

REVISITING RADICAL REVISION

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Although various aspects of the writing process have been studied extensively of late, research on revision has been notably absent.

—Nancy Sommers

In my high school days we wrote papers once and handed them in once.

—Carmen, first-year writing student

Even as post-process theorists charge process pedagogy with ignoring context, erasing social differences and social forces, their own research similarly effaces writers and scenes of writing ... [and they] don't mention revision practices.

—Nancy Welch

I asked them [my students] about revision, and they were stumped ...

—Nancy DeJoy

I never appreciated revising because in my past experiences I didn't revise. There was only editing ...

—Bart, first-year writing student

REVISION OVER THE DECADES

Over the years, I have told many students that “there is no great writing, only great rewriting,” and I decided to begin this essay with that quotation, wishing to give it the proper attribution. What I have discovered, however, is that it is not entirely clear whose words these are. The leading contender seems to be Justice Louis Brandeis, but my most recent search uncovered variations on the theme of the primacy of revising ascribed to Nabokov, Tolstoy, Oates, Michener, Dahl, Crichton, et al. This next citation, however, is accurate: “Teaching writing is teaching re-writing” (Fulwiler, 1992, p. 190).

The need to teach revision to student writers has not lessened over the years as the epigraphs to this essay, drawn from three decades, suggest. Nancy Sommers' study described student revision practices of the time as “scratching out,” “marking out,” and “slashing” (1980, pp. 380-381). Toby Fulwiler described his students' revision practices at that same time in terms similar to Sommers'.

All too often, students in first-year composition and fourth-year literature alike believed that revision meant shuffling around a few commas on last night's paper before handing it in. While this generalization does disservice to serious students writers, it remains true for many who completed our classes with far less language proficiency that we had hoped for. (1982, p. 100)

I was in the composition classroom during that same period of time. Thanks to the expressivist theorists of the 1970s and 1980s, I had become convinced that teaching revision was vital, given that my students, by and large, seemed unfamiliar with that stage of the writing process. As the 1990s began, Donald Murray made the observation that

“Revise,” we command, and our students change some of the punctuation, often trading new grammatical errors for old; choose a couple of long words they don't really know from Roget to “profound it up” as one of my students said; misspell a number of words in a more innovative way; catch a few typos; and pass back essentially the same paper. It is all they know. (1991, p. vii)

In the mid-1990s I was in my fifteenth year of full-time teaching at Miami University Middletown (Ohio) and had been emphasizing revision in my writing courses as part of a portfolio approach to writing instruction. I decided to find out whether the emphasis on revision in my first-year writing courses had had any impact, so I compiled a list of 85 former students who had taken my first-year writing course anywhere from four to fourteen years earlier to survey them about their experiences and recollections. My list was not random: I deliberately chose memorable students, the ones whom I felt had “gotten it.” I received a 29% response rate: twenty-five students completed my survey. The fourth survey question read, “What specific activities in which you participated as a student in freshman composition stand out in your memory? Why?” Despite the open-ended nature of the question, 36% (9) students identified revision as a memorable feature of the course. Their comments were intriguing in that they did not describe their revision process so much as their affective reaction to revising. One student commented, “of the various writing habits I acquired ... the habit of revising my work has proven to be the most valuable,” and then she discussed how the habits she had developed persisted after graduation. Another student wrote that the course

made me feel okay about rewriting ... For some reason I had

this other mistaken belief that people should be able to write perfectly, and that all writers had this inherent talent to choose words. Never once did you make me feel stupid ... You simply suggested a better way. Sometimes I agreed and sometime I didn't, but no matter what, it was okay either way.

A third student wrote that, “the positive experience I received from freshman comp was the ability to learn how to revise. Also, I became extremely confident in my writing.” Another student, however, one who later became an English teacher herself, made a telling comment when she wrote, “I like the fact that we used THE WRITING PROCESS and were guided through each phase, rather than rushed. Re-vision was seeing the writing’s meaning come to life.”

The conclusion I draw from this survey, in retrospect, is that some students who had come of age in the 1980s and early 1990s were receptive to an emphasis on revision as a complex and vital activity because they had previously had, as Sommers, Fulwiler, and Murray assert, a very limited sense of what revision could be. By the end of the 1990s, Nancy Welch was advocating that the process movement’s methodology itself for teaching revision was in need of revising. She too looked back to the 1970s and 1980s and noted that there was not much research done into revision. She also observed, however, that while post-process theorists leveled a critique at process pedagogy for “ignoring context, erasing social differences and social forces, their own research similarly effaces specific writers and scenes of writing.” In sum, these post-process theorists, she pointed out, “don’t mention revision practices” (1997, p. 24).

And, indeed, throughout the next decade of the 2000s, commentary continued to suggest that revision, if taught and studied at all, was not presented as a complex and vital activity but more as a mechanical cleaning up of faulty prose. Lisa Costello has recently reviewed revision articles of the decade and reports that research appears to focus on collaboration, on contrastive studies with experienced writers, and on ESL and tutoring. She concludes that “a survey of recent literature on revision ... suggests that teaching individual revision might still remain an ‘afterthought’ except as it applies to remedial or struggling writers” (2011, p. 154).

The difference between the discussion of revision and writing in the most recent decade and the discussion of the 1980s and 1990s may be that the new “millennial generation” of college students itself has come under fire. Mark Bauerlein points the finger at students who rely upon electronic chat and no longer care about capitalization and spelling, who do not expect writing to be clearly composed and coherent, and who spend more time playing video games than

reading books (2008). While I find Bauerlein's jeremiad unconvincing thanks to its shrill exaggerations, I also note that his observation that the millennial generation of students brings a new set of challenges to the writing classroom is worth considering: contemporary students may not, in fact, have a limited conception of revision so much as a limited interest in it. In a quite different take from Bauerlein's, Andrea Lunsford argues that college students now may, in fact, be writing more and with a greater awareness of audience than the students in the previous decades, thanks to social networking and electronic media. However, she also reports that college students' writing errors have not changed over the past twenty-five years. The inference I draw is that the majority of the "life-writing," in Lunsford's phrase (Haven, 2009), that contemporary students are doing does not necessarily have as its goal the kind of complex and polished final texts expected in the academy. Notably, Lunsford does not say anything about revision and what role it might play in the "life-writing" of the students in the Stanford study.

Nancy DeJoy's research also tends to confirm that revision, for many students in the 2000s, was not even on the radar. DeJoy analyzed more than 600 student placement essays in response to this prompt:

The faculty of our first-year writing program is busy preparing for your arrival, and you can help by writing an essay in which you explain your strengths as a reader and writer. Conclude by stating both what you will contribute to your first-semester Critical Writing, Reading and Researching class and what you hope to gain from that class. (2004, p. 26)

DeJoy listed two dozen responses in the essays that explored what the students hoped to contribute (2004, p. 33) and 546 responses to what they hoped to gain from the course (2004, p. 35). Not a single student referred to revision by name as either a potential contribution or a hoped-for gain.

The silence about revision continues. Rebecca S. Nowacek's 2011 study of transfer of learning concludes that "good writing is not a skill that can be extracted from the complex social contexts for writing and applied unproblematically. Rather, writing knowledge is actually a complex constellation of knowledges and abilities linked together by a writer's understanding of genre" (p. 100). She continues by discussing "writing processes and analytical approaches" that the students she studied had learned and transferred into other situations, "most often to their invention process" (2011, p. 100). This section of the book does not refer to revision. Nowacek refers to invention on six other occasions in her book, offering several examples. By contrast, according to the book's index, revision is not mentioned once in the study.

A NEW PATH: RECONCILING POST-PROCESS AND PROCESS PEDAGOGY

The larger question may be where does that leave process pedagogy? Lad Tobin's take is that the fundamental beliefs of the writing process movement included the idea that "a premature emphasis on correctness can be counter-productive" (1994, p. 7). And Fulwiler, a decade after his earlier observations, argued in the 1990s that after twenty years of both teaching writing and writing professionally himself, "I have come to believe that knowing when, where, and how to revise is the greatest difference between my own good and bad writing as well as between the practices of experienced and inexperienced writers" (1993, p. 133). But by the end of the 1990s, a post-process approach to teaching composition had begun to hold sway. Robert Yagelski's view, however, is that process and post-process approaches are not "entirely incompatible" and that teachers "still routinely speak of planning, drafting, and revising—terms that suggest individual agency—in our conversations about writing and teaching writing" (1994, p. 204). He explains why this language is still useful because "the idea of composing as a process is a powerful way to understand what writers actually do." The composing process, he continues, "makes simple the complicated activity of writing. It allows us to talk about, study, and teach writing in ways that make the complexity of the act manageable" (1994, p. 205). Of course, post-process theorists' criticism of process pedagogy suggests that it offers too simplistic a view of a complex set of processes, but Yagelski, I believe, has something valuable to contribute in his final sentence—process provides tools to make discussions of writing "manageable."

Nancy Welch agrees that process pedagogy offers something of value in that it presents revision through the concept of dissonance that provides the starting point for revision. She objects, however, to a view of dissonance as a "problem to be corrected" (1997, p. 30) and confesses to being "troubled by constructions of revision that emphasize craft, technique, tidying up, and fitting in" (1997, p. 6), later defining the form of revision to which she objects as "the systematic suppression of all complexity and contradiction" (1997, p. 135). In other words, she wants to find a pedagogy that encourages dissonance, feeling that process approaches do not. In such a critique, Welch echoes James A. Reither's earlier concerns that "composition studies does not seriously attend to the ways writers know what other people know or to the ways mutual knowing motivates writing—does not seriously attend, that is, to the knowing without which cognitive dissonance is impossible" (1985, p. 622). These are powerful—and persuasive—arguments. But the recent history of teaching writing/rewriting is rooted in process pedagogy, and to be more specific, in what has come to be known as

expressivism, and expressivist pedagogy has long offered an approach to teaching revision that requires dissonance rather than attempting to squelch it.

Post-process critiques of process, Yagelski says, “problematize the notion of ‘individual’ or ‘subject’ as often conceived in expressivist discussions . . . ,” but he concludes that “these critiques of expressivism have less to say about the composing process per se than about the political implications of particular ‘expressivist’ approaches to teaching that process” (1994, p. 207). To Nancy DeJoy the shift that James Berlin’s groundbreaking work encouraged was a “methodological move” away from teaching writing “mastery” to teaching “analysis” (2004, p. 51). DeJoy sketches out an ambitious and exciting pedagogy that involves her writing students in rethinking the composing process, in a sense redefining invention, drafting, and revising into rich, complex acts. However, by emphasizing analysis over mastery, her approach does not offer concrete, usable strategies for less experienced writers so that they might engage in productive revision of their drafts in progress.

Yagelski, Welch, and DeJoy work diligently to find a path that does not set up process and post-process as antagonistic models of writing instruction. Welch and DeJoy in particular seek to offer enriched approaches to understanding and teaching revision in opposition to the spare and underdeveloped models familiar to many students. But, as I hope to show, some “expressivist” approaches to teaching revision are entirely compatible with postmodern notions of the writing process and do indeed offer a rich conception of revising, one that emphasizes the value of dissonance.

A NEW FAMILIAR PATH: PROVOKING REVISION

Nancy Welch’s concept of “getting restless” is also designed to promote a complex, complicated, and problematized form of revision, but the voices of expressivist teachers had also been advocating a richer conception of the role of revision, before Welch’s book was published in 1997. Kim Korn, in an essay that appeared in the same year as Welch’s book, advocated teaching revision as “an act of invention rather than editing” (1997, p. 88) through the use of “strategies that encourage us to step out of our writing comfort zones” (1997, p. 89). Years earlier, Donald Murray had asserted that “Writers are born at the moment they write what they do not expect and find a potential significance in what is on the page” (1991, p. ix), and both Toby Fulwiler and Wendy Bishop were advocating revision pedagogies designed to shake up student writers. Fulwiler’s *Provocative Revision* (1992) and Bishop’s edited collection *Elements of Alternate Style: Essays on Writing and Revision*, which presents her concept of “radical revision” (1997), offered an expressivist-derived approach that encouraged students to

work toward mastery of revision by unsettling their more routinized approaches to rewriting as editing.¹

What Fulwiler and Bishop present is an assignment that calls upon students to revisit a completed essay, requiring them to reconceive of the piece by revising it in a major way. Fulwiler outlines four processes that might be employed to provoke a new text related to but different from a previously-completed text; he terms them “adding” (expanding the scope of the piece), “limiting” (narrowing the focus of the piece), “switching” (finding a new perspective for the piece, e.g. switching from first to third person), and “transforming” (changing the genre of the piece, e.g. transforming a narrative into an argumentative essay). Bishop requires her students to produce a “radical revision” of a completed text, accompanied by a reflective commentary on the experience of revising the draft. Her assignment suggests that students consider changes in voice/tone, syntax, genre, audience, time, physical layout/typography, or even medium as a means of producing a radical revision.

I have found Fulwiler’s and Bishop’s presentations convincing and have been using them, on and off, ever since first learning about them. Most recently, I have used the radical revision assignment in the early part of my semester² to conclude a unit of the course that focuses on teachers. We read about teachers, we brainstorm lists of the qualities of good teachers, we analyze video clips of teachers at work in fictional films. The students then write a paper about a memorable “teacher” (as they define the term) in their own lives. I use the topic because first-year students are experts when it comes to this subject, having had a lifetime of experience in dealing with teachers. Once this paper has been completed, the course shifts into a discussion of revision, wherein the students become self-consciously aware of the process of revision through assigned readings.

In a similar fashion, Nancy DeJoy designs her first-year writing course to invite students into the discussion of the writing process that has been ongoing in the composition field. At one point, she observes that in focusing on the role of audience, there are key essays in the field that the students ought to read (2004, p. 29). Although she does not make a similar claim about revision essays, I want to make that assertion. So my classes begin a discussion of revision by reading Nancy Sommers’ study contrasting the revision practices of experienced and student writers (1980) and discussing the students’ own backgrounds in revision in contrast to the student writers and experienced writers in Sommers’ study. I then assign the radical revision and present an overview of possibilities by sharing Fulwiler’s four processes with examples. Like Bishop, I include several reflective pieces in conjunction with this process, and I would like to focus on those reflections as a means of making a point about what the students gain from engaging in a radical revision assignment.

At the end of the semester, the students produce a final letter to me in which they are invited to reflect on the activities and experiences during the course that they found meaningful. In the last three semesters in which I taught first-year writing, 190 students completed this letter. I find it striking that eighty-three of them (44%) chose to discuss the radical revision as a key experience in the course. Korn claims that the radical revision assignment provides an opportunity for writers to gain “thoughtful insights” not only into their own composing processes but also into their “motives and choices” as writers. The letters in my course often illustrate such insights.

For example, one young woman remembers that the radical revision prodded her into experimenting with the structure of her writing.³ She says,

When the class was assigned the radical revision, I was pleasantly surprised and relieved to see that there are ways to move away from the five-paragraph essay format. Going from assignment one to assignment two helped me open my eyes to the fact that I was being close-minded and that there are other options for my writing ... Changing my essay to a letter of nomination forced me to write to a new audience: to the person who would be choosing whether my nomination deserved the award.

It is hard to say which decision came first: a new purpose, a different audience, or a new genre, but her commentary makes clear that she has become quite aware of how those decisions moved her away from her previous comfort zone of the five-paragraph form.

Another student focuses on how the radical revision assignment affected her belief system about revision

Before taking this course, I believed that revising a paper meant to fix grammatical and punctuation errors. Now, I agree with the credo statement “I believe revising helps a writer step back, look at the paper from a different perspective and make changes ...” For assignment number two, I revised my paper from being a narrative to a letter. The narrative just told the reasons why my teacher had good qualities and had stories to support them, but in the letter I explained why these qualities made my teacher deserving of an award.

This student has not only transformed the genre of her essay, but she has switched her intended audience of readers, and the dissonance of these transformations has produced a change in her conception of the possibilities available in revising.

I also required students to compose a Writer's Memo to accompany each radical revision, a metacommentary on the new draft. These reflective pieces reveal the impact of the radical revision on the students' understanding of the writing process. One student had transformed her personal essay into the first chapter of a hypothetical self-help book. Her memo explains why. "I have a very hard time writing personal things ... it is really hard for me to talk about myself in my writing." The self-help book approach resolved her issues by sharing the same information about her influential teacher (she had chosen Buddha) by couching the discussion in terms of how readers might benefit from his teachings instead of revealing her own personal experiences.⁴

Several students chose to transform their personal essay tributes to a favorite teacher into more public pieces of writing, learning along the way how choosing a genre and audience can affect the impact of a draft. As Daniel Collins writes elsewhere in this collection, "the writer is not separate from larger social contexts, and so the writing process does not end until such inquiry is used to in the making of meaning for the writer and for others." One student converted a personal narrative into a newspaper feature story about her teacher and described one of her major changes as reconfiguring her introduction. She chose to incorporate "quotations" from her teacher, primarily remembered as favorite comments the teacher had made, in order to give the new version the sound of a human interest feature story, demonstrating her understanding that readers of newspaper articles have expectations of the genre, expectations that she felt it important to meet.

Harlan's narrative essay became a commencement speech. "By doing this," the memo reveals, "I still shared memories, but directed them in a way that showed everyone how great a teacher she was and how she helped me grow as a student ... I selected this approach because I knew she was a great friend to many students in my grade. I felt that this would have been a good tribute to her and a collective farewell." While the genre has changed in this radical revision, it is important to note that the author has also learned that a single piece of writing can have multiple purposes.

In a similar move, Wanda decided to revise her narrative about her favorite instructor into an open letter addressed to younger students at her old high school, the intent of which was to encourage them to take classes with this fine teacher.

The organization of this paper works better because as a student, I could determine which traits were more important to other students than other traits. Therefore, I could organize the paper from less important traits to most important traits.

It worked better than in the last paper because my audience was clearer so I could really organize my paper in a way that would be interesting to students.

For Wanda, the radical revision had led to her exploring organizational patterns and considering herself as a member of a specific discourse community: present and former high school students.

For at least two other students, the radical revision increased the complexity of the writing task as they faced decisions about which of their two teacher essays to include in our final course portfolio. Brady decided to transform his film review of a recent movie about a teacher into a report written by the school's principal that collected several first-person eyewitness accounts of a controversial incident documented in the film. He notes "I think that this paper shows the personality of the characters better than the first [paper] ... because it's easier to show personality through what a person says than it is to explain their personality ... I think that the first paper does a better job of showing my analysis of the movie." Brady has made a discovery about the complex relationship of genre, audience, and purpose through his radical revision; the revision has not simplified his writing task, but actually complicated it as he has realized that there are both advantages and disadvantages to his revision decisions.

Natalie also experienced the problematic outcome of radical revision. She began by writing a personal essay about a teacher with whom she had had a complicated relationship. The teacher was a leader in the transcendental meditation (TM) community in the student's hometown, but she was, at the same time, a difficult and challenging person with whom to have a personal relationship. In her radical revision, Natalie chose to rewrite her personal narrative as an imagined obituary for the teacher in the local paper. "I went from writing an essay to writing an obituary, and I went from writing to, well, an audience of whom I wasn't too sure ... but which I think ended up being my fellow classmates, to an audience of two communities [the TM community and her hometown]." She describes how she did "a little research" by reading a number of obituaries, but then she concludes,

An obituary can be a hard thing to keep interesting! The only thing that I didn't get to express is my negative feelings and criticisms of Kathy, simply because it's not right to be negative in an obituary. That was the only thing that didn't work as well. I almost felt like I wasn't telling the whole story, because I was leaving out that entire side of my opinion of her.

Natalie's reflections make clear that she did not experience revision as how to "correct moments of dissonance" (Welch, 1997, p. 6), but instead ended up

facing a difficult choice between two pieces that do different things better (and worse) than one another.

These students' testimonies show how engaging in radical revision required them not only to wrestle with the challenges of reconceiving their previously finished work but also encouraged them to consider how they wanted to define revision and how they chose to learn to deal with its limitations. Nancy DeJoy objects to students' "consuming and applying heuristic processes they had no part in developing" (2004, p. 62), but these students, I want to argue, have indeed developed their own heuristic processes for revision.

BEING CRITICALLY EXPRESSIVIST

The examples I have shared demonstrate that radical revision often encourages students to move away from personal writing into more overtly public writing: newspaper stories, commencement speeches, open letters. In several cases, moves like this led students to engage with the politics of public education and the challenges of writing in a situation where the balance of power resided with the readers. Interestingly, these students had all chosen to write about a memorably bad teacher. Carlee changed her narrative about how a teacher had let her down into a personal letter directly to that teacher. Her *Writer's Memo* comments on the challenges in this revision: how can she be honest yet still encourage the reader—her former teacher—to read her entire letter? She strikes upon the idea of first praising some of the teacher's methods and then offering advice, showing that she cares about her successors as students in the teacher's class. This approach, she writes in her memo, "gave me the ability to offer suggestions on how she could improve her negative teaching qualities." The radical revision forced her, in other words, to strategize rather than simply venting her feelings, as she had done in the original narrative.

Several other students chose to write formal letters to administrators, voicing their concerns about a teacher's ineffectiveness. One memo explains her thinking:

Since my new audience would be my teacher's boss I was able to instill a purpose in my writing. Before I felt that my paper lacked a true purpose. I confused many of my ideas into one paper and therefore the paper had no direction. With this paper I was able to give it a purpose, that purpose being to initiate a revision of the way teachers can behave with their students on school trips off of campus. I want my reader to do something about what happened to me on my trip so that no other student can feel this way again.

Once more, however, the task has been more complicated than her first narrative paper was—a story that emphasized her hurt feelings in a somewhat rambling manner. The tone of the new piece is a tricky one lest she alienate her reader and thus undermine her purpose. This student's experience reminds of comments made by Daniel Collins, elsewhere in this collection, who writes, "expressivist writing theory, it seems to me, upholds the idea that to write is to discover oneself amidst an array of others. It honors the importance of the student engaging and making sense out of the world." I see this student explaining how her revision was borne out of an enhanced understanding of her ideas in the context of the larger world that included her anticipated reader, an "other" whom she wished to convince. This "engaging and making sense out of the world" was prompted by the radical revision assignment.

I find Nancy Welch and Nancy DeJoy persuasive when they argue for a more nuanced and problematized conception of revision and of teaching revision. Their theoretical arguments are convincing. Welch urges that "border-talk" between process and post-process pedagogies needs to take place in teaching revision (1997, pp. 163-164). The radical revision assignment, I contend, represents that border talk. Radical revision offers the possibilities of presenting revision in the richer, more complex ways that Welch and DeJoy advocate. In fact, Welch's descriptions of how revision is enacted in her classroom sounds like a description of the radical revision assignment (1997, p. 165).

What I want to argue is that less experienced writers may not yet understand all of the rich possibilities open to them through revision.⁵ The "first phase model" of composition instruction, what DeJoy terms "process pedagogy" (2004, p. 4), offers an opportunity to experience revision in writing so that it can be applied in the way that she advocates. DeJoy's empirical data (2004, pp. 34-35) show that the students' placement essays had very little to say about revision, and she later discovers a similar silence when she directly asks her students questions about their revision knowledge (2004, p. 74). DeJoy's notion of "revision" is about a way of thinking—assuming that writers are always "revising the world" by presenting their ideas about the world (in the Burkean sense of joining a conversation and changing it by doing so). To learn to revise texts, however, requires an attention to developing a series of texts, and that is what process pedagogy offers. The radical revision assignment, born out of an expressivist approach to writing instruction, provokes students into discovering that "finished" texts may not be "finished" at all and can be "refinished" into new texts. By being so provoked, students also experience a conception of revision that means more than mere fiddling with commas and word choices, preparing them to continue learning what a rich, complex, and rewarding part of the writing process revision can be.

NOTES

1. It's noteworthy to point out that Welch's book does not cite either of these sources.
2. I chose Bishop's terminology because it seems very direct in telling students what is expected of them: they will produce a second paper that is different while clearly growing out of their first paper. They are not to produce an entirely different text that is only tangentially related to the first—which is not a revision at all—but a recognizable version of the first paper that has been “radically” changed.
3. This student expressed her delight in discovering that the five-paragraph formulaic structure she had learned in high school was not the only effective way to organize a piece of writing. Because she had decided to change her first draft, a traditional five-paragraph theme extolling the virtues of her favorite teacher, into a letter nominating that teacher for an award, she realized that she had to focus on her new readers: the awards committee. That realization freed her to ignore the prescriptive five-paragraph approach, instead concentrating on building a strong and convincing argument for her candidate.
4. Thomas Newkirk notes a potential resemblance between the “traditional, teacher-directed classroom” and pedagogies that rely upon social constructivism and cultural studies (1997, p. 89) and attempts to reclaim personal narrative for the first-year writing classroom, offering an analysis of what expressivism still has to offer in a social-constructionist composition environment. Expressivist classrooms often began with personal narrative, but my initial assignment merely asks the students to write about a memorable teacher. More often than not, this general prompt leads to narrative writing, most likely because it is familiar to the students and because they want to explore a personal relationship, for good or ill, with a specific teacher. I deliberately leave the assignment rather open-ended, however, because I expect the radical revision will lead students to re-examine their initial choices anyway. And it does so—their reexaminations have led students to incorporate self-reflection into personal experience, explore other points of view, modify their purposes, and, as was the case with the self-help book and other examples to follow, even leave personal narrative behind altogether. My examples illustrate a point that Nancy Mack makes elsewhere in this collection when she argues that “writing should open the author to the possibility of agency through the interpretation and representation of memory.” In the open-endedness of my original assignment, I would argue that I follow an expressivist pedagogy, and in the required metacognitive reflection that follows, I would argue the assignment presents the students with opportunities to exercise agency by interpreting their own representation of memory.
5. See Lea Povozahev's “Essai—A Metaphor: Perception of Possibilities and Writing to Show Thinking” in this collection. Povozahev argues that “the critical, searching spirit of pragmatism encourages trying new things,” offering a different path to a similar conclusion reached in this essay.

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APPENDIX: RADICAL REVISION ASSIGNMENT SHEET

ASSIGNMENT #2 (RADICAL REVISION)

What's Expected?

For this assignment, please produce a radical revision of Paper #1. This revision will count as a separate assignment. For example, let's suppose that for paper #1 I've written an essay about my most influential teacher, my high school 11th grade English teacher. I could continue to work on that paper (Assignment #1), telling some new stories about my experiences that show the reader why I hold the opinion that I do. For Assignment #2, however, I might transform that essay into an editorial for the journal that I edit in hopes that it would influence teachers, I might build on it by interviewing some of my old classmates to see what they think about our old teacher, I could limit my topic by focusing entirely on a single interaction I'd had with my teacher as I wrote a major term paper, or I could switch the essay into a third-person description of his teaching prowess. Any one of those four papers would be sufficiently different to count as a radical revision while still being recognizably about the same specific topic, my old English teacher, so I'd now have two different papers on a closely related

topic. In your case, you'll have to pick either Asst #1 or Asst #2 for a final grade just before our midterm break.

For suggestions on how to transform your first paper into something sufficiently new to count as Assignment #2, check the Radical Revision Powerpoint. The genre for this paper is up to you: essay, letter, diary, editorial, film critique, etc.

Length requirement: 3 or more pages

Memo #2 (250 words)

1. How is this paper radically revised from your original paper? Why did you select this approach instead of another one? What other radical revisions did you consider?
2. What works better in this paper than in the original paper? What doesn't work as well? Why? What genre is this paper and has that changed from your first paper?
3. What is your purpose in writing this paper? That's another way of asking, "What are your readers supposed to get out of reading your draft?"
4. What questions do you have for me about your draft? (Remember: No yes/no questions ...)