Chapter 17. Reproduction, Critique, Expression, and Cooperation: The Writer's Dance in an Intertextual World

The journey of becoming an independent critical writer is a long one.[1] We as educators want our students to draw from and be responsive to what has been previously written. We also want them to have something fresh, credible and situationally appropriate to say. We want them to become academic, social, political, and policy thinkers to carry our cultures and ways of life into unknown futures, using newly emergent communicative technologies. The challenges and transformations facing our societies will require high degrees of knowledge, coordination, and concerted organization, dependent on our students' communicative skills. Even maintaining our current complex literate social arrangements requires sophisticated writing.

Even as we rely on the knowledge and wisdom of our forebears and treat with respect the statements of our peers, we recognize the importance of questioning prior thought, debating what new knowledge might be credible, and deliberating on smart and humane forms of progress. Skill in writing is crucial for such knowledge creation, deliberation, application, and cooperation. Our educational systems are charged with developing such writers to guide us in our ways forward. Writing education goes far beyond learning letters and spelling, which are typically instructed in the earliest grades, or grammar and text organization that are introduced shortly thereafter, or even the specialized academic and professional forms which students might be introduced to in secondary or higher education (for overviews on writing education, see Charles A. MacArthur and colleagues, 2015; Charles Bazerman, 2008; and Peter Smagorinsky, 2006). Each level and domain of writing presents new challenges and poses new levels of problems to be solved. While ultimately the writer must diagnose challenges and make choices, yet they can be supported at each level by learning new tools and concepts, being shown models, and entering into dialogs that will make choices more evident and reveal the implications of each choice (see Bazerman et al., 2018, for an overview of lifespan development of writing).

The One Continuing Theme of Becoming a Writer

Yet there is one common theme that runs throughout writing education that needs to be respected and deepened everywhere, for it motivates the hard work and close attention that are part of each act of writing. That is, writing creates meaningful communications (see Michele Eodice et al., 2017). Unless a budding writer finds this meaning, he or she will likely be inattentive to those small superficial details of form and correctness that we as teachers are so quick to spot and use to evaluate the quality of students' writing and thinking. Once students care about writing because it is a way to create meaning and draw others into their vision, they also start to care about the detailed work of meeting and exceeding readers' expectations to create powerful shared meanings.

Consider how children learn to excel in a sport. If children learn to love a sport, make beautiful plays, and feel success in winning, then they will spend hours in repetitive practice to hone skills and build strength and flexibility. They will study the rules so as not to be called out for violations and to seek advantages that the rules and allowable actions can give. Even more they become attentive in noticing their teammates and opponents—where they are, what they are doing, what techniques they are employing—to learn from them and to engage on the field with them. They search out the best equipment, the best strategies, and the best techniques. They will look to heroes for inspiration. Their love of the game, success, and sense of reward only grows with this hard work. But if they never care for the sport, then their technique is limited and slovenly, their play becomes routine and inattentive, they repeat the most common errors, and they exercise and practice only under duress. No amount of external pressure, required instruction, repetitive practice, or punitive evaluation will ever get them to progress very far.

With writing too, unless neophytes learn to enjoy, even love the game, they will not put in the hard and sometimes tedious work to get better, to notice where they are in the field, and to find the right move at the right moment. Instead, they may be filled with fear of embarrassment, haunted by failure, and worried about those who stand over them in judgment. Worse, they may learn to hate writing and resent every attempt to try to teach them what they have failed at many times before (see Keith Hjortshoj, 2001).

On the other hand, if budding writers find they can express themselves, evoke emotions in readers, tell powerful stories, share meanings and information, create ideas and knowledge, coordinate with others, or just be admirably clever users of words, they will put up with the hard work and struggle of writing. Children can sense that meaningful game even before they can form letters. Children want to grow up and master the powers of those older people around them (see Lev S. Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 92–104), emergently imitating forms, attributing meaning to the forms even before they can clearly communicate to others (see Graver J. Whitehurst and Christopher J. Lonigan, 1998). But unless they get meaningful response to their writing and not just correction of their form, they can readily lose

interest, as the game doesn't seem to have much of a point beyond gaining praise for correctness. The sense of meaningful engagement needs to stay with them as they engage in different situations and communities with evolving needs and uses for writing—from simply reporting daily events and sharing emotions to crafting extensive fictions; from filing legal briefs to planning urban development; from sharing recipes to developing investment strategies. Whatever they write, it needs to be meaningful for them to experience the rewards of writing and for them to continue working at it.

Writing in School

Schooling offers a particular and unusual subset of writing experiences. Ostensibly writing in school is to prepare students for later needs and participation in society, but for students school is largely experienced as a self-contained social system with its own values, activities, and rewards. From the perspective of adults—whether parents or government policy makers or educators—the rewards of school are fundamentally built around delayed gratification. But young people within schooling need to experience immediate satisfactions beyond the hopes of some future gratification, particularly as the schooling apprenticeship starts with very young children and can continue as long as twelve or sixteen or twenty years. Even when students complete their schooling, they still will only be at the entry point of writing for their careers, with perhaps years of on-the-job apprenticeship to follow. While reward for reproducing received models and knowledge—that is, getting top marks in school—may be sufficiently motivating for a few, most students need something more. And even those who get good grades without meaningful communication will be ill-prepared for situations when they are more on their own and are expected to show judgment, creativity, and situational responsiveness.

While issues of creating meaningful writing experiences are relevant from the earliest years of schooling, they get most visible and troubling the higher up in education students go, because more is expected of them. Sometimes the problem is not even recognized until the crisis moment when doctoral students are struggling to write their dissertations. At that point, they are expected to make novel contributions to knowledge, based on awareness of what others have written previously, with careful reasoning and good theoretical understanding, while offering strong evidence produced through appropriate methods, and coming to pointed conclusions in terms that show the relevance and implications of the research. All this is expected to be presented in clear language, without digressions, confusions, contradictions, or undue prolixity while following standard expectations of correctness. That is, their work is expected to be knowledgeable, meaningful, high quality, and persuasive according to disciplinary standards. This is a tall order, especially if students haven't been prepared for increasingly ambitious writing tasks throughout all the years of their schooling. And remember, these

students are the few who have come this far, somehow struggling past all the earlier challenges to get to this point. Is it a wonder that so many struggle, never complete doctoral dissertations, or turn in only marginally acceptable texts, never to offer significant contributions again? Actually, the wonder may be that any get to this point at all.

Because the need is so apparent at this near-end point of education, affecting the most successful of students, more universities worldwide are offering support for doctoral writers (for examples of programs see Steve Simpson et al., 2016, and Marilee Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020). All support is welcome, but the best time for help was much earlier. Writing education should have started in the primary grades and continued throughout schooling and university so that postgraduate writers would be prepared to meet the new challenges of dissertation writing. Throughout the school years writing can expand students' expression of knowledge, experience, and point of view. The child may begin simply writing notes of endearment or of gratitude to those around them. With proper guidance this can grow into sharing new ideas and complex materials, facts, and concepts learned in their subjects. Commenting on events and familiar situations can develop judgment and confidence in their views, even as students learn to report carefully and with considered stance the material they are commenting on. More informed views can be held accountable to higher levels of precision in language and carefulness in reasoning and evidence. While students may wish to hide behind the voices of authority from their sources, they need to learn to evaluate, analyze, and deploy their readings to show the sense they make of their sources and apply those resources to the questions and tasks they themselves define. Otherwise, they can wind up mired in the incoherence of cutting and pasting. The work of thoughtful evaluation and synthesis continues and becomes more challenging at every level of education and professional life. The building of confidence, judgment, and courage never ends as one keeps getting into deeper waters, pulled by the writing one does, and looking more deeply into one's understanding of the issues and projects embodied in other texts.

Building Thought, Critique, Judgment, and Stance in an Intertextual World

Study questions and exams can develop accurate reporting and understanding of assigned readings. Summary and paraphrase activities can practice the skills of knowledge reproduction. But the developing writer needs more than repeating phrases and information; the writer needs to engage in value-added tasks that invite taking a position outside the presumed authority of the assigned reading. This could be as simple as providing personal experiences that resonate with the text or question the text's applicability to a particular situation. Or it could be as complex as providing an ideological critique based on a well-articulated theoretical framework and detailed analysis. A first step in developing this judgment is

simply locating points of agreement and disagreement with what one finds and reports in the text. This can then become elaborated in arguments about validity or limitations or evaluation of the evidence and presentation of counter evidence. More subtle stances can develop with sardonic commentary, discussion of the assumptions or beliefs inherent in the text, evaluation of the reasoning, or any activity that requires taking a position that stands outside the text to comment on it. Even a book review (as opposed to a book report) puts the writer in an evaluative, critical position outside a text being written about (for examples of textbooks built on these principles, see Bazerman, 1981/2010, 1997/2015).

In the early stages of increasing student sense of the expressive and meaningful possibilities of writing, teachers may want to provide detailed instructions and guidance to point a way for students to move forward. But as students' skills, confidence, and judgment grow, students should be given wider latitude to find their own directions and make decisions about the shape and contents of texts. Advice and guidance need to be more dialogic and strategic, supporting the directions students want to explore while helping them meet the expectations of persuasive and well-formed work. The emphasis should shift from what the final result should look like to how the students can get there: how they can formulate appropriate intentions and strategically carry those intentions out.

At some point students need to engage with more than one text, as texts do not always fit together neatly, to be pasted together side by side. Texts may disagree, or they may be talking about different things, or they may take somewhat different perspectives. There may even be large gaps between the texts with different kinds of relevance for the student's interests or projects. Students need to learn to make sense of the relations of these differing texts and then see how they can be accurately added up, pieced together, or differently evaluated. A comparison of two or more texts to contrast the positions they hold and an evaluation of the information and arguments in each provides one starting place. Next students might be asked to develop a composite picture that would come from the different ideas and information from multiple related texts.

At the same time as students are learning to make sense of multiple texts, their own thinking will grow as they select and synthesize what they learn from the various texts. They will be developing their own perspectives and stances, their points of view. Throughout this process students should be given space to express how their thinking is evolving and how they are coming to understand the issues discussed in the readings. In placing their own thoughts in relation to the statements of others, they learn to use texts as context, resources, and interlocutors. Writers will be able to develop their authorial positions distinct from the sources drawn on and establish their own authority as writers. Students are challenged here to maintain their voices in this increasingly crowded field of knowledge while still taking seriously what others have to offer. This also means students learning to develop control over the voices others bring in while not distorting their messages. Whenever writers quote, and especially if they quote at length, they hand over the voice of the text

to others. Only by framing the quoted material and placing it in the overall design of their own writing can the writer wrest back control of the text's voice. Then the readers can see why and how these voices are being brought in, in relation to the meaning and point the student writer is trying to develop. In the process of learning to make the statements their own, students may become more selective and purposeful in quotation (as well as briefer) while also learning to deploy summary, paraphrase, allusion, and other means of reference strategically. This flexibility of means of reference gives them more control over what is being said and how, and allows them to maintain the force and continuity of their statements. Appropriate citation, of course, gives recognition to material from others, but it also marks off the rest as the writer's own statement. The more adept and knowledgeable students become at integrating the words, ideas, and information from others, the less unintentional plagiarism will become a problem. Of course, intentional cheating, to claim the work of others as one's one, no doubt will be a recurring problem, but that is appropriately recognized and treated as intentional cheating. The more students know how to navigate the complexity of intertextuality and the building of their meanings within an intertextual word, however, the less often they will need to resort to such cheating. For an informed view of plagiarism and citation see the Citation Project (http://www.citationproject.net/).

The Path to Research

As students gain awareness of the positions and stances they want to hold in the intertextual fields they engage in, they may start to feel the need for more knowledge and evidence to elaborate their positions, to hold their ground, or even to know where they want to stand and why. Research begins with the awareness that one can participate and act more fully and effectively if only one knew more. Parts of the needed knowledge may already have been found out by others and are available in the library, on the internet, in a company's files, or in the city archives. In that case, students will still have to figure out where to look, how to evaluate and make sense of what they find, and then integrate the pieces into an answer to their question. Further, students will need to consider whether what they have found adds up to a complete, coherent, and reliable answer. If not, they have to decide whether they should gather new evidence in primary research or limit their question to what is currently known and knowable. It is very possible that no one has asked the same question they have, in exactly the same way, and applied to the exact same circumstances, so no matter how excellent the resources they find, they may need specific local data, evaluation, adaptation, interpretation, and application, along with coordination with other knowledge.

Much of the research students do in high school and university is of that secondary sort, carried out in libraries, using already inscribed knowledge or statements to build their own knowledge and present their synthesis and analysis to others. But as students advance in their disciplines as undergraduates and then as postgraduates,

they are increasingly expected to form their own inquiries and seek information that hasn't already been inscribed, let alone codified. They need to collect new data to more accurately and precisely represent the world they are analyzing, evaluating, or acting on. In their disciplines they will typically learn field-specific methods and engage in methodological discussion for choosing and evaluating those methods. Behind the selection of methods and methodological reflections are the questions they pose: what they are trying to find out so that they can make new meanings.

This advanced inquiry is a further extension of creating meanings as they have been doing from the beginning of their writing education. Even in the earliest schooling, inquiry can be fostered in meaningful ways that go beyond cookbook experiments where teachers already know the answer. In primary grades students can collect information about problems or conditions in their community. Inquiry processes can become more extensive and elaborate as children know more and move more deeply into their subjects and professions. Throughout this process, the connection between meaning making and inquiry helps motivate developing writers, reinforcing the idea that writing, meaning making, and knowledge making are acts of personal agency, extending what one can know and do.

After students finish their university educations, they will likely need to continue reporting on the world and forming actions within communal intertexts or within the practices and expectations of their professions, domains of practice, or organizations. Only if they collect and inscribe what they find in ways the fields have come to recognize as legitimate will their observations, findings, or recommendations be persuasive. Internship activities, community projects, collaborative teams, or organizational simulations can help students start to see how their writing will shift once they leave the classroom.

The Rewards of Claiming One's Place in an Intertextual Culture

If meaning making and sharing of thinking and experience remain at the core of writing education, students learn to place their stories in relation to the stories of others and to create new stories, enriching the intertextual landscape. Learning to find one's way and create one's place in the intertextual world of meanings is learning a complex dance, a dance of appreciation of others, but also of respect for how one contributes to the communal built symbolic environment. One learns from and against the texts one draws on, but ultimately one tells one's own story.

As students learn to make more complex and informed judgments and decisions, they can sense the rewards in their increasing understanding of the world and growing sense of intelligence and problem solving, particularly in the areas of greatest interest to them. These areas of interest are likely to expand as students comprehend more, moving beyond their most immediate experience, to see their concerns represented on broader canvasses of ideas, history, society, culture, or science, even as increasing knowledge may make inquiries more focused and precise.

Even more they will be able to participate in wider and more advanced domains of society. As we have lived with literacy now for five millennia, writing has become increasingly central to the organization, communication, knowledge, and coordination of most domains in society. In fact, many domains of social organization only formed and developed through the mediation of writing. Banking, insurance, and all the financial domains would not have evolved beyond barter without records, contracts, and regulations. State legal and governmental regimes and institutions would not exist, as we would live only by the transient words of household and village leaders. Medicine, agricultural technique, and other forms of practical knowledge would be passed only by word of mouth. News would be only rumors passed by travelers. Most domains of social life through the mediation of literacy have grown, become more complex, more highly coordinated, and more knowledge based, particularly in the last two or three centuries. The pace of change has become ever more rapid in recent decades, which we now think of as the information age. In short, power, decision making, pursuit of interests, value, and even basic recognition have come to depend on literacy and documentary systems (see chapters in Bazerman, 2008, on the history of documentary systems and the relation to social domains). Persuasively representing one's interests, needs, and contributions requires being able to articulate one's presence and case within knowledge based literate fields. For our students, learning to write goes beyond satisfying personal curiosities to being enabled to become effective members of society in a world whose literate practices are constantly growing and changing.

It is not even enough for students to become familiar with a current set of literacy practices; their literate worlds will keep expanding, and technologies of communication will bring with them new communicative challenges. Students need more fundamental ways of understanding their communicative situations and realizing their messages strategically and skillfully. Students may be introduced to the power of writing through their contemporary situations and forms, but they also need to be able to analyze the underlying rhetorical dynamics of the evolving domains they will participate in during the half century or more of their productive and contributing lives (see Deborah Brandt, 2015).

Writing as a Peculiarly Human Communicative Practice

The importance of communication, history, and transformation are built into our nature as humans. Our cultural evolution is dependent on our communicative and literate evolution, resting on a biological evolution that makes humans unusually cultural creatures. We share with other animals internal neurological processes that allow us to perceive and act effectively within the ambient world. With biological evolution these internal neurological communicative networks have become increasingly sophisticated, making possible complex monitoring of our internal states and external contexts, accumulation of information, and flexible decision making responsive to our material and social environments—even

to the point of coordination with others of the species (see Antonio Damasio, 2010, 2018). But all this information gathering, reasoning, and calculation for most creatures happens only internally, within the physical limits of the individual creature. Every new member of the species must learn, organize knowledge, and train personal neural and sensing systems on their own, only aided by genetic evolution. This means that as long as the species is biologically stable, the life of each individual is much the same as the life of each previous one, going back millennia. Single-celled creatures, fish, insects, and even reptiles now live pretty much the same lives as they did when their species first evolved. Learning starts afresh with each new generation, adjusting only for changes in the material environment that changes the learning environment of each individual of the species

However, some creatures have developed means of coordination and communication that allow them to work together and even create cultures that grow and change across generations and from place to place (Tomasello, 2019). Thus, individuals become more responsive to each other and even learn from one another so that their lives are conditioned by the knowledge and practices of their cultural compatriots. Their learning reaches beyond the skin barrier to participate in sociocultural practices and knowledge. Some of these means of communication can be much more sophisticated than was previously imagined, resulting in the formation of complex animal societies, particularly among birds and mammals. However, the human capacity for language has brought communication to a different level, allowing highly differentiated cultures, forms of knowledge, and practices among different groups of people. This has been accompanied by extended periods of learning (and dependency) for the young and highly plastic neurological systems with brains that evolve throughout life in relation to activities in social and material contexts. Language becomes important in brain formation in affecting perception, categorization, and reasoning. Nonetheless, for the first couple of million years of hominids and perhaps two hundred thousand years of homo sapiens, culture and society were largely local matters, with cultural knowledge relying on direct in-person transmission, word of mouth, and a few enduring material artifacts.

The appearance of writing about 5,000 years ago, however, created new ways of communicating across space and time (Schmandt-Besserat, 1996), facilitating persistent shared knowledge and belief while making possible larger social structures of cooperation, affiliation, and meaning (Goody, 1986). Recorded documents could be compared, fostering higher degrees of argument, reasoning, and evidence within more elaborate and extended statements. Knowledge could be aggregated, synthesized and critiqued. Structures of social organization emerged with texts and written records at their center, such as scriptural religion, philosophy, sciences, finances, law, governance, literature, history, design, and architecture. Each domain became an arena of competition and contention, with battles largely carried out over written words and documents, though written words could also be used to design, strategize, and deploy material resources. Experiences and observations could be compared and reports received from distant

parts of the world, expanding knowledge, and awareness of diversity. Writing also fostered reflectivity, planning, and synoptic vision. The rise of schooling institutions followed the need for literates to carry out expanding social functions and the centralized coordination of knowledge through texts. In the last millennium, print further supported the replication and distribution of copies of texts and contentions across regions and jurisdictions, along with the formation and standardization of national languages, the proliferation of school books, and the aggregation of texts in collections, such as libraries (Bazerman, 2006).

Over the last two centuries, communication at a distance and across time has been enriched by telegraphy, telephony, audio recording, photography, wireless broadcast, and most recently digital technologies and the internet. These technologies have increased the available media for representation and changed the temporalities, distribution, and economics of exchange. But, like writing, they all afforded possibilities of intentionality, reflective composing, revision, and awareness of physically non-present audiences, social organizations, projects, affiliations, knowledge formation, and knowledge aggregation. These technologies as well frequently depend on writing directly in their scripting or their design. The affordances of changing communicative technologies only intensify the need for intentionality, purposefulness, control of design, content, stance, and the other arts associated with writing. Changing technologies also transform existing literate social activity systems and foster new ones. As machines may take over or support more automated tasks (such as is already the case with letter formation, spell and grammar checking, and formatting), human choice making becomes more fundamental, requiring monitoring, guiding, correcting, and projecting. Human beings remain the starting and endpoints of the communication, at least for the foreseeable future (Bazerman, 2018).

Our current students now will likely carry out active careers until 2070 or 2080, and their students well into the 22nd century. What they will need is not limited to the lowest common denominator of writing skills which already are being automated. They will need the highest sociorhetorical awareness of what kinds of messages and knowledge making are possible, with whom, and how their messages will both travel and endure across time, space, and socially organized activity systems. The built symbolic environment is getting more dense. It is harder to carve out one's place and value in this symbolic virtual landscape. This is the future of argument. Our educational task is to prepare students for both the world they inherit and the world they will make.

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