Learning Our Own Ways to Situate Composition and Feminist Studies in the English Department

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We all know that it is possible to hold conflicting intellectual and emotional positions simultaneously; many personalities inhabit us in our lives as teachers, scholars, mothers, fathers, community members, speed offenders, friends, lovers. It is primarily when we move into that rarefied air of our professional lives—say, when we open the door to an English department meeting—that we give ourselves over wholeheartedly to what Mary Savage describes as "academentia." At that moment, our carefully negotiated and necessarily composite personality shivers, cracks, faults and folds under, and we resay ourselves, becoming decontextualized as a "Shakespearian," a "Melville specialist," or, in the lesser ranks, a "feminist," "compositionist," "fiction writer" or "poet." When we label ourselves in this way, we agree to the dominant method of distinguishing areas in English studies, what Gerald Graff calls the field-coverage model, a model that isolates and elevates the literature scholar and critic and isolates but devalues the generalist.

Too often, in entering these singular terrains, women travel nervously, alone, with few maps or guidebooks, while the current-traditional "body" of English studies is very able to absorb our nervousness and discontent. By creating separate women's studies programs, designating fields like "composition" and "feminist studies," or allowing only minimal authority for writing program administrators, the establishment is free to conduct department business as usual. Meanwhile, marginalized cultures within or beside the department's dominant culture, alienated, co-opted or about to be co-opted, sit silently around that meritocratic table, feeling concerned.

Negotiating Rules and Crossing Boundaries

When I was a "good" girl in high school, I completed my classwork scrupulously and found a part-time job in order to save money for future college expenses. The first morning at Woolworth's, I didn't forge right out to the mixed joys of working the candy counter, but was kept in the drafty upper regions of the store to read the rules-and-regulations manual, after
which I signed a paper saying I understood and agreed. Most jobs I held after that—generally part-time, poorly paid, and sure to encourage my pursuit of the examined life—included a quick run-through of parameters. There was always a rules-and-regulations manual. Always, that is, until I entered the more discreet and elite work force of the English department. During my years as a TA, part-time lecturer, full-time renewable instructor, and, finally, tenure-line professor, there were rules but they were not written; there were communities but they were usually not friendly or open.

In my earliest days in academia, I wanted and needed more guidance in many ways. I was a woman. I was naive. And I was traumatized by much of what I experienced. I had "converted" suddenly and enthusiastically from studio art to creative writing and literature, and professors had welcomed me to their undergraduate classes. But in the transition to graduate-level work, something happened: my place as a class member in good standing was usurped. I entered a world where the prevailing hierarchy was visible if not explicit, as Adrienne Rich describes it:

> Look at a classroom. . . . Listen to the voices of the women and the voices of the men; observe the space men allow themselves, physically and verbally, the male assumption that people will listen, even when the majority of the group is female. Look at the faces of the silent, and of those who speak. Listen to a woman groping for language in which to express what is on her mind, sensing that the terms of academic discourse are not her language, trying to cut down her thought to the dimensions of a discourse not intended for her . . . or reading her paper aloud at breakneck speed, throwing her words away.

("Taking" 244-45)

As a female initiate into graduate English Studies, I was no longer expected to have a voice.2

Equally, reading the traditional canon under paternal guidance was going to change me. Patrocinio Schweickart illuminates the problem: "For a woman . . . books do not necessarily spell salvation. In fact, a literary education may very well cause her grave psychic damage: schizophrenia 'is the bizarre but logical conclusion of our education'" (41). For instance, although I had become an English graduate student because I loved reading and writing, the texts I loved to read were no longer sites of enjoyment. Rather, they were sites of struggle where my (generally) male professors were enmeshed in a critical game of vast proportions. These professors were Titans struggling in the bleak "publish or perish" universe, while I, uninitiated, was naively expecting to savor great works with their guidance. But the critical wars were not considered suitable for seminar discussion, the primacy of particular great works was not questioned, and the woman student progressed through literature studies as usual, reading against herself. Schweickart also reminds us of the disturbing end-result of such reading: we create a personality untrue to itself, for this is "the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male . . . to be
After completing master's-level work in creative writing, I continued on through a quick unhappy stint in literature to composition and ESL. I was "guided" into community college teaching by a literature advisor when I failed to pass one of three days of qualifying exams for a Ph.D. in English (literature) and, no longer a good girl, refused to take the exams again. At that time, teaching composition and ESL was considered a respectable "trade."

Years later, finally, happily, I chose deeper work in rhetoric and composition. Yet I've never given up my allegiances to those first areas of study, and I constantly work to reintegrate them into my life. Not to do so would be to lose my culture, my pedagogical and writing life experiences. For me, to be only a poet, or a feminist, or a compositionist is not enough. Nevertheless, traditional scholars warn me not to try to cross field boundaries. Says Martin Mueller:

A great deal of interdisciplinary work in English departments is deficient precisely in the virtue it claims for itself because scholars approach interdisciplinary work too casually. Stick to your knitting is sometimes good advice. We would all benefit from a healthy respect for our own expertise and an equally healthy apprehension of the difficulties involved in venturing on other territory. (9)

Mueller tries to find a middle ground in the critical theory/literature-studies wars, never once mentioning feminist or composition issues. Sticking to my knitting in a traditional English department would include, I expect, not allowing learning from my low-status pasts to inform my present professional status. That is, if I intend to "do" criticism or direct graduate students' theses, I should not dilute boundaries by admitting to having taught ESL or liking to write poems. Cross-disciplinary work, it must be remembered, challenges the existing field-coverage model.

As a participant in English studies, I do not want to stick to my knitting, for, like many others, I do not want to undergo the deracination that Patricia Bizzell suggests may occur to minority-culture students, who must forget where they have come from in order to survive their journey through the academy. Students try to resolve a dialect problem as they accede to the preferred school dialect, a dialect that they need to learn in order to successfully master the discourse conventions of their chosen fields or the academic community at large. Or they may need to learn a new way of thinking entirely, mandating a change in their world view. Bizzell holds that students who are asked to change their world view risk deracination, and she argues for closer study of the ways that academically enforced acculturation affects them (Bizzell, "What Happens"). And, I would add, how academically enforced acculturation affects women, often all composition teachers.
Resisting Deracination in English Studies

Women risk deracination as they attempt to enter the tacit and dominant culture of English studies, literature and critical theory. Often adrift without mentors, "good" girls are offered few choices and denied voice: they may learn to read and act like a man or be stopped short by the gatekeepers, as Dale Spender reminds us:

For gatekeepers are in a position to perpetuate their own schemata by exercising sponsorship and patronage towards those who classify the world in ways similar to their own. Women are by no means the only "outsiders" but they are a significant group and there is considerable evidence which suggests that women's schemata does not at times "match" with men's. (191)

When these gatekeepers hold the rules and regulations in their heads and don't share them, marginalized individuals won't succeed very well or quickly.

Sometimes gatekeepers respond with counterarguments to critiques of the patronage system, invoking the relative-oppression and the quality-work arguments. In the former argument, gatekeepers may compare "(white) women's status with that of black and poor men (not black or poor women), as a means to label women's concerns trivial" (Aiken et al. 267). In the latter argument, individuals, often men and always insiders, claim that access is open for women or marginalized constituencies like part-time teachers or graduate students. If they aren't succeeding, it's probably because they haven't completed the requisite degree or don't do "quality work"—not because they don't know the rules or because they are denied access. Here is a version of this argument:

You will only be outsiders as long as you define yourselves that way. Any time you want to get on the bus, you can. All you have to do to get on the bus is some quality work. Yes, it is a meritocracy. But that's all it is. Nothing else—not race, professional status, gender, religion, clothes style, sexual orientation, or brand of underwear—decides whether or not you succeed in getting recognized. Graduate students can do it if they choose to, although usually it takes longer than graduate school lasts. You can certainly begin in grad school. I'm a reader for six different journals, and I can tell you from my experience that good work gets published. ("CCCC Voices" 213)

This quality-work view is held in literature studies but also in composition studies, despite claims that the professional meetings and community of composition studies are friendlier, more open, and more accessible than those of the Modern Language Association or Associated Writing Programs. This belief does not keep novices in composition—women and men alike—from sometimes feeling they've entered new and discouraging terrain without maps or guidebooks. Here is part of a graduate student's anonymous critique of CCCC, the critique that prompted the "quality-work" response above: "If I am ever an Insider, standing at podiums reading my papers, extolling the virtues of teaching writing, what will I have really gained? A more comfort-
able room, a more self-assured voice, and a sense of uneasiness as I remember what I left behind" (“CCCC Voices” 199). Clearly, this is the voice of a person worried about the effects of gatekeeping and deracination.

Both the relative-oppresion and quality-work arguments ignore issues of marginality and feminism in composition studies where, as Elizabeth Flynn reminds us, gatekeepers still flourish. She refers to her recent (and eventually successful) attempt to publish “Composing as a Woman,” a theoretical essay informed by feminism. As she relates, the essay “is thoroughly feminist in perspective and method. . . . The reviewers of the piece seemed to be offended by my criticisms of the field, though, so I decided to shift the emphasis of my discussion, focusing on the positive rather than the negative” (88). Flynn’s view is at variance with the quality-work argument offered by the male composition scholar above.3 These voices of dissent should remind us that the rules-and-regulations manual is not always available for everyone.

In the same vein, Maxine Hairston reminds us:

But our experience [in composition studies] is much like that of the women’s movement. One can look at how far we have come and rejoice at our progress, or one can look at the barriers that still exist and become discouraged. I believe, however—and once more the situation is analogous to that of many women—the major reason we get discouraged is that our worst problems originate close to home: in our own departments and within the discipline of English studies itself. (273)

As compositionists, we interact daily with what Hairston calls the “intimate enemy,” members of the traditional English department. Her argument here is possibly for secession—that writing find a new home. Terry Eagleton argues even more persuasively that this new home might be a new and unified department called rhetoric. Clearly, secession has been the solution for some feminists who have built separate women’s studies programs within existing university structures. In some cases, separation has resulted in strength, allowing marginalized cultures to circumvent the tendency of the English department’s field-coverage model to absorb their interests in isolated intra-departmental pigeonholes. In other cases, secession has resulted in further alienation and erasure of any campus profile, problems that seem similar to those experienced by some writing-across-the-curriculum programs.

In composition studies, those of us involved with feminist issues who intend to exist within English departments and to encourage such existences might further learn from Rich:

Today women are talking to each other, recovering an oral culture, telling our life-stories, reading aloud to one another the books that have moved and healed us, analyzing the language that has lied about us, reading our own words aloud to each other. . . . To do this kind of work takes a capacity for constant active presence, a naturalist’s attention to minute phenomena, for reading between the lines, watching closely for symbolic arrangements, decoding difficult and complex messages left for us by women of the past.
It is work, in short, that is opposed by, and stands in opposition to, the entire twentieth-century white male capitalist culture. (On Lies 13-14)

We need to become active for ourselves while observing these issues with "a naturalist's attention to minute phenomena." We need to remain active while realizing that we are a formidable challenge to the status quo. We need also to learn from Susan Aiken and her colleagues, who address the resistance that comes in response to attempts to change: "Curriculum integration is . . . an exceedingly complex undertaking. . . . Those who direct it should anticipate resistances that will shift—in both kind and intensity—according to the changing chemistry of the groups involved. Because resistance assumes such protean forms, there is no single right way to proceed" (273).

Nevertheless, we may accomplish much by learning from ourselves. To start, we can recognize that what we have learned from studying multicultural students in writing classrooms can illuminate our own positions. There is a connection between what we do to enable those students to negotiate academic lives and what we may do to resolve our own lives within the culture of the English department. Certainly, we need to explore new attitudes and practices for learning and knowing: neighborliness, praxis, feminist mentoring, and encouragement of "believing" behaviors. Arguments for these positions come from composition and feminist theory and pedagogy. We need to examine our world to see where we might go in light of such explorations, questioning whether through active intervention we may not be able to do for ourselves what Bizzell suggests we do for our students: "offer them an understanding of their school difficulties as the problems of a traveler to an unfamiliar country—yet a country in which it is possible to learn the language and the manners and even 'go native' while still remembering the land from which one has come" ("Cognition" 238). We and our graduate students are much like the students that Bizzell considers, and we are traveling inward, into forbidden territory.

Learning from Ourselves

Discussing multicultural writing students, Terry Dean suggests that "teachers need to structure learning experiences that both help students write their way into the university and help teachers learn their way into student cultures" (23). Kevin Davis voices a parallel understanding, finding that basic writers are "neither deficient and in need of remediation nor developmentally unadvanced; they are, instead, quite adept users of different languages, capable of explaining who they are, where they are headed, and why they want to get there" ("What I Learned" 35). Joy Ritchie adds to and extends these ideas: "Learning to write and teaching writing involve us and our students in a process of socialization and of individual becoming" (153). All three writers pinpoint the transactional nature of such learning.

Additionally, Davis claims a need for "translation" so that students’
"language can be understood by members of other cultures" (35). Both Dean and Davis point out, too, that those from the dominant culture need to interact with and enter into the minority cultures’ concerns. But can we, as feminists and compositionists, engage the dominant culture of literature faculty members in our lives even as we engage in theirs?

Other theorists working with students from marginalized cultures offer concerns equally as insistent. Lucille Schultz, Chester Laine, and Savage suggest that college writing teachers need to resolve their own class biases before trying to resolve intra-departmental biases. College writing teachers can accomplish this by realigning themselves with elementary and secondary writing teachers through collaboration and, thus, breaking down the hierarchical and elite system of thinking that insists “knowledge should be created at advanced levels of the educational system and applied or carried out at lower levels; and . . . that the language and discursive practices of each educational level should be separate and distinct” (147). It is easy to see that such hierarchical thinking works against composition and feminist studies within the English studies department but less easy to see our own faults—that we also work against precollege writing teachers (who are often female) simply by ignoring connections between our practices. In this sense, the enemy is even more intimate than Hairston suggests. Even as we complain about our own impoverished positions, we may be the oppressors of writing teachers in the precollege writing world.

What, then, do those working with culturally marginalized individuals suggest? Dean says that he has found success building bridges and translating across cultures by including cultural and language topics in class, using peer response groups, publishing class newsletters, bringing campus events into classroom discussions, and encouraging the use of anecdotes (“What I Learned” 28-36). Patrick Hartwell suggests that we need to access “underlying postures toward language” by “banishing teacher talk,” “investigating literacy events,” and looking at our metaphors and narratives. Echoing Rich’s call for a naturalist’s attention to detail, Hartwell further suggests that we use classroom ethnographic observation, that we watch and explicate ourselves, teachers and students alike (12-16).

The anthropological model of teachers who learn as they teach is supported by the research of Mary Belenky and her colleagues in Women’s Ways of Knowing. They argue for “connected teaching,” in which the teacher views herself or himself as a participant-observer in the classroom: “A connected teacher is not just another student; the role carries special responsibilities . . . an authority based not on subordination but on cooperation.” They further claim that “connected teachers are believers. They trust their students’ thinking and encourage them to expand it” (227).

Hairston offers several suggestions as well. She urges us to realize that literature professors are not listening to us, to stop being angry and wasting energy, and to pay attention to the inner voice—to stop trying to be “good.”
To accomplish this, she suggests that we become productive and publish, and network with fields outside our own and with the professional (nonacademic) world (278-82).

Finally, Savage offers instant relief in “neighborliness,” claiming that “neighborliness is an antidote; it is not a new direction, paradigm, consensus. Rather it is an instant, homeopathic remedy that allows the body to come back to its senses” (16). For Savage, neighborliness is “praxis, practical activity, like teaching people to read, or helping women provide better nutrition for infants, or accompanying a grieving family at a wake” (16). This type of praxis is founded on Freirean pedagogy and Christian ecumenical work in which neighborliness “establishes both closeness and distance in the critical interrogation of life” (16). As she points out, such a critical interrogation of life is being undertaken by “pastoral workers in Latin America [who] are curing their own clericism by asking a central question: whose cry do I hear, toward whom do I move, whose interests do I serve?” (17). Savage’s suggestion is strongly rooted in a feminist perspective, and she suggests that “writing teachers capitalize on their womanliness, their ‘limnality’ (their living at the limits, on the margins of the system), and that they approach one another as neighbors” (18).

Turning Toward New Graduate Students

Whose cry do I hear? At times I hear many, but I want to attend here to the novitiate, the official new member of the English department community. We need to pay close attention to our “young,” those temporarily (and sometimes permanently) marginalized male and female TAs, the next generation in the changing department of English, the people that we may come into contact with in exciting and valuable ways. These are the individuals that I move toward, for it just may be that the entrenched literature-studies professional is too obdurate to change. Remember Hairston’s “intimate enemy,” and look at her war imagery. Remember that Dean, Davis, and Ritchie tell us that those who develop critical consciousness, enter into dialogue with minorities, and cross cultural boundaries are both agents of change and themselves changed.

Simply put, those individuals with strongly developed classification systems may find it impossible to change; they have more at stake, more to lose. Additionally, for those in power, intentional change can be seen as giving in, becoming the enemy, and, in the case of men, becoming female. Aiken and her colleagues found this occurring in an institutionally sanctioned project, a curriculum integration seminar designed to aid university faculty in incorporating feminist concerns into courses: “Unfortunately, participants who transcended masculinist preoccupations and attempted to voice feminist positions frequently found their contributions ignored or discounted by others in the groups or found themselves subtly classed as ‘female’ by their [male] colleagues” (269).
Rather than go to war, to insist on change in those for whom change entails great risks and who may even react with punitive or repressive measures against department subcultures, I look toward the new graduate student, who is not yet such a fixed product, who is still in the process of becoming. No adult comes to a graduate program as a blank slate, but new graduate students are voluntarily enrolling in a process that can have profound effects on who they are and who they become. For example, Carol Berkenkotter, Thomas Huckin, and John Ackerman trace the writing development of a new student in rhetoric and linguistics who learns to write like a rhetorician. John Schilb critiques this case study because the researchers, he feels, do not illuminate the ideological biases of the culture this student was asking and being asked to enter; nor, Schilb feels, do the researchers come to terms with the political and ethical issues of academic acculturation. Since graduate students represent great potential for English departments, we should explore public and private channels for teaching critical consciousness to these soon-to-be peers. As the next wave of composition and feminist workers, and as newly aware literature faculty, these students have the potential to make changes that we have sometimes despaired of making.

Forums for graduate students can and should include an introductory course in “English Studies” that goes far beyond the required bibliography, research, and criticism courses currently offered. Such a course would be concerned with knowledge-making, with philosopher Gilbert Ryles’ often-quoted distinction between “knowing that” and “knowing how,” a distinction summarized by David Foster:

“Knowing that” and “knowing how” are two different kinds of knowledge, not antecedent and consequence. “Learning that” is “acquiring information,” becoming “apprised of a truth”; “learning how” is “improving in ability,” or “getting trained in a procedure.” These two capacities are both exercises of intelligence, but are not associated in a simple cause-and-effect fashion.” (117)

In most graduate programs, the bibliography, research, and criticism course focuses on knowing how, while knowing that about the professions is incidental information, program lore, academic rules and regulations transmitted by word of mouth from mentor to mentee or puzzled over by graduate students in midnight lounges. To exercise both knowing capacities, the introductory graduate seminar should also focus on knowing that.

In such a course, we might question our own history by examining texts like James Berlin’s Rhetoric and Reality, Graff’s Professing Literature, Toril Moi’s Sexual/Textual Politics, and Joseph Moxley’s Creative Writing in America. These books can help us begin to know that because their authors share a determination to examine the historical and ideological conditions that influence our lives within the English department. By including works related to all areas of English, a redesigned, historically aware, multicultural
seminar in English studies can begin to offer graduate students important contexts and a forum for question-making. In such a seminar, questions could be asked about how our intertwined but varied subdisciplines have come into being and, often, into serious conflict. Such a seminar would work against the traditional assumption that “students should be exposed only to the results of the controversies of their teachers and educators and should be protected from the controversies themselves” (Graff 261).

Within this participatory seminar, we can also use activities similar to those in multicultural classrooms, including anecdote and storytelling, for telling stories is a neighborly act that can illuminate the academy’s ways. Our narratives can also be considered “change-active.” Linda Brodkey argues for critical ethnographies in which the writer’s voice “is made most audible by interrupting the flow of the story and calling attention to the fact of the narration” in order to be “theoretically sound and honest to draw attention to one’s ideological position as a narrator” (73). Critically conscious historical discussion will bring up the political and ethical issues of academic acculturation.

And questions will be raised. What does it mean to study literature, writing, critical theory, and rhetoric in the English department? Whose cry do we hear? Toward whom do we move? Whose interests do we serve? Questions promulgate dialogue. As we do with our multicultural students, we may interact in diaries, journals, and peer groups, telling anecdotes and stories, examining processes, developing critical consciousness on a range of department- and profession-specific concerns. Using Elizabeth Daumer and Sandra Runzo’s suggestions, we could “focus on experiences of being unable, or denied the right, to speak for oneself and on incidents of racial, sexual, and linguistic oppression and assertion” or describe “a time when someone changed or distorted their language,” or consider “telling a story of personal significance to another who then retells it to the class,” or encourage a student to “write about herself in a context that she thinks social conventions have generally denied her” (55-56)—as I did when I began this essay. We can discuss whether quality work does count, how it counts and who says so, and how it should be done. We can discuss gatekeepers and conventions. Through such discussion, we can illuminate the ideological bases of all groups involved: gatekeepers and gatecrashers, dominant and minority cultures, males and females.

**Valuing Mentoring and Believing**

Neighborliness can extend beyond the graduate seminar to those departments too small or too conservative to transform the curriculum. Women in composition (and men who value such alternatives) can provide new and positive mentoring models to female and male students new to the profession. Mentors can develop for and articulate to graduate students their sense of the operative rules and regulations governing the department and field;
such articulation may well serve mentors to better understand their position, too. Reminding us that “mentoring is not only an intellectual relationship but also an emotional one,” Kathleen Schatzberg-Smith explains its benefits:

Productivity is enhanced by affiliation with a mentor. This in turn stimulates the novice’s career advancement. The protégé also gains access to a professional network that would not be so readily available without the assistance of the mentor.... The mentoring relationship provides in a sense a safe haven in which the protégé can take risks and develop personal and professional values and style.” (48)

Certainly, mentoring provides a wonderful opportunity for those new to the field; yet mentoring opportunities are often restricted for women.

We need new ways to view mentoring. Belenky and her colleagues offer one in the “midwife teacher,” an individual who utilizes connected teaching and believes in and cooperates with students: “Midwife-teachers focus not on their own knowledge (as the lecturer does) but on the students’ knowledge. They contribute when needed, but it is always clear that the baby is not theirs but the student’s” (218). Janet Emig describes an analogous mentoring model: “Teaching writing is more like what is classically the maternal role than the paternal role and that is to make certain that something grows. And you do it any way you can” (132). As Dixie Goswami suggests, this mentoring model is based on a progression, a mentor serving “first, as collaborator with a student, next as reformulator for a student, and finally as audience, as a very particular kind of audience” (qtd. in Emig 132). A nonhierarchical mentoring model makes sense, for by becoming a first collaborator, first reformulator, and first audience for young academics, we might just reduce our collective “academentia.”

The benefits of such mentoring are explained from a Jungian perspective by Daniel Lindley. Lindley claims that successful teachers tap the “student” in themselves and the “teacher” in their students, transferring authority from teacher to student, who ultimately finds that “her inner teacher is all she needs. She can do the work on her own” (164). In essence, successful teachers enable a student to become a successful self-learner, just as successful feminist mentors could enable a graduate student—in literature, composition, or creative writing, female or male—to become a successful academic: one who has critical consciousness and expects to perform in a neighborly fashion, one who has achieved a measure of holism and is able to use both male and female behaviors, one who explores ideologies and explicates and critiques his or her beliefs.

Being a positive mentor to many students is not impossible if we redefine our concept of mentoring, as Nel Noddings does: “I do not need to establish a lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every student. What I must do is to be totally and nonselectively present to the student—to each student—as he addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encoun-
ter is total" (qtd. in Belenky et al. 225).

Encouraging believing behavior can also promote neighborliness within our departments, helping us to make sure that something grows. Peter Elbow encourages us to develop both doubting and believing capabilities, viewing both methodological doubting and believing as essential learning activities. He claims that we more often doubt than believe, needing only one disconfirmation to abandon an assertion; however, proof of the nonexistence of a disconfirming instance is very difficult if not impossible to provide. He claims that doubt too often caters to "our natural impulse to protect and retain the views we already hold" (263). Elbow calls for balance and integration: doubting and believing are both necessary for broadening our intellectual repertoire.

Valuing believing behavior and realizing its connection to praxis may foster such integration. Drawing on Richard Berenstein’s work, Schultz, Laine, and Savage discuss praxis: "Praxis, or critical practice, therefore, is neither the highly theoretical knowledge of the advanced scholar nor the technician-like knowledge of those asked only to carry out ideas, but practical activity which continuously involves judgment and reflection" (150). We practice judgment and reflection in our classrooms and seminar rooms as we develop what Stephen North has called (not always flattering) teachers’s "lore." We can share this lore that is based on judgment and reflection by using anecdotes and narratives, if we gather our understandings carefully in diaries and teachers' journals and begin to see ourselves as teacher/researcher/ethnographer/naturalists. We can reap the productive results of metacognition and become aligned with feminists who advocate praxis as well. Schweikert claims that "feminist criticism . . . is a mode of praxis. The point is not merely to interpret literature in various ways; the point is to change the world" (39).

Listening to Our Voices

In this essay, whose interests do I hope to serve? Again, Rich offers insight: "What interests me in teaching is less the emergence of the occasional genius than the overall finding of language by those who did not have it and by those who have been used and abused to the extent that they lacked it" ("Teaching" 67-68). What interests me in teaching graduate students is not finding the original genius but helping to give voice to those who want and need voices, for silencing still occurs. Two simple examples passed into my critical consciousness lately. Reading the Chronicle of Higher Education, for example, I learned with little surprise that some academics intend never to change. Here is what I read, a news item on the new MLA-sanctioned guidelines for avoiding gendered language:

Edward A. Cowan, an assistant professor of German at the University of Texas at Arlington, tells The Chronicle that using "he" is grammatically and stylistically correct
because the masculine pronoun is by definition without gender when used as a generic pronoun. He writes that he plans to continue using "normal English," adding, "if that is 'sexist,' then so be it." ("In Box")

And, while reading the AWP Chronicle, a newsletter that represents creative writing programs around the country, I listened to poet Maxine Kumin and learned:

Every six months or so another critic of the contemporary culture parachutes among us with the bad news that poetry is dead. Joseph Epstein's Who Killed Cock Robin? essay employs so much ammunition in the service of cramping us poets even deeper "into the dark corner poetry now inhabits" that I can only throw up my hands and agree with him.

Things are indeed bleak, but we women poets can hardly be held accountable. In this didactic and learned essay peppered with the names of the dead great poets... we don't amount to much. Although, to quote Carolyn Kizer (not cited by Epstein), "we are the custodians of the world's best-kept secret: / Merely the private lives of one-half of humanity," only the sacred deceased triumvirate of Dickinson, Bishop and Moore are mentioned. . . . It would seem that we have blundered into an all-male profession by mistake and may therefore ask to be excused. (15)

Whose interests do I serve? My own, of course, but I also try to listen to graduate students. I listened recently to MFA students enrolled in a graduate-level seminar in creative writing in which I tried to practice what I preach here—critical consciousness, feminist mentoring, neighborliness, and believing. Certainly, I did not practice all these behaviors successfully, but in response to semester-end questions designed to gauge their learning in the seminar, they said such things as these:

I hadn't considered the issue of sexism in the field of teaching creative writing. I had thought about it in terms of literature and the male-dominated canon but not in terms of the workshop. And I think when I sensed sexist behavior, such as male teachers flirting with female students, I told myself I was misreading the situation. Now I think I am more sensitive to it in the academic community—and more resentful when I see it going on. Across the board, male teachers are still setting the norms without being sensitive to female students. I guess I have changed in that with what I have learned, I'm a little more critical of how workshops are conducted and how teachers treat students.

Maybe what it all boils down to for me is that students get the respect they deserve in classrooms. I don't think it matters what we're teaching—literature, composition, or creative writing—what we're helping students to achieve is the ability to empower themselves through language. When we understand this, the tools—literature, essays, poems, stories, or criticism—take on an equal weight. One is no more primal than the other. What is most important is that students experience language, discover it and clarify their relationship to it.

Engaging in "change-oriented" teaching means that we must proceed with care, both for our students' and our own sakes. If we provide new models, our students will consider them.

Maintaining a questioning stance means, too, that we question our-
selves. Listen to writer and teacher Katharine Haake as she doubts and believes herself:

For me it is much easier to say what I do wrong: I talk too much, I am not nurturing enough, I don't make effective enough use of collaboration. As for what I think I may do right, what I want is not to be the focus of the classroom, and what I do to allow for this shift is . . . provide a theoretical context by addressing such issues as how discourse operates to constitute ourselves and the world, and what happens to writing in the absence of an author. I also make explicit my own ideological assumptions, including my various stances as a feminist that extend to embrace those who are marginalized in other ways as well, by race, by class, by belief, by status: blacks, for instance, or students themselves. I work to establish a common critical practice that can empower students by giving them control over their own work. And there is one other thing: I listen very, very closely, for we are all working this language together, clumsily, eagerly. (Haake, Alcosser, and Bishop 2)

And listen to writer and teacher Kevin Davis as he considers his own writing classrooms and makes suggestions for good teaching:

What I'm suggesting is asking questions you don't know the answer to, letting students establish meaning, accepting whatever answer they produce as their answer, perhaps seeking a little clarification . . . You don't have to know any answers to teach; you only have to know the right questions. And you'll know the right questions when you see them. (Letter)

The questions we each need to ask may be simple: whose cry do I hear, toward whom do I move, whose interests do I serve? Asking these questions helps us to cure our own "clericism." And the mentoring model may be simple: first collaborator, first reformulator, first audience. Yet the results of our activities will be productive and dangerous. Neighborliness is not passive but active praxis. Feminist mentoring is not ideologically free but self-analytical and self-critical, based on belief and premised on engaging ourselves to ask the right questions. The rules-and-regulations manual does and should change. Our constant endeavor is to help translate it into the language of graduate students and then to be, in turn, translated by them into the best academics we can be. 8

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Notes

1 On the authority of writing program administrators, see Olson and Moxley.
2 See, also, Bolker; Sperling and Freedman.
I contrast Flynn's assertions that gatekeeping does exist—she felt she had to modify her essay to pass the scrutiny of gatekeepers who did not value feminist claims—to Robert Connor's assertions that composition publishing is not based on "race, professional status, gender, religion, clothes style, sexual orientation, or brand of underwear"—not to beatify or vilify either writer but simply to show that gender has influenced the perceptions of these equally prominent members of the composition community. In fact, as did other readers, I appreciate Connor's openness in identifying himself to the graduate students who wrote "CCCC Voices." Nevertheless, when James Raymond, College English editor, reviewed submission and publication patterns during 1985-86 and compared them with earlier figures, his data showed that gender and professional status do influence editorial reality, at least in that prominent composition forum (556).

I discuss this issue further in Something Old, Something New: College Writing Teachers and Classroom Change.

See Stewart for a story of curriculum change and resistance in which a department chair dismantles a threateningly successful rhetoric program within his English department.

Also see Stewart for a suggestion that the same type of rethinking is needed in the undergraduate English major.

On the restriction of mentoring opportunities for women students, see Hall and Sandler.

My thanks to Kevin Davis and Katharine Haake, peers whose thinking always helps me to think, and more recently to Bonnie Braendlin for careful and supportive reading, and to Don McAndrew—a mentor in all the best ways.

Works Cited


—. “Teaching Writing in Open Admissions.” *On Lies* 51-68.


**Winterowd Award Winners Announced**

The first annual W. Ross Winterowd Award for the most outstanding book on composition theory published in 1989 was awarded to Susan Miller for *Rescuing the Subject: A Critical Introduction to Rhetoric and the Writer*. Honorable mention went to Charles Bazerman for *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*.

The award, which was generously endowed by Professor Winterowd, includes a cash prize and an attractive framed citation. The selection committee was chaired by Joseph Comprone. Professor Winterowd presented the awards during the Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition meeting at theCCCC Convention in Chicago.

Send nominations for the 1990 W. Ross Winterowd Award to Gary A. Olson, editor; *Journal of Advanced Composition*; Department of English; University of South Florida; Tampa, FL 33620-5550.