Have we all, at some time or another, sat in a beginning-of-the-year workshop on writing instruction, summer settling in our stomachs like a not-quite-digested meal, listening with at least some skepticism as colleagues painted glowing pictures of the flourishing collaborative environment they had cultivated in the classroom? We wisely nod to signal our agreement with our colleagues' findings, but out from the dark corners of our minds jump unsettling questions: What am I doing wrong? Where did my groups stray from the path? Why don’t my students come away from collaborative assignments with that aura of success and good will that their students experienced? Although our students’ experience of the collaborative process seems not to conform to what we have been assured are appropriate outcomes, we may be doing nothing wrong, nor have our groups necessarily chosen the wrong path. Our students’ problems with collaboration may lie not so much in the way we facilitate the collaborative process but rather in the way we conceive of the methods and goals of that process. Predisposed to accept the team ethos of American sports and business as the paradigm for collaboration, we may be overlooking our students’ day-to-day experience of collaboration. Conditioned to listen for consensus and monological agreement, we may not appreciate contending voices.

Collaboration is more than teamwork. Teamwork is primarily goal and success oriented. Few of us have ever heard a college coach explain a losing season by proclaiming, “It was teamwork that got us there.” Although collaboration can have a goal and an outcome or product, it is, above all, a process. At its most effective and affective levels, collaboration is a process in which individual participants redefine themselves as a group, approximating what Victor Turner refers to as *communitas*. For *communitas* to result, group members have to exchange the monologic discourse that so often marks negotiations between the powerful and the powerless (the discourse that often characterizes group decision-making in management—a language designed to negotiate from a position of strength, in which one party “compromises” by giving up what he or she can afford to lose) for a dialogic discourse that allows for co-existent, often conflicting voices. We should
remember that "collaboration" can also refer to the act of siding with those to whom one was once opposed, as in "collaboration with the enemy." Despite, or perhaps because of, the transformational nature of collaboration, it is often a messy process, marked by conflict, disagreement, and difference. Students know a lot about all three.

Students come to technical and professional writing courses with cooperative experiences that teachers often overlook. Students cooperate every day in their family lives, marriages, personal and social relationships; they negotiate decisions with family, spouses, lovers, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. The goal of familial cooperation is much like that of academically manipulated collaboration: successful problem solving or decision making. It doesn't always work. Who among us has not claimed that those nearest us, those who should care the most about what we think, say, and feel, are not listening to us, not respecting our ideas? We put this knowledge aside when we walk into our technical writing classrooms, forgetting that the students in those rooms share our expectations of and frustrations with day-to-day relationships. They, too, have families, friends, lovers, and co-workers from whom they expect a lot and with whom they do not always get along. Most of us are introduced to social cooperation within our family units: fathers and mothers organize children to clean up their rooms, dress up for company, prepare for vacations, and so on. Family life is one long cooperative enterprise. Without substantial training in child-rearing or productive collaborative strategies, most families muddle along. Although parents establish guidelines that they hope will foster healthy children and promote socialization, rules and goals are often not clear, or they may change as circumstances intervene. Divorce, drinking problems, economic instability, and psychological or physical abuse undermine cooperation in over fifty percent of American families. Often, family life consists of acrimonious fights and irrational decisions. Students are the products of approximately twenty years of familial and social cooperation, albeit poorly developed, unfairly exercised, at times even dysfunctional. The more dysfunctional the family, the less likely it is that students will arrive at college well prepared to learn about collaborating in the work place.

Even in a "normal" family, whatever that may be, giving or withholding signs of love and affection control cooperation. To punish a resistant family member (or friend, since the concept of family should be expanded to include the entire social circle), emotional recriminations are common, sometimes accompanied by tangible punishment, such as isolation, verbal conflict, even physical blows. Further, although violating social rules leads to punishment, seldom is one thrown out of a family for failure to cooperate. Unlike professional collaboration, which is usually a studied and deliberate action, familial cooperation is instinctive and non-reflective. We plan vacations or discuss professional goals with family and friends without giving much thought to the process. Although we may hope for the perfect vacation or
help in making the best career choice, we value the continuance of the relationship more than the outcome of the collaboration.

Professional writing courses (business and technical writing) usually proceed without accommodating students' experience with social cooperation. Neglecting this shared experience and underestimating its importance, teachers ask students to launch into collaborative assignments that supposedly represent situations students will encounter when they enter the "real world": the work place. Since the conventions of social cooperation are not identical with those of professional collaboration, teachers frustrate students by requesting they set aside personal strategies for getting along and participate in role playing based on corporate models. These frustrations became apparent to us when we asked our students to assess their writing groups in personnel memos. In this essay, we examine selected examples of these memos for what they tell us about the collaborative process. In analyzing our successes and failures with collaborative assignments, we let students speak for themselves. These voices reveal that student writers use negotiating skills that are closer to familial models of group decision making than they are to managerial models.4

The Classroom as a Site of Difference
That "real world" for which our courses are, hopefully, preparing students is far from just and equal. It is also not somewhere "out there" beyond the protective walls of the classroom. With our courses' orientation toward work place writing, we participate intimately in the process of acculturation. In very real ways, our classrooms are sites of difference: contact zones between often conflicting cultures.5 There is, of course, quite a bit of work extant on the cultural and social impact of writing courses. Using Paulo Freire as a standard, cultural theorists argue for allowing students access to their culture, respecting their roots, and accepting their varied social and linguistic histories. Richard Rodriguez’s Hunger of Memory and Mike Rose’s Lives on the Boundary represent the core issue: how do educators enable students to succeed professionally while respecting their often non-standard social and linguistic backgrounds?6

Thus far, teachers of professional writing courses have not participated significantly in this debate, perhaps because the titles of our courses indicate a foregone conclusion: "Technical Writing" and "Professional Writing" proclaim that students must acclimatize to the business world to survive. What research that has been done on collaboration within business and technical writing environments has emphasized managerial rather than interpersonal aspects of collaboration.7 Although teaching students "survival skills" so that they can better negotiate non-academic writing situations has definite value, such instruction assumes that our students accept the behaviors, language strategies, formal structures, and interpersonal strategies required of a middle-level white-collar worker. If we were to judge from
business and technical writing textbooks, our method of achieving this goal is to nod briefly to social interaction and then move ahead to describing ideal professional collaboration.\textsuperscript{8} Our failure to bridge the gap between what happens in the classroom and what our students can expect to have happen in the workplace, hurts our ongoing discussion of professional collaboration and seriously hampers our ability to teach our students to collaborate.\textsuperscript{9} They are not "blank slates" with no experience; they are not open to any and all instruction on collaborating; their complex lives and beliefs color and sometimes impede whatever they learn.

Into this complex network of social, collegial, and professional cultures, we interject the professional writing classroom, with its unique guidelines for using, controlling, and assessing "correct" collaboration. Experienced in social and familial cooperation, students use their familiar interpersonal problem-solving skills to solve technical or managerial tasks, all the while coping with the conventions of college. Students' previous school experience conflicts with collaborative projects. Individual work and independence are ingrained; students have been trained to view learning as an uncompromisingly individual process, not something to be shared. Ideas "belong" to someone; writing style gets "ruined" by running through several writers. Despite the growing emphasis on collaborative work at both the high school and college levels, students perceive quickly that their teachers value individuality highly and reward it accordingly. Leaning across the aisle to glance at another's paper, even if it assists the student in understanding what he or she was too timid to ask of the teacher, means expulsion from the very group (the competent) the student was attempting to join.

Most teachers, whose promotions depend upon a record of individual scholarship, equate individuality with creativity. Even well-intentioned and useful advice about the composing process, such as telling students that writing will help them find their unique voices, undercuts subsequent efforts to get students to see the value of a collaborative identity. Small wonder that students have trouble navigating the rocks and shoals of collaborative work.

The classroom environment, then, is filled with conflicting messages about the nature and value of collaboration. Conflict and difference do not, however, mean collaboration is impossible. Indeed, fruitful collaboration often starts with the recognition that difference is essential if a group wishes to generate truly original ideas rather than to rely on made-to-order compromises that satisfy no one. The problem lies not so much in resolving conflicts when they arise as in getting students to express their conflicting views openly and then deal with them productively.

**Introducing Students to Collaboration**

Like many of our colleagues, we have used peer reading groups for rough drafts, group editing, and small writing projects in our technical writing courses. Three years ago, we decided to attempt a larger group project: a
collaboratively planned, researched, and written proposal. Students identify a local or university problem that needs to be solved, research the problem, construct a viable solution, and write the proposal to the appropriate audience. We do not assign students to groups in this project. Through trial and error, we have determined that students are more satisfied with collaborative work if they can select fellow toilers. Although assigning students to work groups might be reasonable from a business standpoint, if we intervene, we complicate the group dynamics. Usually, we let shared interests in a proposal topic determine group membership; that is, after the class has collectively brainstormed a number of likely topics, they select three or four of the most promising ones and interest groups form around a topic, such as ways of streamlining procedures for student registration. Some students select groups according to their own criteria, sometimes seeking friends or fellow majors, sometimes simply looking around for non-threatening faces and gravitating to them. All students in a group receive the same grade for the proposal; if the final proposal receives a B, a limited participant receives a B, even if she or he did not do as much work as the rest of the group.

We spend a few class periods orienting the students to group projects, using a variety of standard exercises for improving group dynamics. We discuss problems common to group projects, conflict resolution, productivity measurements, and decision-making strategies. For most students, training in group dynamics is limited to our class, except for organizational communications students who take several courses in interpersonal dynamics and small group decision-making. We allow substantial in-class time for development of the projects, but students must arrange outside time for more in-depth collaboration. As one might expect, groups run into many problems, ranging from a paucity of information on their problems through motivating lazy or irresponsible colleagues. Teachers work as facilitators, advising and helping where we can but refusing to solve the groups' problems. Occasionally, problems become so severe that more serious intervention seems warranted, but our roles remain neutral, quite intentionally. This project is the group's responsibility, not ours. To provide students with the opportunity to assess the process, product, and participants, we implemented a personnel assessment memo, similar to evaluative memos used in industry.

Although we occasionally had students come to us during the writing process to air concerns they had about the project or their colleagues' participation, the evidence that our students were having problems with collaboration emerged most forcefully in their end-of-project "personnel assessment" memos. The memos reveal many, often conflicting, aspects of the collaborative process. We have isolated two aspects of their documents for detailed discussion here: their use and misuse of the rhetoric of collaboration, and their resistance to and accommodation of conflict. Through their often creative adaptations of collaborative terminology, students revealed
their gradual adjustment to this venture that requires them to set aside individual goals. Their social and collegial cultures were in active conflict with the collaborative strategy discussed in this class. Their avowed (or denied) reactions to conflict hit at the very heart of collaboration: most students stay far away from conflict; they view disagreeing as a failure. Acknowledgements of conflict are usually confessional in tone.

The Rhetoric of Collaboration

The personnel assessment memo is the final word on a project that most students find difficult but rewarding; it allows students to vent frustration, analyze their experiences, and help future students. In a sense, it is practice at meta-discourse because students are discussing a discourse community, anatomizing its weaknesses and strengths. Assessment memos reveal how some students not only test out what they perceive as the language of collaboration but also how they get stuck at the level of language. For these students, collaboration is more a rhetorical term than an operable reality. In the example below, the writer affirms belief in the collaborative process while, at the same time, expressing alienation from that process:

If individually I would have written a proposal, I would have selected a topic of some familiarity or one that would have provided knowledge in an area of interest to me. In my overall opinion group collaboration is a useful and productive means in achieving a goal. However, in working on this particular task I experienced much ambiguity in regards to this topic and the group itself.

Trying to sound objective and distanced from a project that clearly bothered her, this student claims that collaboration is “a useful and productive means in achieving a goal”; this particular instance did not, however, work well. She saw the purpose of the memo as an affirmation of collaboration and used what she felt was appropriate rhetoric to achieve that purpose. This rhetorical affirmation only heightens the disparity between the student’s claims and the reality of her experience. Grafting the rhetoric of collaboration to a message that reveals her deep misgivings about the collaborative process, this student produced a document that denies what it affirms.

Such grafted discourse is common. In students’ attempts to use the rhetoric of collaboration to define what their groups were doing, students often import terms without fully understanding their contextual meanings:

Our focus on Non-Traditional student housing and the need for day-care was chosen through group consensus. Although this decision forced the group to discard other ideas I was more in favor of, such as entertainment on campus, I gave my consent. I found that other members of the group were less interested in my ideas, and foresaw a better working experience if I agreed to their focus. (emphasis added)

Verbs such as “force” and “discard” indicate that this student perceived consensus, perhaps more correctly than we were willing to admit, as a
coercive rather than a collaborative act. In this context, consent equals unwilling acquiescence. Clearly, this student did not like the decision but went along to avoid conflict. "Consensus," for this group, meant some form of voting, with dissenting members giving up their positions; they behaved as is socially appropriate. Consensus, of course, means far more than a grudging agreement, but it is messy and time-consuming.

The conflict avoidance present in this and other memos is closely tied to students' experiences of familial cooperation in which "peace keeping" is more important than conflict resolution. Although students went to the teachers with complaints about poorly performing peers and although the personnel evaluation did not affect the grades of individual participants, students were reluctant to critique the performance or the contribution of their peers in writing. This reluctance mirrors the desire on the part of family members to maintain social amity often at the expense of constructive criticism. One of the primary rules of familial and social collaboration is not to "rat" on colleagues: children hide misbehavior from parents; friends protect one another from authority figures; coworkers bury problems to avoid repercussions. Our students read this exercise as "ratting" on friends, and perhaps they are right. After all, teachers grade students; we wanted them to work hard on the assignment; and we want them to tell us, in confidence, how well their co-workers did. In industry, evaluation usually comes from above, not from co-workers; students are peers—they are "in it together."

Familial and social experiences not only affect students' reluctance to discuss conflict but also the rhetorical frame of their evaluation memos, particularly their desire to narrativize rather than analyze the collaborative process. As we often do within family situations, the students transformed their group experiences into anecdotal rehearsals of the collaborative process. Rather than focusing on group members' successes or failures at meeting expectations, students often told "stories" about how the group divided the tasks and worked sequentially to complete them. These "success stories" went something like this:

John was appointed secretary and did the majority of the typing on his home computer. John also worked with me researching project costs and alternative types of funding. He was very cooperative and accessible for collaboration.

Although this example ends with an evaluative statement, most of the paragraph is constructed on a narrative framework. Chronologically arranged and task-focused narratives bury or obfuscate students' contributions to both the process and the product. Rather than evaluative terminology such as "John's contribution was minimal" or "his data were crucial," we often received quantitative valuations: John "did the majority of the typing on his home computer." We should not be too surprised that students want to narrativize their assessment memos rather than analyze each other's
performance. For many students, narrative is both a way to personalize observations and to distance themselves from an evaluative task they perceive as difficult. They can fictionalize the process, make it just a story.

Students are, however, comfortable with critiquing (often very constructively) the process of writing a group proposal and the product they submitted. One particularly clear-thinking student wrote:

Although none of the group members were well acquainted prior to this time, we quickly learned a lot about each other. Each person involved in the project is a very distinct individual, with widely varying ideas and writing styles. Learning to compromise and work cooperatively together was a necessity for completion of this venture.

We experienced few serious problems. On all occasions we were able to resolve any disagreements we had concerning text content by rationally discussing each side of the conflict. While we were not always in total accord regarding writing styles and editing, we managed to arrive at acceptable compromises.

This student identified the primary goals of the project and then assessed her group's success at achieving a “good” group. She avoids becoming personal (she doesn't name any single student), yet she credits the group with being sensible and professional, quite an accomplishment for a nearly randomly selected group of students under severe time constraints. Further, she comfortably uses the language and rhetoric of group dynamics established in the early stages of the group project. In this fragment, for instance, she mentions acceptable compromises and notes that each individual has distinct voices and methods. This rhetorical modeling allows her to objectify the experience; it helps her discuss, in a non-threatening way, what she and her colleagues have achieved.

In a less successful group, another student (who called herself “stifled aggressor”) deflected responsibility for the disastrous group process from the group to the teacher:

I feel that putting this group together was the worst thing that could have happened. Everything was distributed unevenly, which left some of us feeling left out. The reason your project failed was because you said, “If one person doesn’t agree, then you don’t do it!” I feel that was unfair and a big mistake. All the problems we had came from that one statement.

As previously explained, we do not put students into groups; the groups are self-selected, with the open option of re-forming if necessary. This student misunderstood or, more correctly, revised what the instructor had actually said about the advisability of achieving consensus instead of simply voting for solutions. Part of the instruction on group dynamics includes decision-making strategies; consensus is by far the best way to achieve affiliation with group decisions. When things go wrong, as they most certainly did in this group, students can point to the process itself and the instructor's set up as the “real” problem. Again, evaluation moves away from fellow students and toward the teacher. The product becomes “your project,” not theirs.
This preference for the textual over the personal, in addition to being "safer" and less threatening, is related to the fact that most students' previous experiences with collaboration have occurred within two distinct environments: the familial or social group, and the classroom group. Within the family group, while there are few opportunities (other than family gatherings with their tales of family triumphs or failures) to textualize experience, individual critique is often deflected in the interest of preserving the unit. Within the academic setting, most often the composition classroom, students' collaborative roles are more those of readers/editors than of fellow participants in a group project. Even when they have had some exposure to truly collaborative work, it has often been on an assignment that has been set by the teacher. Those few students who are willing to critique the work of their peers and call attention to another student's failure to match the group's expectations are more likely to be those who have had work place experience with collaboration and who know the consequences of managerial evaluations of group projects.

**Difference and Dissent: Conflict Resolution**

In their personnel assessment memos, students commonly insist that everyone in their group was truly cooperative. Because we have observed group dynamics through the three years of doing this project, we know that nearly all groups experience conflict of varying kinds, often very severe. Students neglected to mention conflict in these formal documents because teachers, much like parents, are perceived as authority figures who can hurt people. Students neither want to be "hurt" by a poor final grade nor want to hurt one another. The following memo clearly represents the ambiguous feelings students often have about the conflicts they suppress rather than redress. She begins with an insistence that they did not experience conflict:

Conflict in the group was minimal. There was a point in the group process when I became very intimidated by Kelsey. I was responsible for obtaining certain information before the second progress report was due. I reported my findings to Kelsey who in turn was to report them to Jean for inclusion in the progress report. The information was never used.

When she writes about Kelsey's editing of her work, she confesses that she had backed away from confrontation:

Another issue was that of editing my written work. Kelsey had edited so much of my proposal draft that its intended purpose was lost. I did try to confront Kelsey on these situations but she became slightly defensive. I chose to drop the issues to avoid conflict. The negative side to this situation was the attitude I assumed. I allowed myself to pull away, indiscreetly, from the group. I only did what was asked of me and chose not to offer any suggestions for fear of confrontation. I realized that this was only "pretend" and didn't think the hassle was worth it. The way I handled this situation was not in the group's best interest. Confrontation should have been allowed to transpire. This could have led to more cohesiveness and openness while encouraging others to address any hidden issues.
This memo is an interesting example of a conflicted text in which the writer both denies and admits conflict. Although this student claims that “conflict in the group was minimal,” conflict clearly surfaced at all points in the process, from information gathering to final editing. Her remark that “conflict was minimal” means, in this case, “we never faced our problems.” The writer’s comments pin down the reasons why students are reluctant to confront one another. Politeness strategies combine with extremely practical concerns (is it worth the effort?) to discourage students from resolving conflicts. Students have only familial/social conflict models: if you disagree, you will fight and the more powerful will win the fight. If you don’t have strong emotional reasons to pursue resolution, don’t bother. Students who feel they are being ignored or who note problems in the process avoid commenting for fear of disrupting a fragile illusion of collaboration. If someone speaks up, it is often a targeted complaint (why didn’t you use my material?), resulting in defensiveness from the other students.

Since students have little or no professional experience resolving conflict, they don’t believe that conflict might be good. Although the writer of the preceding memo knew that the group was masking its problems and concluded that “confrontation should have been allowed to transpire,” the fictionality of the situation (“I realized this was only ‘pretend’”) is cited as the reason for the writer’s and the group’s unwillingness to express or deal with conflict. In avoiding conflict, students rush into decisions, force assent, and smother dissent. Their rushed decisions result in poorly done documents.

One student, familiar with the language of group decision-making assessed her own role in the group as follows: “I was not present for the decision as to what our proposal would be; therefore, I relinquished my right in negotiating a topic. . . . Where the process could [have] been stronger, I would say was related to our communication structure, collaboration, and lack of structured criticism.” In a similar vein, another student cited the process of selecting a topic as the main impediment to successful collaboration:

Because I was not in the group initially, I can not say how the topic was chosen. It appeared to be a unilateral decision to work on teacher effectiveness. . . . We didn’t define the problem well enough in the initial meetings so it was hard to communicate with each other when we got together. There were major communication problems that we couldn’t resolve. People were not focused on the task and talked about unrelated matters. Perhaps a general consensus about the subject chosen would have made people more open to the task we performed.

In each of these examples, the student did not participate in the initial selection of the proposal topic. Surprisingly, in light of the random assemblage of the groups, initial group affiliation seems to have been important. The student who missed the session in which the group chose its topic but who felt herself a member of the group from the start was more willing to
relinquish her right to a voice in the process. The student who joined a group after it was formed felt that topic selection was a “unilateral decision” (although she did not say who had made that decision). In each case, however, the student’s awareness of a language in which she could discuss the group’s decision-making process or the lack of that process allowed her to bring the issue into her evaluation.

Time constraints were often cited as reasons for allowing group tensions to go unattended. A self-motivated student who frankly wrote, “I don’t like working in groups and I respond to conflict by withdrawing,” observed that the tensions in her group were left unresolved because there wasn’t time to deal with them:

The short duration of the project probably encouraged everyone to ignore the tensions in order to get the work done. Had the project lasted longer it would have been almost impossible to get anything done until the members brought the conflicts out in the open. In an actual job situation, I would suggest that the group have a meeting for the express purpose of discussing why we were having difficulty working together.

Ironically, although the short time available for completing the project hampered collaboration, it also allowed them to get the project done: “It would have been almost impossible to get anything done.” Classroom constraints work against collaboration yet allow students to hide from true conflict, which might well be messy and unsettling.

In another case, what appeared to be a complete disaster became a more complex learning and collaborative venture than the instructor would have ever expected. Bonnie produced a diary of her experiences instead of the expected assessment, but she found it necessary to think through just what had happened, why her group project became such a grueling experience. She detailed her introduction to the group process:

When we were told to get into small groups I was a little nervous. I looked around the room to see if anyone was feeling the same way. I wanted to be with people who were interested in really doing a good job. I thought Mark would be nice to work with because he seemed to be active in class, so I motioned and asked if he would like to work with me.

Bonnie wanted to be in a good group, one with energetic and involved students; unlike many more passive students, she actively pursued group members. In her diary she recalls one of the group’s first meetings:

We put our desks in a circle and began to talk about the topic I had suggested. . . . Everyone seemed to be happy to have a topic to work on. I liked my idea, but I've worked in groups before and I wanted to give everyone a chance to offer suggestions. . . . Mark pulled out a piece of paper and wrote down the new topics that were mentioned. . . . Our first meeting ended with each of us exchanging full names and phone numbers. Mark was different. He gave us his work number and told us that if we needed to get in touch with him, just leave a message there. Mark was quite verbal and it was obvious that he was going to try to lead the group, but a leader needs followers and nobody was listening to Mark. I think part of the reason no one listened was that he had not earned the group's respect.
As the group puts together the final proposal, Bonnie fires a final salvo at Mark: “Mark made no suggestions and kept saying he didn’t have time to look at them. We managed to pull it all together the last day and turn our group project in.” Clearly, things went wrong in this group almost from the start, but the conflicts between the group and Mark were not resolved during the project; instead, they were written into Bonnie’s narrative that documented his attempts to dominate the group and his refusal to participate in the work of the group. Interestingly, Bonnie decided it was important enough to resolve the conflict that she pursued resolution well after the end of the collaborative project: she met with Mark and hashed out their differences. Conflict, in this case, was resolved after the project. For her, this project was not “pretend.”

When students did realize the value of debate and criticism and sought it out during the process, they often focused, as would be common in familial or social groups, on the actions of one member of the group:

Tom’s occasionally rigid skepticism served as the main point of debate at many of our meetings. Although some of the debates did not resolve themselves sufficiently, most of the argumentation was absolutely essential to the proposal’s success. Without Tom as the catalyst to such discourse, I don’t think we would have completed the project.

Although the group found Tom occasionally annoying, they saw that his input made the document stronger than it would have been without it. Unlike many of the other groups, they confronted the conflict and, while they did not resolve it completely, they did see value in it. In this case, conflict generated the energy that enhanced their final project.

When other groups discussed problems they had in making their collaboration work, they often focused on ways of making the process smoother. Students commonly lamented that they did not have enough free time outside of class to get together and discuss their projects. Conflicting schedules make out-of-class meetings difficult if not impossible. Students also stated that they wanted more intervention from the teacher. What they meant by this, usually, was that they wanted the teacher to step in and direct or redirect the group and often to bring a recalcitrant or nonparticipating group member into line—that is, to reduce the conflict. For instance, one student wrote:

The strain of the project itself accompanied with uninvolved and uncooperative members resulted in more of a headache than a constructive learning experience. Methods of avoiding this may include forming smaller groups and possibly submitting a weekly or daily memo on each member’s performance. It’s difficult to leave it up to group members to keep on the others. As college students, it is surprising that this type of supervision is necessary.

They felt that the teacher’s role, much like that of a parent, was to assure that “good” students were not harmed by the “bad” ones, clearly a misunderstanding of collaborative projects, albeit an understandable one.
The call for prescriptive or authoritative intervention is interesting in that, if followed, it would subvert the collaborative nature of the assignment by reestablishing the familial and social model of collaboration, with teacher as gatekeeper, time and task manager, and academic disciplinarian. In our classes, the teacher volunteers to help as a facilitator but avoids becoming the "repairer" of problems and "resolver" of conflicts. No matter how much teachers want to stay out of the collaborative process, students often want to pull them in and make them responsible for the texts coming out of the group.

Conclusion
As a forum in which students experiment with conflicting models of collaborative behavior, the writing classroom is truly a site of difference. It is the locus at which familial and social, academic and economic models of collaboration converge. If, as linguists assure us, the site of difference is also the point at which meaning is negotiated and understanding occurs, then we have a unique opportunity in our often conflicted classrooms. To make the most of this opportunity, to create an environment in which students feel that they can afford to take the risks of collaborating, we have to remember what initially motivates their response to even the best of collaborative assignments. Students are following our directions: we ask them to collaborate, so they do. We assure them that they will have to collaborate on the job; they believe us. We provide them with a language and rudimentary processes for successful collaboration; they use them. In most cases, however, they are doing what they believe minimizes personal conflict; they are performing and writing to please the teacher, a process strikingly similar to the performance models that worked for them in familial or social situations. Their cooperation, a term that appears and reappears in their memos, does not indicate that they have internalized collaborative processes or converted from individual strategies for problem solving to group strategies. They are primarily concerned with their individual grades; they are universally grateful that their grades are not harmed by the project. We must not fool ourselves into believing that our brief courses will convert students from socially adroit team players and individual students to people for whom collaboration is empowering, perhaps even liberating. To borrow an analogy from linguistics, students' verbal comments about collaborative work and their frustration with collaborative tasks indicate that familial and social models still provide the deep structure for their emerging grammar of collaboration.

Surface features of that developing grammar that appear in their personnel memos are, however, important, as they indicate students' willingness to experiment with collaborative modes of discourse. Our task as teachers of professional writing is to bring the deeper issues to the surface, to allow our classrooms to become those sites of difference from which true collaboration emerges. We must not only teach what James Moffett has called the "universe of discourse," we must step out of the way and let that universe of
discourse develop in which social and familial, academic and managerial worlds bump into each other, perhaps even collide. If things seem to be going wrong, if we don’t see the facile teamwork that advertisers assure us is the hallmark of everything from the modern army to investment banking, we may be doing something right.

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Notes

1Turner defines community as “spontaneous, immediate, concrete,” emphasizing that it “differs from the camaraderie found often in everyday life, which though informal and egalitarian, still falls within the domain of structure” (274). Although we do not claim that collaboration is directly equivalent to the liberating, ritual experience that, for Turner, constitutes community, we do see collaboration as an anti-structural process that can bring people together by levelling difference and, at the same time, preserving personal identities.

2For the sake of clarity, we will be using the term “cooperation” to describe social collaboration.

3We use the term “social cooperation” for the sake of simplicity, not to imply that professional collaboration is anti-social but to allow us to distinguish between the two. It is certainly true that all collaboration is social in nature; it is impossible for it not to be so by definition. Thralls and Blyler, Kogan, and Forman instruct readers about the need to understand social parameters to be a successful professional.

4We use our students’ documents with their permission; we agreed to blind the excerpts to ensure privacy. All the names used in the text are fictitious.

5Pratt explains “contact zone” as “the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). She takes the term “contact” from linguistics, where contact languages are defined as improvisational adaptations that allow speakers of different native languages to communicate to conduct trade (6). We find this a useful term for discussing what happens to our students as they adjust to new cultural demands.

6The debate about multiculturalism is far from over, and legions of thoughtful writers have participated. Bizzell establishes the core issues. Harris, Dean, Brodkey, and Bazerman have contributed cogent arguments.

7The publication of Lee Odell’s and Dixie Goswami’s Writing in Nonacademic Settings (1985) marked a shift in the direction of composition research as it applied to collaborative writing. The entire focus of the book is on helping teachers understand the business world and its needs and adjust accordingly. Recently, Technical Communication, the official journal of the Society for Technical Communication, dedicated an entire issue to collaboration (see volume 38.4). In technical and professional writing, research has usually focused on work place collaboration. In “Interpersonal Communication for the Technical Communicator,” David M. Craig and Thomas M. Steinfatt remark that bibliographies on technical communications rarely cite works on interpersonal communication: “An Annotated Bibliography on Technical Writing, Editing, Graphics, and Publishing (Carlson et. al. 1983), lists, for example, just four items on interpersonal communication in its over 4,700 entries” (137). Craig and Steinfatt do not claim that research in technical writing ignores interpersonal communications; they note, however, that “when work is done on interpersonal communication within technical communications, it almost always has a skills orientation on the applicability of interpersonal skills within a business or industrial context” (158).

8Clearly, although all collaboration shares features, social and familial cooperation differ in some important ways from professional collaboration. Social cooperation relies on and
rewards emotional bonds that are often de-emphasized in American business transactions. That American business undervalues personal and emotional attachment to the organization may in part explain why highly touted Japanese management techniques which conceive of the business as a social or family unit are so difficult to employ in this country.

Studies of how to bridge the gap between academe and the work place have begun to appear. Morgan applies classroom strategies to industry, and Debs discusses collaborative writing in industry, citing studies based on theories of small-group behavior that may offer some insight into the kinds of problems students encounter in their collaborative projects. Because, as Debs points out, these studies “have focused on well-defined groups,” we have to be careful in developing hypotheses based on their findings “since some may be applicable only to the groups studied” (37). Among the more promising of these studies is Forman and Katsky.

Beach provides some practical advice for encouraging students to assess one another, and Sommers outlines how response memos allow the teacher a window into students' thinking processes and encourage revision.

Works Cited


**Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition**

Plenary speakers Shirley Brice Heath, Susan Miller, and John Swales, and other featured speakers including Thomas B. Farrell, Cheryl Geisler, Patricia Harkin, Joseph Harris, and George Myerson will be among the participants at the 13th annual Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, July 13-16, 1994, in State College, Pennsylvania.

We invite scholars, researchers, and teachers of rhetoric and writing to propose papers, demonstrations, panels, or workshops on any current topic in rhetoric and composition. One-page proposals (including a 150-word abstract) will be accepted through April 4, 1994.

To receive conference information, submit a proposal, or volunteer to chair a session, contact: Don H. Bialostosky; Department of English; Penn State University; University Park PA, 16802 (e-mail: rac2@psuvm.psu.edu).