Marilyn Sternglass' stated purposes in *The Presence of Thought* are admirable and should be interesting to teachers of all levels and subjects because of the detailed glimpses she gives us of writers and readers at work. She says throughout the book that her study is an attempt "to document and explore the range of strategies that a competent group of language users would employ to respond to a range of reading and writing tasks over a semester's time in a more naturalistic instructional setting than has been used in prior studies." The tool she uses to document these strategies is introspection or, rather, retrospective accounts written by a group of graduate students in literature, reading, composition, and education while taking a seminar with Sternglass on introspection as a research tool. If that sounds convoluted, it is; but the problem of intro/retro-specting on introspection is small compared to the rather disappointing conclusions the book reaches.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. In this study, Sternglass divided a seminar into two parts. During the first half, the students read research articles on the topic of introspection and wrote summaries, syntheses, position papers, and reaction statements. During the last eight weeks, they designed their own research projects on introspection. Most importantly, the students kept journals for Sternglass, ongoing weekly commentaries on what they were writing and reading. The student accounts are fascinating, revealing all sorts of agendas and assumptions about what it means to be a graduate student in our field, the role of authority in classrooms, the effects of prior knowledge, the complicated contexts for writing in and out of the classroom, and the need for responses from varied audiences in a community of learners.

However, Sternglass seems far less interested here in what happened to these students as they read assigned tasks, wrote assigned papers in specific genres, and then designed their own research projects—all while keeping an introspective journal on these activities—than she is in defending her own research methodology. *The Presence of Thought* is filled both with defenses of introspection as a valid research tool for inquiry into mental and language processes and with attacks on more rigidly controlled protocol analyses. She continually argues that retrospective accounts of reading and writing processes yield insights that "could never be discovered through a short-term protocol of an individual responding to a demand requiring instant reaction and writing." Of course, she's right to insist on the "necessity of examining composing processes over real time in complex settings." Of course, purely
empirical research in a laboratory setting will constrain the range and the kinds of insights we can gather about real people composing.

Yet, I think Sternglass hasn't gone far enough in her argument. Like many of her students in their final research reports, she seems caught between what she calls the "empirical" and the "naturalistic" paradigms of research. Her study finally feels like a mixed metaphor: she's trying to "prove" the value of introspective accounts through empirically controlled methods. For example, one of the real limitations of this study is the lack of "conversation" between students and students and between students and instructors. Even though Sternglass begins by describing this study as an "extended conversation," throughout all the writing of these introspective accounts the students received no written responses from their teachers to any of their writing. Sternglass made the conscious decision not to respond in order "to encourage them to explore their own thinking more freely." She also required that during the first half of the course the students not discuss their writing, reading, or class discussions with one another. Sternglass acknowledges her own failure here in an instructional sense (she notes that students did not have the opportunity of a supportive responder nor the chance to build a learning community), but she doesn't acknowledge the source of this failure: her attempt to impose the standards of "pure" experiment on a naturalistic study. This confusion runs throughout the book as Sternglass continually backs off from what I see as the most important conclusions she might have reached.

As I read this text, I kept writing "of course" or "but this is obvious" in the margins of the pages. In her section on implications for teaching, for example, she cautions us that we must differentiate between response and evaluation, a conclusion that Peter Elbow has been arguing for ten years. She argues that we should share our insights about the processes of planning, drafting, and revising with students. But don't we already do that, as Donald Murray taught us ages ago? She argues that students need time for reflection and incubation, that they need to define individual purposes for writing for themselves, ideas that certainly weren't new to writing workshop teachers like Nancy Atwell or Lucy Calkins. She wants, ultimately, for each of her students to be able to "understand what I am saying, why I am saying it, how I am saying it, and for whom I am saying it," processes that Ann Berthoff has been explaining for years through double-entry notebooks, a more fruitful kind of introspection. With all the information that Sternglass gathers, she doesn't seem to come up with much that's new or surprising.

As I said earlier, the most fascinating parts of The Presence of Thought are the student accounts of their own writing and reading, their grappling with the assignments in the seminar, their attempts to figure out what Sternglass was up to, what she wanted, and to reconcile all this activity with their own prior experience. But Sternglass virtually ignores what I see as the most interesting questions she could have asked about these introspective accounts:
Why do you say that? What do you think are the connections? How did you come to that? Crystal's final research report, a creative fable depicting a conflict between an "empirical King" and his "subjective Subjects," seems to me to point Sternglass to the way out of her dilemma. Crystal's "subjects" have built a labyrinth that the "empirical legions" can't negotiate because each "subject" built one part of it individually and so the key to the maze lies in personal knowledge. When the "empirical King" complains to the "subjects" that he can't figure them out, they retort, "Why didn't you ask for directions?" The King explains, "BECAUSE YOUR DIRECTIONS WOULD BE SUBJECTIVE AND THEREFORE UNRELIABLE." I get the same sense about Sternglass. She wants to argue for subjective accounts, but she's at bottom suspect of uncontrolled experiments.

If only she had taken the time to ask her students for directions. I kept wanting Sternglass to broaden this study into an even more naturalistic account of those students' reading and writing. Although she did have her students read *The Presence of Thought* in manuscript, she only mentions ethnographic research once in her conclusion, and she does not seem to have learned Shirley Brice Heath's lessons about how to become not only observers of language activity but also participants in the community. I wholeheartedly agree with her concluding call for more naturalistic research "carried out over extended periods of time that give the participants opportunities to reveal as much as they can of the factors that influenced their interpretations of tasks and the shape of the outcomes," but I would argue that ethnographic research will tell us much more than retrospective accounts alone, especially journals written in such isolation as these.

Marilyn Sternglass has probably done what she set out to do in *The Presence of Thought*: add to the body of knowledge about how composing happens. However, she could have done so much more than support what we already know about writing and teaching, if only she had taken the time to ask her students questions.


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Frequently, it seems to me, English faculty go about their business largely oblivious to what's going on in English studies. Composition theorists, for example, only occasionally and indirectly affect what average practitioners actually do in average composition classrooms. Similarly, what