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## TOWARD A PERFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY IN THE WRITING CENTER

A memorial service for a famously self-destructive performance artist is about to start, and out on the sidewalk on the Lower East Side, the sousaphonist for the Hungry March Band is teaching the tenor sax player a new song.

No sheet music is required.

“We’re going to repeat five notes,” Scott Moore, the man with the big horn, tells Emily Fairey. “The first three notes everybody drew out of a bag, different notes for everyone. The fourth note is a collective B flat. The fifth note is your choice. It’s sort of a tribute to his idea of random chaos.”

Ms. Fairey nods like a veteran pitcher. “Got it.”

*Newman (1)*

My friend Geoff arrived for a visit on a Sunday afternoon and went straight for my guitar. “I heard this song on the radio on the way down here, and I want to play it for you,” he said. “I think you’ll like it.” He smiled gently as he plucked the strings along the neck, shy as always about inviting a demonstration of his musical talent, and then he rendered the song perfectly without exactly reproducing it. I was so jealous I could hardly breathe.

I am a literate musician. I never played a note until I had learned to read it, and now I can’t play it unless I can see it. A terrible musical handicap. Perhaps this is why I resist to such a degree the idea of scripted performance in the writing center. I much prefer thinking of the work of the writing center as random chaos, or maybe controlled chaos, instead. It is a frame that enables me, in my work with writers, to acknowledge the importance of preparation while at the same time

immersing myself in the pleasure of the here and now. But that of course means that we have to consider the here and now in all its glory as well as with all its dents and scrapes. *Oompah*.

Coming clean about the chaotic nature of our work is no doubt troublesome to some people. In fact, much of what is written about the work of the writing center (and, for the purposes of this chapter, much of what is written in the way of advice to new tutors) touts the orderly nature of our work, plotting the writing center, as I have already written, on a triumphalist trajectory of improved grades, improved retention, established protocols and procedures, and reasonably replicable methods. (See also my February 1999 CCC article for more on this.) In this way, we—those of us who re-make our writing centers on a daily basis—are as implicated in the containment of our practice as are the administrators, faculty members, and institutions we work with (or against).

Our work is, of course, not without order, nor should we want it to be. But from whence is that order derived? If the writing center is to function as an apparatus of educational transformation, that order must develop *out of* chaos, not through the elimination of it. We must imagine a liminal zone where chaos and order coexist. And we would certainly do a service to ourselves, to our students, and to our institutions if we spent as much time championing the chaos of the writing center as we do championing the order.

This tension between chaos and order is most evident to me when I sit down to plan my annual staff education course. Getting materials together for the course, which I teach every spring, coincides ironically with what is perhaps the most chaotic point of our writing-center year—halfway through the fall semester.<sup>1</sup> Over the past six years, I have taught the course using almost all the staff education manuals available for tutors. I have used Ryan's *Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, a slim volume offering bare-bones advice to tutors, along with Harris's *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*. I have taught with Capposella's *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* and with Murphy's and Sherwood's *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, a text designed to ground potential tutors firmly in composition theory and to provide traditional readings (like North's "The

Idea of a Writing Center”) to bring students into the professional conversation. This past year, I used Gillespie’s and Lerner’s *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, a manual that fills out the sketches offered in a text like Ryan’s and offers an ethnographic approach to the study of writing-center tutoring. Two other texts that seem promising are Reigstad’s and McAndrew’s *Tutoring Writing* and Rafoth’s aforementioned *A Tutor’s Guide*.

This is the chronicle of a professor dissatisfied with the course she has been teaching.

Each of these texts has accomplished its basic task—that is, enabling a tutor to sit down with a student and talk about a piece of writing—reasonably well. The authors of these texts are all well-respected writing center professionals. Semester after semester, however, students rate the texts as “not helpful” and I find myself unhappy with the material presented in them. Many tutors, for example, will not need a chapter entitled “Getting to Know the Student.” They get to know their peers all the time. Who am I to presume they need direct instruction in this? (In fact, many of our students might point out that—whoops!—we’re the ones most in need of this sort of instruction.)

I look at these collections, with book titles that dictate the practicality of the job (e.g., *The Practical Tutor*, Meyer and Smith 1987), with chapter titles like “Analyzing an Assignment,” “Finding a Focus” and “Organizing and Developing a Draft” (chapters four, five, and six of Capossela) and I am b-o-r-e-d!!! Though these are all important issues to discuss with writers, I wonder about foregrounding their significance, about strategies appearing so early in the texts, and about play and experimentation being so . . . well . . . absent. Why aren’t these books more fun? How do these texts represent the work of the writing center to the potential tutors? How and where do they prefigure the mutation, potential transformation, and re-organization of our systems of education? As far as I can tell, they don’t. But they should.

In defense of myself and in defense of these texts, I would say that this is a difficult course to teach because it needs to accomplish several important tasks: it must get tutors up-to-speed with their own

writing; it must encourage them in shaping a philosophy of education, of teaching, and of learning; and it must help them to figure out ways to think usefully (and quickly) about responding to the work of their peers and about enabling their peers to respond to their own work and the work of others. Those are big jobs for one course. Labeling it a difficult course, however, glosses over the fact that all courses have multiple charges and face numerous challenges. Calling the course difficult also downplays what I know to be true: this is my favorite course to teach.

Articulating a vision for this course has boiled down for me, in the last few years, to stepping back from the class/work and asking, “What do the sessions in the writing center look like?” and “What do I *want* them to look like?” Designing the course then becomes a process of figuring out how to get from point B to point A. Following Bruffee and North and Trimbur, I feel strongly that writing-center sessions are not substitutes for faculty response or supplements to classroom instruction. Sessions in the writing center have their own, let’s say, groove. I began listening closely to what my colleagues were saying about the work of their centers and learned that people like Denise Stephenson and her tutors at Grand Valley State University use toys and manipulables in writing-center sessions. I heard Frankie Condon and Mike Condon issue challenges to writing center directors that our centers become models of non-violence and sites for the interrogation of race and privilege. I was also fortunate enough, through sheer geographic proximity and overlapping terms on the Northeast regional writing center board, to sneak a peek at Meg Carroll’s tutors, only to discover that they were doing the work that I wanted to see take place in our writing center. Much of this chapter, then, describes the meetings I observed during a summer-long study of the staff education program at Rhode Island College. Putting into place such training involves working to make the exception(al) the norm in the writing center.

Describing the course in detail, as I am about to do here, means that I run the inevitable risk of scripting and sedimenting what I wish to remain unscripted and unsedimented. Failing to describe the course would, I fear, leave me open to the fair question of what this theory I have laid out would actually *look like* in practice. I prefer to

chance the former. I do hope, however, that the following trans/script will be taken in the spirit in which it is offered: not as a pre/script-ion to cure the tutor-training blahs but as observations, exaltations even, of the performances of the players in one particular writing center during particular moments in time.

THE PLAYERS (in order of appearance)<sup>2</sup>

*Mike:* I'd like to say that in the past few months I have been gaining a wider perspective of the globe . . . learning more from listening than ever before, unsure of tomorrow but endlessly hopeful. I am learning more and more that our actions and words effect change in everything and everyone around us. Through careful and compassionate analysis of the spectrum of possibilities, our movement through this world can be both positive and enriching.

*Jill:* Senior English major. Can be sarcastic in the best way possible. Most polite and quiet loud-talker ever. Initiator of discussion in journal book.

*Meg*<sup>3</sup>: One groo-ooo-oovy lady; generous with her mind; persistent tutor recruiter! Keeps me straight on birthdays; has the best sunken living room ever; the horse loving, button losing, organized director.

*Lisa:* The quiet, thoughtful tutor who constantly pursues knowledge and always types papers in show-all-characters mode.

*Justin:* I guess I am not a typical tutor. I became a tutor before my senior year at RIC. I enjoy working with people and communicating with them. . . . I have learned a great deal about various different types of people during my short stay here in the WC.

*Bryan:* Bryan is a writer with his moon in Pisces. He makes crazy mix tapes for his friends and loved ones and currently resides wherever his friends will set him up.

*Sarah:* Sarah is the summertime absentee training woman, but be assured while absent, she is battling for justice—not the American way.

*Amy:* Amy Peters entered the writing center as a fourth year student in part-time study of English and philosophy. Two years later, she left as a wife and mother. In that she married a fellow tutor, she feels she owes much of her happiness to the enchantment of the WC.

*Joanne:* The girl who said ‘crap’ . . . distracts others from their homework with tales about Gramma . . . knows just about every song on the radio.

*Donna:* I am the mother of two brilliant children. I am an artist. I guess that’s it—I don’t think a lot about myself.

*Barbara:* Barbara was our videographer who, as a theater major, is usually much more at home in front of the camera. Since she’s been to all the meetings, she thinks she’ll apply to be a tutor next year.

#### THE JOURNALERS (descriptions provided by Meg)

*Kate:* Kate has an MFA from New Mexico State University and, in addition to teaching, is working on her first novel.

*Jay:* He’s a new dad (he’s married to Amy), will begin working toward an MFA at the New School in the Fall of 2001.

#### PRE-SESSION ORGANIZATION<sup>4</sup>

At the end of each academic year, Meg recruits two tutors—one long-term tutor (someone with more than one year of writing-center time) and one recently-hired tutor (someone with only one year of writing-center time)—who will work with her to plan that summer’s weekly meetings. Together, they decide where to begin. Each year’s planning sessions are a bit different, then, but they are all likely to involve re-reading articles from the previous year’s meetings, reading new material, reading through staff journals, and brainstorming helpful activities. Meg writes that she has played around with the composition of this pre-session group, ensuring now, for example, that a recently-hired tutor always be part of the mix so that, for at least one person, “the questions and confusion of training and beginning to tutor are always fresh.” Meg freely admits that she is tired of some of these readings, but her conversations with the tutors in the

planning group remind her that “it’s easy to forget what it’s like when these issues are new to your life or when you get to name an experience for the first time.” This summer the planning sessions featured, in addition to Meg, Jill as the recently-hired tutor and Mike (with two years of writing-center time) as the veteran tutor.

During their planning meetings, the three of them decided to drop the readings from the RIC Journal Book (a surprising decision, given the centrality of these journals, as I will take them up later) and to shift the focus of the readings. Mike points out that they “added a lot of new stuff” this year and that previous years’ sessions had been more structured—“an issue per week.” This year, they are trying to take what Mike calls “a holistic approach,” using *Women’s Ways of Knowing* as a base and arranging other essays around it. A goal of the planning group, as Meg described it to me, was to highlight a whole body/kinetic approach to education, one which “integrates experience and theory in order to move the group to a different level of understanding.”

By the time I ask Mike and Jill to reflect in conversation with me about their experiences planning and executing (so to speak) the summer sessions, it has become clear that the tutors are resisting *Women’s Ways*, and Jill, Mike, and Meg have reconsidered its place among the readings as a result. In response to my question about the biggest surprise of the summer, Mike leaps in with “scrapping half the curriculum, definitely.” When I ask him how he feels about the fact that *Women’s Ways* didn’t work out as planned, he describes it as “the coolest thing that could’ve happened.” Suspicious, I press him. “Why?” I ask. “Because it left some gaps open,” he replies. In a jointly composed message to me, the three of them comment again on the scrapping of *Women’s Ways*: “We felt that it was a wonderful failure . . . The three of us learned more about revision—in fact, what the summer syllabus doesn’t show is the fact that it was revised almost weekly—and we rethought our emphasis.”

Jill, for her part, is most surprised by the openness of the group. She deems them “more conversational” than last year’s tutors, observing that “new people are participating more and more spontaneously.” The whole session feels “not as planned or deliberate” to her

as last year's sessions did. When I ask her why she thinks this might be, she offers that it might be because of a better ratio of old to new tutors, since last year she felt that the conversation was dominated by old tutors who "really seemed to know what they were talking about" and who, as a result, intimidated the new tutors. Mike supports her sense of the "vibe" in the Center and describes the room as "resonat[ing] from conversation," but Jill also admits that she feels "more relaxed" in the Writing Center now than she did when she first started, so her own comfort level may be influencing her reading of the interaction. In her final essay, Jill characterizes herself as "shy," and I was inclined to read her group interaction through this lens, until I re-read my notes from this interview, phrases and observations that made me think that Jill was quiet, in part, yes, because that is her way, but in part, too, by design, in an attempt to create space for others. I liked that.

The three of them, reading, writing, and talking together, giving shape to the summer's sessions. Reading through their messages to me, continuing our conversations, I so admire the work that Meg is doing: she has found a way to emphasize foundational principles of collaborative work and the political significance of literacy and education not only by way of the readings compiled to prepare tutors for this work, but also by inviting tutors into the design of their own and their peers' education in such significant ways.

Before the first meeting, each participant in the planning group writes a note to be included in the packet of materials.<sup>5</sup> Meg's is predictably teacher-like, though friendly and informal. Jill, in her role as representative new tutor, writes as a student to students: "Hi!" she begins. Though Meg's letter consisted of much housekeeping information—what students should have read and written, meeting times—Jill's letter contains none of that. Instead, she reflects on her newfound position relative to theirs ("It felt funny just then for me to be addressing you guys as 'new' when I'm so used to being one of the 'new' tutors. . . . There are no boundaries here between new and old. . . . We're all always learning together, and from each other. This summer will just be the beginning as we read theory together.") Jill explains the process of reading and re-reading: "Much of what we



read is new to all of us, and some of us ‘old’ tutes [sic] will be revisiting theories, but even the old will be new again because all of you will be adding your thoughts and feelings about it. The ideas and concepts you bring in make it all different.” Jill remarks that working in the writing center has been “a life changing experience,” but she also promises that “we have fun here.”

Mike, for his part, writes a poem to the new tutors. He echoes what Jill says, but also extends her comments by playing with them somewhat:

the writing community that you have already entered  
will change as you write yourself into text  
the text writes your understanding of it  
in its letters and syntax  
the impacts of your questions will  
transform the norms  
that we think we hold dear,  
but collaborative discourse will persevere  
over the doctrines that we’ve already established  
we need your newness to embellish on  
the truth that is always failing to hold true.

In considering the impact of this succession of letters, I realize that my students only ever see the one that looks like Meg’s. What have they missed if they don’t see something like Jill’s reflection on her development as a tutor, if they don’t see Mike’s language play, his challenge issued to them?

#### THE READINGS

A thick green binder sits at my feet, tabs marking off about every fifty pages or so. In it are copies of the selections that the RIC group read in preparation for each meeting. The binder is Meg’s copy, and I brought it home with me because I thought it would help me tell the story, but it does not. In fact, it seems to work against the telling. The folder looks so uninhabited. And the presentation of readings—Week 1,

Week 2, Week 3—fails to account for the negotiation that went on between Jill, Mike, and Meg each week.

But, for what it's worth, here they are:

*Meeting 1: June 19*

Sondra Perl's "Understanding Composing"

Gail Godwin's "Rituals and Readiness: Getting Ready to Write"

Min-Zhan Lu's "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle"

*Week 2: July 26*

Beth Boquet's "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre-to Post-Open Admissions"

Kenneth Bruffee's "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'"

Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Chapter 2

*Week 3: July 3*

Celebrate Independence Day—no meeting! no readings!

*Week 4: July 10*

Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*, "Crossing Boundaries"

Mary Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, "Subjective Knowing"

Ilona Leki's *Understanding ESL Writers*, "Contrastive Rhetoric"

*Week 5: July 17*

Mary Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, "Procedural Knowing"

bell hooks's "Keeping Close to Home"

*Week 6: July 24*

Min-Zhan Lu's "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing?"

bell hooks's "'When I Was a Young Soldier for the Revolution': Coming to Voice"

Gloria Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue"

*Week 7: July 31*

Jessica Benjamin's "First Bonds"

Nancy Welch's "Introduction," Chapter 1 ("Getting Restless"),  
and Chapter 2 ("Collaborating with the Enemy")

Week 8: August 7

Kurt Spellmeyer's "After Theory: From Textuality to Attunement  
with the World"

Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone"

Beth Boquet's "Channeling Jimi Hendrix, Or Ghosts in the  
Feedback Machine"

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE RIC WRITING CENTER

Two days ago, in the midst of an email message to Michael Spooner about book-related things, I signed off hurriedly when I received word that someone from the Dean's office was coming to take away our new computer—something about the Writing Center having been reclassified as adjunct faculty office space and, as such, it did not qualify for new equipment. (I won't even get started unpacking all the assumptions implicit in this last sentence.) When I explained my log-out to Michael, he fired back, "Your *one* computer?" Yes, our one computer.

It occurred to me then, as it had occurred to me before, that we make all sorts of assumptions about the spaces in which we operate. Our writing center at Fairfield is smaller and less well-appointed than just about any I have ever seen (and yet it is bigger and better-equipped than it was when I arrived). Others seem lavish in comparison. Yet our writing center shares with other writing centers many of the attributes we have come to expect: not only a computer, but a coffee pot; not only MLA style manuals and Random House dictionaries, but Polaroids of tutors past and present; not only an institutional paint job and adjustable bookshelves, but a couple of stained couches and a few plants in various stages of distress.

It seems appropriate, in light of this acknowledgment, to offer some description of the Writing Center at RIC, notes about what it shares, probably, with most of the writing centers we're familiar with, but also what is particular about it, because we all know

there's something particular about every one. So I asked the RIC tutors if they would tell me what seems important to say about their center to people who have never seen it. Here is a portion of Jill's response:

It's December 8, and it's the first real snowfall of the season. Through the many windows of the WC, I can see buildings and grounds covered in white, students walking to and from class. The WC is very silent. Only the sound of a clicking computer keyboard and the scratch of my pencil can be heard. . . . After going to class all day in cold and impersonal spaces, the WC is a haven. Especially the backroom. The backroom is great. I've had so many great conversations there with everyone. The couches and chairs . . . are comfy. The lamp is great. Just getting away from harsh fluorescent lighting for a while helps your mood. . . . The big windows I've stared out for hours and just thought, or better yet didn't think at all. . . . The bulletin board with flyers, pictures of tutors old and new at conferences, weddings. Cards, drawings, momentos—all of these things remind me that I'm not alone.

Jill writes more than a solid page about what she calls the “backroom,” a converted closet in the back of the Writing Center where tutors tend to hang out when they're not officially “on.” I find it fascinating, though not surprising, that Jill's description of the Writing Center begins with a consideration of the ways in which she finds both comfort (which we might easily associate with writing centers) and solitude (which we might be less likely to associate with writing centers) in that backroom. She is a page and a half into her response before she begins to describe what she calls “the WC itself,” and she positions that writing center *in relation to* the backroom:

Outside the backroom, there is the WC itself. It's bright and open, with large windows across one wall. Food greets people when they enter.

As I read Jill's response, I am glad that I didn't try to write this description on my own, as observer rather than inhabitant of this writing center, because the aspects she chose to foreground are not ones that were immediately apparent to me, and the objects that make up the background (or at least the tail-end of a lengthy single-spaced email message) are the ones that would have been most likely to gain my attention:

The decorations are fun too. It makes the atmosphere more fun and lively. Every holiday, practically, we decorate. . . . The decorations are also a conversation starter when someone comes in all stressed out. There are certainly enough conversation pieces here. The giant Scream doll, posters by various artists, puppets, toys, markers, paper. It's almost like elementary school for big kids. Lots of colors and textures everywhere.

I love the image of the writing center as an "elementary school for big kids," an image that instantly calls up the activities of the summer session (which I will cover later in this chapter).

Mike sent his email message from London, where he spent the fall semester studying. The Writing Center is no doubt less colorful, less textured, for his absence, but his distance provides an interesting perspective. Rather than sitting in the Writing Center composing his description, as I imagine Jill might have done, or even composing it from home, having just spent the afternoon working there, Mike crafts his response from a flat somewhere in England. He begins by offering a concession to what might be an "appropriate" response:

it could be summed up in the plaster rectangle with artsy posters and a coffee pot tucked in the left wing of a modernist craig lee [the name of the building] asbestos hut . . . we do have posters and pictures . . . and food . . . the aim of a free environment.

From here, he takes off, describing the Writing Center as it exists for him in his time and his place, now.

our conversations have taken us out of that physical place and into the space that the actual dialogue happens . . . if you want my most true, recent description, it would have to be the wide boulevard-style stairwell with sparse blue carpet and resonant steel railings, talking to a smiling belgian girl about fate being the moving force that is me . . . inside me . . . how this relates to literary analysis . . . through flemish to english . . . or the doppleganager themes in poe and gogel in the small rectangle dorm room with crude fluorescent long bulbs and speeding traffic through the small ventilation [sic] window facing new cross high street . . . or the kitchen in loring hall flat A 6, speaking to claudine . . . a confident british student completely frustrated with her stuffy professorial-type professor for belittling her unconstructively about the shape of her latin american colonial economics paper . . . she found that just talking out loud about it made her ideas come out that she didn't get a chance to do on her own . . . . . . . . the writing center is wide and long, stretching everywhere the conversation will take it . . . expanding to immense girth without wearing out . . . it is the discourse . . .

this is the RIC writing center I know at this point.

#### THE SUMMER MEETINGS

Meetings began at 4:30 P.M., and tutors trickled in beginning at around 4:00. Mike and Jill were around all afternoon, since the 2:00–4:00 P.M. hours were their scheduled tutoring slots on Mondays in the summer. Others came in after classes or from work or from home. Occasionally people would arrive early and settle into the backroom to finish reading one of the day's selections or to write a response. By 4:15, anyone around was drafted into furniture arrangement, setting up tables and chairs in a manner that would facilitate conversation and dinner. The six small tables in the Writing Center are shaped like trapezoids, so most days we simply fit the puzzle pieces together and put the food in the middle—bagels, hummus, chicken and tuna salads, grapes.

## Meeting 1: Monday, June 26

Meeting 1, like the first meeting of any class, was tentative. The new tutors (especially Lisa and Justin) eyed the place nervously and waited for cues from the others, particularly with regards to the food, following the lead of the old tutors, who dove into the bagels with gusto just as the meeting got underway. Bryan settled in a bit more easily and seemed bemused by the interactions. The new folks hesitated when discussing the readings, but Meg, Mike, and Jill trudged forward gamely. The video of the meeting reveals an empty chair between Bryan and Justin behind which stands a life-sized blow-up version of Munch's *The Scream*. As the camera pans, *The Scream* appears to be part of the group, expressing what Lisa and Justin might be thinking at right about this time. Interestingly, throughout the course of the summer, there is only one occasion in which anyone chooses to sit in front of *The Scream*; so, given the poor depth perception of the video camera (or of my tired eyes), the character seems to be part of the interaction. Indeed, as new tutors engage more and more in the life of the summer sessions, *The Scream* too becomes increasingly integrated into the group, even getting dressed up as part of a performative piece at a later summer meeting.

Watching the video of this first meeting, Meg and I decide that we both talked too much during the first hour. It was teacherly: "Let's discuss the readings you were assigned for today." The students responded dutifully, looking down when a question was posed, offering brief responses when pressed or when the wait became embarrassingly long. It was not until the end of the meeting, when Mike proposed a story game we've come to call "Pass the Beast," that people began to loosen up. Mike explained the activity as follows: "I'll start the story game by saying a few words. Then I'll throw The Beast [a stuffed armadillo-type rag animal]. If I throw The Beast to you, then you, umm, have to say a few words and throw it to somebody else." Nervous smiles and laughter from the group as people look around. There's some discussion regarding how best to facilitate the interaction and finally people stand—some on the ground, a few (Meg, Sarah, and Mike) on chairs. Mike begins:

“Billy the Beetle received no pasta on Tuesday.”

He pitches The Beast to Sarah, who continues: “Because on Tuesday pasta is illegal in Saskatchewan.”

Sarah pitches it to Lisa, who emits a long, tortured “ummmm” followed by more nervous laughter. At this point, Lisa receives some coaching from the group: “Just say anything.” “Anything is fine.” She just keeps saying “ummmm” and finally simply hands it to Justin, who is standing anxiously to her right. Justin passes The Beast from one hand to another. More “ummmms” followed by a “Can we start over?” and an admission: “I’m not creative.” He continues passing The Beast back and forth between his own two hands while the others prompt him, as they had prompted Lisa, by reminding him that he can say *anything*. Finally, he takes them literally and re-asserts his “I’m not creative” statement as his contribution to the storyline, at which point he throws The Beast to Bryan, who looks surprised and then offers: “Life in the forest was good.” And the story is off and running.

The story begins to move faster and faster, and the old tutors model what a person can do when she is stuck with The Beast, can think of nothing to say, and just wants to get rid of it *fast*. Adding on is a favorite tactic in such cases. Amy models an “and more peas” phrase, which is all she tacked on to a list of things that the beast might eat. Lisa catches on to this by the next time The Beast comes to her:

*Mike:* The beetle said, “Have some more pasta.”

*Joanne:* The dog gave it to Peter.

*Lisa:* Who gave it to Jill.

Lisa is visibly excited by her clever contribution, and the others are too. Everyone implicitly recognizes that Lisa has caught on, and the next time The Beast comes to her, she is bold enough to shift the storyline a bit by introducing suspense: “But then the armadillos stepped up.” She pitches The Beast and, after passing through a few more hands, it is returned to Bryan, who takes the action to its climactic moment: “By this time the people of Saskatchewan had had it.”

The story goes on for a few more rounds until Sarah declares:



The people of Saskatchewan paved paradise and put up a parking lot.

She tosses *The Beast* to Meg, who deems this “The End” as several people start singing the Joni Mitchell song “Big Yellow Taxi” and explaining, to those who are mildly confused, that this was the referent for Sarah’s conclusion. The tape at this point is obscured by laughter and by the numerous discussions splintering off among participants as people resume their seats.

Contrasting this activity to some of the more typical icebreaker activities, I ask the tutors why *Pass-The-Beast* seemed more appropriate in terms of their own preparation. Sarah was quick to offer a response. She first characterized more typical greet-the-student advice as “reductive.” The story game, she explained, “preserves the complexity of the interaction. It puts people on the spot but it also allows you to support them. You have to really pay attention to what other people have said. You have to think about the people who are coming after you. You have to think about what role you as a participant are playing in the game at that particular moment.”

#### Meeting 2: Monday, June 26

Meeting 1 was *supposed* to wrap up with a mapping activity, where tutors would map the story of *The Beast* that they had just created. The story ended up being too chaotic (and too long) to try to map, so that activity was abandoned and the meeting was effectively adjourned. At the beginning of the second meeting, then, Meg revisits the issue of mapping as a technique and divides the tutors into teams of two or three to map out the day’s readings. The tutors get colorful markers and large white pads as they sit cross-legged on the floor of the Writing Center, circling the area to find a favorite spot. Upon reviewing the tape of this meeting, Meg declares that this activity “didn’t work as well” as some of the others did. “It’s traditional,” she observes, “an academic project.” She’s right, and though we see a few interesting moments—what Mike does with color, how Bryan uses solid lines and dotted lines—we also notice that the tutors’ texts are never far from them, literally or figuratively. Justin, for instance,

repeatedly flips back to see what he has highlighted that might need to be transcribed onto the paper. Joanne and Donna produce a wonderfully chaotic, messy map that Joanne promptly crumples up once she has copied it over into a neat pyramid. Donna sits back and watches her.

In a later conversation, I ask Mike whether he recommends strategies to other students that he himself does not use. He explains that he is always seeking “multiple channels,” other ways in. He sees it as crucial that tutors stretch and elasticize their own processes. At the same time, he acknowledges that there are activities that just don’t seem to work for him and that he “almost never” uses in a tutoring session. Mapping is one of them. I am surprised, then, that the tutors chose to use it as the central activity for this second meeting of the summer. I talk to Mike about my own experiences teaching, about my pedagogical Believing-Game maxim: if you believe it, they will do it. But if you don’t believe it, if it doesn’t engage you—as tutor, as teacher—then you’re all dead in the water.

Conversation is the word most frequently used by the tutors to describe all of their activities: the summer meetings, the journals, tutoring sessions, their relationship with each other and with Meg. So it should not be surprising that our conversation—Mike’s and mine—turned to a consideration of the responsibilities of the students in these interactions. Mike talks about his recent experiences with Jason, a Korean student who “comes in with nothing.” His goal is to read, write, and speak more English. “So,” Mike says, “in the beginning there’s this constant pressure of like ‘What do we do? What do we do?’ So we do drawings and freewrites to try to open up the process for both of us, just symbols and diagrams and then we write and talk about them.” I ask him what they talk about. “Just plain old talking. Where we both are, as people. We use visual imagery to supplement conversation. As a kind of relay.” Mike shows me a specific example of drawings and writing they did the previous week. They began by tracing out their hands. Mike’s is relaxed and open. Jason’s, while not quite curled into a fist, is tense. Jason freewrites around the perimeter of the drawing, listing the things his hand can do: the fingers can pinch, can lift, can squeeze. From here he writes about his habit of clutching a golf ball in his hand

and squeezing it when he is anxious. He says that last year at this time, his golf ball was his constant companion because he was sad and depressed, but now he has less need for it. He feels better.

Mike describes these sessions with Jason as mutually satisfying because Jason is so willing to enter into the work. For their next meeting, Jason is bringing one of his golf balls and, Mike says, "We'll see what we can do with it."

Meetings 3 and 4: Monday, July 10 and Monday, July 17

The third meeting marks the start of more intense wrestling with texts and more extended discussions between the tutors, with less intervention from Meg. At this meeting, the tutors begin to discuss *Women's Ways of Knowing*. At the same time, the new tutors have figured out that these texts are intended to be provocative, not categorically accepted by the group. Bryan commented to Meg, for example, that he hadn't realized that they were going to be *encouraged* to disagree with the material presented to them. He seems relieved and freed by this discovery.

What's revealed on this tape (and what becomes more evident in Meeting 4) are the ways in which students work through a difficult text together. The tasks require the tutors to struggle in much the same way that writing center students struggle with assignments, texts, and ideas. The tutors in this meeting, then, rather than consider explicitly *how* to work with a student who has a difficult text, find themselves engaged in the same project as the students with whom they will eventually work. Several of the tutors observe, for example, that they had never encountered such diverse and challenging readings prior to their first summer session.<sup>6</sup> In an interview, Jill characterizes her "view of people and of the world [as] much more limited" before she began tutoring. The combination of the readings, the conversation about the readings, and the environment in which it all took place has given her more confidence in herself. At the same time, these activities have left her "more open-minded to other people and ideas, to how other people think." When considering *Women's Ways of Knowing* during this particular meeting, the tutors comment on *how* they read it: they talk about

where Belenky et al. rely on theory; they discuss the role the anecdotes play in the text; they remark on the nature of a qualitative study.

The previous sentence masks the complexity of the scene, of course. In general, the process is often unsettling, especially to the new tutors. In follow-up interviews, nearly everyone admitted that they felt a bit off balance during their first summer session. On the tape at this point, Meg and I see evidence of this as Justin alternately sits forward and then back, engaging and disengaging, sometimes scratching his forehead with his pen. The old tutors must also expect to be caught off guard (if one can ever expect such a thing), reminding themselves to be open to hearing new interpretations of material they may think they know inside and out. (This is how they ended up revising the emphasis of the summer session midway through the course.) The dense passages require unpacking, connecting as peers, finding multiple ways into the text. The tutors connect it to other pieces they've read, either as a group or individually, readings that were easier for them, that made more sense. They, quite frankly, tutor each other until some temporary closure is reached.

By the end of the meeting, the tutors have moved away from the Belenky text and are talking about Rose's portrayal of education. Mike says, "We conceptualize art differently than we conceptualize schooling—it's like remediation. It's like, you're not working toward anything creative. You're just working toward this linear method of thought. I mean, to get any sort of praise outside of that, you have to break that. It's like, go inside that cage I made for you, and I'll be impressed when you break out." [Laughter erupts.] Bryan adds, "Yeah, like, you must be some sort of mutation—how'd you get out?" Mike continues, "It's like, 'Oh, I guess you're cool enough to have a beer with,' you know."

A pretty stinging indictment, especially if you've ever shared a beer with a student.

Meeting 4 has the group returning to *Women's Ways of Knowing*. People have openly admitted that they dislike the text; they characterize it as "reductive" (Bryan) and claim that it has "an elitist air to it" (Donna) when compared to hooks's piece that the group has also

read for this week. Nonetheless, the tutors do give it a generous reading. For example, when one person raises an objection, another person will frequently attempt to rescue the text. Bryan, for instance, criticizes the authors for studying down: "Let's look at these people who didn't have all the advantages we had." In response, Justin, who has his share of problems with the text, contrasts the *Women's Ways of Knowing* group with the wealthy, elite group that Perry chose to focus on, making the point that we might not otherwise have heard those voices at all.

Meeting 4 ends with a very specific return to the texts, but an interesting one, as tutors spontaneously begin their own read-around, reading together their favorite quotes from hooks's essay, a piece they all seemed to like. Donna, Bryan, Mike, Meg, and Jill all offer their favorite passages while the others testify softly in the background—"Oh, yeah," "Oh, I like that one," "Yeah, yeah"—with each flip of a page.

Reflecting on meetings like these, Sarah admits that, as a beginning tutor, "all this theory doesn't feel like a wealth of information. It feels like we just talked all summer, like a whole bunch of ideas." In retrospect, though, she says she is glad that there was no handbook or template on tutoring to follow: "If I had had that, I would have felt secure. The summer sessions taught me that you have to be invested, have to hear them, have to hear what they need from you, what you can offer them. It gives you a lot of freedom."

For Mike, the summer sessions create "enforced equal confusion," or critical unease, that leads each participant in the group to consider where-am-I and to ask, how does another person go through this process? He sees parallels with the students who come to the RIC Writing Center because "that's where students are when they come here." The best sessions, according to Mike, occur when both participants—tutor and student—are involved in a "mutual creation process." The worst sessions, when a tutor says, oh, I've been through this. The result: "Blocks happen because you're not creating; you're just spouting out." In general, Mike says, the summer sessions prepared him for tutoring by inducing a state of "relaxed readiness, of constant tension and release, flexing and stretching."

## Meeting 5: Monday, July 24

By this time, the pre-session discussions have become increasingly lively, and this fifth meeting marks a real turning point.

The meeting begins with an activity. Meg declares that the group will be engaged in “a different kind of composing.” As she talks, Mike gathers markers, pens, pencils and paper and distributes them across the tables. Meg continues, “By drawing, indicate to people who you are. Or, take what you know about your own culture and make a composite.” She explains that drawing is just “another way in.” Predictably, she gets questions of clarification. “We draw?” asks Bryan. “You draw,” replies Meg.

Again, the old tutors take the lead. Joanne pulls the caps off a set of markers: “Oh, these are the scented ones.” They begin passing markers back and forth across the table. Somehow, a whole bunch of the markers have wound up in front of Jill, and when Joanne requests one, Jill jokes, “I failed sharing.”

As Barbara, our videographer, pans the group, we see Mike and Donna already deep in concentration. Mike is making concentric circles with a pencil. Jill and Joanne take longer to get into it and are still a little chatty at the other end of the table. Lisa and Justin have not yet started to draw and are looking off into the distance for inspiration, Lisa with her hands clasped together near her mouth, elbows on the table.

Every few minutes, someone touches base about what’s supposed to be going on, and different group members respond to the questions. At one point, for example, Donna asks, “So this is about me?” Mike, who is sitting next to her, responds, “Yeah. Your essence.” “My essence?” Donna replies querulously. Mike, without looking up from his circles, “Yeah, captures your essence.”

Barbara turns the camera back on Mike, who is now drawing lines radiating out from the center of his circles. We can actually *hear* Mike drawing, even when the camera is not filming him. His pace becomes frantic. Even looking down to take notes, I can tell whether he’s drawing circles or lines or squiggles. It’s rhythmic and hypnotic.

As the activity draws to a close, people begin commenting on each other's drawings and offering brief explanations of their own. Mike has to be stopped (by Meg).

Donna offers to show hers first. It is an arresting sketch, pencil on white paper, of her body on the face of a clock. Very spare. She begins,

I'm standing on my head. Well, actually, I'm standing on one hand. My kids are in my [other] palm, and at my feet [which are up in the air] I have a pile of books for school and on the other [foot] I have my computer, and all these things demand my time. I'm on the clock because time is a thing that really kinda weighs on me, like I don't have a lot of time, like my kids are growing and that's time, and things that I have to do take up time, and time is running out, and I'm kinda like the hands of the clock because of how I use my time is what's important, you know what I mean? And a lot of this [page] is empty because I don't feel like, while I have to do all this stuff . . . Politically speaking I'm like a fringe person because of the lifestyle choices that I've made and because of politics and the place that I occupy in our society because my husband passed away and because me and my kids fit between the cracks and I fall between the cracks income-wise so it's kinda difficult to exist financially and otherwise, so . . .

Her voice trails off. People are quiet. Mike offers a soft "awesome" and nods his head. Bryan says, "Cool." Donna puts her sketch down on the table.

Bryan's rendering is fascinating, too, and he begins his explanation by stating plainly, "This is me." He goes on:

It is a world of swirling ego and hierarchy. What I have is, uh, the see-through pyramid. It has the disconnected eye at the top, symbolizing awareness of my own ego construct, which is just a bunch of me's on top of me. And then I have the guy in the middle who's looking at both in disbelief and it's got the reverse image of the eye trying to be aware of

what the hell's going on, but it's kinda hard. And there's [points to a stick figure walking toward a clump of trees] my hopeful aspirations just to leave it all behind and travel, you know, not in a bad way but just like, you know, no more hierarchies, no more nothing, just off in the woods.

And then there's Mike, who holds up what used to be a large white page, now covered with graphite:

I was working just like with circles, just the idea of circles and it's, like, with the interconnections of everything so in essence I am the process of circles, the process where orbits and ellipses make solid black out of graphite, out of constant lines. It's like trying to draw through music, no longer visual representations but just drawing as music, like with rhythms and trying different rhythm strokes and stuff like that and then things come out cyclically and form more multiple infinite more circles and coming out of infinite centers. One of the things that's really cool about it is starting out with basic patterns like concentric circles or swirls then going with lines or degrees that shoot out and then every time I do it I progress and I get bored with that and then I do something different and then I'll do like wavy lines shooting out or the same lines start turning into circles or stuff like that. So it's trying to get at ideas of the infinite essence that we're all intertwined with . . .

He then pulls out a second page.

The other cool part I like is this as the tandem piece to it, which is where it breaks out totally on itself and I couldn't do what I wanted to do on this [the first] sheet of paper and it has to break out.

Once everyone's drawings had been presented, there was no further formal discussion of them. Meg admitted to me later that she believed that was a missed opportunity. Perhaps. But the work that followed the presentations was so rich, it's hard to imagine a



better opportunity, and I am certain that the groundwork laid by their artistic efforts played an important role in the discussions that followed.

Jill began, shortly after Mike wrapped up his description of his piece/s, by referring to my Hendrix chapter, which the tutors were reading in draft form. She said, "It seems like creativity is born out of confusion." And then she observed that this was "not something our school systems teach. Everything's supposed to be clear-cut. You're not supposed to be confused by things. I know I think that way a lot, like, 'I'm not supposed to be confused by this.'"

Donna agrees, "It does lay a foundation with lots of cracks. . . . It makes people mental." When others laugh, she laughs too, but then she looks down at her paper, raises her eyebrows, and reiterates, "It does."

Discussion turns to the second essay by hooks and veers to a place some might consider far off-task—to the Arab-Israeli conflict and to questions of land ownership. Before weighing in with her opinion on this topic, Donna clears this with Meg: "Is this an appropriate . . . you know." Meg replies, "Nothing is inappropriate." Donna says, "OK." The discussion continues for a while. Mike brings the discussion back around just a bit by saying, "All this stuff is asking us to get rid of our hierarchical thinking . . . I think we just need to go to ground zero." Bryan responds, "I think it's essential to be aware of as many things as possible." Donna tries to interrupt—"But since that's not gonna happen . . ." She's talked over a couple of times before she finally gets to make her point:

Since that's not gonna happen, how do you work within the boundary that you have? If people don't talk about stuff, you need to keep bringing it up until the pain is at a manageable point, right, so everybody can deal, cuz that's what it's all about, right? It's all about pain, basically. It's all about fights and wars and feeling oppressed and not having any freedom so the bottom line is when you're oppressed and you have no freedom and you can't learn and you can't do stuff, then you're in pain and then you act bad . . . .People need to maintain their integrity. You need to lift people up out

of the cracks through, what?, education, right? . . . So that's what we've been reading.

Justin jumps in here. "Are people in that much pain? I mean, is it really that bad?" he asks. "Everybody's doing pretty well, I think," he continues. "I mean, everybody here's doing well." Throughout his observation, Donna shakes her head across the table and mutters, increasingly loudly, "No, no, no, no." When Justin finishes, Donna continues,

The word pain—it's just part of the picture. I think labels like "good" or "bad" . . . defeat what's going on . . . I think it just *is*. Like, I fight every day. I have to come here every day. I live on a really tiny amount of money. My place in the political structure of this country—I'm a very marginalized woman, you know. Things could be better for me.

The back-and-forth is frank and raw as people openly disagree, and say so. At this point, (with the possible exception of Justin) most seem to agree that revolution is necessary, but what constitutes revolution, or how a revolution might take place, is up for grabs. Here's Donna again:

Frankly, if you're living on \$50 a week and you don't even have anything in your fridge and you have nothing for your kids, where you gonna get the strength, if you can't even eat, to do that [the cultural work of revolution]? You're not. Cuz you're dying. Emotionally, psychologically, physically. You're dying a really slow, horrible death. It's a terrible thing.

This is not an academic issue for Donna. The situation she just described is her own.

*Bryan:* It's a really effective way of controlling people.

*Donna:* Yeah. And that's why we have to help people. When you write, it's so personal. It's like channeling your innermost thing, even if it's a totally fluff thing. It's still a really personal thing, any word that comes out of your fingers.

From here a discussion ensues about maintaining the integrity of writing and of the writer. That topic comes back around to Donna, who finishes it up this way:

I think . . . that there is a way . . . to express yourself so that it expresses *you* on paper and that you can polish it so that it will get you the B or the A in the classroom. From my own personal experience, I'm a very idiosyncratic person and I have a very idiosyncratic way of writing and it works for me because I take the cues which I've kept and I can put the paper out and I think that that is a skill that we can give to people who come here. I think that it is possible. Which is one reason that I'm here. People can come here with their personal experiences, their cultural lives, and it can be accepted . . . without the person losing their integrity.

Then, in the next moment, she completely shifts gears, turns her body toward Meg, and asks,

What if you get a person who just can't put a sentence together? What do you do? Do you just . . . *teach* them?

At the end of this evening's session, Mike proposes a round-robin improv music event:

We could go through this [what we've been doing] in some musical way. Like, we have musical instruments in front of us, all around us [referring to all the objects on the table]. I'll start a basic pattern or rhythm, and anyone, we can just slowly just start picking up, it doesn't have to be in order either but just as you start feeling something just add anything, any noise, any movement, any rhythm. Feel free to elaborate, change. OK.

Mike takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and begins by slapping a 4/4 beat with his bare hands on his chest. This elicits an exchange of knowing smiles from Bryan and Jill. Meg starts popping the table with her hands, and Jenn picks up a ring of keys and begins shaking

them in syncopation. Jenn's act is the defining moment of the jam; she vibrates in sympathy with Mike. The others feel the vibration, too, and they start to find the gaps, find a way in, enter the groove. Justin clicks the top of his pen. Bryan takes a pen and runs it along the corrugated side of a Poland Spring water bottle. Mike shifts gears once a critical mass is reached, drumming on a container of Skippy peanut butter instead of his chest. Slowly, the session winds down. Everyone falls off except Mike, who continues the beat, in 4/4 rhythm, for one final measure.

#### Meeting 6: Monday, July 31

The post-break segment of Meeting 6 takes up an earlier, but brief, discussion of the selections from Nancy Welch's book. All the building materials are brought to the table—legos, toobers and zots, markers, toys—and Meg asks the tutors to “think about representing what death-work and life-work might be for you. A drawing or a conversation or build death-work. Try to see if you can somehow represent it.”

Barbara focuses the camera on Mike and follows him through his entire process. I can see why: He *is* fascinating to watch. He begins by returning to his circles and lines, this time on two pieces of big, bright yellow posterboard. He crumples them up, one inside the other, and punches his fists through them. He is now wearing the posters like giant, golden handcuffs. Eventually, he pulls his hands out of them, positions them on the table, and starts clipping at the crumpled edges with scissors. Next, he applies pieces of tape at seemingly random junctures. Finally, he drizzles glue all over it. Not surprisingly, his piece has drawn a lot of attention by the end of the activity, and Mike is the first one to offer an explanation of his life-/death-work:

I wanted to take the piece that I had been working on [from last week's activity] so that it would be a real revision—screw that—I ripped it up—so I started to apply life-work to it by bringing it back together, stitching it, taping it, so it just looks really weird now. [He regards it momentarily.] It's just dripping and it smells. It's basically a mess.

The piece begins to settle as Mike is talking. Meg jokes, "It's still creating itself." Mike finishes,

I think this is one of the best revision processes I've ever done. It's opened up the process a lot.

At the other end of the room, *The Scream*, which Meg has decorated as part of her depiction of death-work, collapses under the weight of the umbrella she added. Mike calls it "a performance piece."

Next, Amy holds up an 8½ x 11-inch piece of computer paper on which she has sketched, in pencil, "the death-work tree." It is striated, like ligature, and looks like a skinned human hand. Amy begins simply:

I like trees. I have nothing to grab onto. I have to like shimmy up the tree and sometimes that's really easy and sometimes it's really hard and then once I get there there are all these different places I can go to and I come this way and it's difficult to make myself come all the way out here and so OK now I have to come back down here and go over there and explore these parts and sometimes the branches might not hold me and then I might fall to the ground and have to start all over again and even if I could explore all the branches by the time I was done new branches might have grown.

She's done explaining, but she continues to hold up the tree for a moment before putting it down and turning her attention to Lisa.

Lisa remarks that she had "about a thousand different things going through [her] head so this is open to any interpretation." Using toobers and zots, she has constructed an abstract piece that is difficult to describe. Its basic properties consist of a stable axis on which other objects rotate. The rotating objects on each side of the axis are identical, so the piece is balanced in that way. The object in the middle is the only one of its kind. Even if you can't imagine the piece, I think you can appreciate her explanation:

Well, it could be two separate people and, in order for communication to occur, it has to go through this barrier [the one-of-a-kind object in the middle] and the barrier is the one

part of this piece—it's symmetrical, it's organized, and it's not about to fall apart—but it's hindering communication. All these things [the objects at either end of the axis] represent the ideas and the beliefs they're trying to communicate to each other and in order to do that they first have to pass through the barrier. And to look at it as far as revision [another possible interpretation], this could be where you are [indicates one side of the axis], this could be where you're trying to get [indicates the other side].

When she's finished explaining, I observe, "The way you talked about it, the barrier is the only thing that's not contingent." Mike, picking up on a part of my own representation of death-work, offers a quote from Davis: "What it shares is sharing itself."

### The Final Meeting

In her notes for the first meeting, Meg has a "reminder" to be shared with the tutors: "By the end of the summer, each person will be responsible for a piece of writing that explores one or more of the readings in more detail." Periodically throughout the summer, Meg brings up the topic of the essay, asking people how much they have written (which very quickly, as we might expect, turns into a question of whether or not they have *anything* written). Tutors, as we all probably know, are as likely as any other student to procrastinate, to start and re-start a paper incessantly, particularly since tutors often feel a great deal of pressure, especially initially, to demonstrate their skill at writing. These difficulties are compounded, during the RIC summer session, by some of the other pressing issues in the tutors' lives—work for their credit-bearing courses, for example, or just plain life issues like the ones that have already been transcribed. By the July 17<sup>th</sup> meeting, Meg's reminder reads, in all caps:

THINK ABOUT THE PAPER YOU'LL BE WRITING FOR  
OUR LAST SESSION. BRING SOMETHING IN WRITING  
TO SHARE WITH AT LEAST ONE OTHER PERSON  
DURING THE MEETING.

Meg's something-in-writing is evidence of her frustration at the tutors' willingness to talk about thoughts that they had regarding their papers but their unwillingness to commit anything to the actual page.

All tutors—old and new—were expected to contribute their own essays, and the final meeting was reserved for people to read their papers aloud and for others to comment on them individually. I was pleasantly surprised by their papers, which, for the most part, turned out to read less like essays for a class than like precursors to the kinds of explorations the tutors are expected to do in the journal. They didn't reference the readings nearly as much nor as formally as I had expected, even though it was clear that they had all read them. And the papers were achingly personal.

The meeting that evening began with Meg reading Jill's paper aloud. (Though Jill had to miss the last meeting, she sent her essay along so that Meg could read it to us.) At the top of the essay, where the title would normally be, is instead an epigraph from Freire about the problem of the "banking model" of education. Jill's first paragraph describes the relevance of this quote:

I've been struggling with writing this, and I just figured out why. I want to describe to you the impact working here has had on the way I think, and I just realized that I can't do that without describing to you the way I used to think, and why. I was trying to write words that would be "detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them . . ." [the reader is to understand that Jill has lifted these phrases from the Freire quote], so I wouldn't have to open myself up. I was doing what I've told students in tutoring sessions not to do, going against every theory I've read here over the past year. I was going to try and write this without making a connection between my personal life and how theory has changed me, when I realized this is impossible to do.

Jill's next paragraph begins with this declaration: "I have always wished that I was not so shy." After describing the sort of person she is not—one who "can make small talk with anyone, say hello to perfect strangers"—Jill admits to being able to "identify with many of the

women in *Women's Ways of Knowing*” and she offers another block quote here, part of which reads, “Growing up without opportunities for play and for dialogue poses the gravest danger for the growing child.” She acknowledges, in her analysis following this quote, that for much of her life she “didn’t think to speak at all” and then attributes her shyness to “the way [she] grew up.”

I grew up living with just my mother, my parents divorcing when I was six. Since it was just us, I spent a lot of time amusing myself, either reading or being outside. I was alone often, so I really had no reason to speak aloud. My mother also suffers from mental illness. She has obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), agoraphobia, and depression. OCD can manifest itself in many ways, and her way was in organizing and cleaning house. Needless to say, I lived in a very controlled and stifling environment. I was afraid to move in that house, because if I messed anything up, she would get mad at me. As I grew older, I realized that the way we lived was very different from other people, and this also contributed to my silence. I felt very different from everyone else.

In the next paragraph, Jill analyzes in more detail the impact of this environment on her life outside of her home, particularly on her school routine:

The more aware of my silence I became, the more quiet I was. I would sit there in class or when just hanging around with friends and think to myself “I should be saying something, what can I say that will be interesting enough?” I didn’t think anything I had to say was important enough to say aloud. I didn’t realize that people say anything, whether it’s important or not.

(I love this last realization. I smile every time I read it.)

The last third of Jill’s paper considers the impact of her work in the writing center on her own personal development:



The way I think is so different now than it was two years ago, and much of it has to do with the writing center, and the theory we have read. Working here has helped draw me out of myself. . . . The readings we have read here have opened my eyes to the world. I was so inside myself, so introverted, so focused on myself, that I was not letting anything else in. I was going through the motions with everything, I knew how to do school, but I wasn't really trying to learn anything, nor was I questioning whether I really was learning anything.

Here she inserts another quote from Freire, this one about critical consciousness, which, Jill claims, is "what [she] has developed working here," and she concludes with two beautiful, revealing statements:

I feel like I am actually participating in life rather than just watching it like a film.

[This new way of thinking] allows me to see myself as a part of the whole world, instead of being alone inside my own world.

Through most of the summer, Jill had provided a stark, and necessary, contrast to Mike's presentation of self, and their papers offer much the same sorts of distinctions.

Mike's introduction reads, "at the piano/cooling, composing long landscapes of innuendo./in everything,/the music opening, laughing at my hands and the keys in labour[.]" Mike is one of the tutors who started and restarted his paper on an almost weekly basis, and in his first paragraph, he explains what he's been working toward:

what i'm trying to put my finger on is the theory or life rhythm that all my actions flow through, regardless of social or physical context. i want to connect the theory of the writing center, something i consider a beautiful practice of reciprocity, to the breathing network of cultures and symbols that we encounter in our other sphere of existence . . . in essence, to explain how what happens here at our center is in harmony

and critical counterpoint to the formless source of all biologic music that we are attuned to.

Mike is a self-taught musician who routinely adjourns to the campus practice rooms to jam on the pianos, and he is part of a hip-hop freestyling community, a practice that informs most of the writing of his essay. He tells the story, for example, of a late-night conversation at the beach with his friend Ryan, who feels intimidated by the skill of the other freestylers in their group, including Mike. They walk along, and Mike writes:

silence, save for ocean threats two waves deep. every time i tried to flow with ryan, rather than encourage him it only stifled him. when i let my process, my rhythm flow free in the night sky, it only composed shovels for ryan's mind to bury itself with. so this is my beautiful creative process. my connection to my self and my desire to express my emotions and mind patterns to my friends only ends in silencing them.

In the next paragraph, then, Mike wonders,

if i could describe the beauty that i feel, the "attunement" [referring to the spellmeyer piece] to the world around me through rhythm, the joy of expirementation [sic] as, say, a coming to voice—then what impacts [sic] does this coming to voice have upon me, and how will this freedom i feel be interpreted by others around me?

This question leads Mike into another narrative, one where he feels moved to flow in front of a group of his friends by a magnificent Fourth of July fireworks display. He then has to consider the effects of this demonstration:

morgan is an acquaintance who i don't particularly enjoy the presence of. on recent occasions he has expressed racist ideas that turn me away from his energy. he is smug and arrogant, and wears the prejudices of his parenting proudly . . . the night after the firework display . . . morgan started freestyling to me . . . unexpectedly . . . i could see the

excitement in his eyes, the liquid rhythm flowing through him . . . he told me this was his first time flowing in public, that my display at the fireworks the previous night had inspired him to begin his journey into new voice. this scared me, in fact i was horrified.

To explain his dismay at this prospect, Mike describes what he sees as the purpose of flow:

flowing allows for improvisational critique and question, calling attention to all social mores and patterns of logic and communication . . . flow is an art of living so perfectly in the present tense. i feared the stability of morgan as a conduit of the flow . . . from his racist comments and arrogance, he could use the force of infinite poetry towards means of oppression, inspiring fear, exclusion—he now had a platform for speaking, i was very worried of his campaigning.

had i created a monster?

Mike's solution to Morgan's presentation was to respond in kind:

in flow, in a response to his call, i layed down basic rules of righteousness to adhere to in flow . . . how to be sensitive to the silences and pauses of others, how to understand the mutual growing process of everyone involved, how to always channel the flow in positivity . . . i directly addressed him . . . telling him to be free of all prejudices, to flow is to let go completely, to drop the baggage of prejudice . . .

Mike continues for another paragraph or so, writing about his hopes, his fears, his uncertainties, before ending the piece with this couplet:

creative spirits come with infinite questions  
i'm dropping one answer for every thousand inquisitions

Reading over their papers as I key this material into my own text (to the extent that it is my own), I am struck by how much their papers *sound* like them. Perhaps I shouldn't be. After all, our writing

is *supposed* to sound like us. At least one would think so. But we know how often it doesn't. Jill's essay is economical in its choice of words, yet says what it needs to say quite strongly nonetheless. Mike's is filled with a sense of wonder and awe, and it embraces its imperfections—misspellings, malapropisms—rather than interrupt itself or pause to get corrected. Bryan's text comes with its own sly smirk, beginning with its title: *Bryan's Ways of Knowing*. He begins by commenting on "humanity's search for a tribe to belong to" and about our "Folk Society Deficiency syndrome." He then asks,

Is the Writing Center a folk society or a tribal community? In a way, I, like many of the people I've talked to, have been searching for such a folk society, a little writing community that is organized tribally, for a long time. And, again like many people, I've grown disenchanted and disillusioned, not finding anything that's truly satisfying.

Bryan then traces his trajectory of failed attempts at schooling, declaring that he was "in and out of college from 1992 to 1997." His withdrawal in 1997 he intended to be "for good," coming on the heels of a stifling film course he'd taken at another institution. In that course, he notes, "We'd been lectured all semester on how every film in the world was racist, sexist and homophobic, from *Star Wars* to *Schindler's List* and beyond." Dissenting opinions, he added, were "not welcome."

Bryan's next paragraph offers a disclaimer of a sort:

I find it useful at this point to say that no, I'm not anti-New England, or a Republican, or a racist, a sexist, a homophobe or a reactionary who yearns for imaginary good old days. I don't believe anything should be taught the way it's been taught before, really. . . . School has never been anything but something standing between my making up my own mind and my accepting what was being offered as truth.

Here Bryan engages with the readings, which he characterizes as echoing many of these same themes: "Students of all colors, shapes, sizes and economic backgrounds feel alienated by the hegemony we've inherited."

He returns, then, to the film class, in particular to the screening of the film he'd produced, entitled *Rave Chicks*:

It was basically a chase film through the Oregon District of old Dayton that ended with my friend Emily in a dominatrix outfit stepping out of a church gateway and driving a steel-tipped high heel spike through a rubber duck. It took me forever to properly intercut the skewered duck with images of her laughing face in slow motion, but it was a labor of love. No one got it.

Here I feel pain, and Bryan goes on:

My professor had some grudging praise but made sure to tell me that my work that semester lacked any kind of social message and didn't talk about anything important, 'like homosexuality.' This is a flashbulb memory in my head, one seared onto my gray matter.

What a great image, one that brings me back to feedback, to the responses that students can recall a day or a semester or, as in Bryan's case, years later. These moments make me think before I speak, make me wonder whether what I'm about to write or say will become "a flashbulb memory" for one of my students. They make me very careful.

Bryan then briefly chronicles his arrival at the RIC Writing Center, with Katie, a former tutor (who appears later in this text) as the conduit, encouraging him to try working at the Writing Center. Bryan admits that he had "reservations":

I'd never found anything resembling a folk society in any college I'd attended or visited in the past 8 years . . . And to become involved with a writing group only to have it turn sour on me was not something I wanted to experience again.

Despite these concerns, he gave the Writing Center a try and "bit [his] tongue and did [his] reading when the readings took a familiar turn." For his efforts, he was rewarded, he writes, with:

A whole folder full of essays I probably would have avoided for fear of fascist association. I have a whole slew of academic terms like intersubjectivity, hidden multiplicity, subjective knowing, connective knowing, and collaborative learning in my head. All of these new tools, given to me as tools and not dogma.

In his concluding paragraph, Bryan reflects on the summer, declaring himself

Tremendously grateful that I kept my mouth shut and took things as they came. I really *like* how this place operates so fluidly. I'm going to like the future conversations we'll have around this table. I'm glad I gave you all a shot, and I'm glad you all gave *me* a shot. I've never been able to sell an agenda, but I can talk to people about writing and listen to what they have to say about their lives. My goodness, what a job.

Like Bryan, Lisa is one of the Writing Center's new tutors, but she has participated in the summer sessions more as I expect Jill did last year—quietly, thoughtfully, a woman of few (spoken) words. When Lisa does give voice to her thoughts, though, her insights make it clear that she really “gets” the work. Although her essay reads in some ways like a solidly-written piece of school, opening with a narrative about learning to write in cursive in the second-grade, the details are vivid and capture Lisa making sense of the material in concrete and specific ways. Several paragraphs into the essay, for example, she recounts a conversation with her teacher, Mrs. Franklin:

As I write my line of little J's, something strikes me as odd. Why does the lower-case “j” need a dot? It is not like the lower-case “l” that can be mistaken for a number 1. The dot does not change the sound of the letter like that funny dash over the “E” in my friend José's name. It must have *some* purpose. I raise my hand. Mrs. Franklin comes to my desk and asks what my question is. I look up at her and say, “What's the dot for?” She looks at me quizzically.

"What do you mean?"

"The dot over the little 'j' . . . What does it do?"

"What do you mean 'What does it do'? That's the way the letter is written. It has a dot."

"Okay," I reply, reluctant to argue any further. I continue making my line of J's, only now, the dots are just a little smaller and just a little lighter.

In her analysis of the exchange, Lisa characterizes Mrs. Franklin's reason as "accurate enough" before going on to consider it as an example of the ways in which a child's curiosity is tamped down by formal education: "In school, we learn that there is always one correct answer, and the teacher's job is to measure our ability to find it."

Donna, also new to the Writing Center this year, did not attend the final meeting/sharing of the essays. In fact, it was several weeks into the fall semester, after much prompting from Meg, before Donna actually turned in a culminating essay. My copy arrived in the mail, from Meg, with absolutely no identifying information: no name, no title, no date or purpose. My attention was drawn immediately, in lieu of these things, to the middle and bottom of the first page, where the word "scary" appeared and was later repeated, centered in the middle of two otherwise blank lines. The essay begins:

I stood looking at the open ocean. I had thoughts of sailing. Exploring the hugeness and enjoying just being. Then fear crept into my fantasy. I wondered what would happen to me if the boat I was sailing started to sink. . . . I would be in ocean life's territory, and there would be a substantial communication gap. Would any fish really care what I was saying?

Scary.

If I thrashed enough, and made a big enough scene in their otherwise tranquil ocean, I might be considered a nuisance and be gobbled up by the inhabitants. Serves me right for attracting so much attention. If only I knew the language, maybe then I wouldn't end up like in the belly of the whale . . . [W]hich marine life would I speak with? Who would want to decipher my attempt at a language and my mad scratches?

Scary.

I think about American Indians on government reservations existing in housing developments. I think of their lives and a language that few care about knowing: a history missing, and a group of people neglected and seldom heard from. I think of the people from different places in the United States, isolated not just by location but by income class, gender, and whom they choose to love. . . .

How does one being help another from being swallowed into the belly of the whale?

Acceptance and education. Compassion and a belief in human rights. Respect for all things living. . . . Being able to assimilate into a culture while keeping personal integrity isn't the simplest task to be given. It's hard enough to live in one's own space, but in a space that clearly belongs to another, or so we're told over and over, the challenge can look and feel insurmountable.

It isn't.

Donna's sole direct reference to any of the readings comes in the second-to-last paragraph, when she mentions hooks as an example of someone who refused to accept the limitations others attempted to impose. Donna then concludes her essay with the following paragraph:

Helping people communicate with pride in a culture that is sometimes hostile toward them based on the way they look and where they came from is a task that requires a willingness to learn as well as to teach. It goes beyond "where there's a will there's a way." It gets down to showing someone they're allowed to have a will. Then helping to guide them, and be guided, part of the way.

#### JOURNALING

It's quiet in my writing center at the moment. I have arrived early this morning, and the tutors are not yet in. Though I get bored without them when they're gone too long (over the summer or over the long



winter breaks), I do love poking around an unoccupied-but-recently-occupied (an hour ago, a day ago, last night) writing center. Those times, I feel like I'm snooping in my host's bathroom cabinet. I walk from station to station. The "Happy Thanksgiving" turkey has been replaced on the Magna Doodle by a Christmas tree fashioned of star stamps. A scrap of an assignment from an Info Systems class missed the garbage can—nothing special, not worthy of comment, but that's the point, isn't it? I wouldn't have seen it had I not seen it this way. A new magnetic-poetry poem has appeared on the side of the filing cabinet:

a void  
the languid moon  
of a cool winter sky  
shine/s through  
a shadowed forest  
a woman cry/s  
ache/ing for what/s  
gone  
a moment  
  
still time trudge/s on

The old stand-by remains:

Lust after boy/s who cook and iron

I notice Sydney's block print on the white board. She closed last night and left this trace:

We couldn't all be cowboys  
So some of us are clowns  
Some of us are dancers on the wire  
We roam from town to town.

I recognize this as the middle stanza of the Counting Crows' song, "Goodnight, Elizabeth." I erase it and scrawl the next few lines in its place:

I hope that everybody  
can find a little flame

Me, I say my prayers and I just light myself on fire  
And walk out on the wire once again.

A piece of business is tucked in the upper-left-hand corner of the bulletin board, Carina's reminder that any tutors interested in participating in the Evergreen Network (a program that distributes food and toys to needy families in Bridgeport) need to contact her ASAP. The tutor journal sits closed on the coffee table. I pick it up. No new entries.

Last year, for the first year since I've been directing the Fairfield Writing Center, we had no journal. The tutors didn't seem to miss it. But at the first staff meeting of this year, one of the long-term tutors, Kristy, asked if we could be sure to get a notebook for tutors to write in. Easy enough.

Much has been made of the role of journals for writers. Despite all this, I've never been an avid journaler. They too often feel like certifying mechanisms to me. The explicit directions for journals may be to "reflect" on reading material or to "extend" class discussions, but the implicit expectation is that students will demonstrate mastery of course materials in yet one more way—simply another way for faculty to usurp writing that would otherwise be for the students' eyes only. Toby Fulwiler has co-opted the letter (see "Silent Writing Class" in Heinemann's *A Word to the Wise*) so that he can require his students to pass notes to each other in class. What's left?

Meg and her tutors, however, talk often about the central importance of the Tutor Journal to the life of the RIC Writing Center. The archives at the Writing Center contain years' and years' worth of such journals: large black binders, the date stamped down the side, line the back wall of the Center. Meg rarely writes in these journals herself, and the tutors' journaling hour is a paid non-tutoring hour scheduled weekly. What Meg gets in return (and what I get less of but still some) are playful ruminations on tutoring and life and more. Meg and I began systematically reading through these journals several years ago, as part of a presentation we were giving at the 1997 National Writing Centers Association meeting in Park City, Utah. We were going to talk about the journals as tutor-training devices, demonstrating the ways in which the journals engaged traditional notions of writing center

practices. We thought that we would use the RIC journals to illustrate the Center's collaborative foundations and then to explore the tensions between that collaborative basis and the "fix-it shop" expectations of many of our colleagues and students. Very few entries emerged, however, simply spouting the party line about indirection, collaboration, and bringing errant sessions under control. Rather than functioning as a regulatory mechanism, these journal entries were truly generative and incredibly rich in unexpected ways. Here are bits and pieces of a few of the entries Meg and I shared at that NWCA session, a not-quite-dialogue between two former tutors, Katie and Jay.<sup>7</sup>

In her first entry of that semester [Spring 1997], Katie writes:

Let me introduce myself. I'm katie. I like pomegranates, writing short stories, dead leaves that cover brick sidewalks, sheep, speaking french, and taking pictures. I hate corporate america, people who laugh at other people's bad grammar, and the way my ears get really painfully cold when it's windy. I also have a tremendous guilt complex and I make a mean coq au vin, a *really* mean one, downright spiteful.

Into the text are pasted frames from the graphic novel *The Sandman* (which one, I'm not sure), and she asks,

have any of you read  
"the sandman"?  
it's a comic.  
it rules the universe.

She also writes:

Thanks Jay for calling my voice "intriguing." I dreamed the other night that a wild boar had ripped off your toes. That dream was a strange place . . .

You know, knowledge isn't really transmitted so much as generated within us all, so there's no need for old tutors to "guide" new tutors, like give them our knowledge, because everyone should be forming her own tutoring philosophies by now, so if everyone's talking about tutoring you know

everything should be fine. I don't know what's going on, but from reading the journal (the "big one") I sensed some anxiety on the part of old tutors that stuff is falling apart. In a technical sense, yes, the money is gone away, and even people are going away, but the real tragedy isn't that some older people have left, but if what left with them is their dedication to tutoring, to talking about it, to making themselves better tutors. It's an arduous task which does involve a certain amount of introspection, and perhaps everyone doesn't have the time, etc. to do this, but when we did have a journal hour people were faced weekly with exploring their processes and we all learned from that, see you really have to form a philosophy. Well you don't, but it should be hard *not* to, if the community is together, writing, reading, responding. at least this is the theory, and we all know how fickle theories can get.

Um.

That's all.

Love

Katie

Jay's first entry of that semester [February 11, 1997] is entitled "My Attempt at Relating Milan Kundera to Tutoring":

In eight days I'll be able to booze up on a daily basis. I think about this frequently.

I hope that, in retrospect, we will consider this journal (being that it is my first of the semester) as "the journal that started it all." The ideas and theories I will set forth in this journal will prove to be revolutionary. In a circular sense, that is.

Yes, this will be the first journal that will demonstrate my ability to talk myself in circles about absolutely nothing. You will read along and think that I am about to go somewhere, about to make my thetic point, but then I will suddenly bring my self to a place in which I have already been, often to my own and to your disappointment. But it is inevitable that we want to put ourselves in the same situations we have been in

before, so that we might get it right. This is how we recreate ourselves. This is how we get answers.

It's hit or miss. Trial and error. Milan Kundera said that it is impossible for us to know whether we did the right thing in life because "the only rehearsal for life is life itself." So we have microlives, lives within our lives, in which we perpetuate those relationships and situations that we got wrong, until we get them right. But the re-creation is healing only when there is change, variation, in the re-creation.

Beethoven's music, in this sense, must have been a way of healing for him. He begins his fifth symphony with a theme (da da da dum . . . da da da dum) that is used throughout the piece in different forms, re-created and varied. In this way, our lives are symphonies with themes that we are compelled to use throughout in different forms. . . .

This repeated return to where we have been and to what we know is where I began this journal. In tutoring, we always repeat the situation and the relationship of the tutoring session in an attempt to get right what we missed in the last one. Although the only rehearsal for a session is a session itself, we have the opportunity to recreate the experience in the next session, and to change it based on reflecting on the last session. This is how tutoring becomes a theme in one's life, like a motif in a novel or a melody in a Beethoven symphony.

—Jay

I think of Todd. I think of Hendrix.

One reviewer of this manuscript observed that entries like Katie's and Jay's offer evidence that the tutors spend a great deal of time thinking about their own writing, but little evidence that the tutors engage in a similar process about the writing of Writing Center users. In follow-up interviews, I ask the tutors to respond to this reviewer's comment. Bryan takes issue with "the underlying assumption that there is a destination to be reached once we reflect in the journal." Nevertheless, he admits that many of the journal entries do

reflect a tutor's preoccupation with his or her own writing. Like all of the tutors with whom I spoke, Bryan characterizes the journal as simply "one more way to have a conversation—sometimes with yourself, sometimes with others." Sarah agrees and adds:

There's a lot of repetition in the journals. When you read them they make you aware of the nature of conversation over and over again. The same issues come up over and over again, written by different people or by the same people. Sometimes you want responses; sometimes you don't. Sometimes you get responses; sometimes you don't. [She stops for a moment before summing up her thoughts.] They allow room.

Katie, writing on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February:

Creative spaces: the silences of tutoring

The academic world expects us to be creative . . . oddly enough, creativity isn't talked about. It's even discouraged. Memorization of facts and other people's ideas is the name of the game. Maybe this is because it's impossible to teach creativity. It's only possible to give examples of creativity . . . but these are often misleading, and students often take these examples and copy them because copy and repeat is what they've been taught.

What people really need for creativity is space. [Here Katie leaves several lines blank to illustrate her point.]

Space in a conversation is also what is known as "silence."

[I]'m finding it difficult to describe exactly what happens during the creative process. I may be completely wrong, but I feel it has something to do with the intersection of my personal history and the text . . . my emotional impressions while reading the text . . . what I had eaten that day . . . these

are only my general impressions of what the process is. I'm finding it difficult to say, exactly.

The creative part of the process cannot speak to me in words. It cannot explain itself. I think what the creative part of the process wants most is silence.

(What does a sperm have to say to an ovum?)

—Katie

I'm reminded of Trinh Minh-Ha.

Katie writing again, on 2 April 97, shortly after she visited New Mexico State University, where she was planning on getting her master's:

I wonder what teaching will be like. Maybe it will be harder and at the same time easier than tutoring. Maybe it will be tutoring multiplied by fifteen. Maybe I will not teach at all this fall, but grade the papers of people I've never met, a stack of blue books on the desk.

On the highway before Las Cruces there was a fissure in the air, a line of grey dust slanting into the gold sand, sharp and defined, the air was like layers of blue gauze behind it, obscuring the Organ mountains which hung like layers of darker cloth behind. It looked like a storm but it was not a storm. Nothing happened, the air stayed where it was, we drove past it in an hour.

—kd

Jay offering a poem on 8 April 97:

TO ONE WHO TORE HIS PAGE OUT

Often, often before  
I've made this awful pilgrimage to one  
Who cannot visit me, who tore his page  
Out: I come back for more . . .  
After I learned his pilgrimage erased,  
After so many poems and cigarettes,  
A life spent listening quietly for joy,

His words at once took a helpless shape,  
 Revealing naked bodies seen in cold  
 Mirrors, harsh lights, imperfect and frustrated—  
 His pilgrimage at last tore out his song.  
 (the whispered eyes . . .  
 . . . the silent stare of words . . .)

I searched in drawers and boxes, for his face,  
 And found a black and white photo of him.  
 I noticed first (I never noticed before)  
 The pale and modest stripes that lined his shirt.  
 The precise trails his comb left in his hair.  
 The heavy greyness in his beard and eyes.  
 The longing for silence that only comes when feet leave pavement.

I have been thinking about writing and bodies.  
 Speech-tongues  
 Writing-hands  
 Typing fingers

Language is created by bodies, and bodies “speak” many languages. Whatever a body does says something. The language of movement and process.

The languages my body speaks are cultural, the language of many bodies (the way that it walks with a woman), and they are also exclusive to my body alone and its experiences (bodies live in the traditions of their drives, exclusive to themselves).

Listen to what you are doing.

Though there are certainly entries which speak only of tutorial strategies, with little or no direct reference to the tutors’ lives (inside or outside of the writing center) and there are some (though fewer) entries chronicling daily activities (with no reference to tutoring), I find myself drawn to entries like these, the ones that move back and forth with relative ease between academic life (not an oxymoron) and personal experience. In my own writing I’ve tried to capture the revolutionary (in a circular sense) nature of their entries. Perhaps



you are a reader like the one Jay invokes, continually thinking that I am “about to go somewhere, about to make my thetic point,” only to find that I’ve brought you back to some place it seems we’ve already been. I like Jay’s suggestion that “[t]his is how we get answers.”

The journal for this academic year is just getting underway as I am drafting this, but already the tutors have penned some intriguing entries:

Bryan Log, Stardate October the 5<sup>th</sup>, 11:11 a.m.

Greetings . . . I spent the morning tutoring and in-between drawing out birth charts for two friends of mine. I’m pretty much going to leave that astrology book at the Writing Center, as I see various people using it and getting a kick out of it, so that makes me happy. This is a very Venus Cancer way for me to feel. I received a 6-month transit chart for my birthday and today certain things are going on in the celestial breadbasket that are affecting me thus: my sun is square to earth (??) so I have to watch my ego today, my mantra is “put others first.” I forget what the other celestial relationships are, but other things to look out for today are overeating and the delusion of loneliness. (i.e. I’m not, but if I feel that way, I can rest assured that it’s just a trick of the stars and to transcend it. Presumably through the power of my crazy, crazy ego. Who knows . . . )

I’ve had a variety of appointments this week. Jim, the regular student whom Donna and I share, had no work on Tuesday and canceled today. Donna talked to him, he seemed pretty sick. We’re a bit concerned, as he’s had trans-continental girlfriend problems, and that’s never good. (or fun).

(I’m having trouble writing this, as Donna and Barbara keep teasing me and distracting me. Grrrr . . . you see, I type with two fingers but can type pretty fast, so it looks funny and sounds weird and always solicits comments. Same thing with my guitar picking. I used to be a very bad student. Who the hell are you to tell me how to play, etc., not that I ever got into

that conversation. I'd just roll my eyes and act like a heroin addict—such is the “whatever” coolness of yesteryear.)

[Bryan adds several paragraphs about his tutoring sessions here.]

The sky is gray and getting grayer. There's a great Ringo Starr song called “Blue, Turning Gray, Over You.” It's a big band, Sinatra-esque number. Highly recommended. It would be a fitting soundtrack for this afternoon.

Now Donna says from behind me, “Your chocolate coffee makes me nervous.” I like chocolate milk in coffee. (Not Yoohoo, though, which is Joanne's confession of the moment.) I ask her why, and she says it's because Rutger Hauer lived on chocolate and coffee in a movie and was disturbingly intense. I tell her it's just part of my winding down process—chocolate, cocaine, cigarettes, nicotine patches, a pot of coffee. (Just kidding, folks, this isn't a sneaking-by-you-confession or anything.) Now everyone's talking it up and laughing. It seems an appropo time to end my journal time.

I leave you with this spontaneous haiku I wrote on the way home yesterday afternoon. I looked over and saw this very attractive girl looking over and then pretending she wasn't, and then looking over. I naturally went “hey, wow, this is nice.” Then as I was driving away, I thought, “How ridiculous to assume she was checking me out,” which led to:

What a strange thing  
For a Leo to think  
On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October.

Jenn spent her journaling hour the week of October 19<sup>th</sup> combing through the collection of old journals, which is a favorite thing to do, and decided to record some of her favorite quotes from them. Her page is a random collection of quotes, then, from old and current tutors:

“Somehow I don't think we ever get over that incessant questioning of ourselves as tutors. It's enough to drive us insane . . . ” —Meghan, Sept. 16, 1998

"Apple picking together is a fine idea." —Jay, Sept. 17, 1998

"Why do I always feel responsible for other people's feelings, for sheltering them from hurt?" —Meghan, Sept. 28, 1998

"What I'm actually doing, I believe, is slowly giving you all pieces of myself." —Joanne, Nov. 18, 1998

[Jenn concludes her entry with a reference to the Moments of Zen that tutors post on the chalkboard from day to day.]

I like them all, for different reasons . . . They are Writing Center Moments of Zen . . .

By early November, tutors are using the journal to wrestle with their definitions of literacy, in preparation for a proposal to the Northeast Writing Centers Association for its annual meeting. Lisa, one of the new tutors, spends a paragraph describing her definition of literacy, one she deems "more conservative" than the definitions offered by most of the other tutors. Then she breaks, scrawls "moving on" (the only two words written in cursive in her entire entry) and offers this tidbit:

This has been a good week to be Lisa. As of 11:29 p.m. last Tuesday, I am 19 years old (ack! I feel so old. What I wouldn't give to be 6 again.) Also as of that day, I have embarked on a brand-new relationship, so I'm pretty psyched about that. This guy can do a kermit the frog impression like nobody I know. What a catch. Well, that's really all that's been going on. I've only had a couple tutoring sessions this past week . . . nothing really noteworthy went on in those. I guess I'll just wrap it up here! Have a good weekend everyone! ~Lisa

Bryan offers that he too had "an interesting week":

Tutoring sessions all went well. Classes are going well. Besides that, this past week has been all about profound shocks to my Ego structures. It started with Katie, who, through finely crafted argument, let me know that I was wearing no clothes

but out strolling through the kingdom. Then it quickly passed through Boat Chips, my band in case you didn't know (uhh . . . <http://boatchips.iuma.com>) and then to my ex-girlfriend Moira, with whom I had to negotiate national boundaries for our newly formed separate kingdoms. All in all, I'm amazed.

Bryan invokes the specter of Katie [the former tutor who recruited him and the author of the earlier journal entries] to refer to an on-going email exchange prompted by his five-page journal entry on literacy, an entry in which he questions whether the practice in the writing center "shouldn't be a bit more regimented" before immediately arguing the opposing side:

But it's not our job. That's what the handouts are for. But chances are these kids have seen the handouts, and they're not cutting it on their own. How do you properly mix a sense of grammar-drilling with a sense of writerly expression? The eternal WC question, it seems, from reviewing old journals. Plus . . . there's only so much you can do. We're here as a resource, and we have to maintain a certain detachment [sic] in regards to being blown off, cancelled, not listened to, etc. People make their own reality, and all we really can do is talk to them about writing and life, etc.

He goes on for another two pages before admitting:

God, I'm in a grumpy mood. Sorry, folks, maybe I should take a breather and return in a minute. Okay.

Next page. He takes up the mantle again but abandons it about halfway down the page in favor of the following delineation:

We should hang a picture of Mr. Spock on the wall and do whatever he tells us to do in our minds.

We should respect everyone's ideas as if they were indisputable fact, but we should keep in mind that "indisputable fact" is what gets us in trouble in the first place.

We should not abandon our own principles and beliefs on writing, life, etc., but we should meditate and revise constantly as to how to appropriately bring these into a tutoring session. The Writing Center should allow for some stumbling on this road, and give positive encouragement to people who start to walk better and better.

We should encourage everyone to express themselves as they see fit but be equally dutiful in reminding people that the very concept of “grades” limits that expression.

We should not silence opinions we don’t agree with, no matter how fucked up and ignorant they are, and there should never be a Writing Center curriculum in dealing with the fucked-up-ness and ignorance (ie homophobia, fundamentalism, racism, sexism, etc) of people. “What to do if that stuff comes up” is not an invalid question, of course, but we should keep in mind that we’ll never come up with a law or a policy that will wipe out ANY of that stuff. . . .

Same shit, different day.

God wins, we all die.

Thanks for listening, folks.

—Bryan