Collaborative Role-Play and Negotiation: A Cross-Disciplinary Endeavor

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This article chronicles a cross-disciplinary project that began informally as a series of conversations among three faculty who met through our university’s Writing Across the Curriculum program. These faculty—Lauren Wright (Marketing), Tom Imhoff (Philosophy), and Thia Wolf (English)—discovered several shared commitments in our work: all of us believed strongly in an ethics-based education; all of us used student-centered learning strategies in our classrooms; and all of us recognized that group work in our courses fell far short of promoting the kind of independent, critical thinking we hoped our students would practice. As our work in our university’s WAC program brought us in contact with one another more frequently, we began to consider ways of building on each other’s experience and knowledge in the classroom. We became especially interested in evaluating our collaborative teaching experiences. In an attempt to analyze these experiences more systematically, Lauren and Thia created a WAC workshop which provided a forum for the conscious critique of collaborative pedagogy.

During that workshop Lauren presented a transcript of a taped student discussion from her course in Case Studies in Marketing. In this transcript, a group of students responds to a segment of film which depicts a young married couple arguing about the woman’s reluctance to accept an advertisement (for the newspaper that employs her) from a fur coat distributor. The dilemma presented in the film clip arises between the woman and her husband. She dislikes the fur industry, but her husband wants her to accept the ad because of the good commission that will go along with it. The students were instructed to define the ethical issues, discuss what they would do in this situation, and develop a “win-win” situation for all parties involved. An excerpt from the students’ conversation is provided below:

Transcript One

Mike: What should she do?
Anne: [laughing] Get a divorce!
Margaret: Well, she was pretty annoying, too.
[Laughter from several members of the group]
Mike: She reminded me, you know of one of the whiners on Saturday Night Live
Keith: What's the ethical issue here?
Anne: She has to decide whether she wants to...
Margaret: Accept advertising that's offensive to her.
Anne: I think she should accept it.
Mike: Yeah, 'cause, kinda like, you know, it's business. A lot of times in business, you have to put your personal feelings out of it. Think of what the business needs.
Keith: That's why there's ethical issues.
Mike: I know, but that's just how it is.
Keith: If you did everything business-wise, then there would be no ethical issues.
Mike: That's true, but sometimes you have to do what they want you to do. Put your personal biases behind you and just for business reasons.
Margaret: Well, you know what it is. How many people here are against the fur industry: I don't have a problem with the fur industry.
Al: I mean, I...
Mike: No.
Anne: No, it doesn't bother me.
Margaret: If people really, if they don't eat meat or wear leather then they're okay. Otherwise they're hypocrites.
Keith: If they're serious about it.
Al: I think it depends; for me it depends on the type of animal that you, I mean, a rabbit or whatever can be raised for that situation but...
Margaret: Trapping's really horrible.
Al: Yeah.
Margaret: Trapping's really horrible, but otherwise... It's just that we care because they're not a cow or a pig or whatever.
Anne: Oh I know. They raise chickens to be killed and cut up. I mean, they raise rabbits for the same thing.
Keith: Raise chickens?
Margaret: They raise beef. What's the difference?
Margaret: It's just that minks are cute. Chickens are ugly.
Al: Yeah [laughs].

The conversation recorded in this transcript raised a series of disturbing questions for Lauren about the plausibility of critically exploring ethics in a collaborative classroom setting. She was dismayed by the transcript because it revealed how easily students constructed business as an environment where profit provides the primary justification for decision-making. In response to her concerns, Tom pointed out that her students lacked what he called "a model for moral reflection." He suggested that an ethics-based method he had been using in his philosophy courses might prove useful to Lauren.

Tom, Lauren and Thia met after the workshop to discuss the possible applications of Tom's methods to Lauren's class and other courses we taught. As we analyzed the reasons why Lauren's class discussion did not meet her expectations, it became clear that the design of the assignment had contributed to the unsatisfactory outcome. The task of defining the ethical issues, identifying the interested parties, and coming up with a "win-win" situation was much too complex and unstructured for students to handle within a single class period. Tom described how the ethics-based method he used in
his classes simplified the students' tasks and provided a more structured framework for complex decision-making. Since this approach seemed to address the problems we had initially identified in the transcript of Lauren's marketing class discussion, we decided to use it as the foundation for a collaborative method that we hoped would lead to more productive discussions in our classrooms.

**Development of Our Collaborative Method**

The ethics-based method that Tom uses in his classes is based on the theoretical work of philosophers T.M. Scanlon and Brian Barry, who developed a model of contractualist ethics. Their model proposes that individuals involved in a conflict usually work together in a complex process of negotiation. For negotiations in this model to be considered ethical, negotiators must be fully informed. They must also be guided by the idea of constructing “a proposal which cannot be reasonably rejected” (Scanlon 111). The goal is to consider some moral problem (most often a conflict of interest) in order to design a compromise solution which creates no big losers among the interested parties. The guiding rule of the negotiations is that if it is reasonable for any negotiator to reject the compromise proposal, then it would be immoral to implement that proposal. This rule requires all interested parties to continue negotiations as long as objections to a proposal arise. Since the contractualist ethics framework requires repeated negotiations based on an understanding and consideration of all parties' positions, it becomes a useful tool for systematically developing new knowledge and problem-solving strategies.

While we agreed that the contractualist model seemed an effective way to provide students with a framework for making complex ethical decisions, we were concerned that it did not address all of the variables inherent in collaborative classroom interactions. In reexamining the transcript from Lauren's class, we felt that group dynamics were limiting the students' abilities to examine all sides of the ethical issues they were addressing objectively. To understand the nature of these dynamics better, we referred to the work of Erving Goffman, who is well-known for his sociological descriptions of group interactions.

We were especially interested in Goffman's conceptualization of “performance” in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. According to Goffman, performance includes behaviors designed to obscure truths or possibilities in favor of making a desired impression. Goffman suggests that people interact by assuming roles and residing behind masks. Interactions are characterized by the attempt to control the impressions which others form of the self and by the defense of particular impressions as accurate and justified (9, 14). It seemed to us that the concept of performance might explain some of the outcomes observed in Lauren's transcript. As Goffman notes,
In their capacity as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged. Because these standards are so numerous and so pervasive, the individuals who are performers dwell more than we might think in a moral world. But, *qua* performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realizing these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized. Our activity, then, is largely concerned with moral matters, but as performers we do not have a moral concern with them. (251)

It seemed very possible that even though the marketing students were instructed to examine moral issues, they were unable to do so on any meaningful level because of their inherent roles as “performers.”

Based on this insight, our pedagogical goal became the undermining of group performances as they traditionally occur in our classrooms. We wanted to disrupt dysfunctional group practices and replace them with a model for ethical (or “moral,” in Goffman’s terms) interaction that would cause them to question and to evaluate their behaviors by entering into genuine dialogue with one another. It seemed to us that the contractualist framework could effectively upset traditional group performances by encouraging the types of collaborative conversations that force students to reflect on their own and others’ ideas and behaviors. The recursive nature of the contractualist process provides students with many opportunities for such critical self-examination.

We hoped that this method would encourage intellectual inquiry in our students that maintains, in the words of feminist liberation theologian Sharon Welch, a “tensive” quality. According to Welch, true knowing is tension-laden, uncertain, and always in internal discussion/argument with itself (31). Truth can only exist “as conversation.” Welch believes that without this understanding of truth/knowledge as a process, it is impossible to maintain a necessary “openness to continued change and modification” (87). This openness, by its very nature, runs contrary to Goffman’s observations about the behaviors of traditional groups who work very hard to create a well-orchestrated group performance. The contractualist framework we have designed provides students with a systematic structure for examining ethical dilemmas. This structured process allows them to transcend the suboptimal group performances described by Goffman and encourages them to create their own knowledge (as advocated by Welch) based on critical self-reflection and awareness of others.

**Contractualism in Our Classrooms**

Our contractualist approach involves a series of collaborative role-plays. At the beginning of a role-play, students are assigned well-defined roles. They begin the exploration of moral disputes by adopting a specific, self-interested view of social reality. Our method then attempts to free students from these self-interested roles by specifying the performance of a drama which requires them to empathize with the roles assumed by each of the other players.
Ideally, this leads to an examination of group processes, performance strategies, and self-interested motives as students learn to listen to and consider the stated interests of others. The process we developed to implement contractualism in our classrooms included the following steps:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase One:</th>
<th>Context definition. What is the problem and who are the interest groups?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phase Two:</td>
<td>Creation of interest groups. Class members are divided into interest groups. The teacher asks each group to identify those concerns they view as most important and instructs each group to construct a solution to the problem which represents how they would resolve the dispute if they had absolute control over the situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase Three:</td>
<td>Meeting of all the interest groups. The groups explain their concerns, the basis for these concerns, and how they would solve the dispute to ensure protection of their interests.</td>
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<td>Phase Four:</td>
<td>Discuss compromise solutions. Each interest group returns to a small group setting in order to discuss within the group what sort of compromise solution it could design to appeal to the interests and concerns of the other groups. Negotiations have not yet begun, and as yet there may be no interest in deep analysis of or empathy with other groups' positions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase Five:</td>
<td>Whole class negotiation. This phase represents the beginning of conflict, self-critique, and whole group examination. Ideally, a broadened, responsive perspective will emerge. Interest groups discuss with one another their various compromise proposals and offer reasons why particular compromises should be accepted, rejected or modified.</td>
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This process became our guideline for designing in-class negotiation activities. We used the method in several different courses and taped student discussions from the various phases so that we could examine the outcomes of our collaborative framework. Excerpts from some of these conversations plus an analysis (based on our interpretations of Goffman and Welch) of student responses during the various phases are provided below.

**Phases One and Two**

In the first stage of this process, students are assigned an interest group role and a task. In the second stage, they must create both an identification with the role they will play and a group method for entering and examining this role. As the excerpt below indicates, initial attempts at identification often require frequent discussions about the group process itself, setting the stage for later examinations and critique of group decision-making and representation.

The first excerpt, from a literature course, shows students considering Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* from the perspective of the protagonist's (Edna's) children. The students were asked to articulate the children's preferred, self-interested outcome regarding their mother's affection for Robert, a young man who inspires for the first time in Edna's adult life feelings of passion/love.

**Transcript Two**

Anne: Let's ask her [the teacher].
Teacher: [overhearing Anne] Yes? Did you have a question?
Anne: The kids don’t really know about Robert, right?
Teacher: There’s no indication that they do.
Anne: So how could they, how could we...
Teacher: Right now you’re thinking about what’s in the children’s best interest. What do children want for themselves in a home environment? What do you think these children might want from their mother or their parents?
Clem: Oh, so it’s just, we make this up.
Teacher: You use what you can from the text, but in your group’s case, yes, a lot will be invented. The text doesn’t say much about the children, so try to use what you know about children in situations like this.
Clem: Okay.
Linda: Well, if it was my mom, I wouldn’t want her to go anywhere.
Michael: But these kids hardly see their mother anyway.
Clem: Yeah. It’s not like she’s not really there for them. It even says... she doesn’t feel like a mother most of the time.
Anne: But I think, maybe the point is, maybe we’re supposed to, to think about just how are kids when one of their parents is going to leave them?
Linda: In those days, could she even have been with them again? I mean once she left them. Couldn’t he, Leon...
Clem: Leon...
Linda: Yeah, couldn’t he just keep them? Because she would have been considered, uh, you know, like a bad mother or...
Michael: Well, she was a bad mother.
Linda: But, you know, like a bad person. Like something was wrong with her.
Michael: She killed herself. [There is a pause in the conversation.]
Clem: We don’t have to think about that, do we?
Michael: Yeah, well I’m just saying [unintelligible], she killed herself. You know. There was something wrong with her. There was definitely something wrong with her.
Jane: The book is about... the class is... um, I think the book and the class are trying to say that... Mm... It’s not so much she killed herself, right, mm... but she didn’t, she couldn’t choose anything. Everyone was making, they thought they all knew her, the best things, mm, for her to do. So even Robert...
Linda: Yeah, even Robert acts like he knows she should stay married.
Michael: Well, maybe she should have. That’s a lot better than killing yourself [some laughter]. I mean, for god’s sake. Let’s get real about this.
Clem: I think we’re kinda off track here [more laughter]. What Mike is saying is what the kids would say, too. She should be alive, be with them.
Linda: Kids always want their mother. That’s right.
Anne: Because it just feels safer that way. I know when I was a kid, I never wanted anything to change. I didn’t even like going to a new grade.
Linda: [laughs] Yeah, it’s like, let’s stay in the first grade forever. I remember that. [A digression, hard to hear, where several students discuss school and other changes they encountered during childhood.]
Anne: And then my dad wanted to leave, you know, and I didn’t want that. It’s probably, probably better. I think it’s the better thing. But still, a kid doesn’t know that.
Clem: Yeah. Right. A kid can’t know that. And I’m not sure, I’m not sure what’s really better.
Anne: No, I think it was better.
Linda: For Edna? Or did you mean...
Anne: Oh no, no. I meant, I wasn’t thinking of Edna. But, okay, I think Edna didn’t love her husband but Robert wasn’t there either. I mean, she could’ve lived in the little house maybe and visited every day. Kids might have accepted that.
In this excerpt, Anne helps the group on two different occasions to think about the "point" of the task. She first asks the teacher for direction then reminds the group that they need to focus their efforts on imagining the children's view rather than commenting on the personality or behavior of their mother. The group reviews the task and examines its progress four times during the conversation. One member, Clem, points out that the group has gone "kinda off track" after several members critique Edna and consider Robert's point of view about their relationship. Later in the discussion, Michael stops Linda's digression about Edna's viewpoint by reminding her that "that's not the thing. The thing here is, what about the kids? How do they see it?"

These students reframe their task several times because they need to create a single point of view in reference to a complicated situation. In this early phase, they are pushed by the task toward an artificial form of consensus. The clarification and adoption of a view that is not their own marks the interaction as a performance from the start. This permits self-conscious evaluation of the group's process (and makes the group independent of the instructor once the task is clarified).

Because the group is required to explain its position to the other interest groups in phase three, this process also exposes facts which provide what Goffman calls "destructive information" (141). This kind of information is closely related to Welch's discussion of "subjugated knowledges." According to Welch, for "dominant knowledges" to prevail the conflicts posed by subjugated knowledges (considered "naive" or irrelevant by those in power) must be hidden or erased (19). These knowledges have the potential, if they are uncovered or restored, to "discredit, disrupt, or make useless the impression that the performance fosters" (Goffman 141).

An example of these dynamics occurs as the group develops a position that focuses only on the children's view. The students act out a form of oppression practiced by at least one character in the novel: Madame Ratignolle. For this character (who is in accord with the "dominant knowledges" in this situation), the occupation of mothering supersedes all other rights a woman might demand and all other roles she might occupy.
When asked how they have arrived at their position that "Edna should be with her children," this group has no difficulty describing its process of weeding out "extraneous" issues such as Edna’s feelings and her very real experiences with social oppression. This process, called "information control" by Goffman (141), reveals how subjugated knowledges become subjugated. Information is selectively arranged so that only a single, simple and devastating picture of the truth emerges: Edna is "a bad person" or "a bad mother" (these terms being synonymous in the group’s argument) because she committed suicide. By the time their initial position statement is created, the group has expunged the following facts: Edna’s marriage is loveless and oppressive, her love life with Robert is unhappy, and, in Jane’s words, "she couldn’t choose anything." Since the contractualist framework provided students with an opportunity to develop a single position and then to reflect on the implications of this position during a whole-class discussion, they were able to come to a better understanding of some of the subjugated knowledges underlying Edna’s behavior.

To understand how this process gives students an effective avenue for critical self-reflection, compare transcript two with transcript one from the marketing course. In the first transcript, we find students exhibiting "team dynamics" as defined by Goffman. He states that if members of a team have a reason for "maintaining a show of self-respect before one another," it may be necessary for members of the team to learn what the group position is and adopt it without admitting to themselves or to each other the extent to which that approach differs from their own individual beliefs (88). In transcript one, Keith tries early in the conversation to direct the group’s attention toward the ethical problems inherent in business choices. Al makes a tentative move to express disapproval of the fur industry. Both are quickly silenced as more dominant group members define the issue in non-personal ways (business considerations or aesthetic criteria for justifying which animals should be killed). Everyone adopts the "party line," and the character of the position held by the team starts to change. Goffman describes this phenomenon in the following way:

Instead of a rich definition of the situation, reality may become reduced to a thin party line. We may expect ironic remarks by which a teammate jokingly rejects the line while seriously accepting it. On the other hand, there will be the new factor of loyalty to one’s team and one’s teammates to provide support for the team’s line. (85)

A comparison of the marketing and literature groups provides some interesting insights about the different collaborative processes. The marketing group, because its task is overly complex, touches on several moral positions without examining any position in depth. The literature students, whose task is simplified because they have been assigned a defined role, ultimately construct a realistic viewpoint of a single interest group. This provides them with the foundation for a more complex investigation of the ethical dilemmas inherent in the situation.
Because its task is so unstructured, the marketing group has no way of critiquing its own progress or process. Unlike the literature group, these students cannot define their task in a way that helps them judge the appropriateness of their inquiry and discussion. For example, in an extended transcript of the entire group conversation, it is apparent that the marketing group never realizes it has ignored the husband’s role in the conflict. In its eventual construction of a “win-win” situation, it considers only profit motives, siding with the fur industry’s “right” to advertise in the newspaper. The group overlooks the conflict between the husband and wife and thus has not fully explored the possibility of a “win-win” compromise that addresses all parties’ interests.

Finally, the marketing group sees their task as purely academic and, hence, not related to their own interests. They make no move, other than deciding that they are not animal activists, to enter the ethical dilemma on a personal level. Perhaps the lack of identification with its task encourage the marketing group to devise a clever rather than a carefully constructed response. When asked to describe their position to the whole class, the students declare that ugly animals could be killed while “cute” animals could not. They are unable to describe how they arrived at this decision. The many strands of group discussion and partial analysis are lost once the students decide on the statement that summarizes their views. In this case, the subjugated knowledges (such as the views of animal rights activists or the role of personal values in conducting business transactions) are never available for further examination.

By contrast, students in the literature group create and maintain an identification with their assigned role, comparing the experience of the children in the novel to their own experiences. They are also able to examine the position of the children in the text for clues to the children’s probable feelings and desired outcomes. The strength of this identification becomes apparent during a phase five negotiation between groups when a member of the “Robert” group sympathized with Edna’s position:

John: But now, if I have to be Robert I can see Edna with a difference. Maybe she just wants to be happy. And that’s not so bad. That’s not so bad. I can see that.

Michael: Try being her kid, man. [Laughter]

Here we see John, a member of the “Robert” group, viewing Edna through a new, more empathic lens. Michael, a member of the “children” group, chastises the Robert representatives for overlooking Edna’s children’s feelings. Both speakers demonstrate the extent to which students can come to identify with their assigned roles as the contractualist process proceeds.

A major difference, then, between the assigned role-play and the unstructured ethical debate is that the first invites self-conscious development of a single view which permits later access to an evaluation of this position and its history, while the latter allows students to touch on many positions without ever fully exploring any of them.
Phases Three and Four
In the third phase of collaborative negotiations, all groups report back to the class as a whole. They define their position and describe their desired outcome in the conflict, explaining why that outcome meets their needs. In this phase, students may ask each other questions in order to understand each group’s report more fully, but no other interaction across groups takes place. This phase permits students to hear and comprehend alternative views and solutions without entering into debate with other interest groups.

In phase four, students are required to acknowledge the wealth of disparate views and solutions by attempting to design a solution “package” that takes all groups' stated needs and preferences into account. In this phase, students may develop solutions that are still based primarily on their own role-based interests; thus, they must be clever in the rhetorical design of their compromise solutions if they hope to win other interest groups to their view. Phase four externalizes many underlying motives and strategies that support self-interest. Students tend to admit within their own groups that their solutions arise fundamentally for the betterment of their identified interests rather than for reasons of compassion or a desire to benefit all parties involved in the dispute. This is true even though they now know (from the presentations in phase three) what the other groups’ needs and concerns involve.

The excerpts below are taken from an Advanced Composition course where students read a newspaper editorial about the employment of gay men as Boy Scout leaders. The piece focused on a gay Boy Scout leader named Dave whom the writer knew and believed was an appropriate role model for young men. The group whose conversation is recorded below takes the role of the Boy Scouts of America organization and develops a position statement on the right of gay Scout leaders to continue working within the organization. The first excerpt is from the group's Phase Two discussion, the second from Phase Four.

Transcript Three: Phase Two
Betsy: We have to come up with a position.
Ellen: We know what the position is.
Julie: They don't want gay Scout leaders. Gay leaders are immoral and unacceptable. They think if there are gay Scout leaders, they prey on boys. But I don't buy that; what about heterosexuals?
Betsy: I've also heard that some people feel they're condoning gays.
Laura: Maybe they're afraid it'll produce gay children. Seems strange to me that people think that's true.
Betsy: We need to decide what we're going to do.
Julie: There's also the military point of view; we don't want them affecting our military, macho men.
Betsy: Two issues there; some people feel it's a choice, some feel it's a civil right. That's the way I feel; it's a civil right. It gets back to the issue of homosexuals in the military, people globalizing issues from the Boy Scouts to the military.
Laura: This is going off-track a little, but what about Blacks and Japanese in the
military? It's the same kind of discrimination.

Ellen: That's the seed of why it's wrong—religion—from my point of view.

Julie: I don't know what we're supposed to be doing from the Boy Scouts organization's point of view. We know what they think. They don't want them. We have to have an argument about why. They use religion and God. When you use them, you've hit a big emotional wall.

Ellen: So what's our statement now?

Betsy: I think God, religion, morality.

Transcript Three: Phase Four

Betsy: But what about Dave?

Laura: I don't know.

Betsy: The parents of Dave's troop and the kids already know.

Laura: Personally, I don't understand the big objection.

Betsy: There's this big fear that homosexuals will be recruiting other homosexuals. I don't know anyone who does this; heterosexuals sure don't!

Julie: Let's put Dave on extended probation.

Betsy: Yeah, and make it so restrictive and hard but we still let him in.

Laura: He has to just stay at home and hold hands in the dark. No social life because if any kid sees him hugging a guy in public, he's out!

Julie: So all parents of Dave's troop have to sign a contract because he's already known, and other gays have to sign in blood. Oh No No No, we don't want that!

[General laughter]

During their phase two conversation, this group has difficulty entering its assigned point of view. The members support Dave's right to lead Boy Scouts and see anti-gay policies as discriminatory. By Phase Four, the group has entered its task more completely, consciously trying to devise a strategy for excluding Dave from Scouting. They are starting to participate in a team performance that is maintained through the use of what Goffman labels "strategic secrets." These secrets pertain to intentions and capacities of a team which it conceals from its audience in order to prevent them from adapting effectively to the state of affairs the team is planning to bring about. Strategic secrets are the ones that businesses and armies employ in designing future actions against the opposition. (142)

For this group, the strategic secrets include an agreement to play on religion and fear. They also make an attempt to be clever in the design of their proposal; they try to sound as if they are accommodating Dave when they are really trying to force him out of the Scouts. But as the students conclude phase four by preparing their proposal for the full class, they continue to question the assumptions of the anti-gay position they have been assigned. For example, Laura reminds the group that she still doesn't "understand the big objection" to gay membership. This kind of questioning would never occur in a typical team setting where strategies of exclusion or manipulation may become what Goffman terms "inside secrets," secrets whose possession marks an individual as being a member of a group and helps the group feel separate and different from those individuals who are not "in the know"
In the role-play setting above, the students practice the unethical manipulation of others through sarcasm and an appeal to fear while consciously recognizing that they are doing so. They have the opportunity to realize that the very tactics they dislike when used by an opponent are well within their own repertoire of strategies. Throughout the conversations above, the group maintains the type of tension-laden dialogue where “unnecessary relations of power and domination” (Welch 30) are exposed and examined, but where the examiners’ participation in such relations is also exposed.

This process permitted at least one member of the group to reconsider the choices she makes when writing persuasively. In a written reflection on the ethical component in the Advanced Composition course, Betsy states that she is now more aware of the numerous temptations facing her as a writer. Her group’s work on the creation of an exclusionary policy made her realize how “often I wanted to embellish things in my rhetoric for effect. Who would it hurt, anyway?” Ultimately, she sees herself as a writer/thinker who must repeatedly tell herself that using rhetoric “for our own purposes, ‘just this once’ can really get us into trouble.”

Phase Five and Beyond

Phase Five is the culmination of the previous phases. In this phase, students engage in debate after presenting their initial solution packages. Students begin this phase in character and negotiate with other groups (who also remain in character). The negotiation process is an attempt to design a compromise solution that addresses each interest group’s needs and desires, with compensations offered to groups who benefit the least from a proposed solution. A negotiation is completed when all groups agree that an acceptable solution has been reached.

Phase Five does not usually result in a satisfactory compromise solution. This phase does, however, make evident the difficulty of rising above self-interest in order to consider what is beneficial to all involved parties. Our goal in this phase is to give students opportunities for violating the usual rules of negotiation performance. We hope for what Goffman calls “moments of great crisis” (167), when the well-defined boundaries of each team begin to erode. These moments of crisis did not always occur in our classroom settings. A shortcoming of our method was the lack of well-designed catalysts that could systematically create these productive crises. In fact, we discovered that students were occasionally able to complete phase five without disrupting their group performances at all. This is clearly illustrated in the conversation presented below, where students in a political science class stay in their assigned roles to the bitter end. Transcript four is an excerpt from a complex negotiation among six interest groups about the large retirement package offered to a Chancellor in the University of California system. The “voice” of the Regents is actually a single student who
dominated the regents’ conversation; the rest of the parties are represented by multiple group members’ voices.

Transcript Four

UC Students: If his motive is to help out his fellow man by being a UC Chancellor then he might consider that when he takes his lump sum of $857,000 plus his $126,000 annual retirement.

Board of Regents: $126,000 isn’t anything compared to 7.5 billion dollars. We would also like to say that the California State University, Chico, Chancellor [sic] Robin Wilson makes a yearly income of $100,000 and this guy is getting an annual retirement of $126,000 for a 7.5 billion operation. He is at least worth $126,000 when compared to Robin Wilson who makes $100,000 for running a single campus.

[Some transcript has been omitted.]

UC Students: On behalf of the students of the UC system, we already have to pay a large tuition to go to this school to begin with. Our state is having a big budget crisis and the governor is having to cut back on our schools—the teachers that we have and a lot of our classes—and raising tuition and you guys—we are going to give this guy a big huge lump sum. . . . The educational value of this school is going to decrease unless you start giving some money back to the universities.

Board of Regents: We don’t want anyone but the best running our $7.5 billion corporation and if we don’t that is when we are going to start losing money, and that is when you are going to start paying even more money.

UC Students: What you are doing is pricing yourselves out, and the students cannot afford it or the taxpayers.

Board of Regents: I agree that the UC students are paying a lot for their education. But think about how thankful you are going to be once you get out of school and are on the cutting edge of technology and you do have an edge over the graduates coming from other institutions. Then who are you going to thank? You are not going to have anyone to thank except Gardner, who made it all possible.

Throughout this transcript, students maintain a strong identification with their assigned roles. The Regents never appear to hear the students’ arguments, nor do they take those arguments into account when considering whether an alternative plan might be created. In this class, true negotiations never occur. The students cling to their poses and adopt the typical political ploy of making speeches rather than entering debate. Their performance follows Goffman’s maxim that when “teams present themselves to each other for the purposes of interaction, the members of each team tend to maintain the line that they are what they claim to be; they tend to stay in character” (167). Given this outcome, it became obvious that we needed to incorporate additional exercises into our framework that would systematically create the “moments of crisis” referred to by Goffman.

Although the results weren’t optimal, the negotiation described above did have some positive consequences. The students were given an opportunity in a whole-class setting to discuss what went wrong and how public negotiations among bureaucrats and politicians involve more posturing than
listening. They put this learning to good use later in the semester during a phase five negotiation about the building of a minimum security prison near a small town called “Ninaville.” In the discussion that is partially described below, the debate has been in full swing for some time. A number of objections to the prison have been raised, including the damper it will put on tourism, and local residents’ fear that their safety will be compromised.

Transcript Five

Local Families: Well, can’t you build it further away?
Prison board: I don’t know if we are actually working on any construction, but I think the prison is scheduled to be built on the outskirts of Ninaville.
City Council: If we decide we don’t want the prison here, how do we justify to the next community that they should have it there?
Prison Board: I don’t think we can. The reason you guys don’t want it here is because your families are afraid. Correct?
Local Families: We would rather have it built further away. We aren’t opposed to having it built. Just further away.
Prison Board: I think it is going to bring in revenue for the city.
City Council: Who is opposed to having it built a little bit further away?
Prison Board: It is still going to be the Ninaville state prison. We will be providing jobs: guards, bookkeepers. It’s going to be providing jobs and revenue for the city.
Travel Agents: What about tourism though?
City Council: People do visit prisons. Coming from Folsom, people do come to visit. Actually it does boost the economy.

[Eventually, the group agrees to construct the prison thirty miles outside the town, with increased security provided by the prison when the inmates commute into and work in the town itself.]

This interaction represents the most complete negotiation we’ve observed in a class based on our method. The students playing the City Council role make sure that all interest groups have a chance to declare their concerns, and the final agreement appears to take all of the groups’ concerns into account. It is unclear, however, what the cost of this negotiation would be in a real-world setting. The students’ compromise maintains a certain strategic vagueness when it comes to the actual location of the prison (for example, will the prison be secluded, or will it in fact be placed nearer another town whose interests have not been fully acknowledged?) In evaluating this transcript, we considered the possibility that the students demonstrate a facility for what Goffman calls “collegueship,” the ability to identify individuals or groups whose interests square with one’s own (163). If, in fact, the groups have acted as “colleagues” who have protected themselves at another community’s expense, they are still acting out of self-interest alone.

Some of our classroom outcomes did include “moments of crises” when team boundaries started to dissolve and more critical reflection was possible. The next transcript (from the literature course discussed earlier) includes the students’ reflections on their motivations in phase five. Through discussion, they are able to clarify the way they have viewed and manipulated the
negotiation process. In the excerpt below, the groups are proposing compromise plans in response to the concerns of characters in *The Awakening*. The different groups are indicated by the names of the characters whose interests they represented.

Transcript Six

Robert: This is what we think. We think you should, uh, you could see that Madame Ratignolle is really the kind of wife that Mr. Pontellier [Edna's husband] wants, so we thought, you could just, why not just kill him off?

[General hubbub. The class dissolves into laughter and groans. A student from the Edna group asks, "Is that ethical?"]

Teacher: Okay, okay. Look, I'm going to, you're forcing me to, well, not forcing me but, it's like this: You can't kill people.

Robert: He's not on the list.

Teacher: What?

Robert: Mr. Ratignolle. He isn't, he's not one of the people here.

Teacher: In this negotiation?

Robert: Right.

Teacher: Well, that's because. Look, I didn't see his interests as involved in Edna's feelings for Robert. But if you're going to kill him, I mean, now you are involving him. It's not in his best interest to be killed. You can't just say, he didn't show up here so we're going to kill him. I mean, that kind of thing might happen in some situations in the world, but the whole point here, in this classroom, is to see if we could, maybe we might do something a little differently here. Not bump people off because they're inconvenient.

Edna: I think, the thing is here, we're trying, the Robert group is trying and some of the rest of us.... Like the group that said, well Mr. Pontellier can decide to just give his wife a divorce.... We're trying to make happy endings.

Robert: Yeah. That's true. It's like, let's make everyone happy. But that doesn't always.... Maybe that never....


Teacher: What's not ethical?

Edna: Well, happy endings. They're not really....

Teacher: What's not ethical?

Robert: Real.

Edna: I'm not sure, maybe they're not even, maybe they're not moral.

Robert: Yeah, because, to get a happy ending here, you'd almost have to kill someone.

In this conversation, the students disrupt their performances in order to critique the work they've done. No longer speaking in character, they begin to explore the implications of what they've been saying. The critical examination of Robert's proposal by the "Edna" group is readily accepted by Robert's representatives. Rather than staying in character to save their performances, the groups have stepped outside their roles to create a moral critique of the fairy tale belief that it is possible and desirable to live happily ever after. Having abandoned their group identities, this class never chose to reenter them. They spent the rest of the class period imagining how role-playing and collaborative negotiations might have changed the lives of the characters in question. Then they moved beyond the realm of the novel to consider the application of contractualist problem-solving to models of political power they'd been studying throughout the semester.
One person, in response to several other students' evaluations of the role-play/negotiation method, summed up by saying, "I think if people really did this, this ethics thing, we'd have to think different . . . . How could there be room for war? You'd be too busy talking." This speaker's reflection on classroom practices of role play and negotiation matches Welch's assertion that one's own interpretations must be brought "into dialogue with other interpretations, without assuming that the dialogue is to be one-sided, a 'dialogue' of persuasion of the other" (87). The student notes that there would be no "room for war" because talk would require all of our energy and attention. She does not seem to imply that one particular discourse would dominate; the conversation she envisions is "busy," not persuasive.

This type of conversation does occur in transcript six. Though the speaker from the Edna group begins to critique the Robert group, she moves quickly to a whole-community critique: "We're trying to make happy endings." Applying her insight across all groups, she opens the door for the Robert group to recognize its complicity in promoting a damaging cultural myth. There is no attempt to persuade other groups to a particular point of view; rather, the views here build on each other (for example, when "Robert" begins to articulate that happy endings may never actually occur) and intersect (as when "Robert" connects "Edna's" insight to his group's attempt to ensure a happy ending by killing a character). This is a class engaged in truth-making through dialogue. Argument has been set aside as team performances are abandoned in favor of a broader and more critical examination of the issues involved.

Conclusions
The classroom experiences described above indicate that our contractualist method provides students with a learning environment that encourages critical self-reflection and awareness of the positions of others. It also appears that the process has the potential to disrupt dysfunctional group dynamics by systematically encouraging students to examine their own behaviors as well as those of others in the class. However, we recognize that there are many additional opportunities to "create knowledge" (in Welch's terms) that we have not yet incorporated into our collaborative framework.

Our future plans include the creation of multiple activities and assignments which will encourage students to examine the implications of their actions more completely. We also intend to design these exercises so that they stimulate the types of productive crises that force groups to critically examine their own performances. These activities and assignments include: in-class shortwrites asking students to reflect on their own learning and their insights about the group process at the end of each class period; essays about the role-play/negotiation strategy (how it works and doesn't work, what it challenges and why); the recording and transcribing of group planning interactions followed by a reflection paper on the secrets and strategies that
enter or frame group conversation; team journals (Graybeal) permitting students to discuss and critique in writing their team’s interactions; group presentations on the negotiation performances of political leaders and other “real world” interest groups; and the development and direction of role-play/negotiation scenarios by students.

Reflections on Our Own Collaborative Process
As we reflected on the experiences we had shared in developing our contractualist methodology and integrating it in our classrooms, it occurred to us that we had begun focusing more on the development of the method itself than on its value as a theoretical construct for reshaping the nature of our classrooms. (This is not unusual for new teaching techniques that trace their roots to university WAC programs. See Mahala for a critique that examines the “dissociation of theory from pedagogical innovation” in these types of programs.) Our emphasis on the pragmatic concerns of developing and implementing the model had obscured some interesting information about our own collaboration. When we began to analyze the transcripts from our courses, it became apparent that different priorities and separate, sometimes conflicting, theoretical underpinnings had led us to implement our common method in radically different ways. The most striking example of this is in Phase Five, where students in Tom’s political science class learned to perform all five steps in the role-play negotiation process without engaging in obvious or verifiable self-critique. However, in Thia’s literature class the students spent most of the final stage reflecting on their own actions throughout the role-play/negotiation process. These differences in the final phase can be traced in part to differing classroom goals on the part of the teachers.

During our conversations about the transcripts, it became clear that Tom was deeply interested in helping students achieve “reasonableness and impartiality,” goals of the contractualist ethics theorists. In his political science class, students worked repetitively with the role-play/negotiation method until they were proficient at reaching well-negotiated outcomes. Thia’s literature class, by contrast, had incorporated the five-step method within a larger context of liberatory pedagogy. Her students had been rewarded for critiquing and, in some cases, rejecting and redesigning classroom structures. Their decision to step outside of assigned roles in order to examine their learning process was not at odds with their previous experiences in that particular classroom setting.

Further, it became apparent as we discussed the transcripts that our measures of teaching success differed across disciplinary boundaries. Tom was most interested in outcomes: what could the students produce at the end of the process to demonstrate that they knew how to negotiate a reasonable compromise? He genuinely wanted his students to behave impartially and believed that this was possible. Lauren cared less about outcomes than about
the students' experience of the process: could they articulate an understand­
ing of their own and others’ points of view? Because ethical decision-making and problem-solving skills are vital in the world of business, she wanted her students to develop decision-making processes that considered a multiplicity of people and perspectives. Thia’s interest in contractualist ethics turned out to be political: could this method offer students a framework for deconstructing oppressive power models in favor of more egalitarian problem-solving among all people? She hoped to enrich the ongoing critique in her classroom by providing students with an alternative model of communication that could provide all students with a voice.

We began to realize that the systematic method of collaboration we had designed for our students bore little resemblance to our own practices of collaboration. Due to our hectic academic schedules, we could meet to discuss our classes and transcripts only sporadically. During these discussions, we began to focus primarily on descriptions of the role-play/negotiation technique. Thus, what began as a self-critique of our collaborative learning pedagogies became a pragmatic conversation about the machinery of the method we’d agreed to use. Only our difficulties in returning to Goffman and Welch during the writing of this article made us aware of how many differences our similar method had obscured.

Our recent conversations, while certainly tension-laden, have chal­lenged us to revise our method, bringing more reflection to bear on each stage of the process. We have agreed that we are ultimately less interested in the method itself than in the critical self-examination that we believe the method can encourage. If truth exists, as Welch asserts, not in a particular body of knowledge or a single process of knowing but in dialogues that include many knowledges, then the most appropriate educational practices must foster and value conversations which speak across disciplinary bound­aries. Our collaboration continues in the hope that we can find ways to promote this conversation among ourselves and in our classrooms.

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**Works Cited**


