7-31-2014

Personal Values, Professional Lives: Toward Fulfilling Composition Instructors' Ethical Obligation Through Critical Self-Reflection

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PERSONAL VALUES, PROFESSIONAL LIVES:

TOWARD FULFILLING COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS' ETHICAL OBLIGATION

THROUGH CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

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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August 2014

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Title: Personal Values, Professional Lives: Toward Fulfilling Composition Instructors' Ethical Obligation Through Critical Self-Reflection

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English Composition instructors have an ethical obligation to teach their classes to the best of their ability. One way to work toward fulfilling this ethical obligation is for a composition instructor to practice critical self-reflection upon his or her personal ethical values, teaching situation, and place within that situation. To assist the composition instructor through this process, this dissertation offers instructors an understanding of ethical theory as it applies to teaching composition and provides a heuristic that guides instructors' critical self-reflection by asking them to question who they are and what their local context is. It further leads instructors to critique their answers in order to make ethical decisions concerning their teaching. While it is contended that this process of critical self-reflection is best performed prior to making decisions concerning teaching practice, it also has value for those who are in the throes of an ethical dilemma, as it may clarify where the actual point of ethical conflict lies and help the instructor work toward resolution.

In order to test critical self-reflection's usefulness for composition instructors, three practicing composition instructors worked through the heuristic and shared their reflections. Two instructors completed the critical self-reflection as originally intended, as a way to fulfill their ethical obligation to their profession without consideration of a specific ethical conflict in which they were involved. The third instructor used this process as an opportunity to determine

how her own personal values had conflicted with the values of others, and how that conflict of values developed into an ethical dilemma. All three participants noted that there were areas where their personal ethical values could or already had come into conflict with the values of others. As a result of these three instructors' experiences with critical self-reflection, it can be seen that this process has value for composition instructors, as these instructors have identified the potential areas for conflict and have started to decide how they might approach these areas to prepare for eventual conflict or to attempt to lessen potential conflict by altering their teaching practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Claude Mark Hurlbert for his mentoring and his patience throughout this project. I also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Michael M. Williamson and Dr. Michael Pemberton for their insights and support throughout this process. Without the help of these three scholars this dissertation could not have reached its fruition. I would also like to thank my beautiful wife, Jiemin Wan, and my darling daughter, Katelyn, whose love and support kept me going even when I was feeling that I had reached an impasse. I also need to thank my colleagues, but especially Dauvan Mulally and Mary Jean Lotz for their continued support and much appreciated feedback as they read draft after draft. I would also like to thank Ellen Schendel, Patrick Johnson, and Lisa Gullo and Grand Valley State University's Fred Meijer Center for Writing & Michigan Authors for holding the writing retreats that I used religiously in order to finish this project. Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank my classmates for your friendship and support. You are Some Kind of People.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION:

ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS FOR PRACTICING TEACHERS OF COMPOSITION

Composition instructors face ethical challenges every day in their professional lives—when they are required to act in their teaching practice, in their interactions with students, and in their relationships with their colleagues, departments, and schools. Many times such actions are made due to on the spot decisions rather than carefully arrived at through a thoughtful, informed decision-making process, and likewise are often defended by an on the spot justification. However, when a composition instructor arrives at a professional decision by considering his or her own personal ethical values and how she or he has come to possess those beliefs (Boylan 4; Palmer 10; Weimer 23; Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher* 17; Fink 71; Richlin 9), then such decisions are no longer based on hasty justifications; rather they become the result of an intelligent, informed, thoughtful process. This decision-making process is complicated by the need to consider the expectations of the students, department, and institution involved (Schneewind 156; Fink 70; Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher* 55-58; Richlin 12-17). Informed decision-making takes time, practice, and forethought, and it requires critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection is considered by education theorists to be an important part of any instructor's course design (Richlin 9-11; Weimer 24; Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher* 26; Palmer 4). Informed decision-making using critical self-reflection is more than a good habit or good practice. It is an ethical and professional obligation for a composition instructor to reflect critically on who he or she is as well as whom and where he or she is teaching.

In order to understand and fulfill the ethical and professional obligations to practice informed decision-making, this dissertation will offer practicing composition instructors an understanding of ethical theory as it applies to teaching composition and provide a heuristic that guides instructors' critical self-reflective processes by asking them to question who they are and what their local contexts are, to critique their answers, and ultimately, to decide. It is designed to help writing instructors rationally determine where their own ethical values lie, how those values influence their teaching, and how those values either mesh or clash with the values held by their students, colleagues, and institutions. In this way, a composition instructor fulfills his or her moral obligation to apply critical self-reflection when making professional decisions.

Definitions of Key Terms

Four key terms will be used in this discussion: *ethics*, *postmodern ethics*, *ethical issues*, and *critical self-reflection*. These terms will be defined here, but will be discussed further when they will be applied to the practice of teaching composition.

Peter Singer defines *ethics* as that which "deals with values, with good and bad, with right and wrong" (v). The term "ethics" is also equated with "morals" and "morality" (Midgley 3). In this dissertation, following the definitions set by ethicists, *ethics* and *morals* will be used interchangeably, and the term *values* will be used to discuss ethical principles that an individual or community possess. Ethics, then, may be thought of as determining what is "right," "good," or "moral." *Ethics* can also mean the study of what is right and wrong. For centuries, philosophers, theologians, and ethicists have sought one universal set of ethical codes that would apply to all people, in all times, in all locations. Aristotle sought the universal code in the virtue of the

individual, Western medieval scholars sought it in God, and Renaissance and humanist philosophers sought it in the good of humans. In this dissertation, the term *ethics* will be used in two ways—as the act of determining what is right and as the social science discipline that seeks to understand what determines right and wrong action.

However, since we are influenced by a postmodern world, in this dissertation the view of ethics that will be discussed is the view which is theorized by postmodern moral philosophers. The term *postmodern ethics*, for the purposes of this study, might be best thought of as ethics influenced by a postmodern age. Zygmunt Bauman claims that "Human reality is messy and ambiguous—and so moral decisions, unlike abstract ethical principles, are ambivalent. It is in this sort of world that we must live . . . . Knowing that to be the truth . . . is to be postmodern" (32). Since human reality, according to postmodernism, is messy, it can be no wonder that the postmodern view of ethics is also not clear-cut.

Unlike the ethical theories of previous eras, postmodern ethics rests upon the belief, since human reality is "messy and ambiguous," that there is no universal ethical code by which we all must abide. While postmodern ethics accepts that the field of ethics studies what actions are right or good, it claims that the criteria used for evaluating an action determine the ethicality of that action, rather than the outcome of that action. In other words, the outcome of the action is irrelevant—only the process of deciding which action to take determines the ethicality of the action. Postmodernism offers a way to look at ethics, it does not supply absolute answers as to what is the correct way to act. It also claims that consideration of the Other, the "neighbor" who is or will be affected by those actions, is paramount (Bauman 12, 4, 84). The Other is so important, Bauman claims, that "he will be the gatekeeper of moral life" (85). Since all of the

decisions that a composition instructor makes concerning his or her class affects others, including but not limited to the students in the class, each decision is an ethical decision. Postmodern ethics, for this dissertation, will be used in this manner—that there can be no one set of rules that will always determine a correct, moral answer; that the process of deciding what is ethical is, in fact, ethics in and of itself; and such decision-making cannot be ethically completed without considering the impact that the decision will have on those who will be affected by the action that results from the decision-making process.

Ethical issues, for this study, are those situations which composition instructors face in their professional lives that could lead to conflict between the instructor and an Other. An example of an ethical issue is when an instructor must decide which assignments will be included in the coursework. Not only are the students affected by the decision, but also the community of the school is affected, as what the students learn is expected to transfer to other writing situations. The department to which the teacher belongs is also affected, as other departments within the school might offer feedback concerning the skills that the students learn in the composition course. An ethical issue often concerns two or more conflicting ethical structures, such as might occur when an instructor wishes to assign a report writing paper in a department that does not highly value the genre. In this situation, conflict may arise between the instructor and the department.

Critical Self-reflection is a practice by which an individual, for our purposes a composition instructor, asks herself "to make sense of an experience . . . [to] make an interpretation of it. When we subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision making or action, then making meaning becomes learning" (Mezirow 1). We critically reflect on our

experiences in order to learn how to make decisions from them. Jack Mezirow, an education theorist and a leading proponent of teachers engaging in this inward-looking practice, also claims that "[b]y far the most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection—reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting" (13). In this discussion, critical self-reflection is a crucial part of evaluating our actions.

Ethics, Ethical Issues, and Teaching Composition

Educators often go to John Dewey for advice on how to teach as Dewey's theories influenced much of our education system's structure. Educators influenced by a postmodern world can still find value in Dewey's teachings as teachers even in Dewey's day, which was already shifting toward becoming a postmodern world, did. Pragmatic thought, especially in education, stems from Dewey. His practical discussions of what is moral—what is right and good—for teachers to pursue should encourage them, both ethically and professionally, to engage in critical reflection. In his revised *How We Think*, Dewey suggests that decision-making judgment springs from self-reflection by stating that:

> the whole process of thinking consists of making a series of judgments that are so related as to support one another in leading to a final judgment—the conclusion. . . . judgments do not appear in isolation but in connection with the solution of the problem, the clearing away of something obscure and perplexing, the resolution of a difficulty; in short, as units of reflective activity. (119)

We judge what the best solutions are to whatever problems we face, what the best course of action is for us to take, after first engaging in a period of reflection. Postmodern educators can find a connection between Dewey's call to partake in "reflective activity" and postmodern ethics' viewpoint that reflective activity is ethical. In "The Logic of Judgments of Practice," Dewey furthers the idea of judgment to be a judgment of value, to determine whether or not the proposition is "right" or "good" (i.e. ethical). He also claims that "all judgments by their very nature are intellectual or theoretical" (Dewey, "The Logic" 236). Hilary Putnam, in describing the ethical nature of Dewey's thought, noted that "[i]f there is a central theme in Dewey's ethics (and all of Dewey's work is in one way or another connected with 'ethics') it is that *the application of intelligence to moral problems is itself a moral obligation*" (271). According to Dewey's line of thought, to teach ethically composition instructors must engage in thoughtful self-reflection in order to make good judgments regarding what is done is their classrooms.

Fulfilling the ethical obligation to reflect critically on one's teaching is a necessity for composition instructors, since, as Stuart C. Brown writes, "ethical conflicts dominate our professional lives" (157). Although Brown was specifically referring to Writing Program Administrators (WPAs), ethics is of special concern for writing instructors as well. Issues regarding course design, assessment, and student-teacher relationships, which are concerns of both WPAs and composition instructors, have ethical dimensions (Soc. for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education; Richlin 60-61; Williamson and Huot "Literacy" 191; Detweiler, Mathison-Fife, McEachern, and Coulter 191). In class and in student writing, instructors may deal with racism, classism, sexism, violence, or disruptive student behavior and their professional decisions and actions in reaction to these issues will often be viewed by others

through an ethical lens. The application of an intelligent, informed decision-making process reduces the chance that poor decisions will be made.

As a composition instructor, I have encountered on a daily basis the need to make ethical decisions. The following three examples illustrate the challenges I regularly face, each with a discussion of how the situation requires a decision grounded in ethics:

1. I am trying to re-imagine a First-Year Composition (FYC) course. "What can I do to improve the course"? I wonder. "What assignments should be given?" I must tread carefully. I have many genres to choose from, but the choices that I make affect my students. If I craft an assignment that does not work—perhaps it asks so much from the students that they cannot complete the assignment in the way that I envision or perhaps I assign a paper that is so "light" that they will have difficulty finding an appropriate academic angle to work with—their grades could suffer as a result. According to my department, each student is required to turn in a final portfolio which consists of the three best papers out of the several he or she has written for the class, and that portfolio will be group-graded by his or her instructor and up to two other composition instructors. If my assignments fail, I do not have the option of simply learning from the experience and letting my students have higher grades than their work allows. Instead, my students' work will be assessed on the quality alone.

As a result of the portfolio group grading requirement, most instructors assign four or five papers per term, in order to allow each student more experience generating ideas, writing academic papers, and engaging in assessment as he or she discards one or two of the weakest drafts. I ask myself, "should I assign four papers for the students to write? Five? Or just three?" I have had discussions with a colleague who trained and worked under Wendy Bishop who is

adamant about the number of papers that are appropriate. He argues that revision is vitally important for the work of the course, and that assigning three papers allows the students to concentrate on revision. He also feels that by doing so, he is following Bishop's vision for a FYC course, a composition theorist and teacher that he looks to with much professional respect (as do many composition instructors). On the other hand, the former director of my school's FYC program argues for five. When he had originally designed the course, all aspects of writing were deemed equally important, and assigning five papers, for him, is best as it puts equal emphasis on prewriting, research, drafting, revising, and editing skill development. With only three papers, and a focus on revision and editing, he feels that composition instructors will "teach to the test," and focus primarily on getting the students ready for the portfolio grading rather than on the skills students will need to write well in all of their academic courses. He personally values the freedom that individual composition instructors in my department have in designing their courses, but he is not comfortable with the fact that not all of us assign five papers. All of my colleagues have opinions, formed through experience, education, and research, on the number of papers to assign. No matter how many papers I assign, it is likely that I will be in pedagogical conflict with at least one of my colleagues. Since pedagogy is developed according to what an instructor believes is the correct, or right, way to teach a course, this has become an ethical issue.

As I continue to reimagine my course, I find myself asking more questions. Some of my colleagues choose a theme for their FYC course, such as "Social Injustice," and although our course description for Writing 150, our FYC course, claims that students will learn to write in a variety of genres (Mulally 4), individual instructors have freedom to choose which genres they will assign. As I reflect upon what my course should look like, I ask myself: "Should my course

have a theme? Should I assign a personal narrative, knowing that I might create conflict between myself and some professors in my department who do not like reading them? Should I only assign research-driven paper, to cater to my colleagues who believe that these types of assignments best prepare students for college-level writing? Or should I ignore these colleagues' opinions and assign writing based solely on what I believe will best serve the students, knowing that this decision could cost the students a good grade on their final portfolio?" As with the number of papers that I assign, my colleagues have pedagogical beliefs concerning these issues, and therefore I could come into ethical conflict with them concerning my choices. If I were to come into conflict with the FYC director it is possible that my professional reputation in his eyes could be tarnished. If he feels that I am not professional enough, I might not have my contract renewed. If I were to come into conflict with a colleague, I might have difficulty in future portfolio groups. Fortunately, in my own department and among my colleagues, these are not great fears for me, as I believe that we all respect each other's professionalism, but I sense that others, especially those recently hired, may feel these fears more strongly than I.

As I struggle with this decision and the potential ethical conflict I might create, I again turn to Singer's definition that "Ethics deals with values, with good and bad, with right and wrong" (v). Since teachers always wish to do what is right and good in their classes, even seemingly routine decisions concerning the specifics of designing a course become deeply ethical as teachers work with students over the course of a semester. Designing a course requires teachers to have more than a degree. They need to "have content competence, pedagogical competence, be able to deal with 'sensitive topics,' understand and contribute to student development, . . . provide valid assessment for students, and have respect for their colleagues and

the institutions at which they teach" (Richlin 60). Course-design decisions will affect the students, who need to develop a solid skill foundation for future writing projects in their FYC course. Since students pay to learn these skills, and since our departments, schools, and profession expects instructors to help the students develop these skills, fulfilling this need is an ethical obligation teachers have to their students (National Council of Teachers of English; Council of Writing Program Administrators). My course design will also be assessed by my colleagues, who will be reviewing my students' work and evaluating not only the final portfolios but also the effectiveness of the design and my ability to instruct the students. While I am given considerable authority and autonomy over what I do in my classes, I am aware that the design will further be assessed by the department and the university, both of which have expectations for the course and what the students should know and should be able to show they know in their writing at the end of the term (Mulally 16-17). As an employee of my institution, paid to fulfill the mission of the course and the school, I am ethically obliged to meet the expectations of my department and university (Richlin 61; Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 12). I wish to do what is right according to my own values and the values of the students, colleagues, department and school. I want to deliver a course design that satisfies all of these obligations.

After I have looked at what the students, the department, and I expect the course to deliver, I assign four papers, all of which use research in some way. While assigning only three papers appealed to me, I do not have the luxury of tenure that my colleague who had trained under Wendy Bishop has and have decided upon a number that would be acceptable to most of my colleagues. From conversations with past students, I have learned that many high schools

often assign narratives, so the genre seems to be so familiar to many of my students that they see it as a repeat of a high school assignment. Therefore, rather than a personal narrative, I assign an interview paper in which the students tell their audience someone else's story. In this way, I hope to keep the paper challenging and interesting for the students, as well as incorporate a research element that will appeal to their audience. In another assignment, the students are asked to examine an aspect of who they are, in order to foster their self-reflection skills. The students will also be required to respond to a reading and to write an argument paper, both of which are types of writing that will likely be well-received by my colleagues, and based on conversations with junior and senior students in my Writing 305: Writing in the Disciplines classes, I can reasonably expect that my first-year composition students will encounter later in their academic careers at our university. I also decide not to adhere to a course theme, since it might be too limiting for some students. After careful thought, I believe I have arrived at decisions that will fulfill the expectations of all the communities that are involved in my teaching—my students, my colleagues, my department, and my school. And the actions derived from these decisions will be ones that that I can ethically justify if challenged, even if it leads to conflict amongst any of the involved parties.

2. Prior to a final portfolio group-grading session, a colleague approached me. "I have an ESL student," she began. "He is a good kid who has really struggled throughout the semester. He has done everything I've asked for—worked on drafts over and over again, made weekly appointments at the writing center and even talked with a writing consultant outside of those weekly meetings. He has been to my office at least once a week just trying to pass. But I am afraid that he will get a bad grade even though he has worked very hard and I *have* seen

tremendous improvement in his writing. I was wondering if I could give his portfolio to you to read and grade because I know you have had a lot of experience teaching ESL students. I think you would be better at seeing his improvement and can appreciate how hard he has worked compared to some of the other students."

I agreed to read the student's work and gave assurances that this particular portfolio would be assessed with an understanding of what the student had done to finish the papers, instead of simply on the quality of the product as is expected by the department. At the time, I agreed quickly, without careful consideration. Since that time, I have reflected on the decision that I had made, and have realized that I was in dangerous territory with this decision. My colleague approached me in the same way I would have approached her—personally, outside of the hearing of our colleagues. There are members of our department who would refuse this request, as they believe strongly in only valuing the quality of the student's work, regardless of what difficulties the student in question may face. To accept my colleague's request could have been seen as undermining the authority of the department-approved rubric and grading practice. It is quite possible that I could have been called to defend my action if the right, or wrong, people heard about this. It is also possible, however unlikely, that I could have lost my job.

However, I do feel confident in this decision, as I know that the "CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers" does recommend that special assessment consideration be given to ESL writers, although it does not specifically recommend taking the student's work habits into consideration (Conference on College Composition and Communication). However, even without the permission that CCCC has given me, I would consider offering special consideration to this student as it rests on one of my inner values—for me, it is a matter of

having respect for students. After thinking this through, I realized that all of my colleagues would support the standpoint that having respect for our students is a value we should hold. Although my action of offering special consideration to this student could have resulted in an ethical conflict between myself and my colleagues and department, had I been called to defend my actions, I believe that my colleagues would be convinced that my actions were ethical.

Certainly, it is vitally important that all students be respected; it is an ethical responsibility to do so. More than that, it is simply good teaching practice, as a teacher or department that "does not respect its students is primed for failure and almost certain to engender resentment" (Silva 359). Tony Silva, in "On the Ethical Treatment of ESL Writers," claims that in order to respect our ESL students, we must do four things: understand them, put them in the correct courses, give them the instruction they need, and fairly assess their work (359). Ann Berthoff tells instructors that by understanding our students, we can "identify and encourage the innate powers of our students' minds; to nurture what is native; to explore what it can mean to say, 'Begin with where they are'" (48-49). This does not mean that composition instructors should hold ESL writers to a lower standard; rather, instructors should understand that errors in grammar may be the result of struggling with a foreign language, and issues in the student's rhetorical structure might be the result of cultural differences (Silva 362). Therefore, I can defend my action to look at this particular student's work with modified assessment criteria based not only on my inner values but also on the work of respected scholars in my discipline.

This scenario deals with the difficulty of ethically grading our students' work and also implies the importance of considering the accountability that we have to the department and the university, either of which may have stated policies for such issues. While it would not be ethical

to ignore completely the department's assessment criteria, adapting those criteria for certain students as a matter of respect may be judged as ethical, since the decision to do so has been made through a careful, thoughtful, informed process—a process which has been informed by an understanding of the communities involved, as well as what scholars in the field have advised us is the right course of action.

3. During a weekly computer lab writing session, an African-American student raises her hand and asks me for help. There is a first draft of an argumentative paper that is due in two days, but she still has not chosen a topic. She and I sit down and collaboratively brainstorm. I ask her questions like "What is your major? What do you like to do? Is there anything in the local news that struck your interest? What would you like to know? What would you like to share with others?" After several minutes, she has found a topic that interests her and that both she and I feel will be able to produce the necessary thought, research, and pages required for the assignment. When I get up to leave and handle the next student's question, she thanks me.

"No problem," I respond absentmindedly.

"No," she responds. "Thank you. All of my other professors, when I ask for this kind of help, always suggest topics like Affirmative Action, discrimination, or racism. Thank you for not doing that." My smile fades as I process what she has told me and what she has gone through at the hands and words of other educators.

This scenario illustrates the ethical obligations we must acknowledge in our student-teacher relationships. This particular student had endured a history of well-meaning teachers telling her which topics should interest her. I am certain that her other teachers felt that they were

giving good advice that would help her. They are perhaps best characterized by Frank H. Wu as those who "may well wish to be color-blind. They probably would be shocked if they were told they had treated people differently based on race even though thinking of themselves as polite" (15-16). I am also certain that, even though I had not done so in this instance and will not do so again, I have done so in the past. Although in this situation the student was an African American who had often been prompted to write about supposedly Black issues, it could easily have been an older student who has been repeatedly asked to write about age discrimination or the difficulty of returning to school, a woman who has been advised to write about sexism, or a student of Tibetan, Sudanese, Vietnamese, or Cuban ancestry being encouraged to write about refugee issues.

In this situation, I very easily could have come into conflict with a student. It is unlikely that there would be official repercussions had I, in a paternalistic way, offered her topics to write about based on the color of her skin. However, even if there were no official repercussions, unofficially my professional reputation could have been marred. This student, who had quietly suffered injustice, might tell her friends, who might tell their friends, and so on, to avoid the racist teacher.

As a result of facing situations which could have put me in ethical conflict with my colleagues, department, or students like those illustrated above, I kept wondering why I had made the choices that I had. I believed then and I know now that I had made a good and right decision in each case. In the past if a colleague had asked why I had made such a decision, I would not have been able to explain why these decisions were good and right. I have come to

realize that when I too quickly make decisions like these and others that I am simply muddling through, faking my way through a forced justification.

The Problem

The problem I faced in the second and third situations above was not an inability to make ethical decisions, but rather that I did not completely understand my actions until *after* I had taken them. I found myself attempting to justify the decisions that I had made after I had made them. I also had not seen, at the time, the potential consequences of my actions. I typically did not attempt to anticipate such situations and determine what my course of action should be, although I certainly could have anticipated these situations. They are familiar situations for me: at least once a year I revisit my course design to determine if I might be able to achieve the objectives in a better way, I have graded numerous student papers, and I have conversed with thousands of students from a wide variety of backgrounds. In casual conversation, a colleague might ask questions such as, "Why do you assign a narrative?" or "Why not allow Wikipedia as a source?" I must, at that moment, justify why I believe that narrative is a good assignment for the students or why Wikipedia is not a good source for college students' papers. Likewise, I see my colleagues struggle to justify their decisions when I ask them the same types of questions. While these attempts at justification sometimes lead to good collaborative discussion and occasionally lead to departmental standards, I feel that composition teachers often make decisions in haste and then hope that nobody asks about them again.

While composition instructors are expected to make ethical decisions, few have received explicit training in how to approach the ethical decision-making that a composition class requires.

College instructors, as Lion F. Gardiner notes, begin their teaching careers "with little, if any, formal professional training or experience other than the content of their various disciplines and perhaps employment as graduate teaching assistants." Composition instructors, "with little, if any formal professional training" tend to fall back on what they know, what their FYC teacher did, or pedagogy gleaned from journals and books to justify their decisions rather than seeking an answer within themselves. They may assign a narrative paper because they had to write one in their first-year composition course. They may answer a question about why they assign a service learning project by only reciting research from Thomas Deans, Ellen Cushman, or Bruce Herzberg, rather than using these scholars in conjunction with their own informed decision-making process. Without training and without critical self-reflection to guide informed decision-making, composition instructors are forced to muddle through, relying on the advice of others who do not know the situation in which the instructor teaches.

Parker Palmer relates an incident in which a professor, Professor X, had attempted to model his teaching on that of another person, his mentor, rather than on his own understanding of who he was and where his strengths as a teacher lay. Palmer was warned about "Professor X, a curmudgeonly and unpopular teacher, though brilliant in his scholarly field" (23). Yet when Professor X spoke to Palmer:

> [h]e told the story of his mentor with hesitancy that comes from speaking of sacred things, and—as he talked about how hard he had tried to model his career after his mentor's—he surprised us, and surely himself, by choking up. . . . For twenty years, Professor X had tried to imitate his mentor's way of teaching and being, and it had been a disaster. . . . X's attempt to clone his mentor's style had

> distorted his identity and integrity. He had lost himself in an identity not his own. (23)

When composition instructors fall back on what they have seen as students rather than on what they as teachers can know about themselves and their discipline, they can allow their identities to be coopted by another. Instructors can feel like failures when they cannot elicit responses from students as their professor had pulled from them or they had expected to receive due to their disciplinary knowledge inspired pedagogy. They may feel like failures when they feel that their comments on student papers do not seem to be as insightful as their professors' comments were to them. In order to face the difficulties that teaching presents—from creating assignments to establishing relationships with students, and everything in between—and to make decisions that meet those challenges, instructors should look outward at their own teachers, colleagues, and their field's scholars and they also should look inward; too rarely do instructors ask what decisions their personal beliefs will lead them to. The knowledge earned through critical self-reflection will add to an instructor's understanding of why a pedagogy is not as effective for her as it was for the scholar who wrote about it, or why an assignment that worked well for her as a student is not working well for her students.

Composition instructors need to be aware that these actions that we take, such as choosing which papers to assign or choosing the words to use when we respond to student writing, are inherently ethical choices, choices that deal with what is right, choices that could result in conflict with the ethical values of others involved, choices that need to be arrived at through a careful, thoughtful, intelligent decision-making process. As part of this decision-making process, we need to understand our situational context and we also need to look at our

own personal ethics when we try to determine whether or not any action is ethical. We need to ask ourselves, "what do I believe?" Furthermore, understanding why we have made these ethical choices at the moment when we make them, rather than when we are later questioned about them, is the best way to understand the decisions we make and why we act the way we do.

Postmodern Ethics: Reflecting on the Whom and Where

Postmodern ethics addresses the need to acknowledge situational and personal contexts in our decision-making. Contrary to traditional ethics, postmodern ethical theory suggests that ethical behavior may not be universal; rather, what is ethical is defined by individuals in their own given situation. James Porter states: "A postmodern approach to ethics differs from traditional ethics because it is grounded in community or local standards; it does not rely on, nor would it attempt to seek, a universal ground for ethical action" ("Developing" 216). The culture that an instructor is a part of, the company that she keeps, her situation at work, and even who she is as an individual all come into consideration. In a composition course, this means that an instructor should reflect on the fact that his or her ethical structure is shaped by the students, the department, the school, and the local community outside of the school. In order to use properly this understanding of ethics to make ethical decisions about our courses, we must look at and understand this local community's culture. Postmodern ethics suggests that the local culture's ethical values need to be part of an instructor's decision-making process, so that her choices, reflecting the local culture, are appropriate.

Because ethical guidelines, according to postmodernists, are not universal, when one person, group, or culture attempts to impose their morals on another ethical conflicts are created.

When teaching composition, instructors must realize that their personal culture and ethical beliefs may not be the same as those of their students. While it is not wrong for the instructor to hold beliefs that are in opposition to those of his or her students, the instructor, as the authority figure, must make certain that the students do not feel coerced to adopt the instructor's beliefs. In order to know the student's beliefs and to minimize conflict, the instructor must learn the beliefs of the student. This is, of course, an impossible task to complete with one hundred percent accuracy—but an attempt can still be made. When we do attempt to understand the students' beliefs, we will be less likely to make assumptions about our students and inadvertently pressure them toward our beliefs.

Several years ago, my department hired an instructor on a one-year contract. It was evident in my conversations with her that she believed that it was her personal responsibility to show her students that religious beliefs were unnecessary for educated people. At the time of her appointment, however, eighty-six percent of our students claimed to have a religious affiliation ("Diversity: Religion"). In our first-year composition course, personal narratives about mission trips are common—and this instructor often complained to her colleagues that these offended her. She ignored—or possibly did not understand—the fact that her beliefs were not shared by the students. Try as she might, she could not convince her students that her understanding of religion was correct. In conversations with other professors in our department and with me, she confided with us that she was unhappy and that her students seemed to be unhappy. After her one-year contract was up, she opted to leave the department rather than experience the conflict of moral beliefs again. While we should hesitate to blame her for not understanding the situation, as her experience at this school and area of the country were non-existent prior to her taking the

position, had she critically reflected on her teaching situation—concerning the students' values, particularly—prior to starting the course, she may well have designed her course in such a way as to minimize these conflicting beliefs.

Ethics, in addition to being what is right, good or moral, is also questioning and decision-making that considers the relationship of the moral agent—in our case, the composition instructor—to the other parties affected by his or her actions in the time and space of the local context. Since, according to Zygmunt Bauman, postmodern ethics "recasts the Other as the crucial character in the process" of acting morally (84), consideration must be given to the larger context: "what will others think about our actions?" or "how can we look outward at the local context?" Porter tells us how ethics can be used by composition instructors:

> Ethics—in the postmodern sense and as tied to composition—does not refer to a static body of foundational principles, laws, and procedures; it is not to be confused with particular moral codes. Ethics is not a set of answers but a mode of questioning. That questioning certainly involves principles—but it always involves mediating between competing principles in light of particular circumstances. Ethics is decision-making—but it is decision-making that involves question and critique. It is informed, critical, and pluralistic decision-making. ("Developing" 223)

As composition instructors, we must ask: "Who are we teaching?" "Where are we teaching?" and "Who will be affected by our actions?" This outward-looking ethical inquiry into our local context is vital to understanding what we do and is vital to our ability to make decisions concerning our teaching.

The professor who had come into our department who was dismayed by the religious convictions of her students could have learned quite a bit about her students had she looked at the local context. At the time of her appointment, fifty-two percent of the school's undergraduate students came from four local counties (Allegan, Kent, Muskegon, and Ottawa) and fifty-six percent of the population of Ottawa County, where the school is located, claim to attend religious services regularly, a rate that is slightly higher than the national average ("Geographic Profile;" "Ottawa County"). Moreover, eighty-six percent of students at the school claimed to have a religious affiliation ("Diversity: Religion"). The local community surrounding the university and the community of university students value religious beliefs. Had the professor understood this, she could have attempted to find ways to minimize the conflict between her beliefs and those of the community—perhaps by not asking for the students' personal narratives. She could have also attempted, as Gerald Graff suggests, using the conflict to produce an "educationally productive debate" (Graff 4). However, Graff's call to use conflicts in order to show students how to argue academically depends upon the willingness of the participants to entertain alternative viewpoints as potentially valid. Since this particular instructor had made it clear to her colleagues, at least, that she saw no value in religious beliefs, it may have been the better alternative in her class to avoid the conflict altogether.

Care should be given, though, when we do question. Aristotle leveled criticism at the Sophists of his day, claiming that at least some of them were willing to use rhetoric to inflate their case in arguments, creating fallacies (Jacob). To avoid this sort of situation, when we question, we should maintain the integrity of the case. Manipulating our rhetoric, our words, to create an outcome that we desire is unhelpful. For example, a composition instructor in a Writing

department wants to determine whether or not it would be right for me to assign poetry writing in his class. He determines that his colleagues would not consider that to be appropriate, so he broadens the local community to include the English department, with the expectation that those in the English department would be more accepting of the assignment. In doing so, this fictional composition instructor has manipulated the situation in order to win an argument—that he should assign poetry. This, according to rhetoricians, creates a fallacy—he has won the argument, but he has done so by ignoring the needs of the others that are most directly involved in his work.

I would go further and claim that ethics has to include more than looking at the local context; ethical questioning and decision-making is also self-reflective and inward-looking. Not only should we look at the context, we also need to inform our decisions by questioning our own personal ethical beliefs (Palmer 4; Boylan 1). Doing so will help us understand the decisions that we make. A colleague of mine had a student whose actions were disturbing her. The student would be late with assignments, rarely attend class—and when he did, he was tardy—and had offered several different weak reasons to excuse his actions. She found herself in a situation that called for an ethical decision about how strict or lenient she should be. After looking inward, my colleague discovered that when she was a student, she had valued professionalism in her work. Her student did not seem to value professionalism in his work, and this disturbed and offended the professor. Understanding this, my colleague was relieved, decided not to be lenient, and acted accordingly. She now knew that she was not simply being mean. By looking inward at her own values and outward at the values of her department (which confirmed that professionalism was a reasonable expectation of the student) my colleague made a decision based on a rational understanding of herself and the local community, not based on an emotionally charged moment.

This is what my dissertation challenges composition instructors to do—to use what the field of ethics offers us, especially regarding critical self-reflection and consideration of our local context, in order to question, critique, and to decide. By raising issues of what is right, we ask ourselves to evaluate our own ethics, morals, or sense of what is good. We ask ourselves to use our best critical thinking skills to arrive at a decision, a process that pragmatist John Dewey saw as a moral obligation in itself (Putnam 271), a process that postmodern ethics claims *is* ethics. This philosophical questioning works well for composition instructors, as Ann Berthoff rightfully claims that "everything we deal with in composition theory is fundamentally and unavoidably philosophical" (61). Due to the nature of their work, composition instructors are philosophers. H. R. Swardson says that all teachers are pragmatists, and if teachers are not labeled as philosophers it is because "[w]e teachers are so pragmatic we don't even worry about *sounding* like Philosophers" (302). We are philosophers—composition and education philosophers at least—and philosophers question. Addressing questions about our actions in our classrooms and teaching before they arise allows us to be more confident because we know and can defend the actions' claim to ethical rightness. The most productive way to address these questions is to become aware of our own ethical perspective prior to making professional decisions about our actions. Awareness of our own ethics will create a foundation upon which our decisions can be built. We will no longer be forced to justify our decisions when questioned in the hallway by our colleagues, but rather we can answer with a statement that arises from our own ethical understanding of who we are, where we are, and why we act in certain ways.

A Self-Reflective Moral Heuristic

In order to make ethical decisions concerning our teaching, we need to understand our local community, as Porter suggests ("Developing" 216), but we also need to understand ourselves (Palmer 4; Fink 71). L. Dee Fink states that knowing our "philosophy of teaching, that is, the teacher's underlying values and beliefs" is necessary and essential to "shape the course design decisions" (71). Eugene R. Hinkston, in "Teacher Know Thyself," states:

> The man who begins to teach without knowing a good deal about himself may communicate distortions familiar to the blind men describing the elephant. The angry man will see a merciless world, bereft of kindly motives. The cynic will view the world as a mindless rat-race where the main question is "what's in it for me?" The naïve romantic is cheerfully assured that God is in His Heaven and all's well with the world—the best of all possible worlds. And all of these dispositions and more, and the convictions that articulate them, are transmitted to the gaping Freshman seeking models to emulate and adopt. It is only fair to the student, it is only honest to one's trust, that the teacher should know the elements of the well-spring from whence rise his disposition on every issue and value. (3)

When we strive to know who we are and where our decisions come from, we approach our obligation, as Hinkston puts it, to be "fair to the student . . . [and] honest to [our] trust" (3). If we do not know this about ourselves, we could potentially lead our students along our path of anger, cynicism, romanticism, Marxism, liberalism, conservatism, and so on, even if that path is not right for them. Once we look inward at ourselves and see what our values are and look outward

at our students', department's, and community's beliefs, we can move toward meeting our ethical obligation to teach what all involved parties agree our students should gain from our class.

Looking inward demands teachers to engage in critical self-reflection. John Dewey stated that "*reflective* thinking . . . involves (1) a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, [and] mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching, hunting, [and] inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity" (*How We Think* 12). In other words, we identify a problem we are having, such as how to design a course that reflects the values of all involved, and through a process of careful thought we attempt to find a resolution to the problem. Critical self-reflection builds on Dewey's definition of reflective thinking by asking that we use our personal experiences to guide our move from the state of doubt to the resolution of that doubt. Not only do we attempt to find resolutions to problems through careful thought, we also need to seek to understand and reassess our own beliefs constantly. As teachers we are still learners, and the opportunity to partake in this "most significant learning experience" should be something that excites us. In their attempts to help college instructors become more thoughtful teachers, Stephen D. Brookfield, L. Dee Fink, and Laurie Richlin all recommend that teachers reflect on who they are when designing a course, yet these authors do not go into great detail about how to do so (Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher* 24-28; Brookfield, *Becoming*; Fink 71-72; Richlin 9-11). Critical self-reflection raises our consciousness about ourselves (Hart 48) and allows us to look inward and outward to address the challenges that we face, such as course design or how to distribute authority in the classroom, and understand and critique our decisions concerning those challenges.

Furthermore, Donald A Schön speaks of the reflective nature of professionals, or practitioners of a professional field. There are many situations that practitioners face that fall outside the realm of what is offered by their respective fields' scholarly or technical advice. Schön calls these "indeterminate zones of practice" which can be the result of "uncertainty, uniqueness, and value [i.e. ethical] conflict" (*Educating* 6). For a composition instructor, an indeterminate zone of practice occurs often—whenever he or she must consider how a community will accept his or her assignments, will receive written responses to and assessment of student writing, or approve of the types of relationships between the instructor and student or department. When faced with these situations, the professional must act according to their own self-reflective decision-making process. Schön claims that "gifted engineers, teachers, scientists, architects, and managers sometimes display artistry in their day-to-day practice. The art is not invariant, known, and teachable," but it is potentially learnable (*The Reflective Practioner* 18). These gifted practitioners perform this art in their profession automatically and inherently, but the secret to their success is a process that can be learned. Composition instructors who participate in self-reflective practices in order to take action when facing Schön's "indeterminate zones of practice" will soon find themselves in the company of those that Schön calls gifted.

So, how specifically do composition instructors engage in critical self-reflection? I propose that an important step in doing so is understanding our personal beliefs and where they come from. We need to begin by asking ourselves, "Who am I?" (Boylan 1; Richlin 9; Weimer 23). We need to know who we are, what our characteristics are, in order to teach composition ethically. If we truly adopt critical self-reflection as a practice, then the answers to this question can reveal insights about our ethical beliefs and can help us determine why we act the way that

we do. While it is possible for an instructor to respond to this ethical obligation for critical self-reflection in a quick manner by using the discipline's buzzwords, such as "I am a critical pedagogue" or "I am an Expressionist," I am calling for a much deeper, more serious, disciplined approach. In order for readers to understand this more disciplined approach of understanding our own ethical beliefs through self-reflection, I first offer a look at various ways instructors can ethically justify their actions. Then I offer a moral heuristic, which is one possible way to help guide a composition instructor in his or critical self-reflection. This critically self-reflective moral heuristic asks us to question inwardly—our background, whether or not we hold faith-based beliefs, how we view ourselves professionally—and to question outwardly by reflecting on our local context, in order to determine how these aspects of who we are have shaped our values, ethical principles and decisions.

Normative Ethical Theories

There are many different ways to determine if a person's actions are ethical. For example, a Christian might need to look no further than the Bible to justify their actions and would deem actions outside biblical prescription as immoral. In the United States, we see this every day in opposition to an issue such as gay marriage. A Christian who believes that the Bible defines ethical behavior reads verses that denounce homosexuality as sinful and may find it difficult to accept that another set of ethics does not see homosexuality as an ethical or moral issue. This Christian might subscribe to the ethical theory of moral absolutism and see one set of morals (biblical teaching) as the only true ethical structure for all people, in all places, in all times

(Boylan 141-151). Acting in the way prescribed by religious beliefs, for this person, is enough ethical justification.

Another person might accept ethics as intuitive. If an action feels ethical, then by virtue of it seeming right, it is right. This form of ethics is known as intuitionism.[1] Although intuitionism is often not accepted by ethical theorists on the grounds that it is impossible to study and measure "what feels right," many people live their lives according to this principle, whether or not they are aware of it. For the intuitionist, "if it feels right, do it" is a motto that he or she can ethically live by.

"The greatest good for the greatest number" is the catchphrase for utilitarianism, which was popularized by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.[2] Utilitarianism is present in our understanding of how the U.S. government should work as we expect our representatives to act according to the wishes of the majority of the population. In a composition classroom, a utilitarian might decide that if eighty percent of her students need help with grammar it becomes ethical to teach grammar, even at the risk of wasting the time of the other twenty percent of students.

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[1] For a detailed understanding of Intuitionism, see:

Ross, William David. *The Right and the Good*. 1930. London: Oxford UP, 1967. Print.

Prichard, H. A. *Moral Obligations: Essays and Lectures*. 1949. London: Oxford, 1957. Print.

[2] Bentham, Jeremy. *The Utilitarians: An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. 1789. Garden City, NY: Dolphin, 1961.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism.* 1863. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. 1957. Print.

There are other ethical theories that people adopt, consciously or unconsciously, to determine what actions are deemed ethical: deontology, which teaches that an "action itself is inherently right and not due to any calculation about the consequences of the action"[3] (Boylan 88; cf. McNaughton and Rawlings 424-458); virtue ethics, which has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy[4] and says that the aim of ethics is to answer "questions about personal character [that] clearly occupy a central place in ethics" (Pence 249; cf. Annas, Julia 515-536); and feminist ethics, which emphasizes caring over justice (Boylan 126-140; Held 537-566). When confronted with a case of plagiarism, a composition instructor who is a deontologist would take action without regard to the consequences that the student might face, such as a loss of scholarship or expulsion from the school. An instructor who follows virtue ethics might look at his or her personal character—what is the best virtue for a teacher to have in this situation, to be lenient or strict? An instructor who subscribes to feminist ethics would look at what would best benefit the student and ask "what would a caring teacher do in this situation?"

The above ethical theories are all *normative* ethical theories.[5] Normative ethics deals with "questions such as: What kinds of actions are right or wrong? What kind of person should I

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[3] For example, lying to Nazi soldiers about the presence of Jews hiding in a house would protect the Jews, but lying is unethical. Therefore, a Deontologist would tell the truth, regardless of the consequence of the Jews being captured.

[4] Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. and Ed. Roger Crisp. New York: Cambridge UP, 2000. Print.

[5] Postmodern ethics often finds itself at odds with normative ethics, since many of these ethical theories focus on trying to find one ethical code that will always work for all people, in all places, and all times, and postmodern ethics refutes this idea. However, that is not to say that a normative ethical theory, for example,

be?" (Copp 19). While these normative ethical theories are all ways to justify an instructor's actions as ethical, this dissertation intends to go even deeper into the ethical persona of the instructor. What I intend to do is to help composition instructors discover not what normative ethical theory they subscribe to, but rather what is at the heart of their decisions.

Metaethics

Metaethics is the term used to describe "the most general investigation about how to go about creating and applying a theory that prescribes how we should act" (Boylan 6). Metaethics goes deeper into a person's ethical values than normative ethics do—in essence, a person's metaethics drives the formation of his or her normative ethics. The moral heuristic presented in this section consists of six questions designed to help a composition instructor by encouraging critical self-reflection on his or her ethical values. It is designed to help an instructor have a better understanding of his or her metaethical foundation to learn the source of those ethical values. It asks instructors to look inward by asking them to reflect on their personal backgrounds, religious beliefs, and professional values, and then it asks them to look outward at what they understand to be the values of their local community, students, and colleagues.

The heuristic has two parts, Looking Inward and Looking Outward, and in order to form the six questions of the heuristic, I have researched what ethicists, education specialists, and composition theorists recommend that a person should do in order to understand his or her metaethical structure and situational context. Zygmunt Bauman, with his explanation of

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feminist ethics, could not be influenced by postmodern ethics, if it looks to the local context of the ethical issue and considers who will be affected by an action.

postmodern ethics, and Michael Boylan, whose work calls us to understand our metaethical framework, are two of the ethicists that have heavily influenced the section of the self-reflective moral heuristic that asks a composition instructor to look inward at the source of his or her own ethical values. Bauman's work, as it speaks of understanding the situational context in order to make ethical decisions, is complemented by the work of composition theorist James Porter, who applies postmodern ethics to the composition classroom, and these authors form an important basis for the Looking Outward section of the heuristic. The work of education theorists such as Laurie Richlin, Parker J. Palmer, L. Dee Fink, and Stephen D. Brookfield has been very useful in determining which questions to use when looking inward and have influenced the decision to include the question concerning our students' values when looking outward. These education specialists all offer advice for educators concerning what to do in order to prepare oneself to teach.

The moral heuristic aims to make the implicit explicit. While the questions may seem simple, the insight that the answers can give an instructor a clearer understanding of who he or she is, what he or she values, and what metaethical foundation his or her ethical values lie on. Taken together, the answers can reveal insight into how an individual is affected by and affects his community. When implicit values becomes explicit knowledge, the instructor can then use that knowledge not only to act in a manner that can be supported individually and communally as ethical, but also to defend that action as ethical to himself or herself and/or the community.

It is likely that a composition instructor, as I have done, will turn to the heuristic as the result of an ethical conflict that he has just faced. In that situation, the moral heuristic will help the instructor defend their actions. This is a valid use of the heuristic. However, the moral

heuristic is also designed to work when the critical self-reflection is produced prior to coming into ethical conflict with a student, colleague, or department. When used in this way, the moral heuristic will give the instructor the explicit reasoning to defend his action prior to him taking those actions. In this way, the instructor is no longer forced to justify his actions when put on the spot, but rather can defend his actions based on the reasoning that the moral heuristic produced.

The Questions of the Self-Reflective Moral Heuristic

Looking Inward: Who am I?

In following Socrates's admonition that "The unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato, *Apology* 33), we need to start by examining ourselves. There are three main questions that we ought to reflect on when considering the question, "Who am I?" Applying these three basic questions helps us to determine what we personally value as ethical, which allows us to understand why we decide on the actions we take.

1. *What is my background and how has this shaped who I am, and what is my current situation?* [6]

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[6] Laurie Richlin devotes a chapter of her book *Blueprint for Learning* to helping professors answer this and the next two questions (9-11). Maryellen Weimer states that "we need to make discoveries about instructional identity. Who am I, and what can I become, as a teacher and in the classroom?" (23). Stephen D. Brookfield writes, "Our autobiographies as learners in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood frame our approach to teaching at the start of our careers, and they frequently exert an influence that lasts a lifetime" (*Becoming* 50). Finally, the question is implicit in Michael Boylan's discussion of where our personal values come from (1-2).

The answers to this two-part question reveal the influence of our past and present. This question can be further broken down to the following questions: Where did I grow up and what influence does this have on me? What was my family situation when I was growing up? What is my family situation now? What ethical beliefs did those who shaped me (i.e. parents, teachers, siblings, etc.) hold, and how has that affected me? While some of the values that we hold are given to us, we choose to hold others (Boylan 2). Looking at our background will help us determine which we were given and which we chose. With this information, we can begin to see what influence our past has had on us and whether we have accepted that past by accepting the values we were given or have questioned or outright rejected those values in favor of ones that we have chosen. Our past may offer insights into stereotypes or other negative attitudes we may hold, as well as identifying where our positive attitudes come from (Richlin 10). Education specialist Laurie Richlin says that knowing our personal background is "the most important element" of course design; in order to teach effectively we must know who we are. For example, a composition teacher who comes from a blue-collar background might unconsciously give preference to those students that are understood to be from the same background. The instructor might even realize that she does give preference, but may not understand why. Once the teacher has looked at her personal background and realizes why she is acting in this way, she can be consciously aware of this effect and adjust her teaching accordingly.

2. *If I subscribe (or choose not to subscribe) to religious beliefs, how does this influence who I am?* [7]

Closely related to the first question, acknowledging our personal religious beliefs is important as they may reveal that they subtly—or not so subtly—influence our decision-making process (Boylan 143). While postmodern ethicists would certainly not privilege religious beliefs as the ultimate source of ethical values—the local community is of more importance for them—neither would they claim that these beliefs are of no value as a tool for reflecting on a person's ethical structure. The ethical values of individuals who hold religious beliefs are clearly influenced by those beliefs. Individuals who hold no religious beliefs form negative and positive reactions to the religious beliefs which may well be present in the local community. Those individuals may use this question to reflect upon these reactions, and by doing so they may develop a better understanding of their own ethical values.

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[7] Michael Boylan adds his discussion about ethics and religion as a separate ethical theory rather than as a component of understanding who we are. However, in his discussion of metaethics (the underlying beliefs which influence our actionable ethical beliefs) he asks his readers to consider whether or not they believe that morals are absolute (true for all people at all times) or relative (as in postmodern ethics); whether or not we believe people act morally for egoistic or altruistic reasons, and whether or not we believe that people are basically good or basically bad (9-14). All of these metaethical questions can be influenced by religious beliefs, which is why I include this question here. Parker J. Palmer also reminds us that the center of many spiritual traditions is "'Be not afraid'" (57). If we fear change, or if we fear what we may learn about ourselves in this process of critical self-reflection, religious beliefs may function to help us "escape fear's paralysis and enter a state of grace where encounters with otherness will not threaten us but will enrich our work and our lives" (Palmer 57). In this way, Palmer suggests, religious beliefs can be quite helpful to a teacher.

A question concerning religious beliefs is specifically included in this moral heuristic for the following reasons:

1. Those who hold religious beliefs often locate the origin of ethics in the supernatural realm. Since these beliefs often subscribe to one universal theory of ethics, they often conflict with postmodern ethical theory, which emphasizes local community values. If a deity has deemed certain behavior as ethical, that behavior is universally, not locally, ethical. For those who hold faith-based beliefs being ethical is more than making certain that they are acting rightly—it can also influence their relationship with their deity. If we hold faith-based beliefs, we cannot ignore the influence they exert on ourselves and how they affect our teaching. Attempting to ignore them puts us on a failing course since having religious beliefs, for many, is not an outward characteristic but is internally exhibited; it is an aspect of who we are rather than of how we act. Since the moral heuristic aims to help us better understand who we are and since religion can play an important role in who we are, it is necessary to consider this question.

The fact that an individual instructor may not hold to any religious belief cannot be ignored. While those who do hold faith-based beliefs may think that those who do not are immoral or unethical, "this view just runs roughshod over common sense" (Berg 531). Instructors who hold no religious beliefs still have to work through this question because they are influenced by values they developed over the course of their life. Without prescriptive guidelines, one will have to use his or her own ethics, an ethics handed down by parents or hammered out on the anvil of a personal perspective, rather than handed down to them from the pulpit.

2. Most college professors do claim to have at least some belief in the existence of a higher power. According to a study completed by Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, seventy-five

percent of full-time American college professors at least agreed with the statement "I do believe in a higher power," with thirty-five percent of the respondents claiming that "I know God really exists and I have no doubt about it" (114). Less than ten percent identified themselves as atheists, which is still three times the national average (113-114). Since up to seventy-five percent of college professors do have some form of religious beliefs, it seems appropriate to include this question in the moral heuristic.

However, faith-based beliefs are liable to hold to moral absolutism, the belief that ethical codes are universal, which does not work well with ethics in a postmodern time. If God has decreed certain actions to be sinful, i.e. immoral (or amoral), then it is may not be possible for it to be true that such an action might be ethical in any given local situation. In a postmodern classroom, an instructor may have to accept that while his faith-based ethical values are right (as they must be, for him), he may need to fall back onto other values, such as respect for the student, in order to teach in a manner that does not create ethical conflict. Even those instructors whose ethics are not influenced toward moral absolutism because of their religious beliefs can benefit from answering this question, as they may find that they are in a classroom, department, or institution where a prevalent religious belief system must be negotiated. Any instructor, no matter what formed her or his ethics, ought to accept that there might be a clash of values whenever a student writes about abortion, lethal injection, military intervention, or any other topic that calls for an ethical response. Understanding that a clash of values is what is truly going on between, for example, a conservative Christian instructor and a student writing a paper in defense of abortion will help the instructor eliminate a potential ethical conflict.

3. *Who am I, as a professional?*[8]

This is another important aspect of who we are. What does it mean to us, personally, to be a professional in our field? Is it our job? Is it our calling? Do we do it for the paycheck, or because we care about our students? Am I a collegial member of a department or do I prefer to work alone without input from my peers? Am I a teacher? A scholar? Since postmodern ethical theory claims that there is no universal code of ethics, none of these positions would be inherently right or wrong, and an instructor who holds one view of himself or herself is no more or less ethical than an instructor who holds a different view. Reflecting upon where we see ourselves as professionals in the field will help us understand how we decide to act in our teaching, our classroom, and in our relationships with our students. For example, if an instructor discovers that he values taking responsibility for his actions, it would explain why he shows no sympathy for the student who is chronically turning in shoddy, uncompleted work. If an instructor's sense of professionalism means she is always in class on time, it affects her student attendance expectations. A composition instructor who discovers that he teaches because he values helping students learn can understand why he can justify rescheduling a meeting with a colleague in order to help a struggling student. Likewise, an instructor who values being a member of a department can understand why she can justify, to her colleagues, departments, and even to her students, why she decided to keep that meeting instead of helping that student.

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[8] Fink states that understanding the teacher's philosophy of teaching is important in designing a college course (71); Richlin speaks of how our professional experiences shape us as teachers (9-11).

Looking inward and answering these questions about our background, our religious beliefs, and our professional values helps us understand which ethical values we were given and which we chose for ourselves. Using critical self-reflection to know where our values come from can help our moral decision-making, as we will understand which values we hold that may not be appropriate in our current situation. If we have created our values while we were in the same or similar situation to which we currently find ourselves, we may decide that these values are appropriate to keep intact. And if we formed values that are not appropriate to the situation, we might decide to keep them but be aware of these values and minimize conflicts that might arise. For example, an instructor was raised in a family and in a religious establishment that views homosexuality as immoral. Yet she finds herself teaching at a public school which values diversity and respects all students. Faced with a student who wishes to write about his homosexuality, she realizes that her personal values are likely to come into conflict with those of her student and institution. Some possible courses of action she could take would be to decide to change her views (which, due to her religious beliefs, may not be likely), choose to follow the ethical structure of the university and encourage the student to write about what he values, or minimize a point of conflict between herself and her student by tactfully recommending an alternative topic. None of these actions is inherently unethical—the only unethical course of action, if we follow Dewey's reasoning and postmodern ethical thought, would be not to use intelligence to think through what the course of action should be while considering the effect the action might have on the others involved in the situation.

Looking Outward: Determining Our Local Context

Now that we have a basis for understanding the metaethics that makes up our individual ethical selves, we can turn to the ethical values held by those with whom we share the context of our classes. The three questions in the Looking Outward section of the self-reflective moral heuristic have been designed specifically with postmodern ethical theory in mind, since postmodern ethical theory relies heavily upon an understanding of the local community values as well as respect for the welfare of any person who may be affected by the action of a moral agent, i.e. a composition instructor who takes an action as a result of an ethical decision-making process. It would not be right, according to postmodern ethical beliefs, to act without the consideration of others. In order to look outward we must look at what the local community, our students, and our department, university, and profession value in our teaching. The ethical values of one party do not necessarily outweigh those of another, but situations occur when one party attempts to enforce their values on another. This results in ethical conflict. In order to anticipate possible conflicts, and by anticipating avoid them or lessen their impact, we must also understand what values are expected of us in order to fulfill our moral obligation to our local community, students, and colleagues. The following questions will help us determine what the values are that they others in our context hold.

1. *What does my local community value?*

We should examine our community and what it values. The community is especially important to consider for postmodern ethics as "[a] postmodern approach to ethics differs from traditional ethics because it is grounded in community or local standards; it does not rely on, nor

would it attempt to seek, a universal ground for ethical action" (Porter, "Developing" 216). Ethics are dependent on the community, be that community a nation, a city, a borough, a small town, or the college campus itself. Each community creates for itself a set of ethical values, and each community judges its members according to this shared value system. A composition instructor may need to adapt to his or her community's ethics. An instructor moving from a private, religion-affiliated school to a public university might be moving from a community where personal relationships among students are frowned upon to one where students are assumed to be in such a relationship. This instructor must understand that this is where he now is, and if he acts to oppose the ethics of the community he may have to face consequences, such as loss of respect from the students.

For composition instructors, the local community might be as large as New York City or as small as a local college town. Obviously, the larger the community the more difficult it is to approach this task, but we can, at least, look at the results of local elections or the types of active local organizations to make reasonable judgments about what the local population values. For example, in an email exchange documented in *Letters for the Living: Teaching Writing in a Violent Age*, Michael Blitz shows an understanding of his local community:

> So many of my students, here at John Jay College [of Criminal Justice, City University, New York], come from housing projects, high-crime neighborhoods, treeless, glass-littered streets without lights, without security. . . . Those who have made it through these preposterous situations and have come to college now face unbearable hikes in tuition and fees at this public university. They see their education—their hopes and idealism (tenacious though such idealism must be)

> kicked out from under them by a governor and mayor who, in a staggering lack of vision, have determined that the City University will work better if the poor cannot afford to attend. Those who do attend must borrow sums of money they cannot hope to repay if they remain in a city whose political and social economy precludes their finding sufficiently gainful employment (let alone in a nation whose leaders are *debating* whether to raise the ridiculously low minimum wage a few cents!). (3-4)

Blitz has identified the values of the community in this dystopian passage. The local community is poor, but those who have not lost hope see education as a way to escape poverty. Yet the larger community of New York City does not seem to value their desire to attain an education, as Blitz notes that the city government has made it more difficult to gain the desired education, so the local populace must also value tenacity. If this were not the case, the students from this area would not be willing to borrow money to attend the college. As Blitz has shown, even in a community the size of New York City, it is still possible to reflect upon and attempt to understand the values of the local community.

Communities will vary from institution to institution. One composition instructor might find that her local community thinks highly of proactive change, while another instructor discovers that his community wants to maintain the status quo. As Blitz found, one community might value education as a means to an end (e.g. a job or escape from poverty), while another instructor determines that her community values education for its own sake. We do not have to agree with the values of our local community, and we do not need to act in a way that the local community would deem ethical if such an action would violate our own personal ethics. For

example, using the description that Blitz offered of New York City, the community might find it appropriate to deny certain students an education. If we do not share this view, we are not ethically obligated to ignore the needs of these students. However, whether or not we agree with the local community's values, we still must be aware of them, at the very least so that we can understand where conflict between our teaching and those values may occur.

However, it is not always easy to know what the community views as ethical in our writing classrooms because "the multicultural, multiethnic, multipolitical, multisituated, and multidisciplinary nature of writing instruction has complicated discussions of the ethics or communally sanctioned ethical values that might be embraced by instructors and/or passed on to the students" (Pemberton *Ethics of Writing Instruction* x). We now have many different communities that overlap and hold a stake in our classrooms, which makes it difficult to distinguish what the communities collectively value as ethical. This should not stop us from the attempt to determine what all communities involved expect from our teaching since looking outward is a necessary component of our obligation to adopt an ethical decision-making process. To continue looking outward, the next two questions help us attempt to further negotiate the problem of determining our local context.

2. *What do my students value?*

It is also necessary to consider the students. In schools where the students come from the local community, studying that community can help an instructor discover who his or her students are. In other schools, understanding the local community may not be of much help in understanding the students since the students come from all over the state, nation, or even the world. We need to ask: Who is in our classrooms? Are they students from the local community?

International students? Are they upper class, middle class, working class? Are they in our classrooms because they were ordered to be there by their parents or as the result of a writing placement test? What attitudes do they hold about education? What is it that they desire from our class—knowledge, skills, a passing grade? Do they hold full-time jobs? Are they military veterans? What are their incoming GPAs, SAT, or ACT scores? Do they plan to continue their education past the bachelor degree?

Since the process of critical self-reflection asks us to rely on our personal experiences, we may make hypotheses concerning our students based on those past experiences or our knowledge of the student population, but we should never make the mistake of deciding who our students are before meeting and talking with them. Based on conversations with colleagues from around the country, I know that my experiences with my students are quite typical: I have had international students from cultures that I have little knowledge of and I had to learn about who these students were by interacting with them. I have had Caucasian American students whose background initially seemed similar to mine until conversations with them revealed significant differences in social class or political beliefs, and I have had many students who did essentially live the same life I have. I have also had African-American students whose past experiences with professors had bordered on racist stereotyping (unintentional, and presumably well-intentioned) by suggesting that they choose Affirmative Action, racism, or other perceived Black issues as topics for papers. This is what can happen if we allow ourselves to make assumptions about our students before we know them.

We can also attempt to know what our students expect of our own ethics. If our students expect that we value returning work within a short time span, we can act accordingly. However,

if a quick response conflicts with another of our values—perhaps we believe it ethical to spend a considerable amount of time poring over their work before returning it—we may decide to let them know, gently, that our beliefs are not theirs. If our students expect us to believe that it is our ethical responsibility to teach them, we can understand our student's frustrations when we try to help them teach themselves. If our students expect that ethically we are bound to help them out with their personal issues, we can either adopt that role, or, again, gently let them know that that is not our role—depending on where we ethically stand in regard to that position. By understanding what our students expect from us ethically, we can understand their reactions to our teaching.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to know completely what our students expect from us and our ethics until we get to know them. We can, of course, assume that our students expect us to do our jobs and help them develop their writing skills and to do so without belittling them. However, attempting to understand our students before we get to know them can lead to stereotypical assumptions, and this will not benefit the students. It may not be possible to know what each and every student expects from us—but we can try, by examining the situation and using critical self-reflection. We can also know, through our interactions with our students or through reading the school newspaper, what the predominant, collective expectations seem to be. This is semester-long process, one that is repeated each and every term.

3. *What values do my department, school, and the scholarly literature in my field advocate?*

As well as looking outward at our community and critically self-reflecting upon ourselves and our students, we need to consider what our departments, schools, and our discipline's scholarly literature hold to be ethical behavior. This is, perhaps, the most practical aspect of

examining our situation. The department and administration will decide whether or not tenure is given, our contract is renewed, if we get a merit pay raise, etc. The department is much more likely to demand an explanation of our actions as well. Things to consider when examining our department would be: Which department do we work for—English, Writing, Communication, First-year Studies, etc.? What is the dominant pedagogy of the department? What is the expected outcome of our courses? Likewise, our schools are an important aspect of our situation. Do we teach at a public or private institution? Do we teach at a four-year university or a junior college? What does the school promise the students? What does the school expect of us? If we are teaching at an institution that focuses on preparing students for the business world, this will affect our decisions concerning assignments. We may find that report writing is more appropriate and expected than the personal narrative. We may decide that argumentative papers should be focused around business practices. We may be expected to require that our students participate in community service (in the way of writing newsletters for a non-profit organization, perhaps). Whatever our situation, we have agreed, by accepting the position at the school, that we will help the students achieve what the school expects them to achieve. Finally, the scholarly literature will keep us grounded in what the discipline values from its members, as well as keeping us informed as to what disciplinary values will soon be adopted. If we wish to strike off in a different direction from our department, school, or discipline, we should, again, be able to defend that choice. In Chapter Two, I will expand greatly upon this particular aspect of looking outward to determine our local context.

Example of Determining Our Local Context

A professor would like to assign a personal narrative in her first-year composition classroom. She teaches in an English department at a school that feels that first-year composition is meant to be a service course, preparing students to write in their other courses. As such, research, citation, and the genre of argument are favored. She could simply ignore the department's wishes to teach research-based writing and assign what she wishes, but she does so at the risk of alienating her relationship with the department and failing, by the department's values, in her duties. Therefore, ignoring her department's wishes would be unethical. In order to maintain her moral obligation to the department, she will either need to determine how the personal narrative assignment fulfills the department's expectations of what her students learn in her course, or she will have to adapt the assignment until it does. Most of all, she needs to be prepared, through ethical inquiry into her outward situation, to defend what she chooses to do.

A Personal Example: The Moral Heuristic and the Narrative Assignment

Every semester, I find myself in a situation similar to the one discussed above. In my department, there is an ongoing conversation about the usefulness of the narrative assignment. Several of my colleagues contend that few other courses will ask the students to write a narrative, so the time in our first-year composition classes is better spent teaching argument or report writing, which these instructors feel will better prepare the students for their future writing projects. Other colleagues of mine contend that narrative writing is important to master since even if other classes do not require the genre students still learn important concepts of writing, such as how to reach an academic audience and how to edit their writing in order to meet the

expectations of that audience. While it is important at any school to consider what the members of the department value, in my personal situation it is perhaps more important than in most schools, since at the end of the term my colleagues and I participate in holistic portfolio group grading. If my students include their narratives in their portfolios, and the members of my department do not value the narrative as an assignment, my students' grades could be negatively impacted by my decision to assign it. Therefore, I have an ethical obligation not only to my students but also to my colleagues to reflect critically on whether or not the narrative should be included in the course.

It is possible, of course, to defend the use of narrative in a first-year composition class without looking inward at one's self and outward at one's context. For example, there is ample research which shows that the narrative is a useful form of academic inquiry. However, since I contend that it is our ethical obligation to participate in this critical self-reflection in order to determine if it is right to include such an assignment, I have taken the opportunity to understand narrative writing assignments by looking inward at myself and outward at my context. I began by using the moral heuristic and free writing what I know about myself and what I know about narrative. Here are some of my reflections, which are followed by the conclusions I have drawn about my own practice of assigning a narrative in my first-year composition courses.

Looking Inward

1. What is my background and how has this shaped who I am, and what is my current situation?

I am Dutch American. I am the third son and third child of my parents. I am White. I grew up in Michigan, and in my time in America I have never lived more than ten miles from the house where I grew up. I grew up in a conservative, Christian household. I wasn't allowed to ride my bike, go swimming, or participate in any rigorous activity on Sunday, as it was the Lord's Day. My parents took us to church twice every Sunday. I attended catechism classes on Wednesday nights. My father's highest work achievement was the title of "Maintenance Supervisor;" he lost that title because he never caught on to using computers. My mother was an RN who retired after the birth of her second child and became a housewife. My parents are contradictions: they are loving and kind yet racist. I have never heard from them anything good about African Americans, except for the occasional "there are some good ones." I don't remember racism towards any other people group, with the possible exception of Hispanics who are "probably illegal, but good workers." I was a communications major as an undergraduate student, and have an M.A. in English literature. I changed to literature because I enjoy reading but was disappointed when I discovered that much literary criticism seems to me to be completely fabricated and serves only to increase the reputation of the critic. I enjoy reading accounts of historical events.

As I look at this brief description of my background, I realize that I have written a narrative. And much like I expect my students to write narratives in which they reflect on aspects

of their lives, I realize that I reflected on similar aspects of my life. Since I have found value in my reflection, I see why I like assigning my student to share details about their personal histories. I see why I respect those who hold religious beliefs, as I respect my parents and what they have taught me regarding religion. Unlike some of my colleagues, I personally enjoy well-written mission trip stories, as I respect the students for sharing their faith. Because I respect my parents and what they have done for their family, I see that I also respect my students who come from working class backgrounds as my father and mother did. The personal narratives of these students when they describe their feelings about not having the latest electronic device that their classmates all have or about never having gone on a vacation more than fifty miles from their house because their parents could not afford to go to Florida for Spring Break strike chords in me as I reflect upon my own experiences. I also see why I am sometimes surprised when an African American student writes well—and why I tend to be nicer to my African American students who struggle than I am to my Caucasian students as I overcompensate for the remnants of racism I try to expunge from myself.

Because I see the value in writing and reflecting on the narrative of my life, I might assign a narrative to my students, as I hope that they too can benefit from the exercise as I have.

2. If I subscribe (or choose not to subscribe) to religious beliefs, how does this influence who I am?

I am a Christian. Although I don't hold to the strict observance of the Sabbath as my parents taught, I do try to go to church at least three times a month. I still attend the church I grew up in. I believe that God "sent his only begotten Son" to die for me. I believe that the Holy Spirit is alive and active in the world today, although admittedly some events happen in the

world that cause me to question that belief. I am a Protestant and a Calvinist. My faith has been accused by another Christian as being "too intellectual," an accusation I took as a compliment. It was because of my faith that I went to teach English in China, not only to tell others about God's love, but also to show that love by teaching (for a pittance, mind you) a language to students who desperately wanted to learn it.

As I reflect upon what I wrote about my religious beliefs, I realize that the scripture I hold as sacred is largely written in narrative form. Since the Bible has influenced much of Western culture in everything from moral beliefs to literature, I can see that by assigning a narrative I am upholding a tradition that was used by those who are like-minded. Jesus himself spoke in parables, a narrative literary form. So who am I to argue that narrative is not appropriate for a first-year composition course when Jesus found it to be the best way to get his message across to his listeners?

Again, I have discovered why I do not mind reading the mission trip narratives that many of my colleagues discourage in their classes. I also have questioned my own faith and have strengthened my faith through the questioning. This questioning is an aspect of the intellectual side of my faith, as I, along with the religious tradition I affiliate myself with, believe that through questioning and struggling with belief a Christian's faith grows stronger. Because of my own faith-questioning experiences, I particularly enjoy reading narratives about struggles that my students have with their faith. I also find that I am harder on a student who writes about a mission trip and does not question or struggle with their faith. After all, I believe that that is one of the points of going on a mission trip, to challenge the faith of the missionary. Chris Anderson wrote an (partially fictitious) account of a teaching assistant who was offended by a student's

narrative in which the student wrote of religious convictions. The teaching assistant wanted to confront the student about her beliefs (Anderson 12). It seems as if this teaching assistant expected students who critically thought and wrote about their faith to abandon it. I, on the other hand, expect students who critically reflect on their beliefs to bolster their faith. When students do write narratives in which they show that their questioning has led them to abandon their faith or convert to a different religion it saddens me, but I still respect their spiritual journey.

By reflecting on this question, I have discovered that assigning a narrative paper to my students is appropriate because the narrative tradition is an important part of my faith and my professionalism. The narrative assignment does not conflict with my religious background; rather, my background supports the assignment. Therefore, it might be an ethically sound decision, for me, to assign the narrative.

3. Who am I, as a professional?

I am a teacher—a composition teacher. I do not teach in an English department, so I never teach literature. I do not teach creative or professional writing, I teach only basic writing and first-year composition. This means that I spend my weekends reading student papers. I enjoy teaching and reading argument papers. I value research in my students' writing. I am an assistant editor for Writing Spaces, *an open textbook for composition classes. I know that if I am given the chance, I am an easy grader. However, I am also a member of my department, and in my department's program, all first-year composition instructors participate in a group grading exercise. We get together once a week during the semester to talk about what we look for and how we grade.*

Since I see my professional identity as that of a teacher, I need to determine what skills the narrative will teach the students. As was identified in the answer to question one, I do believe that the students will learn about themselves. However, my ethical obligation is not necessarily to teach them about their lives, but to teach them writing. Does the narrative accomplish this? As a professional teacher, I can say that the narrative does teach them how to write effectively, although I freely admit that I am tired of certain topics: "The Day I Graduated from High School," "The Day I Got My Driver's License," "The Day I Got into My First Car Accident," "The Day My Grandparent Died," and "The Day A Classmate of Mine Was Killed by a Drunk Driver." I recognize that these topics are all important topics to the students and I do not mean to belittle either the topic or the students who write them, but I have found that most of these narratives sound very similar to each other. Aside from the expectation that the writing be relatively error-free, which makes the assignment an exercise in editing, the narrative as it is assigned in my class has to be more than a story. The piece must show that the student author is aware that an academic audience is reading the essay, and as such the narrative must show intelligent reflection upon the event. Since, as a professional, I value teaching research to my students, I require them to include an interview in their narrative. Also, by requiring the student to reflect on the needs of the audience, I am helping them understand what good writing does, and that makes the narrative useful, and therefore it passes ethical muster.

My inward-looking questions have shown my metaethical beliefs support using the personal narrative assignment. Now, I must consider whether or not my specific local context will accept my assigning of this paper as a moral action.

Looking Outward

1. What does the local community value?

My local community consists of the university itself and West Michigan. West Michigan is a conservative area, three of the area's four counties typically vote Republican in presidential elections, and all four counties are heavily Republican in their local governments. The university is a bit different, offering same-sex partner health benefits to employees against the wishes of the local community. There are a large number of working class people in my community, and this is seen through the large number of first generation college students that I have in my classes. This is also seen in the practical nature of the population. While the city of Grand Rapids hosts many arts festivals throughout the year, I know many people who have never attended a single one. "Not much point," they tell me. "What does art have to do with me?"

The university hosts a Community Reading Project, where once a year a book is chosen for the community to read and opportunities are given to discuss the book. Since 2005, there have been two novels and three first-person nonfiction narratives, one of which presents the personal life stories of people the author interviewed. One of the narratives, The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, begins with a first-person narrative to show the author's connection to the story. It certainly seems that the university community values narrative.*

If conservatism means that we should limit change and preserve the status quo, and if Republicans are truly conservative, then it seems likely that the local community would advocate doing things the way they have been done for many years—and that would imply that the narrative would be acceptable to the local community. A former student of mine once told me

that at her *public* high school, located about fifteen miles from campus, her volleyball coach would lead the team in prayer before each game. Therefore, it would appear that Christian missionary trip narratives would also be accepted by the local community.

The practical nature of the local community might make justification for the narrative assignment difficult. If the narrative is not assigned in other courses or is not useful for the student's future career, the community may not see a practical need for it. If I do decide to keep the narrative in my class, I must be prepared to show the practical nature of the assignment if challenged.

The Community Reading Project selections would suggest that the more liberal campus community, too, values the narrative. Based on the two local communities that I have looked at, I believe that it might be ethical, if the practicality of the assignment is proven, to assign a narrative.

2. What do the students value?

In the winter semester of 2012 I assigned four papers, one of which was a narrative. The students chose three of the papers to submit in their final portfolio. A quick look at the seventy-seven portfolios that my students submitted shows that sixty-three students (about 82%) chose to include the narrative over another paper. In conversations with students over the years, I have been told that they enjoy writing the narratives for a variety of reasons, including "it is easier" and "I learned something about myself." Many of my students value the writing skills that they have learned in my class. I have heard numerous times that research or editing skills that they have practiced in my class has helped them receive a good grade on a paper in another course.

My students certainly do seem to value the narrative. My students often claim that the narrative is easy to write—a claim I do not believe, because in my experience as a writer and as a writing teacher narratives are quite difficult to write well—and in any case I would not choose my assignments based on what my students believe is easy. However, I do like the fact that the students learn something about themselves. In the end, though, I teach writing, not self-exploration. If my students like the narrative for only the reason that it leads to self-exploration, I might claim that it is a morally right action to assign the narrative as the assignment reflects what they value. However, if the students are not improving their academic writing abilities through the narrative assignment, then I cannot claim to be acting ethically in regards to what the students need from my course.

3. What does my department, school, and the scholarly literature in my discipline value?

During the fall and winter semester, instructors of Writing 150, my school's first-year composition course, meet in small groups once a week to read and discuss student work. In this way, we norm our assessment practices, finding out what each of us values in student writing. Whether or not we value narrative is an ongoing discussion. It seems that while most of my colleagues do assign a narrative paper, many of them simply tolerate it, assigning it because they believe they should, or because they know that the students expect it. I have never heard a colleague outright claim that it should never be assigned, although I have heard several question its usefulness. But I keep remembering what I learned from a course I took a few years ago that specifically looked at the narrative as a form of academic inquiry, so I know that scholars in my

field have been finding the genre to be more and more useful to the academic community at large.

Those within my department feel conflicted about the narrative assignment. As mentioned earlier, many of our students find it to be easy, although it is a challenging assignment to write a narrative that successfully captures an academic audience's attention. Yet students love their narratives so much that they often include a weak narrative in their final portfolios rather than revising a research paper or an argument, two genres that are perhaps more academic. While I do not doubt that the narrative is being well taught in my department, among my colleagues there is a feeling that a narrative pulls down portfolio grades, that including the genre in the portfolio damages a grade when compared to a portfolio that includes three attempts at more scholarly writing. Yet other instructors argue that the narrative adds a human connection to the author, that it gives the portfolio a voice that it would otherwise lack.

The discipline does, however, value the narrative. I volunteer as an assistant editor for the textbook project *Writing Spaces*, which offers composition students open textbook articles written by composition teachers on a wide variety of topics—from advice on completing assignments to conducting research to utilizing writing centers. I notice that most of the articles in *Writing Spaces* are written using a first-person, narrative voice. L. Lennie Irvin, the author of "What is 'Academic' Writing?" writes, "I freely admit my own past as a clueless freshman writer, and it's out of this sympathy as well as twenty years of teaching college writing that I hope to provide you with something useful" (4). Not only do the authors in the field use the narrative, the Conference on College Composition and Communication Executive Committee has released a position statement in which they declare:

> To restrict students' engagement with writing to only academic contexts and forms is to risk narrowing what we as a nation can remember, understand, and create. . . . the Conference on College Composition and Communication affirms that many genres and uses of writing must be taught well in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities: . . . [including] forms of personal discourse that create and maintain relationships; including a relationship with one's self, as a means to social and emotional well-being, including journals, personal narratives, memoirs, reflections, meditations, conversations, dialogues, and correspondence, all in various media . . . ("CCCC Statement on the Multiple Uses of Writing")

Our discipline values narrative for more reasons than the students' claims of "it is easier" and "I learned something about myself." Narratives record and create knowledge that helps us as a nation understand ourselves. Since the discipline accepts and values narrative, I can claim that it is ethical to assign it in my class.

In *Narrative Inquiry,* D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly worked to solidify narrative as a valid form of academic study. "Experience is what we study," they claim, "and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it" (18). Following their lead, Gian Pagnucci makes a strong case in his *Living the Narrative Life* for including narrative in the composition classroom. "I don't see why," Pagnucci writes, "we should ignore the power that narrative can also have to influence a reader, establish a credible ethos, or make a persuasive point" (ix). Furthermore, David Schaafsma and Ruth Vinz tell us that "Narrative Inquiry helps us to see more carefully and completely. It compels us to care about people's lives in all their complexity and often moves us

to action" (1). While all of these composition scholars do acknowledge that narrative is viewed, at best, with suspicion among scholars across the disciplines, these authors all question whether or not it should be so denigrated.

I want my students to learn the power that narrative can have, that it can make sense of experience, that it makes us care about the lives of others—and ourselves—and to see the power narrative has to make us act. After all, critical self-reflection, which I argue is essential for composition teachers to embrace, is narrative inquiry. If I have found it useful, I can have a reasonable expectation that my students will find value in it—and Clandinin, Connelly, Pagnucci, Schaafsm, and Vinz all agree that they will find value.

My outward-looking questions have shown that within my local context I can claim that it is morally right to assign a narrative to my students, since I have verified, through critical reflection, that the values of the overlapping communities of the students, the department, the school, my profession, and the local population all can accept the assignment as a valuable tool that teaches writing skills.

The decision to assign a narrative, or any project, to students in a first-year composition course should not be made hastily. Decisions regarding coursework should be made through a careful inward and outward study which will reveal whether or not the decision is right or ethical. Although admittedly the example above could have gone deeper into examining my personal experiences and beliefs as well as the values of the overlapping communities, I doubt that a more thorough self-reflection would have changed my ultimate decision that the narrative is ethical for me to assign in my specific context. By using the self-reflective moral heuristic, I have listened to John Dewey who said that "the whole process of thinking consists of making a series of

judgments that are so related as to support one another in leading to a final judgment—the conclusion" (119). By looking inward and examining who I am, my religious beliefs and how they have influenced me, and who I am as a professional I have made a series of judgments that show that I can claim that the use of narrative as an assignment in my classes is ethical. By looking outward and examining my local community, my students, and my department and discipline, I can make the same claim.

Conclusion

Informed decision-making is an ethical responsibility that composition instructors have. This obligation can be fulfilled through the use of a moral heuristic which allows an instructor to reflect on their metaethical beliefs and their responsibilities to those around them. The heuristic I have presented in this chapter challenges us to look inward at ourselves and outward into our local context. By answering these questions, we can anticipate our judgments in reaction to issues in our teaching before those issues arise. In this way, we will not be forced to justify our actions on the fly as we are questioned about them; we will have justification for those judgments in the work that has already taken place.

In the next chapter I will examine what scholars who have adopted ethics as a way to look at the teaching of composition and composition pedagogy and theory have written. This examination will show the way in which a particular scholar's perspective clarifies our ethical obligations to our discipline. The assumption is, then, that if a scholar is of a different metaethical and/or contextual background than a reader, then a reader's adoption of said theory will not work as the scholar intends. This review will give a solid foundation to our

understanding of who we are and what our discipline values and will help us as composition instructors look inwardly and outwardly at what we are doing. Following that, in Chapter Three I argue that testing the usefulness of the critical self-reflection requires us to collect responses from individual composition instructors, while understanding that any conclusions about ethical behavior that we might draw from those responses depend entirely upon the situation and those involved in it.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six offer the responses of three composition instructors—Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark, respectively—to the critically self-reflective moral heuristic These chapters demonstrate the experiences that each of these instructors had, and attempt to show an instructor in the process of making implicitly held ethical values explicit while also helping these instructors determine where the potential for ethical conflict lies. These chapters will also relate the instructors' reactions to the process of guided critical self-reflection, and whether or not they found value in the exercise.

CHAPTER TWO

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING PEDAGOGY, AUTHORITY, ADVOCACY, AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

In the previous chapter, I showed that composition instructors can be faced with the need to act upon ethical decisions every day, from determining whether or not to include a certain assignment in their courses, to dealing with issues such as plagiarism, to justifying their actions to their colleagues. These ethical decisions must be made carefully, as conflict may result from the actions based on these decisions. Chapter One also showed that when composition instructors look inward at themselves to explore how their personal background has shaped who they are, how their faith-based beliefs (or lack thereof) have influenced them, and how they see themselves as professionals they can understand their metaethical values which will then help them understand how their own actions are based on their personal ethical beliefs. Furthermore, the previous chapter showed that by looking outward at their local community, their students, and the department and discipline composition instructors can determine what those who have a stake in their classroom practices view as ethical. When these inward and outward questions have been explored, judgments regarding what actions are ethical can be made and understood, the composition instructor can know that he or she is acting in a right manner, and ethical conflicts can be defused before they occur.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, when looking outward, a composition instructor has an ethical obligation to know and reflect on the scholarly literature in their field. Therefore, this chapter focuses on what the scholarly literature says is acceptable, ethical behavior in a

composition classroom, particularly in regards to choosing pedagogy, adhering to departmental and institutional requirements, dealing with authority in the classroom, choosing whether or not to advocate certain social ideals, and responding to student work all while remaining true to the instructor's metaethical beliefs. Knowing the scholarly literature will expand composition instructors' understanding of their teaching situation and help them teach their courses more ethically.

Compositionists have been interested in how ethics can inform their teaching for some time. As Michael Pemberton tells us:

> Concerns about the relationship between ethics and writing instruction are not new . . . . . Both Plato (as expressed in *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*) and Aristotle (as described in his *Ethics* and *Poetics*) believed that the social functions of oral and written discourse and the practical needs of a democratic society required an educated populace trained in the principles of rhetorical persuasion and ethical conduct. (*The Ethics of Writing Instruction* ix)

Discussions about ethics in the composition classroom are appearing more and more frequently. Richard Weaver's *The Ethics of Rhetoric* was published in 1953 and started a new generation of compositionists thinking about ethics and their profession. Weaver sees the "true rhetorician as a noble lover of good . . ." (18), and since composition has grown out of the field of rhetoric and is still greatly concerned with the use of language that "can move us toward what is good . . . move us toward what is evil; or . . . fail to move us at all" (Weaver 6) composition instructors are rhetoricians. Therefore, we can paraphrase Weaver and claim that the "true compositionist is a noble lover of good, of the ethical." More recently, Sheryl I. Fontaine and Susan M. Hunter's

Foregrounding Ethical Awareness in Composition and English Studies (1998) and Pemberton's *The Ethics of Writing Instruction* (2000) are two important anthologies concerning writing instruction and ethics. From 2008 to 2011, there were ninety-six presentations given at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) that explicitly dealt with ethics and composition. These books, presentations, and articles published on the topic, many of which will be discussed in this chapter, attest to the fact that the discussion concerning ethics and teaching writing is still ongoing.

Composition and Ethics

Post-process composition theory, in part, claims that first-year composition (FYC) teachers must consider the contexts of where they are, who their students are, and what their department, institution, and field values. Understanding these contexts is necessary, because as Peter Vandenberg, Sue Hum, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon claim, they are of "overriding significance . . . in theorizing and teaching writing" (16). Without an understanding of the context in which they teach, composition instructors cannot theorize, plan, or discuss what action they can take to present writing to students more effectively. Compositionists cannot ignore their local contexts or the context of the discipline's scholarly literature if they wish to teach and theorize within their academic discipline; to do so, according to postmodern ethical theory, would be unethical.

Ethics and Choosing Composition Pedagogy

Recognition of the personal values we hold is important as these beliefs can help a composition instructor decide on the pedagogy that he or she wishes to adopt in his or her

teaching. When an instructor begins teaching, the literature offers several ready-made pedagogies to choose from: process pedagogy, critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, cultural studies pedagogy, and so on (see Tate, Rupiper and Schick, for example). Advice is often given from one theorist or another about which pedagogy should be adopted, and there is much good advice in the pages of these articles. However, few, if any, essays delve deeply into whether or not an individual pedagogy is in line with a professor's own personal set of ethics, and none speak of the necessity to recognize the instructor's personal values first or how to decide if the specific pedagogy in question is appropriate for the instructor to adopt in light of personal beliefs and teaching context. Rather, these authors typically advocate that all FYC instructors adopt the authors' favorite pedagogy. Examples of this can be seen in Lad Tobin's proposition in his chapter "Replacing the Carrot with the Couch: Reading Psychotherapeutically" that we not shy away from playing therapist with our students who seem to be requesting us to do this (*Reading* 53), in Ann George's argument in "Critical Pedagogy: Dreaming of Democracy" that we should adopt critical pedagogy to encourage our students to become politically aware citizens (93), and in Susan C. Jarratt's "Feminist Pedagogy" where we are encouraged to utilize a pedagogy that recognizes "a view of contemporary society as sexist and patriarchal, and of the complicity of reading, writing, and teaching in those conditions" (115). Certainly, there are composition instructors who will find that one of these pedagogies is appropriate according to their personal beliefs and their context. However, each of these pedagogies, at least in part, grows out of the scholar's personal ethical framework, so readers are asked to adopt not only the pedagogy but also the underpinning set of metaethics and the author's context that led to its creation.

Without first understanding his or her ethical beliefs, an instructor can face a problem when, swayed by the persuasiveness of an author, he or she quickly and without a deliberate decision-making process adopts that author's pedagogy. In such cases, it is possible that the pedagogy adopted is metaethically unacceptable to the individual. A conservative Christian professor, for example, may be swayed to adopt a Marxist pedagogy because she is attracted to the Marxist idea of equality for all. And while liberation theology claims that Marxism and religious beliefs are not incompatible (Stenberg 271), the atheistic tenets of Marxism may clash too strongly with many of her own religious beliefs. In such a situation, the professor finds herself in ethical conflict with her pedagogy. As a result, the professor may find that she is continuously unable to justify her actions against her personal ethics. The conflict that she faces within herself may become evident in her teaching, as the comments she writes on student work, drawing on her personal beliefs of what is appropriate to point out to the writer, may conflict with an assignment that was driven by the pedagogy. As a result, the students, attempting to offer their instructor an essay that follows the assignment but receiving feedback that contradicts what the assignment aims to teach, may become confused. The students become unhappy, the professor may become unhappy, and little in the way of the educational goals is accomplished.

Therefore, when deciding upon whether or not to adopt a specific pedagogy each instructor must first understand his or her inward context—his or her personal background, faith-based beliefs, and professional identity. This will show the instructor which pedagogy fits their metaethical beliefs. The instructor must also look at his or her outward context—the local community, the students, the colleagues, the department, the university, and the profession that he or she exists in and with in order to determine if a pedagogy is in line with the values of those

who hold a stake in the course. In the above example of a conservative Christian professor attempting to adopt a Marxist pedagogy, if that instructor were teaching at a conservative religious institution, the values that drove the creation of the Marxist pedagogy may be foreign to the values of local community. Conflict may arise between the instructor and the students who cannot accept a pedagogy which does not accept God as an integral part of their lives, and between the instructor and the department and school which expects that a God-centered worldview be espoused in the teaching. In short, before deciding whether or not to adopt a pedagogy to utilize in their classroom, each instructor should use critical self-reflection to discover who they are and what they value.

The example of the conservative Christian instructor adopting Marxist pedagogy is hypothetical. However, the field's scholarly literature does provide examples of when ethical conflicts arise between colleagues due to pedagogy. It was the issue of how to enact ethical pedagogy in a first-year composition course at the University of Texas that led to the heated debate between Maxine Hairston and her colleague at the University of Texas Linda Brodkey. The conflict arose when Brodkey, the Director of the Lower Division English Program, determined that the university's FYC course was in need of revision (Bizzell and Trimbur 37). The new course would have implemented a pedagogy in the FYC curriculum that focused student writing on the theme of difference. Those who opposed the change argued that it was enough just to teach writing skills in a composition classroom, and were concerned that the newly-designed course would serve to indoctrinate students into accepting beliefs that the community would not approve of, i.e. multiculturalism. Arguing against the change, Hairston writes, "my first response is 'You see what happens when we allow writing programs to be run

by English departments?'" (183). The problem arises, she claims, when English professors, not wishing to teach "those often despised introductory English courses" turn them into courses that promote the professors' social agendas (185). Hairston describes the situation at her school:

> Five years ago the regular faculty in our department at Texas tried to get rid of freshman English altogether by having it taught entirely in extension or at the local community college; this past year, many of those who had previously advocated abandoning the course were in the forefront of the battle to turn it into a course about racism and sexism. Now the course was suddenly worth their time. (185)

Hairston was not arguing that allowing pedagogy to shape the FYC curriculum was inappropriate; she simply argued that the pedagogy that informed FYC should be FYC pedagogy. The new pedagogy, for her, was inappropriate due to her personal value that student writing and student writers should be the focus of the course. In this situation, both sides essentially claimed that they were adhering to contextual values—Hairston relying on what she saw the profession and students valuing, and Brodkey, according to Hairston, relying on the community values of faculty members.

On the other hand, Brodkey and those who supported her work defended the action of creating a difference-centered FYC course on the grounds that what they were trying to do was create a course in which the students were taught writing skills. Brodkey states, "The students we teach in this course, many of whom are practiced writers, but practiced writers of the five-paragraph essay, haven't experienced writing as we do it, as a chance to explore ideas, articulate claims, lay out cases and modify them in the light of the evidence" (Robinson and Brodkey 23).

The goals Brodkey claims that the course would pursue, helping students learn skills to "articulate claims, lay out cases and modify them in the light of evidence" are goals that few FYC instructors would claim are not valuable. Furthermore, the English Department, by a vote of forty-six to eleven, upheld the right of the Lower Division English Program Committee to create and implement changes to the curriculum, which showed that the local community did support the action (Robinson and Brodkey 23). It was due to the authority that the university held, pushed by the community outside of the school—in this case, not just a local community but a community of the nation, represented through the media—that the course was never implemented as originally designed (Bizzell and Trimbur 37; Robinson and Brodkey 23).

According to an understanding of postmodern ethics, both sides initially acted ethically since both sides were concerned with and reflected upon the values and needs of the others who would be affected by this decision. Brodkey and her supporters questioned what the students needed and valued in their education and determined that the right course of action would be one that would give students the opportunity to practice academic argument (Robinson and Brodkey 23). The values of others were also sought by the Lower Department English Program Committee when they sought and were given approval from the English Department in the form of a vote. Hairston and those on the opposing side also thought of the others involved, and concluded that a FYC course, in order to help students develop as writers, must focus on student writing (Hairston 186). For Hairston and those on her side, it was feared that adopting a theme such as "Writing about Difference" would be a poor way to teach writing, as it was feared that "Difference," rather than student writing, would be the focal point.

In the conflict, both sides called upon their understanding of the values of others in order to bolster their claims, but the stated goals of both camps, to teach the students to argue for their opinion (Robinson and Brodkey 23) and making student writing the center of a FYC course (Hairston 186), are not the source of the conflict. The conflict began with the introduction of a pedagogy that not all members of the department could agree to, and escalated when those in the minority intentionally sought out a larger number of others to include. While I have argued that we do need to consider what the local community values, I have also argued that we do not need to agree with or follow those values if those values conflict with values of the other communities who are involved, i.e. the students, the department, or the school. If our scholarly literature, departments, and students hold one value, then we should not discard that value to please a community that holds an opposing value. In this conflict, the minority acted unethically when they ignored the values of the department and turned instead to the general public of the university first (initially with little result) and then to the national media to push their personal values onto the community, in exactly the way they were accusing Brodkey of doing.

Adopting Departmental and Institutional Requirements

Relying again on Porter's definition of postmodern ethics as "grounded in community or local standards" ("Developing" 216) and Bauman's recognition that postmodern ethics depends upon the others involved in the situation (84), we see that what constitutes ethical behavior may change from department to department. Certainly, there will be values that any composition or English department in an institution in the United States would hold, such as a belief that students should give credit to the sources they use in their writing. However, one department

might place a high value on this and severely punish students who do not correctly cite their sources and another department might consider this merely a teaching opportunity, a minor hiccup in the student's path to becoming an effective writer.

In order to act ethically, we must know what the communities of our department and school value. We must look outward at these communities; we must critically reflect on what they view as ethical behavior. This process also demands that individual composition instructors practice critical self-reflection to determine if the values of the department are in line with the values of its members. Once the values of the department are explicitly known, its members will be able to defend their actions as ethical. If an individual member does not share the values of the department, he or she must either work for change or, since the values of others define ethical behavior, must adapt their actions to suit both sets of principles.

Several theorists have written about their reflection on what their departments value and how they have worked within that community to create ethical teaching practices or have written advice to teachers and departments to work together to create harmony between teaching practice driven by personal values and department policy. For example, Elbow and Belanoff's "Portfolios as a Substitute for Proficiency Exams" shows the value of portfolio-based assessment for the local communities—students, instructors, and departments. They have brought these communities together, creating a teaching practice that all can value. As another example, Richard Haswell and Susan Wyche-Smith, in "Adventuring into Writing Assessment," urge composition instructors and departments to take ownership of their institution-mandated writing assessment programs in order to maintain local community control, which is rooted in local community principles, over these programs.

While several authors imply the ethical responsibilities that instructors should have to departments and institutions, there are a few authors who explicitly call for departments and institutions to make ethical decisions concerning their practices and policies. Larry Beason writes that some English departments are acting in an unethical manner. Beason confronts the issue of whether or not first-year composition is a service course designed to enhance students' skills before writing for other courses, or if FYC is a stand-alone course that is its own reward for the students who take it (as seen in Downs and Wardle's argument to create Writing about Writing first-year composition programs) (105). He points out that the service aspect of FYC is often emphasized in English departments because "[c]omposition courses often give English departments considerable enrollments, funding, and power" if every student goes through the program (111). However, if a department claims that FYC is a service course to get funding and then never evaluates the service that it is offering, it is being unethical, as those who fund the course, i.e. the administration of the institution, would hold the value that the students receive what they have paid for and that the institution receives the results that the administration has paid for. In this situation, a first-year composition course is for the benefit of the department, not the students. Beason goes on to argue that in order to maintain ethicality, each department needs to reflect upon its values to determine if its construction of FYC can be defended on ethical grounds. He further says that the department either needs to say yes, we are ethical and prove it, say no and defend the course as prerequisite on other grounds, or eliminate the requirement that all freshmen take it (131-32). I would trust that each department, after careful consideration, could prove the need for the course on ethical grounds, even though there are others who may wish to dismantle the apparatus that is first-year composition (e.g. Sharon Crowley's

Composition in the University which argues that FYC should not be a required course if it is based on a humanistic approach [13]).

Miles Myers is another scholar who calls for English departments to reflect upon their ethics as an important component of their decision-making processes. Myers speaks about the necessity of English departments to establish a code of ethics, as governments require professions to adopt such a code. While Myers focuses his discussion on K-12 education, his arguments are valid for the collegiate setting, as well. Organizations for the professions of medicine, engineering, and law, for example, have established codes of ethics for their practitioners (c.f. "Medical Ethics"; "Ethics: Code of Ethics"; "Model Rules"). Myers wonders why the profession of teaching First-Year Composition should be any different. After all, FYC instructors do have a national organization, the Conference of College Composition and Communication (CCCC), they have an education which has trained them to teach FYC, or at least trained them to learn how to teach FYC, and there are quite a few FYC teachers. It is, perhaps, a natural aspect of the evolution of the field to create and adopt a professional code of ethical conduct. Currently, CCCC has established codes concerning using students in writing classes as human subjects in our experiments and also regarding the use of student writing in our research ("Ethical Conduct"; **"**Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct"; "Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment"). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has established a position statement for the teaching of composition, but it does not specifically speak to the ethical responsibilities of the composition instructor (NCTE). CCCC also has a "Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" in which they recommend standards for the teaching of first-year composition, but unlike the code of ethics for medicine, institutions

are not required to abide by these standards in order to be part of the profession. For example, the statement recommends that "[n]o English faculty members should teach more than 60 writing students in a term. In developmental writing classes, the maximum should be 45." At my school, full-time instructors of first-year composition—and developmental writing—routinely teach eighty-four students per term. Yet my institution faces no disciplinary action for this practice. Because of the fact that the position statements of CCCC and NCTE are no more than suggestions, the organizations could go further and create a profession-wide code that includes an understanding of where our discipline stands in today's world in regards to what makes a profession ethical (Myers 273) and requiring constituent members to abide by the code or risk censure. Myers argues that by establishing this code, FYC instructors go beyond the "compact between the state and profession" that exists to protect and further the profession (265). By going beyond what is required, the profession becomes proactive, leading the way for other professions, anticipating future legislation, and charting its own course rather than simply being reactive and only doing what is required to keep from getting into legal difficulty.

Arguing against an established code of ethics, Detweiler, Mathison-Fife, McEachern, and Coulter counter that such codes are rigid and prescriptive and remove from the professional the ability to make decisions in specific circumstances. Such codes do not "provide adequate help in making concrete choices" (212). Rather, these codes can make it more difficult to act in a manner that the individual instructor believes is the ethical. If the discipline as a whole must establish a code of ethics, Detweiler, Mathison-Fife, McEachern, and Coulter would like to see a code that allows an instructor to alter her actions according to the specific situation in which she finds herself (213). In this way, each instructor, each department, can choose what is ethical for

them, in a specific location, at a specific time. If the advice from these authors is followed in the creation of such a code, critical self-reflection would be a necessity to help the instructor understand how to act ethically in her specific situation.

Since the values of individual departments vary, each department should ask its members to reflect upon the values that the department holds or should hold to determine if creating an actual code of ethics is necessary. In order to consider creating a discipline-wide code, CCCC could ask its members to reflect on whether or not an established code of ethics would be useful. As seen by work of Myers and Detweiler, Mathison-Fife, McEachern, and Coulter, there are two views on this matter. However, if the disciplines takes up the call to reflect upon this matter, those who disagree with the final will of the members of the discipline will be able to take some comfort in knowing that the action was taken according to the values of the discipline, and will be able to reflect further on their values and how their values will be able to work with the values of the discipline in order to minimize ethical conflict.

No matter where the field of composition currently stands on the issue of whether or not to adopt a profession-wide code of ethics, instructors must be aware of where the debate stands. In this way, each instructor will be able to understand the political and social forces that are at play in their own local communities and in their discipline and use that information when practicing critical self-reflection to make judgments about how to act ethically in their relationships to their departments.

Negotiating Authority

Students find themselves in composition classes not necessarily because they want to be there, but because the college or university that they attend requires that they be there. As a relatively captive audience, these first-year students are stuck in a classroom; their only hope of moving on is to receive a passing grade. They find that they must submit to the authority of the teacher if they hope to continue learning in the academy. Hopefully, that authority will not be abused by their instructor. Composition instructors need to understand what the discipline recommends about the use of authority in order to make ethical judgments about the proper use of authority in their own classrooms.

Authority is always problematic in the composition classroom because, whether the instructor intends it or not, teachers are given authority over the students by their institution (Gale 10) and the students (Bizzell 58). However, the proper use for that authority is still being debated. Many composition instructors have been struggling with the use of authority in their classroom. They are influenced by theorists such as Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* painted a picture of a teacher as an oppressor, using his or her authority to keep the oppressed students ignorant of their situation (74) or Peter Elbow, whose *Writing without Teachers* advocated removing the presence of the teacher in the composition classroom as much as possible in order to foster a "blessed state of not worrying" about the correctness of the writing in students who will then produce authentic student writing and learn (181). Composition teachers need authority in the classroom in order to keep the class moving toward the objectives,

yet many also believe that wielding too much authority stifles students' ability to learn. According to Xin Liu Gale:

> [t]o this day, composition scholars and teachers are still trying to deal with the paradoxes inherent in teacher authority: the conflict between the teacher's desire for democracy and equality in the classroom and the need for authority in teaching; the incompatibility between the teacher's wish to teach discourses of the others and the goal of the institution to maintain and continue the dominant discourse and dominant culture; and the contradictions between the teacher's good intentions and the students' diverse and varied needs. No satisfactory solutions to these dilemmas have been offered yet. (4)

Gale goes on to say that "[t]o form a pedagogy that truly enables learning and promotes equality and democracy, compositionists need to recognize the complexity of the teacher's authority and the context in which it is used" (34). When an instructor reflects upon what their local communities value, specifically the values of the communities of the department, institution, and students, they will understand what authority has been given to them and will better understand how to wield that outwardly granted authority.

Teachers are given authority and power by the institution (Gale 10), but there are other sources of an instructor's authority that must be taken into account when we reflect on how we can ethically wield authority. According to Palmer:

> [i]n a culture of technique, we often confuse authority with power, but the two are not the same. Power works from the outside in, but authority works from the inside out. We are mistaken when we seek authority outside ourselves, in sources

> ranging from the subtle skills of group process to the less than subtle method of social control called grading. This view of teaching turns the teacher into the cop on the corner, trying to keep things moving amicably and by consent but always having recourse to the coercive power of law. (32-33)

It is precisely the "cop on the corner" image that theorists rebel against and try to remove from their classroom as they struggle to find ways to use authority wisely and judiciously—to assign grades, keep student cell phones turned off, get students to turn papers in on time, and so on—to help their students succeed in the class. However, when an instructor relies on the "coercive power of law" (Palmer 33) to force students to act in ways their instructor views as appropriate, they are not wielding authority, but power. Authority comes not only from the institution but from within the teacher (Palmer 33; Gale 51), since "[t]eaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness" (Palmer 2). There is an inward source of authority, one part of which Gale identifies as the "teacher's desire for democracy and equality in the classroom" (4). Because authority comes from within the teacher, from their expertise (Gale 51) or from "their own words, their own actions, their own lives" (Palmer 33) it becomes necessary for a composition instructor to know who they are internally, what they believe, and where those beliefs come from. What instructors carry within them—their background, their personal faith-based beliefs, and their view of himself or herself as a professional—gives them authority. For example, an instructor may remember the authority that her teachers held and use that part of her background to wield similar authority. Or perhaps another instructor believes that the Bible verse "The student is not above his teacher . . ." (*New Layman's Parallel Bible*, Matt. 10:24) shows that teachers should wield authority over his students, albeit carefully, as he also believes in the

truth of another verse, "[n]ot many of you should become teachers . . . because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (*New Layman's Parallel Bible*, James 3:1). Yet another instructor sees authority as an attribute of being a teacher and uses it strongly (or weakly) as she views that use of authority as appropriate to the profession. Since "the teacher's authority, no matter in what form it appears, has the potential danger of oppression and exclusion" (Gale 55), it becomes an ethical obligation to understand where our inward authority comes from in order to avoid creating conflict through oppressing or excluding our students. Examining oneself through critical self-reflection, perhaps by using the moral heuristic that I offered in Chapter One, by looking inward to determine one's metaethical beliefs and looking outward to determine one's local context, clarifies this ethical obligation, as we will be better able to determine how we believe authority should be used, as well as what uses of authority are expected by the others within the situation. As an added bonus, the instructor will also be forming the personal pedagogy for which Gale is calling.

Composition instructors and theorists are concerned with how to use authority, but they are also concerned with how to distribute it. Whether the instructor should hold all the authority in the classroom or whether some authority should be distributed to the students—or even whether *most* of the authority should be given to the students as Peter Elbow advocates in *Writing without Teachers*—are important questions facing composition instructors. As Dennis Ryan explains, "In an ethical context, authority is marked by the transactional nature of the teacher-student relationship, and everything pertaining to that relationship: the teacher's personal ethos, teaching effectiveness, assessment, affective response, and so forth" (2). This "transactional nature of the teacher-student relationship" is what complicates this issue. We

interact with our students on many levels, as teacher, mentor, assessor, and authority figure. If we choose to distribute authority to the student—allowing the student to determine assessment criteria, for example, we affect our relationship with him or her on all of those levels. If, upon self-reflection, we determine that it would be ethical for us to wield authority in one way or another, we must be prepared to accept the new teacher-student relationship that will result.

Another concern of composition instructors and theorists about the use of authority is whether or not it is an appropriate use of authority to instruct students according to our personal social beliefs. Certainly, these beliefs are rooted within our personal values, values that can be understood through critical self-reflection. John Ruszkiewicz writes about the potential conflict between student and teacher if the instructor does decide to use authority in such a pursuit. He claims that the composition teacher who advocates a social or political position in the composition classroom might hold

> all the power: she selects the topic to reflect her worldview; she confers permission to disagree; presumably, she gives out the grades. And so it must be when a teacher makes her class a forum for advancing political views, even in the name of virtue . . . . what seems to be at stake finally seems not to be important civic and social issues, but the instructor's ability to control them. (32)

Patricia Bizzell also feels this problem with the instructor's use of power within a classroom that promotes a social or political agenda: "we want to serve the common good with the power we possess by virtue of our position as teachers, and yet we are deeply suspicious of any exercise of power in the classroom" (54). As an instructor I am suspicious of exercising power in the classroom, largely since, as an undergraduate student, I had several professors who clearly

advocated social or political positions in the classroom that I did not agree with. It was clear to me when a professor was doing so. However, I also understood authority, and never questioned the professor. I did what I needed to do to get a grade, spoke poorly about the professor behind his or her back with my classmates who felt the same way, and twenty years later I still offer anecdotes from these classes when speaking to others about the sorts of excesses that I wish to avoid. As instructors, we need to be aware that our students see our uses of authority in this regard, and it is our ethical obligation to reflect on whether or not such an action is appropriate within our local context.

This does not mean that upon critical self-reflection we will find it unethical to advocate social or political agendas in our classrooms. Social issues such as race or class appear in our classrooms on a regular basis, and discussing these issues in such a way as to lead our students to a socially accepted conclusion (e.g. racism is bad) is certainly ethical, as the communities involved in the discussion will see this as an ethically appropriate belief. If the values of the department and the professor agree that social or political agendas can be used in the classroom, care must be given to avoid coming into conflict with student values. William H. Thelin admits that he does offer a form of political advocacy within his classrooms, but he believes that he has found an answer to the dilemma of using authority to do so. He writes, "I feel the epistemic approach I am using puts political rigor within the framework of the writing process, *while safeguarding the students against the loss of freedom* and more extreme pedagogical mistakes, such as indoctrination and inequality in grading" (60; emphasis added). If Thelin is able to use his authority to teach writing, advance a political agenda without indoctrination, and maintain the

students' freedom to disagree with his agenda without fear of retribution, then perhaps at least in this one case, Ruszkiewicz's concern is unfounded.

Another political agenda that is espoused by many composition instructors, departments, and institutions is to prepare students to be active citizens of their communities. Irvin Peckham states that "as educators, we have a double function—to help students with their writing *and* prepare them to be critical citizens in a participatory democracy" (160). Yet, although it is a value that he holds to help students become critical citizens, when he examines his own teaching, he decides, "I have never wanted to do anything else but teach 'just' writing" (160). While many of us would like our students to fulfill the duties of citizens in our participatory democracy, we must determine, through examination of our own values and those of the communities which hold a stake in our classrooms, if it is ethically appropriate to do so. Since our departments and institutions have assigned us the task to teach writing, the primary use of authority in the classroom should be teach writing skills, even if a secondary use of the authority is to advance a social or political position.

Today, "authority" can mean many things to many people—and most of those meanings can be negative. Andrea Lunsford is concerned with the way composition instructors and theorists use the word authority negatively. She warns us to be careful with the term, and she states, "unless we can recuperate the positive associations with authority—as a source of knowledge and experience we can and should respect, we may be better off to eschew the term altogether" (66). In the American university setting, professors design the course and assign work, and the students are expected to follow the professor's plan of action—failure to do so will result in a poor assessment at the end of the term. Even though this may be seen as the way

authority works in a classroom, "authority" should not be a term that strictly means that the one holding the authority commands and those without authority follow. Something must be done in order to create an environment where the word authority is recognized for what it should be, not as forcing one to do something against their will, but rather as "respect due to deep knowledge and experience" which is inspiring, not oppressive (Lunsford 66). Defining the relationship between ethics, authority, and the university classroom, Dennis Ryan claims that "'authority' is a relation, a locus of continuous revisitation of the teacher-student relationship, that this revisitation is in itself inherently ethical, and, as a result, should compel the teacher of writing to use a variety of pedagogical discourse models to enhance this relation" (2). This definition challenges us, the instructors, to review constantly what we are doing in the context of the authority that we hold and wield. Used in this way, the term becomes an important part of our vocabulary, rather than something to avoid.

Students' Right to Their Own Work: Using Plagiarism Prevention Tools

Instructors use authority as a tool when dealing with academic dishonesty. When a student intentionally or unintentionally breaches ethical standards, the instructor must use authority to instruct, and possibly to correct, in order to help the student understand that such ethical breaches are not tolerated among writers. Several companies now offer tools which claim to help an instructor use this authority to prevent academic dishonesty before it happens in ways that help a student learn.

Plagiarism is rampant in the First-Year Composition classroom. At least, it seems that is the way that FYC instructors and schools are told to think of plagiarism by those who wish to

profit from the mistrust of students. iParadigms is one of the most successful plagiarism prevention[9] companies, with schools in 126 countries using their Turnitin.com services (Stapleton 125). On its website, Turnitin claims:

> There's no doubt that the digital age has made plagiarism much easier to perpetrate than in the past. Finding a wide range of pre-existing content, copying it, pasting it and sharing it with others has become a quick and nearly effortless process. Detecting plagiarism by traditional means is much harder . . . . There is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest that plagiarism is now widespread. ("FAQS")

Turnitin's solution is to fight fire with fire, to deal with the perpetration of digital plagiarism by using a digital tool. With over one million instructors using the tool ("FAQS"), it appears that many teachers find this to be an effective tool for their teaching.

In certain cases, my department has found the use of plagiarism prevention tools to be helpful. Once a year my department publishes a textbook for all of our FYC students to use. Included in this textbook are departmental guidelines for the course as well as examples of what was considered strong student writing from the previous year. In 2010, an essay was published in this text book which was later found to have incorrectly cited material—there were passages that had come from a source which were not documented. It was later determined that the student, when submitting her work to the editor, had accidentally sent in an unfinished draft of her paper

[9] While my experience has been that most instructors call these anti-plagiarism tools, Turnitin is marketed as a plagiarism prevention tool. By doing so, Turnitin is cast as a tool to help students learn how to prevent plagiarism, rather than as a tool to catch unethical students. To be fair to these websites, I will use their terminology in this section.

rather than the final work that was submitted to her professor for grading. In the final work, these issues had been fixed. This incident was the source of some embarrassment since the department was telling students that plagiarized work was considered strong writing. The editor now sends all student essay submissions for the textbook through SafeAssign, a plagiarism prevention tool bundled with Blackboard, with the student's permission. Although the department accepts the use of plagiarism prevention tools, and our school does have a license to use SafeAssign for all of our student work, the department does not require nor recommend that we use these tools in our classes. No composition instructor in my department uses SafeAssign regularly, and most have not used it even once. Since the department values instructor autonomy in our FYC courses, the department allows each instructor to make this decision.

Over the past several years, plagiarism prevention sites, especially Turnitin.com, have found themselves defending against charges that they violate intellectual property rights, or that the right of the student to own their work has been compromised. Students may be required by instructors to submit their paper to one of these websites to check for plagiarism—intentional or unintentional. These sites then keep those papers in their database and check incoming papers against them for signs of plagiarism. Currently, Turnitin claims to have more than 250 million student papers in their database ("Products"). The legal issue arises due to the fact that Turnitin has not paid the students for the right to use their papers in this way. Samuel J Horovitz's legal analysis of Turnitin's business model finds that "[a]rchiving student works and comparing them against subsequent papers . . . results in copyright infringement" (245). In effect, by not receiving permission from the student author to use their work as part of the database, Turnitin, the most widely used plagiarism prevention tool, plagiarizes the student papers. Since Turnitin is still in

business and must therefore have convinced the government of the legality of its practice, instructors who use Turnitin or SafeAssign might come into ethical conflict with their students who hold that their intellectual property rights are violated by the use of the website.

There are other concerns with these plagiarism prevention websites. Kathleen Gillis, Susan Lang, Monica Norris, and Laura Palmer discovered that both Turnitin and SafeAssign penalize FYC students for doing what their instructors tell them to do. They found that both of these websites identify writing as "unoriginal" when presented with writing that "represented an attempt by the student to use the conventions of academic writing in his or her essay" (56). For example, they "found that commonly used phrases, such as 'In a study from Brown University,' or 'Researchers have found that X contributes to…', are among the most often flagged as potentially plagiarized material" (59). Out of all of the issues that these two websites identified as problematic, only 24% were due to citation errors—and of those errors, the researchers determined that most of the students erred in the citation of their sources; deliberate plagiarism was not the issue (58). A student who has been told that his paper is largely unoriginal when he is following the stylistic conventions taught by the instructor will either distrust the service or his teacher. Results such as these have turned many instructors away from using these sources.

Finally, the values that students hold must be taken into consideration when an instructor considers adopting plagiarism prevention tools such as Turnitin.com. Renee Brown, Brian Fallon, Jessica Lott, Elizabeth Matthews, and Elizabeth Mintie found that many students had no concerns about submitting their papers to such a site. The prevailing viewpoint among those students was that only plagiarists needed to be concerned (19). However, the researchers also showed that many students do not know how the tool works, or are even aware that their

professor is using it (14). One student, Jesse Rosenfeld, refused to use the software and risked failing his course. He claimed that he would not use it because, as he said, "I was having to prove I didn't plagiarize even before my paper was looked at by my professor" (Grinberg). Rosenfeld valued, and expected, being respected by his professors, and came into ethical conflict with a system that did not offer that respect. Personally, I have not asked my students to use this software for exactly the same reason. I want my students to know that I trust them. However, I have colleagues who do use it, and they make a strong case that it is not about trust but about helping students understand how to cite sources correctly.

Whether or not an instructor chooses to use the tool to detect plagiarism or teach students how to cite sources correctly, he or she must realize that plagiarism prevention tools do not always work. Although Turnitin draws upon a database that includes "24+ billion pages of digital content . . . over 250 million papers in the student archive, and 120,000+ professional, academic and commercial journals and publications" ("FAQS"), it is still possible for a paper that is plagiarized to get through. For example, a student might turn in as his own a paper that was earlier written by another student but not submitted to Turnitin. Brown, Fallon, Lott, Matthews, and Mintie also learned that students who wish to plagiarize learn how to change just enough of the wording of the original material so that Turnitin does not detect the plagiarism (19). Therefore, instructors who use Turnitin must still rely upon their own judgment, skill, and experience to discover deliberate plagiarism. Using a tool such as Turnitin still requires a professor to analyze reports to determine if plagiarism in a student paper that is flagged by the tool is truly plagiarism.

Teaching students how to avoid unintentional plagiarism is an ethical responsibility of the instructor. The others involved in the instructor's teaching context demand that he or she discuss academic honesty and the reasons that avoiding plagiarism is so important to writers—the students need to practice academic honesty in the form of proper citation of sources in order to further their writing abilities, and since it is important to those who teach writing it is a value that all departments share. Plagiarism is a violation of an author's right to his or her work. Composition instructors must be aware that by requiring students to submit their papers to a plagiarism prevention website, they may be participating in violating a student author's right to their own work.

Using Students as Research Subjects

Related to the idea of the students' right to their own work, and necessary for a composition instructor/researcher to understand in order make judgments about authority in his or her classroom, is the question of whether or not instructors can use first-year composition students as research subjects. And, if it is possible, how to do so ethically. Since the instructor/researcher is a person of authority in the classroom, students may feel compelled to become research subjects or risk punishment in the form of poor grades or a damaged teacher-student relationship. The Conference on College Composition and Communication, the field's leading organizational body, does not tell its members how to teach ethically, but it does tell them that while conducting research they should protect "the rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being of the persons who are involved in their studies" ("Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment").

Therefore, assuming that the composition instructor abides by this guideline, students should not fear retribution for refusing to participate in the instructor's research.

CCCC's "Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students and Student Writing in Composition Studies" was created in accordance with the federal government's 1974 standards for humane treatment of subjects in research (Haswell, Hourigan, and Sun 104) and were created, according to committee member Peter Mortensen, to address "issues in the conduct of research that our institutions and the government would have been (and remain) happy to address without a word from us" (qtd. in Brooke and Goodburn 9). Perhaps by creating these guidelines the committee was attempting to resolve the issue before those who would regulate our field did so without input from us.

It is tempting for many composition instructors to use their students or students' works as material for research—it is easily available, and the work the students produce is a rich area for data mining. While we acknowledge that "[i]nquiry in composition studies often focuses on students and student writing," we as instructors and researchers in the field of composition are also warned to protect "the rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being of the students who are involved in [our] studies" ("Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment"). We also must be aware of the legal implications of intellectual property law—our students' works belong to them, they have the right to their own work, and we cannot use those works without the permission of the author. Even though, as Susan Hunter tells us, intellectual property law is "rarely applied…to students' texts regularly solicited for use in classrooms, faculty workshops, research reports, and writing textbooks" (161), we cannot violate the students' rights and defend our actions as ethical.

Hunter does go on to claim that, even though an instructor who appropriates student work for their research may not be called to defend himself or herself legally,

> the case of unpublished written work—whether composed by an academic to submit for publication, by a student to fulfill an assignment, or by a student or academic to participate in electronic conversation—should be investigated as a site of intellectual property, where—legalities aside—we must confront the ethical dilemmas that our belief in social, collaborative theories of composing and our striving as individual authors pose. (161)

Because composition instructors, as academics, are concerned that their intellectual property rights be upheld, it would be hypocritical and unethical to protect the intellectual property rights of the instructor and abuse the intellectual property rights of the student subjects. We, as individuals, members of our departments, and practitioners in the field of composition, must confront these issues and determine what is considered ethical behavior and what is not. When student work is used as the basis of research, the researcher needs to consider carefully the ethical implications of stripping these rights from the rightful authors.

Not all composition instructors/researchers are happy with the CCCC's "Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students and Student Writing in Composition Studies." Rather than adopting the guidelines as absolutes, Janis Haswell, Maureen Hourigan, and Lulu C. H. Sun, who have experienced difficulty with them, write that they believe that the guidelines are still open to interpretation and change, and they encourage their readers, their "colleagues, peers, and students to rethink, reconsider, and discuss them" (105). While they do not disagree with the intent of the guidelines, their main issues are centered on the limitations the guidelines place on their research

by an Institutional Review Board (IRB); as qualitative researchers they feel that they should not be constrained by quantitative research guidelines. Also, Janis Haswell, in "Ethics in a Postmodern Age: Lapsing into Legalism," argues that these guidelines leave our profession with legalistic rules instead of a sense of moral rightness (23). Andrea A. Lunsford and Karen J. Lunsford lament the red tape that they faced due to stricter IRB guidelines while attempting to gather student essays for their national comparative study of writing error (786-88). Other articles by Sun, Carra Leah Hood, and Lynn Z. Bloom, to name a few, attest to the concern that the field has toward not only receiving permission from an IRB to use students and their work to understand how to serve them better, but also how to protect our students from ourselves (Sun, "Presenting and Mispresenting Students;" Hood, "The Ethics of Researching;" Bloom, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly").

Using students or students' works as research material has not been forbidden; it has simply been made more difficult for researchers to do so and presumably safer for their students. I doubt that any composition instructor would deny that he or she wishes his or her students to be safe; the main issue appears to be that many composition instructors believe that they themselves are good judges as to what may or may not harm the student. These scholars resent the implication that their judgment needs to be evaluated by others, typically by an Institutional Review Board comprised of scholars outside of the field of composition. Often, the IRB has little knowledge about what composition instructors do, and so it may be the case that the instructors are better judges of what may harm the student subjects than the IRB. For example, in 1986 Robert Connors and Andrea A. Lunsford, following IRB protocol, completed data collection for their study on errors in first-year composition student writing in three months. In 2006, Lunsford

and Karen J. Lunsford replicated the research—and found that the ponderous new IRB protocols held up for eighteen months a study that was not reasonably expected to put any students at risk of harm (Lunsford and Lunsford 786). While the IRBs took their time trying to determine if these researchers could be trusted, the research was put on hold. While acknowledging the potential benefit to composition scholars by adding viewpoints from the scholars on the IRB, this concern that composition scholars had about their research needing to be evaluated by others was the driving motivation behind the push to create ethical standards for our field raised by Miles Myers, discussed above. While they may not be popular, CCCC's "Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students" has helped the field of composition establish credibility among colleagues across the academic disciplines.

Authority and Critical Reflection for the Composition Instructor

We need to reflect critically on our experiences and the local context and use that knowledge to make ethical and professional judgments about the use of authority in our teaching—how to wield that authority, whether or not to use that authority to require students to submit papers to plagiarism prevention websites, or the use of that authority in conducting research with student subjects. As part of the critical self-reflection, we need to understand that we cannot truly avoid being seen as an authority in the classroom, since our students, our departments, our schools, and our local communities expect us to be the authority figure in the classroom. When looking outward, when asking ourselves to reflect critically on what our students value, what the local community values, and what our department and school values, we can ask ourselves how we can properly use authority to meet those values. If the students value

earning a passing grade, we may find that we can ethically use authority to demand that a student keep on task. If the local community values learning how to write a report, we may ethically use our authority to assign a report writing assignment. If our department values maintaining the right of the student to his or her work, then we may ethically defend our decision not to use plagiarism prevention software. All the while that we look outward at our students, the local community, and our departments and institutions, we must keep in mind what our profession recommends about the use of authority.

Choosing Advocacy

There are many ways that composition instructors can advocate their personal beliefs in the classroom. These advocacies range from teaching pedagogy to advocating political or social beliefs or activism. To determine whether or not an instructor should advocate their personal beliefs, the moral heuristic can not only help him or her look inward to determine what their beliefs are but also look outward to discover whether or not the local context would support advocating such beliefs. Finally, if the others within the local context are resistant to the advocacy, the instructor must decide if their personal ethics require him or her to promote it anyway.

Advocacy of Ethics in Composition Pedagogy

When a composition instructor looks outward at his or her local context, he or she may discover that using the class to teach ethical behavior alongside writing could be a pedagogical advocacy he or she could adopt. Michael Boylan and James Donahue say that, "if a university is to be true to its mission to develop in students the skills necessary to construct a more humane

world for the future, it must necessarily allow and encourage students to explore ethical issues" (14). In order to accomplish this, Boylan and Donahue advocate the inclusion of ethics into all disciplines and courses, not only to help the students, but also to help the instructors "wade into what they perceive as the treacherous waters of ethical discourse" (14). Since "successful ethics education…engages the lived experience of students and compels them to examine both the theoretical coherence and practical meaning of their moral lives" (15), many composition instructors feel inadequate to the task at hand. Do we really want to know the students' lived experiences? Do we really want to use our classes to help students examine their moral lives? There are those composition instructors who say "yes."

Composition instructors already do teach ethics by teaching ethical writing behavior. According to David V. Harrington, ethical writing behavior is "more than just being honest and considerate in what one says to a reading audience; it means disciplined attention to a number of processes, such as insistent inquiry to get to the heart of a problem and rechecking of data, with which many beginning college students have had little previous experience" (13). When instructors comment on and question the content of their students' work, student authors are led to understand that they should be inquisitive, accurate, and methodical in their attempt to understand their papers' topics. Therefore, it is not enough to read a student's paper and comment on mechanical or grammatical errors. While I do not expect many of my colleagues to disagree with Harrington, other authors have gone further with what they do with teaching ethical behavior in the composition classroom.

Many composition instructors have found using ethics in the writing classroom to be helpful to their teaching. It seems as if this could be a perfect fit—students are asked to write, so

why not ask them to use their writing to examine their moral lives? This attitude is often reflected in first-year composition textbooks. As Barry Kroll notes in a review of textbooks:

> [r]ecognizing that controversial issues often invite ethical arguments, some textbook authors have begun to discuss principles of moral philosophy and methods from applied ethics, specifically as a way for students to tackle disputes with an ethical edge. For example, Ramage and Bean [in *Writing Arguments*] include a section titled "An Overview of Major Ethical Systems" in which the authors present the Utilitarian focus on consequences, the Kantian ethic of principles, and finally a comparison and integration of these approaches. (105)

However, Kroll warns us against applying practical ethics as if we were asking our students to use a formula, "because a top-down method of practical reasoning fosters the very intellectual tendencies that composition instructors typically work *against*, such as the impulse to oversimplify disputes by ignoring complexities that arise in particular circumstances, or the tendency to look to authorities (experts or rules) for easy resolution of conflicts" (106). If composition instructors adopt *Writing Arguments* and the pedagogy that it grew out of without fully understanding themselves and their context, the problems that Kroll warns against can arise. Examining oneself through the use of the critical self-reflective moral heuristic can help identify an area such as this which could cause conflict between the teacher and the pedagogy.

One composition instructor who has waded into Boylan and Donahue's described "treacherous waters of ethical discourse" is Paul Connolly. In "The Poet(h)ical Art of Teaching" Connolly writes that he designed his course to make students think about how knowledge is made in "mathematics and science; the arts; language and literature; and social studies" (15).

His students read selections from across the disciplines and write essays that explore how knowledge is made by exploring their own writing process and commenting on others' papers. This is done, Connolly explains, with an aim to help the students "develop their virtue, their *arete*, as thoughtfully writing persons," although Connolly admits that he wishes his assignments would do more to help that development (15). Connolly seems comfortable with this type of advocacy in the classroom, and he cites a Modern Language Association (MLA) sponsored conference in which Andrea Lunsford "reported in her summary reflection that the participants' consensus was that advocacy in teaching is inevitable" (23). Connolly is choosing how he wishes to use advocacy in the classroom, and he does so by advocating a development of students' virtues.

While Pat Belanoff's article "Towards an Ethic of Grading" is primarily interested in how to grade student papers, Belanoff also brings up the question of whether or not ethics or morality should be taught as subject matter, and whether or not composition instructors can go beyond their role as writing teachers and assess a student's moral character as presented in written work. She acknowledges the traditional, classical understanding of education which encourages the moral growth of the student and wonders, "To what extent do we grade on the basis of the perceived moral or ethical quality of what we read?" (189). Her final answer is that the moral quality of the writing can be valued and assessed if a department, through the collaborative work of its members, determines that it should be.

Sandra Stotsky argues that we should teach writing itself as an ethical exercise, respecting the text, the readers, and the authors of the sources that the students use. She does this, she argues, because "[t]eachers are expected to develop—and evaluate—their students' moral

thinking, not only for the students' sake, but also for the sake of their disciplines and the civic communities that support their work and their schools" (129). She claims that our schools today have neglected ethical teaching, even though our society still expects the school to be a place where students learn morals, and she argues that a class that teaches academic writing (i.e. first-year composition) is an excellent place to deliver our moral expectations of our students' scholarly and civic pursuits.

These instructors, Kroll, Connolly, Stotsky, and others[10] have determined that ethics is a valuable addition to their composition course. However, when we simply add content to our composition course over and above writing instruction, instead of calming the "treacherous waters of ethical discourse" (Boylan and Donahue 14), we run the risk of roiling those waters even more. When we use the first-year composition classroom to teach other subjects, we run the risk of undervaluing the writing instruction that is meant to take place. Ethics can be incorporated into composition classes either as subject matter or as an influence on the pedagogy, but an instructor should carefully consider why it is necessary to advocate ethics in the course. If, after carefully considering personal beliefs and his or her local context, the instructor's critical self-reflection reveals that it is ethical to use ethics in the composition classroom, then Boylan and Donahue's call to "allow and encourage students to explore ethical issues" (14) should be answered.

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[10] Other instructors who have advocated including ethics into their composition classrooms are Daniel F. Collins and Robert C. Sutton, who taught "a second-semester English course, 'Argument-Based Research' [combined] with 'Introduction to Ethics'" (46) and Norbert Schürer, who believes that environmental ethics can find their place within a college composition classroom (76).

Social and Political Advocacy

Aside from advocating the teaching of ethics in the composition classroom, another form of advocacy, social and/or political advocacy, is popular among composition instructors. In fact, one of the more important decisions that composition instructors face now is that of whether or not the composition classroom can or should be used for advocacy of a social or political theory, and whether or not it is ethical to advocate or not to advocate. Like it or not, several "[m]embers of our discipline often envision themselves as agents of social change who try to promote critique of dominant ideologies and empower students to become active participants in the larger political world" (Friend 548). Many instructors adopt advocacy positions for their course in reaction against a nation-wide usage of a first-year composition course that "promulgates the middle-class values that are thought to be essential to the proper functioning of students in the academy" (Bloom, "Freshman Composition" 656). Linda Brodkey sums up the feelings of those who promote social and political advocacy in the composition classroom: "What goes on in our classes, what students do and what teachers do, depends in large measure on our ability to theorize writing in ways that invite students to see themselves as entitled to identify, analyze, evaluate, and ultimately propose alternatives to the social and political conditions that beset us all" (346). There are several composition pedagogies (such as Cultural Studies, Critical Pedagogy, Feminist Pedagogy, etc.) that promote advocacy, and the supporters of these pedagogies certainly believe it is ethical, if not a moral duty, to do so. But is it right for us, as composition instructors and as individuals, to promote such social critique and political activism? And, if so, is there consensus on what should we advocate?

For Michael Murphy, these questions are moot. He writes, "[E]ducation in America, especially literacy education, has always been marked by a peculiar faith in social progress" (345). He goes on to show that public education and universities have always adopted the preferred socially progressive theme of the day, and then he claims that composition "in the late 1960s and early 1970s . . . seemed anxious to mark itself a certain distance, even if sometimes somewhat tentatively, from this still largely intact sense of the educational institution as enrolled in some greater mission of social progress" (346). Rather than seeing social progressivism as counter-culture, Murphy argues that social progressivism *is* the culture of the university, and that composition has lost this sense of purpose. The institution expects the disciplines within it, including composition, to support the socially progressive agenda that the culture has entrusted to it, and Murphy claims that ignoring this mission is to fail the institution and, ultimately, the culture that has entrusted the institution to do its wishes. Yet composition somehow lost its "sense of its own institutional service as part of that mission" of social progress (346). For Murphy, adopting a socially or politically progressive advocacy agenda is ethical, as it fulfills the discipline's service obligation to the greater institution and it returns our discipline to the institution's greater mission.

Not everyone agrees with this mindset, however. John Ruszkiewicz does not support political advocacy in the classroom. He writes:

> What's wrong with college teachers using writing courses to propagate their political beliefs? . . . . Instinctively, I sense the issue ought not be raised at all. It's a question framed to appall the few nonacademics reading our anthologies or

> journals—we must seem like psychiatrists asking, 'What's wrong with dating patients?' (23)

While Ruszkiewicz, a self-described "fairly active conservative" (25), states, "I consider political topics thoroughly appropriate in writing courses and think it healthy for students and teachers to confront vibrant political ideas that challenge their opinions and prejudices" (27), he also acknowledges that he has "no desire, no inclination at all, to make 'Writing About Family Values,' or 'Writing About Personal Responsibility,' or 'Writing About Reagan' into topics for the freshman courses that I teach" (25). In other words, he is content to let the students themselves turn the class into a personal expression of advocacy, but he will not lead them down that road.

Michael Pemberton, on the other side of the political spectrum from Ruszkiewicz, describes himself as "confirmed, die-hard, yellow-dog Democrat" ("Critique or Conformity?" 262). In other words, Pemberton identifies himself as politically liberal. However, like Ruszkiewicz, Pemberton feels no desire to be a political advocate in the classroom. He does not disagree with other professors who do, as he states:

> Let me make one point explicitly clear here. I am not arguing that teachers or tutors who adopt critical liberatory approaches are unethical or do not have the best interests of their students at heart. Quite the contrary, they are doing their best to make their teaching conform as closely as possible to their personal values and they do so in pursuit of social goals that are noble and laudable. ("Critique or Conformity?" 264)

Professors who have intelligently considered what they and their local context values and find that to advocate social or political goals is an ethically acceptable practice may feel called to advocate those goals in order to be ethical in their teaching.

Likewise, Stephen K. Tollefson acknowledges that while he does use censorship as a theme in his writing courses, and that his "secret hope is that students will climb on my hobby horse, agreeing that almost all forms of censorship are bad," he claims that his real purpose is not to indoctrinate his students, but to "get them to write better" (60). Tollefson claims that a student who does not agree with him is not abandoned or given a failing grade because "it is not my job to sway that student in my direction…I'm a writing teacher, after all. That's it" (60). Because Tollefson feels this way, he questions those in his profession who do feel that it is their moral obligation to teach students to "understand and defeat their oppressors"—those who would use their power to victimize the students, such as the institution, the state, or the world (63-64). Even Christy Friend, who supports advocacy in the classroom as ethical, asks: "Does a student who holds an 'ethical' position, on, say, racism, necessarily know how to construct a text on that topic that the academic community would consider responsible?" (553). Not necessarily, which is why students enter our classrooms—to learn how to write well.

Irvin Peckham, in *Going North, Thinking West,* also grapples with this issue of advocacy in the composition classroom. He argues that:

> writing courses devoted to what is basically argumentation for its own sake function subversively as a sorting mechanism based on privileging extrinsic knowledge . . . that exists outside the area of instruction and is thus a property of

> the cultural knowledge and the linguistic and cognitive habits students bring with them. (12)

Peckham believes, like Bloom, that the traditional first-year composition class is based on middle class values, and that students who do not come from the middle class are at an immediate disadvantage in our classrooms. Therefore, these students are, in Freirean terms, oppressed by the social structure of the classroom. For this reason, Peckham adheres to a pedagogy that focuses on social action, "the purpose of which is to continuously work against all forms of social oppression based on the mythologies of individualism, democracy, and equal education" (63). Yet even though Peckham's pedagogy focuses on using education to free an oppressed people, he does not feel that he has the right to force his personal beliefs on his students (158). He is also concerned that the move in first-year composition courses to teach critical thinking—a term he shows is poorly defined—"seems to blur our focus on problems with style, grammar, and conventions, problems that might be exacerbated by our attempts to challenge their [the students'] home values" (142). In his teaching, Peckham claims that while he believes it is part of his job as an educator to get students ready to be "critical citizens in a participatory democracy," his real job, and all he ever wanted to do, was teach his students writing skills (160). In the end, we teach writing. If the student learns to be an ethical advocate but does not learn how to write appropriately for their audience, can we say that we have succeeded at our job?

William H. Thelin tells us that the purpose of his essay "Advocating Language: An Ethical Approach to Politics in the Classroom" is:

> to try to clarify the disputes over politicized pedagogies by giving the discussion a grounding in rhetorical theories. This should determine whether what is happening in some classes is ethical. I then want to propose a teaching method where politics can fit comfortably into the writing classroom and help in the development of student writers. (36)

The fact that his essay proposes a teaching method that includes politics in the classroom is a clear indication that he expects to discover (and does) that it is ethical to include political activism in the composition classroom.

However, even though Thelin does claim that advocacy is acceptable, he further claims that it would be "unethical when the instructor first hides her political agenda after encouraging an expression of subjective truth, then reveals it during group workshop or as marginal notes on a draft" (44). If we choose to advocate a political position, that should be clear to the students—and whether or not we intend it to be, it will be clear to them through our assigned readings, writing assignments, etc. One can also infer from this statement that if we decide to hide our political bias, then it should remain hidden throughout the course. Allowing a hidden bias to influence our responses to student work can actually harm the student, as an instructor's bias leads them to challenge a student's beliefs and makes the students feel as if they are being attacked for their views—or perhaps the difference of beliefs leads to a grade which reflects the teacher's bias rather than the student's work.

Others, such as Pamela J. Annas in "Style as Politics: A Feminist Approach to the Teaching of Writing" and Lynn Z. Bloom in "Freshman Composition as Middle-Class Enterprise," support using the writing classroom to advance an agenda, in these cases, feminism

and social class awareness, respectively. And, of course, professors who do decide to adopt a pedagogy of advocacy in the classroom should heed Lisa M. Toner's advice. She warns professors that if they adopt such a pedagogy and want to be ethical teachers, they should make explicit their agenda and what it will entail throughout the semester. Toner further advises that professors "make explicit a discursive methodology that encourages students to feel that their opposing views will be respected" (3). Doing so helps the students to feel as if they are not being brainwashed, and that their beliefs are respected.

Advocacy and Critical Reflection for the Composition Teacher

When critically self-reflecting on our personal experiences and beliefs and examining the values that the students, local community, and our department and school holds in order to make professional and ethical judgments about our teaching practices, we may discover that we can advocate a position that is acceptable to all of those who hold a stake in our classrooms. If we teach at a religious institution, it would be acceptable—if not expected—to advocate the beliefs about society that the religion advocates. If we teach at a small liberal arts college in an urban area, we may find it acceptable to advocate for social justice. There is nothing inherently ethical or unethical about advocating a social position. In true postmodern ethical fashion, the ethicality of advocacy rests upon our values in conjunction with the values of those with whom we share our context, not on what another composition instructor or scholar with a different metaethical framework working in a different context determines is appropriate for him or her. However, there is one point that stands out in the scholarly literature concerning advocacy. Whether or not a professor advocates a social or political position within their classroom, that agenda is

secondary to the task of teaching writing. Maintaining this ratio of writing instruction over advocacy is necessary to be considered ethical according to the values of the discipline. Finally, keeping in mind what the scholars of our professional literature recommend to maintain an ethical position, if we decide to advocate within our classrooms, we must make our agenda clear to the students and allow our students to have their own voices, even if they disagree with us, and if we decide to hide our own political or social beliefs, they should remain hidden.

Responding to Student Work

Many articles and books have been written by composition scholars to help composition instructors effectively respond to student work. Authors such as Nancy Sommers, Richard Straub, and Chris Anson have devoted much of their scholarly life to the pursuit of offering effective and appropriate, i.e. ethical, responses to student writing. Careful and thoughtful response leads to a better understanding of writing; poorly shaped response can create ethical conflict. This section will focus on the intersection of responding to student works and ethics, with particular regard to understanding how an instructor's responses fulfill his or her ethical obligation to the student, school, and department to teach writing skills.

Edward M. White identifies Nancy Sommer's 1982 essay, "Responding to Student Writing," as "the landmark, the essential beginning of the quest" ("Introduction" 81) to understand how to respond to student writing effectively, efficiently, and ethically. Sommers notes that composition instructors comment on student drafts because we, as writers, know that writers "need and want thoughtful commentary to show us when we have communicated ideas and when not, raising questions from a reader's point of view that may not have occurred to us as

writers" (148). However, Sommers raises two ethical concerns about the responses that composition instructors write on the students' papers. First, Sommers argues that when instructors take a heavy-handed approach to response, offering suggestions on how to reword a sentence or marking every grammatical error, "[t]he teacher appropriates the text from the student by confusing the student's purpose in writing the text with her own purpose in commenting" (149). This forces the student to recreate the paper in the image that the teacher has chosen, rather than pursuing his or her own course. This runs counter to the authority that is normally given to authors, and results in "classroom writing situations [in which] the *reader* assumes primary control of the choices that writers make" (Brannon and Knoblauch 158, emphasis added). While the teacher most likely means well, as the student will get a better grade if the expectations of the audience (i.e. the instructor) are fulfilled, this is problematic as the teacher oversteps his or her authority and compromises the authority of the writer over his or her text.

Second, Sommers finds that most responses are not tailored to the specific situation, that the comments appear to be "not anchored in the particulars of the students' texts, but rather are a series of vague directives that are not text-specific" (152). Professors write comments on student papers in order to improve student writing (White *Assigning* 50). If we do not tailor the responses according to the context of the situation, we are not fulfilling our ethical obligation to our students, as we are not fulfilling their needs. Richard Straub writes:

> As researchers have increasingly reminded us, response must be viewed socially, in context. What works or does not work, we have come to say, depends. It depends on the particular teacher, the individual student, and the larger classroom

> conversation. And it does. Some teachers are going to be predisposed to write more comments than others. Some students are going to need more or less direction. Some classes are going to place greater emphasis on process, others on the written product, still others on students' development as writers. You cannot just employ principles of response in some general, ready-made form. You have got to particularize them. You have got to shape them to the circumstances of the class. You have got to tailor them to individual students. You have got to match them to your classroom persona and your overall teaching style, and enmesh them in your classroom instruction. ("The Student, the Text" 51)

In order to respond ethically to student papers, we must take the time to understand ourselves, our students, and the class. An important part of this process is to understand the values that we bring into a specific situation. Straub writes, "By sorting through our values, we can clarify our own commitments and develop a sharper vision for our work as teachers. We can become better readers of our students' texts, become more able to adapt our responses to specific students in specific situations, and, quite simply, improve our instruction" ("Reading and Responding" 54). Rubber-stamping comments from one student's draft to another does not fulfill the ethical obligation that we have to both the student and our department to use response to improve the writing skills of the student.

Anson calls for composition instructors to understand that their issues with student error that lead to rubber-stamped responses are often no more than personal annoyances that do not impede comprehension ("Response" 8). In order to avoid ethical conflicts resulting from our responses, we must tread carefully when conversing with our students about their writing in both

our written and oral responses, and not focus on the errors in grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. Anson writes that we as composition instructors must be "more reflective of the conditions, nature, and sources of their response to error in students' texts" ("Response" 17). Errors are often noted on student papers when the student blunders into a pet peeve of the professor—I know that I often mark apostrophe errors, not simply because they are errors, but because they bother me. Knowing this, Anson's article advises me to understand that apostrophe errors are an annoyance that rarely impede communication and focus my attention on areas of the text which could be strengthened. Treading carefully in our responses means beginning our responding process by evaluating our context, reflecting on how language is used in society and where our bias against an error is rooted, and asking whether or not it is appropriate to call an error an error or an annoyance. We need to remember that we are making comments to help our students strengthen their writing skills, rather than pointing out to them their incorrect usage of a punctuation mark.

Unfortunately, there is no one way to respond to student writing that will work in any situation. Peter Elbow states that the "right or best comment is the one that will help *this* student on *this* topic on *this* draft at *this* point in the semester" ("Options" 198). In order to know what the "right or best comment" should be, we must reflect on the context and ask, who is the student? What is the assignment? What do I want my student to learn from this assignment? What does my student want to learn from this assignment? What is going on in the classroom? Ethically responding to students requires an instructor to be "'facilitative,' providing feedback and support," without being directive, and "dictating the path of revision (Straub, "The Concept of

Control" 223). We can only facilitate student learning through comments when we understand the local context.

Ethical conflicts between students and teachers can result if instructors do not heed the advice of the above scholars, and support our students with thoughtfully crafted facilitative responses. There is real potential that response could be, and often is, used to correct rather than converse, and serves to reward "the academically canny and privileged . . . to reward virtue and punish vice" (White *Assessing* 51). Used in this way, to praise those who follow grammar and format rules and punish those who do not, response becomes useless to attain the goal of improving student writing. It serves instead to shut down the act of writing, rather than open it up.

Responses to student writing must be thoughtfully crafted according to the needs of the student at that particular time. Thoughtless comments often do not help, can possibly impede the student's progress, and can even lead to conflict between the instructor and the student. In "What's Wrong with Larry?" Beth L. Virtanen recalls her encounter with a student she names Larry. At the beginning of the term, Larry appears very resistant to the composition course that Virtanen teaches, but he later becomes an active participant. Toward the end of the course, Larry asks Virtanen to read over a paper that he had turned in for an earlier composition course, and Virtanen understands his resistance. At the end of a narrative that Larry had written describing his close relationship with his uncle who was murdered, Larry's previous instructor had written, "Writing about such an emotionally important event is often difficult—but doesn't your beloved and respected uncle deserve your very best writing?" (75). There were certainly many sentence level errors that impeded communication of the paper's main ideas, yet the instructor's response seems at worst mean-spirited and at best uncaring. Larry's understandable reaction was to

distrust and disrespect the professor who had written the comment, and he carried that distrust and disrespect into his next writing class. This one poor response had created a roadblock that stalled Larry's progress as a writer, a roadblock that took some time and effort on the part of both Larry and Virtanen to overcome.

In 2000, Sandra Murphy, after reading several articles on responding to student work, lamented, "I was disappointed by what I did not find in these articles—serious attention to the role played by students in 'teacher' response" (88). Six years later, Nancy Sommers answered that call and published the results of a study which gave serious attention to the students. Sommers followed four hundred students through four years of college, and recorded their reactions to response. She discovered that, "feedback plays a leading role in undergraduate writing development when, but only when, students and teachers create a partnership through feedback—a transaction in which teachers engage with their students by treating them as apprentice scholars, offering honest critique paired with instruction" (250). Students must take an active role in the conversation which is started by their writing and continues into the instructor's comments in order to learn from the experience. Sommers also found that instructors who "engage with their students by treating them as apprentice scholars" rather than as students prone to commit error have the greatest effect on the student's improvement of writing skills (250). Sharon Mitchler also surveyed students and concluded that students do want written response, they do take it seriously, and they do not like vague comments or notation of error without explanation (448). These findings from Sommers and Mitchler challenge the long-held notion that students do not read our responses. In fact, they do. When we neglect our ethical obligation to consider who our students are and what the local context is, our ability to respond is

compromised—we may not understand what our students need, and end up rubber-stamping comments from one draft to the next.

In order to fulfill our ethical obligation to help composition students progress as writers, both written and oral responses to their work must be individually tailored, addressing the author as a writer or scholar rather than as a primarily a student, and focusing on areas where they can strengthen their work without, at least on early drafts, much regard to error. I do not deny that this is difficult and time-consuming. I do not claim that in every situation I have done this. But our students want our help, and they do listen to what we have to say. We may as well tell them what they need to hear.

Concluding Remarks

Even though the authors presented in this chapter give composition instructors advice that speaks of how we can ethically choose teaching pedagogy, use authority, pursue an agenda of advocacy, and respond to student writing, few of them offer advice on how to evaluate ourselves and our local contexts in order to find out what it means to us to act ethically as composition instructors in our postmodern world. Fontaine and Hunter, in their introductory chapter to *Foregrounding Ethical Awareness in Composition and English Studies*, tell us:

> The goal of foregrounding such an [ethical] awareness is not to change behavior in a predetermined manner, but to see what may not have been seen before, to resist complacency and reconsider what had, heretofore, seemed acceptable. So, as belief in fixed ethical systems has been questioned, what has emerged is an

> ethical awareness that values the process of measuring ethical behavior, the importance of the individual, and the particularity of each situation. (4)

The essays in their anthology ask composition instructors and scholars to question the actions that they take in their teaching practice. However, the essays do not often speak of the individual in explicit terms. For the most part, essays that deal with ethics and the composition teacher focus on what each author feels is important and tell the audience how to apply their ideas, but they rarely, if ever, ask the reader, the individual composition instructor, to determine what he or she views as important.

I believe that my colleagues and are ethical when we teach writing, but I would like my colleagues to have a greater understanding of what we, as instructors of composition, can do within our own teaching practices to be more ethical. Teresa Henning voices my experience: "When I tell my colleagues that I am interested in writing and ethics, they too tend to be concerned with issues of good citizenship and/or moral empowerment and often ask me about the 'ethics' of dealing with student plagiarism or student absences" (2). While I do believe that it is important that students be good citizens and pupils, I also believe that when we expect ethical behavior from our students when we have not examined our own ethical values and obligations to others we become hypocrites. As I have shown in this chapter, ethical concerns with students in a writing course go well beyond plagiarism and attendance issues. As composition instructors, we must always consider the ethical implications of our actions and the consequences that those actions have on our students. But we cannot do this unless we have done the "foregrounding" process that Fontaine and Hunter suggest (4). This foregrounding process is one of looking inward at who we are, how our religious beliefs or lack thereof have influenced us, and how we

see ourselves as professionals. This process further asks us to look outward at our local community, our students, and or department and discipline to find the values that are implicit in those groups.

If we analyze our own personal ethics in order to learn who we are and what we value, the results of this process of self-discovery will be seen by the students that we teach. We will have confidence when we make decisions, we will have answers when we are questioned, we will have consistency in dealing with diverse students, and we will not be sending mixed messages to students who see how we handle authority, advocacy, and assessment in our classes. And all of this—our confidence, our answers, our consistency, our use of authority, our pedagogy, and our responding practices—will be born from our commitment to the ethical obligation that we have to self-reflect on who we are as individuals and professionals and on our community context, a self-reflection that is further influenced by the scholarly literature of our field.

This purpose of this chapter was to give the reader an understanding of what compositionists have been working with in their quest to determine what it means to teach writing ethically. In the following chapters, I will argue that the most appropriate way to show the value of critical self-reflection to fulfill a composition instructor's ethical obligation to the communities involved in their teaching is to present instructor's own responses to the questions of the moral heuristic. I will also present the responses of a composition instructor and discuss what her narrative responses reveal about her metaethical structure, her embedded values and how they inadvertently led her into an ethical conflict, and how the clash of her ethical values and those of the others involved led to this conflict. I will discuss how other composition

instructors might use her example in order to make an informed, reflective discovery of whom they are at their most basic, ethical being and how understanding their own metaethical framework will benefit themselves as practicing composition instructors.

CHAPTER THREE

TESTING CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION'S VALUE TOWARD FULFILLING OUR ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS

As presented in Chapter One, the self-reflective moral heuristic asks for composition instructors to look inward at themselves and outward at the context in which they teach writing. I began the creation of the heuristic by researching what scholars in the field of ethics claim is important to understand when determining the metaethical beliefs of an individual[11]. I used this research to flesh out the first three questions of the heuristic, which ask the instructor to look inward at his or her personal ethical values. The questions for instructors to ask when looking inward are: *1. What is my background and how has this shaped who I am, and what is my current situation? 2. If I subscribe (or choose not to subscribe) to religious beliefs, how does this influence who I am?* and *3. Who am I, as a professional?* While these three questions look simple on the surface, the process of critically reflecting upon them helps instructors develop an explicit understanding of the basis for their ethical beliefs, or their metaethical structure. This metaethical structure provides the framework for the decisions that an individual composition instructor makes. In addition to personal metaethics, decisions are made and determined to be ethical or not in regards to the values of those within the local context. To determine which questions to incorporate into the heuristic which will help instructors look outward, I researched postmodern ethics, which places emphasis on the others involved in the ethical decision[12]. When

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[11] Of particular use were Aristotle, Boylan, and Singer.

[12] See Bauman.

looking outward, an instructor considers what the local community or communities they belong to view as ethical. When looking outward, a composition instructor should consider the following three questions*: 1. What does my local community value? 2. What do my students value?* and *3. What values do my department, school, and the scholarly literature in my field advocate?* Critically reflecting upon these three questions helps composition instructors to understand where conflicts between their personal ethical values and the ethical values of the communities involved in their teaching context could occur. Next, I read what education scholars wrote concerning the day-to-day operation of teaching, and determined that the practical decisions of teaching—creating much of what they were asking for regarded making ethical decisions[13]. These scholars helped to solidify the theory behind the questions of the moral heuristic. After looking inward and outward, a composition instructor should be better able to determine what action in any given situation is ethical, based on their personal beliefs, the beliefs of the others who hold a stake in the outcomes of their teaching, and what the literature of our field recommends. This process of critical self-reflection should also increase an instructor's confidence in the decision that others will be able to accept the decision and subsequent action as ethical.

In order to test whether or not the self-reflective moral heuristic that was presented in Chapter One performed as I anticipated, I originally asked several composition instructors from around the nation with whom I have a personal and professional relationship to share an experience in which they felt that they had had to make a difficult decision related to their

[13] Of primary importance were Richlin, Fink, and Palmer.

teaching. I purposely avoided using the words "ethical" or "moral" when I asked for their stories, as I did not want to influence their answers. I also asked them what their decision was in that case, and if they thought that was the right decision. Of these, I chose one to complete the self-reflective moral heuristic and share with me her answers. The experience and the instructor's responses are reported in Chapter Six. This instructor, Melanie[14], related an event that embodies several conflicts of ethical values[15]. Two other composition instructors completed the questions of the heuristic without first sharing an ethical conflict that they had found themselves in. The heuristic is designed not just to find the root of conflict concerning ethical values, it is also designed to help a composition instructor discover their own personal values and how those values can and do shape their professional lives. These additional two instructors, Jeanette and Mark, are presented in Chapters Four and Five, respectively[16]. I directed them to write down the answers to the questions of the moral heuristic, not only to keep a record of their answers but also because "[w]riting is a way to puzzle out a situation, [or] think through a series of events" (Schaafsma and Vinz 51). This is what I hoped that they would find themselves doing—puzzling out their situations and thinking through the events that lead them to make their ethical decisions. Once I read through these three instructors' responses to the heuristic, I asked them questions about their answers for clarification and additional detail. I continued to ask questions until I was satisfied that I had received a clear understanding of what they saw as their situation, background,

[14] All participants have been given pseudonyms.

[15] Melanie's original response is presented in Appendix A.

[16] Jeanette's and Mark's original responses to the Moral heuristic are located in Appendices B and C, respectively.

and ethical values. These three instructors' responses from the guided critical self-reflection reveal their metaethical structure, the ethical values that they possess, and their perception of the ethical values of their students and colleagues. Melanie also relates how the process of critical self-reflection benefitted her in her quest to understand exactly how the situation of conflict developed and her role in its development. When such understanding is gained, instructors may be better able to avoid conflict in the future—or even be able to negotiate such conflict in order to teach the skills that the course intends the student to learn, particularly skills regarding critical thinking. Her responses are used to show that critical self-reflection is a useful tool in a composition instructor's professional life and can be a powerful tool when negotiating ethical conflicts.

Testing the Moral Heuristic

The only way to test a critically self-reflective moral heuristic for composition instructors is to have practicing teachers of composition work through it. I established certain criteria when choosing potential participants: I wanted them to be composition instructors that I knew personally and professionally, they needed to be practicing teachers of first-year composition at the university level, and they needed to be experienced teachers as well. I used these criteria for the following reasons: I reasoned that if the participants knew me professionally and personally, they might be more willing to share with me this very personal act, since I was asking the participants to open up their personal histories and share their own personal ethical dilemmas. I chose to ask practicing teachers of composition as I wanted their experiences to be recent and relevant in today's world. Asking an instructor who has not taught first-year composition

recently might reveal a dilemma that has already been adequately discussed and resolved in the literature of our field. Finally, I asked experienced teachers as I believed that not only would they have a greater range of incidents to choose from, but also I expected that they might be more fully aware of their own teaching practices and the implications of their actions when faced with making an ethical decision than would a newly-minted teaching assistant. I was also concerned that an inexperienced instructor might not be as confident in their abilities or their position and, fearing possible retribution for their responses, might be more prone to hold back on their responses than an instructor who was confident in his or her position.

All eight composition instructors that I had originally asked to share their experiences of conflict met these criteria, and all eight recounted ethical dilemmas that they had found themselves in. I rejected two initial responses as case studies as they dealt with issues of plagiarism. Although plagiarism does seem to represent a significant portion of the ethical dilemmas that composition instructors face and there is still much that is not settled concerning how to deal with plagiarism, much scholarly literature in the field already exists that speaks to the issue.[17] When the literature discusses the ethical concerns of plagiarism, it tends to focus on the students' ethical values rather than on those of the instructor. Regardless, since much has already been done concerning plagiarism I decided not to focus on this issue.

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[17] CompPile, the database that documents the work of Composition Studies, list 537 academic books and articles that have been written about plagiarism from 1940 to the present. Prominent scholars Rebecca Moore Howard, Chris Anson, Lisa Ede, Barry Kroll, and Linda Adler-Kassner are among those who have added to the scholarship of plagiarism.

Five of the original eight respondents spoke about the difficulties of grading students, especially concerning whether or not to pass or fail students in specific situations: a football player who could lose his scholarship and therefore his opportunity for a college education, an English major that was choosing to fail his English class by not completing most of the assigned work, a student whose illness prevented her from attending more than half of the class sessions but was determined to complete the course, or basic writing students that were not showing that they had developed writing skills that would allow them to succeed in their next class in the first-year composition sequence. I rejected these instructors' experiences as candidates for further study because I believe that experienced teachers of composition will have already been faced with and surpassed similar ethical decisions regarding grading. Certainly, even experienced composition instructors still struggle with these decisions, yet I decided that experience has given instructors a basis on which to act ethically when faced with these situations. I chose instead to focus on a respondent's situation with which I believed readers of this dissertation would have little experience.

Melanie, one of the instructors who had shared an experience of conflict, originally presented her situation as a grading dilemma: she felt pressured to pass a student in her Advanced Composition class, a student that she felt should have failed. However, when looking at her situation, I began to suspect that it was not solely an issue of grading, but of ethical conflict as a result of her response to a student's writing and a conflict between her personal ethical values and those of her department and college. I felt that hers was a unique situation, one that crossed the communities of students, colleagues, and department. I had hoped that through a

process of guided critical self-reflection that Melanie might come to understand that her issue was the result of conflicting ethical values.

Using Personal Responses Involving Self-reflection

Before discussing Melanie's, Jeanette's, and Mark's responses to the moral heuristic, however, potential concerns regarding the responses need to be addressed. In essence, what these three participants have created when answering the critical self-reflective questions of the moral heuristic are personal narratives. These narratives reflect what the participants perceive their experiences to have been, which may or may not be what another person situated within the context perceived. This type of qualitative research draws conclusions from judgments about events and does not rely on the quantitative research tenet that "reality is a single, consistent knowable piece that can be systematically divided into parts and subparts that can be apprehended through the five senses" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen 20). For example, as we shall see in the next chapter, Melanie perceived that the actions that she believed she should take might jeopardize her employment. Her department chair, also involved in the situation, may not have held the same opinion, making Melanie's understanding of the situation incorrect.

So, how do we account for the fact that the personal narratives, given that they represent a perception of the facts and rely on the judgments of the participants rather than on known facts, might not be reliable? When a participant reveals that a student took certain actions that the participant did not actually witness, can we trust the participant when they say that the student

actually took that action? When a participant makes a judgment call regarding the pedagogical beliefs of a colleague, can we believe that the colleague truly does hold those beliefs?

Within the academic field, quantitative research has largely been valued for its contributions to knowledge. Within the academic field of composition, this has also largely been true. Whereas quantitative research produces knowledge which can be measured, qualitative researchers are much more interested in the lived experiences of people, and how meaning is made from those experiences. As such, qualitative methodology is of use for this dissertation as I am seeking to discover what experiences composition instructors have had and relate those experiences to their ethical values and the ethical decisions and actions they have made. Qualitative research is especially useful to the field of composition in this regard. However, as Chris M. Anson, David A. Joliffe, and Nancy Shapiro note, "our highly practical discipline has not yet learned to accord much scholarly significance to narrative accounts" that qualitative researchers study (26). Anson, Joliffe, and Shapiro have found, though, that narrative "'cases'—real or realistic stories about teaching problems used for discussion and problem-solving—are one useful and engaging way to integrate theory and practice in teacher preparation" (24). This dissertation seeks to use narrative responses to problem-solve—to understand exactly why a composition instructor acted in the way that she did when faced with an ethical dilemma, and to determine if her actions can be called ethical.

To maintain the academic integrity of qualitative research to an audience which might value quantitative research more highly, several scholars have offered advice. D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly address the problems that qualitative researchers have with a quantitative research-based audience in their book *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in*

Qualitative Research. When working within a committee to determine if Bloom's Taxonomy needed to be updated for current scholarship, Clandinin and Connelly sought to include wording that would allow for the lived experiences of participants to be valued as academic research. They faced resistance in several areas and determined that these areas, which they call boundaries, revealed tensions between the quantitative academic research valued by Bloom's taxonomy and the qualitative academic research that they espoused (21-29). In revealing these boundaries, they concluded that qualitative and quantitative researchers should work toward understanding the tensions in order to improve communication between the two schools of research.

The first tension that Clandinin and Connelly discovered is that researchers studying narratives follow a concept of temporality. They state, "any event, or thing, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future" (29). Quantitative research tends to value knowledge that is timeless, or in other words, always true no matter when it occurs. Qualitative researchers work under the assumption that understanding of events can change as time changes. In Melanie's critical self-reflection, she revealed that since her experience she has continued to think about her actions and has gained new understanding about what has transpired. Whether or not the event reveals a truth that will always be true is not a concern of this study, rather, what is a concern is that Melanie recounted an event as it happened, at a specific point in recent time, in order to be relevant to other currently practicing teachers of composition.

In qualitative research, the people involved in the event under consideration are of primary importance, which causes tension between qualitative and quantitative study (Clandinin and Connelly 30). Quantitative research tends to value knowledge that exists independent of the

people involved, in other words, knowledge that does not change when applied from person to person. As qualitative researchers, Clandinin and Connelly write, "We take for granted that people, at any point in time, are in a process of personal change and that . . . it is important to be able to narrate the person in terms of the process" (30). In each of the three cases that will be presented, the participants spoke at length about all the people involved in the context of the ethical decision, including themselves. Narrative is a useful vehicle for understanding the people involved in the research. Steph Lawler writes that narratives are "*social products* . . . produced by people within the context of specific social, historical, and cultural locations . . . they are interpretive devices, through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others" (242). By asking instructors to reflect upon and write about events as they happen or as they have recently happened, the critical self-reflective moral heuristic can act as a way to capture the process of change that Clandinin and Connelly speak of while acting as a device in which a person can reveal who they are to themselves and to others.

Clandinin and Connelly add a third tension that exists between those who practice qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, that of how an action is understood. They explain that an action is "a narrative sign:"

> For example, a child's performance at a certain level on an achievement test is a narrative sign of something. It is necessary to give a narrative interpretation of that sign before meaning can be attached to it. Without understanding the narrative history of the child, the significance or meaning of the performance, the sign, remains unknown. (31)

Actions point to meaning, and researchers must interpret the sign in order to discover its meaning. In Melanie's story, the actions that are under investigation are the results of decisions concerning ethical dilemmas. As Clandinin and Connelly state, we must view these actions as narrative signs, and they can only be truly understood after they have been interpreted by us and by Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark, using the "narrative history" of each of these three teachers as tools for interpretation (31). The first three questions of the moral heuristic, those that look inward, give us insight into their personal narrative histories.

Another tension that Clandinin and Connelly discovered is that of context. Every action exists within a context, which is what the last three questions of the moral heuristic seek to establish by asking participants to reflect upon whom their students are and what they value, the ethical values of the local community, and what the department, school, and discipline of composition studies values. When possible, I have added outside sources, such as websites which offer the local community's demographic information, to establish better the context of the course of events that Melanie describes and to increase the reliability of the her responses, although it is difficult to add many outside sources without compromising her anonymity. In the end, though, as Clandinin and Connelly state, "*the person* in context is of prime interest" (32). In other words, the context surrounding the event is of less importance than the perspective of the participant who shares his or her experiences.

The last area of tension between qualitative and quantitative research, and arguably the greatest area of tension, centers on certainty. Unfortunately, according to Clandinin and Connelly, we can never be one hundred percent certain that our understanding of events—even our understanding of events of which we are a part—is a true understanding. They state, "[T]he

attitude in a narrative perspective is one of doing 'one's best' under the circumstances, knowing all the while that other possibilities, other interpretations, other ways of explaining things are possible" (31). This does not mean that researchers cannot use narratives as a method for research, in fact, it might be the best reason to do so. Narratives lead participants and researchers to interpret what is uncovered. Lawler writes that "what is apparent—what can be seen and observed—is not all there is to say: a much more interesting issue is that of interpretation—how social actors interpret the social world, and their place within it" (244). Interpreting the events helps the participant understand how they fit into society. Lawler claims that "facts (or experience) and the interpretation of those facts (or that experience) are envisaged as necessarily entwined" (243). It is not enough to recount experiences; we must interpret those experiences in order for those experiences to have meaning for our research.

This does not mean that questions concerning the reliability and credibility of the participants' narrative responses to the moral heuristic are to be dismissed. What it means is that rather than knowing what is true, we can know instead what the participants perceive to be true. In qualitative research, researchers "assume that human beings must operate within realities they themselves have constructed" (Erlandson et al. 21). While we necessarily must rely on the participants to share the truth, what is actually true is less relevant than the participants' perception, since the intent of the project is to determine what constitutes ethical behavior based on the situation—a situation that has at its heart the participant.

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, in their book *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods*, recommend that in order to be trustworthy, qualitative researchers need to establish the credibility of their research material. Two of the ways that they list that credibility may

possibly be established is through the strategy of prolonged engagement and persistent engagement (30). Since the research I have collected is the personal accounts of composition instructors recounting experiences in their personal and professional lives, I was unable to engage personally in the context of the situation. Likewise, I was unable to observe any events Melanie, Jeanette, or Mark recounted, as the events had already passed. However, I have communicated with the participants on several occasions over the course of up to a year concerning their responses to the critical self-reflective moral heuristic. In doing so, I hope to avoid what Joseph Maxwell calls "spurious associations and premature theories" which can result from too short a time frame examined for the study (110). Melanie's understanding of the event over this time period remained consistent, as did the understandings that Jeanette and Mark held concerning their personal and professional values.

Other strategies that Erlandson et al. recommend include triangulation and referential adequacy materials (31). Triangulation refers to getting points of view from other people and referential adequacy materials refers to collecting documents "to give holistic views of the context" (Erlandson et al. 31). To increase the certainty and reliability of the case studies, I have collected additional material to verify the perceptions of the three participants when possible—for example, when Melanie, Jeanette, or Mark spoke of the local community I collected information about the community from general demographic reference websites in an attempt to verify their perceptions. However, given that they was promised anonymity, it would be difficult if not impossible to maintain that anonymity if we were to speak to the other people who are involved in their teaching lives.

Perhaps the most important strategy for establishing the credibility that Erlandson et al. recommend is that of member checks (31). Maxwell goes as far as to claim that "[t]his is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (111). Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark have had access to my interpretations of their self-reflections, and they have verified that my recounting and interpretation is accurate and viable. Whenever possible, primarily through the strategies of referential adequacy materials and member checks, I have worked to maintain the credibility of the research.

As well as establishing credibility, Erlandson et al. recommend creating trustworthiness through the transferability of the research, or the ability of the research to "be applied in other contexts or with other respondents" (31). Writing thick description and purposive sampling are listed as strategies for increasing transferability (33). The research as it was crafted for this project necessarily relies on Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark themselves to write descriptively, as they were recounting events that I, the researcher, was unable to witness due to the fact that they happened in the past. However, I was able to ask the participants to supply greater detail of the events than they had originally given, and they all complied.

Another strategy that I have used is that of crafting open-ended questions for the moral heuristic. Pamela J. Brink writes that using questionnaires such as the one I have used for the moral heuristic "have reliability and validity built into the design" (157). This is true because "the use of open-ended questions with no correct answer intimated by the question" reduces the possibility that the participant will give an answer that they think I am looking for (158). There was no right way for Melanie, Jeanette, or Mark to answer the questions of the heuristic.

The strategy of purposive sampling was applied to the research (Erlandson et al. 33). Brink claims that error in qualitative research often comes in the form of "asking the wrong people" (33). Martin Sanchez-Jankowski also warns about choosing a research site carefully, "If the researcher has chosen poorly, then reliability has been compromised" (154). I made every attempt to choose my participants carefully in order to not compromise the reliability of the study. As stated earlier, I requested initial information from several people concerning ethical conflicts that they had found themselves in, and I chose just one of those to illustrate that the moral heuristic could help an instructor understand why she chose to act in one way and not in another. I also asked another two instructors to complete the heuristic without first revealing an ethical conflict that they had found themselves in, in order to test the heuristic as a tool to discover where personal ethical values intersect and/or influence professional lives. I chose the respondents carefully, following the criteria that they be composition instructors that I knew personally and professionally, were practicing teachers of first-year composition at the university level, and were experienced teachers of first-year composition. I chose Melanie primarily because she offered an interesting ethical dilemma that showed conflict of ethical values across a number of people involved in the situation. Melanie was faced with the decision of whether or not a student who was arguably on the borderline should pass or fail. This is not a unique situation for composition instructors, and I have noted that five out of eight respondents to my original query shared similar stories. However, the context of Melanie's situation involved not only herself and her student, but it also spilled over in the contexts of colleagues and department. Therefore, I felt that her understanding of the situation would transfer to other instructors who were also dealing with the difficulties of grading students. Both Jeanette and Mark were chosen

largely because they fulfilled the criteria established above, that they be practicing, experienced first-year composition instructors that I knew on a personal and professional basis.

Another strategy to increase the trustworthiness of the data that Erlandson et al. recommend is to create dependability and confirmability audits (34-35). These audits depend upon research trails. I have amassed a good deal of information from Melanie regarding the event and her understanding of that event. Likewise, I have also collected data from both Jeanette and Mark. Much of this information is in the form of their responses to the questions of the critical self-reflective moral heuristic and the follow-up questions that resulted from those answers. Researchers who might wish to conduct an external check on my materials will be able to see that I have reported the events and the perceptions of the participants as accurately as possible.

Trustworthiness in the Study of Narrative Response

Validity is a term which refers to "the trustworthiness of the inferences drawn from the data" (Eisenhart and Howe 664). This trustworthiness in qualitative research is difficult to prove because the "inferences drawn from the data" are the researcher's interpretation of the perception of truth of a narrator (Lawler 243; Erlandson et al 21). In order to work toward trustworthiness in a qualitative study, there are measures that qualitative researchers strive to take. Many of these have already been discussed since the term "credibility" is often used by qualitative researchers as a substitute for the term "validity" (Freeman et al. 26). Among procedures meant to bring credibility and therefore trustworthiness into this study, I have maintained contact with Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark about their responses for a time span of more than a year, in order to verify

that their perceptions of events remained consistent; I have looked at additional materials, especially demographic information of the area and school in which Melanie teaches, in order "to give holistic views of the context" (Erlandson et al. 31); and I have had Melanie member check the data that I have presented in Chapter Four in order to make certain that it was correct according to her perception. I had also requested of Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark that they add description in their narrative responses, asked for additional detail from them, and I have attempted to add description based on referential materials when necessary. All of these attempts to establish the credibility of the research also, according to qualitative researchers[18], work toward establishing trustworthiness.

Additionally, qualitative researchers call for "(a) thorough description of design and methods in reports, (b) adequate demonstration of claims to data, and (c) thoughtful consideration by the researcher of the strengths and limitations of the study" (Freeman et al. 28). In Chapter One, I discussed how the critically self-reflective moral heuristic was created, and in this chapter I discussed how I chose Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark as participants. In Chapter Four, Five, and Six I make claims regarding the responses that Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark have given to the moral heuristic, and I have shown how those claims were created. Throughout this dissertation, I discuss what critical self-reflection can offer to an individual composition instructor, and in Chapter Five I discuss the limitations of this study. In all of these ways I have striven to make certain that validity is present in this study.

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[18] See Freeman et al. for a detailed discussion of the evolution of the standards of validity in qualitative research.

Conclusion

The tensions that Clandinin and Connelly discovered are concerns for the case studies that I have presented, but they need not be debilitating concerns. It is possible that the studies, written in a primarily narrative form, may be viewed as unacceptable research by those who value quantitative research over the type of qualitative research that will be presented. However, quantitative research seems to be less useful to us when studying actions that are the result of a composition instructor's ethical values that are born out of their personal and professional experiences. Moreover, situations in which postmodern ethical theory is applied by their very nature would be difficult, if not impossible, to be measured in a quantitative way, as a postmodern understanding of ethics relies on the context of the ethical decision. As Clandinin and Connelly have shown, quantitative research assumes that the knowledge gained from a study exists independently of the time in which the study occurred and the people who are involved in the situation. Postmodern ethics claims that what is valued as ethical behavior exists because of community values, which can change from place to place and from time to time (Bauman 12). It also claims that primary consideration needs to be given to the people involved, especially the others who will be affected by the decisions and actions taken (Bauman 4, 84). Ethics are not quantifiable, according to postmodern ethical theory, and therefore quantitative study of ethical behavior is an incorrect approach to use. Therefore, the upcoming chapter includes examination of the ethical values of the composition instructor involved, the situation she found herself in, and an attempt to discover if her actions were ethical according to her personal beliefs and the beliefs of the others that were involved in the situation.

CHAPTER FOUR

JEANETTE'S CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

In Chapter Two, I presented what the scholarship of composition studies tells us concerning ethics and teaching, with a particular focus on the use of teacher authority, promoting positions of advocacy, and responding to student writing. In Chapter Three, I argued that one way, perhaps the best way, to determine if critical self-reflection was viable and necessary for composition instructors to understand the source of their ethical conflicts was to collect narrative responses from the instructors themselves. After receiving the critical self-reflective responses of a few practicing composition instructors, I realized that these instructors are also dealing with the same issues of which the literature speaks.

In this chapter, I introduce Jeanette[19], a practicing teacher of composition. Jeanette did not begin with a specific ethical conflict in mind that she wished to understand better; rather, she practiced guided critical self-reflection with an eye toward better understanding how her personal values have influenced her professional life as a writing instructor. She also attempted to identify where her personal values might lead her into conflict with others who have a stake in her teaching. I will focus on those values, how she was led to her professional understanding of the three areas of authority, advocacy, and responding to student writing. By examining Jeanette's responses to the guided critical self-reflection, I believe that this chapter will show that critical self-reflection is an essential part of a composition instructor's obligation to his or her teaching.

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[19] "Jeanette" is a pseudonym.

To collect the information from Jeanette, I corresponded with her via electronic mail in a series of back and forth exchanges. I sent her the moral heuristic, and she returned it to me. I asked her follow-up questions, and then follow-up questions to her answers. In an attempt to maintain clarity and accurately document the exchange, I have titled the email responses that she sent to me. In chronological order, those emails have been titled as "Questions," "A Few More Questions," and "Another One," and the appropriate email will be referenced in the text.

According to Aristotle, to be ethical a professional must be the best at their trade as he or she can be, and to be the best at his or her trade one must follow the ethical expectations of their field (10). As was noted in Chapter Two, practicing critical self-reflection is an ethical obligation for professionals. In this dissertation, critical self-reflection is presented as an ethical obligation for composition instructors. John Dewey tells us to apply intelligent reflection and thought when dealing with ethical dilemmas (Dewey *How We Think* 119; Dewey "The Logic" 236; Putnam 274). Zygmunt Bauman and James Porter tell us that according to postmodern ethical thought we must consider the situation and the others that will be affected by our decision in order to claim that our actions are ethical (Bauman 84; Porter "Developing" 216). Moreover, postmodern ethics claims that intelligent reflection upon the ethical issue is necessary. Porter goes on to claim that it is exactly this intelligent reflection that makes the upcoming action ethical ("Developing" 223). By melding these ideas from Aristotle, Dewey, Bauman, and Porter, it is seen that to be ethical we must strive to be the best at our profession as we can be, and intelligently applying critical self-reflection to our professional lives is how we do so.

Before Jeanette's critical self-reflection is discussed, it is important to be reminded that the moral heuristic that was developed in Chapter One is intended only as a guide for critical

self-reflection. It is not necessarily the only way to practice critical self-reflection, and some composition instructors may find less value in it than others. However, in reflecting upon the responses that were given, Jeanette believed that she took from the experience something of value. She stated that "it made her think" about her teaching practices, and gave her an idea of how to approach her colleagues during the semester in order to learn their best grading practices. Not only did she take the opportunity to write about her implicitly held values, thereby making them explicit, she also shared the source of the values. In doing so, she also began to reflect upon her reflections—a possible sign that her self-reflection was leading her to learn more about herself and her professional values. By participating in this guided critical self-reflection, Jeanette worked toward completing her ethical obligation to her profession.

Jeanette's Teaching Context

Jeanette is a non-tenure track composition instructor at a large university in the Midwest. She works under a three-year renewable contract and receives the same benefits as tenure-track professors, although she receives a lower salary and teaches more hours than a tenure track professor. She has no requirements for service, scholarship, or student advising. She normally teaches basic writing and first-year composition for her department. She has held her current position since the early 2000s, and she intends to maintain this position until it suits her to retire. She has earned a Ph.D. in English, specializing in Creative Writing, and when she is not teaching she writes fiction for publication (Jeanette, "Questions").

Jeanette teaches in a Writing department, not an English department. Her department offers majors and minors in creative and professional writing and has approximately two

hundred students pursuing a writing major or minor. However, Jeanette and her lecturer colleagues primarily teach courses that serve the university, rather than the courses that writing majors need to take. Jeanette is typically assigned to teach general education writing courses: basic writing, first-year composition, and a junior-level Writing in the Disciplines (WID) course. She might, someday, be asked to teach other courses, but to do so requires permission from the department and the dean, and only if there are no tenured or tenure-track professors available to teach that class. She reports that her department employs approximately fifteen tenured or tenure-track professors and about twenty lecturers (Jeanette, "Questions").

Jeanette's university's website claims that the institution has an enrollment of over 21,000 undergraduate and more than three thousand graduate students. When her university was founded approximately a half century ago, farmland was purchased on which to build the campus. As a result, the surrounding area of the main campus, where Jeanette teaches, is largely agricultural with a nearby small town, but the university has been building up a substantial secondary campus in the nearby city. It also has satellite campuses in three other cities in the state. Jeanette describes her university and its ideological standpoint as, "[a] liberal arts education with an emphasis on the practical application of what's being learned: business, healthcare, public administration, police or court work" ("Questions").

Jeanette reports that those in her local community mainly hold manufacturing jobs, and that they value "family, good beer, well-manicured golf courses, [and] sleek cars. They are also generous with charities and committed to volunteer work" ("Questions"). The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the population of the county in which the main campus of her university is located is 93.3 percent white. It is a politically conservative area, as is seen in the results of the

last presidential election where two-thirds of the votes cast in the county went to the Republican candidate ("2012"). More than half of the people in the county affiliate themselves with a Christian denomination ("Breakdown").

The students at her school come from all over the Midwest, with a few students from farther away. However, Jeanette notes that most of the students come from the state that the university is located in. She claims that, "most [students] are middle class, had good high school grades (high B to A), [and] take out student loans or work to pay their own way through school; few have parents who pay for all college expenses" (Jeanette, "A Few"). In terms of their academic ability, Jeanette claims that they have been fairly well prepared for the university's first-year composition course. She reports that most of her students do not need "remedial help," and have experience with writing research papers and narratives, although they do need help with "analysis, response, and evaluation paper" (Jeanette, "A Few").

Jeanette's Critical Self-Reflection

Before we look at Jeanette's responses to the guided critical self-reflection, it needs to be said again that readers may disagree with Jeanette's viewpoints or the conclusions that she has drawn about her background and values and their influence on her professional life. Readers with greater experience in teaching than Jeanette possesses or with greater expertise in their respective areas of teaching might take exception to the answers that are given. The point of this chapter is not to show that Jeanette's values are the best possible ones to hold. Rather, the point of this chapter is to show that critical self-reflection can lead to understanding of the source of a specific composition instructor's ethical values and can show where ethical conflict might occur.

Critical self-reflection might also lead to an understanding of the role that the respondent played or could play in creating a past or impending conflict. Readers need also keep in mind that, according to post-modern ethics, actions are ethical as determined by the situation in which they occur. With this in mind, it is quite possible that given the local context of the conflict, the values held by the instructor are the most appropriate, ethical values to hold.

Looking Inward

In Chapter One, I argued that in order to understand the source of our ethical values we need to start by examining ourselves by asking the question, "who am I?" For the composition instructor, I recommend approaching this question from three different angles: 1. his or her personal background, 2. the beliefs concerning religion that he or she holds, and 3. the professional identity of the composition instructor. Applying this approach to answering the question "who am I?" helped Jeanette to determine what she personally values as ethical and the origin of those values.

1. What is my background and how has this shaped who I am, and what is my current situation?

Looking at her personal life experiences lets Jeanette see the influence of her past on the present values that she holds. Looking at her background may help her see which values were passed down to her and which values she chose for herself. Her past may offer insights into stereotypes or other negative attitudes she may hold, as well as identifying where her positive attitudes come from (Richlin 10). Education specialist Laurie Richlin says that knowing our personal background is "the most important element" of course design (10). Therefore, in order

to follow Aristotle's dictum that to be ethical we need to be the best at our profession as we can be, to teach ethically and effectively Jeanette must know who she is.

When asked the question "Who Am I?" Jeanette wrote first about her childhood, stating that she grew up in the countryside as the daughter of a chemist who would bring home issues of *Scientific American* for her to read. As a result of her childhood situation, she writes, "I spent my days outside with my cousins, our dogs, and horses. I loved to read and do 'scientific' studies of plants and pond water with my microscope" ("Questions").

Jeanette goes on to discuss her current situation:

> I teach first-year writing classes . . . at a large university in [the Midwest]. My Ph.D. is in English with an emphasis in creative writing, and I try to spend 15-20 hours a week writing fiction. But that doesn't work so well when student papers start piling up. I advise my students (Elbow-style) to write fast rough drafts, to get their ideas on paper quickly, and then revise. But that has never worked for me. I am a slow writer. So I always feel sorry for my students who are slow careful writers as I rush them through the process of four papers in fourteen weeks. ("Questions")

Jeanette understands what the field offers concerning writing process and advises her students to follow Elbow's advice regarding drafting. Yet she also acknowledges that she does not practice what she preaches. She has revealed that while it is an ethical value for her to teach according to the profession's advice, since she does not do so she has compassion for those who do not draft quickly. She also reveals in this answer her empathy for her students, as she "feels sorry" for students who have a hard time keeping up with the pace of the class's writing requirements.

Finally, Jeanette makes a connection between her background and her current teaching practice:

> As I think about what I wrote about my childhood, nature and science, I wonder if that's why I always try to assign some paper that has to do with the natural world or lit reviews of research studies. Such papers have instant audience appeal, at least with me. I tell my students to pay attention to details, and perhaps that comes from my early days of learning that a butterfly isn't simply a butterfly. And it's not simply a swallowtail. It's a Spicebush Swallowtail. ("Questions")

In this passage, Jeanette is already beginning to discover the usefulness of the critical self-reflection. She has begun to reflect on her reflection, and has made a connection between her past experiences and her current values as a professional. She likes her student papers to include scientific or natural topics, has her students write literature reviews—which she understands to be more akin to scientific writing than the academic writing of a first-year writing course—and values the detail that is of utmost importance in scientific writing.

2. If I subscribe (or choose not to subscribe) to religious beliefs, how does this influence who I am?

The second question asks a composition instructor to reflect upon their faith-based based, or their beliefs about faith. Personal religious beliefs can greatly influence our decision-making process (Boylan 143). Often, religious beliefs are tied to ethical behavior, as is seen in the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments. For those who hold faith-based beliefs being ethical is more than making certain that they are acting rightly—they may believe that their ethical behavior can influence their relationship with their deity. If a composition instructor holds faith-based beliefs,

he or she cannot ignore the influence they exert on himself or herself and how they affect teaching behavior. Doing so ignores the fact that religious beliefs often reveal information about who we are instead of simply how we act.

Jeanette has already revealed a scientific curiosity as a result of her personal background. Now, Jeanette reveals that she does subscribe to very specific religious doctrine. She writes:

> I am a Christian. A Calvinist. On days when I am nervous before teaching a class, I pause for a moment outside the door and think through Q&A 1 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*: "what is your only comfort in life and in death? That I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ . . ." Then I take a deep breath and go inside. ("Questions")

Jeanette's faith is important to her, as is seen in her falling back onto it when she feels "nervous" or stressed about her teaching. It is also important to note that she identifies as a Calvinist, a Christian who follows the doctrinal teachings of John Calvin. Calvinism is often marked by an intellectual predisposition toward faith. This is evident in the requirement of both the Reformed Church of America and the Christian Reformed Church of North America, two of the largest Calvinist denominations in the area surrounding Jeanette's university, that their pastors have Masters of Divinity degrees (DeYoung; "Journey toward Ordination"). When describing her church experience while growing up, Jeanette writes, "[c]hurch was a place where there were important things to study and learn. It still is" ("A Few"). Jeanette has been intellectual in her Christian faith; she sees church as a place to "study and learn" and she has thought through her faith and the options that she has. She chose Calvinism because after thinking through the

options she decided that, "I like specific details and being a Christian with a Calvinist bent affects my view of God, sin, salvation, worship and grace" ("A Few").

Because her religious beliefs are quite strongly held, Jeanette finds herself in potential conflict between her religious beliefs and her professional life teaching at a state university. However, she is very much aware of this potential conflict, and writes:

> I teach in [a] public university and honor the line between the public sphere and the private sphere. One of the books that deeply influenced me is *The Fall of Public Man* by Richard Sennett about the blurring of the line between public and private, how increasingly there is this sense that everything personal has to come pouring out into public. ("Questions")

Although she acknowledges that she has a strong faith, Jeanette does not find her faith to be an appropriate topic for the classroom and does not share her beliefs with her students. Her faith is part of her private life, and she does not believe that it is appropriate for the personal to become public, in spite of what she sees as the direction that our culture is moving in which the private lives of people are displayed for public consumption. Even though she relies on her faith to help her with her teaching, as is seen when she uses her faith to help her calm down when she is nervous about teaching a class, she believes that it is not her job to spread her faith in the classroom; it is her job to teach writing.

There is also a part of her beliefs that could strongly influence her writing assignments. She does assign a personal narrative in her class, and the reason for it may be born out of a deeper ethical reason than that the assignment is a staple in first-year composition courses. Jeanette writes, "For me, my faith is private, not easy to express in everyday conversation, and

certainly not a topic for a classroom lecture; it's a mystery that's best left for story" ("Questions"). What she means by this is, "God remains a mystery. All we have are revelations of God, ways God has chosen to reveal God . . . For me, a good story, like Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* or Kathleen Norris's *Acedia & Me*, comes closest to capturing that mystery" ("A Few"). God has revealed himself in stories, in narratives, and Jeanette values the genre and sees that it is useful to express faith-based beliefs. This value could be a large part of the reasoning behind assigning the narrative in her classroom.

Aside from finding her faith helpful for her teaching and influential on her choice of assignments, she also finds that her views on her faith influence her relationships with students. While we might assume that her relationships with those who do not share her faith might be negatively influenced, she does not report this. Instead, it is Christian students that she finds herself at odds with from time to time, particularly with those who share her religious beliefs but do not seem to share her beliefs about the privacy of religious beliefs nor the importance of intellectual thought applied to religion. After revealing that her faith is very private, she writes, "Hmmm . . . this is probably why I am so hard on students who write in all the contemporary pop-religious clichés about being saved or how God is soooooo Awesome!!!!" ("Questions"). Jeanette explains her reaction to students who write such emotionally-charged statements: "Their whole sense of God is reduced to the lyrics of a praise chorus. There are important issues that the church and Christians are facing in today's world but students aren't writing about them" ("A Few"). She wants her Christian students to tackle serious religious issues, and not fall back on an understanding of God as is presented in "the lyrics of a praise chorus." As an academic scholar and as a Christian who employs intellect in her faith, she wants her Christian students to apply

intellect and reason to their faith. She holds her faith deeply and tightly to herself, she has arrived at her beliefs thoughtfully, and seems to find it inappropriate to their shared faith when her students make overtly public or emotionally-based or irrational comments about their faith.

3. Who am I, as a professional?

This third question of the critical self-reflective moral heuristic is designed to foster thought about the professional values that the instructor holds. The values that he or she adheres to as a professional composition instructor can certainly come into conflict with what others view as his or her position. For example, as we shall see in Jeanette's answer, she sees it as a professional goal to help her students "learn to love working with words" ("Questions"). A student in her course that values little more than receiving a passing grade might be offended when Jeanette tries to get him to move beyond writing simply to pass the course.

When reflecting upon whom she sees herself to be as a professional, Jeanette writes:

> I am in the classroom to help students become confident, fluent writers. Is it too much to hope that some of them might learn to love working with words? (Looking at that first sentence--I originally wrote "to teach students" but changed it to "help students." What does that tell me?) ("Questions")

Jeanette has used the critical self-reflection not only to answer the question but also to reflect on her answer. What does it tell her that she changed "to teach students" to "to help students?" It tells her, and us, that as a professional she sees it as her goal not just to teach, but to help. She wants her students "to see writing as more than a pedestrian task, that they will enjoy the process of calling up words and moving them around on paper to make what's inside their heads visible--making the invisible, visible" ("A Few"). She hopes that the students will understand that

language has power and that by effectively wielding language a student will discover new knowledge, and will help others make the same discoveries by sharing it in his or her writing.

Jeanette also views herself professionally as more than just a teacher or a helper. She also sees it as part of her profession to stay on top of scholarship. Although her background is in creative writing, she teaches First-year Composition and tries to remain up on the scholarship in both fields. She writes:

> I stay current on issues in the fields of fiction writing and composition studies by reading scholarly books and journals like *College Composition and Communication* and the *Writer's Chronicle*. This semester our department has asked for a stronger emphasis on students working in collaborative groups, so over the summer I read up on that. ("Questions")

She works to keep herself informed in the scholarship of both creative writing and composition studies, presumably in order to be a better teacher of composition. But more than that, she also sees herself as a team member of her department, doing independent reading to make herself an informed and useful participant in her department. She also applies what she learns from the scholarship to her teaching. For example, Jeanette writes, "a while back I read an article in *College Composition and Communication* on how composition instructors need to have more respect for the literacy skills that games like World of Warcraft help students develop. Now the next time a student wants to write about video games, I have some new ideas to talk about with him or her" ("A Few"). Jeanette takes her responsibility to stay current on the field's scholarship seriously, and has found benefit in her department and in her classroom by doing so.

Looking Outward

By looking inward and reflecting on the source of her values Jeanette has a basis for understanding the metaethics that makes up her ethical self. Next, she looks outward and reflects on what she perceives to be the ethical values held by those with whom she shares the context of her classes. She reflected on what she believes her local communities, her students, and her department, university, and profession values in her teaching. As stated in Chapter One, the ethical values of one party do not necessarily outweigh those of another, and Jeanette should not be expected simply to abandon her values in order to comply with the ethical values of others. However, after careful reflective thought she may find it to be the best action to submit to the values of the others involved in her teaching situation. Understanding the differences in ethical values may help Jeanette understand where potential ethical conflict could occur, and could make her more prepared to deal with ethical conflict should it arise. By reflecting upon the values of the others involved in her teaching life and by understanding the effect that her ethical values has on her professional life and how her values could affect others, Jeanette fulfills her ethical obligation to those others.

1. What does my local community value?

As part of Jeanette's critical self-reflection process, she must examine her community and what it values. In our professional lives, it is especially important to consider the local community in our postmodern world as "[a] postmodern approach to ethics differs from traditional ethics because it is grounded in community or local standards; it does not rely on, nor would it attempt to seek, a universal ground for ethical action" (Porter, "Developing" 216).

Ethics are dependent on the community, be that community a nation, a city, a borough, a small town, or the college campus itself. Each community creates for itself a set of ethical values, and each community judges its members according to this shared value system. Whether or not Jeanette agrees with the community's values, she must still be aware of them in order to discern where future ethical conflict may lie between her and them.

Jeanette seems to find herself at ease with what she sees as the values of the community. Jeanette writes:

> My local community values family, good beer, well-manicured golf courses, sleek cars. They are also generous with charities and committed to volunteer work. [The area], because of its manufacturing, for many years provided blue and white-collar workers with a good living. You could work on the factory floor all week and spend weekends up North at your cabin with your power boat in the summer and your Ski-doo in the winter. The Great Recession changed all that, and I can see it in my students' lives and hear it in their papers. ("Questions")

Jeanette painted her community in rosy colors—although she does acknowledge that the community is showing signs of suffering from the current economic situation of the country. She sees the local community as largely middle-class, valuing its leisure time, but no longer able to spend as much time in leisure as it used to.

Jeanette further comments on her relation to the local community:

> While I don't drink beer or play golf, I do value family and wish I drove a sleek car. I think most of my students come from families that have the same middle-class values as I have, but I also understand why it is necessary for them to test

> those values. First-year writing is a good place to have them explore new ideas, values, and possibilities. ("Questions")

Lynn Z. Bloom argues that first-year composition is an "unabashedly middle-class exercise," because it, "in philosophy and pedagogy, reinforces the values and virtues embodied . . . in the very existence of America's vast middle class" (655). Among these "values and virtues" is "the ability to think critically and responsibly" (655). Jeanette is positioning herself as an advocate of critical thinking, which Bloom identifies as a value of the middle class, but Jeanette wants her students to use that middle class value of critical thinking to challenge the middle-class values that her students possess. She does not do this to make them change their values—as a matter of fact, she claims that she holds those values as they do. She wants them to question and critically explore those values. In the same way that she wishes her Christian students to reflect critically upon their religious beliefs, Jeanette wants her middle-class students to do the same regarding their middle-class values.

2. What do my students value?

It is also necessary to consider the values that our students hold. If we attempt to understand our students' values, then again we are working toward fulfilling our ethical obligation to consider the others that are involved in our teaching. While it is not possible to understand every single student's ethical values, we can make the attempt to discern them regarding education, in an attempt to discern where future conflict between teacher and student may occur.

Jeanette writes of her students, "Let's talk about [the students'] short-term values: pizza, friends, working out, parties, cute guys/girls, reality TV, Twilight, sports" ("Questions").

Although Jeanette seems to describe rather frivolous values here, it also seems as if Jeanette is making judgments about what her students are interested in while they are at college. She describes her students as living in the moment, concerned largely with enjoying life. However, Jeanette lists these as "short-term values" and goes on to describe the long-term values that her students hold as being more serious:

> Long-term values? Most students want to do well in college. They want skills and knowledge that will help them in a career. Most put great value on a career that helps people. They fear that they will end up moving back home and living in Mom and Dad's basement. ("Questions")

In the end, she believes that her students value an education for the economic power that they believe it will give them. She even writes that she believes that her students are afraid that they will not gain this economic power and that they will never gain financial independence. It is important to see that Jeanette does not claim that she believes that they are interested in getting rich—instead, she seems to believe that many of her students value being successful in a career that helps others. She concludes her reflection on her students' values by making a connection between her perception of the students' short and long-term goals, "What some have trouble doing is putting aside short-term goals and working on the long-term ones, but that's true of the larger community too" ("Questions"). She believes that there are students who prefer to live for the moment, losing sight of the greater goal of economic freedom because they are having a good time exploring the short-term goals. But she goes on to modify her claim in an apparent attempt to prevent herself from judging the students who have lost sight of the long-term goals by claiming that they are not the only people who do this sort of thing.

3. What values do my department, school, and the scholarly literature in my field advocate?

As well as looking outward at her community and critically reflecting upon herself and her students, Jeanette also needs to consider what her department, school, and her discipline's scholarly literature hold to be ethical behavior. This is, perhaps, the most practical aspect of examining her situation, as the department and administration will decide whether or not her contract is renewed, if she gets a merit pay raise, etc. Jeanette has agreed, through her action of accepting the position at her school, that she will help her students achieve what the school expects them to achieve.

When reflecting on the values of her department and field, Jeanette by far wrote more for this answer than any other. In her answer, she focused on the end-of-term grading that her department uses for all of the first-year composition courses. In particular, Jeanette reflects upon how she sometimes feels that the grades produced by the department's holistic grading system do not always coincide with her assessment of the student's writing abilities. In her department, end-of-semester student work is graded first by the students' professor, and then by another composition instructor. If the professor and the second reader agree on a grade, then the grade stands—but if there is disagreement the work is passed to a third reader who acts as a tie-breaker. She writes:

> I tell myself to trust the system, that when a grade ends up other than what I assigned I am probably being influenced by factors related to process, not product. That rationale works well when a portfolio hovers between the criteria for an A and B portfolio, or between the criteria for a B and C. What troubles me is when it a portfolio shows the characteristics of both a C and a D portfolio. If a student

> portfolio gets a D, then the student has to retake the class. . . . [S]ometimes my individual classes show grade anomalies that leave me troubled—have they gotten the "fairest results"? I can usually justify a portfolio grade to an individual student or a colleague, but there have been times at the end of a semester when I worry about what I would say if certain students started comparing grades and asked me to explain. (“Questions”)

While Jeanette believes that she must “trust the system,” and she fulfills her ethical obligation to the department by adhering to the grading system, she still finds her own personal values clashing with a system with which she does not always agree. She claims to value process, but sees that her department assesses the student work largely based on product. She is concerned for her students who may have to retake the course even though she does not believe that it is necessary for the student to do so. She is also concerned about her students that pass the course when she believes that it would be useful for the student to retake the course.

Although Jeanette had not indicated prior to undertaking the guided critical self-reflection that she had faced any ethical conflict in her teaching, when answering this question Jeanette talked of a specific incident where she felt that she was close to ethical conflict with the values of the department, specifically the department’s values concerning grading student work. In the end, conflict was avoided as Jeanette adjusted her personal values to coincide with those of her department and she was able to justify that decision, but still was not completely satisfied with her final decision. She followed the procedures, but she feels that there was a problem with the outcome:

> One semester I had two ESL students; both of them struggled with English. In class and lab they had trouble understanding verbal instructions, and their in-class writings were very rough and brief (2-3 sentences in 10 minutes), and often unclear and unconnected to the assignment. Over the course of the semester, their papers improved, but Student X seemed more involved in the revising process than Student Z. When I read their final portfolios, the portfolio of Student X was a stronger portfolio in terms of content, organization, and use of sources than Student Z's final portfolio.
>
> While they were better writers by the end of the semester, I assigned a D to both students' portfolios because I decided the D grading criteria [that the department provides] best fit their papers. All semester long my portfolio grading group had looked at sample student papers and these two portfolios fit with what we had said were D papers. ("Questions")

Jeanette followed the department's grading criteria and assigned a D—a failing grade—to both students based on the product. However, there was also additional reasoning for the D's. She writes, "I also sensed that these two students would be helped by another semester of writing" ("Questions"). She failed the students not only because of the quality of their work, but also because she felt that they still had more that they could learn. After assigning D's to each student, she passed the portfolios on to colleagues for their assessment of her students' work.

Jeanette continues her narrative:

> A second reader also gave Student X's portfolio a D. So Student X had to retake the class. Student Z's portfolio went to a different second reader, and that reader

> gave it a C. So it went on to the third reader, who was a completely different reader from the other two. She gave Z's portfolio a C also. Two out of three--student Z ended up with a C and did not have to retake [the first-year composition class].
>
> I have visions of X comparing his portfolio to Z's and asking me to explain. I have no idea what I would say other than the luck of the draw. He got one second reader and Z got two other ones. That doesn't seem fair. ("Questions")

Jeanette followed the system, and passed one of the students and failed the other, even though in her opinion both students, who had similar backgrounds, writing abilities, and portfolios, should have failed. Jeanette seems to fear that she will be asked to explain to others why these two similar portfolios received two different grades and she will be unable to do so.

The value that Jeanette holds that applies to this situation is her value that grading be fair, equitable, and consistent for all students. She writes:

> I am troubled by the unevenness of the grade and consequences when I compare the two portfolios. I am left with the feeling that both portfolios should have gotten the same grade, whether C or D. I could be content either way as long as it was consistent. And I am left with questions. Was I too hard on both X and Z's portfolios because of what I saw in the classroom, thus treating X unfairly by assigning a D as a first reader? Did I not listen close enough as we talked about C/D grades in portfolio group? Did I make an unfair justification that they needed another writing class? Or were the other readers too lenient in giving Z's portfolio a C? As we talked about grades over the semester, did they pretend to grade

> harder than they actually do? Did they go a little easier on Z's portfolio because he had the more ethnic sounding name and they assumed he was ESL? ("Qustions")

As a result of this situation, Jeanette has begun to second-guess her own grading practice and her role as a professional in the department, and she seems to question the professionalism of her colleagues. She wonders if this situation was the result of a failure of a system that does not allow for grading criteria that fall outside of product, a failure on the part of her colleagues for not following those grading criteria, or a failure on her own part, either by not following or properly understanding those grading criteria.

In the grading system that Jeanette uses, Jeanette receives the grades from her colleagues, but she is responsible for submitting the grades to the school. It is possible that Jeanette could have maintained her values concerning grading and given both students D's, in opposition to the grades that her colleagues had assigned. Had she done so, it is unlikely that anyone would have even noticed, as although there are ways to verify that an instructor has reported the grades that the holistic grading system has produced, this is typically only done if there is suspicion that an instructor is not following department guidelines. Jeanette, however, maintained her ethical obligation to the department and reported the students' grades that the holistic grading group had assigned. Even though she could probably have given both students D's with no repercussions from her department, Jeanette shared that she would not do so as she states, "[m]y own guilty conscience would catch me" ("A Few").

In the next portion of her response, Jeanette seems to have found justification for adjusting her personal values to match those of her colleagues and department:

> And, so, I am back where I started: I tell myself, trust the system. I think back to when I taught and wasn't in a portfolio group. I am sure, despite my attempts to remain consistent, that there were uneven grades and, at times, unfair grades. Portfolio group grading and the common grading criteria that we all have to follow keeps us accountable to one another and the department for what we value as academic writing. We get things right more often than not. At least that's what I keep telling myself. ("Questions")

She has justified her decision based on her beliefs that she has not always been a consistent grader and that she believes that the department's grading system normally works as a method to maintain consistency in grading. It is also likely that her religious beliefs have come into play in this scenario. As she noted earlier, when she feels nervous about her teaching she finds comfort in her faith and in her relationship with God. It is quite possible that the same comfort was found in this event, too—she has likely trusted that God will work it out. It is interesting to note, however, that the last sentence of the above quote implies that she is still not so certain that she has made the right decision. By completing a guided critical self-reflection, Jeanette has come to realize that even though she does not always agree with the grades that the department's system produces, she believes that it has the potential to be more reliable than her own grading might be.

A Potential Clash of Authority

Chapter Two focused on what the scholarly literature of our field values as ethical, with particular focuses on the areas of authority, advocacy, and responding to student writing. Jeanette's narrative responses to the critically self-reflective moral heuristic reveals that her self-

reported values do have the possibility of creating conflict with the values of others, particularly concerning the area of teacher authority. Her values concerning her authority over her students' grades could potentially lead her into conflict with her colleagues and her department, and she fears that by following the values of the department concerning grading she might find herself in conflict with her students.

In most first-year composition courses throughout the nation, the authority that a teacher has to assign grades is largely absolute. While in certain schools instructors may be limited in their authority to design their course, for the most part it seems that if a composition instructor wishes to assign a grade of A, B, C, D, or F the decision to do so is his or hers alone. There may be guidelines or a grading rubric offered by the department, but the teacher is tasked with interpreting those guidelines, and as long as the students do not complain too loudly the department rarely looks at the grading practices of their established teachers. However, in Jeanette's case the authority to grade her students at the end of the term is shared with her colleagues as she and her portfolio grading group collectively interpret the department's guidelines and then individually assign grades to student work. As Jeanette has shown, even though she and her colleagues have spent a semester discussing and collectively interpreting the rubric discrepancies can still occur between the grading group members.

Composition teachers like Jeanette are given authority in their classrooms by their institutions (Gale 10). However, as Gale and Palmer points out, teacher authority is also deeply rooted in the individual teacher (Gale 51; Palmer 33). Authority comes from within the teacher, from their expertise (Gale 51), or from "their own words, their own actions, their own lives" (Palmer 33). Jeanette considers herself to be an experienced teacher, and as such should be able

to claim the authority that comes from expertise. The requirement that the authority to grade student work be shared seems to make Jeanette feel, at times, as if the authority that the institution has granted her and that she has worked to establish within herself has been reined in by the department. In relinquishing some of her authority, Jeanette is concerned that her students may not always be fairly graded.

All composition instructors should be concerned, as Jeanette is, about making certain that their students' work is accurately and fairly graded, and many instructors have also asked themselves how to assess the work ethically. One of those who works to understand the relationship of ethics and assessment is Pat Belanoff, who directly considers ethical grading. In her article "Towards an Ethic of Grading," Belanoff looks at the current grading practices that many instructors and departments use and finds them wanting. She sees many issues with first-year composition grading practices and writes, "How many times have all of us listened to students protest that some paper of theirs we have just graded would have gotten a better grade from some other teacher?" (176). This is the same problem that Jeanette is concerned with—that her colleagues that she shares authority with will grade a student's work differently than she would. She is concerned that her students might compare their work and their grades and find inequality in the grading system. It is to Jeanette's credit that she returns to her mantra to "trust the system," as this is in accord with what Belanoff recommends as a solution for this issue. The best, if not the only, way to answer the problem, according to Belanoff, is to work collaboratively with our colleagues to address the issue of assessment and therefore to infuse a sort of reliability to our assessment practices (185). This is what Jeanette and her colleagues

continue to do every semester when they return to the department's established grading criteria, interpret them, and attempt to work together to be as fair as is possible.

Even with the knowledge that what the department is doing with its grading practice is an attempt to make their grading equitable and reliable, Jeanette has found herself questioning the limitations placed on her authority to grade her own students. She tells herself to "trust the system" when she doubts the validity of the grades that her colleagues give her students, and says that she believes that the system largely works. Although at this time Jeanette has so far been able to justify the group's grades when they run counter to her own, this may not always be the case in the future. The potential exists here for Jeanette to run into ethical conflict with her colleagues and with the department's grading policy. Perhaps one day Jeanette will feel so strongly about a student's grade that she will be tempted to record a grade that is different than the one that the grading group has assigned. Perhaps one day she will feel so strongly that a student's work has been misgraded that she will question her colleagues' abilities or her department's policies. At this point, based on Jeanette's reflections, it seems unlikely that these scenarios may play out. As long as Jeanette continues to "trust the system" ("Questions"), play by the values of the department, and let her "own guilty conscience" guide her in abiding by the department's values ("A Few"), full-blown ethical conflict will most likely not arise.

Jeanette's Response to the Guided Critical Self-Reflection

When asked to respond to this process of guided critical self-reflection, Jeanette originally answered by revisiting her narrative regarding end-of-term grading. Specifically, she stated that answering the questions made her realize how much this situation regarding grading

has bothered her. However, upon reflection, Jeanette has strengthened her faith in the grading system—albeit with a decision to ask her colleagues to be more transparent in their grading practices:

> Our portfolio group meets weekly to talk about sample student papers, assign a grade, and offer suggestions. When we get one that everyone says is a D, I should ask them to talk more specifically about why. Would it actually be a D at the end of the semester? ("Questions")

By asking her colleagues to be more explicit about their grading practices, not only will Jeanette attempt to ameliorate her end-of-term grading concerns, but it will continue the assessment discussion that Belanoff calls for and will also help the grading group to be fairer and more reliable in their grading. Answering questions about grading practice weeks before the actual grading takes place allows time for continued discussion about the group's interpretation of the department's grading criteria. Jeanette seems to believe that this will allow the group to come to a better consensus about how to assess student writing than she feels her previous grading group had.

Jeanette has also, throughout her responses, made it clear that the reflection was helping her see certain things in her professional life more clearly. While she certainly understands that she is a person who holds faith, and she understands that she has not always been receptive to Christian students who do not see their faith as intellectually as she does, it was during the reflective response that she made the connection between these two aspects, her personal background, and her beliefs concerning the private nature of faith. She seems to be offended by students whose "whole sense of God is reduced to the lyrics of a praise service," a possible

insight into her own intellectual understanding of faith. While she lets her students write narratives about mission trips, she requires them to include consideration of a naysayer, someone who, for example, "complains that para-church organizations did more harm than good after the [earthquake] in Haiti or argues that mission trips enforce cultural stereotypes" ("A Few"). She makes this requirement in order to make her Christian students think a bit more intellectually about their faith. She further claims that instead of mission trip narratives, she would much rather see a faith-driven paper tackle important issues concerning the student's religion. During this time of self-reflection, Jeanette has begun to see how her own personal values concerning her faith are influencing her interactions with students who wish to write about faith-based topics.

Finally, after having thought about her reflection, Jeanette writes:

> Doing these questions made me call up some memories and connect them in a way I hadn't thought about before. Last semester and this semester one of the papers that I assigned to my students is to do an evaluation, and one of the options is to evaluate a scientific research study of their choice. I have to admit the people in my portfolio group never seem particularly excited about this option because "there's no way to personalize it." And, of course, the students who choose this option struggle with the language, the methodology, the review of literature—the whole genre. So why am I excited about assigning and reading these papers? As I looked back over my answer to the reflection questions, I decided it has to do with my dad being a chemist, the scientific journals, my love of the natural world, and the way science can help unravel things. Hopefully my students who love science

> will start to see how their questions will lead to answers—and how their writing skills will be used in their work. ("Another")

Jeanette shows the importance of critical self-reflection for the composition instructor in this answer. As the teacher, Jeanette has the authority to assign papers to her students, and they must write them in order to pass the class. Jeanette, an experienced teacher of composition, tries to offer her students assignments that will help them develop writing skills that they will need in their college career and beyond. But as an experienced teacher, Jeanette has read hundreds, if not thousands, of student papers, so she also tries to find assignments that will help the students hold an audience's attention—and Jeanette herself is that audience. Jeanette could easily have justified her choice to assign as an option a scientific research study as a format that teaches certain writing skills or the importance of audience, and it would seem likely that this is the justification that she has used within her portfolio grading group. However, upon reflection, Jeanette understands that a primary reason that she personally has chosen this assignment is because it is line with her own values, values that she has adopted based on her own personal background. This exercise has allowed Jeanette to make what was implicit explicit, and has added yet another justification for her actions. And this justification, that her actions are born out her own personal values, and that those values are not in conflict with the values of the others that hold a stake in her classroom, is valuable as it is rooted in Jeanette's own personal values. It is not a justification that she been coerced to accept. Therefore, Jeanette is able to embrace who she is and what she values and she can confidently bring those values into her professional life.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARK'S CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

Chapter Two included a discussion of what the scholarship of the field of composition studies offers us concerning ethics and teaching, with a focus on the concepts of authority and advocacy in the classroom and on teacher response to student writing. In Chapter One I contended that it is a composition teacher's ethical obligation to practice critical self-reflection, and in Chapter Three I argued that collecting teacher narrative responses was one way to illustrate the importance of meeting that obligation. After receiving composition instructors' responses to guided critical self-reflection, I realized that these instructors also deal with the same issues—authority, advocacy, and responding to student writing—of which the literature speaks. In Chapters Four I introduced Jeanette, a practicing composition instructors whose critical self-reflection helped her better understand how her personal ethical values have influenced her professional life. In this chapter, I focus on Mark[20], an established, experienced, tenured full professor. Mark's responses showed his experience and a solid understanding of what he personally values, yet he also came to understand a bit more clearly how certain aspects of his personal values have influenced his teaching.

This chapter will attempt to develop the use of the critically self-reflective moral heuristic that was presented in Chapter One by showing insights gained by a composition instructor as he answers the questions. In this way, I intend to show that critical self-reflection is an important

[20] "Mark" is a pseudonym.

tool for any instructor of composition, no matter if they are just starting out in their professional life or if they have many years of experience teaching the subject.

To collect the information from Mark, I corresponded with him via electronic mail in a series of back and forth exchanges. I sent him the moral heuristic and asked him to describe his teaching context. When I read his answers, I asked him follow-up questions, and then follow-up questions to his answers. In an attempt to maintain clarity and accurately document the exchange, I have titled the email responses that he sent to me. In chronological order, those emails have been titled as "Self-Reflection," "Re: Self-Reflection," and "Follow-up Questions," and the appropriate email will be referenced in the text.

Mark's Teaching Context

Mark is a tenured professor of writing at a four-year university in America's Heartland. He teaches courses across his department's curriculum, including but not limited to basic writing, first-year composition, business writing, and sports journalism. Mark has been teaching at his school for more than twenty years. He is the past chair of his department, serves the university in a variety of ways, such as by chairing the General Education Committee, and has published several professional articles and books, many of which concern assessment and placement of students in first-year composition courses ("Self-reflection").

Mark's department employs fifteen tenured or tenured-track professors, approximately twenty instructors, and between ten to twenty adjuncts, depending on the semester. Many writing courses are offered, including basic writing, first-year composition, writing in the disciplines, writing with style, fiction, web page writing, and others. The department offers a writing major

and minor for its undergraduate students, and currently has around two hundred students majoring in either professional or creative writing ("Self-reflection").

Mark claims that the college has an enrollment of almost twenty-five thousand undergraduate and graduate students. He describes the university as "relatively young, as state universities go—opening to its first class just over 50 years ago. It has a history as an experimental liberal-arts college, and it has made a successful transition to a mid-sized regional university" ("Re: Self-reflection"). Mark goes on to describe his college as having "a strong mission to educate undergraduates in a liberal-arts setting, even as its colleges of Business, Engineering, and Nursing thrive" ("Re: Self-reflection"). Along with the liberal arts mission, it also often finds itself competing for NCAA Division II national championships in several sports, including football. Therefore, there is also a sense of pride among the student body for their athletic programs ("Re: Self-reflection").

Mark describes the local community as being a "fairly typical Midwestern community—small and medium-sized cities, lots of rural communities, a generally conservative outlook on life—made a bit 'hipper' by its beautiful Lake Michigan beaches, a thriving craft-beer culture, and a lively arts community" ("Re: Self-reflection"). He believes that the people of the local community typically do not move out of the area; once they settle here their children and grandchildren typically stay here as well. The area's political conservatism is seen in the recent presidential elections, in which the Republican candidate received sixty-seven percent of the votes ("2012"). Although generally conservative, Mark believes that the large urban area where he lives is more liberal and diverse than the surrounding suburban and agricultural areas ("Re: Self-reflection").

Mark believes that the majority of the students, up to ninety percent, come from the state in which his college is located, and the other ten percent come from states that are nearby. He also claims that his college "attracts solid students. In fact, we compete for students most directly with [a nearby Tier One Research university], and in terms of 'freshman profile,' we are third in the state among public schools" ("Re: Self-reflection"). The "freshman profile" Mark speaks of concerns the incoming students' high school grade point average. The two state universities that have higher freshman profiles are a school that specializes in science and engineering and a very large Tier One Research university. As far as who the students are, Mark claims that they "are mostly white, middle-class, solid students, pleasant, and eager to please" ("Re: Self-reflection"). He believes that the students are bright, eager to learn, and willing to work.

Mark's Critical Self-Reflection

Before we look at Mark's responses to the guided critical self-reflection, it needs to be said that readers may disagree with Mark's viewpoints or the conclusions that he has drawn about his background and values and their influence on his professional life. However, it is not the purpose of this chapter to claim that Mark's values are the values that all first-year composition instructors should hold; the point is to illustrate the belief that critical self-reflection is useful.

Looking Inward

In Chapter One, I argued that in order to understand the source of our ethical values we need to start by examining ourselves by asking the question, "who am I?" For the composition instructor, I recommend approaching this question from three different angles: 1. his or her

personal background, 2. the beliefs concerning religion that he or she holds, and 3. the professional identity of the composition instructor. Applying this approach to answering the question "who am I?" helped Mark to reflect on what he personally values as ethical and the origin of those values.

1. What is my background and how has this shaped who I am, and what is my current situation?

Mark writes about his family background:

> I grew up in an upper middle-class suburban family. Both of my parents went to college (my father was a first-generation college student, but my mother's parents had both attended college). My father was an upwardly mobile manager with a large corporation, and we moved about every two or three years as he took new positions in the company. My mother was a stay-at-home mom. ("Self-reflection")

Now in his mid-fifties, Mark's family structure would have been seen as fairly typical when he was growing up. He lived with both parents, his mother did not work outside of the home, and although his father's job kept the family from putting down roots in any community, as an "upwardly mobile manager with a large corporation" he presumably brought home a large enough salary to continue and reinforce that nuclear family lifestyle.

An educated couple, Mark's parents believed in education and that it was a virtue to apply intelligence to one's life. Mark states, "[m]y father in particular valued the intellect, and he always encouraged me to read and debate ideas, etc. I was able to attend the college of my choice, and I ended up going to a very selective private university" ("Self-reflection"). Mark applied himself intellectually at home through reading and by exploring ideas. He applied himself

intellectually at school and was accepted into the university of his choice. The value that his parents placed on intellect have influenced Mark to this day—he is still an avid reader, and his experience at college eventually brought him to earn a doctorate and a teaching position. He continues to apply intelligence to his work, and as a result he has an active publication history and has been chosen in the past as the chair of his department and as the university's General Education Committee chair.

Not only was Mark encouraged to think on his own, he was also allowed to apply his intellect to the religious faith that his parents chose to adhere to:

> We attended mainstream protestant churches—United Methodist—throughout my childhood. In my teens I rebelled against religion, and I think because I was fairly thoughtful about it, my parents allowed me to stop attending church when I was about 15. For several years I adopted an adamant libertarian-atheist position. In college I became more liberal politically, but remained uninterested in church through my twenties—although I did enjoy reading theology and religious history. ("Self-reflection")

Mark's parents allowed him to reject religion at the age of fifteen, an idea that would be unthinkable in many, if not most, middle-class American religious households. Mark's parents' value that Mark should apply intelligence had apparently won over any values that they had about maintaining the religious stability of the family.

2. If I subscribe (or choose not to subscribe) to religious beliefs, how does this influence who I am?

The second question I asked Mark to reflect upon concerns his faith-based beliefs, or his beliefs about faith. Certainly, personal religious beliefs can greatly influence the decision-making process that drives our ethical behavior (Boylan 143)—for example, many people in the United States today use their religious beliefs as a basis to decide which presidential candidate they should cast their vote for. Those who hold faith-based beliefs may believe that their actions—both ethical and unethical—can influence their relationship with their creator. A composition instructor who holds faith-based beliefs cannot ignore the influence those beliefs exert on himself or herself and how they affect teaching behavior. Doing so ignores the fact that religious beliefs often reveal information about who we are instead of simply how we act.

Mark has already shared some of his personal spiritual journey in the answer to the first question about his personal background. Now, he takes the opportunity to flesh out the rest of his story:

> After settling in [my current home] and having children in my early thirties, my wife and I joined an independent liberal congregation, and when I was about 40 I was a very active part of a small group of people who started a Unitarian Universalist church in town. I continue to attend that church today. It is a non-creedal congregation—i.e., members are not required or even expected to adhere to any particular religious beliefs, other than to agree to support one another in our personal spiritual journeys. ("Self-reflection")

After a period of about twenty-five years as an "adamant libertarian-atheist, Mark has returned to faith-based beliefs. With his current religious beliefs, unlike Jeanette's of the last chapter, Mark does not follow any specific doctrine or creed. However, the fact that he was a "very active part of a small group of people" that founded a new church is evidence that his religious beliefs are no less important to him than Jeanette's are to her.

Even though Mark does not adhere to any specific doctrinal beliefs, he does feel that his religious beliefs do make a difference in his life:

> My religious beliefs are very important to me. I consider myself a non-Christian who nonetheless values the teachings of Jesus (and other religious figures), and I use the term "God" to embody the general and mysterious tendency toward goodness that I perceive in the universe. I like religious language, and I try to live in a way consistent with my understanding of a religious life. For me, this includes supporting social-justice causes, working to build a healthy local community, acting to conserve local and global resources, and eating a largely whole-foods diet of almost exclusively plant-based foods. ("Self-reflection")

Mark shares that his beliefs influence his life in a number of ways, from the causes he supports to the food that he eats. His religious beliefs do more than guide him on a strictly spiritual journey—his beliefs call him to take action.

When answering this question about his religious beliefs, Mark seems to stray outside of the question and reflects on his reflection—a possible sign that he has begun to apply his answers and his understanding of his own values to other areas of his life. He writes:

> I consider myself fortunate to work as a university professor, which gives me considerable freedom to support intellectual and academic issues of importance to me. I see my work in the General Education program, in the composition program, and in my own classes as generally supportive of and consistent with my religious and political goals: universal education, high levels of critical thinking, personal growth and development for all, and strong local, national, and international communities. ("Self-reflection")

In this excerpt, Mark has shown that his religious beliefs incorporate many of the same values that he holds both politically and professionally, and claims that all of these values are interconnected. It is this interconnectedness of values that allows him to believe, on three different levels, that his goals for education—critical thinking, personal growth, and community—are ethical values for him to hold.

3. Who am I, as a professional?

This third question of the critical self-reflective moral heuristic is designed to foster thought about the professional values that the instructor holds. The values that he or she adheres to as a professional composition instructor can certainly come into conflict with what others believe should be his or her values. For example, Mark has already revealed that he holds "high levels of critical thinking" as a goal or value. A student in his first-year composition class who wants to do the least amount of work possible in order to pass the course may find themselves in conflict with Mark as he seeks to have the student apply intelligence in his or her writing projects, and that student may not understand why Mark values critical thinking in his classroom.

Once again, Mark chose to return to his answer concerning his religious beliefs in order to reflect upon whom he sees himself to be as a professional:

> As I've indicated, I feel a strong sense of consistency between my spiritual life and my professional life. As a teacher, my job is to help students become more thoughtful, articulate, and self-aware, and in so doing to help them create options for themselves in their own personal and professional lives. In my administrative work, I have worked to create structures and policies that support these same goals. Without ever needing to mention my church or my religion, I am in fact doing the work of the church when I do my job. My church and my denomination value open-ended inquiry, the free exchange of ideas, and personal development—and these are also, of course, academic goals. ("Self-reflection")

Mark understands that religious beliefs influence his professional life. One might even argue, as he seems to, that his religious beliefs and his professional beliefs are the same. As he works in his religious life to apply intellect to his understanding of his spiritual values, he also works to apply that same level of intellect and infuse the values he has chosen in his spiritual life to his professional life. There is a relationship shown here between the religious beliefs that Jeanette shared in the last chapter and Mark's religious beliefs—as professionals, neither Jeanette nor Mark see any reason to include their religious beliefs overtly in their jobs. They both understand that those values are incorporated in their professional lives, but they do not necessarily believe that they need to share with their students or colleagues the source of those values.

In his professional relationships with his students, Mark sees the following as values worth pursuing:

> In my teaching, I try not to judge students on the content of their thought, but rather on the effectiveness of their articulation of their thought. I believe that bad or immoral ideas, well-articulated and thoroughly supported, open themselves up for criticism from self and others—and indeed often fall apart in the process of being articulated. I don't need to "correct" anybody's moral or political thinking; I just need to keep asking questions, keep asking for clarification. My job is to facilitate the intellectual development of my students—not to direct it or to shape it. I feel quite content with this role. ("Self-reflection")

Again, Mark has shown that he values the application of intellect and wishes his student to do this in his classroom. He does not seem to feel the need to criticize his students when they do not appear to be applying intelligence in their papers, he instead believes that he will help them apply that intelligence by questioning their thoughts until the students who are advocating "bad or immoral ideas" see the flaws in their argument.

Looking Outward

By looking inward and reflecting on the source of his values Mark has a basis for understanding the metaethics that makes up his ethical self. Next, he looks outward and reflects on what he perceives to be the ethical values held by those with whom he shares the context of his classes. By reflecting upon the values of the others involved in his teaching life and by understanding the effect that his ethical values has on his professional life and how his values could affect others, Mark fulfills his ethical obligation to those others.

1. What does my local community value?

As part of Mark's critical self-reflective process, he must examine his community and what it values. What constitutes ethical behavior, according to postmodernism, is defined by the community, be that community as large as a nation or as small as a college campus. Whether or not Mark agrees with the community's values, he must still be aware of them since his actions may be judged according to them. Understanding these values will also help Mark to discern where future ethical conflict may lie between him and his community.

Mark sees a possible contradiction in the local community, a contradiction of conflicting political and social values that are simultaneously held:

> Generally speaking, my local community is both progressive and conservative. It is progressive in that it offers a rich diversity of breweries, restaurants, and cultural events, including the nationally-recognized [art festivals]. It is conservative in that it maintains a family-business ethic of hard work and individualism, favoring private charity, for example, over public agencies. The fundamental personality . . . is, I think, a traditional American one, one that I would call "liberal" in the classic sense, meaning rooted in the founding documents of the United States—and I'm very comfortable with that. ("Self-reflection")

Although Mark sees progressive, or liberal, values that are held by the community, he also sees conservative values as well. The progressive values that he has listed are not necessarily values that conservatives would object to—many of those with socially conservative views enjoy beer and art festivals. Likewise, the conservative values that he has included in this reflective answer

are not necessarily values that a politically liberal person would find objectionable; for example, he lists an "ethic of hard work and individualism" as a conservative value ("Self-reflection"). The values on both sides of the political and social spectrum that he includes in the answer do not seem to indicate an adherence in the local community to the extreme forms of both views. Rather, his answers could indicate that his local community is politically and socially somewhere in the middle—neither fully on the right nor on the left.

Mark has identified the students at his school as being primarily from the state in which his university is placed. As such, the students can be viewed as members of the local community. Mark reflects on the difference of values that he sometimes sees between the local community and himself:

> When my personal ethical and political values differ from my students, I often feel that they are "surface-level" differences. Even hard-core Republicans generally believe in a positive role for government, and a reason for certain levels of taxation and regulation, and so on. Our disagreements are, then, mainly disagreements about scale and degree, not central purposes. ("Self-reflection")

This passage reinforces what Mark sees as the values of his community in the previous excerpt in that the political differences are "surface level." Conservatism and progressivism can exist together since there is a common ground that they share, such as a belief that government can be positive and that some "taxation and regulation" is necessary for society to function. His phrase "even hard-core Republicans generally believe in a positive role of government" reveals that he is politically liberal, as the phrase is set up to show opposition between his beliefs and those of the "hard-core Republicans."

However, when writing about the political differences that he sees between the conservative elements of his local community, Mark is well aware that not everyone will share his beliefs that these differences are only "surface level." Mark writes:

> Of course, we are all aware of a negative trend in our society to exaggerate rather than to minimize differences between the political extremes of right and left, so many students (like many other current US citizens) mistakenly (in my view) demonize those with whom they disagree—over politics, in particular. I don't like this trend, but I don't take it personally. It's just what people learn from the media and so on. It's not an orientation that stands up to much scrutiny. ("Self-reflection")

In the end, even when differences seem to be too great to overcome, Mark believes that the prevailing culture of negativity of our society which pits liberals and conservatives against each other will fall apart when the disagreements are approached with intelligence.

2. What do my students value?

Mark begins his reflection on this question by trying to understand what would make the students happy:

> Like most other people, [my] students are most interested in "being happy." The tough part is defining what that means. Some reduce it to making a lot of money, while others define it as finding a stable job. Some think of it in terms of living in a particular place . . . and having children, etc. Very few define it in terms of spiritual or intellectual growth, and I certainly don't blame them for that. ("Self-reflection")

Here, Mark expresses his belief that his students are not as interested in fostering their "spiritual or intellectual growth" as they are interested in money or a career. Mark believes that it is "reasonable for students to aim toward a good job, with a solid income" ("Self-reflection"). However, he wants his students to move beyond this thinking. He believes that it is the job of college professors to help their students

> deepen their expectations to include personal growth and freedom. I always say that I, too, want my students to get good jobs, but I also want them to be *good people* in those jobs. And good people are open-minded, generous, articulate, and thoughtful—not self-absorbed, ignorant, and small-minded. ("Self-reflection")

Mark views it as his professional responsibility to advocate ethical behavior in his students. He wishes to use the time that he has to help his students develop their writing skills ("Follow-up Questions") while at the same preparing them to become "open-minded, generous, articulate, and thoughtful" participants of a democratic society.

In the end, though, Mark does not believe it is vitally important to meet the students' values about the purpose of a college education when those values run counter to his own:

> I don't know whether my students are in college of their own accord or because of real or perceived pressure from others—parents or the culture at large. I don't much care, I guess. I try to treat the students *as if* they are there for the right reasons—and if I do that, I think they will eventually act like they are there for the right reasons, which is the same as actually being there for the right reasons . . . . By choosing to attend a professionally-oriented liberal-arts university, the

> students are more or less asking to be treated in a certain way—so that's what I focus on. ("Self-reflection")

Mark has decided to treat his students as if their values concerning education are the same as his own. He does this as he believes that what he perceives to be the "right reasons" are, in fact, actually the right reasons to seek a higher education. These "right reasons" for students to seek an education, according to Mark, are to learn how to become "open-minded, generous, articulate, and thoughtful" people. In this passage, Mark is revealing that he takes a position of advocacy—not a position toward any specific political end, but a position that he hopes will lead students toward being "good people" who practice critical thinking.

3. *What values do my department, school, and the scholarly literature in my field advocate?*

Generally, Mark is satisfied with what he sees as the values of the school:

> I like the overall ethic of my university and my department. The university was founded as an experimental college, and I think an experimental and entrepreneurial spirit still pervades the institution, even as it has matured and become, perhaps inevitably, more corporate and a bit more top-down structurally. Generally speaking, I trust my administrators to have the same basic values I have, when it comes to the overarching goals of higher education. ("Self-reflection")

Mark reveals a confidence in his college administration, and believes that the college and department are in line with his personal values regarding student education. Mark also feels confident that his values and those of his department are compatible. He states, "[my] department provides plenty of opportunities for my own professional growth. I've enjoyed a tremendous

amount of freedom to experiment and innovate. And the basic pedagogical approach of our department very much reflects my own" ("Self-reflection").

Of course, as Mark readily admits, his values and those of the department mesh together quite readily, "in large part because I played a major role in establishing the department and its personality" ("Self-reflection"). In the early 2000's, Mark's university was experiencing explosive growth, a shift in administration, and a change from being an "experimental university" to a university that was trying to compete with Research Tier One universities for students. As the chair at this time, Mark was trying to steer the English department to redefine itself to meet these new challenges. As a result, Mark was instrumental in having his department offer a writing major and minor, co-wrote the grading criteria for their first-year composition course, and almost single-handedly created a new type of lecturer position that has been adopted not only by his department but also by the university as a whole. Today, even though he has not held the chair position for a decade, succeeding chairs have sought out his opinion on departmental policies, showing that his influence on the department's values is ongoing ("Follow-up Questions").

A Potential Conflict Concerning Advocacy

Mark has made it clear that he wishes to help his students become "good people." By this, he means that he wants them to be "open-minded, generous, articulate, and thoughtful—not self-absorbed, ignorant, and small-minded" ("Self-reflection"). In this, Mark is advocating a position that his students should be citizens who think critically and act ethically. It is this advocacy that

could potentially lead to conflict between Mark and his students and between Mark and his colleagues.

Liberal arts universities tend to attempt to instill in their students a desire to be and a responsibility to become engaged citizens. Mark's college is no exception; on its website, its mission statement claims that it "educates students to shape their lives, their professions and their societies." The purpose of a college education, in this view, is not solely for the benefit of the individual, but for the benefits and improvements that the individual can bring to society. Michael Boylan and James Donahue state that, "if a university is to be true to its mission to develop in students the skills necessary to construct a more humane world for the future, it must necessarily allow and encourage students to explore ethical issues" (14). In order to accomplish this, Boylan and Donahue advocate the inclusion of ethics into all disciplines and courses (14). While Mark does not actively teach ethics in his course, his goal to help his students become good people implies that he helps them as they explore ethical issues in their writing. The way that Mark attempts to do this is by questioning his students, and by helping his students question—to help them think critically about the positions that they take in their papers, to show that what is right stands up to scrutiny, and what is wrong does not ("Self-reflection").

As an advocate for critical thinking and shaping ethical and civic behavior in his students, Mark may be walking a fine line between teaching writing and teaching ethical behavior. Conflict might occur between Mark and his students if his students come to believe that Mark cares more for molding them to become ethical people than he does about helping them develop their writing skills. His students might possibly even feel that they are being coerced to adopt the same ethical values that Mark holds. If this situation were to occur, Mark might also find himself

in conflict with both his colleagues and his university which also expects that Mark's students will gain the knowledge that the course is designed to impart.

This possibility is not without precedent in the field. Many scholars have questioned whether or not there should be more involved in a first-year composition course than just writing. One seemingly favorite move for departments and instructors is to attempt to teach critical thinking skills in the writing classroom, and this is a move that Mark seems comfortable with. Irvin Peckham is concerned that this move to teach critical thinking—a term he shows is poorly defined—"seems to blur our focus on problems with style, grammar, and conventions, problems that might be exacerbated by our attempts to challenge their [the students'] home values" (142). According to Peckham, teaching critical thinking to first-year composition students may get in the way of what should be the real goal of the class—writing skills—and has the potential to offend students when their values are being challenged. Even Peckham claims that he believes it is part of his job as an educator to get students ready to be "critical citizens in a participatory democracy" (160), but he further claims that his real job, and all he ever wanted to do, was teach his students writing skills (160). In this, Mark is in agreement with Peckham. Mark writes:

> my primary goal is definitely to teach writing. I believe good writing requires good thinking, and while it's possible for a good writer to have lousy and even immoral ideas, the discipline of developing and structuring those ideas often helps to "moralize" them. And over time, that kind of rigor tends, I believe, to put people on a solid moral track. So, in other words, I am content to focus on teaching writing, with the faith that morality of some kind will follow. ("Follow-up Questions")

In order to write well, students must think. And when they think, Mark believes, they will begin to question their ethical values. This questioning of the ideas and ethical positions in their writing reflects one of Mark's core values—that intelligence needs to be applied to one's life. Mark further believes that this application of intelligence will lead an individual to make sound ethical decisions. If this is the approach that he truly takes, and simply asks his students to question rather than coercing them to challenge their values, then Mark will probably not find himself in conflict.

Mark's Response to the Guided Critical Self-reflection

In the end, Mark's critical self-reflection was an important inclusion in this dissertation, as his position and professional experience are greater than Jeanette's, and much greater than Melanie's, who will be introduced in the next chapter. As such, his critical self-reflection shows that even instructors with Mark's position and experience can benefit from critically reflecting on their personal and professional values, and how those values can mesh or clash with the others who hold a stake in their classroom practice.

Unfortunately for this exercise, Mark did not seem to uncover values that he had did not already explicitly know. His reflection showed that his religious beliefs had a great influence on his personal and professional life, yet his value that he apply his intellect to his beliefs had already pushed him to understand how those religious beliefs have impacted his professional life. I believe that a large part of the fact that Mark already was explicitly aware of his values is due to his value, passed down to him from his parents, that he apply intelligent questioning to his life. Mark's whole life appears to be filled with critically reflective practice.

However, even though the exercise did not reveal new insight into his personal values, Mark did find some worth in the exercise. He states, “I did think the exercise was helpful—less in terms of new insight, I suppose, than as a reminder of why I enjoy my job and university, as it allows me the freedom to live out my values as part of my daily life” (“Follow-up Questions”). As a reminder of why Mark does what he does, as a reminder of how his chosen profession allows Mark to put his values into practice in his profession, Mark found worth in the exercise.

CHAPTER SIX

MELANIE'S CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

In this chapter, I will focus on an instructor, Melanie[21], who experienced an ethical conflict between a student and herself that escalated to become a conflict between Melanie and a few of her colleagues. Melanie's narrative was chosen to be included in this chapter because her responses did show that values concerning teacher authority, promoting advocacy, and responding to student writing were all evident. This chapter will attempt to discover exactly where the ethical conflict developed, and it will offer insight into how Melanie's critical self-reflection can be used to help her avoid conflicts in the future. By offering Melanie's story, I will show that critical self-reflection is an essential part of all composition instructors' ethical obligation to his or her teaching.

To collect the information from Melanie, I first asked her via electronic mail to describe a professional ethical dilemma in which she had found herself. After reading about her dilemma, I asked her to answer the questions of the critically self-reflective moral heuristic. When I read her answers, I asked her follow-up questions, and then follow-up questions to her answers. In an attempt to maintain clarity and accurately document the exchange, I have titled the email responses that she sent to me that I used in this chapter. In chronological order, those emails have been titled as "Response," "Re: Second Draft," "Heuristic," "Re: Heuristic," "A Few Quick Questions," and "Re: A Few Quick Questions." The appropriate email will be referenced in the text.

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[21] "Melanie" is a pseudonym.

Melanie's Narrative

In this narrative account of ethical conflict, readers may disagree with the actions of the teacher or the conclusions that have been drawn. Readers with greater experience in teaching than Melanie possesses or with greater expertise in their respective areas of teaching might be surprised or even offended by the situation that this instructor has found herself in or the actions she has taken. However, the point of this chapter is not to show that her actions were the best possible or that the actions were ethical. Rather, the point of this chapter is to show that critical self-reflection can lead to understanding of the source of the ethical conflict and can show where ethical conflict might once again occur. Critical self-reflection should also lead to an understanding of the role that the respondent played in creating the conflict. Readers need to keep in mind that, according to post-modern ethics, actions are ethical as determined by the situation in which they occur. It is quite possible that given the local context of the conflict, the actions taken on the part of the instructor were the most appropriate, ethical actions to take.

Also, we must keep in mind that as a narrative this example represents what Melanie understood to be happening. It is possible that her understanding is incorrect—but this is not a devastating possibility. We are not necessarily looking for consistent truth, but for the truth as it exists for the person who is sharing his or her narrative.

Melanie's Context

Melanie is a composition instructor at a four-year institution on the East Coast. After having taught in high school for a number of years, she decided in her late forties to pursue graduate degrees and teach at the college level. Currently in her late fifties, she has earned her

Ph.D. in English, with a specialization in English composition, within the last five years. She teaches Technical Writing and Advanced Composition at the institution where she earned her Master's degree in English. She taught in the English department at this school as a teaching assistant for two years while she was pursuing her Master's degree. After she completed her MA, she was hired to teach as a lecturer, which she has done for the last six years (Melanie, "A Few"). She is a full-time instructor, but she is not tenure-track. As a result of her employment condition, she describes herself as poor. She had expected to earn a higher salary upon completion of her Ph.D. study, but due to a budget freeze she is still earning less than other lecturers in her department who only hold Master's degrees ("Response").

Melanie reports that the university in which she teaches has approximately seven thousand undergraduate students, and draws its student population largely from the surrounding area. The school offers forty undergraduate programs, and more than a dozen graduate programs (Melanie, "A Few"). Melanie says that when asked, the majority of her students have told her that they are attending college in order to get a decent job upon graduation. She claims that she does not see much racial diversity on campus, as most of the students are white. She believes that there is also some *de facto* segregation in the area, as African American students typically attend a nearby college rather than the college where she teaches ("Response").

Melanie teaches in an English department which consists of approximately twenty tenured or tenure-track professors. She is one of seven lecturers. The department offers both bachelors and masters degrees in several different specialties, such as literature, creative writing, and writing and rhetoric. The bulk of the courses, more than fifty percent, that the department offers undergraduate and graduate students concern literature, only about ten percent of the

courses concern writing or composition studies. The remainder of the courses covers topics such as grammar instruction, English as a Second Language, and film studies (Melanie, "A Few").

Melanie reports that English majors at her institution choose one of five tracks: Literature, Rhetoric and Composition, Film, Creative Writing, or Linguistics. Regardless of their track, all English majors must take Advanced Composition. Secondary Education majors who choose English as their focus also take the course. Advanced Composition instructors at this institution teach the course in a variety of ways, but Melanie believes that most teach it as if it is an extension of their first-year composition course (FYC). However, when Melanie teaches the class, she teaches it quite differently than she teaches FYC. Rather than asking for numerous shorter papers as she would in her FYC courses, she requires her students to write one twenty-page paper by the end of the class ("Response").

The area around the college consists of a small city with a population of around thirty thousand people and agricultural land. The university, a community college, a hospital, and an industrial chicken farm/meat packing plant are the main employers. Melanie reports that although the university and hospital offer white collar employment opportunities, the area is largely blue collar ("Response"). In the last presidential election, the county voted for the Republican candidate by a slim margin ("2012"). More than half of the local population is white, and a third is African American. Melanie feels that the area in which the school is located is "still fighting the Civil War," and is struggling with racism. There is also gang-related activity, as the area became a thoroughfare for drug trafficking from the South to the cities of the North ("Response").

Melanie's Ethical Conflict

Melanie responded to my request for an account of ethical conflict that she had faced with an experience that puts a human face on what an instructor can be forced to deal with in their professional lives. Specifically, her story regards relationships between a composition instructor and a student, and also between her and her colleagues. Issues of authority, responding to student writing, and conflict of ethical values concerning the purpose of education are especially evident in her story.

One semester, a student Melanie names Susan, a psychology and English major, attended her class. Because of her interests, Susan decided to choose as her topic for the course's twenty-page paper assignment an argument that psychology should be located within the Sciences at this institution, rather than within the Humanities. While reading Susan's paper, Melanie found it to have a "good argument, and her research was fine, as was her syntax, but her grammar and mechanics were atrocious" ("Response"). Melanie says that Susan's grammar and mechanics were so poor that she was often unable to understand clearly the points that Susan was trying to make in the paper. Melanie's response to Susan on both her first and second drafts was that the grammar and mechanics needed to be cleaned up or Susan would not pass the course. Melanie explained to Susan that academic and professional audiences expect correct usage of grammar rules and punctuation, and that such errors can impede clear communication. Susan responded by saying that another English professor had also told her that her writing had many errors and that she was always at the university's writing center in order to work on these issues.

As the semester went on, Susan was not showing much improvement in the mechanical aspects of her writing. Melanie writes:

> Susan sent me a short email—asking to meet with me, and her email was fraught with error—at least two or three on each line. She came to see me in my office, and I showed her the email and asked if she could identify the errors. She could not, so I asked her if she had problems writing in the past. She said yes, but in high school, because she was in AP courses, they didn't penalize her for grammar and mechanics. Only her **English** professors in college cared about her grammar and mechanics! She said her other professors didn't care. I asked her if she had ever been tested for a learning issue like dyslexia. She said no but that there had been discussion and then nothing came of it. I called our disability department to try to get her tested, but they said she would have to take care of that herself. ("Response")

The necessary conversation between a professor and a student who might have a learning disability is one of the tasks with which composition instructors are faced. Perhaps Melanie overstepped her authority by contacting the disability department on behalf of the student, but it appears that she did so with the intention of helping Susan, a student she describes as "smart" ("Re: A Few"). In any case, Susan never reported to Melanie that she had tried to determine if there was a learning disability that was affecting her skills as a writer.

After the mid-point of the semester, as Melanie saw that Susan's errors were not being addressed, Melanie attempted to discover if the writing center was working with Susan to help clear up the difficulties she was having. Although Susan had told Melanie that she was "always"

at the writing center, the writing center director had documentation to show that she had been there only twice that semester. Melanie was now a little irritated that a student who had told her that she was working very hard to correct the issues was not, in fact, working as hard as she claimed to be. Melanie again told Susan that she could not pass the course unless she cleaned up her writing, and offered to meet with her outside of class to help Susan understand the errors and how to correct them. Susan informed Melanie that it was okay to pass her, even with the errors in her paper, as "she was planning to be a psychologist with the CIA or FBI, and she would 'never need to write in her job'" ("Response"). Once again, Melanie told Susan that she could not pass her if her writing was so fraught with error. This time, though, Melanie recalls that she told her that she could not *ethically* pass Susan if her work was not cleaned up.

Susan apparently did get to work—but not on her papers. Melanie writes:

> Shortly thereafter, a psychology professor and the writing center director separately went to my department chair to complain about me being too hard on Susan. Apparently Susan complained so bitterly about me that these people felt they had to step in. My chair called me into her office and told me this, so I showed her Susan's writing, which my chair agreed was very poor . . . the next day the writing center director asked if we could meet, so my chair must have called her. We did, and she told me that I took Susan's email, an email in which Susan was "reaching out for help and used it against her." (??!!) Then she told me that I shouldn't have said I couldn't morally pass Susan. Frankly, I thought I used the word ethical, but they aren't that different. Anyway, the writing center director is tenure track, and I'm not. She never would have done this to a tenure

> track faculty member . . . I never knew which Psychology professor complained. ("Response")

At this point, the ethical conflict between a student and an instructor escalated into a conflict between an instructor and her department and between an instructor and her colleagues. As a result of the writing center director's criticism, Melanie reports that she lost respect for her and has decided to work with her no longer. Melanie believed that she was acting in an ethical manner—she was trying to help Susan improve her writing skills and was acting with the authority that she believed she held as an instructor. However, because of Melanie's position as non-tenure track instructor, this conflict began to become one which Melanie felt she could not win. Between the influential, tenured position of the writing center director and the authority of the department chair, Melanie began to fear that her employment contract might be canceled. She says that she feared for her job, for her career, and for the financial difficulties that would occur if this situation was pushed too far ("Response").

There is some good that came from this conflict between Melanie and Susan. Susan finally did take it to heart that she might not pass the course, and she did go to the writing center and specifically asked for—and received—help with her grammar and mechanics. Melanie believes that while Susan was at the writing center the tutors explained the errors and helped her correct them. But Melanie reports that after she had received the help and

> before handing in her paper she added a few paragraphs which were fraught with error. She hadn't learned anything, and her writing going forward was certainly not going to be college level or even high school level writing. So my dilemma

> was whether or not to pass her. Students must pass Advanced Composition with a C, and I felt Susan deserved a D. ("Response")

Melanie recalls that the new paragraphs exhibited the same errors as the original draft had prior to being edited, specifically errors concerning subject/verb agreement and possessives, but these were not the only mechanical issues that were in her final draft. Since the new paragraphs repeated errors that Melanie believed Susan should now know how to address, Melanie believed that Susan had not learned what errors she was actually making nor how to correct them ("Re: A Few"). Ultimately, afraid of the consequences that could ensue if she did fail Susan, Melanie did pass Susan with a C. The following semester, Susan went to the chair of the English department to complain again about Melanie saying that she could not "morally" pass Susan if the errors were not cleaned up and to complain about the C since she felt she deserved a higher grade. In retrospect, Melanie feels that she had betrayed her own ethical values by passing a student whose work was not up to her expectations, and Melanie is angry that the student did not recognize that a gift had been given to her ("Response;" "Re: A Few").

Although the ethical dilemma, whether or not to pass Susan, has been resolved, the underlying clash of ethical values has not. Instead of harmony amongst colleagues, there is suspicion, fear, and distrust. Melanie suspects that the writing center director and English department chair will not side with her professional decisions, she fears for her livelihood because of these suspicions, and she does not trust these colleagues to respect her and her teaching. Furthermore, there is a clash of values that still exists between Susan and Melanie. Since Susan specifically, at least twice, complained about the fact that Melanie had said that she could not "morally" pass her (although Melanie specifically recalled using the word "ethically"),

it would seem that Melanie has a different understanding than Susan does regarding the term. It is as if Susan believes that Melanie is claiming that she is immoral, when Melanie is referring to her obligations to the department, university, and profession of teaching composition.

Melanie does not believe that her action, passing Susan, was ethical. She believes that her action was not the right decision, as she states, "my name is on her passing grade, and she didn't deserve it. She can't write—at least not the grammar and mechanics" ("Response"). Melanie's assertion that Susan "can't write" should be taken in context—although the accusation seems quite harsh, and although composition instructors should know that good writing is characterized by more than adherence to grammar, style, and punctuation rules, what Melanie is stating is that Susan's exhibited writing skills were below the passing requirements for her Advanced Composition class. Although the conflict happened over a year ago, Melanie's decision still bothers her, and she continues to feel that she had been coerced by outside pressures that undermined her ethical values and her authority. She especially felt bullied by her colleague, the writing center director, who she felt treated her as if Melanie needed instruction in how to teach composition. Melanie went to the writing center to talk to a colleague, an equal, but felt that she was instead treated with disrespect. Melanie believes that it is her position as a lecturer that led the writing center director to treat her this way, and confidently claims, "She [the writing center director] never would have done this to a tenure track faculty member" ("Response"). While we cannot know with certainty that the writing center director would not have acted in this manner toward a tenure-track professor, Melanie herself is certain that she would not. Melanie felt that she was being treated "as a second class citizen (probably because I'm contractual)," or because

she is non-tenure track ("Re: A Few"). For this reason, Melanie now tries to avoid the writing center director whenever possible.

Melanie's Critical Self-Reflection

The moral heuristic as offered in this dissertation is a tool to help composition instructors fulfill their ethical obligation to practice critical self-reflection. It is not the only possible tool which will fulfill this obligation. I also admit that there are many questions that might be added to the moral heuristic, but the heuristic as it stands has been developed with the questions that have been offered by the separate fields of ethics, education, and composition studies[22]. This section will develop the use of the moral heuristic by showing responses given and insights gained by a composition instructor as she has answered the self-reflective questions. In this way, I intend to show that critical self-reflection is an important tool for any instructor of composition, no matter if they are just starting out in their professional life or if they have many years of experience teaching the subject.

Before the critical self-reflections are discussed, it is important to be reminded that the moral heuristic that was developed in Chapter One is intended only as a guide for critical self-reflection. It is not necessarily the only way to practice critical self-reflection, and some composition instructors may find less value in this approach than others. Among the possible outcomes of using this guide are making explicit the knowledge of an ethical value that has been implicitly held, discovering the source of a known value, and being reminded of held values and reflecting upon those values. All of these outcomes are useful, and regardless of the outcome,

[22] See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of the source of these questions.

when we partake in critical self-reflection we work toward completing our ethical obligation to our profession by applying this practice to our teaching lives.

In order to show that the Melanie's conflict was caused by clashing ethical values and to understand better the origin of the conflict, I asked Melanie if she would answer the questions of the critical self-reflective moral heuristic. As she worked through the heuristic, she wrote her answers electronically and sent them to me via email. Her responses read like diary entries, with much personal introspection. This personal writing approach to the questions might indicate that Melanie was writing for herself more so than an audience. This could mean that Melanie intended to complete the heuristic not as a favor to a colleague, but in an attempt truly to understand what she holds as ethical and how her values could cause conflict with others. This section reports what she disclosed in her critical self-reflection, giving insight into what Melanie holds as ethical values in her personal and professional lives.

Looking Inward

To understand the source of our ethical values, we need to start by examining ourselves by asking the question, "who am I?" For the composition instructor, I recommend approaching this question from three different angles: 1. his or her personal background, 2. the beliefs concerning religion that he or she holds, and 3. the professional identity of the composition instructor. Applying this approach to answering the question "who am I?" helped Melanie to determine what she personally values as ethical and the origin of those values, which allows her and us to understand why she decided on the actions she took.

1. What is my background and how has this shaped who I am, and what is my current situation?

When answering this question, Melanie revealed that she is the youngest child of a middle class family from the Boston area, born to first-generation American Catholic parents. Her father was a mechanical engineer who travelled a lot for his work; he was also a World War II veteran. Her mother, a homemaker, was "mean, and she wasn't a good mother" ("Heuristic"). Melanie goes on to say that her mother "chose to be mean to my father, to my brother, and to me. She could, however, control it because she wasn't mean to her friends" ("Re: Heuristic"). As a result of her mother's unpleasantness, although her parents are still alive, Melanie has dissolved her relationship with them. Melanie describes her familial relationships:

> My father was an affable man, but my mother was a . . . I'm having trouble with wording here . . . a bitch. That'll work. My mother was a cold, critical, damaged person. She was mean, and my father was too weak to stand up to her. He would rather just placate her and keep the peace. She destroyed him, my brother, and to a certain extent, me. When my brother was in his early twenties he told me to get out, get away, and to never look back. He told me I would never get what I so desperately wanted from her. He was right. Couple an ineffectual father with a tyrannical mother, and add in the bullshit that is the Catholic Church, and you have the holy trifecta of dysfunction. ("Heuristic").

Melanie's self-described dysfunctional early family life has laid the groundwork for the ethical values that Melanie now holds. For example, Melanie was given as a role model an unpleasant

mother, but she rejected that role model and claims that she now wants to demonstrate "human kindness" rather than her mother's meanness in her life ("Re: Heuristic"). Just as she believes that her mother chose to be mean, she believes that all humans can choose to be kind. Melanie claims that she makes a conscious effort to be kind to others, and it is possible that her attempt to help Susan get tested for a learning disability was born out of kindness—Melanie was trying to help Susan get help. Her answer to this question of the moral heuristic shows that being kind to others is an ethical value of Melanie's. Although this was not a value that was passed down to her from her parents, the origin of this value is nonetheless created because of her personal family background.

As a result of her life experiences, Melanie claims that she has placed value on certain things:

> I guess I value the wisdom that comes with age. My life hasn't been easy, and I've never really been happy[23], and I can see now—in hindsight—how my life

[23] For an ethicist, it is interesting to note that Melanie reveals that she has never really been happy. Although it is not in the scope of this dissertation, much of the history of ethical study has focused on the concept of *eudaimonia*. The ancient Greek philosophers advocated the pursuit of *eudaimonia,* which is usually translated into English as "happiness." However, *eudaimonia* is better translated as "the source of happiness" (Rowe 123). This happiness springs from *arête*, "virtue." Being good (i.e. virtuous) makes one happy, for as Socrates says, "a good and honorable man or woman . . . is happy . . ." (Plato, *Gorgias* 102). According to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to be virtuous (and to therefore achieve happiness), one must be the best at their trade as they can be; to be the best at his or her trade one must follow the ethical expectations of their field (10). If

> evolved as it did, why I made the choices I made. I have been seeking that which was missing in my childhood. In addition to wisdom . . . I value knowledge as it relates to human interaction. I want to understand why people value what they value and why they make the choices they make. I value an ever expanding horizon, which is also frustrating because the more I know, the more I realize how little I know. ("Heuristic")

As ethical values, Melanie believes that it is right to pursue wisdom, knowledge, and an "ever expanding horizon," in other words, continuing one's education. These values have grown out of her life experiences. She feels that her mother, with her strict adherence to the guidelines of the Catholic Church, did not expect her children to seek wisdom, knowledge, or to expand their horizons beyond the prescriptions of the church. In refusing to accept her mother's beliefs, Melanie has placed value on doing the things that her mother would disapprove of. Furthermore, Melanie's answers show that she, valuing wisdom, knowledge, and learning, could be frustrated by a student like Susan. In Melanie's perception, Susan did not wish to learn, instead claiming that it was not necessary for her to learn what Melanie was trying to teach her.

2. If I subscribe (or choose not to subscribe) to religious beliefs, how does this influence who I am?

Melanie revealed her thoughts about religious beliefs in her previous answer, but she reiterated them in answering this question. Her beliefs are unmistakable when she says,

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Melanie were to take advice from the ancient Greeks, she might find that she can be happy by pursuing a goal of being the best composition instructor that she can be.

"Organized religion—in my humble opinion—is the downfall of mankind . . . Religion is man-made, man being the operative word, so it's misogynistic evil bullshit" ("Heuristic"). She claims that she is most likely an agnostic, although she is not even certain about that. Concerning her beliefs, she writes, "I believe in good and evil or love and hate and our power to choose" ("Heuristic"), rather than believing in a supernatural deity.

While religious beliefs do not appear to be a point of conflict between Melanie and Susan, or between Melanie and her colleagues and department, she does admit that occasionally religious beliefs are points of conflict in her Advanced Composition classroom. Rather than being between her and her students, conflict can occur between students in the classroom:

> I'm pretty open with my students, but I tell them I'm not judging them on what they believe. I'm grading them on how well they research a particular topic, how well they translate that research into prose, and how much original thinking I see. My students write one twenty page paper over the course of the semester, and we do whole class peer review of each paper twice. They write under pen names, so it's anonymous. Mostly they aren't writing about controversial subjects, but sometimes they do, and there's friction in the peer review sessions—although the writer remains anonymous, so the friction is not aimed at him/her. We get to be a pretty close group, and usually students feel free to express their opinions and argue, but I'm sure there are students who remain silent because they either cannot or will not defend their beliefs. I try to mediate by finding places where students can either agree or at least consider the other side. ("Heuristic")

In organizing her class in this way—being open about her beliefs, letting the students maintain anonymity, "finding places where students can either agree or at least consider the other side," and telling her students that she values "original thinking"—Melanie is showing that she values critical thinking in her course. Although she does not claim to have a social position that she advocates, she nonetheless follows William H. Thelin's advice that it is appropriate to make one's beliefs clear to the students, as it would be "unethical when the instructor first hides her political [or social] agenda after encouraging an expression of subjective truth, then reveals it during group workshop" (44). She allows anonymity during peer review for her students as she believes that this makes it safe for opinions in papers to be voiced without fear of being judged. She believes that removing this fear of being judged allows the students to explore further their beliefs within the paper. Finally, she tries to position herself as a mediator in the groups, so that all students can be exposed to opposing viewpoints and hopefully will then be able to entertain the idea that there is more than one way to view an issue. This last point might show that she wishes her students to become critical thinkers and to look at an issue from many perspectives in order to understand it fully. Through this understanding of different perspectives, she hopes that the students will make a more informed decision regarding any situation they encounter.

3. Who am I, as a professional?

When answering this question, Melanie chose to speak about the goals for her class: "My goal is to take them out of their safe little boxes and shake them up a bit. This happens more in [Advanced Composition] than Technical Writing where I get a mix of students not just English majors. I try to move them along in their writing as well as their thinking" ("Heuristic"). By taking her students "out of their safe little boxes," Melanie means that she wishes her students to

think critically about the world they live in. She wants to "move them along in their writing," which is certainly important as this is a writing class, and was evident in Melanie's reaction to Susan's poor writing skills. Susan needed to "move along" to improve her writing skills, and this did not appear to Melanie to be happening. Critical thinking is also a key component of many writing courses, and developing critical thinking skills is even listed as a desirable outcome for students of first-year composition by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, which offers policy guidelines for composition programs ("WPA Outcomes"). Again, her answer to this question of how Melanie sees herself as a professional shows that she values teaching critical thinking as a professional obligation.

Furthermore, Melanie sees it as her professional job to help the students be kinder and to be civil in their use of language. She states in this passage:

> In the classroom I talk about the meanness of political rhetoric and how we are doomed if we can't find kinder ways to talk to each other. I want my students to access appropriate language and to do solid research before they argue something. I remember years ago when Clinton was in office, Rush Limbaugh said something about Hillary's "fat ankles." I was horrified. What did that have to do with politics? And then, of course, he called that woman a slut. And Bill Maher called Sarah Palin a c***. This shows how low we have sunk. I want my students to strive for better rhetoric and manners. ("Re: Heuristic")

When Melanie accomplishes her goal of having students "strive for better rhetoric and manners," she feels that she has accomplished a large part of her professional obligation to the students. Given that in her answer to the question about her personal background she wrote that she holds

"human kindness" as an ethical value of hers, the answer to this question shows that her personal values have become part of her professional values. She finishes her discussion of who she is as a professional by writing, "I just realized that when I taught high school, I had a student who told people that I taught them more than just English, I taught them how to live. Now that's something" ("Re: Heuristic"). Beyond her professional obligation, she also feels great personal satisfaction when she satisfies this human kindness value.

Looking Outward

After completing the first portion of the moral heuristic in which she looked inward at her own values, Melanie has a basis for understanding the metaethics that makes up her individual ethical self. She then turned to reflect on what she perceives to be the ethical values held by those with whom she shares the context of her classes. She looked outward at what the local community, her students, and her department, university, and profession value in her teaching. As stated in Chapter One, the ethical values of one party do not necessarily outweigh those of another, but conflicts can occur when one party, for example a student or a colleague, attempts to enforce their values on an individual such as a composition instructor. Therefore, it is useful to understand the values of these communities in order to see where conflict might occur.

1. What does my local community value?

Melanie describes the community as "rural and conservative" ("Heuristic"). The economy of the area is largely built on blue collar and farm work, with a local industrial-scale chicken farm as one of the largest employers. A hospital and the university are the other two large employees. Melanie confesses that without the educated employees of the hospital and

university she would feel out of place, as she claims that she has "*nothing* in common" with the other members of the community, especially since "they don't want to hear anything that strays from what they've been taught in Sunday School" ("Heuristic").

Melanie also believes that the local community is rife with racism ("Heuristic"). She recounts an event that happened recently:

> I was at Sam's [Club] yesterday, and the woman checking cards at the door was selling popcorn for a dollar to benefit some charity. There was a sign for the charity on the popcorn maker showing a black girl and an [sic] Latina girl. I asked what the charity did for the children, and the woman said, "Well, I don't know, but look what color they are. Do you see a white child in the photo? No money is going to white children." I hear crap like this all the time. ("Re: A Few")

Melanie claims that she has noticed that those who have moved to the area for professional jobs at the hospital or the university are less likely to express racism, but that "[t]he people who were born and raised here are a different story" ("Re: A Few"). While we should hesitate to declare that the entire community is racist based on Melanie's claim, we must also accept that this is Melanie's perception of the community and that it is true for her.

The differences Melanie sees between herself, an educated professional, open-minded, and agnostic, and the local community, blue collar, dealing with racism, and religious, are certainly points of conflict. While these particular differences of ethical values are not necessarily the cause of the conflict between Melanie, Susan, and her colleagues, Melanie does know that most of her students come from the local community or from similar communities nearby ("Heuristic"). Melanie did not know whether or not Susan actually came from the local

community, but it is very possible that she had. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that the conflict, at least in part, came from the differences between Melanie's values and those of the local community.

Melanie is aware of the values that the local community holds and is also aware of her conscious rejection of those values. She herself, as noted above, came from a background very similar to what she sees as the local community's background. A child from a blue collar family that she describes as racist and very religious, she married into a family that had a similar make up. It was when she realized that those were not her values that she felt that divorce was the only option. In describing the values of her local community, she states, "I've lived that life; I've seen it from the inside, so I know I cannot be part of it" ("Heuristic"). As a result, Melanie rejected the religious and racist beliefs of her past, and therefore also rejects what she perceives to be the similar beliefs of her local community.

2. What do my students value?

When reflecting upon the values that the students hold, Melanie writes:

> Most students come to college to get a job. Last semester I asked them to tell me on a little piece of paper—anonymously—why they are here. Most said to get a good job, some said because their parents said they had to; none said because they wanted to explore their place in the universe, which is my way of saying that I wish they were here for more than the job training. What's so sad is that aside from nursing, what specific jobs are we training them for? What they really need is to learn to think, and we do that by reading, researching, writing, and discussing. That's what we do in the humanities. Many of them, I suspect, have no idea why

> they are here. And what's tragic is that my worst students, the worst thinkers, the worst writers, are education majors. ("Heuristic")

Melanie's students want jobs, and Melanie laments that the students apparently value earning money over gaining knowledge and the critical thinking and writing skills that she tries to encourage and teach in her classes. Melanie places high importance on both critical thinking and writing skills and believes that gaining these skills is vitally important and will affect the student's future success. Her conflict began when she was trying to give Susan what "was needed to get a handle on her writing problems in order to succeed in life" ("Re: A Few"). Susan's responses to Melanie's feedback regarding her errors—that Melanie could pass her due to the fact that Susan would not need to write in her career—reveal that Susan may be one of these students that Melanie describes here, a student whose goal in college was to achieve her career goals and not to gain knowledge. Finally, Melanie again shows in her answer to this question that she values teaching critical thinking—and complains that those who most need to learn how to think critically, the education majors who will go on to teach critical thinking, are the ones who do not share her values.

3. What values do my department, school, and the scholarly literature in my field advocate?

Melanie chose to focus on her school and department rather than composition literature when answering this question, and she claims to be rather happy with the values that her department holds. She writes, "The school values its reputation as a University of National Distinction, and I think there are some other lists we are on. They value academics. My department values academic rigor and academic freedom. No one tells me what I can and cannot do in my course. I appreciate that" ("Heuristic"). This value of academic freedom and rigor in

the department is seen through the department chair's actions. Instead of forcing Melanie to take any specific action in her course, the chair asked Melanie what the situation was, and let Melanie make the decision regarding her student's assessment. Melanie's decision to pass Susan was based in large part on the conflict between herself and a colleague, not a conflict between herself and the department—although Melanie seemingly feared that this colleague could sway the department against her decision.

A Clash of Values over Authority and Responding to Student Writing

Melanie has revealed quite a bit about herself in her answers to the questions of the moral heuristic. When we look at her answers, we can see that the points of ethical conflict in Melanie's case are twofold: 1. there is a conflict between the ethical values held by the involved parties concerning authority and 2. Melanie's response to Susan's writing revealed a conflict between the ethical values that Melanie and Susan hold regarding the purpose of education. Melanie views the purpose of education to be able to think critically and to expand one's horizons, and she perceived that Susan viewed its purpose to be to attain her career goals, i.e. a good-paying job.

Authority as a Point of Ethical Conflict

As laid out in Chapter Two, there is a need for composition instructors to understand the parties who hold a stake in their classrooms in order to determine the appropriate use of authority. Melanie does understand what her department values, as her department chair, the official representative of the department, agreed with her about the quality of Susan's work regarding its grammar and mechanics issues. Melanie also told her department chair that she felt that the

actions of her colleagues—the writing center director and the psychology professor who had complained to the English department chair about Melanie's responses to Susan—were "unprofessional," and her chair again agreed with her ("Response"). Melanie and the department chair, at least, seem to be in agreement concerning professional behavior within the department.

Earlier, in her narrative concerning the events, Melanie wrote about the Advanced Composition course and how the different composition instructors each designed and taught the course. Since there is difference among the designs, the department must allow the instructors freedom to design the course as they each feel it should be designed. Melanie appears to have been well aware of the academic freedom, and thereby the authority over her classroom practices, that the department values and gives to its members.

It seems that Melanie was less aware of the values of her colleagues. Melanie was especially irked by the actions of the writing center director, who Melanie claims treated her "as a second class citizen" ("Re: A Few") and made Melanie feel as if she were an outsider within the department. She had attended a meeting with the writing center director expecting to show that Susan's work was not up to the standards expected of her, and instead was told that she was acting inappropriately in her response to Susan's work. Melanie considers herself to be an expert in her field and has earned a Ph.D. in composition to back up that claim. However, the writing center director treated her differently from her other colleagues: Melanie believes that "[s]he [the writing center director] never would have done this [criticized an instructor's teaching] to a tenure track faculty member" ("Response"). This lack of respect for her expertise is a clear point of conflict between Melanie and the writing center director. This conflict between Melanie and the director has also not been resolved, as Melanie reports that she simply no longer has any

contact with her. At this point, it is good to remind ourselves that in qualitative research, researchers "assume that human beings must operate within realities they themselves have constructed" (Erlandson et al. 21). We cannot know if the writing center director did not respect Melanie unless we actually talk to the writing center director—but to do so would compromise the anonymity of Melanie as well as Melanie's authority over her own narrative. Therefore, we must rely on Melanie's perception of the truth of the matter, and since the purpose of this chapter is to examine Melanie's personal critical self-reflection it is more important to this study to understand her perception of the truth than to know what the truth actually is.

Another point where ethical values concerning authority came into conflict occurred when Susan seemingly did not give the authority to Melanie that Melanie expected to receive. Patricia Bizzell sees the relationship between teacher and student as one in which the teacher must persuade the student to submit to his or her authority. The persuasion hinges on the teacher convincing the student that by submitting to the teacher's authority the student, "without seeing how [the student's] best interests will be served thereby," will acquire the knowledge or skills that they desire (57). In other words, Susan needed to grant Melanie the authority to respond to her writing and needed to accept that authority. Andrea Lunsford claims that authority should be wielded "as a source of knowledge and experience we can and should respect" (66). Melanie presumably expected that Susan would respect her instructor as a source of knowledge and experience and therefore grant Melanie authority. As a source of knowledge and experience, Melanie understood better than Susan the problems that poor writing could cause in her career after college, yet Susan was apparently unconvinced and remained committed to a belief that "she would never 'need to write in her job'" as an FBI agent ("Response").

Melanie's actions in her classroom are supported by the scholars of our field as ethical. Whether or not Susan granted it, Melanie did hold authority in the classroom that had been granted by the institution (Gale 10). Melanie also did use that authority well, again according to the scholars in the field. In her narrative about the experience and in her answers to the critical self-reflective moral heuristic, she seems to have used her classroom to teach writing without forcing a political, social, or religious viewpoint on her students, as composition scholars advise (Peckam 160; Tollefson 60). Where she did hold strong beliefs that could cause conflict, she made her beliefs clear to the students, as Thelin advises (44). She writes that "[o]rganized religion—in my humble opinion—is the downfall of mankind," but she also claims, "I'm pretty open [about my beliefs] with my students, but I tell them I'm not judging them on what they believe. I'm grading them on how well they research a particular topic, how well they translate that research into prose, and how much original thinking I see" ("Heuristic"). Whether or not she realized it, Melanie followed Dennis Ryan's advice that "the teacher of writing . . . [should] use a variety of pedagogical discourse models to enhance this [student/teacher] relation" (2) by speaking to Susan as a student in a class, in her responses written on her paper, and by speaking to her personally during an office visit. Melanie attempted to impress upon Susan, based on her own knowledge and experience, that correct grammar and mechanics are important to Susan's readers, both now and in her future career.

As Melanie revealed in her answers to the moral heuristic, she holds as ethical values that it is right to seek wisdom, knowledge, and to expand understanding of the world. Therefore, not to seek these things would be unethical. In the case of her conflict with Susan, it appears that Susan did not value education as Melanie does, nor does it seem that she was willing to give

Melanie the authority that Melanie expected to be given. Perhaps this was because Melanie had not persuaded her to give her the authority, and perhaps this was due to a disinterest in the course on Susan's part. Either way, one reason that this conflict continued to grow was that neither side truly understood that, at its center, this conflict was caused by a disagreement of ethical values.

The conflict between Melanie and Susan was not helped by the fact that Melanie sees it as a professional goal, an ethical value, to move Susan along not only in her writing but also in her thinking and in her manners. Melanie wished to challenge Susan's thinking, to show her that her audiences, both now and in the future, expect certain things from her writing. It seems that Susan did not wish to accept this "new" way of thinking and rejected Melanie's goal of improving her writing, rejected Melanie's belief that the goal of education is more than simply getting a job, and rejected Melanie's value of being kind and civil to others by speaking poorly of Melanie to others without voicing her concerns to Melanie first. With Susan's blatant violations of Melanie's ethical values, it is no wonder that the conflict grew to the proportions that it did.

Furthermore, Melanie believed that Susan simply wanted to complete the course and move on so that she could start her career in a law enforcement agency—she did not desire to learn the skills that would make her a better written communicator. As someone who was happy with her understanding of the world, Susan was in violation of Melanie's ethical beliefs. It was appropriate for Melanie to claim that she could not ethically pass Susan if she did not demonstrate that she had learned these grammar and mechanics skills, as Susan's refusal to learn and exhibit the writing skills that Melanie was obligated by her department and school to teach truly did violate Melanie's ethical standards.

Responding to Student Writing as a Point of Ethical Conflict

Chapter Two also discussed what the scholars in the field wrote about authority's impact on teacher response to student writing. By and large, it would seem that Melanie did respond correctly to Susan's writing, according to the literature. Melanie followed Nancy Sommers's advice when responding to Susan in that she tried to show Susan that, from a reader's perspective, communication was impeded by the grammar and mechanics issues (Sommers 148). She also does not appear to fall into the trap that Sommers warns us of when discussing the tendency of some instructors to attempt to rewrite the students' papers for them (Sommers 149). Instead, Melanie told Susan that issues existed and tried to help Susan discover and correct them on her own.

While composition instructors are advised not to focus on grammar and mechanics errors in responding to student work, Melanie did not respond to Susan's errors in an unethical manner. Richard Straub tells us to particularize the response—to craft each response to try to give an individual student what they need to hear/read at a particular moment in time on a particular assignment ("The Student, the Text" 51). Melanie seems to have also done this, as she noted that Susan had created a "good argument, and her research was fine, as was her syntax" ("Response"). Melanie had looked at the whole paper and decided that Susan needed to receive feedback that addressed the mechanical issues in order to strengthen her writing skills. And while Chris Anson tells us to be wary of response to error born out of an instructor's personal annoyance ("Response" 8), this does not seem to be the case with Melanie's response to Susan's work as the issues were not concerning only one or two types of mechanical error, which would indicate

annoyance. Melanie notes that Susan's paper's "grammar and mechanics were atrocious," and were so flawed that Melanie suspected a learning disability ("Response"). Overall, in choosing to respond to Susan's work by concentrating on the grammar and mechanical issues, Melanie did not fall into the category of a "bad responder." She showed herself to be a responder who, motivated by ethical values that created a desire to help and to show kindness, tried to show a particular student that the writing skills that she possessed were not what academic or professional audiences would consider adequate, and then attempted to help that student learn the skills that she needed.

In Melanie's situation, however, she responded in at least two ways that either could have or did raise a conflict between herself and Susan. The first response was questioning whether or not Susan had a learning disability, which could have offended Susan, yet it seems, according to Melanie's report, that Susan was not offended by the query. The other comment that seems less offensive but created great conflict was Melanie's use of the word "ethical" in telling Susan that it would not be ethically possible to pass Susan if the errors in grammar and mechanics remained.

As noted earlier in the discussion concerning Melanie's answer to her personal background, Melanie sees education as a way for a person to learn about their world, as a way to pursue an "ever expanding horizon" ("Heuristic"). For Melanie, it is a personal ethical value to seek knowledge for knowledge's sake—it is right to do so, which makes it ethical to do so. Melanie also considers it her professional obligation to maintain the integrity of her course— she wants the course to help students strengthen their writing skills, and not to be a class where a student can pass without learning anything. This is what Melanie meant when she had told Susan that she "couldn't ethically pass a student who didn't fulfill the requirements" ("Response"). At

the end of the course, Melanie did not believe that Susan had learned the lesson that grammar and mechanics are important for communication, nor had she learned the skills to recognize and remove the errors. Susan had sought help and had cleaned up the errors in her draft, but she then added paragraphs to her paper that contained the same errors that she had worked to remove from the earlier draft. Melanie believed that this showed that Susan had not learned what Melanie expected her to learn. Since Melanie values keeping the integrity of the course, she felt that Susan did not deserve to pass. Melanie felt that passing Susan would not fulfill her ethical obligation to the course, and it would also violate her own ethical values concerning the role of education.

It would seem that Susan did not understand all this. While it is reasonable to assume that Susan would understand that there is an expectation to learn in a college course, Melanie sensed that Susan did not value the skills that she could learn and develop in the course. This is apparent in her statement that Melanie could "pass her because she was planning to be a psychologist with the CIA or FBI, and she would 'never need to write in her job'" ("Response"). Furthermore, it seems that Susan equated the term "morals" with "ethics" without the understanding of the term that Melanie had. Susan reported to others that Melanie had claimed that she could not *morally* pass Susan while Melanie recalls that she told Susan that she could not *ethically* pass her. While it is common for ethicists to use the terms "morals" and "ethics" interchangeably, it appears that when Melanie said that she could not ethically pass Susan if she did not clean up the errors that Susan took that to mean that she was somehow acting immorally because of the grammar and mechanics errors. It is likely that this misunderstanding of the term is what escalated the conflict. According to Melanie's recounting of events, Susan complained to the writing center director,

the psychology professor, and the chair of the English department *after* Melanie had told her that she could not ethically pass her. Believing that she had been told that she was acting immorally, Susan defended herself. It is fortunate for Melanie that the English department chair, at least, understood that Melanie was not bringing Susan's morals into question.

These two issues—the authority of the individual composition instructor and responding to students in an ethical manner—continually challenge all writing instructors. By taking the time to reflect on their own situation, their own values, and their own relationships with students and colleagues, instructors can see where conflict of ethical values has the potential to arise. Melanie may well have found this critical self-reflection on her ethical values to be of some help had she been able to complete it prior to the conflict with Susan. If she had done this earlier, Melanie may have become explicitly aware of the fact that her values regarding the purpose of education were not the same of at least some of her students and may have developed strategies to deal with such conflict when it arose. Melanie found herself in a situation where she felt forced to abandon her values, both of what she sees as right, or ethical, when it comes to education, and also what she sees as ethical when it comes to professional responsibility of assessing student learning.

Melanie's Response to the Guided Critical Self-Reflection

After completing the moral heuristic, I asked Melanie to reflect upon her experience of critical self-reflection. This was done as I wished to learn what she thought of the process, but I also asked her to do this to have her revisit her narrative and responses for veracity and clarity as

a form of member checking the data. Melanie was asked whether or not it was helpful to work through the questions. She writes:

> Yes, this was helpful. Having to write answers to your questions forced me to examine myself and put some things into coherent prose. The problem is that I could write a book about all this. Someone recently put some dumbass thing on Facebook about how we are entirely responsible for the decisions we make, and we shouldn't blame our parents or anyone else. That kind of bullshit pisses me off. Everything is connected. I am who I am *because* of the experiences I've had. I've made decisions based on need more often than I've based them on logical thought. I guess that makes me an emotional intuitive person rather than a logical person. Perhaps in my advanced years, with the wisdom I've accumulated, I'm merging the emotional intuitive me with the logical me. Better late than never.

Melanie reports that the process of critical self-reflection helped her see how everything is connected—how her past experiences, her beliefs about religion and her professional persona, and her interactions with her local communities shaped her actions in this case. She writes, "I knew I was upset about the incident, but I hadn't unpacked it and examined all the reasons *why* I was upset ("Re: A Few"). She realized that she was upset at the actions of others—Susan's complaints to her psychology professor, the writing center director, and the English chair; the writing center director's treatment of Melanie "as a second class citizen . . . and judging the way [she] was handling her student;" and the English chair's discussion with Susan in which he did not instruct Susan to go to Melanie first ("Re: A Few"). The actions taken by Susan, the writing center director, and the English chair all deal with what is *right*, or what is ethical. Melanie did

not believe that the actions of the others involved in the situation were right, and therefore she was upset at what she essentially viewed as unethical behavior.

Melanie acknowledges that she rarely logically thinks through moral conflicts, relying on emotion over logic, but ends by claiming that she sees the value in incorporating logical, critical self-reflection with her emotional intuition to understand how to act ethically when faced with a moral conflict. When Melanie first told me about the experience with Susan, the writing center director, the psychology professor, and her department chair, she was very unhappy with her decision. She felt that she had acted unethically; that she had passed a student who had not earned a passing grade. She believed that this was unfair to the students who had worked to learn the skills and did earn a passing grade. She felt that her decision to pass Susan was ethically unjustifiable ("Response").

According to a postmodern understanding of ethics, because her action was based on what the local community valued, as was evident in the discussions that she had had with the writing center director and the English chair—the representative of the department—her action to pass Susan was ethical. Melanie was looking for justification for her actions, and postmodern ethics would provide that for her by showing her that the others involved in the context of her classroom, primarily members of her department, supported her decision to pass Susan.

Concluding Remarks

With Melanie's situation we can see that instructors are constantly making ethical decisions and those decisions are often made based on what feels right at the time. As Melanie's case shows, though, often what feels right to an instructor does not feel right to the others who

hold a stake in the outcome of the decision. However, as Melanie has shown us through her answers to the moral heuristic, it is possible to identify our own ethical values and see where our values can come into conflict with others who hold a stake in our classroom. Although I contend that undergoing this process of critical self-reflection is useful before conflict arises, Melanie shows us that the heuristic also works well to identify these points of conflict after a decision has been made. Using postmodern ethical theory, we can see that Melanie is able to justify her decisions through understanding that she acted according to the values of the others involved. Even though her decision required her to put her own values aside and made her feel as if she had acted unethically, she was able to see that she still acted in an ethical manner.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I argued that informed decision-making is more than a good habit or good practice for the composition instructor. To be virtuous, that is, ethical in our work, we must be the best at our profession that we can be (Aristotle 10). We can do so by reflecting upon ourselves, our values, and our work. According to postmodern ethical theory, in order to act ethically we must consider the other people who will be affected by our actions (Bauman 84). Postmodern ethics also requires us to question (Porter, "Developing" 223). Critical self-reflection guides our ethical questioning (Mezirow 1) and helps us in our attempt to understand who these others are and what their values are. This reflection is not only important to an understanding of the cause of an ethical conflict; it is also useful as we prepare to teach our classes. It therefore becomes an ethical and professional obligation for a composition instructor to reflect critically on who he or she is as well as where and whom he or she is teaching. When we do so, we will be better able to make judgments concerning values and will be able to act upon those judgments ethically (Dewey, *How We Think* 119; Dewey, "The Logic" 236). To fulfill this ethical obligation, I proposed that composition instructors undergo a process of critical self-reflection in order to discover what their ethical values are, how they had come to hold these values, and when and where their personal ethical values could come into conflict with others who hold different values. By critically self-reflecting on their teaching practices teachers of composition will be better able to teach their material in an ethical way.

Composition instructors need to be aware that the actions that they take, such as choosing which papers to assign or choosing the words to use when we respond to student writing, are inherently ethical choices, choices that deal with what is right, choices that could result in conflict with the ethical values of others involved, choices that need to be arrived at through a careful, thoughtful, intelligent decision-making process. As part of this decision-making process, we need to understand our situational context (Porter, "Developing" 216) and we also need to look at our own personal background and the ethical values we have formed due to our lived experiences (Richlin 10; Weimer 23; Brookfield, *Becoming* 50). We must look at both our context and our personal ethical values when we try to determine whether or not any action is ethical.

In order to facilitate the process of critical self-reflection, I created a two-part moral heuristic. The first part is designed to help a composition instructor look inward at their own personal values and the second part of the heuristic asks the instructor to look outward at the values that others hold. The moral heuristic is intended to help writing instructors rationally determine where their own ethical values lie, how those values influence their teaching, and how those values either mesh or clash with the values held by their students, colleagues, and institutions. In this way, a composition instructor fulfills his or her moral obligation to apply critical self-reflection when making professional decisions.

I argued that after looking inward and outward, a composition instructor may be better able to determine what action in any given professional situation is ethical, based on his or her personal beliefs and those of the others who hold a stake in the outcomes of their teaching. By answering these questions, we can anticipate our judgments in reaction to issues in our teaching

before those issues arise. In this way, we will not be forced to justify our actions on the fly as we are questioned about them; we will have justification for those judgments in the work that has already taken place. This process of critical self-reflection may also increase an instructor's confidence that others will be able to accept the decision and subsequent action as ethical. For an instructor who is currently in or who has recently been in the throes of an ethical dilemma, critical self-reflection is also useful as it can show which ethical values came into conflict with each other. Melanie's responses and the subsequent interpretation of those responses in Chapter Four showed that critical self-reflection is useful in this regard. Critical self-reflection after the ethical conflict has occurred may also help the instructor avoid a clash of similar values in the future.

In order to put the critical self-reflective moral heuristic to the test, I included in this dissertation the narrative responses of three practicing composition instructors with several years of teaching experience who completed the moral heuristic. Each of these three instructors that I chose as participants are teachers that I have known professionally and personally, as I believed that a composition instructor that did not know me might be less willing to share such personal responses of the sort that the self-reflective moral heuristic asks. Each of the three was chosen primarily for her or his level of teaching experience, although Melanie was also chosen partly because of an ethical dilemma that she was involved in. Melanie, the least experienced of the three, still has several years of composition teaching experience. Jeanette has taught composition for over a decade, and Mark has almost three decades of composition teaching experience. In the course of reviewing their responses, I came to believe that it was a good strategy to include varying levels of experience, as it was shown that the most experienced instructor, Mark, has

already discovered the value of critical self-reflection, and it seems that the least experienced instructor, Melanie, found the process to be the most informative. I presented the questions to the participants as freewrites, as I wanted the participants to make the questions their own, to answer the questions as they wished to rather than answering them in a manner they perceived I was expecting. I directed each of the participants to write down the answers to the questions not only to keep a record of their answers, but also because "[w]riting is a way to puzzle out a situation, [or] think through a series of events" (Schaafsma and Vinz 51). This is what I hoped that they would find themselves doing—puzzling out their situation and thinking through the events and their values that led them to take their ethical actions.

Overall, I believe that the moral heuristic functioned as it was intended to function. After completing the guided critical self-reflection, Melanie claimed that the process helped her better understand her own values and where the source of those values lay. She also was able to reflect upon the values of her students and colleagues and determined that she agreed with some of those values, such as her department chair's values concerning professional behavior, and disagreed with others, such as her student's values concerning education. Melanie was able to see how the actions that she had taken were not only rooted in her values, but she was also able to use the answers to the heuristic's questions to determine the source of the ethical conflict and as a way to justify her actions as ethical. Melanie gained a deeper understanding of something that she already knew—she knew she was angry and felt guilty over compromising her ethical values, but she learned exactly why she was angry and why she felt that guilt.

The results of testing this moral heuristic showed that Melanie already understood a good deal about her own values and where those values came from. However, she came to understand

that there were values that she held, especially her values concerning authority and education, that were affecting her more than she realized. Sheryl I. Fontaine and Susan M. Hunter, in their introductory chapter to *Foregrounding Ethical Awareness in Composition and English Studies,* tell us, "The goal of foregrounding . . . [ethical] awareness is . . . to see what may not have been seen before, to resist complacency and reconsider what had, heretofore, seemed acceptable" (4). This is what happened with Melanie. She saw what she had not seen before—or saw it more clearly than before. She discovered that the process was helpful in getting her to "unpack" her anger and understand why she had felt so angry over this violation of her ethical values (Melanie, "A Few"). Understanding this will allow Melanie to see where future conflict might arise. Whether or not we agree with Melanie's action to stop working with the writing center director, Melanie has stopped working with her because she does not trust the writing center director to respect her. However, what Melanie is really doing is attempting to minimize future ethical conflict with her.

Jeanette discovered that her childhood background, growing up with a father who encouraged scientific reading and scientific observation, has influenced her professional life several decades after the fact. She values what she sees as scientific writing, and she encourages students to make the same sort of writing moves that scientific writing asks for, such as writing about the natural world or incorporating literature reviews. Through this process of critical self-reflection, she also saw more clearly how her very personal religious beliefs have influenced her professional life, especially due to the intellectually-minded doctrine that her denomination professes. She came to a greater understanding of why she wishes all of her students to adopt the

same sort of intellectual mindset, but expects it even more so from Christian students writing about religious experience.

Mark's experience with this guided critical self-reflective practice was almost as if he was greeting an old friend. He has long held it as a personal value to approach his life thoughtfully, and therefore the critical self-reflection did not seem to offer very much new understanding of how his personal values have impacted his professional life. However, he shows us in his responses that his personal values do heavily influence his professional life, and he seems to be very much aware of exactly how they do so. While this experience did not lead to much greater knowledge of the link between his personal values and professional life, Mark still found the exercise to be valuable, as he felt that it reminded him of why he enjoys his profession.

What we can take from this dissertation is that even experienced teachers of composition can learn more about themselves and can better understand what they value personally. This process of critical self-reflection in particular helped Melanie and Jeannette make what was implicitly known explicit. This will help them to know when and where ethical conflict might occur, and will also help them understand when a conflict is a conflict of ethical values.

Limitations of the Study

Throughout the course of completing this dissertation, certain limitations became apparent, particularly the limitations of limited heuristic testing, participant credibility, and timing. While I do not believe that these limitations damaged the usefulness of the study, they should be understood in order that future research into this area may better account for them.

Limited Heuristic Testing

Chapters Four, Five, and Six presented participants who completed the moral heuristic once, but the moral heuristic is not designed to be of one-time use. I believe that the one-time completion showed Melanie, Jeanette, Mark, and us that it is a useful tool to understand our personal ethical values and where our values might conflict with the values of others, but I also believe that the heuristic would be a more effective tool if it is used several times over the course of our professional lives. Completing the heuristic at different times of our professional lives may allow us to see how our values change over time—or not—and how the values of others who have a stake in our teaching can change. For example, Melanie has revealed in her answers to the heuristic that she values education more for its own sake rather than for the monetary or career benefits it can bring—for Melanie, it is right to pursue education in order to learn. She perceived that her student placed value on education as a means to a career goal, and this was one area where ethical values clashed and conflict arose. However, Melanie must also value education as a means to career goals—if she did not, she would not have left her high school teaching position to pursue her graduate degrees. She wanted to use education to gain a college-level teaching position. Had Melanie completed the moral heuristic at the start of her graduate degree progress, it is very possible that Melanie and Susan's ethical values in this regard would be more in line with each other.

Although the limited testing of the critical self-reflective moral heuristic is a limitation of this study, it does not need to be a limitation that greatly weakens this study. The example that we have from Melanie's, Jeanette's, and Mark's experience with critical self-reflection should

show readers that the heuristic was useful to them and therefore it is reasonable to assume that other practicing composition instructors may find it to be of value. Even though Melanie completed this guided self-reflection just once, the insights that she has gained (as reported in Chapter Four) should offer readers of this dissertation a reasonable expectation that Melanie, if faced with a different ethical conflict, would be able to use this guided process of critical self-reflection to her advantage again.

The Limitation of Participant Credibility

Critical self-reflection as presented in this dissertation asks the composition instructor to reflect upon their past and on their personal beliefs. Because completing the moral heuristic is such a personal act, it is possible and probable that the participants in the study did not reveal everything about themselves that they could have. Not only might they have not revealed information due to time constraints that they may have had while completing the questions, they also may have inadvertently neglected to include information. Also, because they knew that the answers would become public, they might not have revealed anything that they did not want others to know. It is quite possible that answers were edited, either mentally or physically, before being sent to me. For example, because we may not know everything that transpired between Melanie, her student, her department chair, and the writing center director, our understanding of the course of events may be incomplete. Also, since we may not know important details about Melanie's past, her religious beliefs, her understanding of herself as a professional, and what she perceives to be the ethical values held by her local community, her students, and her colleagues, the interpretation of her answers and the application of those interpretations might be incorrect.

It is important to note that I am not accusing Melanie, Jeanette, or Mark of being untruthful or of withholding information. What they have offered us, though, is not necessarily the truth of what has happened, but rather their perception of that truth. In order to establish the truth of the events further, we would need to discuss the events with all of those involved in any events that the participants discussed. However, to do so would undermine the anonymity that was promised to Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark, so this is therefore impossible to do. Fortunately, this restriction on our ability to know the consistent truth of the event is not a limitation according to qualitative researchers. In qualitative research, researchers "assume that human beings must operate within realities they themselves have constructed" (Erlandson et al. 21). Therefore, qualitative researchers seek to uncover "how social actors interpret the social world, and their place within it" (Lawler 244). It is of primary interest to the qualitative researcher to understand not what the truth actually is, but to understand the truth as the narrator perceives it. This is what I have done with Melanie's story of ethical conflict, and with Jeanette's and Mark's narrative responses to the guided critical self-reflection. Since we cannot ever be one hundred percent certain that a respondent's account of the events is consistent truth we must acknowledge that possibility and work not with truth but with one narrator's perception of truth.

While some readers might still believe that our inability to know the consistent truth is a limitation, this is a potential limitation of the study, not of the critical self-reflective moral heuristic. Completing the moral heuristic is a very personal act, and the self-reflective answers that are given by the participant are meant to be used only by an individual composition instructor for the purpose of self-discovery. There is no requirement that the answers be shared with others. Perhaps Melanie, Jeanette, or Mark did edit their responses before sharing them.

Even if they did, it is quite possible that they personally reflected on details that were not shared and still learned from them.

Furthermore, the very personal nature of responding to the moral heuristic can not only cause a participant to withhold information, it can also cause them to feel uncomfortable sharing any information. Although Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark have stated that they are willing to share their responses with the audience of this dissertation, I did have a fourth participant who was not. After receiving responses from Lisa[24], I wrote a chapter devoted to her responses in a manner similar to the chapters of Melanie, Jeanette, and Mark. When I asked Lisa to read her chapter as a form of member checking the data, she told me that she was very uncomfortable with sharing much of the information. She claimed that she had not realized exactly how personal she had gotten in her responses and that, as a private person, she was very uncomfortable sharing the information. While she would still allow me to use her responses, she requested that I edit her responses in such a way that I felt that they would become too incomplete to be of much use. For example, she asked me to remove about seventy-five percent of what she had revealed about her personal background, which would negatively impact the discussion of her personal values and their source. In the end, since I felt that that the edits that she requested would limit the credibility of Lisa as a participant, I decided not to include her chapter. This was a decision with which she was very happy.

[24] "Lisa" is a pseudonym.

The Limitation of Timing

Due to the time periods involved in the process of collecting the information for the study, I was unable to capture a moment in time as an ethical dilemma was unfolding. Melanie, for example, completed the heuristic after the dilemma had largely been resolved. The time space for many dilemmas for composition instructors seems to be fairly short—grades are due tomorrow, should I pass this student or not? Should I fail this student for plagiarism? Can I justify using this textbook that I was assigned but that I dislike?

Unfortunately, unless the timing is perfect, this is a limitation which will be very difficult to overcome. While it would be helpful to the study of critical self-reflective practice to see a composition instructor working through the moral heuristic as they are faced with ethical conflict, it seems unlikely that such a study could be undertaken unless it becomes an autobiographical account of an event. I hope that readers of the dissertation, if they discover themselves in the midst of ethical dilemma, will attempt to practice critical self-reflection by working through the questions of the moral heuristic in order to discover the actual causes of the conflict.

Implications for Future Research

For this project, I have only presented three experienced composition teachers' responses to the heuristic. My reasons for choosing composition instructors with some experience in the profession were that I believed that experienced instructors might be more fully aware of their own teaching practices and the implications of their actions when faced with making an ethical decision than would an untested teaching assistant. Future research might use the moral heuristic

with new composition instructors or teaching assistants to discover what realizations they would make about their ethical values and where conflict could arise due to those.

The qualitative methods that were used in this study rely upon one composition instructor's understanding of an event. Further research might be undertaken which might look at an ethical conflict from several different viewpoints, and collect narratives and critical self-reflective responses from the different people involved. Doing so, however, is a tricky process, as those who have found themselves in conflict in the past may not wish to make amends. We have seen this in Melanie's refusal to work with the writing center director. Therefore, this is likely to be a difficult endeavor, unless one could find a situation in which those who found themselves in ethical conflict with each other have remained amicable, have no fear of retribution from each other, and are willing to entertain other perspectives when undergoing the member checking process.

Furthermore, the moral heuristic could be used to create cases that others could study, which, according to Chris M. Anson, David A. Joliffe, and Nancy Shapiro, can be used to "integrate theory and practice in teacher preparation" (24). Anson, Joliffe, and Shapiro call for cases that can be used as part of new teacher training and as part of experienced teacher development. The narrative nature of the moral heuristic makes it a good tool to answer the call for teaching narratives as it could pull these cases out of experience in order to be studied for these purposes. Perhaps the moral heuristic might be used in a graduate course on teaching composition in order to collect narratives from the students that could be discussed, or simply as an exercise to show these students that practicing critical self-reflection can be a useful tool in fulfilling our ethical obligation to our profession.

While I have used *ethics* and *morals* interchangeably throughout this dissertation, as ethicists claim they are equivalent terms, in general usage the two terms are not equivalent. In common usage, *morals* is seen as stronger word, perhaps with religious meaning. To be unethical means that you are not acting correctly, to be *immoral* means that you are violating some sort of religious rule, i.e. you are committing a sin. This confusion over terms was seen in Melanie's narrative, as she had told her student that she could not ethically pass her, and the student heard/remembered that she had been told that Melanie could not morally pass her. It seems as if the student, Susan, put more weight on the term *moral* and felt as if she had been told that it would be immoral to pass her. While the denotations for the words may be synonymous, the connotations imply different degrees of right behavior. In future work, a clearer understanding and definitions for these two terms might be discovered.

In this dissertation, I examined one ethical obligation that composition instructors have to their profession, that is, to practice critical self-reflection. It is part of the obligation that Aristotle established for all professions when he claimed that to be virtuous or ethical in a profession one must strive to be the best at his or work as he or she can be (10). We have other ethical obligations, and in order to be the best at our profession we fulfill all of them. For example, a case could be made that we have an obligation to know and understand the literature of the field. Further research could be undertaken to examine other ethical obligations that we have in order to be the best workers in our field that we can be.

Concluding Remarks

Composition instructors are expected to make ethical decisions in their professional lives, but most are expected to do so without any sort of formal training in how to do so. Lion F. Gardiner states that college instructors have "little, if any, formal professional training or experience other than the content of their various disciplines and perhaps employment as graduate teaching assistants." Aside from learning about the field of composition—which is not even the case for many composition instructors who hold literature degrees—most composition instructors have little or no training in how to meet the ethical obligation they have to practice critical self-reflection. Without that training instructors tend to fall back on what their composition teacher did or pedagogy gleaned from journals and books instead of trying to understand how their personal values might be used to help them in their professional, teaching lives. Without training and without critical self-reflection to guide informed decision-making, composition instructors are forced to muddle through, relying on the advice of others who do not know the situation in which the instructor teaches.

I believe that this dissertation offers a tool that should be incorporated into composition teacher training. Practicing critical self-reflection not only fulfills an ethical obligation that composition instructors have to the others that hold a stake in the classroom, it also helps the composition instructor make more well-informed decisions regarding their classes. The moral heuristic that is offered is just one possible way to practice critical self-reflection. Trainers may decide that a question or six on the heuristic is less helpful than others, and may decide to discard or replace it. Trainers also need to be aware that those who complete the heuristic are answering

very personal questions. There is a danger that by asking a participant to share his or her responses might make public some beliefs or experiences that the participant is not willing to share—so care should be exercised in this regard.

This dissertation challenges composition instructors to use what the fields of ethics and education offer them, especially regarding critical self-reflection and consideration of our local context, in order to question, critique, and to decide. When a composition instructor critically self-reflects on his personal background, religious beliefs, and his beliefs about who he is as a professional and on the values that his local community, students, and department and college hold, he is evaluating his own ethics, morals, or sense of what is good. When doing so, a composition instructor is asked to use his best critical thinking skills to arrive at a decision, a process that pragmatist John Dewey saw as a moral obligation in itself (Putnam 271), a process that postmodern ethics claims *is* ethics. Addressing questions about personal ethical values and how they influence actions in the classrooms allows a composition instructor to be more confident that his or her actions are right. As composition instructors, having an explicit awareness of our own ethics will create a foundation upon which our decisions can be built. We will no longer be forced to justify our decisions when questioned in the hallway by our colleagues, but rather we can answer with a statement that arises from our own ethical understanding of who we are, where we are, and why we act in certain ways.

Throughout the process of collecting participants' responses, I learned several things about the worth that critical self-reflection brings to practicing composition instructors. I learned that some composition instructors, like Mark, already bring a level of critical self-reflection into their professional lives. I learned that other composition instructors had not attempted, at least

not recently, to fulfill this ethical obligation. I had suspected that this was the case, based on conversations with colleagues both locally in my department and nationally at professional conferences.

Although I believed when I started the project, and I believe now, that this process of critical self-reflection is beneficial to all practicing teachers of composition, through Mark's responses I learned that it may be of more benefit to some than others. Perhaps it was Mark's significant experience teaching composition that led me to believe that the process was less informative for him than I had originally thought it would be, but more likely it was his personal value, instilled in him by his parents at a young age, that he should employ his intellect and explore ideas thoroughly.

Melanie seemed to get the most out of the process of critical self-reflection. Again, this could be due to her level of experience—she has less than a decade's experience teaching college-level composition, although she has many additional years of experience from her high school teaching days. I believe, however, that the main reason that she understood more about her own personal values through the critical self-reflective process is due to the fact that she had recently experienced an ethical dilemma and was thinking about that dilemma as she answered the questions. In her experience, the critical self-reflection not only helped her to understand what she personally valued, she was also able to understand better the values of the others involved and how the clash of ethical values created the dilemma (or dilemmas, if we consider the clash of values between her and her student Susan and the clash between her and the writing center director as separate dilemmas).

In all, I believe that Jeanette best fit the model of what I had expected from the critical self-reflection for the composition instructor. She examined her personal background, including her religious beliefs, and came to certain conclusions about how those values had influenced her teaching. It seemed in her answers that some of these new understandings, for example, her understanding of why she has a preference for papers that follow scientific writing guidelines, were new to her. This is exactly what I hoped that the process of critical self-reflection would show—that a composition instructor would be able to understand the source of her ethical values and see how those personal values had affected her professional life. With a tool like the critically self-reflective moral heuristic that is offered in this dissertation, a composition instructor will be better able to accomplish the ethical obligation that she has to her profession while at the same time learning about herself.

All three of the participants did find value in the process, and I believe that this shows the value of completing a process of critical self-reflection. Through Mark's experience, I also learned that moral heuristic can be used in a way that I originally did not intend it to be used. Mark, who did not learn anything truly new about himself, still found value in the process. He states, "I did think the exercise was helpful . . . as a reminder of why I enjoy my job and university, as it allows me the freedom to live out my values as part of my daily life" ("Follow-up Questions"). Although Mark's experience was less about making what was implicitly known explicit, I believe that there is also value in the process for him, as I have argued that critical self-reflection should be practiced several times over the course of a composition instructor's professional life. Perhaps what Mark is showing us is that after several years, the process becomes useful as a tool to remind us of why we continue to teach composition rather than as a

tool to show us how we might better teach. The moral heuristic, which was originally intended only to act as a guide for critical self-reflection that would lead a composition instructor to understand how their personal values affect their professional lives, can help seasoned composition instructors experience this value of the process.

We, as composition instructors, have an ethical obligation to perform critical self-reflection in order to understand ourselves and our teaching contexts better. The knowledge gained is important as it can inform our course design and interactions with students and colleagues, and it can help to avoid ethical conflicts resulting from a clash of values. If we analyze our own personal ethics in order to learn who we are and what we value, the results of this process of self-discovery will be seen by the students that we teach and the colleagues with whom we work. We will have confidence when we make decisions, we will have answers when we are questioned, we will have consistency in dealing with diverse students, and we will not be sending mixed messages to students and colleagues who see how we handle authority, advocacy, and/or assessment in our classes. And all of this—our confidence, our answers, our consistency, our use of authority, our pedagogy, and our responding practices will be born from our commitment to the ethical obligation that we have to make informed decisions that are arrived at through a critical process of thought.

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APPENDIX A

MELANIE'S INITIAL RESPONSE

At the beginning of the project, I had asked several composition instructors to share with me a difficult decision that they had made in their professional lives. This is Melanie's response.

What has been the most difficult decision you've had to make about your teaching?

I teach Advanced Composition, which is a required course for all English majors regardless of their track. We have five tracks, Literature, Rhet/Comp, Film, Creative Writing, and Linguistics. I also get students who are Secondary Education majors with English as their focus. In the fall I had a student I will call Susan, who was a double major in Psychology and English. In my course I have students write a twenty page paper over the course of the semester. I'm the only person who teaches Advanced Comp this way; the others teach it more like 101 on steroids.

Susan chose to argue that Psychology should be in the Science Department, not in the Humanities. It's a good argument, and her research was fine, as was her syntax, but her grammar and mechanics were atrocious. Her mechanics were so bad that I thought, perhaps, she has a learning disability. I told her on her first and second drafts that I couldn't pass her if she didn't clean up her mechanics. She told me that another English professor told her the same thing. She said that she was "always" at the writing center.

Later, Susan sent me a short email—asking to meet with me, and her email was fraught with error—at least two or three on each line. She came to see me in my office, and I showed her the email and asked if she could identify the errors. She could not, so I asked her if she had

problems writing in the past. She said yes, but in high school, because she was in AP courses, they didn't penalize her for grammar and mechanics. Only her **English** professors in college cared about her grammar and mechanics! She said her other professors didn't care. I asked her if she had ever been tested for a learning issue like dyslexia. She said no but that there had been discussion and then nothing came of it. I called our disability department to try to get her tested, but they said she would have to take care of that herself.

I called our writing center director, who told me that Susan had been to the writing center twice, not "always" as Susan said. She didn't seem to want to put in the time to fix her writing, so I told her that I couldn't pass her if she didn't clean it up. Susan told me that I could pass her because she was planning to be a psychologist with the CIA or FBI, and she would "never need to write in her job." (??!!) I reiterated that I couldn't ethically pass a student who didn't fulfill the requirements.

Shortly thereafter, a psychology professor and the writing center director separately went to my department chair to complain about me being too hard on Susan. Apparently Susan complained so bitterly about me that these people felt they had to step in. My chair called me into her office and told me this, so I showed her Susan's writing, which my chair agreed was very poor. Then I told my chair that I considered those professors behavior to be unprofessional, that they should have come to me personally rather than tattling on me to the chair. My chair agreed, and the next day the writing center director asked if we could meet, so my chair must have called her. We did, and she told me that I took Susan's email, an email in which Susan was "reaching out for help and used it against her." (??!!) Then she told me that I shouldn't have said I couldn't morally pass Susan. Frankly, I thought I used the word ethical, but they aren't

that different. Anyway, the writing center director is tenure track, and I'm not. She never would have done this to a tenure track faculty member. I've been told she'd a snake, so I have cut ties with her. I never knew which Psychology professor complained.

Back to Susan. She finally got scared and went to the writing center for help. They went through her errors one by one, and she cleaned them up after they explained the errors to her. But before handing in her paper she added a few paragraphs which were fraught with error. She hadn't learned anything, and her writing going forward was certainly not going to be college level or even high school level writing. So my dilemma was whether or not to pass her. Students must pass Advanced Composition with a C, and I felt Susan deserved a D.

What did you decide, and how did you justify your decision?

I passed her with a C because I didn't want to deal with the incredible fallout I knew would ensue if she didn't pass.

Do you think it was the right decision?

No, my name is on her passing grade, and she didn't deserve it. She can't write—at least not the grammar and mechanics. And get this, Susan went to my Chair the following semester to complain about me, specifically that I told her I couldn't "morally" pass her if her skills didn't warrant it.

Frankly, I was angry that I had tried to help the student, and I got nothing but grief for it.

APPENDIX B

JEANETTE'S RESPONSES TO THE MORAL HEURISTIC

Looking Inward

1. What is my background and how has this shaped who I am, and what is my current situation?

I grew up in the country in southwest Michigan in a family that valued the land and learning. I spent my days outside with my cousins, our dogs, and horses. I loved to read and do "scientific" studies of plants and pond water with my microscope. I loved it when my dad, who was a chemist, brought home *Scientic American*.

I have lived in Virginia, California, New York, and Iowa, and now I am back in southwest Michigan, living in the country, and still reading and spending time outside with my family, my dogs, and my gardens.

I teach first-year writing classes as an adjunct affiliate at a large university in southwest Michigan. My Ph.D is in English with an emphasis in creative writing, and I try to spend 15-20 hours a week writing fiction. But that doesn't work so well when student papers start piling up. I advise my students (Elbow-style) to write fast rough drafts, to get their ideas on paper quickly, and then revise. But that has never worked for me. I am a slow writer. So I always feel sorry for my students who are slow careful writers as I rush them through the process of four papers in fourteen weeks.

As I think about what I wrote about my childhood, nature and science, I wonder if that's why I always try to assign some paper that has to do with the natural world or lit reviews of

research studies. Such papers have instant audience appeal, at least with me. I tell my students to pay attention to details, and perhaps that comes from my early days of learning that a butterfly isn't simply a butterfly. And it's not simply a swallowtail. It's a Spicebush Swallowtail.

2. If I subscribe (or choose not to subscribe) to religious beliefs, how does this influence who I am?

I am a Christian. A Calvinist. On days when I am nervous before teaching a class, I pause for a moment outside the door and think through Q&A 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "what is your only comfort in life and in death? That I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ . . ." Then I take a deep breath and go inside.

But I teach in public university and honor the line between the public sphere and the private sphere. One of the books that deeply influenced me is *The Fall of Public Man* by Richard Sennett about the blurring of the line between public and private, how increasingly there is this sense that everything personal has to come pouring out into public. For me, my faith is private, not easy to express in everyday conversation, and certainly not a topic for a classroom lecture; it's a mystery that's best left for story.

Hmmm . . . this is probably why I am so hard on students who write in all the contemporary pop-religious cliches about being saved or how God is soooooo Awesome!!!!

3. Who am I, as a professional?

I am in the classroom to help students become confident, fluent writers. Is it too much to hope that some of them might learn to love working with words? (Looking at that first sentence--I originally wrote "to teach students" but changed it to "help students." What does that tell me?)

I stay current on issues in the fields of fiction writing and composition studies by reading scholarly books and journals like *College Composition and Communication* and the *Writer's Chronicle*. This semester our department has asked for a stronger emphasis on students working in collaborative groups, so over the summer I read up on that.

Looking Outward

1.What does my local community value?

My local community values family, good beer, well-manicured golf courses, sleek cars. They are also generous with charities and committed to volunteer work. West Michigan, because of its manufacturing, for many years provided blue and white- collar workers with a good living. You could work on the factory floor all week and spend weekends up North at your cabin with your power boat in the summer and your Ski-doo in the winter. The Great Recession changed all that, and I can see it in my students' lives and hear it in their papers. People used to talk about the "West Michigan bubble" where life was a squeaky-clean dream, but now that the bubble has burst, their families find it difficult to admit to hard times.

While I don't drink beer or play golf, I do value family and wish I drove a sleek car. I think most of my students come from families that have the same middle-class values as I have,

but I also understand why it is necessary for them to test those values. First-year writing is a good place to have them explore new ideas, values, and possibilities.

2.What do my students value?

Let's talk about short-term values: pizza, friends, working out, parties, cute guys/girls, reality TV, Twilight, sports

Long-term values? Most students want to do well in college. They want skills and knowledge that will help them in a career. Most put great value on a career that helps people. They fear that they will end up moving back home and living in Mom and Dad's basement.

What some have trouble doing is putting aside short-term goals and working on the long-term ones, but that's true of the larger community too.

3. What values do my department, school, and the scholarly literature in my field advocate?

I have been thinking about portfolio grading and the reason why our department does it. At the end of a semester my students turn in a final portfolio of three papers. We are to grade product, not process. I assign the portfolio a letter grade and give it to a second reader, who doesn't know the grade I gave it. If we agree on a letter grade then that is the grade assigned to the portfolio. If we disagree, it goes to a third reader, who does not know what grade the two previous readers gave it. So I could give a portfolio a C and the other two intrsuctors could give it a B and the student would get a B. Our WRT 150 guidebook tells students and instructors, "we use this method so that our grading can be as fair and accurate as possible. Our teachers work

very hard to make sure that this method gives you the fairest results." I understand that many portfolios hover between two grades and accept this two out of three policy.

I tell myself to trust the system, that when a grade ends up other than what I assigned I am probably being influenced by factors related to process, not product. That rationale works well when a portfolio hovers between the criteria for an A and B portfolio, or between the criteria for a B and C. What troubles me is when it a portfolio shows the characteristics of both a C and a D portfolio. If a student portfolio gets a D, then the student has to retake the class.

While portfolio grading does function to norm things for all 3000+ first-year writers, sometimes my individual classes show grade anomalies that leave me troubled--have they gotten the "fairest results"? I can usually justify a portfolio grade to an individual student or a colleague, but there have been times at the end of a semester when I worry about what I would say if certain students started comparing grades and asked me to explain.

One semester I had two ESL students; both of them struggled with English. In class and lab they had trouble understanding verbal instructions, and their in-class writings were very rough and brief (2-3 sentences in 10 minutes), and often unclear and unconnected to the assignment. Over the course of the semester, their papers improved, but Student X seemed more involved in the revising process than Student Z. When I read their final portfolios, the portfolio of Student X was a stronger portfolio in terms of content, organization, and use of sources than Student Z's final portfolio.

While they were better writers by the end of the semester, I assigned a D to both students' portfolios because I decided the D grading criteria best fit their papers. All semester long my portfolio grading group had looked at sample student papers and these two portfolios fit with

what we had said were D papers. I also sensed that theses two students would be helped by another semester of writing. I passed Student X and Student Z's portfolios on to second readers. A second reader also gave Student X's portfolio a D. So Student X had to retake the class. Student Z's portfolio went to a different second reader, and that reader gave it a C. So it went on to the third reader, who was a completely different reader from the other two. She gave Z's portfolio a C also. Two out of three--student Z ended up with a C and did not have to retake WRT 150.

I have visions of X comparing his portfolio to Z's and asking me to explain. I have no idea what I would say other than the luck of the draw. He got one second reader and Z got two other ones. That doesn't seem fair.

I am troubled by the unevenness of the grade and consequences when I compare the two portfolios. I am left with the feeling that both portfolios should have gotten the same grade, whether C or D. I could be content either way as long as it was consistent. And I am left with questions. Was I too hard on both X and Z's portfolios because of what I saw in the classroom, thus treating X unfairly by assigning a D as a first reader? Did I not listen close enough as we talked about C/D grades in portfolio group? Did I make an unfair justification that they needed another writing class? Or were the other readers too lenient in giving Z's portfolio a C? As we talked about grades over the semester, did they pretend to grade harder than they actually do? Did they go a little easier on Z's portfolio because he had the more ethnic sounding name and they assumed he was ESL?

And, so, I am back where I started: I tell myself, trust the system. I think back to when I taught and wasn't in a portfolio group. I am sure, despite my attempts to remain consistent, that

there were uneven grades and, at times, unfair grades. Portfolio group grading and the common grading criteria that we all have to follow keeps us accountable to one another and the department for what we value as academic writing. We get things right more often than not. At least that's what I keep telling myself.

APPENDIX C

MARK'S RESPONSES TO THE MORAL HEURISTIC

Looking Inward

1. What is my background and how has this shaped who I am, and what is my current situation?

I grew up in an upper middle-class suburban family. Both of my parents went to college (my father was a first-generation college student, but my mother's parents had both attended college). My father was an upwardly mobile manager with a large corporation, and we moved about every two or three years as he took new positions in the company. My mother was a stay-at-home mom. My parents divorced when I was 22. My father in particular valued the intellect, and he always encouraged me to read and debate ideas, etc. I was able to attend the college of my choice, and I ended up going to a very selective private university.

We attended mainstream protestant churches—United Methodist—throughout my childhood. In my teens I rebelled against religion, and I think because I was fairly thoughtful about it, my parents allowed me to stop attending church when I was about 15. For several years I adopted an adamant libertarian-atheist position. In college I became more liberal politically, but remained uninterested in church through my twenties—although I did enjoy reading theology and religious history. After settling in [my current home] and having children in my early thirties, my wife and I joined an independent liberal congregation, and when I was about 40 I was a very active part of a small group of people who started a Unitarian Universalist church in town. I continue to attend that church today. It is a non-creedal congregation—i.e., members are not

required or even expected to adhere to any particular religious beliefs, other than to agree to support one another in our personal spiritual journeys.

Although I have eschewed many of the "trappings" of suburban life, I nonetheless live in very much the same socio-economic class as my parents. In terms of household income, my wife and I are definitely upper-middle class. We live in a medium-sized city, not in the suburbs, and our children attended city schools, etc., so they were not raised with the same racial and economic insularity that we ourselves were. My children are now both college students, and they have, I am pleased to say, active intellects and, I hope, promising futures. I am a tenured professor with an almost embarrassing amount of job security, and my wife is a free-lance author who is able to choose her writing projects without too much concern about remuneration. In short, we both enjoy a remarkable amount of freedom in our personal and professional lives. In addition, we have managed to reach our early 50s with virtually no health problems, and neither of us require daily medication or suffer from any chronic pains or discomforts. I realize that things can change quickly, but there is no reason to think I will not be able to continue working until my late 60s, and my wife and I can expect a fairly lengthy and healthy retirement. Our house is old and requires a lot of care, but we love it and the city we live in. Indeed, I sometimes wonder how things managed to work out so well for me. I am very, very lucky.

2. If I subscribe (or choose not to subscribe) to religious beliefs, how does this influence who I am?

My religious beliefs are very important to me. I consider myself a non-Christian who nonetheless values the teachings of Jesus (and other religious figures), and I use the term "God"

to embody the general and mysterious tendency toward goodness that I perceive in the universe. I like religious language, and I try to live in a way consistent with my understanding of a religious life. For me, this includes supporting social-justice causes, working to build a healthy local community, acting to conserve local and global resources, and eating a largely whole-foods diet of almost exclusively plant-based foods. I consider myself fortunate to work as a university professor, which gives me considerable freedom to support intellectual and academic issues of importance to me. I see my work in the General Education program, in the composition program, and in my own classes as generally supportive of and consistent with my religious and political goals: universal education, high levels of critical thinking, personal growth and development for all, and strong local, national, and international communities.

3. Who am I, as a professional?

As I've indicated, I feel a strong sense of consistency between my spiritual life and my professional life. As a teacher, my job is to help students become more thoughtful, articulate, and self-aware, and in so doing to help them create options for themselves in their own personal and professional lives. In my administrative work, I have worked to create structures and policies that support these same goals. Without ever needing to mention my church or my religion, I am in fact doing the work of the church when I do my job. My church and my denomination value open-ended inquiry, the free exchange of ideas, and personal development—and these are also, of course, academic goals. In my teaching, I try not to judge students on the content of their thought, but rather on the effectiveness of their articulation of their thought. I believe that bad or immoral ideas, well-articulated and thoroughly supported, open themselves up for criticism from

self and others—and indeed often fall apart in the process of being articulated. I don't need to "correct" anybody's moral or political thinking; I just need to keep asking questions, keep asking for clarification. My job is to facilitate the intellectual development of my students—not to direct it or to shape it. I feel quite content with this role.

Looking Outward

1. What does my local community value?

Generally speaking, my local community is both progressive and conservative. It is progressive in that it offers a rich diversity of breweries, restaurants, and cultural events, including the nationally-recognized [art and comedy] events. It is conservative in that it maintains a family-business ethic of hard work and individualism, favoring private charity, for example, over public agencies. The fundamental personality of [the location] is, I think, a traditional American one, one that I would call "liberal" in the classic sense, meaning rooted in the founding documents of the United States—and I'm very comfortable with that.

When my personal ethical and political values differ from my students, I often feel that they are "surface-level" differences. Even hard-core Republicans generally believe in a positive role for government, and a reason for certain levels of taxation and regulation, and so on. Our disagreements are, then, mainly disagreements about scale and degree, not central purposes. Of course, we are all aware of a negative trend in our society to exaggerate rather than to minimize differences between the political extremes of right and left, so many students (like many other current US citizens) mistakenly (in my view) demonize those with whom they disagree—over

politics, in particular. I don't like this trend, but I don't take it personally. It's just what people learn from the media and so on. It's not an orientation that stands up to much scrutiny.

2. What do my students value?

Like most other people, [our] students are most interested in "being happy." The tough part is defining what that means. Some reduce it to making a lot of money, while others define it as finding a stable job. Some think of it in terms of living in a particular place (often [in the local area]) and having children, etc. Very few define it in terms of spiritual or intellectual growth, and I certainly don't blame them for that. I think it's reasonable for students to aim toward a good job, with a solid income; it's our job to help them deepen their expectations to include personal growth and freedom. I always say that I, too, want my student to get good jobs, but I also want them to be *good people* in those jobs. And good people are open-minded, generous, articulate, and thoughtful—not self-absorbed, ignorant, and small-minded.

I don't know whether my students are in college of their own accord or because of real or perceived pressure from others—parents or the culture at large. I don't much care, I guess. I try to treat the students *as if* they are there for the right reasons—and if I do that, I think they will eventually act like they are there for the right reasons, which is the same as actually being there for the right reasons. I guess I just don't think about this very much. It's more important for me to monitor my own goals and motivations than to worry about my students'. By choosing to attend a professionally-oriented liberal-arts university, the students are more or less asking to be treated in a certain way—so that's what I focus on.

3. What values do my department, school, and the scholarly literature in my field advocate?

I like the overall ethic of my university and my department. The university was founded as an experimental college, and I think an experimental and entrepreneurial spirit still pervades the institution, even as it has matured and become, perhaps inevitably, more corporate and a bit more top-down structurally. Generally speaking, I trust my administrators to have the same basic values I have, when it comes to the overarching goals of higher education. I sympathize with their need to offer an attractive package to students in a competitive environment, and sometimes that means doing things in less-than-ideal ways. I try not to get too caught up in worrying about that. I must say that we have generous benefit and retirement programs, and our salaries are definitely fair, so in general I think we are treated quite well.

Our department provides plenty of opportunities for my own professional growth. I've enjoyed a tremendous amount of freedom to experiment and innovate. And the basic pedagogical approach of our department very much reflects my own—in large part because I played a major role in establishing the department and its personality.