Introduction: Who Does the Teaching?
Learning in Different Directions

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From the time we enter school we assume and expect that teachers do the teaching. This traditional model places the students on the receiving end of teacher transmissions. Yet, when teachers find satisfaction in the classroom, they often report how much they learned from their students. Most people, however, are no more surprised at these reports than they are to hear how parents "learn" from their four-month-old infants. This kind of learning is the kind we place in quotation marks: although parents and teachers learn, children and students aren't understood to be teaching. Education is thought to emanate from authority figures who learn from their own observations and reflections.

Parents and teachers as groups assume responsibility to enlighten, respectively, their children and students. They conduct their lives as if this responsibility were intrinsic to the social relations of parenting and teaching. Few want to reduce this responsibility; likewise, few know, want to know, or can effect, situations in which the responsibilities are reciprocal in ways that are not ritualized or contractual, but spontaneous in ethical, interpersonal, or collective senses.

When the "direction" of teaching is single, we tend not to question it. It is not something we think of as a category for which there may be alternatives. The fact that "one category" is equivalent to "no categories" is significant when contemplating genres or kinds of things. Once the same level or degree of teaching is understood to move also in an "other" (sometimes, Other) direction, many new categories (or directions) of teaching and learning are possible. The number of directions becomes indefinite, open-ended, and contingent on how fully classroom social relations are invited to contribute to the curriculum.

The essays in this special issue suggest how, when the interrelationships among teachers and students are considered, new categories or directions of teaching become possible, available, and desirable. This expansion leads to reconceiving "Rhetoric and Composition" as "Language Use," a subject that includes attention to all language forms: formal speech and writing as well as oral and written colloquial kinds, registers, and genres. One can include in "language use" genres that are at the same time oral and written, formal and informal, those that move back and forth, that overlap with or convert to other symbolic media.
The essays show that to describe different classroom social relations one needs different kinds of writing: both the class members and the authors describing their classes change conventional kinds of classroom- and scholarly-essay writing. The essays also show how, in the process of teaching, it is not possible to separate classroom social relations from subject matter and language use genres. These presentations can be read to help us consider "language use" as a revised subject matter. Taken as a group, the essays suggest that the change from single-direction to indefinite-direction teaching involves a change of pedagogical ideology. There is a paradigmatic shift to approaching one's teaching by first observing and understanding what the population of this particular class is, and, in consequence, what it will need, expect, be motivated and stimulated by, and enjoy. Needless to say, we editors are not speaking for the authors; we are only reading what the authors are contributing, and our points of view derive from our perspectives on all the essays rather than from presumed knowledge of what individual authors may believe.

We divided the nine essays into two sections—the first four start from two-person teaching relationships and consider, some directly, some by implication, issues of collective interest. The last five essays reflect on collective teaching situations—classrooms and groups—by suggesting and giving examples of different circumstances and directions of teaching, and thereby of new categories of classroom social relations. They propose, perhaps, a sense of the plausibility of the changes in perspective that could be adopted more affirmatively by teachers of language use and writing, as well as by teachers of all subjects that, to one degree or another, depend on the use of language to announce knowledges, procedures, values, and to identify the practitioners themselves.

Beth Daniell and Margaret Weaver oppose the traditional split between orality and literacy and expose teaching situations that tend to reinforce and normalize that split. Daniell's "Deena's Story" brings out the pedagogical scope of an apparently simple issue in regard to "AAVE" (Howard, below: African American Vernacular English; or, Black English). On the one hand, one can assume neither inferiority nor "sameness" of Deena's story as compared with those of White students of comparable ability, and on the other hand, one cannot assume the transcendent al Otherness of a different language-use style. The situation is similar for Anissa, as described by Margaret Weaver. Born into American Sign Language, Anissa "speaks" a different genre of oral English that is as different from aural oral English as Black English is from, say, Newscaster English. In both instances, what one refers to as the oral situation is marked by tacit assumptions about who is present in the speaking situation. If you speak your "native" or "first" language, you assume the same kind of social relations that you assumed in contexts where you usually speak this first language or "mother tongue." The term "mother tongue," although clear in the sense of referring to the key role played by mothers in children's acquisition of language, also calls attention to the fact that any first language is to be identified not only through the individual parent/mother that person had, but through "mothers"—or first co-speakers—in that speech community or local culture.
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Deena’s language use assumes a genre of story-telling considered inferior to that of the White majority in her class because her speech community is falsely assumed to be inferior in well-known ways. Anissa’s story emerges from a speech community falsely assumed to be inferior for different reasons—the deaf are also thought of as “dumb”; the meaning of “not speaking orally” is often overridden by the meaning “lacking mental ability.” The hearing community half consciously views the deaf community as less mentally capable. Furthermore, there is no inclination on the part of the hearing community to think of the senses in which the hearing impaired have a different perspective, as compared with the hearing, on what can and can not be said. Weaver’s and Daniell’s essays help us to understand these different forms of “oral” rational functioning and teach us the underlying perspectives and social relations that bring different thinking and language use into public view. The “different directions” represented by Deena and Anissa are different ways of relating socially in classrooms and other collective spaces, as well as new pathways for studying the phenomenology of language. But, as Weaver and Daniell show, this learning in different directions can only occur when the pedagogical circumstances recognize its possibility.

Dawn Dreyer’s essay is a mixed genre presentation resulting from assuming a fluid interchange of oral and literate modes. The writing and the relationship of teacher and student that leads to such writing are departures from what usually appears in scholarly journals. A salient feature of their relationship is their common involvement in “orality” in the sense of how society’s food and body-size obsessions have overtaken the lives of many individuals, and particularly women who have erroneously estimated the configurations of success and failure in their own lives. Epidemic eating disorders have been identified by some as a sociopathy finding its individual locus in illness and suffering; their social etiology has been studied in several recent works, some of which are referred to by Dreyer.

Dreyer’s essay changes language use by bringing to bear some experiences of writing on the study of language: staring at the jeans in the closet precedes the start of work; trying them on to check the fit interrupts it. Many, especially those starting to write, have claimed connections between language use and self-regard, but in this essay, these connections are dramatized in a teaching relationship. The teaching moves in two or more directions—with “dialogue” or reference also taking place through the citation of sources and the assimilation of these sources to the relationship of the two writers. Fear of hunger, of wanting, of nourishing oneself is one of the foundations in feeling that translates into saying, telling, and interacting. For many this leap would be long, but many others, including a wide range of men, whose self-doubt may not have emerged in food concerns, are nevertheless prevented from saying what they can, should, and want to say by the fear of their own passions and desires. It falls within the purview of the teacher of language use to think of one’s work in such terms.
Harriet Malinowitz takes us to where some of our professional problems have begun: our responses to those we know only through their writings as authority figures. Becoming professionals as teachers and writing teachers means creating an imaginary cast of characters out of texts alone. Malinowitz depicts the results of discovering the degree of self-deception involved in the ordinary act of recognizing the status of a professional leader with whom one has no living relationship. Here is one basis of academic rigidity, of frustration, of the failure of dialogue, of negotiation. Malinowitz portrays how relating to professional leaders often has no foundation in human experience and resembles dreams or other narcissistic experiences. Professional relationships imagined from one's readings are different and separate from real human relationships, she observes, so that even to consider teaching and learning to be taking place in them sometimes seems an absurdity, a joke, the response to which is aptly enacted in Malinowitz's fresh and compelling sense of humor. Real frustrations broached by real people stay textualized, and even if they are soluble, they are paralyzed by the ranking and hierarchy in the academy.

The second section of this collection takes us to scenes of interaction where people do reach one another: the classroom and related places in the college or university community in which such classrooms function. In "The Great Wall of African American Vernacular English in the American College Classroom," Rebecca Moore Howard discusses the surprising and disturbing results of a student initiative to speak AAVE for one day in her "Language, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States" class. Although originally excited about the project, as the day for speaking AAVE drew near, more and more students expressed their desire to cancel the experiment, among them the students who proposed it! White students felt they would be seen as ridiculing Black ways of speaking, while Black students felt they would be embarrassing themselves in front of White students. Howard's attention is on the paths between culture and language use and how the seamlessness of the space between them is manifested by the difficulty of making choices that let the language use curriculum reflect society accurately. Howard, a White woman from Appalachia, expresses an especially strong need to present the indigenous culture of Americans without omitting its non-European foundations. Her writing is a combination of scholarly authority and personal searching, and thus helps us, like other scholarly writers who have overtaken experience-based styles of academic work, to identify our more private values and passions as ways into the collective struggles that now dog us as the detritus of slavery.

Readers will feel a change of mood, but not of principle, in moving from Howard's to Karen Paley's voice. Paley is like a conversational reporter who has just been through a long process of direct contact with social combatants. One student in her class reports a racist experience she had on campus and then invites her class and teacher to be her colleagues in responding to it. This they do and the story of how all were involved, what new forms of writing emerged, what books were read, what communications undertaken, what hearsay was reported appear together in this dramatic yet pedagogically directed retelling of a series of college moments.
Paley’s discussion of her class shows that a teacher can and should adapt her curriculum to the social experience of those it serves. While she offers no formulas (which would be contrary to her adaptive stance), her narration of events suggests how the project of making a curriculum contingent is one that teacher and students always enter together: the teacher allows for flexibility, estimates students’ needs, and rethinks assignments in relation to the class events to which she is responding; the students raise issues of personal importance and seek connections between curriculum materials and those issues in order to locate them in broader social terms. Thus, in Paley’s class, teacher and students together drew analogies among ethnic groups and helped each other render in collective terms an individual experience in such a way that collective and individual experiences were felt and understood through the various forms of writing Paley leaves us with in this essay.

Carrie Leverenz takes us to a place that is somewhat opposite to Paley’s. Where the drama of Paley’s essay lies in disclosure, the drama of Leverenz’s lies in concealment—the elaborate, sophisticated, even disciplined ways students can come up to with to refuse to engage the meanings of racism. It is always hard to document “concealment,” so Leverenz’s study is especially valuable in its “blow-by-blow” account of how a group of five undergraduates avoids an issue. One of the interesting and noteworthy features of this account is the problem that collaborative work posed for the one African American student. Because the White students in the group carefully avoid direct engagement with the issue of race, the Black student is faced with the difficult choice of confronting or tacitly accepting the majority’s techniques of not seeing and not admitting. As Leverenz’s private conversations with this student suggest, the Black student knows that no matter what she does, she carries the burden of representing African Americans within that group. This student’s negotiation of the situation takes into account several things—her own comfort in the class, her desire to educate the rest of her group about racism, and her awareness that her groupmates’ own perspectives will shape how they understand her presence in the group. Ultimately, however, while her decision not to confront her groupmates is based in part on a fear of perpetuating existing stereotypes, it also serves to put her in the position of “collaborating” with the White students in their reluctance to face racism. Leverenz’s account poses the question of politically driven teaching and shows how “good” collaboration—cooperative effort among colleagues—subtly changes into “bad” collaboration (as in “collaborating with the enemy”). The African American student in this account seemed to have little choice: if you choose not to fight, by default you collaborate (“badly”); on the other hand, ironically, she may collaborate cooperatively by opposing. At one point or another, each of us has to cope with this choice in classrooms that urge all its voices to speak.

Scott Stevens’s essay shows what could well have been a result in the situation described by Leverenz had conditions been slightly different. In what seemed to have been an accidental development, two female students from
different writing groups inform one another that “the same thing” happened to them in their respective groups. Refusing “collaboration” with hostile members of their own groups, the women decide to work together to create an account of their experiences. Doubling and comparing what happened in the two different groups, these students write a new history of classroom events that recounts their having been censored and their attempts to claim places from which to speak and be heard. Notably, their reclamation of the speaking platforms is achieved specifically through their collaboration with each other. This is what Stevens conceptualizes as “serious work”: the work of “claiming and education,” not just receiving it.

Stevens’s essay presents the complications as well as achievements of learning that moves in various directions. By inviting students to collaborate, to “teach” each other in small groups, he inadvertently promoted a teaching situation that made it possible for the two female students to be censored. But by inviting alternative collaborations, he then made it possible to “revise” the frustrating conditions of work. While “serious work” ought to be the agenda for any student, Stevens discusses how classrooms can enable every student to claim an education, to do serious work. His reflections suggest that we teachers need to educate ourselves—not a new direction, but how many of us will admit that we are always needing to reeducate ourselves?—toward creating classrooms that will permit students to claim their educations and then teach us what they have claimed and learned.

This is what Allison Warriner’s classrooms try to do. She describes how students claim their educations by conducting the classes themselves. Perhaps many of us know the caveats of such experiments: they can’t work at every school, with any group of students, or with any teacher. Yet we would still like to understand such processes when they do work, in order, first, perhaps, to learn to let them work in the places where they can, and second, to adapt them to other situations where we now assume the possibility is out of reach.

In her title, Warriner alludes to a fundamental hurdle in demanding that students take the initiative: the belief on the part of students that their own abilities to ask are not what they came to school to exercise: “I didn’t think they had it in them.” They assume as we teachers once did that if teachers are there to teach, then school is no more complicated than to learn what teachers say is “to be learned.” Yet Warriner shows that the heart of the matter, the turning of the corner, is relatively humble: given a heuristic—which is what teachers learn to accumulate in colleges of education—undergraduates can learn to load it so they can use it. Warriner’s narrative shows that a student-centered class does not mean that students suddenly overtake the perspectives and responsibilities of teachers, but that they are in a better position to use a received heuristic toward the questions they already have than the teachers are to use the same heuristic to give answers to unasked questions. Warriner’s narrative shows that teachers receive heuristics just as students do; it therefore makes more sense to have the students use them directly. Warriner becomes a student-participant and an advisor on peripheral items like just how much work “counts” for now
as satisfactory. A small move is enough to introduce the overwhelmingly important sense in students that they can ask fruitful questions of the subject matter and study the issues in partnerships with each other and with the teacher.

One noteworthy thought that this collection suggests is that most initiatives and experiments in classrooms are benign events that can address potentially threatening developments in postsecondary classrooms whose populations are changing rapidly. We academics are often overburdened by our pompous vocabulary, by the tendency to become obsessed with theory and intellectuality, by the unconscious fantasy that intellectuals at elite universities and European countries have "ideas" that must be constantly rehashed and then "applied." This collection of essays should help to remind us of the richness of the language we want to be teaching, of the variousness of the possibilities of kind, of genre, of register, of voice, that go along with the ways we as teachers and students interact with one another. We all do the teaching because we all have something to learn. We need to find our ideals and theories in our own classrooms and teaching experiences, and this collection says that it can be done.

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