resistance, particularly unproductive negative resistance, we have to understand the nature of mutuality as an ongoing relationship manifested through the classroom community. Determining whether that relationship exists can hardly be described as a simple toggle, i.e., either a class has mutuality or it does not. However, elements of that relationship can be isolated and analyzed, making it easier to determine the *strength* of that relationship. The pedagogical elements examined in these two case studies—dialogue and assignments—showed an ongoing commitment, however conscious, on the part of the teachers to create a class where mutuality could develop. The high levels of mutuality seen in these classes, I believe, strongly correlate with the respectively low levels of student resistance—as determined by teacher/student response coupled with my observations of student behaviors.

Mutuality shows students a way of interacting that may be wholly new to them, one in which their choices and decisions simultaneously place on them greater responsibility and accountability. Mutuality does not push against students; resistance is reduced because there is less to resist when students are made a part of the decision-making process. Decisions are made either by individual choice or democratically as a class and while a truly democratic choice is often incapable of pleasing everyone, the

understanding that mutuality aims for at least shows resistant students *why* certain architectural choices were made even when those students disagree. Reducing resistance through mutuality originates with teachers, who, I would argue, are often the cause of student resistance because of their *own* resistance.

Less discussed in pedagogical theory, *teacher resistance* includes those aspects of teaching that occur when teachers are required to shift their role. For instance, teachers who have traditionally constructed their classrooms as Freire's banking models will no doubt expect compliance with attendance, grading, and assignment policies that have likely been created by the banking teacher. When those teachers are questioned, when students make perfectly reasonable comments concerning the purpose of specific policies or assignment requirements, banking teachers may resist the new role they've been asked to fill—from taskmaster to defendant, or from boss to negotiator. Resistant teachers who are unwilling or think themselves unable to justify their teaching methods may try to maintain their role by justifying their authority. Mutuality suggests a more democratic model for interactions wherein both teachers' and students' roles are in a constant state of flux dependent upon the needs of the other. Ideally, these identity/role shifts will be mediated through dialogue and/or writing that respects the knowledge-making potential of all parties. Teachers wishing to practice mutuality must understand that student response is contingent upon teacher behavior.

But students have a responsibility in this relationship as well; students cannot simply sit back and hope that teachers might provide outlets for expression and agency, nor should they squander that agency when it is given by taking advantage of their newly acquired authority or give it up by arguing in whatever iteration that they are unable to

participate. Weathers said, “I care about students until they teach me not to,” and this admission makes it clear that student behaviors effect teacher behaviors. Indeed, we can assume the reverse is also true; students will care until *teachers* teach them not to. If we expect students to embrace the mutuality-minded relationship and exercise their intellectual autonomy, we need to develop and experiment with frameworks that help us better teach them to care.

Some students will resist the kind of negotiated space that accompanies mutuality, uneasy with their new responsibility as an active learner in the classroom. These students yearn for traditional roles where tasks are explained, assigned, and evaluated with the same precision and certainty of an algebra equation. For better or worse, composition rarely allows students to solve for an objectively-limited and knowable *x*. We instead solve *x* differently for each student, for each topic, for each sentence. Students that expect a forceful, dominant, all-knowing, and guarded professor to tell them what to do may have difficulty with mutuality’s emphasis on co-construction. Brad exemplified these students when he reported:

> “[Some students say] ‘aren’t you just supposed to tell me what we need to do and we’ll do it and we’ll please you and get a grade and that’ll be it?’ . . . The hardest part is that some people still want that and sometimes they have the excuse that they’re not creative enough to come up with an idea or [find it] difficult, [saying], ‘I don’t want to have to develop this on my own, why can’t you just tell me what to write about and I’ll give you a great paper on it.’”

Brad’s response when encountering these students was to make more explicit his teaching theory by explaining why he expects more intellectual responsibility from his students.

However, even after the reasoning behind such pedagogical moves has been made clear to these students, they may still resist. In this area, mutuality does not fail to decrease resistance though students may still resist. More important is the acknowledgement of positions rather than the subjugation or suppression of resistant behaviors. That mutuality can limit resistance should not be taken as its intended goal. Resistance takes many forms and can produce more fulfilling teaching and learning when acknowledged and investigated. Mutuality does not attempt to suppress resistance, but instead seeks to use it as a resource for strengthening dialogue and course architecture as part of a systematic approach to reflective practice.

Future Research in Mutuality

To fully understand mutuality, further research is needed in other contexts. The curricular requirements and learning outcomes of other departments, for instance, may place demands on teachers that are at odds with the principles of mutuality. In technical fields which are seemingly more concerned with the dissemination of established knowledge rather than with knowledge construction, mutuality as described above may not be as effective a pedagogy as the current-traditional model. Mutuality proved effective in this study's writing contexts, but may be inadvisable in other disciplines insofar as course content is concerned. I would argue based on the findings above however that increasing student talk-time, developing a course architecture that values students' interpretive agency, and cultivating a mutually respectful relationship would benefit all disciplines considering institutional limitations, which may include exceptional class sizes or rigidly planned curriculums.

While this study looked at a tenured and non-tenured faculty, both of whom were white males teaching at a school whose demographics were dominantly white, the freedoms given by the English department are such that curricular constraints are relatively limited, i.e., the department allows each faculty, both tenured and not, to select their own course materials, craft their own syllabi, create their own assignments, etc., with the caveat that those designed courses achieve the learning outcomes laid out in the course description guide. Teachers at the Milford Academy are backed by strong union representation that, according to Weathers, secured academic freedoms that may not be present at other schools. Additional research in composition-based mutuality should focus on teachers who do not possess the identity markers of power within their teaching contexts or of teachers who are required by departmental standards to teach particular materials that may interfere with a mutuality-minded pedagogy.

Upper-level composition courses and writing-intensive courses outside the English department should also be investigated to see how interactions differ between the varied levels of student experience and motivation. Upper-level students may be more motivated in their particular courses and find less reason to resist; alternatively, these students may be accustomed to a particular set of teaching methods and may reject the added responsibility that mutuality-based teaching demands.

One important area of mutuality research that has yet to be developed involves academic settings with limited resources, namely teaching contexts with limited funding, constrained or predesigned curriculums, and, what I imagine would be the greatest impediment to mutuality, overcrowded classrooms taking place in large lecture halls. How mutuality could be achieved in rooms with upwards of eighty or more students

seems to me a challenging if not impossible endeavor. International contexts, particularly those with cultures rooted in the discipline-heavy traditions of lecture, memorization, and obedience to authority would be ripe for further research, observation, and practical reconsideration. Individual acknowledgement of student agency, a key component of mutuality, would need drastic reinterpretation to be practiced in larger classrooms—classrooms large enough that simply *remembering* the names of hundreds of students per semester, let alone developing intellectual relationships with each would be a logistic nightmare. In short, the mutuality described in this study is appropriate for its own context and likely could not be accomplished in non-western settings without serious revision.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Purposive Survey for Teacher Participant Selection

1. When you compare student and teacher talk time in your classes:
    a. Student talk time is generally greater than teacher talk time.
    b. Talk times are equal in most class sessions.
    c. Teacher talk time is greater student talk time.
2. Do you provide opportunities for students to dialogue with other students?
    a. Often
    b. Sometimes
    c. Rarely
    d. Never
3. Do you incorporate student suggestions in the construction of your writing assignments?
    a. Often
    b. Sometimes
    c. Rarely
    d. Never
4. Do you allow students to select their own topics for writing assignments?
    a. Often
    b. Sometimes
    c. Rarely
    d. Never
5. Do you solicit student feedback as part of your responses to student writing?
    a. Often
    b. Sometimes
    c. Rarely
    d. Never
6. Do you solicit student feedback during the construction of assignment rubrics?
    a. Often
    b. Sometimes
    c. Rarely
    d. Never

Appendix B – Student Participant Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions

1. How has the class been going for you?

2. How do you feel when you are in class? In discussion? When given an assignment?

3. What do you do when given back an assignment?

4. Do you feel your voice is being heard in class?

5. Do you feel you've been able to make a contribution to the class?

6. Describe your interactions with the teacher; with other students.

7. Is there anything that stands out that you would like to mention?

Appendix C – Teacher Participant Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How would you rate the overall success of your class this semester?

2. Describe a positive moment you had with an individual student this semester.

3. What areas in your teaching do you feel you need to improve on?

3. How effective were your assignments this semester? How do you know?

4. With regard to class discussion, do you feel students were able to make contributions?

5. How would you characterize your attitude toward assessment?

6. Will you be doing anything differently next semester?