

“Opening A Door”: Resisting Institutional Closeting in the Writing Classroom

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Abstract: This essay argues that solidarity and coalition building between feminist educators must be the driving force as we design pedagogy which allows LGBT+ students to see themselves in curriculum, even as institutional voices clamor for their closeting, attempting to render them invisible. We must all be what Sara Ahmed calls “feminist killjoys” (“Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness” 582). Drawing from experience designing courses in topics from women’s, gender, and sexuality studies in the writing classroom, this essay offers a series of concrete takeaways and reflections on using feminist digital archives and concepts of gender and sexuality in writing classrooms. These methods aim to create “a conversation that can open a door, just a little, just enough, so that someone else can enter, can hear something,” as Sara Ahmed advocates. In drawing upon queer practices of complaint, of drawing on feminist killjoy methods, we can open the door for our students- and for ourselves.

Keywords: pedagogy, digital archives, affirmation, community, queer complaint, feminist killjoys, archival literacy

Introduction

At the beginning of 2023, Oklahoma’s state legislature introduced Senate Bill 129, which would strip access to trans-related care for people under the age of 26. This is just the latest in a wave of bills that strip away access to bodily autonomy for transgender people. Already, Oklahoma bans trans student athletes from sports that correspond with their gender identity in state schools and bans trans people from using the bathroom that aligns with their gender. In the classroom, book bans overwhelmingly target texts which deal frankly with gender and sexuality, presenting a threat to education: when LGBTQ+ perspectives are not present in the curriculum, LGBTQ+ students can be further isolated or othered, made to feel as though they do not belong as writers or as students (Harris, Wilson-Daily, & Fuller; Munro, Travers, & Woodford; Kosciw et al; Snapp et al.). In every sense, legislators paint a target on the backs of LGBTQ+ students, presenting unequal treatment as law.

Oklahoma is also my home.

While I was presenting my work on LGBTQ+ inclusion at a major writing center conference, a member of the audience raised their hand and described the climate towards LGBTQ+ inclusion at their private university. “We’re not even allowed to show LGBTQ+ flags, let alone an allyship sticker,” they told me. “How can we demonstrate our allyship for students who may be struggling alone?”

I return to this question in this short essay to ask: in this anti-trans atmosphere, how can educators and allies partner alongside students? In this contact zone, how can we show up for LGBTQ+ students? When we can’t visually signal allyship, how can we make sure that LGBTQ+ students are not isolated, are not struggling alone?

Drawing from my experience of designing courses in topics from women’s, gender, and sexuality studies in the writing classroom, I offer a series of concrete takeaways and reflections for teaching in this environment, from first-year writing to Writing Across the Disciplines. I reflect on using feminist digital archives, along with my experiences in referencing broader concepts of gender and sexuality in writing classrooms.

Think Outside the Circle

When I taught for the first time at Oklahoma State University, I knew I would be teaching students who had grown up in rural and conservative areas. I was determined to define the ground rules for my classroom and make sure that all interactions created an atmosphere of shared respect, where students took accountability for their own work and writing. Towards this goal, I allowed all students to introduce themselves. This may seem a small form of resistance, but in providing students with tools to define who they are, we can all be what feminist scholar Sara Ahmed calls “feminist killjoys” (“Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness” 582). Ahmed argues that the apparent “feminist killjoy” exposes the “bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy” (“Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness” 582). In our current exigence, laws which attempt to erase LGBTQ+ students from the university and from public life negate any avenue for LGBTQ+ students to express bad feelings. In effect, these laws attempt to silence feminist killjoys before they even have the chance to articulate themselves. These same laws dissuade teachers from affirming their LGBTQ+ students in the university. If we are to affirm students, we must, in effect, be willing to kill joy by exposing potential bad feelings, exposing how these laws erase and erode complex human experiences. As feminist killjoys, then, it is our role to partner with our students to make sure that they are offered the tools to express themselves.

At the time, I worked in a front-facing position at the writing center, where I noticed that the forms to schedule a writing center session included a space titled “name you prefer to be called.” This scripted form of prompting allows students to introduce themselves in a manner which may

differ from the name on their official registration, offering a more personal form of communication. I drew on this form to create my introduction strategy.

At the beginning of the first class held on campus, a class on expository writing, I prepared a stack of index cards, which included space for names which students preferred to be called, majors, and current aspiration students hoped to achieve in the class. I explained that these index cards would serve as an aid for our introductions, and then used the board to fill out my own version of an index card for students to follow: I wrote out my name, my pronouns, my prior major, and my current aspiration for the class (which was to introduce students to the tools of expository writing for the college classroom). I then passed out the stack, gave students time to fill out the cards, and suggested they introduce themselves, first to their fellow students on either side, then to the class. In creating this introduction script, I talked with my fellow writing professional Christina Lane, who suggested the idea of the index card as a means of offering a means for students to assert their own identity. As students introduced themselves, if they included pronouns, I made sure to repeat those pronouns, along with their names, to affirm how they referred to themselves.

This first class is instrumental in creating an atmosphere of mutual respect between my students: we go over my code of conduct for the class, which is listed in my syllabus and includes the following clause:

A classroom is a community. Thus, all members of a community should respect the work and dignity of others. A community founded on mutual respect and good faith will be much more conducive to the conversations which we will have throughout the semester. As a community, this space should promote an environment of mutual respect regardless of gender, sexuality, race, disability, etc.

First, I read this code of conduct aloud to my class. Then, we go through it and define each term, from dignity, to mutual respect, to good faith. We discuss what it might look like to treat one another with respect, especially in evaluating one another's writing. I usually write out two statements on the board, one as an example which offers respectful criticism, and one which does not engage in good faith. The first statement usually reads something like this:

"I thought your use of imagery was really effective throughout this essay. However, I had some trouble tracing your argument in your second and third paragraphs, especially your use of evidence." The second statement usually reads something like this: "I didn't like your essay because I don't think you know what you are talking about." Together, we underline portions of the statements which indicate respect or disrespect.

So much of our work as writing professionals is based in showing up for our students through our physical outreach, as Eileen Schell argues, "leading through presence as well as un-

derstanding” (322). In this way, establishing an inclusive atmosphere affirms the right of students to express themselves, without insulting or disrespecting one another, and works through the presence of the writing professional to provide an example. If forbidden to ask students what their pronouns are, allow all students to introduce themselves, and establish a code of conduct for the class. For transgender students, this provides the opportunity to express their identity. As we face growing backlash towards trans lives and identities, educators can still support their LGBTQ+ students. These activities promote an atmosphere of shared respect, setting the standard for the classroom.

“Our Life On the Page”

I wanted to create opportunities for students to encounter diverse voices on the page, including LGBTQ+ voices. Our first assignment was a literacy essay, which asks students to consider a time in their lives in which literacy placed a significant role. In this assignment, students reflect on their first experiences with literacy, whether on the page or learning a skill. As writers, this assignment provides students with a means of explaining how their understanding of literacy has changed, and how their identity continues to affect their experiences. One student commented when we were first discussing what makes an essay a literacy narrative, “It seems like we’re supposed to put our life (sic) on the page.” This is an astute observation, since in this assignment, students often confront their own identities as writers on the page, and how they negotiate that identity while trying on the notion that they might also be writers.

In introducing this assignment, I was determined to offer students a wide variety of literacy narratives to discuss. I wondered how students would respond to a discussion on the work of Alison Bechdel, whose work as a cartoonist graced the pages of gay and lesbian newspapers in the long-running comic strip *Dykes To Watch Out For*. Today, she is better known for her coming-out story in her graphic memoir *Fun Home*, now a Broadway musical. I had a particular piece by Bechdel in mind, her short comic “Compulsory Reading,” which deals with the act of reading and writing, especially dealing with what we are supposed to read, versus what we do read and enjoy. I knew students would connect with its themes of feeling guilty over not reading.

We even had a copy of the comic in our digital textbook, so access would not be a problem. Our textbook had image descriptions of Bechdel’s comic “Compulsory Reading,” intended to contextualize the visual aspect of comics for sight-impaired readers. I was pleased to see this feature, since digital editions of textbooks have unique opportunities to provide accessibility for all students, and image descriptions are underutilized as a means of providing access. However, there was a glaring issue: in the caption, Bechdel’s comic persona was described as a man with spectacles. I knew this presented a conflict, and I would need to explain why the discrepancy existed. As comics scholar Hillary Chute argues, “Comics is largely a hand-drawn form that registers the subjective bodily mark on the page; its marks are an index of the body... Comics works

are literally manuscripts: they are written by hand” (112). As a form, comics presents embodiment as a form of manuscript, and here, the caption served to override Bechdel’s queer authorial presence on the page.

As I flipped to the introductory panel on the projector, the caption stood out in bold font. A student near the front, who never ceased to have questions, raised an eyebrow as he pointed to the caption. “While that’s the caption,” I said, “Alison Bechdel is a woman cartoonist. This just goes to show that fact-checking can always help everyone, no matter how advanced they might be!”

The students chuckled at this comment. And we moved on. Rather than dwelling on a moment of anxiety or discomfort, the conversation branched into the reasons why the captioner might have assumed that Bechdel was a man, from the short hair of her comic persona to the overwhelming gender discrepancy in comics, a field heavily dominated by men. One student offered the fact when a field is dominated by men, people tend to assume that people within it are all men as well.

I explained to my students that Alison Bechdel also lent her name to the Bechdel test, which allows critics to evaluate how a piece of media can avoid gender stereotyping of women. As depicted in Bechdel’s 1985 comic “The Rule,” a work which passes the Bechdel test must feature two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. In the comic, Bechdel’s character remarks, “Last movie I was able to see was *Alien*...the two women in it talk to each other about the monster.”) In naming this visual form of queer complaint in our class, I offer students a means of reading against the grain, reading against intended meanings of a text, which helped to frame our discussion of reviews as critical texts where queer complaint can thrive.

In this same class, students went on to write literacy narratives on diverse topics. One student described the first time he went duck hunting, while another student described the literacy needed to read a driver’s manual and the experience of learning to drive for the first time. Yet another student described the time she wrote a letter to a traveling member of her family, and described the process of learning how to properly address and send a letter through the mail. In a reflection, one student shared, “I thought writing this [literacy narrative] was going to be difficult, but with the examples and the parts we wrote in class, it wasn’t that hard.”

In the discussion which unfolded from this stray moment in our first-year writing class, we discussed how different identities can be expressed across media and how such depictions make a difference. When we see our own identities represented, we might also feel empowered to express ourselves as we attain further literacy. As I think back, I wonder how discussions like this one might be halted or stopped altogether, if those in favor of silencing LGBTQ+ voices have their way.

Digital Archives As Diverse Research

As I introduce students to methods for academic research, I draw on digital archives as a method of bringing diverse voices into the writing classroom. This assignment was informed by the work of scholar-teachers Jess Enoch and Pamela VanHaitsma, who have argued “it is crucial to pause before asking students to leverage digital archival materials in their writing projects and prompt them first to read these archives carefully and critically” (217). Students should first achieve a basic level of archival literacy to draw on digital archives in an effective manner. As Charles Morris shows, archives are “dynamic sites of rhetorical power” (115). In understanding archives as a site of critical rhetoric, digital archives can provide potent case studies for students as they understand what research can look like. Moreover, in a mediated encounter with digital archives, students can respond to an ongoing conversation through carefully addressing the rhetorical situation of a chosen archive, understanding its overall rhetorical purpose, and then addressing how a particular archival entry addresses an unfolding conversation. In this way, students situate their own critical voices to express rhetorical purposes and perform research within the exigence of digital archives.

Informed by Enoch and VanHaitsma’s work, I have found that this assignment is readily adapted for writing classes, as well as classes which focus on introducing students to the basic frameworks of gender and sexuality studies. In providing these resources, I draw from feminist frameworks, such as bodily autonomy and intersectionality, to consider who is included in archives and who is left out. In utilizing digital archives, I focus on a series of outcomes:

- Students will be able to define and identify digital archives and their rhetorical purpose.
- Students will be able to navigate a digital archive through either a Boolean search or through a finding aid.
- Students will be able to identify criteria of organization for a given archive.
- Students will critically consider questions of curation: whose voices are involved? Whose voices are missing? How are these sources contextualized through text like metadata, keywords, and captions?
- In class, we will connect feminist frameworks such as intersectionality and bodily autonomy to contextualize archival entries within a larger context of political activism.

Many of these digital archives fall neatly into Kate Theimer’s definition of a digital archive: “online groupings of digital copies of non-digital original materials, often comprised of materials (many of which are publications) located in different physical repositories or collections, pur-

posefully selected and arranged in order to support a scholarly goal.” Others fall into Enoch and VanHaitisma’s inclusive definition of digital archives: “any digital resource that collects and makes accessible materials for the purposes of research, knowledge building, or memory making” (219). The latter provided the guiding definition for my assignment. After identifying a list of digital archives, I pull up several of these archives onto the projector, and ask students to tell me where to go on the archival page. Through most classes, we examine the “About” page, any contextual menus or navigational aids on the homepage, or any disclosed institutional affiliations, and other explanations provided for the archive’s curation and general archival standard.

Students particularly liked the Queer Zine Archive Project digital archive, which catalogs zines from the riot grrrl movement, along with contemporary queer and transgender zines. This archive often limits the metadata provided to explain the context of these zines, which offers students a chance to research for themselves. In keeping with K.J. Rawson’s argument that environment and language can obscure portions of archives, providing creative means of imagining archival inquiries, we discuss how this apparent lack of context offers new entryways into research for future projects. In our class, we reference the article “[Zines, Art Activism, and The Female Body: What We Learn from Riot Grrrls](#)” by Dr. Rebekah Buchanan (author of *Writing a Riot: Riot Grrrl Zines and Feminist Rhetorics*) to offer historical context for this art as a form of activism. Through texts like “Awkward at the Doctor,” a zine which discusses the experiences of queer, trans, and gender-nonconforming patients as they negotiate complex interactions with medical practitioners, students read through a mode of archival queer complaint.



Figure 1.

In the feminist writing classroom, digital archives can form a gateway for students, as educators demonstrate the research process in class, assessing these archives as sources. In our class, we discussed this archive as a source, considering who assembled the archive and where its limits lie. Whose voices are included, and whose voices are missing? What gaps exist in the

archive, and how might research fill in those gaps? In offering diverse voices in the classroom, educators can offer new methods of introducing students to academic research and analysis.

Conclusion

For teachers of writing, especially in fraught times like ours, questions of how to introduce students to diverse identities in the classroom have only become more difficult. As I sit here writing this essay, I learned that *The Hill We Climb* by poet Amanda Gorman has been banned in Florida, a choice made by a single person (Holpuch). Pictures of shelves stripped of books proliferate, and teachers are constantly facing obstacles that interfere with the jobs we are hired to perform.

As educators consider how to ally with LGBTQ+ students and diverse students in the classroom, we can provide opportunities for students to introduce themselves, and thus support their identities. We can still provide opportunities for students to read and learn from diverse voices. And in drawing from diverse digital archives as opportunities for research as feminist killjoys, offering critical means for students to question and assess sources, educators can also engage students in critical thought enriched by feminist frameworks.

If institutions do not support us as workers, then our work suffers. But dispensing with reliance on institutional support, in the 2019 *Peitho Journal: Special Cluster on Gendered Service in Rhetoric and Writing Studies*, Jennifer Heinert and Cassandra Phillips, Michelle Payne, and Eileen Schell show how feminist writing program administrators contribute to institutional change, despite its challenges. And as Anicca Cox and Rachel Riedner show, coalition building takes place across national, institutional, gendered differences, tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty, graduate student educators and advanced scholars alike, as we look to our growing labor union movement throughout higher education as a model for coalition building, that is, working towards “horizontal, coalitional practices within institutional structures,” dismantling our hierarchical places within institutions in favor of solidarity (18). Beyond the university, library professionals, like Martha Hickson, fight an onslaught of attempts to limit the right to read (Peters). Through reaching out to supportive communities, these library professionals mobilize public support for free exchange of information, despite efforts to ban books.

As a means of organizing, coalition building is deeply relational, bridging institutional divisions based on rank or status to create partnerships. I was only able to offer these assignments and activities for students because writing professionals in my graduate program supported me and offered feedback, sharing their own statements of mutual respect and introductory assignments, which served as a model for my own. Similarly, I have partnered with graduate students and professors alike in designing classes on digital archives, which seek to increase visibility of LGBTQ+ history, the struggle for racial equality in the United States, the history of feminist strug-

gle, and more. Solidarity with one another as educators fosters greater support in the classroom, and in all other aspects of our profession.

Solidarity also looks like working with, not against, the needs of our students. As bell hooks urges in *Teaching To Transgress* (1994), we must view our students as “whole human beings with complex lives and experiences” (15). In her retrospective piece on the legacy of bell hooks and the feminist writing classroom, Patti Duncan reflects, “I was also able to bring my full self to our classes. In the process, we were able to care for one another, learn from each other, and create a sense of community and commitment to our shared space” (2). During a recent community dialogue on public education in Rockingham County, Virginia, high-school students expressed that mental health is one of their greatest stressors, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hagi). Community dialogues, like the one held in Rockingham County, can bridge seemingly insurmountable gaps between educators and the public, and allow us to work with our students to promote further solidarity.

As feminists, we as writing professionals can work together to bridge the barriers of homophobia and transphobia, which stifle our students’ ability to meet each other on equal footing, while realizing, with the Combahee River Collective, that “the major systems of oppression are interlocking”: that we all approach our work through intersecting oppression, which we must seek to dismantle (n.p.). We can work together in refining our methods of fostering inclusivity in the classroom, through mentoring emerging scholars in the field, through sharing methods which worked in our classroom, and by being open about the methods which did not work for us. This might look like creating space at conferences for mentorship, or reaching out to graduate students who express interest in establishing a feminist classroom. Beyond support, solidarity must be the driving force for ensuring that students (LGBTQ+ or otherwise) are able to interact as equals within classrooms and meeting rooms alike. We must all be Ahmed’s “feminist killjoys” (“Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness” 582). We must work together to design pedagogy which allows LGBTQ+ students to see themselves in curriculum, even as institutional voices clamor for their closeting, attempting to render them invisible.

As Sara Ahmed suggests in her lecture “Complaint as Queer Method,” we must attempt to create “a conversation that can open a door, just a little, just enough, so that someone else can enter, can hear something.” In drawing upon queer practices of complaint in the classroom, we can create critical space for students to engage in rhetorical experimentation as they express critical arguments. These methods may be in our classroom organization, in the texts which we choose, or in our intertextual engagement with archives. By providing students with a critical method of queer complaint as feminist killjoys, we can open the door for our students- and for ourselves.

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Cluster Conversation: Reclaiming the Work of Wendy Bishop as Rhetorical Feminist Mentoring, edited by Mary Ann Cain and Melissa A. Goldthwaite

Reclaiming the Work of Wendy Bishop as Rhetorical Feminist Mentoring: A Cluster Conversation

Mary Ann Cain and Melissa A. Goldthwaite

Mary Ann Cain's publications have appeared in national and international literary and scholarly journals, diverse in their subject matter and genres, ranging from scholarly work in rhetoric and composition theory to literary works, including fiction, nonfiction essays, and poetry. Her five books include a poetry collection, *How Small the Sky Really Dreams* (Dos Madres Press, 2021), a biography, *South Side Venus: The Legacy of Margaret Burroughs* (Northwestern University Press, 2018), a novel, *Down from Moonshine* (Thirteenth Moon Press, 2009), and two scholarly books, *Composing Public Space: Teaching Writing in the Face of Private Interests* (Heinemann 2010) and *Revisioning Writers' Talk: Gender and Culture in Acts of Composing* (SUNY Press 1995). Dozens of her scholarly essays on writing theory and praxis have been published in scholarly journals, along with many national and international publications of her literary work. She is Professor Emerita of English at Purdue University Fort Wayne and lives with her husband, poet George Kalamaras, and their beloved beagle, Blaisie. They spend time living in both Fort Wayne and Livermore, Colorado.

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Keywords: mentoring, teaching writing, legacy, collaboration, relationships, rhetorical feminism

“I do have something to add to this conversation because I'm a woman and a creative writer and part of a different generation of compositionists, perhaps because I may experience fewer disharmonies and dichotomies . . . since I don't find my academic and writing lives so disparate although they are often desperate.”

—Wendy Bishop, “If Winston Weathers Would Just Write to Me on E-Mail”

Wendy Bishop was one of the most engaged, prolific, and profoundly influential writers-scholars-teachers-researchers that the fields of Rhetoric and Composition, as well as Creative Writing, have ever known. When Bishop died twenty years ago in November of 2003, she was just fifty years old, but she had accomplished more than many people do in much longer careers. She authored or edited more than twenty books, crossed organizational borders (CCCC, AWP, MLA, WPA), often holding leadership positions, and she advocated for this very border crossing and intradisciplinary cross pollination within English Studies and beyond. Bishop transformed the binary of outsider/insider into a more inclusive, multivocal, multidisciplinary approach. As contributors to this Cluster Conversation, we find in this more fluid and flexible understanding of academic work hope for the future of our fields. We need hope, we need examples and mentors, we need to find sustainable ways of working and being that enrich rather than drain us.

As this Cluster Conversation illustrates, Wendy Bishop's influence and legacy—profound, prolific, and persistent—continue long after her passing, and yet much of what she did often falls within the largely undocumented, relatively invisible, and ultimately devalued work of the academy—sometimes seen as “women's” (or these days, “gendered”) work. In her essay “Places to Stand,” Bishop describes the fear of openly identifying as writers and writing teachers within the profession, a fear that may have “to do with our own concerns about authorizing ourselves as writers-who-teach-a-subject: writing” (12). What Bishop later acknowledges in an endnote is just how profoundly gendered this “pressure to be professional” is: “I also have not entered the larger

discussions of feminism and writing style though I'm aware of it and sympathetic to problems like these" (30).

Her concerns about the marginalization of writing-as-subject, along with the marginalization of writing teachers who must choose between being seen as professional versus writing as a writing teacher, writer, and (what she implies) a woman, echo the broader scholarly conversation about "women's/gendered work"—both within and beyond the academy. Elizabeth Flynn's 1988 groundbreaking essay in *College Composition and Communication* "Composing as a Woman" generated conversations in the field that point to what keeps Wendy Bishop's influence both relatively undocumented and thus invisible but also vitally important—because it is still regarded as "women's work." It's not simply whether or not she is remembered—she most certainly is; it's more a matter of *how*. The *how* is very much in line with what Amy Hodges Hamilton and Micaela Cuelar identify, citing Cheryl Glenn, as the embodied practices of rhetorical feminism. But that *how* is still on the margins of a hierarchical structure at work in the academy.

Beyond Binaries and Hierarchies

"A polyphony. A bouquet of voices." —Carole Maso, *Break Every Rule*

In reclaiming the work of Wendy Bishop as rhetorical feminist mentoring, we seek—in this cluster conversation—to value the kind of writing that sustains us and our work but doesn't always find a prominent place in academic publications: personal, pedagogical, dialogical, reflective, and collaborative. As this Cluster Conversation amply demonstrates, Wendy's work remains vibrantly alive and embodied by those who worked with her and/or read her texts. Very visible in some ways yet invisible in others, Wendy's legacy has given us a way to understand, argue for, enact, reflect upon, embody, and value work that can too readily be written off as "not professional."

Melissa A. Goldthwaite's "Correspondences," first written in 2004 and revisited for this cluster conversation, reflects upon a deeply personal and also intensely writerly and teacherly relationship that sustained both of them for many years, a sustenance that illustrates the power of what Wendy advocated, finding a clear passage to that safe harbor of connection and relationship, of the community so often written and spoken about but so little understood.

In "Inspiring Collegiality: A Roundtable on Intergenerational Mentoring," Lynée Lewis Gaillet, Sarah Bramblett, Don Gammill Jr., Tiffany Gray, Cantice Greene, Letizia Guglielmo, Mary Lamb, Renee Love, Alice Johnston Myatt, Kristen Ruccio, Matthew Sansbury, Lara Smith-Sitton, and Nathan Wagner continue Wendy's legacy of refiguring mentoring as less hierarchical and more dialogical, more mutually engaging and sustaining, more about shared, "intergenerational" learning and less about what Paulo Freire critiqued as "the banking model of education": "This journey [through academia] is enhanced in life- and career-changing ways through recursive

mentoring and collegiality, collaboration, and accompaniment characterized as fluid, liminal, and asynchronous” (Gaillet).

Meg Scott-Copses, in “Creative Composing,” offers a course plan inspired by and based upon Wendy’s writing and pedagogy, illustrating how relevant Wendy’s work remains. Despite the fact that Wendy’s boundary-busting practices and theories preceded much of the current theoretical language that describes them, Meg highlights how much in line Wendy’s work is with current rhetorical feminism in her current iteration of a course, one assignment, and its outcomes.

Amy Hodges-Hamilton and Micaela Cuellar exemplify Wendy’s embrace of the margins-as-center approach to refiguring roles, genres, and dichotomies of personal/political, individual/collective, creative/critical, exploring and interrogating existing boundaries for new possibilities. Their essay both shows and tells the story of how Wendy’s “rhetorical feminism” shaped their collaborations: Amy with Wendy, Micaela with Amy. Their narratives, both collaborative and individual, break generic boundaries to weave their stories and research into a collaborative whole.

In “Writing With and After Wendy,” Doug Hesse describes how mutual efforts in writing program administration dovetailed with Wendy’s genre-busting impulses to write and teach across generic, but also other, boundaries imposed by the academy as well as the culture at large. He also shares some of Wendy’s prompts, writing in response.

“In Dialoguing with Wendy,” first written in 2003-2004, Mary Ann Cain revisits Wendy Bishop’s legacy 20 years later. She considers how Wendy’s work as “writer-teacher-writer” (Bishop, “Places to Stand”) enacts rhetorical feminism while predating the theoretical language that now helps describe and further illuminate that work. She also, like other contributors to this Cluster Conversation, considers how Wendy’s work has influenced and continues to influence her own, including after her retirement from teaching.

Through the lens of a 20-year retrospective, we discover just how current and relevant Wendy Bishop’s legacy still is, and, in turn, consider just how (often quietly) revolutionary it was in her time. Wendy’s work insisted that we break down binary understandings of identity—in her case teacher-student, master-apprentice, insider-outsider, mentor-mentee, researcher-subject, academic-creative, and so forth—in relation to the academy. While she did not have the theoretical language available to her at the time of her greatest productivity in the 1990s, diversity, equity, and inclusion were, indeed, central to her understandings and commitments. She did not specifically claim to be a feminist, or anti-racist, or an ally to the LBGTQ+ community. She simply was. She understood and enacted what legal scholar and Critical Race Theorist Kimberley Crenshaw first named “intersectionality” before she had a name for it, mapping the complexities of navigating the university as a multiply-identified entity (“writer-who-teaches teacher-who-writes”).

She understood how multiple identification also applied, albeit in different terms, to her students. As Amy and Micaela point out in their contribution to this Cluster Conversation, “One way Bishop pushed against these boundaries was to include the voices of students in her scholarship, particularly those we might not have heard from previously.”

We the editors also note how Wendy’s genre-bending and blurring has prompted some of the contributors to migrate between genres within their individual pieces, and as a result, to break some discursive conventions. In particular, Wendy is named in more personal contexts as “Wendy” while referred to as “Wendy Bishop” or “Bishop” in more conventionally academic contexts. Instead of insisting on consistency within each contributor’s piece, we put the question to ourselves and those authors who were not consistent and decided that strategic “inconsistency” was appropriate, especially when navigating shifting relationships: student/teacher, mentor/mentee, colleague, friend, reader and scholar.

Toil, Toll, and Joy

“We must work. The earth of writing. To the point of becoming the earth. Humble work. Without reward. Except joy.” –Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*

Wendy fought hard to make way for a margins-as-center approach aimed at valuing teaching and student writers and their work and knowledge. Even when she entered public debates about what writing studies should be, she quoted students, acknowledging that her goal was not just that students would continue writing after her course but that she would “become more aware and respectful of how much and how well they compose themselves before [her class], in what varied media, with what full lives, acknowledging that they are part of the ‘weight’ of the community” as much as she was; “I have power,” she acknowledged, “but when I write with them I tap into their powers” (“If Winston Weathers” 102). To consistently value what and those whom others dismiss, however, can take a toll. Doug Hesse’s poignant reflection captures the toll such work likely took:

Conversation that started in animation dwindled to near silence as we neared the airport, Wendy slumping lower in the corner of backseat and door. She’d just led her last meeting as CCCC chair, and she was exhausted. I was chastened to realize that I’d failed to register the personal costs of her commitments and dedication, seeing instead only the torrent of her talent.

When it came to institutional change, Wendy was not quiet, was not measured, but instead labored, full-throttle, through her own department and college, as well as through a head-spinning roster of professional organizations, including WPA, CCCC, AWP, and MLA within about a decade.

In this regard, her legacy is also sobering; the effort and exhaustion of taking on such professional and academic entities was Sisyphean. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed describes it this way: “The brick wall is what you come against when you are involved in the practical project of opening worlds to bodies that have historically been excluded from those worlds” (Ahmed). Ahmed goes on to describe how “brick wall” as a metaphor is not simply an idea to those who hit it, over and over. Instead “a metaphor (something is like something) of the wall matters precisely to convey how these institutional processes become something *that can be touched*. A wall is what you come up against. It is a physical contact, a visceral encounter” (Ahmed). Wendy hit those institutional walls over and over: the invisible work of the teacher-writer-WPA. In its invisibility, working the margins, hitting those walls, can sometimes be a lonely task. Such work can also make one hungry, even starved, for connection: “The wall: something tangible to some, that can be perceived by touch, by contact, is not even there for others. What one body experiences as solid, for another might simply be air. There; nothing there” (Ahmed).

The bodies Wendy wanted to open to the world of academia were writer-teachers and teacher-writers who wrote, read, and researched in collaboration with their students. And that is where the joy of Wendy’s legacy comes in. Because she refused to think, act, write, teach, *feel* in binary terms, she found connection everywhere:

Diversity work requires world making; finding spaces to withdraw into, places that are less hard to inhabit. Fragments, those pieces that have shattered: we find each other. We find those who have been shattered; who recognise what we are up against. What and even who. This is hard, but who too. (Ahmed)

Those kinds of connections were documented more than a decade ago in *Composing Ourselves as Writer-Teacher Writers: Starting with Wendy Bishop*; they were strengthened in “Wendy Bishop’s Legacy: A Tradition of Mentoring, A Call to Collaboration”; we seek to reinforce and invite new connections in this Cluster Conversation.

In the sometimes invisible, gendered work of making connections, of refusing binaries, of speaking up and hitting one brick wall after another, Wendy Bishop nonetheless inspired others to work and think and write and play and find connection along the way: “We become inventive: to survive what we have come to know. And we have come to know. We know from what we come up against even if we have only scratched the surface” (Ahmed).

It is up to us to continue to remember who she was, what she did, said, and wrote, to keep inscribing her life, work, and legacy, so that this invisibility, i.e. what is simply “air” to some, is seen, felt, and understood as something “solid,” something “tangible” and thus a shared experience that can lead to something else, something new, including places where we truly can “find each other.”

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in combination with a constructivist approach combination with a constructivist approach,¹ our conversations in the classroom intend to explore real-life situations and challenge, rather than perpetuate, the cultural norms that produce oppression. Deborah Brandt dubs an ethnomethodological approach to composition as sociocognitive, a much-needed empirical method that allows us to understand reading, writing, and (I would add) dialogue as aspects of the social structure of literacy while she views literacy as a cultural activity². A hermeneutically trained scholar of composition, Brandt sees writing as interaction between context and cognition, society and the individual.³

1 For cultural and textual criticism approach to composition see Cooper and Holzman, or refer to Berlin's and Bizzell's scholarship.

2 See Brendt 317.

3 See also Flower and Hayes.

Correspondences

Melissa A. Goldthwaite

Melissa A. Goldthwaite, professor of English, teaches rhetorical theory and creative writing (poetry, creative nonfiction, food writing, nature writing) at Saint Joseph's University. Her books include *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*, editions five, six, and seven (with Cheryl Glenn); *Surveying the Literary Landscapes of Terry Tempest Williams* (with Katherine Chandler); *The Norton Pocket Book of Writing by Students*; *The Norton Reader*, thirteenth through sixteenth editions (with Bizup and Fernald); *Books That Cook: The Making of a Literary Meal* (Jennifer Cognard-Black), *The Little Norton Reader: 50 Essays from the First Fifty Years*; *Food, Feminisms, Rhetorics*; and *Good Eats: 32 Writers on Eating Ethically* (with Jennifer Cognard-Black). Goldthwaite's work has also been published in journals such as *College English*, *Reader*, and *Writing on the Edge* and in numerous books. She earned her MFA in creative writing (1997) and her PhD. (2001) from The Ohio State University.

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“Our correspondences have wings—paper birds that fly from my house to yours—flocks of ideas crisscrossing the country. . . . [A] connection is made. We are not alone in the world.” —Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge*



One of my clearest memories of Wendy Bishop is her standing on a chair outside her beach house at Alligator Point in Florida one hot July afternoon in 2000. I was standing on the sand below, reaching up to hand her the hummingbird feeder she needed to hang. That day, she was all sun and smiles, welcoming the birds. I remember looking up to her, shading the sun from my eyes, smiling.

Will Baker, in a memorial after Wendy's death, captured her personality when he wrote, "Wendy was half hummingbird. Quick. Sharp. Light. Intense. Charged with sweetness, and a subtle thrum in every move" (5). She became what she loved, a symbol of life and renewal.

Her correspondences certainly had wings. Rarely, they were paper; most often, she sent emails—faster than hummingbirds but just as welcome. A flash on the screen, a connection made.

In one of its meanings, correspondence is to agree, in another, to communicate. In both meanings, correspondence implies connection. Wendy Bishop wrote to connect, often following a pattern of invitation-response-invitation to respond in her process of writing both personal correspondence and the poems, essays, stories, and articles she published.

She modeled a practice of writing, teaching, and working in the context of relationship, relationships based not on status but on mutual care and interest. She established relationships with

her students through writing and revising with them, quoting them in her work, and caring about their professional, personal, and intellectual development. She did the same with colleagues across the country, both longtime friends and those who were newer to the field of composition (many trained, like Wendy, in both creative writing and composition) and saw in her a model for how those who care passionately about writing, teaching, and teaching writing could do what they love.

In creating these mutually beneficial relationships through writing with and for others, Wendy found in both students and colleagues hope for the future of composition studies, a field that didn't always understand or value what she so cared about. Through her invitational ethos, she not only created an opening for other like-minded people to join active—though not always friendly—conversations in the field of rhetoric and composition, but also made the field a friendlier place for the kind of work she loved.

Seeking and Finding Connection through Collaboration

In July of 2000, hours before we drove from her home in Tallahassee to her beach house and several years before her book *On Writing: A Process Reader* was published, Wendy told me about the initial reviews that claimed she was presenting a solitary writer's view. She was perplexed, explaining, "I don't think of myself as a solitary writer. . . . Internal and private and quiet, but I don't think of it as solitary. I think of myself as always desperate for connection" (Bishop interview). I saw that desire in her eyes and heard it in the quick, low intensity of her voice.

That desire for connection fueled much of Wendy's writing—as well as the relationships she developed and nurtured through writing, especially email. For me, that relationship lasted eight years. For others, I know, it was much longer. For most, the correspondence was connection and the comforting knowledge that we were not alone in the field of composition studies, in our desire to write both creatively and academically, in our teaching practices, in our personal or professional lives, no matter how internal, private, and quiet many of us are or were.

On that same July day, eight months before she was to give her CCCC chair's address, I asked Wendy what she'd like to do for it. Grinning, she told me she wanted to do a version of *Sesame Street's* "Here is Your Life." "Toaster: this is your life," she said with a laugh and then went on to talk about how she wanted her children and all of her friends whose work and teaching had influenced her to join her on stage. I could picture it: blue-suited Guy Smiley with his oval, yellow face and triangle nose leading Wendy's children, Morgan and Tait, and her husband, Dean, to the stage. Numerous students, teachers, editors, friends, co-authors, and collaborators would follow: huddled, herded, and half-embarrassed/half-amused. They would all tell stories, and she would be there to hear those stories. It wouldn't matter that she'd be embarrassed by the attention; she'd know she wasn't alone.