Public Voices:

Writing Across Lehman College

2003-2012

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INTRODUCTION
PUBLIC VOICES: VISION, HISTORY, OVERVIEW

Marcie Wolfe and Jessica Yood

Public Voices, a collection of essays written by and for faculty across the disciplines, focuses on teaching and learning writing in an urban, public, four-year college. Through accounts of their work at Lehman College, one of the 24 campuses of The City University of New York and its only senior college in the Bronx, authors offer an on-the-ground perspective on writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines. Far too often urban colleges and their students are painted in broad political strokes—"underserved," "unprepared," "under siege"—descriptors that sensationalize the day-to-day struggles of institutions, students, and faculties. Instead *Public Voices* shows the work of writing in actual classrooms, illuminating a rich and complex picture of engaged learning and responsive teaching.

Each contributor to this volume participated in Lehman College's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program for a year or sometimes more. Several faculty members were also active members of a WAC Quantitative Reasoning study group and WAC's Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) initiative. In some cases, faculty write about their courses in the first few years of the program; others reflect on more recent experiences with WAC and WID at Lehman. Descriptions and analysis of their experience using writing to teach are informed by their work in these literacy initiatives.

The chapters offer detailed accounts of experiments teaching with writing in the following fields: Education, History, Latin American and Puerto-Rican Studies, Health Sciences, Social Work, Music, and Languages and Literatures. The ten chapters cover general education, majors courses, and a graduate course, and are authored by professors at the beginning, middle, and later stages of their academic careers.

The descriptions of courses reveal the differences in when they were written, spanning a ten-year period of the program's existence. Lehman's WAC program has evolved over the last decade, beginning solely as a faculty development initiative and becoming a large-scale effort to institutionalize

writing intensive courses in the majors. Additionally, our program today, like so many literacy initiatives, involves digital tools that were not yet central to some of the teaching that faculty describe here.

But throughout, the program coordinators and faculty participants have shared a common mission: understanding the relationships among writing, learning, and disciplinary knowledge. The program's aim in exploring these relationships has been to support faculty's efforts at deepening students' engagement and increasing their academic success.

A central question is at the heart of each chapter: what difference does it make to use writing in new ways, ways that change the dynamics of learning? The contributors invite readers to consider the often hidden challenges of teaching writing-infused courses and how these challenges transform teachers, students, and the larger academic landscape. In courses described here writing makes visible the deep-rooted struggles that some urban students face with academic literacy, the ways in which students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al 1992) from home and community enhance or complicate their learning, and faculty's sometimes unexamined pedagogical assumptions about how students should learn in their disciplines. The contributors to this volume, in first joining the WAC program at Lehman and then agreeing to document and reflect on their own and their students' work, participate in a growing movement in higher education—to make the academy more of a dynamic, cross-disciplinary community of scholars *and* teachers.

Data collected over the last ten years inform our understanding of WAC's impact on teaching and learning. (WAC's ongoing research efforts are conducted with approval from Lehman College's Institutional Review Board. Identities of students described in the chapters were made anonymous as part of the protocol guidelines and in some cases, student work was lightly edited for readability and context.) Course portfolios, created by faculty at the end of their participation in our two-semester and SoTL programs, served as both a resource for the individual faculty members who created them, and a dissemination tool available to faculty outside of or new to the WAC program. The portfolios also became a resource for us as coordinators. They contain a trove of student writing samples, assignments, grading strategies, and writing-enhanced syllabi from which to draw in developing materials and workshops.

All faculty portfolios include a syllabus annotated to show where and how writing was incorporated throughout the semester, sample assignments, student writing, and a reflective essay commenting on the year's work. Many of the chapters in this collection began as reflective essays introducing or concluding a faculty portfolio. In the last four years, digital portfolios have included more student work and assignments as well as descriptions of what makes the course writing-intensive, connections between the particular course and others in the departmental curriculum, and assessment criteria.

Lehman WAC: Some History

Here we offer some context for our program within the borders of our university (CUNY), and describe the influences that connect it to literacy initiatives nationally. Later we discuss three themes that unify the ten chapters in the volume.

Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) is a pedagogical movement that has grown and evolved in higher education since its beginnings in the 1980s. Many WAC programs, like our own, focus as well on Writing in the Disciplines (WID). Three principles form the foundation of most WAC programs:

1. Informal writing encourages and deepens learning.
2. Writing in a variety of forms, for different audiences and purposes, supports critical thinking and learning.
3. Writing proficiency develops when writing is taught by the entire academic community, in the context of the conventions of each discipline.

WAC programs existed at CUNY throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but CUNY's current WAC initiative began in 1999, in response to a mandate by the CUNY Board of Trustees. This mandate required all campuses of The City University of New York to establish a writing across the curriculum program in order to strengthen its commitment to writing throughout students' academic experience. The longevity and success of this iteration of WAC, now sixteen years old and thriving at every CUNY campus, can be attributed to a three-pronged approach: campus-based faculty development programs directed by knowledgeable faculty who have been linked and supported by CUNY's central office, the involvement of CUNY doctoral students as writing fellows to support campus directors in developing and implementing the program, and local institutional support in the form of campus policies requiring all

students to enroll in lower and upper-division writing-intensive (WI) courses. By linking faculty development to campus policies for writing-intensive courses, CUNY and its campuses have ensured institutionalization and continued investment in the program. Yood (2004) argues that this latest stage of WAC at CUNY reflects, for the first time, a system wherein the pedagogies we teach for "learning to write" are contingent on the structural patterns put in place for programming writing at the university.

Although all CUNY campuses offer WI courses and are assigned writing fellows, each WAC program reflects the unique orientation of its leaders and its campus culture. At Lehman College, one of the cornerstones of WAC has been a two-semester intensive program in which faculty from a wide range of disciplines work with WAC coordinators and writing fellows to develop and implement writing-intensive classes. Since 1999, over 200 Lehman faculty members have taken part in this program. Many have gone on to lead faculty development workshops within their departments or campus-wide in order to foster dialogue about writing pedagogy and student achievement. In addition, some faculty participants have published their WAC work in journals that address teaching and learning in their disciplines.

In order to reach additional faculty, each year Lehman WAC also offers special-topic workshops and shorter institutes. But it is the two-semester intensive program that has had the most impact on faculty's pedagogy, syllabus design, and understanding of student work.

In 2010, Lehman WAC embarked on a three-year "Writing in the Majors" initiative focused entirely on courses at the 300 level. Though this focus represented a significant shift in emphasis, we could not have developed this targeted work without the insight of faculty members represented in this volume. All of the contributors took risks in their teaching to consider the place of writing on our campus, in their professions and disciplines, and in the culture at-large.

Scholarship in Writing and Literacy: Influences and Connections

There is a long history of documenting writing at The City University of New York, and our volume is enhanced by the research of scholars who have studied the unique contributions of students and faculty at our large, diverse, urban and public university (Shaughnessy 1979, Perl 1979, Bruffee 1993, Sternglass 1997, Soliday 2002, Hirsch & DeLuca 2003, Yood 2005, Wan 2011). WAC was a product of this important history of writing research and

teaching at CUNY; some of the original pioneers of basic writing were also integral to the creation of this new initiative in its first years. WAC coordinators and leaders of the General Education initiative at CUNY have documented WAC's development in the volume *Reclaiming the Public University* (Summerfield and Benedicks 2004) and in journals like *JBW: The Journal of Basic Writing* (Summerfield et al 2007).

Lehman's WAC program is linked to the larger story of writing at CUNY, and to scholarly dialogue about urban higher education and basic writing more generally. But we have also had a particular relationship with the National Writing Project and with Lehman's Institute for Literacy Studies, both of which had a profound influence on the vision and structure of our program.

The National Writing Project (NWP) is the largest and most enduring literacy professional-development program in the United States. It includes 185 university-based sites where K-12 and college teachers work in partnership, and conducts research that demonstrates the impact of NWP teachers on student improvement in writing (St. John & Stokes 2010). Founded in 1974 in Berkeley CA, and with investments from the US Department of Education and a host of other private and public funders, the NWP provides a dynamic infrastructure of professional-development practice, teaching, and evaluation resources, and literacy scholarship that has exercised profound influence on the teaching of writing over the past 40 years.

Historically the NWP has influenced the design of WAC faculty development programs, and WAC scholarship has influenced the content of local-site seminars and decisions by writing projects to expand their work to teachers from all subject areas. Though WAC began as a higher-education initiative, the "two-way alliances" between WAC and local writing projects (Bazerman et al 2005) enabled WAC to influence practice in K-12 education. Indeed one of the earliest high-school WAC programs–and certainly the first in New York City–was the Writing Teachers Consortium (1981-1984), a FIPSE-funded program of the New York City Writing Project, the local NWP site based at Lehman's Institute for Literacy Studies since 1978. Created by Carla Asher, Richard Sterling, and Lehman WAC coordinator Marcie Wolfe, this project convened teachers from all subject areas in four NYC high schools each year to participate in a year-long after-school seminar and meet individually with a Writing Project on-site teacher-consultant to plan, co-teach, and evaluate writing practices for their classrooms. The design of this early program

influenced the structure of later professional development programs in the NYC Writing Project and the National Writing Project, and is the basis for Lehman WAC's faculty development model.

In their allied histories, some of the most influential directors of WAC programs also directed or were affiliated with their local writing project sites. In New York City, the current WAC initiative, begun in 1999, has had four coordinators who served as directors or teacher-consultants with the NYCWP. One of Lehman WAC's founding coordinators, Sondra Perl, was a founder of the NYCWP and has been a guiding influence in the field of composition for many years at all levels of education.

Lehman WAC has also been influenced by the literature on WAC and WID within the field of Composition and Rhetoric, as well as by scholarship exploring the relationship of WAC to large-scale institutional change. Influences include collections like Kathleen Blake Yancey's *Delivering College Composition* (2006) and Chris M. Anson's *The WAC Casebook* (2002). Books like *Local Knowledges, Local Practices* (Monroe 2005), with its focus on the development of writing courses at one university, and *Engaged Writers, Dynamic Disciplines (*Thaiss and Zawacki 2006), which explores faculty and student perspectives on writing in the disciplines, served as resources for faculty in our WAC program and program-development guideposts for the coordinators. We have also relied on John Bean's *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (2002, 2011), a popular and useful guide to teaching with writing. Like Bean's work, the chapters in *Public Voices* offer concrete examples of effective assignments, strategies for encouraging class participation, assessment advice, and ways to enhance engagement in reading and writing in the disciplines.

WAC faculty questioned and researched their pedagogy not only through WAC workshops but also as part of a two-year initiative blending WAC with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). In this initiative, several faculty members read SoTL literature, especially the work of Randy Bass and Lee Shulman (2005), and conducted classroom inquiries into the impact of WAC practices on teaching and learning. And more recently, we were involved in an institution-wide effort to create effective and course-specific assessment guidelines. In this endeavor, we looked to the scholarship of Pat Belanoff (1991), who argues that assessment standards come from teacher- and communally-formed knowledge. Our work has also been influenced by theorists of situated learning, such as James Gee (2004) and Etienne Wenger

(1998), and by researchers studying how teachers can help students build a disciplinary identity (Moje 2010). The chapters in *Public Voices* share with this work a spirit of inquiry and a belief that questions about teaching and experiments with writing yield important research and scholarly endeavors for faculty in a variety of fields.

Three Themes in Lehman WAC-WID: Writing and Student Identities, Writing and Academic Rigor, Writing and Formative Assessment

During one of our Friday professional-development workshops, Lehman WAC faculty began a discussion about what it means for us to teach and for students to write at our public, urban campus. Our conversations about how best to teach with writing resulted in vigorous debate about the role of literacy at Lehman, and the responsibility of faculty to meet the needs of students and the demands of our changing disciplines. Three dominant themes about our work emerged from these discussions. These themes structure the chapters of the book. They are: Writing and Student Identities, Writing and Academic Rigor, Writing and Formative Assessment.

We have organized the chapters according to the theme that seemed most present in each contributor's essay. Readers are encouraged to choose the chapters that resonate most explicitly with their disciplines or concerns. Beyond our need for a system of organization, though, we want to stress that readers will discover aspects of all three themes in whichever chapters they explore.

The first theme, *Writing and Student Identities*, reflects Lehman College's place as a CUNY campus teaching, largely, "underserved" students. While much of the literature on writing at CUNY addresses the history of remediation and the politics of literacy, our goal is to ask how students' multiple identities become a resource for innovative pedagogy and student engagement. Students explore their identities as caregivers, employees, recent immigrants or children of immigrants, speakers of multiple languages and dialects among others. Faculty contributors do not ignore the challenges students face. Rather they explore the avenues taken to make the college classroom a place for productive inquiry into the connections among identity, the academy, and communication.

When writing is at the center of learning in a college classroom, the identities of students and faculty become part of the course material. The interaction

between disciplinary expectation and lived experience invites friction and innovation. It also challenges fixed notions of rigor or outcomes. The theme *Writing and Academic Rigor* addresses how Lehman students and faculty have used writing to enact and enliven the goals of their courses. In classrooms where faculty find academic writing new to students, faculty devise ways to reach beyond the academy. Through alternative assignments, faculty investigate what matters in their discipline, and rethink academic writing.

The final theme, *Writing and Formative Assessment*, derives from the influence that the SoTL movement has had on WAC coordinators and faculty participants. Faculty who investigated the impact of integrating more writing into their teaching saw that the writing illuminated students' understanding of (or struggles with) the content of their courses. Anticipating the current national pursuit of standards and assessment criteria for K-12 and college education, these chapters show faculty exploring the connections between teaching and learning and the ways that student writing allows faculty to revise expectations for their students and themselves.

Writing and Student Identities

The relationship between access to higher education and changing definitions of literacy in America has been central to many scholars of writing (Sternglass 1997, Soliday 2002, Canagarajah 2006). CUNY receives considerable attention for its history as an open admissions institution, with particular focus on the relationships among literacy, student identity, diversity, and educational access. In both the scholarly work in our field, Composition and Rhetoric, and in the popular press, the teaching of writing at CUNY often becomes a lightning rod for national debates about public, urban higher education, language acquisition, and the politics of teaching (Traub 1994, Summerfield and Benedicks 2007).

Several faculty members acknowledge that their first interest in teaching with writing was prompted by what social-work professor Richard Holody named as a "responsibility" and "imperative" for his students' futures. Faculty report how writing is a way to bring students into the discourses of the academy and the dynamics of disciplines. But contributors also show how disciplines and the academy change with student participation. The multiple identities of students are not a problem but a resource for these faculty who experiment with using writing to access students' "funds of knowledge" in diverse learning environments (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992).

Low-stakes writing is one signature practice through which faculty come to realize students' funds of knowledge. In WAC programs, low-stakes writing is often associated with "writing to learn" activities—opportunities for students to write non-graded, often expressive pieces of writing designed to help them approach new material and learn it at their own pace.

Many of the low-stakes exercises discussed here are aimed at writing to *learn* course material. Yet many more serve as writing to *know*: faculty come to know the students' identities and to incorporate that knowledge into their teaching and choice of course material. Low-stakes writing, as Robin Kunstler writes, "opens up" students, but it also changes teaching. In an interdisciplinary course, Americans at Play: Defining a National Character through Leisure, she asked students to react to a chapter in their textbook about the history of leisure in New York City. She discovered that the artifacts resonated in students' contemporary urban lives. Depictions of 19th century bicycling, for example, illustrated ways that the students could also engage in leisure. Kunstler began using free-writes and reaction writing throughout the semester. While this writing helped students retain their reading, fifteen minutes of unstructured writing time also became a way to perform the subject of her class—leisure in the United States.

Kunstler's example is one among many low-stakes exercises that integrated writing activities with reflections on students' identities. Three kinds of low-stakes writing are represented in these chapters:

1. *Responses to readings that inform faculty of familiarity with and connection to the discipline.* Such "response" essays help faculty gear class discussion and participation. Of the many examples of this kind of writing, journals surface as a particularly effective way to link reading, writing, and students' relationship to their subject matter. Kathleen López, formerly of Lehman's Department of Latin American, Latino and Puerto Rican Studies, describes how reading journals helped "both the students and myself prepare for class discussion. I often evoked students' written comments and put their reading journals in dialogue with each other."

2. *Letters and other forms of dialogue, written by faculty and student alike, that connect course material with personal passions and experiences.* Gul Sonmez, in Health Sciences, details writing a letter to her students that encouraged them to not only learn Nutrition but to cultivate "a better sense of how to feed themselves in ways that not

only pleases them but soothes their spirit." She remarks on the wide responses that this letter received from students and the way she referred back to this concept of food when she assigned a semester-long "food diary" exercise.

3. *Mixed genre or "hybrid" writing exercises that integrate traditional academic research and argument with personal reflection and experience.* This kind of writing allows faculty to see students learning in ways that would not be revealed in traditional academic essays or exams. Historian Cindy Lobel describes the many stages of her "build your own city" assignment, including advertisements and tour guides for the fictional metropolis, which served as a way to access voice in student writing while still cultivating the habits of mind that historians use.

The complexity of teaching in our changing and diverse institution is an ongoing topic in WAC and in higher education more widely. For these faculty members, questions of student identity and disciplinary knowledge serve as motivation to reinterpret teaching with writing.

Writing and Academic Rigor

Throughout history, the call for "academic rigor" has been a way to motivate institutions to change curriculum and create focused literacy initiatives (Crowley 1998, Russell 2002). Rigor is behind a slew of recently published polemics on higher education. Buttressed by data revealing a crisis in undergraduate education, manifestos like *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* or *Higher Education: How Colleges are Wasting Our Money and Failing Our Kids—and What We Can Do About It* (Arum and Roska 2011; Hacker and Dreifus 2011) invoke rigor often in relation to writing education. Most of these studies define rigor as a need for national outcomes: the standards we hope students achieve at the end of a college career. In these chapters we offer illustrations of the first or interim steps students and faculty take to define and challenge fixed notions of rigor.

Faculty define rigor here in many ways; difficulty of content is only one. Rigor means "accountability"—making student writing matter to and accountable in a sphere larger than one classroom or one semester. This is a different definition of "accountability" than is offered by contemporary critics of higher education interested in creating uniform standards or outcomes for college students. For example, in an upper-level Nutrition course, keeping a

food diary allows the professor to see how the students discuss what they learn about a client's food habits, but also how their findings says something larger about the discipline, and, further, about science itself. When students write often about Nutrition notes Gul Sonmez, they can realize patterns and engage in the important thinking of a scientist. This is a goal that the faculty member discovered when she had her students write and revise standard case reports. Reaching rigor required revision and sustained support.

Years of discussion with faculty from many disciplines reveal that is easier to demand rigor than to create it through vigorous teaching. In *Public Voices* faculty show how rigor is increased through writing assignments that allow for revision and nuanced assessment criteria. Students report that writing forces them into awareness of their commitment to the course, and to their discipline. As one student remarks, writing gives "us a second chance at learning."

Getting this second chance required some radical changes to traditional disciplinary teaching practices. Traditional liberal arts classes like Music History become hands-on workshops, where students are exposed to and learn to write like music professionals. Writing the liner notes for a classical CD is just one example. The impetus for Janette Tilley's experimental writing assignment was her initial disappointment with student writing. She noticed the tendency for students to generalize about music, regardless of genre or period. This inspired Tilley to investigate the specifics of students' knowledge base by refiguring her assignments. She created guides for students in listening, steps for students to learn how to write about classical music, and a genre and audience for them to write in and to. She then discovered one source of her disappointment. Students did not have much experience with classical music concerts, so their writing about them was stilted. In her literature course, Carmen Saen recognized the same disconnect. She believed at first that considering the political purposes of novels would be both rigorous and relevant to the students. But she realized that resistance to her approach signaled a need to consider her own assumptions about reading literature. Rethinking the critical essay assignment as a dialogue—a talk show among authors—encouraged students to put their course material in context, with other authors and related material. Kathy López's weekly responses to nonfiction, historical accounts of Latin America history provoked the same rethinking by students and faculty.

Dialogues and other genres of immediacy and experience add a layer of rigor to traditional academic assignments by forcing students and professors to

confront the purpose behind their approaches to literacy and learning. This is rigor that transcends outcomes and expectations. What Saen, López, Tilley and other contributors to this volume show is that college is not the endpoint of experience. The "cultural capital" of literature or classical music or political discourse is not assumed but incorporated and expected, and made attainable through course assignments.

Throughout these chapters we see that when faculty make expectations for writing and thinking clear in innovative and challenging writing assignments, and when revision is a central feature of the course, standards become visible and attainable for students.

Writing and Formative Assessment

Through their participation in WAC, faculty have discovered that they come to understand more about their students as learners by reading their writing. As Bean (2011) notes, student writing provides faculty with valuable information about student backgrounds and values, and insights into how faculty might engage students more fully or coach them more effectively. Student writing also enables faculty to get:

> ...a constant reading of students' learning-in-progress. I can see where students are misunderstanding my lectures, not looking adequately at contradictory evidence or alternative views, or not appreciating nuance or complexity. [Writing gives] me a chance to re-explain concepts based on student confusion... [and] helps me monitor the progress of student learning (22).

Thus one other theme that cuts across many of the chapters is faculty's use of writing for formative assessment. Faculty have typically used writing for summative purposes, assigning capstone research papers at the end of a semester's work. Smith (2001) describes summative assessment as providing a "somewhat final decision about merit, worth, or value" (51).

Formative assessment practices have different purposes and different timing: they help faculty and students as teaching and learning unfold, providing useable data from which to plan or adjust instruction related to course content or writing skills. Formative assessment, therefore, enables faculty to

influence and support student learning before—and possibly in preparation for—their performance on more summative tasks. In Black and Wiliam's (2009) definition,

> Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited (9).

This use of assessment in the service of learning is a defining feature of the scholarship of teaching and learning (Hutchings 2010, Bernstein and Bass 2005). SoTL is a respected movement in higher education to study and disseminate models of reflective practice with positive impacts on student learning. Lehman WAC's methods and products are consistent with SoTL principles and have been developed intentionally within a SoTL framework. An overarching aim of our seminar is to treat teaching as a form of inquiry into student learning (Huber & Morreale 2002), conducted in a collaborative faculty community. Through our emphases on student-centered syllabus design, close links between writing and learning, description and analysis of student writing, and faculty investigation into the impact of their writing assignments, we support faculty in adopting a more systematic gaze on the relationship between their work as teachers and what their students learn.

As the chapters describe, for some faculty, the use of writing as formative assessment started serendipitously, a by-product of analyzing student writing samples and faculty assignments in our WAC seminar or reviewing student writing in weekly meetings with writing fellows. As their year in WAC extended, faculty intentionally created opportunities to learn from their students' work and plan their next instructional moves (or interventions with individual students) more deliberately.

Thus faculty began to use assessment in the service both of student learning, and their own. Through various quick-writes read aloud during class, journal entries, first drafts of papers, or exit slips collected at the end of class, Lehman WAC faculty across a range of disciplines have engaged in the interpretive process of constructing meaning from student work, both formal and informal. Faculty have seen how scaffolded writing reveals the struggles and successes experienced by individual learners, and the diversity of needs

represented by the class as a whole. The chapters include a range of formative assessment approaches and accounts of how faculty addressed individual and whole-class concerns. The approaches include:

1. *Ongoing written dialogue between faculty and students.* Abigail McNamee's chapter describes her semester-long email exchanges with graduate students in Early Childhood & Childhood Education about "their questions, their problems, and their anxieties" as they researched and wrote articles for publication. Elaine Avidon's think-aloud letters, written by Childhood Education students six times in the semester, were "sometimes pre-planned, sometimes assigned on the spur of the moment in response to a matter with which students were grappling…." These dialogues enabled her to see which students needed additional reading or rereading of course content, and where to adjust her teaching. Historian Kathy López, who read and responded to her students' weekly reading journals in a course on the History of the Dominican Republic, offers an account of the results of this teaching strategy, noting how she looked forward to reading the journals, wondering each time: "What did they find interesting and provocative? Perhaps even more importantly, what did they find confusing?"

2. *Comments on ungraded student drafts by faculty or by peers via directed small-group response to drafts and outlines.* Duane Tananbaum describes his strategy for improving student writing in an American History class: "Students were required to hand in previous versions with each succeeding draft, and the final grade depended in part on how well the student responded to the suggestions on earlier drafts." Janette Tilley's music majors provided peer response to each other's draft project proposals, enabling many students to do better work. Tilley observes that the peer groups provided "...a valuable learning opportunity as several students saw ways of organizing material that they had not previously considered." Both faculty recognize the value of situating comments on student papers within a system of revision, so students heed the comments, learn from them, and have incentives for addressing them.

3. *Instructional interventions planned in light of results on earlier papers, or earlier assignments in a sequence.* In Cindy Lobel's chapter about a semester-long writing sequence, she describes using the unsuccessful results of earlier papers to plan interventions for later papers that

would help students avoid the same pitfalls. Lobel and her writing fellow sequenced the assignments and provided low-stakes writing activities to help students understand key concepts and plan their work. Through these strategies, Lobel was able to evaluate whether students were on track for the papers conceptually (e.g., understanding patterns of de-industrialization) and rhetorically (selecting and incorporating evidence effectively, using appropriate voice and style for the genre).

4. *In-class and end-of-class quick-writes.* Nutrition scientist Gul Sonmez describes how the new student writing assignments she developed helped to improve teaching and learning in a Nutrition class. One of her most successful approaches was end-of-class exit slips, where students responded to a single question about Sonmez's lecture or the readings. She noticed that "the use of in-class writing at the end of each class motivated them to be more focused throughout the lecture and take better notes," and that "in-class writing enhances the learning more permanently and helps students develop their ability to apply the acquired knowledge and critically assess information about food and eating practices." Through in-class writing Duane Tananbaum realized "the difficulty the students had in reading the arcane legal terminology of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision," and thus devoted more time in class to reviewing the case. Similarly, Richard Holody designed ongoing in-class writing assignments in which his Social Work students summarized reading and lectures for further discussion or clarification.

5. *Attention to patterns of error in a penalty-free zone.* In their respective chapters, both Tananbaum and Holody discuss their concerns about surface error in student writing. Both note the ways in which error can interfere with student meaning and serve as barriers to communication. Without compromising their principles about striving for error-free writing, Holody and Tananbaum devise systems for addressing this problem through formative assessment. In Tananbaum's chapter, for example, he comments on patterns of error in early drafts, and describes how he takes class time to address the errors that seem most widespread. Students' grades depend on how well they address his comments about content and about error. By noting and responding to error in a risk-free way—on an ungraded draft—students have the opportunity and incentive to learn from these comments.

The ways in which Lehman faculty have incorporated writing as a mode of formative assessment demonstrate their keen interest in supporting students as developing thinkers and writers. The uses of writing described in the chapters show faculty attending both to the cognitive and rhetorical challenges of their courses, and, more broadly, their varied disciplines.

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Writing and Student Identities

WRITERS AT PLAY: THE EXCITEMENT OF LOW-STAKES WRITING IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY LEISURE STUDIES COURSE

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An interdisciplinary course in Leisure Studies offers an ideal opportunity for students to enhance their understanding of themselves, their classmates, and American culture by studying a common human experience. They do so from a variety of perspectives, including historical, psychological, sociological, cultural, and economic. In leisure studies courses, students learn that leisure is not just free time or a recreational activity, but a unique personal experience characterized by feelings of freedom, a sense of control, perceived competence, and intrinsic motivation. Topics are discussed in relation to societal and cultural events, the lives of everyday people, and the students' own experiences. I developed one such course, entitled Americans at Play: Defining a National Character through Leisure, which begins with an examination of the meanings of leisure, identity and culture, and, starting with the pre-colonial period, addresses historical issues and recreation activities popular in each succeeding era, including the growth of organized sports and outdoor recreation, social influences on recreation participation, the role of government in delivering recreation services, women's leisure opportunities, the relationship of race and culture to leisure, the influence of technology on changing leisure patterns, and deviant leisure behavior.

This content is particularly well-suited to Lehman College students with their diverse cultural backgrounds, ages, and life experiences; many students are working and/or raising children, as well as attending school. They often are the first in their families to attend college. These responsibilities place limitations on their free time and contribute to high levels of stress. For students who may have struggled academically, financially, and socially in order to attend college, they find that their individual leisure and life experiences are valued as windows through which to view and understand the larger topic.

According to leisure theorists, individuals make voluntary choices to engage in activities they can control, feel as if they can develop their competence and

mastery of the activity, and experience the personal rewards and benefits they seek. These benefits include learning, socialization, strengthening of family and community relationships, spirituality, creativity, enhanced sense of identity, physical and mental health, relaxation, and a sense of accomplishment and increased self-esteem. Leisure also shapes and expresses identity and character. As a result of taking this course, students come to understand the meaning of leisure in their own lives, become more aware of the leisure choices they have made, and learn about other leisure choices so that they can enhance the quality of their lives and of their families' lives. They learn to prioritize their own needs in order to gain the benefits that come from meaningful involvement in personally satisfying leisure.

Since writing is a popular form of leisure, I felt that through an interdisciplinary, writing intensive course students might explore and develop writing as a personal leisure experience, as well as a means to self-discovery. I was eager to see what would happen if low-stakes writing became a primary focus of the course that would help the students learn about this new subject as well as engage in writing as leisure. Low-stakes writing has a spontaneity and unguardedness that derives from the students' freedom from fear of being evaluated or judged. This freedom is the defining characteristic of leisure, and allowed for, perhaps, a more true expression of the students' identities. This concept was very exciting to me as I embarked on this experience. I felt the students would be more motivated and stimulated to learn if the means to learning was more intrinsically rewarding.

Low-Stakes Writing as a Primary Focus of the Course

As are most instructors when embarking on a writing intensive course, I was concerned about how to cover course content while also addressing writing by using some class time either for low-stakes writing activities or for mini-lessons on writing. Low-stakes writing can be described as informal, exploratory writing that can take many forms, including simple freewriting, responses to questions, journal writing, critiques, and more creative exercises. Would low-stakes writing take up time devoted to the lecture, sacrificing content to process? The purpose of low-stakes writing as I used it was for students to write about some aspect of the day's topic, as a way to stimulate and focus thinking on the subject as well as help them make connections between the course and their own lives. But would this kind of writing really help accomplish the goals of this interdisciplinary course?

Once I began teaching the course, I quickly realized that since it was not required in a major, I did not have the usual anxiety about covering all the material on the syllabus. Since the content was, in fact, almost limitless, it was impossible to cover everything. Therefore the low-stakes writing was not taking away time from the content but was effectively helping students learn whatever I did cover, which was much more than they knew or had ever thought about the topic and which could stimulate their interest for future study. We read a variety of formats—poems, songs, journal entries, research reports, and biographical sketches—to explore the range of modes of expression and the effectiveness of different styles in communicating ideas. This exploration coincided nicely with the discovery that many of the students did write for themselves: They kept journals and wrote letters, songs, and stories; one was even planning to write her autobiography.

The course assignments, as well, included experimenting with different forms and voices:

1. A non-graded formal letter describing their own experiences and feelings about writing during the first week, complemented at the end of the semester by a letter describing their feelings about writing after completing the course.
2. A graded, formal two- to three-page paper exploring how their own identity was expressed through their leisure pursuits.
3. A report on their trip to a recreation site or attraction such as a museum, zoo, ball game, or theater, written as a newspaper review describing their observations of Americans at play.
4. The major research paper on an American leisure activity or pastime, explored from the perspective of the class theme and illustrated with examples from songs, poems, art, and performances.
5. In-class reflective writing, in place of a final essay exam, in which students synthesized their learning and considered their own identity as Americans at play.

The first part of the research paper assignment involved finding articles on their topic, the second was a draft of the paper based on their articles, the third was a discussion of the depiction of the topic in the art forms, and the fourth was a summary tying the entire paper together. These parts were vital to the students being able to research, evaluate and convey relevant material and to learn to revise and critique their own work. Additionally, an exploration and appreciation of the arts and human expression in diverse forms supported the interdisciplinary humanities approach to the course.

And why were such "parts" important to this subject matter, to the experiment of the course? One interesting and unexpected occurrence was that I had to revise the assignment to clarify what I expected; this was another "teachable moment" that showed the students that revision is acceptable and necessary, and that even professors do it. I also learned that "art" has an extremely broad range of interpretations. My expectation was that the students would look to the great museums and literature for examples of their topic depicted in paintings, sculpture and poetry. On the contrary they searched the internet and came up with crafts, songs, and posters which expanded not only my understanding of what they perceive as art but of how they perceive and interact with their own world.

What I discovered from teaching the course was that the low-stakes writing not only helped to meet the course goals, but really extended the day's lesson by allowing the students to think about the topic from another angle and to interact personally with the material. I did not plan for low-stakes writing to be a part of every class session, but early on I found that the writing was a significant shared experience. According to John Bean (2001), this type of writing "deepens most students' engagement with course material while enhancing learning and developing critical thinking...[and] can help most students become more active and engaged learners...It focuses on the process rather than the product of thinking" (118). Students were not merely listening to a lecture, asking and answering questions, rather they were analyzing the material and making it their own. They revealed insights and learning not always demonstrated in formal writing assignments with stricter or more rigid guidelines and parameters. The low-stakes in-class writing turned out to be the most exciting part of the course.

Low-stakes writing also has tremendous value as a way to improve the graded high-stakes formal writing assignments that make up the majority of the final course grade. Many low-stakes assignments can be geared directly to the high-stakes assignments to help students focus their thinking, analyze the material, and organize their ideas.

We had several useful discussions on the writing process as it related to high-stakes assignments. Students were surprised to learn that professors procrastinate, write numerous drafts, get critically evaluated (not always constructively!) by reviewers and editors, and get their work rejected. The students welcomed this information and the advice to "get comfortable" with their own process. The message was that all those behaviors are OK, as long as you finally get down to business. We talked about how to research

information and conduct a search for credible web-based sources; we also discussed the importance of proofreading. Students proofread one of their formal papers in class and made corrections prior to handing them in. They appreciated this proofreading because they caught their mistakes and had a chance to improve. One characteristic of writing intensive courses is that the students have the chance to submit drafts of their formal papers for suggestions from the professor. This made me realize how unfair it is to expect students to produce a high-quality paper that requires no revisions on the first submission. Students were eager for the feedback, an example of what one student called a "second chance at learning."

Students' Low-Stakes Writing

To illustrate how low-stakes writing was used, I will describe three approaches, accompanied by samples of the students' work and an explanation of how the writings reflected and reinforced the course content. The approaches include letters on writing, freewriting, and semi-structured journal entries.

Letters on Writing

During the first week of class, I had students write a letter about their experience with writing. I was surprised at how much experience many of them had. They wrote letters, poetry, and song lyrics; some kept journals; and one had attended a writing intensive high school. Nonetheless, they wrote that they froze up when they knew their writing was high stakes—that it was going to be evaluated, judged, and given a grade.

Freewriting

For our third class session, the topic was leisure in pre-colonial and colonial America. Having discussed in the first two sessions the meaning of leisure, its relationship to identity, and how culture influences leisure pursuits, we read in this third session two Native American poems, a poem by the Puritan writer Anne Bradstreet, three journal entries of Massachusetts Bay colonists, and several slave songs. We compared the writing forms, use of language, meanings conveyed, and imagery. At the end of class I asked students to free-write in response to the question, "What did you learn from the lecture?"

One student revealed how deeply moved she was by the slave songs. She mis-dates the songs, but captures the nobility and essence of their achievement.

> I learned today something I never knew about, a song written in the late 1600s helped the people of that time, who were slaves, to freedom. I never thought that there was a possibility that instructions can be made into a song. How thoughtfully heroic and brilliant that idea was, especially for a black slave with no education.

Another student not only expanded his knowledge of the historical periods, but also perceived the connections among them. This student demonstrated keen insight and analytic ability, thinking deeply throughout the semester about the topics we covered. His strong sense of social justice pervades his comments.

> Today our discussion opened with an examination of the early New Englanders and their thoughts and approaches to leisure or fun. I found it rather odd because I felt there was no room in the Puritan way of life for anything but devotion to religion. So it was a bit of a disconnect to find they indulged in, "ungodly" fun activities.
>
> In the discussion about native nations I ponder whether when even to this day we employ some of their recreational pursuits; how did long after their subjugation did they continue practicing and enjoying them. In fact the example reading in class was a longing for things taken away. The concept of play as a threat to society's order was confusing until we discussed the slave songs and their hidden meanings.

Based on his first paragraph, I could appreciate that this student was surprised to learn that the Puritans did value recreational activities, because the legacy of the Puritan work ethic in American society usually omits that play is the reward for work. In his second paragraph he interprets the Native American readings in a way I had not considered, thereby adding to my own understanding of them. His comment on the slave songs' embedded directions for escape routes demonstrates his pondering of how society uses play as a social control or a subtle act of rebellion. Without this freewriting activity, I would have missed these insights.

Semi-Structured Journal Entry

About midway through the semester, we devoted a full class to the subject of women and leisure, comparing the play activities of boys and girls using examples from a variety of cultures and examining how women's opportunities had changed throughout the 20th century, particularly in the areas of sports, outdoor recreation, and family-oriented responsibilities. We discussed how women with children often find their leisure is centered on activities they do with the family, whereas men typically find time for themselves or with other men. Women's leisure traditionally often combines a recreation activity with a household chore, such as playing a game with the children while doing the laundry or cooking a meal. I also explained the concept of a "minute vacation": one minute when a person can stop whatever he or she is doing and just sit, relax, daydream, doze, or, as in the case of the first student whose writing is reproduced below, think of all that has to be done. Minute vacations are cited as examples of women's leisure. I had the class take such a minute vacation before the writing exercise.

I used a semi-structured journal entry, which provides students with a degree of guidance on what to write on a given topic, so students could go further in their thinking than just summarizing what we had discussed or answering specific informational questions. The instructions for the journal entry suggested that the students reflect on what was discussed in light of their own experiences. After our discussion on women and leisure, students were asked to answer the question, "How does your own experience relate to today's class?" This simple directive was designed to help them to solidify their understanding of the content of the lecture.

The following examples from female students reveal the many roles women fill in today's society, roles that leave them little free time for personal leisure pursuits. Whether single or married, the women felt they had myriad responsibilities. Many of our students work, have children, go to school, and attend to the needs of relatives. One wrote:

> Speaking today about a woman with many identities having less leisure time was something I can identify with. Sometimes I feel I don't have any leisure time, during our minute vacation, I thought about stopping at the bank, getting a money order and went over my grocery list while trying to figure out, how much I can get done before I get my daughters. I think most of the

> leisure activities in my life revolve around my children. I have very few leisure interactions with friends or alone, that is because of all my roles, out of all the roles named, the only one that did not describe me is a wife! Just reading that off the board made me tired and long for a vacation.

In this journal entry, the student referred to her minute vacation, along with the class discussion and the notes on the blackboard, to reflect on her many responsibilities. Despite the number of chores she had to accomplish after class, she was engaged in the day's lesson. A bright but often quiet student, her writing let me know that she was paying attention and relating to the material.

Taking another approach, some students reflected on their own upbringing, revealing poignant memories. The next student rarely spoke up in class, yet her writing revealed depths of feeling that would never have been exposed without a low-stakes writing assignment.

> As per what we discussed in class today regarding women & leisure in my personal experience I can say that gender does play a major roles. When I was growing up it was my brother and sister my sister and I were kept at home until we did all the house cleaning however with my brother he did nothing and was able to go outside and get away with things. However my sister and I didn't. We were stuck. If for any reason I did not finish my cleaning was punishing by not allowing me out of my house.

When I read these journal entries, I knew that the students were learning and internalizing the course content. Lehman women students are prime examples of the women-and-leisure phenomenon, as revealed in their low-stakes writing that day. Their writings also allowed them to express their interests, personalities, sense of humor, and spirit of fun and playfulness. Not only were they getting that "second chance at learning," but they were also experiencing writing as leisure.

Conclusions, Observations, and Reflections

My conclusion from this class experience is that low-stakes writing is an indispensable part of teaching. Without it I would not have gotten to know these students as well as I did when they revealed their ideas, thoughts, feelings, abilities, and needs. I might have misjudged them by not recognizing that they were learning. We talk in higher education about diverse learning styles, uneven academic preparation, and the need to provide a variety of evaluation methods. Low-stakes work addresses some of these concerns. It validates the students' contribution. It provides, as one student described it, "a second chance at learning," a chance to revisit the readings, lectures, and assignments without fear. But it also gave *me* a second chance: to have a parallel, informal dialogue with the students and a more personal opportunity to interact with them about the course content and about their thinking and writing. I found that this dialogue was the best part. I loved reading their uncensored, spontaneously expressed ideas and reactions.

Did their writing skills improve? Lowering the stakes allowed them to write freely and expressively. The students reported feeling more comfortable with writing, saying that they learned helpful techniques and how to organize their thoughts more quickly. I observed them becoming more at ease with writing and encouraged them to transfer this fluency to their more formal writing assignments. I often notice students during a test sitting and thinking for what seems like a long time. I came to realize how much time it actually may take them to think out what they want to write. I hope some of my students overcame some of this hesitation as they developed the habit of regular writing.

There was a broad spectrum of writing ability in the class. I'm not sure that the weakest writers made as much progress on the mechanics of writing as they needed. Of course, some students were more skilled in the higher-level executive functions, some students wrote much more than others, and some would make greater effort in anything they did. In the letter they wrote at the end of the semester, every single student described how they liked the low-stakes writing and they could see the benefits to having it in other courses. Looking over the course goals, I concluded that the course was successful in having the students learn about leisure.

Goal 1. *Acquire an in-depth understanding of the meanings of leisure and its relationship to the American experience from historical, sociological, and cultural perspectives.* I can safely say the students learned more about leisure

than they ever dreamed existed. They realized that a full understanding of leisure and of its role in society and in their own lives included an awareness of the impact of historical events, social change, political trends, and economic and cultural factors on people's leisure participation, and vice versa. Students who had recently arrived from other countries wrote that they had learned about the United States and its customs. They said that they enjoyed sharing their perceptions and experiences. One student wrote of being jealous when other students described what they did for their leisure and of resolving to set aside more time for recreation.

Goal 2. *Appreciate how the humanities have interpreted leisure experience*. This appreciation occurred through our readings of poems, songs, and journal entries and our viewing of reproductions of art works. For their major papers, students found fascinating examples of how leisure activities were depicted in the arts. These included works by artists who focused on a single theme, such as paintings of basketball and skiing; a quilt with coffee cups to illustrate the coffee break as a leisure experience; poems and songs about travel; and short stories about cooking and picnics. The arts can be incorporated in any type of course to stimulate students' interest in a topic. This technique allows a subject to be studied from another dimension, yielding added insights. It also gives students who have had less exposure to the arts an appreciation and understanding of the range and relevance of various art forms.

Goal 3. *Explore how one's own identity is expressed through leisure behavior*. We began the semester with a discussion of identity, culture, and cultural heritage. As the students explored their backgrounds and current behaviors, they thought deeply about the connection between their actions and their identity. We examined how the leisure choices we make are important expressions of our identity and reflect our values. Students also wrote about their plans to make changes in their leisure activities based on their greater understanding of the meaning of leisure in their lives. Many of them were able to redefine leisure, moving from perceiving leisure as requiring a large quantity of time to understanding it as a quality of experience. This understanding can be of great value to Lehman students, who speak of a lack of time for themselves and their own interests.

Goal 4. *Use writing as a means to examine leisure and identity*. When William Faulkner wrote, "I never know what I think about something until I read what I've written on it," he aptly represented the value of writing as a way to explore one's own thinking, attitudes, and beliefs. For their final writing, I

asked students to what extent they felt they possessed aspects of the American character as we had studied it. Reflecting on this question allowed them to define and articulate their sense of who they are. Writing became a voyage of self-discovery, of discovering what they knew as well as what they didn't know and subsequently became more curious about. Observing them writing and then reading what they had written was my window into their joy of learning about themselves, making connections between ideas and experiences, and their pleasure in their own growth and development.

Goal 5. *Experiment with various types of writing as forms of leisure behavior*. Students wrote letters, reviews, dialogues, and essays. In the future, I would like to have them write poems, songs, and stories as well. Low-stakes writing itself became a leisure experience in the classroom. Many students indicated that they enjoyed writing more than they had at the beginning of the semester and would definitely continue writing for themselves, thereby increasing their range of leisure choices. The writing gave many of them relief as they expressed their thoughts, concerns, and frustrations. They also showed pride in what they accomplished.

As a result of my experience teaching this course, I now incorporate low-stakes writing in all my classes. Teaching Americans at Play online, I set up small groups of students. They posted their low-stakes writings in their online group site. The freewriting, semi-structured journal entries, and other low-stakes writings translated well to the online format; the interaction has the added benefit of increasing communication among the students, creating an additional support system of teaching and learning. In another course, students wrote a reflective journal entry weekly during the last ten minutes of class (Kunstler 2007). Once again I observed them writing with increased ease. The shared experience of writing in class was beneficial to the atmosphere in the classroom. Some also wrote me questions that they wouldn't bring up in front of their classmates. I was moved by their insights and their trust, which created and strengthened the bond between us.

Low-stakes writing also can be played for higher stakes. In a graduate course in leisure philosophy, I required students to keep a reaction journal to weekly readings. They wrote a summary of each reading in their own words and added their reaction to the reading. I encouraged the students to include a particularly meaningful quote from the reading, relate it to their own experience, and consider in what ways they witnessed the ideas in the reading "in action." In addition, I asked students to discuss how the ideas in the reading related to other readings, what practical implications of the

reading they saw to their professional work, and how this information might affect their everyday lives. I believe this assignment led them to read much more carefully and to reflect more deeply on the material in the course. The depth of their learning was revealed to me not only in their high-stakes work that semester, but subsequently on their graduate comprehensive examination.

I also decided to apply the lessons I learned from using low-stakes writing in Americans at Play to a very different type of course. The required research methods course for majors in Health Sciences presents a challenge every time I teach it. Students are required to complete a research proposal in one semester, a process that is as difficult for me as it is for them. To incorporate low-stakes writing, first I analyzed what I value in students' work by reviewing the previous class's research proposals. My comments on their papers showed me that I valued their ability to make connections among ideas, experiences, and readings; to see the personal relevance the assignment has for them; and to go beyond what is expected. To assist students in displaying these qualities, I used freewriting and semi-structured journal entries at the end of each class period. I had students write up their own strengths and weaknesses and submit drafts of their proposals; I also gave them weekly homework to answer the questions at the end of each chapter in the text. These approaches helped the students gain a better understanding of the research proposal assignment, read research articles with greater comprehension, write more comfortably and convey their ideas with more clarity, and feel more confident about reading and applying research findings (Kunstler 2008).

In the academic environment, writing intensive courses that use a variety of low-and high-stakes writing activities and assignments are sometimes viewed as labor-intensive efforts to improve students' writing skills and critical thinking. But my experience has taught me that the power of the writing intensive course, for students and faculty alike, is that students experience the joy of writing without judgment and the unleashing of creativity. They gain greater self-understanding and academic engagement, as well as newfound identities as "writers."

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ACTIVE LEARNING IN THE SCIENCES: WAC AND A FOOD NUTRITION COURSE

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Introduction

Nutrition and Health is a course in the Department of Health Sciences at Lehman College, The City University of New York; it is a prerequisite for many later courses in the department. This course is an introduction to the study of human nutrition, which examines how the food we eat affects our health and well-being. Approximately 28 students were enrolled during the semester I used for this case study connected to WAC. The goal in this course was to teach not only the subject matter of Nutrition and Health, but also to promote an appreciation of what science is and to foster an ability to see it at work in our lives.

When I participated in the Writing Across the Curriculum program at Lehman College after several years of teaching within a traditional classroom-teaching format, I began to realize that the instructors were doing most of the work, while students were attending class as passive observers or listeners. Even though this approach helped some students learn the material, most of them were just sitting in the class, lost because they did not have enough preparation. Every college course requires preparation, but advanced science classes often assume quantitative literacy that students don't have. I needed a way to access what skills students already came into the class with, and to build up what they were lacking, while teaching the material of this important departmental requirement.

I believe that as students become information gatherers, critical thinkers, and classroom participants, they learn the subject at-hand better. After a few weeks in the WAC program, I realized that in order to achieve the goal of "active learner" for students, I had to give up my role as performer and to serve more as coach or facilitator of the class. Therefore, for this case study, I decided to move to a more discussion-centered approach. I used some lectures, but mostly I tried to bring in class discussion, multimedia presentations, written assignments and reports, in-class writing, and group

activities as methods of instruction. Student learning was assessed via quizzes, exams, and a variety of assignments. Ultimately, my goal was to bring science education more directly into the daily lives of students, while covering the same important factual information as I always had.

An Invitation to Participate: Letters, In-Class Writing, Food Diaries

I started my class by handing out a letter intending to welcome students to the course and to the material we would tackle together. I tried to explain the topics of the course by referring to questions they had about their own body. In my letter, I invited them to my course as they are, including all of the knowledge and enthusiasm they already possessed, all of their unanswered questions and misconceptions, and all the habits and preferences that have always dictated what they eat. But I proposed that they leave as a different person from the one that came into the classroom. And I suggested that they take with them a more complex understanding of nutrition science.

This idea—that students take with them a better sense of how to feed themselves in ways that not only please them and soothe their spirit, but that nourish their body as well—guided discussions and writing assignments, and helped contextualize the focus on data collection and quantitative literacy. I tried to explain to them that the food they choose has cumulative effects on their bodies. Some of the food they eat today becomes part of "them" tomorrow. If they are like most people, when they eat they sometimes wonder, "is this food good for me?" or they tell themselves, "I probably shouldn't be eating this." At the end of the first class I also asked students to write me a brief letter about what they would like to learn in this course and what they were expecting to learn. This feedback from the students gave me a better ability to plan my course material.

In fact, the feedback changed my approach to teaching. In my professional life I always had very good comments from my students. However, interacting with the students in an ongoing dialogue about their lives and their knowledge of science helped me rethink what I was teaching. Being a "good teacher" in this new context meant that I was letting the students think of the material before, during, and, hopefully, long after the course was over. I believe that in professional education, it is insufficient to learn for the sake of knowledge and understanding alone; one learns in order to engage in practice. In today's multicultural, global, and technological society, preparing

competent health professionals for effective leadership and service roles by providing quality higher education through coursework and clinical experiences is very important.

I learned from receiving letters from students throughout the term, and from working closely with my writing fellow, Rebio Díaz, a CUNY graduate student in Environmental Psychology, to create writing assignments that promote student participation in class and in their future professional lives.

In-class writing was one approach to making the material real for the students. Specifically, the use of "exit slips"—writing at the end of the class about the lecture or about particular data—allowed us to structure the next class lesson around some of the students' needs. These exit slips are also what I used for taking attendance, so students knew that they had to hand them in at the end of each class. On occasion I have also asked them to ask questions about the topic I lectured on that day to help them develop their critical thinking skills and to promote understanding of course material. I chose the questions for the exit slips, but sometimes asked for their suggestions of what would be a good question for the day's class. In general, I noticed that the use of in-class writing at the end of each class motivated them to be more focused throughout the lecture and take better notes. It also improved the attendance. I also realized that using in-class writing enhanced the learning more permanently and helps students develop their ability to apply the acquired knowledge and critically assess information about food and eating practices.

Written assignments became my way to explore material that I could not cover in the class. Most weeks students were asked to write their reflection and understanding of various controversies pertaining to the field of nutrition, discussed in the textbook. They were also encouraged to find a title for their reflections and to include their personal view of the controversies. These two-page written assignments were turned in on designated dates.

I noticed that after writing their reflections, students were better able to discuss the material in the class and I believe this process strengthened each student's learning. Throughout the semester students were required to submit five two-page essays where they discussed key controversies in the field of nutrition. These controversies were discussed in the textbook and the students were asked to present and briefly discuss the information they read. They were also encouraged to incorporate their own views and experiences in light of the information discussed in the book. Some students appeared to

be doing only the minimum for this assignment, but some became very involved with particular topics that resonated with their own experiences, and did a good job of writing about the controversies. For future semesters, I've considered the possibility of requiring fewer controversies (two instead of five) and asking students to prepare these more carefully. Also topics would be chosen in consultation with me so that students could work out different controversies in their subjects. Perhaps a brief presentation to the group will be incorporated. Controversies can be assigned at the beginning of the semester and can be arranged as scaffolding assignments of at least two drafts and one final version. This would allow the writing to be better integrated into the class activities.

The final written assignment required students to record their detailed dietary intake for two days, analyze it for its composition, and then compare their intakes with Daily Recommended Intake (DRI). They then wrote a report about their dietary intakes. For this assignment students were encouraged to draw all of the knowledge and understanding developed throughout the course. This was due at the end of the semester. Like with the frequent two-page essays, I realized that it would be more effective if the due date were given in the middle of the semester. This would enable me to give feedback and allow time for the students to make revisions.

At the end of the semester, I asked students to write another letter sharing their general experience in this class. I asked, "What aspects of the course were most useful?" "Did you feel it prepared you for future work in your profession?" "In what way?" I asked students to refer to class content, format, and the activities and to name aspects of the course that could be improved. I explained to them that their feedback would help me in planning and organizing next year's class.

Final Reflections

I am now more engaged in using writing to connect to the quantitative literacy required in Nutrition courses. Since this course, I try to create an active and interesting learning environment centered on combining curriculum material with a real world context. I foster a teaching environment that encourages innovative, multidisciplinary thinking by teaching with a variety of activities and opportunities. These activities include discussions, short essays, field exercises, problem-solving exercises, and term projects. I am particularly fond of getting students out of the classroom to explore natural wonders for themselves. To supplement in-class

exercises, I make use of web pages to provide resources outside of class and for critical thinking exercises or discussions forums. This promotes active learning, digital literacy, and invites those students who are less likely to speak up in class to become involved in the exchange of ideas.

In my teaching now, I incorporate current real-world issues into the subject matter to ground these exercises into the student's life. To capture student attention, I occasionally take risks by approaching potentially volatile topics. For example, a main theme of an introductory Nutrition and Health Education class is developing a definition for a living being. I may challenge students to apply this definition to the issue of malnutrition or overpopulation or poverty either through essays or discussion in class or on the web. I feel that these types of activities not only maintain student interest, but also enhance their ability to clearly express thoughts both orally and on paper.

A characteristic of all successful students is skill in learning how to gather knowledge on their own. I have come to the opinion that engaging students with a variety of writing assignments helps them meet this challenge. I believe that all real learning starts with a question. Students should be challenged to ask thoughtful questions, and design and perform experiments to resolve them.

STEPS AND CAVES: TEACHING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AS A WRITING COURSE

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Social Work at Lehman College

The Lehman College Department of Social Work seeks to educate students who, as graduates, will be effective in working with the range of populations, problems, and agencies that a large urban environment provides. Accredited by the Council on Social Work Education since 1984, it is one of the largest programs in the country, with over 300 majors and over 125 students on internship each academic year.

The program reflects the diversity of urban life in the 21st century. Many of Lehman's social work students born in the United States, for example, are first-generation citizens whose families continue to converse primarily in the language or English dialect of their original country—including countries such as Russia, the Netherlands, Ethiopia, Mexico, Surinam, and Vietnam. While at least 50% of the students could be classified as English language learners, they are being educated to work in agencies that are dependent on government funding and are required to document their work in written English.

Writing clearly and substantively is not only a challenge for students who are English language learners; indeed *all* students in our program must learn to write in the *language of social work*. This language sometimes requires full description and sometimes brief summaries; it requires sure distinctions among observation, inference, and conclusion. The writing is often done in a hurry with little opportunity for re-writing. The challenges of learning this new form of written discourse can prove daunting: even students who are comfortable in written English expression can be frustrated by the demands of learning to write for a professional audience of supervisors, peers, and auditors.

The process of learning how to write in a new language—literally for some, figuratively for all—is challenging on a practical level as well. This process

requires time, and time is one commodity in short supply for students in the program. Lehman College is an urban commuter school. Though public transportation is unusually well developed in New York City, the journeys to and from the campus can be long and tiring. Almost all of the students are above the age of 30 (that's two-thirds of the program) and many of the younger students are fully employed and raising families; some are also substantially responsible for the welfare of extended family members. Many are dealing with complicated issues of inner-city life and coping with limited access to resources, such as library time and reliable childcare, needed for successful college performance.

Yet the imperative to help students improve their written English is clear. Social workers provide services to clients and communities; they are fulfilling a social mandate often expressed by laws that require detailed documentation. They have an ethical commitment to "draw on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems" (NASW, 1999). These skills include written communication for successful work as advocates, mediators, and case managers.

My Pedagogical Concerns

My interest in learning about teaching a writing intensive social-work course began here: I was clear about the importance of helping social work students improve their writing. Many students are inadequately prepared for the level and amount of writing their profession requires. As capable writers, they would be more effective in their agencies; the clients and communities they serve would receive more professional help. But I was not at all clear about how to improve the writing of the students; or, more accurately, about what I had been doing that wasn't working. What I was doing was giving a lot of writing assignments, but they were all "high stakes" with no opportunity for revision. I spent considerable time providing line-by-line corrections of papers but had not considered: were these comments part of an ongoing teacher-student dialogue or simply the last-minute thoughts of a frustrated teacher that could be read and heeded, or not read and discarded, as the student chose? It seemed to me that most students chose the latter.

Completing the introductory Writing Across the Curriculum workshop clarified for me that other options existed. I was especially concerned with finding a balance between my desire to reduce students' surface errors and my commitment to engage students more thoughtfully with the content of the course.

My work in WAC focused on rethinking my assignments for Social Work Practice II, a course taken by all social work majors just before their internships. I chose that course for several reasons. The class was already capped at 25 students, the outer limit for writing intensive sections. I had taught almost all of the students in Social Work Practice in the previous semester; thus the students and I knew each other and had already completed a lot of good, hard work together, including some writing assignments that I learned were called "low-stakes" in WAC parlance.

Having taught the course many times, I had a good sense of where I wanted the students to be at the end and what would happen along the way. However, my experiences with the final, formal writing assignments were very unsatisfying. Not only was I concerned about students' command of fundamental writing skills, but more importantly the papers had revealed considerable difficulty with applying concepts to case material. Understanding clients through theoretical constructs is a critical piece of being a social worker. I needed to change the way I taught to help my students become effective practitioners.

The term paper for this course, the Biopsychosocial Assessment, is meant to highlight and encapsulate many of the critical concepts taught in the course as well as to prepare students to do real-life assessments in their internships and later employment. In completing the work, the student strives to provide an objective depiction of the client's present circumstances in a formal and organized way. The key elements—objectivity, formality, adherence to an organized scheme of presenting information—were not necessarily emphasized in other writing assignments in the social work curriculum up to that point. Often, social work classes emphasize more exploratory writing.

In previous years, I had students watch a film together in class and write the Biopsychosocial Assessment as if the protagonist of the film were their client. The papers were usually due by the last, pre-final-examination class. In this format, students typically struggled with too many simultaneous educational objectives: learning how to use the outline, empathizing with the client, imagining how they could help the client, struggling with their own questions of professional self-awareness. How to draft the paper became the last, and least attended, chore. I would race to complete the semester with little reflection about how the assignment would connect with the students' need to improve their written communication in English. My work in designing a writing intensive version of Social Work Practice II would need to take into account new methods to help students with this paper.

Visualizing, Rethinking, Coming Up with a Plan

At a WAC seminar at the end of the fall semester, participating faculty were asked to visualize in a map or chart what our spring courses would look like. This was a simple request for many but not for me: I think concretely, in steps, and shy from requests that I find beyond my element. So I explained the goal of my course to my writing fellow, Agnieszka (Aga) Kajrukszto: at the beginning of the semester, the students think they know how to provide professional help but are unaware of the process; at the end of the semester, they are prepared to meet real, live clients in a supervised internship. The journey from "not knowing" to "being prepared" follows the units of the syllabus. For the WAC exercise, Aga and I visualized these units as "steps," each of which would be supported by a low-stakes writing assignment. Climbing the steps, the student nears a high platform—the Biopsychosocial Assessment. It then seemed clear to us that the earlier low-stakes steps would in some way be connected to the Assessment; they would provide the scaffolding for this high-stakes assignment.

But, I added, the steps looked too orderly and purposeful; we needed room for detours, the unexpected. We needed time to pull back, to reassess, and, above all, to reflect on one's own self, as is typical in social work practice itself. Some writing exercises therefore would not proceed toward the assessment but would help students grow in self-awareness. We visualized caves for this work.

The metaphor of steps and caves would guide my understanding of how I would use writing differently in this course. I, too, began in a cave, examining my teaching, before I took steps to change. Below I will detail the process used to change the nature of the course, giving examples of students' work and providing some evaluation of this effort.

The Steps and Caves of Social Work Practice II

I believe that the process of teaching should be as transparent as possible. On the first day of class, I was very explicit in explaining to students that the writing intensive nature of the course was new to me, that there likely would be changes in my teaching as the semester unfolded, and that I would be open to their feedback throughout the course. Though I had taught these students in the previous semester, we were embarking on something new together. I had introduced Aga to the class during the previous semester, and she explained her role to the students in the first class of the spring semester.

While the students seemed accepting of the terms of the course and comfortable with the role of the writing fellow, in truth they knew as little as I did how the semester would unfold; we were setting off on a journey where no one was quite sure what was going to occur except that they would do a lot of writing and I would do a lot of re-thinking. We were trusting each other. The outline of Social Work Practice II, with the "step" and "cave" writing assignments, is shown in Figure 1.

Unit I: The Work Begins in Caves

At the end of the first class, Aga distributed a request that students write a letter "in which you tell me a little bit about your experiences as a writer, both academic and non-academic." This assignment provided the students the opportunity to explore themselves using the first person—it was a cave assignment. As would be the case with most first-person writing assignments this semester, students responded with writing that, even with occasional (or more frequent) surface errors, was clear, vivid, and often quite powerful. Here are three representative excerpts from this first assignment; together they demonstrate what might seem to be a surprisingly high level of student self-awareness about their own writing.

A mother in her early 20s, Guadalupe was born in Central America but had graduated from high school and community college in New York City. She wrote:

> Writing an essay or responding to a reading could be easy or hard. Sometimes I cannot write well and that is why I hate writing. My first language is Spanish. I remember when I used to write in Spanish I was good at it, but coming to this country having to learn to speak English was bad, because language is a very powerful element. It is the most common method of communication, yet it is often misunderstood and misinterpreted, for language is a very complicated mechanism with a great deal of nuance... I hate writing I only do it because I have to now, with this writing assignment, my brain feels like a rusty old engine.

Figure 1. Outline of Writing-Intensive Social Work Practice II Course

Units of Study	Steps	Caves
Unit I: Introduction		• Share your experiences with writing intensive courses. • What did I learn last semester that surprised me the most?
Unit II: Communication Skills	• Based on class lecture, critique a sample social work interview	
Unit III: The Problem Solving Process	• Based on class lecture, summarize your understanding	
Unit IV: The Initial Phase of Helping	• Summarize assigned reading about "beginning with a client." • Letter from movie character "Jake" (requires empathy with the client) • Draft of Sections I and III of Assessment	• Letter to "Jake" (expressing student's personal feelings about his behavior)
Unit V: The Middle Phase	• Drafts of Sections IV and V	
Unit VI: Alternative Interventions	• Take-home assignment: Drafts of Section VI & VII	• Your thoughts and feelings about the movie in any form you choose: dialogue, essay, poem, etc.
Unit VII: The Ending Phase	• Take-home assignment: Biopsychosocial Assessment (opportunity to revise if submitted promptly)	
Unit VIII: Transition from Student to Intern		• Identifying your fears of "burn-out." • Candid self-evaluation of readiness for internship • Student feedback: what worked and what didn't work in this class

Jennifer, the youngest student in the class, is of Spanish-speaking heritage. She had already completed several writing intensive courses.

> …I also write daily in a journal. I have always expressed myself on paper and that is the reason that I always keep a journal. I write in my journal about four times a week. I believe that this helps me with my spelling and grammar, although I tend to free-write. I write in my journal when I am in pain and when I am going through joyous times. I especially like writing when I am upset because I write much more…

And finally, Joseph. In his 50s, Joseph had struggled considerably in his life in experiences that took a toll on his cognitive abilities. He would have the most difficulty with writing during the semester.

> …I will get right to the point because I do not like to write and never have… I don't like to write because I find myself thinking much faster that I can write and so often I leave out words… [Concerning rewriting:] If anything such encounters increase my anxiety, and sometime I want to just give up and not write anything…

In a separate assignment, I asked students to recall something that surprised them from the first semester. This afforded me an opportunity to assess what they remembered and, more importantly, gave them a way to explore what the new learning meant to them.

Units II & III: Preliminary Steps Leading to the Main Work

The material in Units II and III was covered briskly through class lectures, role-plays in which one student would act as social worker and another as client, and small-group discussions. We revisited this material in the ensuing weeks as it provided the supporting frame of reference for the Biopsychosocial Assessment. As a result, the in-class writing consisted of "step" writing, allowing me to gauge, through these low-stakes assignments, how well students were grasping the material in preparation for the major assignment.

Unit IV: Steps and Caves: The Work Begins in Earnest

The basis for the Biopsychosocial Assessment was the protagonist of the New Zealand film *Once Were Warriors* (Scholes & Tamahari 1995). In the film Beth Heke is a contemporary urban Maori wife and mother who endures considerable stress and violence, including at the hands of her husband and his friends, before she is able to reassert control over her family and her own life. The movie provides an intense, "in-your-face" depiction of alcoholism, poverty, gangs, domestic violence, and rape. As I've discussed elsewhere (Holody 1998), though the film depicts these issues through a cultural lens not likely to be encountered by students at Lehman, the presentation is vivid and disturbing enough to require that the teacher attend to students' feelings.

In my prior teaching of this course, I had shown the film in its entirety in one class. This approach was unsatisfactory not only because inevitably some students were absent, but more because students needed to process the intensity of the dynamics and violence of the film before they could analyze it. In other words, we had to go into caves before taking steps.

I decided to show the film in two parts, alerting students well in advance of the dates. In the first 45 minutes of the film, the behavior of Jake Heke, Beth's husband and the father of her children, is particularly repellent. Aga and I devised two assignments. In the first, students wrote a letter in class to Jake, expressing their personal feelings. Because students were encouraged to be as frank as they wished, this was a cave assignment. But then I asked the students to imagine that they were Jake: How would he respond to their letter? What would he write back? Even though students wrote from the perspective of the character, we saw this as a step assignment, because empathizing with clients, regardless of their behavior, is critical to being an effective social worker.

The Biopsychosocial Assessment outline, based on the problem-solving work of Compton, Galaway, & Cournoyer (2005), contains seven sections:

1. Identifying information
2. Referral source
3. Client's presenting problem/want/need; client's initial expectation of agency
4. History of the problem/want/need
5. Other significant data: developmental/health history, relationships, employment history, hobbies

6. Biopsychosocial assessment: Current functioning, external factors, hope/discomfort/opportunity
7. Agreed-upon goals and plan

With the exception of Section 2, for which I provided some boilerplate for everyone to use, students wrote drafts, either in class or as an ungraded take-home assignment, of every section of the assessment. This process became quite complex in part because, frankly, the format for the scaffolding occurred to me as the semester unfolded. Consequently, I needed to provide students with written handouts explaining how the assignments related to my expectations for their term papers.

At this point, the students' work on sections 1, 3, 4 and 5 was based only on the first half of the movie. Because the final paper would be based on events of the entire movie, these assignments were intended to help students learn to use the instrument rather than to have them complete a draft of those sections of the assessment. This approach was confusing for some students, who used their draft for section 1 (Identifying Information) in their final paper even though, in the second half of the movie, one character dies and there are other changes in the household.

Units V & VI: A Necessary Trip to a Cave before the Final Steps

The second half of the film contains compelling and disturbing material. I needed to give students an opportunity to explore their gut-level feelings; I encouraged them to use any format they chose. For this take-home assignment, Shana, a quiet young woman who struggled with her written work, composed this poem:

I felt your sadness, I felt your pain
I hated the way he took his hands
And treated you less than a person
As if you had no feelings,
I scorn the bruises he placed on the soul of a woman
I thought the beating and yelling were wrong
Especially after what happened a few hours before
He made "love" to you, then treated you very cold
Your children were scared and crying,
I also cried
Despite my voice was silent and my tears were dry
I wish I could help,

I wish I could help.
Woman I have sensed your son's screams to belong
But I fear the ones he trusts
Would drag him down.
Some may say it's his way to rebel
But I am paying close attention
I feel he has a story to tell.
Your daughter, I feel sad for her
My heart was crushed by her overburdened world
I am trying to see the way,

Through your family's dark and stormy days.
I wish I could help
I wish I could help.

The response of the other students to Shana's sharing of her work was electric. Her final words, "I wish I could help," were understood by many to reinforce their motivation to enter this profession.

The format for sections 4 and 7 of the assignment was covered in class through lecture and large-group discussion to prepare students to write a draft as a take-home assignment. The following week, the students reviewed their drafts in small-group discussions, which were followed by a full-class discussion to clarify remaining questions.

Unit VII: The Final Step

Students were allowed to submit revised papers for enhanced grades if they submitted the assessment by the announced due date. Every student met the first deadline. Each student received written feedback from Aga and me, and I met with each student briefly when I returned the paper. While a few students were able to receive a higher grade after making some corrections, two students needed to completely rewrite the assignment as, for whatever reason, they simply did not understand how the scaffolding assignments led to the final paper. Perhaps the students remained in a "cave" frame of mind when writing their papers, for both wrote papers that were not an objective summary of information about another person but an ongoing, dialogue-driven story. Both were able to re-write the papers satisfactorily, that is, following the prompts of the outline.

Unit VIII: Final Caves: Evaluations and Good-byes

The course was held on Saturday afternoons, scheduling that allowed for a very good celebration during our last session before the final examination. We had a potluck luncheon to celebrate and reflect on the long two semesters of hard work, especially with regard to the writing intensive nature of the spring semester. I also provided a review of material for the final examination. As her parting gift, Aga presented students with a handout that reviewed her experience as a writing fellow and included writing tips. During this class she asked students to write an evaluation of their writing experiences this semester. Students were asked these questions:

- Which was the most difficult assignment and why?
- Which was the easiest writing assignment and why?
- What has changed about your writing?

Twenty-one students were in class that day. Twelve students found the Biopsychosocial Assessment the most difficult. This finding seemed right to me: despite the earlier scaffolding, the final assignment required students to "put it all together" in one coherent paper, a very different challenge. Five students found another format not described here most difficult. Three students thought the in-class exercises were most difficult because they could not prepare their answers. One student said everything was difficult.

The cave assignments found the greatest support as the easiest: nine chose cave assignments not described here and two chose the assignments concerning feelings about Jake and Beth. Two students found the Biopsychosocial Assessment to be the easiest because of the scaffolding. One student said "nothing" was easy because "I think in Spanish and write in English."

Only one student thought nothing changed in her writing: "I'm still working on it." Six students were not sure of improvement but either received positive feedback or felt they improved but were not sure how. The other fourteen students could point to specifics in either their writing or their approach to writing, among them:

> I am able to produce shorter sentences.
> I now proofread.

I write more concisely.
I am more cautious. (Three students wrote that comment.)
I am more confident.

My Evaluation: I Return to a Cave

I must acknowledge that many in this group of students already wrote fairly well. The Social Work program requires that students have at least a 2.7 grade point average to enroll in the upper-division social work courses such as Social Work Practice II; further, some of these students already completed other writing-intensive courses, and almost all had completed my section of Social Work Practice I, which included a lot of writing, though not nearly as much as Part II.

Three or four students wrote with serious surface errors that severely affected their ability to convey meaning. In almost every instance, however, these students wrote more clearly in the in-class exercises, or in the "personal" aspects of the take-home work, than in the more abstract or conceptual works. All but one showed some marginal reduction in surface error by the end of the semester.

What seemed most significant of all was that these students seemed more engaged with the content of this course than had students in previous sections. But it was I who changed the most. I re-thought how to teach this course; the key was visualizing the steps and caves, *seeing* how the low-stakes assignments connected to the high-stakes piece and embracing the need for "cave" work. I had always known where I wanted to go with this course but now had found another avenue. This road included:

- Using low-stakes assignments with the understanding that they would connect with the term paper;
- Allowing students time to re-write the high-stakes assignment if they chose;
- Using writing exercises at the beginning of each class.

I also began to re-train myself to read student low-stakes writing for content, not surface errors, while still providing summary feedback about the latter.

Finally, I learned to identify what was most important to me about errors in student writing: spelling and complete sentences. I did not convey this perspective to the students as explicitly (i.e., in writing!) as I should have,

primarily because we neared the end of the semester before this insight was clear to me. It will become part of my work next time.

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Writing and Academic Rigor

SCAFFOLDING A FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT: MUSIC OF THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

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Finding a balance between skills and content in a course is a challenge every instructor faces at the start of the semester. This balance is particularly challenging in the music classroom where students, who are accustomed to performing music, are faced with a new vocabulary for analyzing music and must come to terms with centuries of changing aesthetics: the soprano who comes to music school because of a love of Verdi must still demonstrate mastery over the material of the centuries both before and after 19th century Italian opera. For musicians, finding words to express and explain a non-lingual art form can be a frustrating experience, yet doing so invariably focuses the ears and mind to musical detail and helps students understand aesthetic differences in a way that is more sophisticated and nuanced than mere intuition. Recognizing the importance and challenges of writing within our discipline, the Music Department at Lehman College has designated all four of its mandatory music history courses as "writing intensive." These courses offer students multiple opportunities to develop writing, thinking, and listening skills that are specific to the professional musician. In the architecture of the sequence, some courses focus on research and source evaluation, others on musical analysis, and others on listening skills and vocabulary. Some involve elements of music criticism while others introduce more "classic" argumentative musicology papers.

The Course and the Students

Music of the Classical Period (roughly 1740-1810) is a history seminar that includes studies of major musical cities (London, Paris, Vienna), genres (opera, symphony, concerto, sonata), and composers (Hayden, Mozart, Beethoven). It explores perhaps the most homogeneous period in music history in terms of musical style. This homogeneity means that student projects are likely to overlap in important ways (we all look at the same significant musical genres and the analytical language is the same) and individual projects reinforce the underlying threads of the course content: having studied a Mozart opera, say, students should confidently be able to

apply this knowledge of form and genre to a Salieri opera, and do likewise for a sonata, symphony, or string quartet. Thus course content and specific writing skills complement each other in all assignments.

My objectives for the course were numerous and included several general goals that are reinforced within the four-semester music-history cycle. In the course syllabus, I outlined a few key objectives, including:

- develop an understanding of the major social, political, religious, and artistic conditions that shaped the production of music;
- identify and become familiar with the major composers, genres, forms, and instruments of the Classical period;
- develop critical listening skills;
- develop an accurate and precise citation style following the guidelines set out by the *Chicago Manual of Style*;
- develop a vocabulary and style for writing and speaking meaningfully about Classical music;
- critically read and evaluate writings about music.

Of these course objectives, I chose to focus on the listening and writing skills more deeply than the research skills that we develop systematically in another course.

The student body in the music program at Lehman is unique in many ways, particularly for a program that focuses on “Classical” or “Art” music. Some students come to the music program well versed in the Classical tradition, having played the piano or sung for many years. Most, however, are relatively new to music as a serious academic or professional pursuit and are at the very early stages of a possible career in music. Some have extensive experience in Jazz or popular genres, but almost no experience with Classical music. Some come to Lehman directly from their high school band; others are returning to school after a career as a professional session musician, bringing long-term though narrowly defined musical experience. One of the goals of this course was to expose students to live musical events of the sort that we would be studying in class. For some students, these events would be their first live experience of Classical music—a situation that would be unthinkable at most music schools.

While Lehman music students are unusual compared with students in other Classical music programs, they are also unique in their own communities.

One student in the class articulated his “outsider” status in his project proposal, noting:

> While working with today’s youth here in the South Bronx I’ve come across a rainbow of reactions when they learn that I am a classically trained vocalist. If there ain’t gun talk, it ain’t music[;] the idea of what is musical art is limited to rhyming words and bragging rights by many male teenagers. Generally things which are foreign to these children are considered “gay” but not so much in a homosexual way but rather in a “less-than” perspective. Less-than what one may ask, less-than that which urban artist[s] uphold [as] their ideals of masculinity.

Struggling within their communities, and struggling to meet the demands of a new academic discipline to which they feel drawn, Lehman’s music students inhabit a unique social space. One of the challenges of this course, and one that necessitated a scaffolding approach, was the very fact of their diverse and non-traditional musical identities.

Building a Semester of Writing

Three short writing assignments near the beginning of the semester were intended to help students develop experience with Classical music and work on a vocabulary for writing about musical experiences in an appropriate manner. All three were short reviews, of the kind one encounters in a better music journal or magazine. To begin, students brought reviews from various media outlets such as the *New York Times* or *BBC Music Magazine* and together in class we studied the reviews, creating outlines, summarizing the main ideas, and coming to understand the scope and organization of a well-structured review. Having studied models, students were then asked to write three reviews over roughly five weeks, one review of a CD and two of live performances. The CD review allowed students the opportunity to re-hear music and to study a physical product while the concert reviews required more immediate thought and reaction, excellent note-taking skills, and swift reflection. Almost without exception, students improved over the course of the three assignments. Their writing became better focused on the music, paragraphs tended to have better cohesion, and students learned to support assertions with evidence. A good reviewer is a well-informed one, and as students learned about the music of the Classical period, they incorporated

details into their writing, describing formal elements, motives, dynamic ranges, textures, and acoustics with little of the jargon that is more appropriate for popular music.

The first three short assignments deliberately developed a vocabulary for writing about Classical music, but they also exposed students to different ideas about building a program of music and about large-scale coherence—ideas that we would develop in the term project.

Final Writing Project: Liner Notes

The final project, liner notes for a recorded collection of Classical music, was both an academic research project and a pre-professional project with real practical application. Most musicians will want to issue a recording at some point in their career. If they are fortunate to be independent artists, they will be expected to write their own notes and explain the music for their audience. Concert-goers, too, expect some written explanation, and the writing of liner notes develops the same skills as writing program notes, something almost every musician must do for a solo recital, an ensemble performance, and even school productions.

The final project was overtly scaffolded with two preparatory assignments before an outline and draft. First, students wrote a short critique of liner notes that had been selected for the assignment. A wide variety of liner notes was offered for this assignment, of which two were to be chosen for the short two-page paper. The notes were all extensive, scholarly essays that explored the music from a variety of perspectives, some more immediately musical, others social and political. All were models of the kinds of writing that I expected in the final project. Students were surprisingly critical in their writing, some out of misunderstanding of the CDs and the purpose of notes, and others justly pointing out missed opportunities for explanation. Students acknowledged that liner notes should "put up road signs to guide the aural excursionist through recorded, and sometimes unfamiliar music" and "help one understand a recording, telling one what to look for, and assisting in the creation of a deeper appreciation for the music itself." Students justly supported explanation of the works and their genesis, and pointed out lacunae:

> The liner notes for… *Ute Lemper: Berlin Cabaret Songs* were meager and unclear. The author, Peter Jelavich, assumes too much information on the reader's part; or

> much rather, he provides too little information. Nowhere in the text does he actually explain what cabaret is, and neither does he give sufficient details about the genre's major composers and performers.

Another student, clearly struggling with the scope of Classical liner notes, criticized one collection for not including detailed musical analysis—something that would never appear in liner notes but comprises the bulk of a music textbook:

> While both liner notes attempt to be as informative as possible, they are written for a more general classical fan base. The use of more colorful terms to help describe the music instead of detailed musical terms is usually a sign that something is written for a more general readership. Angela Hewitt attempts near the end of her notes to give some musical detail, I believe it falls short in explaining the compositions overall. Explanations of why the use of a major or minor mode, do they go to the dominant of the key or did they go somewhere else, what techniques are used to approach a modulation or mode change, this is information that makes liner notes thorough. Most of this is missed in Norrington's notes and just touched upon in Hewitt's.

The author of this passage has observed correctly that liner notes need to be directed at an intelligent, general audience, but avoid unnecessary musical technicalities. The student missed the opportunity to learn from this and instead criticized the liner notes for what would normally be a success—to deliver musical insight without excessive reliance on technical analysis. Interestingly, the author of this critique included no technical analysis at all in his or her own final notes project, choosing instead an extremely populist topic that avoided any and all musical details, resulting in one of the least successful final projects.

The second stage in the project was a proposal, written as a formal letter to a record company "pitching" the idea for a two-disc recorded anthology of music from the Classical era. The assignment was specific in its requirements:

> You have been asked by a major record label to construct a two-CD anthology of music from the Classical period. You are free to select any music for your anthology, but it should be unified by some common theme—city, composer, instrument, theme, ensemble, or genre for example. Write a persuasive two-page letter (minimum) to your editor outlining your proposed CD collection. Give a summary argument for making your recording available to the public. You should describe the theme of your proposed recording and give justification for it, that is, describe the original nature of your collection and the need for such a recording. (You'll have to do some research here to find out what has and has not been done). Name the pieces that you will include on your CDs and give justification for including them. Remember that CDs generally hold 60 to 70 minutes of music; the total playing time of your CDs will be 120-140 minutes.

Owing to the breadth afforded students in this project, many arrived at very personal and creative projects. Unfortunately, some proposals were not as well suited to the specific project as students might have hoped. Some students thought about cultural ideas before music, resulting in a project that might be suited for an argumentative or exploratory essay, but not for a collection of recordings. One student chose to explore gender identity:

> In this anthology I would like to present a comparative discussion of pieces which contain what is interpreted as feminine or masculine attributes and I will try to identify the specific aspects of music that inspire such characterization. Attached is a list of articles and some of the compositions which I will use as reference material because I believe it is wrong to give gender associations regarding logic and emotion so much weight that they influence our artistic values.

Most of the music this student selected was from the Romantic period, not the Classical, since most of the scholarly research in this area has been in this period. Faced with the problem of finding a musical repertoire that would fit the proposed thesis, this student chose not to pursue this topic and instead examined a relatively common genre of the period—the concerto. On the one

hand, this assignment did not offer the intellectual challenge that this student may have been seeking. However, from the proposal, it is not clear that the student was necessarily up for the challenging work that lay ahead in this topic since most of the rationale stemmed from generalizations about popular culture, not historical or documented attitudes. He or she certainly could have found music that engages with gender discourse (we discussed in class notions of "feminine" and "masculine" endings and gendered language in music analysis), but this may have been too abstract for the student to apply to a recording collection.

Another student explored a parallel topic, but by starting with a musical repertoire was able to build a collection of music that would form the basis for exploring gender in the Classical era. In the proposal, the student explained:

> The works of Anna Amalia, Corona Schröter, Maddalena Sirmen, and Maria Theresia von Paradis did not ring so much as a glockenspiel in the repertoire of orchestras across Europe. Even though women composed in virtually every Classical genre and form, the obscurity of the works lingered, and still lingers even today… Despite the availability of her works and those of other female Classical composers, only textbook anthologies and disparate collections of their music are available. Therefore a CD compilation exclusively comprised of female Classical Period composers will prove to be a profitable endeavor; profitable because it will be a rare find that will showcase artistic masterpieces.

Feedback and Support

Students received written feedback on their proposal letters in the form of a letter from a fictional panel of editors (myself and my WAC writing fellow) reviewing their proposals. Most students took these letters very seriously and applied the recommendations to their final projects. Students also received feedback on their plans from their peers. Students were asked to bring in detailed outlines of their work. In small groups, students read and discussed each other's outlines and filled out a directed comment sheet which asked pointed questions about the project:

- What are the project's goals?
- Do you have a clear understanding of the project as a whole?
- Does the author motivate or persuade you?
- Does the author use research to build a solid foundation for the project?
- Is a balance struck between large-scale historical context and specific detail about the music?
- Identify one of the draft's successes.
- Identify one place for improvement.

This was a valuable learning opportunity as several students saw ways of organizing material that they had not previously considered. It also helped many students bring their projects into focus as their peers asked pointed questions about the material. For some, seeing the way in which another student approached the project opened up possibilities and offered new models.

The assignment for the final project asked that students:

> ...write liner notes for the discs appropriate for a scholarly, musical audience. In order to write informative liner notes for the pieces you have selected, you will need to be very familiar with the music—listen carefully and often to select elements of which the listener should be aware. You should put the pieces in their historical context by including background information as appropriate for your collection… Keep in mind that liner notes must be concise, and should include enough detail to guide the listener but not confuse. This is not the place for deep harmonic analysis, but some comments about the character and organization of the piece would be appropriate… Exercise good judgment. The suggested length of 6-8 pages is just that—a suggestion. If you choose many short pieces you may need more pages to treat each piece in a few sentences.

As the semester progressed, students realized that what sounded like a straightforward assignment that drew on experience and familiar material (who hasn't read liner notes?) was, in fact, a labor- and research-intensive project. Most students had not anticipated the work required for the project

and our class discussions often turned to practical writing issues, organizational concerns, and questions of general content—how much analysis was expected? How much biography? Should the notes be a detailed list or an essay? Despite a carefully scaffolded project, questions lingered in students' minds as a reminder that nothing can replace class discussion and one-on-one counseling.

Results and Reflections

Although we always hope that, after a semester of guidance, students will absorb, integrate, and apply their learning to earn that coveted "A," reality reminds us that not all students perform at that exceptional level. Some students took care to apply their learning to later assignments, while others seemed less able to change habits. Nevertheless, a growth in individual student writing was perceivable throughout the semester. Students were better equipped to employ technical language of the discipline, writing about musical forms and genres with some authority. Most students upheld the academic rigor of the assignment, including a bibliography and footnotes as required. Less successful projects avoided musical insight or deep engagement with the music and failed to include research apparatus.

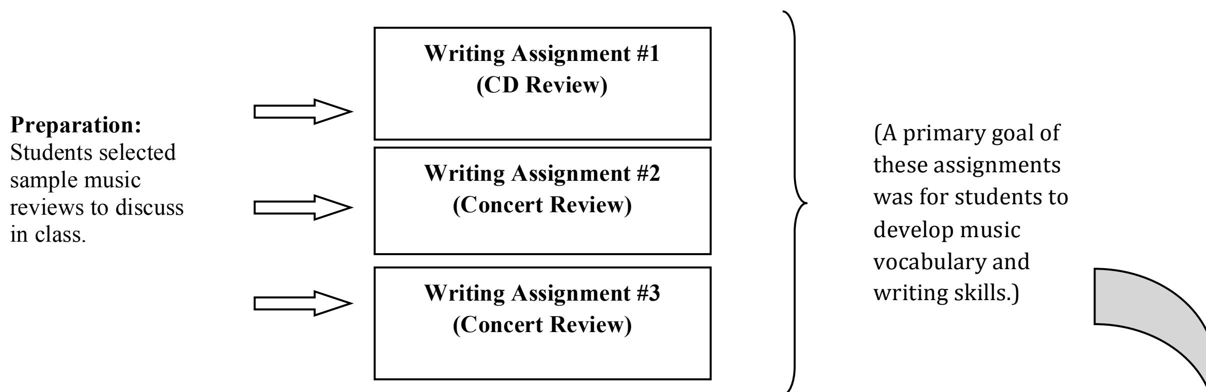
In any class, there is always a range of ability and improvement. Given the diversity of Lehman's music students, it is reasonable to expect this range to be extremely wide. The challenge, then, is to help all students meet the same high level of academic achievement, though they begin at different places. The scaffolding approach serves this goal well as students learn through stages and have the opportunity to build and develop. Multiple opportunities for learning, for failure, for success, and for feedback are vital components in this scaffolded writing project. Models, critiques, formal proposals, and repeated assignments all contribute to student mastery of content material as well as to core writing and thinking skills in the discipline.

For me, the success of this experimental semester lay not so much in what students achieved on the page, but what they had to achieve in their minds in order to get to the page. All of the assignments required careful, attentive listening and creativity, an inquisitive mind, and careful research. Part of the inspiration behind a non-traditional final research assignment came from reading semesters of uninspired term papers, most of which demonstrated that students had not actually listened to any music. This semester forced students to listen to music with ears tuned not so much to the analytical detail expected in Theory and Analysis class, but to stylistic features that

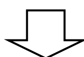
become apparent the more familiar one is with the period. At the very least, this semester exposed students to the live musical experience that lies at the heart of our discipline. Ideally, students came to recognize that music history is not a discipline concerned with a distant and unapproachable past, but one that brings further color and meaning to a rich and living musical tradition.

Appendix 1
Music of the Classical Period: Building a Semester of Writing
Janette Tilley

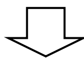
Music of the Classical Period is one of four required history seminars for music majors and is normally taken in the beginning of a student's fifth semester. The goals of this section of the course were for students to develop attentive listening skills, develop a vocabulary for writing about music, gain exposure to live Classical music in New York, and develop an appropriate tone in writing about and evaluating music.



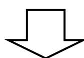
I. Critique of Liner Notes: A two-page assignment in which students selected two CD liner notes from samples posted on Blackboard. In their critiques students were instructed to comment on the scope, specific content, intended audience, clarity of prose, or anything else that they noticed about the relative success or failure of the notes to introduce the recorded material. These critiques were brought to class for a class discussion of liner notes as a genre. (5% of final grade)



II. Project Proposal: A letter to the editor of a fictional record company "pitching" a two-CD collection of music from the Classical period (roughly 1730-1820). Students were to explain the relevance of their collections and rationale for their selection of tracks in a persuasive letter. (10% of the final grade)



Outline and Draft of the Final Project: Both of these received feedback in the form of peer evaluation.



Final Project: A collection of liner notes, six to eight pages in length, for a fictional two-CD collection of music from the Classical period. (20% of the final grade)

Appendix 2
Music of the Classical Period: Anthology Assignment (Final Project)
Janette Tilley

The term project for this course is a detailed set of liner notes for a fictional 2-CD Anthology of Classical Music that you will design. The project is broken into 3 stages:

1. Critique of Liner Notes

Value: 5% Due: March 15 Length: 2 pages

Details: Attached to this assignment page are files containing several sample liner notes. Select two and write a 2-page critique of them. Your critique may compare and contrast the two selections, or you may simply consider each individually. Your critique should consider the liner notes from several perspectives, including, but not limited to, intended audience, sources and citations, musical detail, historical information, accuracy, and precision of information. Think about how effective the notes are, what kind of information is included, and what is not included. Are you left with many questions after reading the notes? Your critique should be written in complete sentences and paragraphs.

2. Project Proposal

Value: 10% Due: April 10 Length: 2 pages (minimum)

Details: You have been asked by a major record label to construct a 2-CD anthology of music from the Classical period. You are free to select any music for your anthology, but it should be unified by some common factor—city, composer, instrument, theme, ensemble, or genre for example. Write a persuasive 2-page letter (minimum) to your editor outlining your proposed CD collection. Give a summary argument for making your recording available to the public. You should describe the theme of your proposed recording and give justification for it, that is, describe the original nature of your collection and the need for such a recording. (You'll have to do some research here to find out what has and has not been done). Name the pieces that you will include on your CDs and give justification for including them. Remember that CDs generally hold 60 to 70 minutes of music; the total playing time of your CDs will be 120-140 minutes. Your proposal will be accepted (letter grades A & B), accepted with revisions (letter grade C), or rejected (letter grade D & F). Comments you receive on your proposal should be taken into account when you write your final project.

3. Final Project

Value: 15% Due: May 10 Length: 6-8 pages

Details: A major record label has accepted your CD anthology. Write liner notes for the discs appropriate for a scholarly, musical audience. In order to write informative liner notes for the pieces you have selected, you will need to be very familiar with the music—listen carefully and often to select elements of which the listener should be aware. You should put the pieces in their historical context by including background information as appropriate for your collection. For example, if you are making a collection of clarinet music, you will need to describe the Classical clarinet and its history in the period. Information about the composers should also be included. Any research you do should be included in a bibliography at the end of your notes, and if you use direct quotations, use a recognized citation style such as *Chicago* or *MLA*. If you are writing about vocal music, include texts and translations, giving credit to translators where appropriate. Texts and translations do not count toward the page total. Your notes should be typed in a legible 12-point font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Include a title page with your name and the title of your CD anthology.

USING DIALOGUE TO PROMOTE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE IN A LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE COURSE

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Context: The Course, the Students

Conceived as a writing intensive (WI) distribution course, my section of Latin American Literature in Translation was designed to provide first- and second-year students with a general introduction to literary studies and a panoramic view of Latin American short fiction of the 20th century. We covered a large selection of texts written by some of the most prominent Latin American writers of the period; I grouped the readings thematically. During the first part of the semester, we read and discussed the works of some authors who used literature to reveal their political, social and cultural concerns. In the second part of the semester students analyzed some of the best examples of so-called fantastic literature and magic realist stories. I also included some Latin American films.

Because my section of the course was listed as writing intensive, we used writing as our main thinking and learning tool. Throughout the semester, students were assigned a wide variety of written work, ranging from some short, informal pieces (low-stakes assignments) concentrated at the beginning of the semester, to more formal, longer works that were developed in different drafts and stages (high-stakes writing). The low-stakes assignments started with a bio-poem, followed by a dialogue and a fictional autobiography. The first high-stakes assignment was a more sophisticated dialogue (one draft) and a final project (two drafts). I also implemented some in-class writing to facilitate class discussion and a better understanding of the assigned readings. Even though most of these assignments proved to be quite successful, it was clear to me by the end of the course that students were more at ease confronting ideas when writing "creative" assignments, particularly dialogues. Based on my experience teaching this course, I reflect in this chapter on the value of dialogues or argumentative scripts to foster students' participation in an intellectual debate.

To understand the strengths and weaknesses of the course as I first designed it, it is essential to take into account the main characteristics of the student body. In order to familiarize myself with the backgrounds and needs of the 25 first- and second-year students that enrolled in the class, I distributed a letter together with the syllabus on the first day we met. I started the letter with a brief introduction of the course, and I asked them to write me a response letter answering several questions regarding their reading and writing habits, their linguistic background and their knowledge of the subject matter in particular and Latin America in general. I found the letters very useful, since they allowed me to know each of the students better, and gave me an idea of the challenges we would be facing during the semester.

What stood out most prominently is that most students arrived in the United States from Spanish-speaking countries as children or teenagers. Their written English presented many grammatical and formal problems, and many of them had difficulty writing coherent sentences and paragraphs. Very few had any knowledge of Latin America or its literature and history, and a vast majority confessed that they did not read or write anything that was not assigned to them in class, including the newspaper. As an exception, some were familiar with the works of Paulo Coelho, a Brazilian writer famous for his self-help books, and some kept a personal journal.

Reactions to My Writing Assignments: A Problem Emerges

These characteristics help to contextualize students' reactions to the format of the different writing assignments that they had to complete during the semester. As I mentioned before, most of those assignments proved to be a success. It did function very nicely to begin with the more creative low-stakes assignments (such as the bio-poem, the fictional autobiography or the short dialogue) to warm up the students and to encourage and reinforce their self-confidence as writers. These assignments provided an opportunity to explore the readings and films and to reflect on the social and political reality of Latin America as portrayed by the authors in their works. They allowed students to practice the particular skills required in analyzing different literary genres. Moreover, because the assignments were designed to be creative, I did not encounter any plagiarism.

While the first high-stakes assignment was also very well received, for which students produced a fictional dialogue written in two drafts to reflect on the problems of Latino immigrants in the US, their reaction to the second high-stakes assignment, the final project, was very different. To be coherent with

the narrative of the course, this assignment consisted of a five-page essay in which the students had to discuss the role of the writer in Latin American countries. As a first step, I distributed copies of various essays and interviews containing the opinions of several Latin American intellectuals on the subject. Whereas Gabriel García Márquez and Miguel Ángel Asturias explained and supported the existence of committed literature in Latin America, Mario Vargas Llosa and Jorge Luis Borges defended the right of writers to keep their political and social concerns separated from their literary production. Students were supposed to summarize and analyze these texts and to take a stand in the debate by expressing their own position, using as evidence the literary readings explored during the semester and any other reading or film that they might feel was relevant to the subject. They prepared for this paper by developing a double-entry log for each of the secondary sources to organize their thoughts and to react to the opinion of the writers in question. Then they had the opportunity of writing two drafts before turning in the final version of the assignment.

In spite of all these efforts to help them prepare for the final essay, students were seriously intimidated by the project. They found it very demanding to read academic essays and to express their own opinions on a subject that was entirely new to them. I asked in class what it was that they found most challenging about their final project. They answered that they felt unprepared to write a paper voicing and elaborating their own views on an intellectual debate because that had never been asked of them before. And when I reviewed and responded to the double-entry logs they wrote in preparation for the final project, I noticed that a significant number of students had problems selecting three quotations that were really crucial to the general argument of the essay.

Rethinking Assignments for Next Semester

These problems made me realize that it was important to re-think the course, particularly this final assignment. In the next year, I was fortunate enough to receive a grant that allowed me to participate in a special inquiry project organized by Lehman's Writing Across the Curriculum program. It was only natural that the focus of my inquiry would be the revision of the course. My main concern was how to devise a new and more successful approach to the final project. When revising the syllabus and the different assignments, I realized that part of the problem had been that the students had not been exposed to academic prose during the first half of the course. Further, I had never asked them to react to the assertions of literary critics using the short

stories to support their arguments. Therefore, I included in my new tentative syllabus a set of new low-stakes assignments, concentrated during the first part of the semester, designed to scaffold and practice the reading and writing skills required to participate in the intellectual conversation required by the final project. All of these assignments ask the students to focus on a quotation from an essay or an interview commenting on an aspect of the literary readings we are discussing in class. The students then react to the quotation in writing using their analysis of the literary work as evidence. I include as an example the instructions they would receive to reflect on the first reading:

Critical Reading Low-Stakes Assignment I

"The Solitude of Latin America"

García Márquez explained his preoccupation with what to say at the 1982 Nobel award ceremony in the following terms:

> …I must try and break through the clichés about Latin America. Superpowers and other outsiders have fought over us for centuries in ways that have nothing to do with our problems. In reality, we are all alone (78).

Simons, Marlise. "A Talk with Gabriel García Márquez." *Gabriel García Márquez: a Study of the Short Fiction*. Ed. Harley D. Oberhelman. Boston: Twayne 1991. 78-79.

Assignment:

We have read and discussed in class "The Solitude of Latin America," the Nobel Prize Lecture delivered by Gabriel García Márquez at the award ceremony on December 8, 1982. I would like you to read the text again and to write a paragraph stating if, in your opinion, García Márquez succeeded in achieving his goal as stated in the interview he granted to Marlise Simons. What clichés about Latin America does he question? What arguments does he use to prove them wrong? What Latin American problems does he think have been overlooked by other countries? To what extent does he prove that Latin Americans "are all alone"?

In addition to planning this new type of assignment, I also considered the possibility of changing the format of the final project. After all, it was not totally true that the students had never been invited to participate in an intellectual debate earlier in the course. As I mentioned before, they were assigned two fictional dialogues to discuss controversial issues during the first part of the semester. The first one was supposed to reproduce a conversation between an attorney and a defense lawyer to determine if

Juvencio Navas, the main character in Juan Rulfo's short story "Tell Them Not to Kill Me" should be condemned for his actions. The underlying question students had to address was to what extent the hardships imposed by adverse social conditions and exploitation are a valid justification for a major crime.

The second dialogue, as mentioned previously, focused on the experiences of immigration and exile. The setting was an imaginary Oprah Winfrey show to which five characters from the readings covered in class were invited to discuss their experience as immigrants in the United States. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of both assignments, I reread the samples of student work I had included in the teaching portfolio I created after teaching the class. As I remembered, with a few exceptions, most students had succeeded in creating an argumentative conversation among several characters who hold opposing views on the issue under discussion, and they had devised certain strategies to have an active presence in the debate.

From the start, students felt very comfortable with the dialogue format. First, it was less intimidating to write everyday conversational English. Additionally, the use of role-play facilitated the exploration of the different sides of the topic under discussion in a creative and more spontaneous manner. Even though students were not asked to place themselves as participants in either of the debates, they managed to be present by expressing their thoughts through the perspectives of one of the participants. For example, in the Oprah Winfrey show, most students used Oprah to voice their questions and their reactions to the ideas and comments of the five characters that had been invited to the show. I also noticed that in order to portray characters and their words in a convincing manner, students felt compelled to analyze in detail the literary readings included in the syllabus in an effort to capture the essence of the characters' personalities and to employ the course material to build their arguments.

Furthermore, they used the dynamic of the conversation to express their sympathies or antagonism towards the different characters and their worldview. This was particularly the case in the second dialogue, in which the Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman, whose autobiography had generated a very negative reaction on the part of the students, was either ignored or portrayed as self-centered and narcissistic. The aggressive responses of the other characters to his comments reflected the antagonism students had felt towards a well-to-do Latin American that had gone into exile for political reasons without enduring the hardships of poverty. In other words, by using

fictional dialogues, I had facilitated students' engagement with the course material and the ideas debated in class discussion, and I had encouraged effective participation in an intellectual debate.

Using Dialogue to Teach Academic Argument

I re-examined the copies of students' final papers from the previous semester that I had included in my teaching portfolio. It was obvious that even though some students had produced well-reasoned essays constructed around opposing ideas, thus bringing the main theme of the course narrative into a problematic focus, the majority had failed to do so. Part of the problem was the anxiety they felt when reading and writing academic English. But after going over their essays I realized that the main problem was deeper than English-language proficiency. To begin with, I noticed that most students had attempted to arrive at a conclusion before exploring and contrasting the views of Borges, Mario Vargas Llosa and Miguel Ángel Asturias. Instead of defining the problem they were supposed to address when writing the paper, the role of the writer in Latin American countries and the relationship between literature and politics, many students devoted their first paragraph to expressing their rejection of "committed literature," or *littérature engagée*. This rejection was related to their general reaction to the cluster of literary readings included in the first part of the course, a collection of short stories written to express the political and social preoccupations of their authors.

When discussing this first group of readings, most students could not reconcile themselves to the idea of mixing politics and literature. Arguing that the role of literature should be to help the reader to escape the negative side of reality, they resented the absence of happy endings. Prompted by this frustration, they started their essays with an introduction in which they firmly opposed the notion of using literature to talk about politics. That is, they opted for taking a stand in the proposed debate before dissecting the ideas of the three Latin American writers to which they were asked to respond. A section attempting to summarize the content of the assigned secondary sources typically followed the introductory paragraph. Finally, and without contrasting the arguments each author presented to defend his position or responding to those arguments, students repeated the same statements they had included in their introduction. That is, they had not engaged themselves in the intellectual discussion of the proposed topic.

I realized that I could address the problem of students' intellectual engagement by assigning a second dialogue, this time for the final project. After all, if my main goal when designing the final project had been to promote students' participation in a critical conversation about ideas, why not use a genre that had previously proven successful in attaining the same goal? It was my assumption that students would feel more confident using a more informal format that had already been used in two prior assignments. And by requiring them to role-play an exchange of ideas, the dialogue strategy would promote a change of focus from thesis to discussion. Ideally, students would not feel the necessity of asserting their rejection of committed literature from the start without taking under consideration the arguments of Borges, Mario Vargas Llosa and Miguel Angel Asturias. Instead of just summarizing the ideas of these Latin American intellectuals in consecutive paragraphs, students would have to confront their thoughts, making these writers "talk" to each other. Moreover, to facilitate their own involvement in the conversation, I would ask the students to become the fourth participant in the debate. In this manner, it would be hard to avoid the responsibility of reacting and responding to the other participants' opinions and assertions. In other words, the dialogue format would have a de-centering effect. Students would not feel compelled to arrive at their own conclusion without listening and responding to the other sides of the debate. And they would have to read the assigned essays more carefully in order to build a meaningful conversation.

These reflections led me to redesign the final assignment (See Appendix). Naturally, in order to determine the success of this innovation, I will need to teach the course again and to compare the response of the students to the new format with the essays I have kept from my previous semester. Nevertheless, based on my experience with the two dialogues I have previously discussed, it is my belief that the dialogue format will promote students' engagement in intellectual argument, while moving them a step closer to conventional academic writing.

Appendix: Revised Final Assignment
Latin American Literature in Translation
Carmen Saen-de-Casas

During this semester, we have been reading, discussing and writing about a large variety of Latin American literary texts. We have moved from the social critique of Juan Rulfo's narratives to Ariel Dorfman's reflections on exile, to Gabriel García Márquez's magical realist stories. Some of these texts have been written by authors who believe in the power of literature to transform reality by criticizing and denouncing social, political and cultural concerns in their literary works. This group of texts belongs to what has been denominated *committed literature* or *littérature engagée*. Other texts were created with different literary objectives in mind. We have also read various essays in which prominent Latin American intellectuals express their opposing views on the role of the writer and his relation to social and political issues in Latin America. We have debated their ideas in class and you have already developed a double-entry log for each of those essays.

Based on the above, I would like you to write a five-page dialogue as the final assignment for this course. This imaginary dialogue will include you and the three Latin American authors whose distinctive views on the relationship between literature and political commitment we have been discussing throughout the semester: Borges, Mario Vargas Llosa and Miguel Ángel Asturias. You and the three participants will engage in a conversation about the role of the writer in Latin American society. Naturally, each participant will express ideas consistent with the content of interviews and essays we have covered in the course. Being part of the discussion will allow you to confront these intellectuals with your own questions and arguments. To support your comments, you may use as evidence the material covered in class (short-stories, memoirs, movie, historical data…), your own private reading and your personal experience. The purpose of this final project it is not to reach a definite conclusion to the debate, but to explore the issue in a critical manner.

Dialogue requirements

You are supposed to hand in two drafts and a final version. All drafts and the final essay should be proofread and typed. Please hand in three copies.

If you use direct quotations, include quotations marks and indicate the source using parenthetical documentation following the rules of the Modern Language Association of America, as explained in class.

Length: 5 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt font, standard margins.

A "REVOLUTION" IN READING: A FIRST-YEAR PROFESSOR'S EXPERIENCE WITH READING JOURNALS IN A LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY COURSE

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Introduction: A Common Dilemma

Like many new faculty members, I spent much of the winter break of my first year at Lehman College thinking about how I could learn from the mistakes and mishaps of the fall semester. As I prepared my syllabus for a new spring semester course, one question loomed: How can I get students to digest what they read, have a conversation about the reading material with their peers, incorporate the readings in a formal essay or assignment, and relate the readings to their lives?

Through the Writing Across the Curriculum program, I embarked on an experiment with *directed reading journals* for the upper-level history course, Reform and Revolution: Latin America in the Twentieth Century. The course dealt with the social and historical roots of reform and revolutionary movements in Latin American and Caribbean colonies and nations. We focused on three major revolutions in the region: (1) the 1791 slave uprising in French Saint-Domingue that culminated in the formation of the black republic of Haiti, the second independent nation in the Americas; (2) the Mexican Revolution of 1910; and (3) the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Toward the end of the course, we examined contemporary Latin American and Caribbean societies, focusing on racial, ethnic, and gender inequalities, relations with the U.S., and the effects of globalization. Throughout the semester we returned to a couple of interrelated questions: How have people of the region struggled for reform within existing structures of oppression and backwardness left by colonial and neocolonial practices? What propels radical revolutionary change?

The course fulfilled the history and politics distribution requirement for the Department of Latin American and Puerto Rican Studies and the non-Western history distribution requirement for the Department of History. It

also served as one course in the four-course writing intensive requirement for Lehman College. Sixteen students enrolled, whose knowledge about historical methods and about Latin America and the Caribbean varied greatly. Based on my own interests and background, I selected readings on social movements in the region. They included primary sources and key scholarly debates within the field of Latin American and Caribbean history. My goal was for students, in dialogue with these readings, to think critically by challenging their assumptions and engaging alternative points of view. A related aim was to enable students to apply what they learned by connecting Latin American and Caribbean history to events in the world today.

Reading Journals: A Solution?

In past teaching experiences, I had encountered two major problems with student reading: (1) students do not do the reading; or (2) students do the reading, but come to the next class unable to recall what they have read. To accomplish my instructional goals, I needed to find a way for students to engage with the material in a substantive way. In conjunction with the WAC faculty workshop, I developed a focus question to guide my investigation into this issue: *How can low-stakes writing be used to support reading, to help generate thoughtful discussion, and to improve the quality of formal assignments?* As I developed the syllabus, I infused low-stakes writing into the course on a weekly basis. In-class workshops and online discussion board postings supported reading and writing throughout the semester.

Ten linked reading-journal entries formed the core of the low-stakes writing. On the first day of class I introduced the concept of the weekly reading journals in a letter to students in which I explained the objectives of the course. I wrote:

> Think of these responses as a ‘space’ where you can think out loud, grapple with ideas, engage different viewpoints, summarize scholarly articles, and practice some of the writing strategies we learn about in class.

I asked students to keep their journal entries together in a notebook and bring them to class, where they would serve as a basis for discussion.

The reading journals were usually not open-ended. Rather, I offered targeted questions and prompts related to a specific line of inquiry in Latin American and Caribbean history or to a skill within the discipline. The journals were

due on or before the day designated for discussion of the particular reading or topic. I collected, read, and usually commented on the reading journals. I did not assign a grade to each entry, but together they totaled 25% of the final grade. Students were not evaluated on grammar, spelling, or sentence structure or on their development of an argument (I assessed these skills in their formal papers). Rather, in order to gain full credit for the journals, students needed to submit them on time and demonstrate that they had engaged with the particular reading in a critical manner.

For the first reading-journal entry, I asked students to write a letter back to me introducing themselves, describing their familiarity with historical methods and with Latin America and the Caribbean, and reflecting on their experiences with writing. In their letters, students expressed some of the issues they confront with writing:

> I am fairly comfortable with written assignments as long as I have ample time to complete my task and I am familiar and stimulated with the subject matter.
>
> The only time I struggle with writer's block is when I am about to start an essay, term paper or any kind [of] other academic paper, other than that I don't get writer's block.
>
> Writing has always been something that concerns me for several reasons, the first being the fact that I wait to the last minute to do a paper, so my first draft is likely to be my final draft.
>
> I have to admit that I do not like to write. I feel very uneasy about writing and I hate to have to write a lot. I usually just say what I have to say and that's it. It is very hard for me to expand ideas.

Common dilemmas for students included not having enough time, not knowing how to begin, and not knowing how to elaborate on a topic. This student feedback reinforced for me the potential of low-stakes reading journals for the goals of the course, since the journals would provide some raw material that students might draw from for formal papers.

Reading Journals and Formal Writing Assignments: A Case Study

Tracking student writing throughout the semester enabled me to evaluate the impact of the reading journals on comprehension of material and on formal essays. Ultimately, the weekly reading journals and other low-stakes activities helped students to read more critically and to better understand the material, thereby generating lively in-class discussion. In several cases, they helped improve the quality of formal papers. I developed three different formal writing assignments: a document-based essay on rebellion in the French Caribbean colonies; a critical dialogue comparing different experiences of the Cuban Revolution; and an examination of contemporary social movements in Latin America and the Caribbean (See Appendix 3). For students' final grades, the three writing assignments were weighted 20%, 25%, and 30% respectively.

Most of the reading journals were designed to provide scaffolding for a formal paper. In general, students who had engaged in some preliminary writing produced better quality papers. The chart in Appendix 1 shows the relationship of the low-stakes exercises to the three formal assignments.

A discussion of one student who demonstrated a particularly strong correlation between her reading journals and Writing Assignment 2 follows. Interestingly, at the beginning of the semester this student did not self-identify as a "good writer." In her letter to me, the student described herself as someone who confronts difficulties with writing. She reported having some experience with response papers and essays, but she added:

> Although the material was interesting sometimes I just did not get the "big picture." I do often feel uneasy about writing because I want to thoroughly explain what I mean, but I often get stuck with words or ideas.

Later in her letter, she describes fears of "sounding unintelligent" and lacking good vocabulary, even describing her own writing as "impaired."

For Writing Assignment 2—a critical dialogue—students were asked to demonstrate their understanding of how different people participated in and were affected by the Cuban Revolution and to explain different positions on key issues. Reading Journals 4, 5, 6, and 7 all potentially related to this assignment. The student's reading journals exhibited early engagement with the texts, including the ability to use quotations and specific evidence. For a

journal on *Our History*, a memoir of three Cuban generals of Chinese descent who supported the Cuban Revolution, she focused on the involvement of the Chinese in the struggles and on the role the revolution played in ending racial discrimination. She noted that one of the Chinese Cuban generals recalled ethnic taunts during his childhood. For another journal on the exile memoir *Finding Mañana*, she wrote about Hector Sanyustiz, an unemployed Cuban who drove a bus into the Peruvian Embassy, setting off the Mariel refugee crisis of the 1980s. She focused on his marginality in Cuban society, as an unemployed young man with a police record for petty crime, and on his frustrations with the repressive government apparatus.

Consequently, when the student prepared her formal writing assignment on the Cuban Revolution, she already had engaged with two of the relevant texts in a meaningful way. Her critical dialogue was among the best in the class. She established a realistic setting for the dialogue, an annual conference on Cuban Americans held in Miami. She cast herself as mediator of a panel on the Cuban Revolution. She crafted an engaged conversation between herself and three other people: Moisés Sio Wong, one of the Chinese Cuban generals; Mirta Ojito (Cuban exile and author of the memoir *Finding Mañana*); and Alma Guillermoprieto, a reporter and author of an essay about the "Special Period" in Cuba and the role of dissidents on the island. The student had the "characters" speak to each other, representing different facets of the Cuban Revolution. Through their debates, she addressed several important issues, ranging from the impact of the revolution on everyday lives to political dissidents to contemporary social problems, such as the recent increase in prostitution. Throughout the dialogue, the student incorporated details and evidence from three of the readings. For example, the moderator asks the panelists about their experiences growing up in pre-revolutionary or revolutionary Cuba. The student, writing as Ojito, responds:

> The hardest part for me growing up was being outcast in school by my teachers. One day as I peeked into my school records to carry them to the middle school I needed to be registered for, I began to read what teachers wrote about me. "Excellent grades but needs to become more involved in revolutionary activities" wrote my sixth grade teacher. Another teacher wrote, "…won't participate in political activities. She has relatives in the United States, and the family regularly communicates with them."

Among the most potent parts of the dialogue are the exchanges between General Moisés Sio Wong and the journalist Alma Guillermoprieto. For example, Sio Wong states:

> Cuba greatly exceeds its Latin American neighbors in intellectual, cultural, health, educational, and political accomplishments. Cubans understand the urgency of transcending imperial and neo-colonial domination. However, although we lack funding this is just a minor setback. We continue fighting every single day for the unconditional defense of our socialist movement.

Guillermoprieto responds: "…do not forget that authoritarian powers threaten to hurt those very systems you just spoke about." She then recalls the case of a doctor sentenced to eight years in prison for speaking with foreign correspondents about an epidemic of dengue fever. The general retorts that this particular doctor "threatened our national security and political standards." When Guillermoprieto brings up the issue of prostitution, Wong replies:

> …the government is using legislation and education in social responsibility and ideology, aimed at the prostitutes, their families and the community in general to combat these social ills that threatened to disrespect what [sic] worked so hard to build.

Engaging with two different books through reading journals helped this student to better understand the complexities of the Cuban Revolution. By first focusing on the achievements of the revolution (*Our History*), then writing about some of the negative aspects (*Finding Mañana*), she was eventually able to present both sides through a convincing, lifelike conversation. In addition, she incorporated into the dialogue an essay by Alma Guillermoprieto that she had not written about previously (few students used more than two sources). Having already read and begun writing about the other two sources, she was able to take the time to incorporate a third voice, that of a non-Cuban who reports on the contemporary situation.

Reading Journals and the Intellectual Rigor of the Course

The low-stakes writing in the course helped students improve document analysis skills, comprehension of scholarly articles, and ability to discuss and debate the ideas within these readings. In particular, the journals provided students with a focus as they approached a text. The dense prose of assigned readings became more manageable when students were asked to dissect an essay's organizational logic: historical background, thesis statement, evidence, conclusion, etc. For example, for Reading Journal 5, a response to a scholarly article on race and nationality in Cuba, I used the following question as a prompt: "What were the official attitudes toward race in Cuba of: (1) Jose Martí, the "father" of the Cuban nation and intellectual leader of the War of Independence in 1895? (2) Fidel Castro, leader of the socialist revolution in 1959 (and current president of Cuba)?" Several students addressed the differences between the ideologies of these two leaders and were able to restate the author's thesis statement in their own words. One student who made connections between colonial Cuba and the more contemporary revolution concluded her reading journal with the sentence: "Cuba throughout history has tried its best to silence the dilemma of race in order to maintain national unity."

In addition to improving reading comprehension for students, the journals also helped me to identify major concepts that remained unclear for the class. For one of the early journals on the Mexican Revolution (Reading Journal 3), I posed the question: "What legacies of *colonialism* and evidence of *neocolonialism* does the author mention?" While students identified different social groups supporting revolutionary movements, they were unable to write about themes that were not overtly stated in the article, such as colonialism and neocolonialism. One student wrote that "legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism are displayed," without further development or examples. The lack of engagement with this question helped me to realize that students needed a thorough explanation of these concepts that formed the foundation of the entire course.

During the second half of the semester, I urged students to make connections between past and present and between the different social movements they were learning about. For example, I wanted students to be able to think about the 1937 massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic within the context of the broader history between the two countries and colonial legacies. Reading Journal 8 posed the question: "How does this article about the Dominican Republic's official policy toward Haiti relate to what you know

about the creation of Haiti in 1804?" One student responded by first describing the 1937 massacre, then describing the 1791-1804 revolution. She was unable to connect the two events beyond stating "Both revolts are similar in the sense of the terrible massacre." Other students discussed the 1937 massacre without making any reference to the past or probing motivations. After reading the journals for that week, I made the legacies of the Haitian Revolution for subsequent Caribbean history the focus of our next in-class discussion.

The reading journals helped both the students and myself prepare for class discussion. In class I often evoked students' written comments and put their reading journals in dialogue with each other. Their own thoughts and questions thus drove the conversation. For Reading Journal 9 and the related class discussion on social revolution, for example, students were able to choose one of five selections to write about. The readings included: Che Guevara's essay on guerrilla warfare, the testimony of a Guatemalan peasant woman revolutionary, an excerpt from a scholarly work on Christianity in the Nicaraguan Revolution, an excerpt from a scholarly work on socialism in Chile, and a speech by Salvador Allende. The amount of reading was shorter than usual, but for the journals I required students to go deeper in their analyses. In class almost everyone participated in the discussion, and students were able to make connections with other themes in the course. On the few occasions when I did not assign a reading journal, the conversation took more time to initiate. Most students usually read or at least skimmed the material, but they were more hesitant to discuss it. Doing some informal writing about the material clearly helped students to process it.

Concluding Reflections

For the reading journals to be effective, students needed to take them seriously and submit them on time. The overall level of participation was not as high as I would have liked. Out of 16 students, 31% (five students) completed eight to ten (out of ten) journal entries, 50% (eight students) completed five to seven entries, and 19% (three students) completed fewer than five entries. Many of the students who struggled with the class did not engage with the journal writing on a weekly basis. But, in one case, a student who struggled with the course material did complete most of the journals. By reading her journals, I was able to pinpoint the source of her confusion with the readings. I gave her the opportunity to rewrite some of journals that I deemed critical to the formal assignments (such as the document analysis). In

the end, although her formal papers remained problematic, the student was able to demonstrate a basic understanding of the texts through the reading journals.

In order to encourage consistent student effort, in the future I would consider increasing the value of the reading journals from 25% to perhaps as high as 40% of the final grade. After all, reading the material and writing about it were the two pillars of the course. Another option for increasing the level of participation is to use some class time for journal writing, so some of the reluctant students have an opportunity to write with support from their classmates and from me.

I invested much of my own time in reading and commenting on the journals, treating them as part of my preparation for class, and the returns on this investment were substantial. These journals became a highlight of my teaching experience. Without feeling the pressure of assigning a grade, I looked forward to students' impressions of what they had read. What did they find interesting and provocative? Perhaps even more importantly, what did they find confusing? Serving as the core of both discussion and formal writing, the weekly reading journals greatly enhanced the intellectual rigor of this course on reform and revolution. The reforms in student learning will certainly stick, and I look forward to future evolution and revolution in the classroom.

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Appendix: A Semester of Writing
Reform and Revolution: Latin America in the Twentieth Century
Kathleen López

Workshop: Primary Sources

Reading Journal #2: Document Analysis, Slave Revolution

⇨

Major Writing Assignment #1
Documentary Analysis: Slave Rebellion in the Caribbean

Make a scholarly argument about some aspect of the Haitian Revolution, using at least 2 documents from class to support your claims.

⇨

1. Follow-up workshop: Thesis Statements

2. Follow-up workshop: Quotations

Reading Journal #4: 3 questions & follow-up responses to NYU panel

Reading Journal #5: Race, National Discourse, & Politics

Reading Journal #6: Our History: Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution

Reading Journal #7: Memoir, *Finding Mañana*

In-Class Debate

Discussion Board, film *Fresa y chocolate (Strawberry and Chocolate)*

⇨

Major Writing Assignment #2
Critical Dialogue: The Cuban Revolution

Use the perspectives of contrasting characters from readings and films to create a dialogue discussing a theme in the Cuban Revolution, past and present. (Sample themes provided.)

⇨

Follow-up workshop: Assignment Review

Discussion Board: Political Cartoons

Discussion Board: Murals

Reading Journal #3: Mexican Revolution

Discussion Board, Film *Las Madres*

Reading Journal #8: 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic

Workshop: Thesis Statements and Evidence

Reading Journal #9: Social Revolution

Reading Journal #10: Newspaper article, Contemporary Social Movement

Submit Topic and Thesis Statement

⇨

Major Writing Assignment #3
Contemporary Social Movements

After reading a series of newspaper and magazine articles about a recent social movement in Latin America and the Caribbean, discuss the movement within the context of the course themes. (Suggested topics provided.)

Writing and Formative Assessment

RETHINKING, REVISITING, AND REVISING IN A TEACHER EDUCATION COURSE

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In teacher education, as in any professional studies program, ongoing sites for practice, review, and reflection are critical. While professional courses aim to provide these spaces, too often they do so without offering students opportunities to sort through and revisit their emerging beliefs and understandings. This essay focuses on the written work of an undergraduate student I'll call Edwin. Through Edwin's work I demonstrate how writing can be used in a course to help students develop, articulate, and clarify ideas in order to deepen and extend their learning. I also explore how faculty can better support students as thinkers and learners through their writing. And finally I discuss how Edwin's written work provoked me to revise and restructure the course's major writing assignment.

Context: The Course, the Students

The writing-intensive course I taught during my participation in WAC, The Child in Context: Child Study and Development, Birth to Grade 6, was among four prerequisite classes for Lehman undergraduates planning to enter one of the college's teaching certification programs. With classroom and fieldwork components, the course has enough material to fill four semesters. Over the years, I learned to shape my sections so that students considered child development in the context of a descriptive child study (Carini 1975, 1979; Himley 2000, 2002[1]). Students were therefore expected to work regularly with a child, with a specific focus on an interest or activity of the child's choosing—a piece of "loved" work. I chose readings for the class that illuminated aspects of child study. These included published narratives focused on teachers' work with individual children, essays on observation and description, and texts on child development theory and on child development within sociocultural contexts.

[1] The child study follows the format of a Descriptive Review (Carini 1975, 1979; Himley (ed.) 2002), a process developed at the Prospect Center, North Bennington, Vermont, as a way to come to know and support a child's learning and development.

Each time I taught this course, I struggled with how best to balance teaching the required readings with allowing time and occasion for students to consider those readings in dialogue with their child-study work and their often strong beliefs about children, learning, and schooling. While I knew that writing could be a key venue for that comparative reflection, I hadn't yet figured out how to use writing to bring together all the pieces of the course.

The section of the course that I consider here included 17 students ranging in age from 19 to the mid-40s. Most attended Lehman part-time; 15 held jobs. Seven of the students worked in daycare centers as teachers or assistant teachers, or in public schools as paraprofessionals or teacher aides. Eight members of the class were parents.

My Dilemma and a Possible Resolution

For over 30 years, formal and informal writing, both during and outside of class—have played a key role in my teaching. I had previously taught composition and served as director of the New York City Writing Project, and my students wrote extensively. Still, I had been feeling stymied for some time about the shape of this course. I was dissatisfied with one of the course's major papers, what I called the *narrative analysis*, and was not certain about how to change it. Because the paper was designed as a vehicle for students to express what they had learned cumulatively, it was positioned at term's end. When students' papers arrived, because the term was over, there was nothing to be done with them other than to assign a grade. Yet for a number of students, their narrative analysis papers represented thinking that was still tentative, with connections between ideas underexplored. In spite of this limitation, I strongly believed in the value of this assignment for individuals planning to become teachers. I also remained convinced that the weaving together of theory and practice, of the students' child-study field work and their readings, could only happen once the bulk of a term's work was done.

During my WAC year, I had the privilege of sharing my teaching with Lehman WAC Writing Fellow Patricia Duffett. To address the dilemma of the narrative analysis paper, Patricia and I designed a series of low- and medium-stakes writing assignments for my spring-term class that offered students repeated opportunities to make the kinds of connections the final paper required. The final paper remained at term's end.

Patricia and I spoke of the low- and medium-stakes writing as opportunities for students to grapple with the ideas of the class. But we also intended

interconnections among these assignments, so that ideas expressed in the low- and medium-stakes work would inform and provide content for the more formal high-stakes work. In a letter I distributed to students on the first day of class, I explained the four ongoing uses of writing in the course and their purposes:

> As you may have noticed, this is a writing intensive section of the ECE 301 course… In this class, I'll ask you to use writing in four ways: to record what occurs when you are with a child (documentations); as response to the readings you do for the class (double-entry notebook responses); as a way of thinking through and letting me in on what sense you are making of the ideas and work of the course (think-aloud letters); and to communicate your understandings of and views on the ideas of the course (formal papers)...
>
> All of the writing… is connected. It ultimately comes together in two formal papers. In essence, you will have been working on these papers all term…
>
> I hope the writing you do in this class allows you to put your hands and minds on the ideas of the course; to begin to make sense for yourself of matters you've likely already met and will continue to meet in your professional and personal relationships with children… I want you to leave this course having made your own connections to the ideas we explore.

In my mind's eye, students would use writing to explore connections between the ideas of the class and their work with a child. This, I assumed, would make the writing of the final paper less onerous, and I would have a better sense, along the way, of what students understood and what was not yet clear. (See Appendix for the four modes of writing in my course.)

Learning through Writing: One Student

When Edwin entered my class, he was working full-time at a local middle school as a one-on-one "management" paraprofessional with individual children classified by the Department of Education as needing special assistance. He was in his third semester as a part-time student at Lehman,

having attended various colleges on and off for 12 years. Edwin brought to the class a strong sense of justice. His thinking was informed by the many sociology courses he had taken over the years as well as by his personal knowledge, as a Puerto Rican male growing up in the Bronx, of the sociopolitical and economic forces affecting many Bronx families, children, and educational institutions.

For the child-study project, Edwin proposed to document his work with José (a pseudonym), a 14-year-old boy he worked with in his capacity as a paraprofessional. Though I initially said no because José was well beyond the age reflected in the course's curricular emphasis, I changed my mind based on what Edwin wrote in his first in-class "think-aloud" letter which asked students to respond to one of four quotations on the course syllabus and consider how their own experiences influenced their responses.

Edwin chose a quotation that easily led to writing about José: "...to love what is there in its imperfectness, by looking closely, intendedly…" (Carini 2002). After explaining his thoughts on what the quotation meant, he wrote:

> I am a management paraprofessional and I work closely with one child. He is dyslexic. Because I am not trained in how to teach children with dyslexia, I am very frustrated this year. I feel very bad about the situation this child is in. He is in the eighth grade but he reads in the second or third grade level. He has very low self esteem. I am trying very patiently to help him but because of my lack of knowledge about dyslexia I get frustrated at times…

He then returned to the quotation and wrote that he hoped there was "more to José" than the academic difficulties and emotional disorders ascribed to him on his Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

Edwin's letter demonstrated investment in working with a particular child and provided information I could build on to support his work. In addition to saying yes to his request to work with José, my response included a reference to an article I thought useful in helping Edwin think about José's reading struggles. Edwin followed up and over the term this became our pattern: based on what he wrote in his documentations and letters, I suggested readings—many of which he put to good use.

At the outset of the term, Edwin's writing relied on generalization. He could speak to the outstanding abilities of a child and about what appeared wrong or problematic. Like many of my students, he had little experience in recognizing the less visible and perhaps less school-valued preferences, strengths, and ways of making sense that affect a child's learning. Edwin believed that the education José was receiving was not working but had no useable understanding of why this was the case.

Edwin used writing to learn. He used writing to clarify and extend ideas, to connect what he was experiencing in his work with José with what he was reading, and to express anger at a school system he saw as failing his student. Writing offered Edwin the opportunity to sort through his experiences with José and his views about teaching. Edwin's writing in response to theoretical texts enabled him to consider and reconsider his ideas alongside those of experienced educators with the aim of providing appropriate support to José.

Low-stakes Writing: The Double-entry Notebook

Students wrote in double-entry notebooks (Berthoff 1981) in order to join the ideas of the class with what they were learning in their fieldwork with a child. We used a two-column format: notes and response.[2] I emphasized that the narrow *Notes* column was crucial; here students recorded both key ideas from a reading and the ideas that drew their attention. In the wide *Response* column, at the outset, students had free rein. I did, however, offer suggestions and provide examples of the ways former students had used the notebook. I encouraged students to include specific references to their study child—to indicate all connections, similarities, and/or differences that came to mind.

The double-entry notebook not only pushes students to do the assigned readings but also encourages students to be in dialogue with the perspectives of a field and to consider seriously its ideas. The likelihood that this dialogue will take place depends on the extent to which students' responses are integrated into class discussions and individual conferences.

Perhaps for my own sake, and more so for my students', I choose not to collect the notebooks regularly. I want students to have written work on the ideas of the course that is theirs, where they can openly and honestly explore,

[2] I have also experimented with using three and sometimes four columns: notes, response, questions, later thoughts. Sometimes I invite students to add commentary to their responses following a small-group meeting or class discussion.

be confused, experiment, practice. For that to happen, my presence as final arbiter needs to be minimal. Rather than collecting and grading the notebooks, I have students use them in small ongoing "family" group meetings prior to any lecture or discussion. These group conversations may be shaped by specific questions or be open-ended; the one consistent requirement is that students draw from their double-entry responses. As an active presence in the class, often joining a group discussion, I am well aware of whether they do so.

In addition, in the large group I occasionally ask students to comment on the experience of writing in their notebooks, particularly if the assigned reading is difficult. These brief "process" discussions serve to broaden students' understanding of ways they can use the notebook and allow me to make suggestions, give permission, and reaffirm my expectations. At mid-term I meet with students individually to learn more about their experiences using the notebook, to discuss my responses to some of what they have written, and, if necessary, to clarify my expectations for the rest of the term.

At best, my students used this double-entry writing and their small-group conversations for trying out their thinking—for identifying questions, making connections, and forming hypotheses that fed into the whole-class lectures and discussions.

Readings for the first weeks of the class were predominantly classroom-based narratives and ethnographic studies. Edwin covered 61 pages of Vivian Gussin Paley's book, *The Kindness of Children* (1999), in the Notes column of the first page of his double-entry notebook. This was not an auspicious beginning: he needed to slow down and respond to smaller chunks of text. Over the next few weeks, Edwin did begin to use the Notes column reasonably well. In the Response column, Edwin tended to agree or disagree, occasionally expressing indignation based on his own experience in public schools. In these early entries, notes far outweighed response.

Several weeks into the term, to support their child-study documentation, students worked intensively with the idea of *description* as a form of inquiry and a pedagogical stance for coming to know a child and how she learns. (Avidon, Hebron, & Kahn 2001; Carini 2001; Polakow 1992; Traugh 2002; van Manen 1997). In his response to Max van Manen's chapter on "Seeing Children Pedagogically" (2002), Edwin began to use the Notes and Response columns to think about the ideas of our class and his work with José:

Excerpt from Edwin's Double-entry Notes

NOTES	RESPONSE
How and what we see depends on who and how we are in the world. (p. 51)	I guess this means it depends on our experience, our ideology and our position on society
How and what we see in a child is dependent on our relationship with that child. (p. 51)	This is so true. I have such a closer [sic] relationship with José than his teacher does. I see him as being very intelligent. I see him as always struggling to read and trying very hard. Some teachers think he is lazy. They think he doesn't try hard enough. Some teachers think he is very immature. His bus matron sees him as being such a gentleman and very well mannered.
<u>Pedagogical</u>?	The art or profession of teaching
The teacher has a pedagogical interest in the life of the child. He stands in a pedagogical relationship to her and he cannot help but see the child as a unique and whole human being involved in self-formative growth. (p. 52)	Some teachers do have a pedagogical interest. I guess it means having the child's education as # 1 priority—NOT trying to have a power over relationship, but relationship where education is a collaborative effort. Each child is a unique being that grows in his/her own pace.
A teacher is a child-watcher. This does not mean a teacher can see a child "purely" without being influenced by the philosophic view that the teacher holds of what it means to be human. One cannot adequately observe children without reflecting on the way one looks at them. All I am saying here is that a teacher must observe a child not as a passerby might or a policeman or a friend. A teacher must observe a child pedagogically. This means being a child watcher who guards and keeps in view the total existence of the developing child. (p.52)	… I can see how as an educator you have to be very "vigilant" -Avidon- while working w/children. I think reflecting on how one looks at children means—are we looking through prejudiced eyes or from a position of power. On just observing children by just seeing their physical presence, a teacher must also take note if the child is eating breakfast or lunch regularly, if the child's temperament changes drastically. Vigilance

On the most straightforward level, one can see that Edwin looked up the word *pedagogy* for this entry. The term is complex and his definition limited, but as a starting place, for the sake of his own sense-making, it was a useful act. Then he took a word I use, *vigilance,* and used his work context to give the word meaning.

Edwin also used the double-entry notebook to monitor his own teaching practice. In one of the earlier readings about a teacher's anger at students (Houser 1998), he responded, "I myself have realized when I exhibit this behavior—I focus too much on the children's bad behavior instead of concentrating on the positive." Later in the same entry he wrote, "Sometimes adults are quick to answer problems for children. They should have patience and help them answer it on their own." Patience emerges as a critical theme in Edwin's evolving view of the role of a teacher.

Edwin also connected several of the readings to his experiences as a Latino male growing up in New York City and considered how his autobiography was affecting the kind of teacher he was becoming. Our study of children's social and emotional development included an excerpt from William Pollack's "The Boy Code: Four Injunctions" (1998) that speaks to pressures placed on boys from a young age. Edwin's six pages of response drew both on his own childhood and on his current views of teachers and schools. He began with generalizations about gender roles and children: "Kids at work act like that." Slowly though, he moved from the general to his own experience:

> I can relate to the part where if you ask for an explanation in a confusing or frightening situation, you are seen as weak. I was trained in that way. My dad hardly ever asks for help and I learned that. Till this day I get scared to ask for help.

Edwin's experience of being raised not to show feelings or ask for help played a crucial role in his relationship with José. He decided to make room for José's feelings while insisting that José speak to what he needed. However he also positioned himself so that José, who Edwin recognized was able to go the next step as a reader, would have to do more for himself. As a learner, José benefited from the twofold stance Edwin chose, and Edwin continued to explore this approach in later writing assignments.

Low-stakes Writing: Think-aloud Letters

Patricia and I planned to have students write think-aloud letters as often as possible following "family group" or whole-group discussions. We planned to use the letters to connect specific ideas and bits of text and to move students toward the narrative analysis paper. Reality, though, interfered with intent. Because of time constraints, students wrote only six letters, including one on the first day and one on the last day of class.

Still, these six letters proved invaluable. The letters—sometimes pre-planned, sometimes assigned on the spur of the moment in response to a matter with which students were grappling—served several purposes. They provided me with ongoing access to the meaning students were making of the class, and thus served as formative assessment of students' learning and of the impact of my teaching. What I learned from the letters sometimes shaped the teaching or re-teaching I did and the reading or re-reading I invited a student to do.

But I also used the letters to work one-on-one with Edwin and with other students on understanding the theoretical readings and relating them to students' observations of children. For one letter, I asked students to select a quotation that represented a central idea from the text we were discussing and "1) explain the particular idea; 2) state your view of the idea; and 3) relate the idea to your child-study child." In this case, I used my response to point out to Edwin and to many other students what they had not done. Edwin selected this quotation from "Natoshia Behind the Curtain" (Houser 1998): "To truly know someone you must look carefully beneath their surface to their inner, and sometimes hidden being" (pp. 4-9). Edwin wrote:

> I totally agree with this quote. When I first worked with "José" I was given a description about him. I was told he was dyslexic, schizophrenic, and that he was lazy. At first I took their word and believed them. It wasn't until I worked closely with him, observed him and developed a good relationship with him that I found out he needed glasses, I needed to be patient with him, he needed extra reinforcement and he was not lazy. …I really don't care if José is schizophrenic or not because that is not going to stop me from helping him. The glasses helped him read better… This project is allowing me to dig deeper into José and pull out his strengths.

Edwin selected a key tenet of Houser's argument. His letter suggested an understanding of Houser's belief and showed how attentive Edwin now was to the ways language can affect how a child is perceived. However, this assignment asked students to be explicit about their understanding and viewpoints. Going straight to his example after saying "I totally agree" was not enough.

Medium-stakes Writing: Documentations

My students' fieldwork assignment required them to work with their child on 12 occasions and to document each meeting as a participant-observer. After the fourth week of the term, students handed in a typed documentation each week, so they submitted eight. The focus of the documentations was twofold: the child's evolving relationship to the work the child had selected (José chose to build volcanoes with Edwin) and the developing relationship between the student and the child. The documentations included a narrative of what occurred, descriptions of how the child went about her work, and a discussion and explanation of the decisions the students made as they worked alongside the child. I hoped that by moving from their field notes to more fully written discussions, students would be better able to see the child and to articulate and understand the impact of even their smallest "teaching" decisions. I expected them to be able to use this information in their final papers.

Individual documentations were not graded. I told students that at the end of the term I would consider their eight typed and four raw documentations as a collection and that the grade would depend on their growing ability to capture and reflect on their work with a child. Documenting was not something I could expect students to do well at the outset, so it wasn't until their fourth documentation that I made evaluative comments pointing out both strengths and shortcomings.

As writing fellow Patricia Duffett wrote:

> The written documentations were a unique balancing act of narrative, descriptive, and reflective writing. As an academic writing form, they occupied an unfamiliar territory between informal and formal writing: not quite quick notes, not quite polished narratives, yet they required elements of both.

To support this writing, Patricia and I distributed models of effective documentations from the previous term and occasionally invited a few students to read their documentations aloud to the class. In each instance we asked students to locate the strengths of the particular documentation and to note where they wanted to know or see more—to note, in other words, what was missing.

It took four documentations for Edwin to find his stride so that his writing became fuller and more descriptive, staying clearly focused on the "loved" work and on José's process. Documentation #4, totaling four pages, was one of Edwin's most effective. It was tightly focused on two connected stories: one about José's guitar class and one about a letter José wrote to his brother. At the end Edwin reflected on the growing bonds of trust between him and José.

On the day this documentation was due, students wrote an in-class think-aloud letter that included the question, "What guides the decisions you make on how to work with your child?" Edwin spoke in this letter about how his responses to "The Boy Code" (Pollack 1998) influenced a decision he made. The documentation, the think-aloud letter, and Edwin's autobiographical responses to this reading in his double-entry notebook provide a rich picture of how these writing sites served each other in leading Edwin to understanding about children, himself, and his own agency as a teacher. In the interplay of these different writing forms, Edwin made connections among the ideas of the course, his past, his teaching practice, and his relationship with José—everything I had hoped for!

At this point, more than halfway through the term, what was happening in Edwin's documentations was happening in other students' work as well. Both in terms of content and the nuts and bolts of writing—from grammar and punctuation to transitions between paragraphs and overall organization—Edwin's documentations showed both skill and room for improvement. My comments on these later documentations encouraged reflection and invited connections. I continued to indicate where students needed to ground what they were saying in evidence and example, asking, "What led you to this conclusion? What's your evidence?" I also corrected and explained a few repetitive patterns of grammatical error. For example, with Edwin, I commented on his lengthy paragraphing and his informal word choice. Patricia and I discussed these patterns with students after class or during the mid-term conference. When documentations were due, we gave time in class for a final proofreading. We taught the students to read their work aloud,

encouraging them to correct any surface errors they noted. Edwin's documentations are evidence that multiple experiences with a specific writing form lead students to deepen their understanding of that genre. This unfamiliar form gradually became a tool that Edwin and his fellow students used to interrogate their fieldwork experiences and build their narratives of the semester's work.

High-Stakes Formal Writing: Descriptive Review and Narrative Analysis

The two formal writing assignments—the child-study descriptive review and the narrative analysis—called for students to re-position material they had already written. I believed revisiting earlier writings would bring coherence to the term's work and make students' understanding more concrete. I also expected the papers to demonstrate how each student's thinking about children and child development had evolved. Each paper required the use of evidence and example; what differed was their focus and, therefore, how the data were to be used.

The child-study descriptive review is organized under five headings: the child's physical presence and gesture, disposition and temperament, relationships with adults and children, interests and preferences, and modes of learning and thinking. To help students assemble the evidence they had gathered within the appropriate headings, students participated in five in-class "guided writing" activities, each dedicated to one of the five headings of the review. Students' documentations were the primary source of evidence for these descriptions. Students shared early drafts of several sections of this paper with their "family groups." The paper was due on the last day of class.

The narrative analysis paper required a chronological summary of the work relationship with the child, an analysis of the changes in that relationship, and connections to a larger body of ideas in the field. Students' documentations were again a primary source of evidence, but here a summative re-telling was appropriate. To complete this paper, students also returned to their double-entry notebooks and think-aloud letters. Patricia and I encouraged students to work from connections they had already made among the readings, their understandings of the child, and their own evolving ways of working alongside this child. This paper was due during finals week.

In this assignment, Edwin had to tell the story of José's work project and of their evolving relationship, to make connections between José's work and his own work, and to use the theory he had studied to make sense of all this. In

his low- and medium-stakes work, Edwin had written about the value of looking closely at the child in action, a theme in several of the readings, and about how this examination was affecting the ways he worked with and thought about José. Several of the readings, for instance, had led him to think about the pace at which an individual learns and his own need for patience. Yet the task of drawing together what he had learned and transferring that knowledge to the structures of this paper proved difficult.

In Edwin's narrative analysis, José develops independence as a thinker and a maker. Sometimes Edwin summarized what occurred; at other points he moved entire segments of a documentation into his narrative analysis. In each instance, he critically examined his data, asking what happened and emphasizing the changes in both himself and José—again drawing from his earlier writing on these matters. After the chronological summary of his work with José, Edwin brought together his analysis and the course reading. What follows is an excerpt from the seven pages he devoted to this task.

> It is only from a firmly grounded knowledge of children's strengths as thinkers, learners and persons can we create an environment conducive to growth and an education (Carini 1986). As a result of being able to draw on José's strengths, his relationship towards me and his work changed. In the beginning of our time together doing the loved work, José was always eager to be with me because it was an escape from his classes. On numerous occasions, José expressed to me feelings of inadequacy in most of his classes because of his inability to read and write well. After reading the article, "In the LD Bubble" by Lynne Pelkey in which she describes how it felt being a student with a learning disability, I began to understand more and more just how hard it is living in José's shoes.

Edwin's narrative analysis was a first draft rich in potential. However, the transfer of the ideas he had been working on from informal written formats to a more formal genre was not always smooth. The connections he made were important, yet cursory. His earlier work showed evidence that he had a sense of how to refer to and cite written sources, but in his narrative analysis he both quoted and paraphrased Carini, all without quotation marks. His

erratic use of citation and neglect of commas also required intervention. The organization needed work. Yet at some points his ideas flowed and held together in a logical, unified way. And I could hear what he had learned.

The narrative analysis demonstrates a type of revision—not in the sense of polishing a written work, but rather of returning to the ideas of the course. But for this kind of revision to succeed, students needed more feedback and support, more explicit work on course readings alongside their documentations, and perhaps needed to have read some theorists earlier in the syllabus. Edwin's paper, full of possibility that never had occasion to shape itself, might then have become worthy of Edwin's ideas.

Because the paper was due during finals week, Edwin had no opportunity to write a more thought-through or polished draft. Edwin's paper points out the absurdity of expecting a finished product, a final paper, without providing opportunity for written revisions. Because Edwin had come to understand much about learning and teaching, his paper raised the question of what it is I value in a student's academic journey—the development and articulation of one's thinking, the use of appropriate and standard academic forms, or both. In his formal papers, Edwin's writing was not yet academic, yet his learnings were beginning to be. That academic voice needs time and takes time; it requires a range of opportunities to locate itself. I think of what Edwin did here as just one of those opportunities.

Though some of my students did reasonably well with the narrative analysis, they tended to be students who had done this sort of work before and already had a sense of what was required. In Edwin's case, and for most of my students, this paper was far more complex than the work that had previously been asked of them. They needed the structured support and time that I now have learned to provide.

My Own Revisions

During the third meeting of the class, I asked students to select a passage that resonated for them from Vivian Gussin Paley's book, *The Kindness of Children* (1999). Edwin selected the following:

> I feel a surge of pleasure knowing that my audience is about to hear a story that will remind them of who they were and can become again.

As I look back at Edwin's work, I realize that, over the term, this view of possibility "of who [he was] and can become again" was exactly what Edwin enacted, both in his work with José and in his own learning.

But this is also my story. As one who continues to rely on writing as a source and location for learning, I am thinking now about whom I "can become again." My colleague Ellen Schwartz (1987) writes, "...it is in the returning that understandings begin to take form and deepen. ...Connections need *time* to make themselves apparent." Edwin and many of his fellow students have convinced me that writing allows multiple occasions for returning to ideas and understandings, that it provides students with occasion and place to make connections in which their learnings take hold and deepen.

Fortunately, faculty have such opportunity, too, because we get to teach our courses again and again. Over the next few semesters, I modified the syllabus so that students would spend more time on fewer readings and write two fewer documentations. I also omitted one section of the narrative analysis. For students to work with the rich data they collected in their documentations and translate it into other formats and genres, they required my support. I experimented with several ways of providing that support, from coding systems to having students keep ongoing time-lines where they entered ideas from the readings we discussed alongside their observations and evidence. In-class letters became a regular feature. Students wrote about their teaching decisions, gave reasons for them, and selected ideas from a reading to support or critique or shed light on that particular teaching act. The letters allowed students to practice, not just once but several times over the term, how to bring segments of their work together. In addition, although I had always expected APA format, I had done nothing more than express that expectation. I now, at least, distributed a handout on it and spent some class time reviewing it.

The ways I used writing in the course continued to provide students with opportunities to think as a student and as a novice teacher—to begin the academic journey of becoming the teacher they could be. But students did so with more support and clearer structures. For Edwin, for me, for anyone becoming a professional, revising, rethinking, continuing to learn and to relearn must remain central.

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Appendix
Forms of Writing in The Child in Context: Child Study and Development
Elaine Avidon

1. ***Documentations:*** Eight narrative and descriptive accounts of ongoing work with a child. Excerpts shared regularly with the whole class. Key source of evidence for the child-study descriptive review; content of narrative analysis paper. Due weekly, weeks 4-12. Responded to but not graded.

2. ***Double-Entry Notebook:*** Low-stakes written responses to 10 reading assignments; used to think about and make sense of the ideas in the readings and to connect them with child-study work. Regularly shared in class in small groups; shared with me at midterm and end of term.

3. ***Think-Aloud Letters:*** In-class low-stakes writing responding to text, matters being discussed, or questions students or I asked. Used to clarify, define, share positions or understandings, and/or encourage connections between theory and practice. Often used prior to or following discussions, sometimes read aloud, sometimes collected. Viewed as a location for practicing, as well as for comparing and contrasting ideas from the readings with what students were observing in their child-study work.

   The three ongoing writing assignments described above ultimately lead to:

4. ***Formal papers***

   a. ***Descriptive Review:*** Child-study paper informed by in-class guided writings, peer response to drafts, and teacher response. Final draft due near the end of the term.

   b. ***Narrative Analysis:*** A three-part high-stakes paper that: 1) traces the evolution of the child's relationship with the chosen work and the student's relationship with the child, 2) uses the readings and class lectures to analyze the development of the child in relation to this work and the relationship formed with the student "teacher," and 3) reflects on the decisions the student made as the adult supporting the child in doing the work. Parts could be done as separate chapters or integrated. Minimal time in class for sharing of drafts. Patricia and I were available during office hours to confer about this paper.

TEACHING AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS: THE EVOLUTION OF A WAC HISTORY COURSE AND A HISTORY PROFESSOR

Duane Tananbaum
Department of History
with Celeste Donovan, Writing Fellow

> *Writing "helped me to discipline myself and learn more because in order to write, I was obliged to think, question my knowledge, read a lot and then express my ideas clearly."* —Student in History 274

Searching for Solutions

After twenty years of teaching United States history, most of them at Lehman College, I was looking for ways to improve my students' writing. I also hoped to improve their ability to analyze documents and other primary sources, think critically, and understand American history. I had learned to incorporate visual and online materials into my courses and had started allowing students to submit drafts of formal papers, but I soon realized that these efforts were not enough. I needed to find ways to engage my students more actively in the learning process. Requiring them to write more frequently and to employ different modes of writing seemed like a possible solution.

However, this strategy meant making major changes in the way I had been teaching for two decades. In 2002–2003, I volunteered to become a faculty writing specialist—one of twelve Lehman faculty members in a year-long program to develop, teach, assess, and document a writing intensive course. My involvement in Lehman's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program two years earlier had given me an opportunity to think seriously about my teaching for the first time in many years. My first experience with WAC had not, however, been entirely positive, because there had been little time for advance planning. This time I would work with a CUNY writing fellow in the fall to revise my syllabus for an introductory course in modern U.S. history, to make it a writing-intensive course for the spring semester.

The students in this course were typically freshmen or sophomores, Hispanic or African American, and graduates of New York City high schools. They were usually the first in their family to go to college. They generally lived at home and frequently had family responsibilities or jobs that limited the amount of time they could devote to their studies. English was often their second language; while most of them could express their thoughts orally, their writing skills needed improvement. Lehman had recently adopted a policy requiring students to complete four writing-intensive courses to graduate; many students, wanting to improve their writing, sought out such classes.

I was lucky to have Celeste Donovan, a Ph.D. student in art history at the CUNY Graduate Center, as my writing fellow. Celeste brought to the project a fresh perspective and tremendous energy and enthusiasm, qualities I sometimes lacked after twenty years of teaching. I met with Celeste many times that fall to discuss ways to incorporate more and different types of writing in the course. We also met monthly with other faculty writing specialists and writing fellows to discuss our experiences, hopes, and concerns. Enthusiastic discussions of innovative teaching and writing strategies helped overcome most of the usual anxieties that haunt any professor mulling over the specifics of moving towards a writing-intensive approach: Where would I find the time to read and comment on all this student writing? Were there ways to have the students do more writing without creating a huge increase in my workload? What were the advantages and disadvantages of changing my syllabus to incorporate more writing in different forms? Would it "work"?

Rethinking the Course

I had already made a number of changes, but Celeste and I began to reconsider the structure and format of the whole course, starting with the master document: the syllabus. Celeste suggested that, rather than simply listing the topics to be covered, we should state clearly the overall themes of the course: the expansion of the federal government's role in the American economy and society, the struggle for civil rights and equality for all Americans, and America's growth as a world power. She thought that listing these themes up front would help students to see the historical connections we wanted to emphasize. We assigned a traditional textbook, as well as some traditional historical documents, so students could understand the chronology of 20th century U.S. history, but we also used many online sources and visual materials, which students often found more engaging than printed texts.

We wanted students to get used to writing from the start, so in the very first class we asked them to write two paragraphs: one on what they thought life was like in the United States in 1900, and another on how they would go about learning more about that topic. These paragraphs gave us not only a sample of their writing ability but also a sense of what they knew about history and "doing history." Their writing showed that most students were not very knowledgeable about history or historical sources. For example, one student asserted that, in 1900, "Like today, people were looking for the latest fashions and also criticizing the government. Many of them were probably holding protest and meeting at coffee houses to discuss political and moral issues." Most students wrote that they would go to the Web to find out more about life in the U.S. in 1900.

During the first week, Celeste wrote a letter asking the students to write back discussing their experiences as writers, their attitudes towards writing, their reading habits, and their thoughts about taking this writing-intensive course. Besides wanting students to get used to writing from the beginning, we also wanted to expose them to different kinds of writing, including writing in their own voices. We wanted them to get to know themselves *as writers*. The students' paragraphs and letters surprised us: Most students wrote more effectively, were more comfortable with writing, and had more experience with journals and other forms of writing than we had expected. One student complained, "Writing is very tedious and if it is not going well it gets annoying." Another student distinguished between writing short stories, where she was "not afraid to make mistakes," and written assignments that often felt "like an unwanted chore." A third student reported that writing "helped me to discipline myself and learn more because in order to write, I was obliged to think, question my knowledge, read a lot and then express my ideas clearly."

Low-Stakes Assignments

One of the main changes Celeste and I made was to incorporate numerous "low-stakes" writing assignments, generally at least one per week. These assignments were *low stakes* in that they would not be graded, though failure to turn them in would affect the class participation part of students' grades. They ranged from just a few sentences or a paragraph to a page or more, some done in class and some on students' own time. We alternated between requiring hard copies and having students post their writing online on our Blackboard discussion board so other students could respond. Celeste or I commented on most but not all of these low-stakes assignments. We hoped

that having the students write regularly would help them feel more comfortable. We also thought that having students write frequently about assigned texts would encourage them to keep up with the reading.

I must confess that I did not put a lot of thought into developing these low-stakes assignments. I based them on historical materials that were easily available online and fit with the themes of the course. Looking back, however, I can see that the assignments actually fit together better than I realized. For example, early in the semester we asked students to write a paragraph based on a Jacob Riis photo that shows an Italian ragpicker living in poverty with her baby in late 19th century New York City. Later in the semester, students wrote a paragraph responding to Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother," which depicts a poor southern mother and her children living in a tent during the Great Depression. Responding to these photos conveying the love of a mother for her children even in the midst of horrible poverty and deplorable living conditions, students saw the strength and poignancy of photographs as historical evidence. They also realized, as one student wrote, that "photographs are used to depict, emphasize, and support the message that the photographer is trying to convey to the people." By focusing on a mother and child, both Riis and Lange hoped to arouse support for social programs to help the poor.

Similarly, having students write a page summarizing the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and then later a summary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision helped them see how the court's interpretation of the 14th Amendment changed over time. However, the paragraphs on *Plessy v. Ferguson* showed that most students did not understood the facts and issues in the case, so I rectified this gap by going over the details in class. Without the written assignment, I would not have realized the difficulty the students had in reading the arcane legal terminology of the decision. I learned that in the future I should assign an article summarizing and discussing the case rather than the actual decision. In retrospect, I also wish I had asked the students to write a new paragraph on the case after the class discussion to see if they understood it better.

In addition to engaging their thinking and awakening their interest in history, these informal writing assignments revealed areas where students needed help with the mechanics of writing. We tried to pay attention to patterns of error in a given student's writing, pointing out and correcting repeated errors in our written comments. We also looked for patterns of shared errors among the students. Celeste addressed one such common problem by

preparing a handout explaining the differences among frequently misused homonyms, such as *its/it's, there/their/they're, where/were/we're,* and others. This handout did not completely eliminate such problems, but it did reduce them, and it left me with a helpful resource for future classes.

We returned most of the low-stakes assignments to the students with comments on the substance of what they had written as well as corrections and suggestions on their grammar. Responding did not take as long as we had feared. We found that we could read a paper and make extensive comments much more quickly when we were not worrying about whether the paper deserved a B or a B+. Also, focusing on one surface error at a time, rather than trying to correct every mistake—and expecting the student to absorb every grammar rule immediately—reduced my frustration and helped students see and understand their errors.

The value of these low-stakes assignments extended beyond helping students with their writing; the writing exercises also proved to be a wonderful way to get all students, not just the few who typically raised their hands, involved in class discussions. Sometimes we simply went around the room and had everyone read what they had written or posted. One of our most successful assignments had students write and then read a paragraph on the message conveyed by an editorial cartoon by Dr. Seuss about Japanese Americans a few months after the United States entered World War II. One student who seldom spoke in class noticed a background detail in the cartoon that no one else, not even I, had seen: a burning ship, which the student said represented the destruction of the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor.

We realized over the semester that we needed to be more explicit in our directions for these low-stakes assignments. For example, the instructions for a low-stakes assignment comparing and contrasting the policies and programs of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois did not specifically say to refer back to assigned readings by these leaders. To our dismay, most students relied almost completely on their class notes instead of going back to the original materials. Similarly, in asking students to use a website on the 1912 presidential election to write a page summarizing the positions of the four candidates—Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Eugene Debs—on one issue and stating which candidate the student would have voted for and why, we did not state explicitly the need to cite sources for all information, even if it was taken from the assigned website. Many students took material verbatim from the website without putting it in quotation marks or citing their source, providing us with an opportunity to

teach them about plagiarism. In another instance, when discussion board postings proved disappointing, we realized that we needed to provide examples of the kind of postings we were looking for. More specific prompts should make future writing exercises more successful.

Scaffolding and Drafts: The First Formal Written Assignment

In planning the course, Celeste and I searched for ways to make some of the low-stakes writing assignments important enough for students to put time and effort into them rather than throwing something together at the last minute because it was not going to be graded. We adopted the practice of "scaffolding": The first formal paper would build on work students had already done in a low-stakes assignment. Specifically, for the first five-page paper, students were given a choice of two assignments: (1) comparing and contrasting Booker T. Washington's policies and goals with those of W.E.B. DuBois and choosing which were better for contemporary African Americans, or (2) explaining which candidate the student would have voted for in the 1912 presidential election based on the candidates' stands on two issues.

We required students to submit a first draft of the formal paper and commented extensively on it. I had adopted the practice of requiring drafts when I taught my first WAC course. Before then, I had assigned a research paper due near the end of the semester, but I had always been concerned that students looked only at the grade and not at the comments into which I put so much effort. This fear was confirmed when my 15-year-old son, on receiving his high school history paper from a teacher he respected and admired, glanced at the grade and then put the paper in his notebook, ignoring the teacher's comments. I realized that I needed to design a system that would force students to think about my comments. After experimenting with different formats and debating with colleagues the merits of putting a grade on the first draft, I concluded that my purposes were best served by requiring students to submit a first draft that received extensive comments but no grade. Students were required to hand in previous versions with each succeeding draft, and the final grade depended in part on how well the student responded to the suggestions on earlier drafts. Even students who wrote strong first drafts now had an incentive to pay attention to my comments as they revised.

After receiving the first drafts, Celeste and I devoted a week of class time to common problems, particularly difficulties with quoting, citing, and paraphrasing. In my experience, such efforts are more successful when based

on examples from students' own writing, so Celeste culled samples of both strong and weak quotations from the first drafts to help students see the differences. She worked with them on using the strongest quotes to support their arguments, deciding how much to quote, and introducing quotes and weaving them into their narrative. Celeste led an exercise in which students had to paraphrase a quote from President Taft on the tariff issue during the 1912 campaign. We emphasized the need for students to include footnotes or citations identifying the specific sources of their information, including webpages.

For the most part, we were pleased with the final papers. Most students caught on to what was expected of them in terms of citing, quoting, and paraphrasing, so there were no incidents of plagiarism in the final papers. Students incorporated many of the revisions we had suggested in our comments and corrected most of the surface errors. We felt that the time we spent going over the low-stakes assignments and first drafts was worthwhile.

The Evolution of a Paragraph

One student's work shows the value of the scaffolding, responses, and in-class work described above. This paragraph was part of the student's response to the low-stakes assignment on the 1912 election:

> The Democratic Party supported organized labor. In the House of Representatives democrats passed the Eight-Hour law and Contempt bill and other bills to help the working man. Thomas Woodrow Wilson, the candidate for president, opposed the minimum wage. He also believed in free competition.

In our comments, Celeste and I praised the student for finding and using information to summarize Wilson's and the Democrats' views on labor. We pointed out that many of the paragraph's words had been taken verbatim from the website, explaining that using someone else's words without putting them in quotation marks *and* citing the source is plagiarism. We also suggested that the student comment explicitly on the differences between Wilson and his party on this issue and made a few other suggestions to help the student clarify. Finally, we corrected grammatical errors.

On the first draft of the formal paper, the paragraph looked like this:

> The Democratic party supported organized labor. In the House of Representatives, Democrats passed the Eight-Hour Law, "the Clayton Injunction Limitations, and Contempt bills," and other bills to help the working man. Woodrow Wilson, the Democratic candidate for president, did not stand for what his party believed in. Wilson opposed the minimum wage. He also believed in free competition.

The student included a footnote citing her source. We commended her for using quotation marks and a footnote to eliminate any hint of plagiarism and for noting the contrast between Wilson's position and that of the Democratic Party. We pointed out, however, that if the student did a little more research on a subsequent webpage, she would discover that Wilson had changed many of his positions after receiving the Democratic presidential nomination.

The student's final paper shows the result of this multi-step process:

> The Democratic Party supported organized labor. In the House of Representatives, Democrats had passed the Eight-Hour Law, "the Clayton Injunction Limitation and Contempt bills," and other bills to help the working man. But Woodrow Wilson, the Democratic candidate for President, had different views from his party. Wilson was against the minimum wage. He also believed in free competition. Wilson's views on labor changed once he was nominated by his party. Wilson went from not supporting the working man to saying that laborers were "the backbone of the nation". He wanted to make sure he had the same views as his party. Wilson also wanted to make sure his views were different from those of Taft.

From a rather simplistic account that was mostly plagiarized, this paragraph had evolved into a strong discussion of the Democrats and labor that highlighted the complexity of a presidential candidate's relations with his party. Although she still had a few grammatical errors, the student had found a wonderful quote to illustrate Wilson's changing views on workers and had learned to cite sources properly.

The Second Paper

The second formal paper in the course was a five-page paper on President Harry Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan to end World War II. Plagiarism had been a recurrent problem when I had previously used this assignment, but I had minimized such incidents by requiring students to base their papers on documents on a specific website. Celeste and I hoped that, ten weeks into the course, students would not need as much scaffolding as they had for the first paper, so this time there was no low-stakes assignment—just a first draft, returned with our comments, and a final paper.

Despite the drama of the topic, most papers on this issue I had received in the past had been rather dry. To enliven the assignment, Celeste suggested that, instead of having the students write a typical research paper, we have them assume the role of President Truman's chief advisor. Celeste thought that allowing the students to write the paper in a new voice would make their writing more interesting while still requiring them to analyze the historical documents and use them to present a convincing argument for or against using the atomic bomb. Accordingly, we instructed students to write a 4–5 page memorandum to President Truman. To ensure that students would take a position and defend it, the instructions said:

> The President is a busy man, so in the first paragraph of your paper you must state clearly your recommendation. You should then go on and discuss the arguments for and against dropping the atomic bomb on Japanese cities, and then explain in detail the reason for your recommendation.

The students' first drafts showed that Celeste's suggestion had made a huge difference; the students really took to their roles as the President's chief advisor, so their papers were livelier than those I had received previously. Students had difficulty, however, in presenting the case for and against using the bomb. Most of them included only the arguments for the position they were advocating. They did a much better job of citing documents than they had on the earlier paper, but they did not always focus on the key issues. Some students, for example, spent more time discussing the specific height from which the bomb would be dropped rather than the criteria on which targets were selected or the distinction between military and civilian casualties.

Since we had only a few weeks left, we didn't want to use precious class time to discuss the papers. Instead, I sent students a memorandum summarizing these problems and clarifying the proper format for a memorandum. I also commented extensively on individual papers, covering both content and grammar. Although some problems remained on the final papers, most were quite good, reflecting the complexity of the issue and the difficulty of Truman's decision. For example, one student who recommended that Truman use the bomb "to insure the safety of our people" acknowledged that:

> The atomic bomb and its massive power raise the issue of civilian casualties. The experiment you were telling me about that took place in New Mexico shows how destructive the atomic bomb is. You yourself told me how only "thirteen pounds of the explosive caused the complete disintegration of a steel tower 60 feet high, created a crater 6 feet deep and 1,200 feet in diameter, knocked over a steel tower ½ mile away and knocked men down 10,000 yards away."...Knowing how destructive this bomb is, we have to make sure that when we use it against Kyoto, Hiroshima, Yokohama and Kokura Arsenal we do not violate Article XXIV, Section 3 of the Draft Rules of Aerial warfare, which states, that it is illegal to bomb any building which has civilians nearby. Even though this article was not adopted as a treaty, it was supported by the United States. If civilians are injured when we bomb these Japanese cities, we will be labeled as barbarians.

Reflections: What Has Changed

Originally, my main interest in Writing Across the Curriculum had been to help students improve their writing, but as my involvement in WAC progressed, I realized that writing should not be viewed as an end unto itself. Students were "writing to learn," as some of my WAC colleagues said, rather than just "learning to write." Without realizing it, I became more comfortable with using spontaneous "writing to learn" activities to make sure that students understood what they were reading. For example, when I was disappointed in the quality of the class discussion on Progressivism, I took five minutes to have the students complete one of the following sentences:

"Progressivism was . . ." or "The Progressives were . . ." The sentences showed that their textbook reading had not given students a clear sense of what Progressivism was all about, so we needed to spend more time discussing it.

Later in the semester, in talking about McCarthyism and President Truman's Federal Employee Loyalty Program, I commented that the burden of proof had shifted from the government to the individual. Rather than the government having to prove that someone was disloyal, Americans were required to prove their loyalty to the United States. I asked the students to write for ten minutes explaining how they would prove their loyalty today if required to do so. In the context of the Patriot Act and the immigrant backgrounds of many Lehman students, this exercise was more than just academic; it led to a terrific discussion. Students realized how difficult it is for individuals to prove their loyalty or innocence, thereby coming to understand why the Constitution and the Bill of Rights require the government to prove that someone is disloyal or guilty.

As I look back now, I see how much has changed in this course over the last few years. I have completely revamped my syllabus. In addition to a textbook and traditional readings, I now use online materials; low-stakes writing; scaffolding, including first drafts, to build toward formal papers; and assignments that allow students to write more in their own voice. I have learned that some ideas work better than others, and I have made my expectations more explicit.

But has it all made a difference? Has WAC made me a better teacher? Has the increased writing made my students better writers? Has it helped them learn more history? For that matter, how does one gauge growth in student writing? If students write strong papers, is it because they were good writers coming into the class, or is it because of what they learned in the course? If students do not do as well on the second paper, does that mean they did not learn anything from the first paper, or might it be that they had three tests and two other papers due that week? Was student improvement attributable to the increased writing they were doing in my course, or was it a cumulative result based on what they were learning in all their courses?

Unsure of how to measure improvement in student writing, Celeste and I decided to focus on whether students' attitudes toward writing had changed. At the end of the semester, Celeste asked students to send her another letter, this time reflecting on their experiences in this class. Specifically, she asked them what they had expected to gain from this writing-intensive course and

whether their expectations had been met; whether this course had affected their attitude towards writing and made them more comfortable with writing academic papers; what specific aspects of the assignments and comments they found helpful (or not helpful); and whether they thought they had improved as writers or learned any skills that would be useful in other classes and disciplines.

We did not get as many responses as we had hoped, but the ones we did receive were encouraging. We heard from a cross-section of students, some who received A's and some who were disappointed with their grades. Although the course did not change all respondents' attitudes towards writing—some still did not like to write—all emphasized that the course had given them more confidence in their writing. Even some who complained about the number of written assignments believed that the experience had helped them improve their writing. One student commented:

> This class actually changed my attitude towards writing. At first I was not into writing but as the semester went on I started to enjoy writing about different topics. My comfort level has definitely gone up because now when I have papers for other classes I do not get afraid of them.

A number of students commented that they now understood the importance of revising a paper, for example:

> When I first started the writing intensive class, I was afraid to make changes in my papers thinking I was going to make it worse than it already was. After this course, I see that the more I rewrite my paper the better it can get.

Students seemed especially grateful for the extensive feedback they received on their papers. One student reported:

> When I turned in papers and they were returned to me with feedback, at first I felt overwhelmed and even a little ill at ease with my errors. Once I had gone over these errors I immediately saw how they affected my work in general. After I had made corrections and rewrote the assignment, I learned more about the topic

> I was writing about and understood how the way I had originally written about it may not have been as coherent.

This student felt that over the course of the semester, she had "improved as a writer because of the kind of criticism I received, from two people who had thoroughly read my papers and gave me criticism that was nothing other than helpful."

Even students who came into the class as good writers found the course to be a valuable experience:

> When I got back the paper on Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, with all the corrections in red, I was a bit surprised. I felt like I must have done a poor job on the paper and was dreading the corrections that had to be made. However, soon after that I realized the importance of feedback and I knew the amount of work I had to put into the paper to improve it. So for me, the comments were initially a pain, but soon thereafter, I found them helpful… I received an A on the final assignment but I saw ways that I could have improved the paper itself.

Some of the students also came to understand the value of "writing to learn." One student emphasized that "extensive writing combined with 20th Century American History helped us, I think, to better understand important events and figures of the past."

Another student "really enjoyed history this year because Professor Tananbaum really got me into it with his in-depth and passionate teaching style." Such comments led me to reflect on my own progress. After I spent all this time trying to change my students and make them better writers and better students of history, the light bulb suddenly went on: *I am the one who has changed!*

Maybe I was naïve; I knew that my syllabus needed to change, but I never realized that *I* would change. Celeste had to point out to me some of the ways I have changed without even realizing it, such as using spontaneous writing exercises. After spending countless hours thinking about and discussing teaching and writing, I teach differently. I understand that writing is an

integral part of my teaching. I see my syllabus as a work in progress, not a work of art. I realize that, in addition to helping students learn to write, I can use writing to help students learn American history. I am energized about teaching again. I had always worked hard on my teaching, but now I put a lot more thought into my syllabus and into what I hope to accomplish with each assignment. WAC may not have answered all my prayers, but it has made me a lot more satisfied with my students and my teaching.

WRITING TANGO: TANGO AS A METAPHOR FOR PARTNERING AND DIALOGUE AMONG PROFESSOR, WRITING FELLOW, AND STUDENTS IN A GRADUATE "TEACHER AS RESEARCHER" COURSE

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Introduction

My mother used to say that I had "two left feet." I have occasionally puzzled over the meaning of this phrase. I knew what she meant: I was awkward. I don't know why she chose this phrase to indicate my awkwardness. As I grew up I generally saw myself as awkward; I never saw myself, for example, as a graceful dancer. More recently, I found myself reconsidering dance, and my relationship to it, as I considered writing about the "Teacher as Researcher" course. In this essay I turn to tango, which offers a surprising and sometimes awkward way to bring together the unique experience I had rethinking this required class in connection to writing, the arts, and research.

Like other departments at Lehman College, the Early Childhood and Childhood Education Department worked with the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts to bring arts education to the academy. The integration of various art forms into seemingly unrelated coursework each semester was my academic department's attempt to value art as a way of learning, not only about art but about other things as well. This perspective was nurtured through an experience with art which focuses on one or more of the following capacities: noticing deeply, embodying, questioning, identifying patterns, making connections, exhibiting empathy, creating meaning, taking action, reflecting/assessing (Holzer 2007).

Over many years I have worked to integrate one art form or another, as well as emphasize writing and research, in the two graduate courses which I regularly teach: a child development course positioned at the beginning of the program and a teacher as researcher course positioned at the end of the program.

In this essay I focus on the research course; the art component I was attempting to integrate was the tango. I also worked with a graduate writing fellow through participating in the WAC program at the college, and used Blackboard Discussion Board (Db) as a journaling device: in essence a three-way dance. As I planned for the course, I wondered if I would be able to manage the integrative dance of the tango, research, and journaling through Blackboard and whether I would be able to manage, at the same time, the complex partnering, dialogue, and movement which would be required among the partners (professor, writing fellow, and students). Would I be able to dance? Would we?

Teacher as Researcher: A New Approach to a Common Course

The Teacher as Researcher course, as the last course that graduate early childhood students take, was designed to be a shift from the traditional master's degree thesis or "project" course. It was thought that it would offer students, most of whom were already teachers, experience in writing an article to be submitted for publication, a genre more synchronous with their professional life as teachers than is a thesis. Writing a thesis or large project, as we had expected of students in previous years, was an experience that got left behind in the graduate program and was never again attempted, or even clearly useful, in their teaching. I thought that the new design of writing and submitting an article for publication might encourage teachers to continue writing and publishing after they graduate from the program. The course would serve as transition from student writer to professional writer. While it is not required in the course that they actually publish, it is required that they experience the process of submission so that this aspect of writing becomes familiar and, hopefully, less threatening. I also thought that our new design would be less anxiety-producing for students.

But, no. No matter how I attempt to sell the course as a non-threatening writing experience, anxiety continues to run high. Despite the shift in this course, some students persist in referring to the article writing expectation as a "thesis." The word "researcher," applied to themselves, seems to alarm students to such a degree that their writing becomes stilted and full of anxiety. Students say that they have not previously "done research." Some students fear writing, generally, thinking that they are not sufficiently competent in basic writing skills, even though they are at the end of a graduate program. It is probably a reality for most that they have completed

courses in the graduate program, and before it, without understanding revision as a necessary part of writing; students are accustomed to turning in a paper and receiving a grade.

Some of the students in the Teacher as Researcher course might have been enrolled in my section of the child development course, two years earlier at the beginning of their program. These students would have experienced the WAC approach to writing. There are, however, different sections of each of these courses, as well as many intervening courses, offering no guarantee of early and continued exposure to good writing practice. As a result, the support students need varies. Individual assessment of writing, and the intervention required on the part of a professor (and that of a writing fellow when available) is essential in every program course if we are to help students who are teachers to use writing well in their classrooms and attempt publishing about their work.

Low and High-Stakes Writing and the Experience of Art

The planned structure of the Teacher as Researcher course this semester was for the class to meet as a whole group three times: at the beginning of the course to understand course goals and organization, at a workshop session in the middle of the course as preparation for experiencing a performance of the tango at Lincoln Center in Manhattan, then at the end of the course to present their work as a poster session, modeling procedure at most conferences (an additional attempt at introducing students to participation in professional forums). At the poster session students would present their own work and react to each other's work on a summary reaction sheet provided. A sample of best work would be selected by the Division of Education from each Teacher as Researcher course section for display at an awards ceremony held at the end of the academic year.

All other work time was to be equally divided between on-line sessions and tutorial sessions on alternate weeks. During the online sessions students were to email their current work to the writing fellow and to me. They would receive written feedback via return email. What was unique in this course was the presence of a writing fellow as I was participating in the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. The writing fellow would focus on writing issues generally; I would focus on research skills, content, and organization. During tutorial sessions the writing fellow and I would discuss with students the next step in their writing; again the writing fellow focused on writing issues and I on research skills, content, and organization. For the

tutorial sessions the writing fellow and I would meet together with students so that we, and the students, would know what had been advised thereby hoping to avoid confusion.

High- and Low-Stakes Writing: From Student to Researcher

Low-Stakes Writing Assignments

Initial and Closing Letters

Students were required to submit initial and closing letters to the writing fellow and me. Here they reflected on their writing skills as they saw them, on the tango as a metaphor for the high stakes writing required in the course, and on the overall course experience as we ended. The initial letter was a response to a letter from both the writing fellow and me. Our opening letter asked about their feelings about their writing, their previous writing experience, whether they had ever considered writing for publication, and what connections they might make between tango and the process of writing. This proved very useful in ascertaining how students thought of themselves as writers and in actually introducing what would be the content of the course. The closing letter, also a response to a letter from both of us, was especially useful in understanding what students felt that they had gained (completing a difficult task well, partnering, beginning to see the possibility of themselves as professional writers) as well as what needed to be improved in the course.

Discussion Board Journal Entries

Students were also required to submit journal entries weekly, focusing on their thoughts and feelings about their own research process, through conversation on Blackboard. At the time that this course was offered, it soon became apparent that students' use of Blackboard would not go easily. At the beginning of the course, despite its advertisement as a hybrid online course in the registration bulletin, some students did not have computers or did not have online technical capacity; some did not have email addresses. Others did not know how to access the Blackboard system online, or could get into Blackboard but could not download the files. Then the system itself was not working properly during the first weeks of the course. My expertise in using Blackboard, new and incomplete as it was, limited both my ability to use it fully and to help students in Blackboard distress. Finally, everything I put on Blackboard needed to be available on hard copy as well. These were temporary problems, thankfully no longer an issue in subsequent versions of the course.

Email

The best payoff of the online work for the students, the writing fellow, and me was not the use of Blackboard, but our email exchanges. By the end of the first month of the course each student had managed to find a computer and an email address, sometimes borrowing another's. They emailed their written "article" work on the alternate weeks as required. Emailed writing also made it easy to maintain copies of student work as they progressed through the course. The writing fellow and I could return to their work and see their progress whenever we wished, which was not possible in earlier courses when I would edit papers, return them to students for rewriting, and often not see them again as each new draft materialized.

High-Stakes Writing

A Potentially Publishable Article

The high-stakes writing assignment involved the completion of a potentially publishable article, organized in sequential steps. In the first whole group session students were told that they were expected to select a topic for their inquiry, write an introductory paragraph, write a review of related literature, write a rough draft with numerous revisions, and move toward a completed draft and finally an abstract. Once the article was complete they were to construct a poster as they might for a poster session at an early childhood conference and present that at a final group gathering for the course. They were to follow submission instructions provided by the early childhood journal of their choice, attach a letter requesting consideration for publication, package it in an addressed envelope, and bring all to me for a final pre-mailing check. If they selected a topic for their inquiry that involved human subjects, it was also necessary to gain approval by the college IRB (Institutional Review Board).

Experiential Education

The Tango

Midway through the course students met for a workshop conducted by a Lincoln Center teaching artist to introduce the tango as an art form through a "line of inquiry." This is a guiding question that attempts to integrate an art form with some aspect of course content. The teaching artist, the writing fellow, and I structured this workshop together attempting both to introduce this art form and to connect it to research writing. During this session

students explored feelings and thoughts in a very personal way, quite openly: reflections on their partners in life, how they "breathe" with their partners, who leads/follows in their partnerships, what makes a successful partnership, what can influence a partnership. These reflections prepared them for the tango performance. They also served as a way to reflect on the partnerships (their roles/the other's roles) that they were experiencing with their student research partner, with the writing fellow, and with me in the "dance" of creating a professional article and seeing themselves as teacher-researchers. We then attended the tango performance at Lincoln Center. In addition to experiencing tango and the unusual connection of tango to research writing, many students experienced Lincoln Center itself for the first time.

Contact and Support

Because of the anxiety that this course generates, some form of scaffolding is always necessary. The presence of the writing fellow, me, and the student made scaffolding more complicated and richer. The writing fellow and I met together during tutorial sessions as we attempted to scaffold student writing. Additionally, students were expected to be in close contact with each other adding to their academic and emotional support. In previous versions of this course, students met every week with the professor unless released from doing so because they were progressing well on their own. The formally organized schedule of tutorials alternating with email submissions this semester was a design experiment, a compromise between asynchronous and face-to-face courses, offering student increased time to complete the rigorous writing schedule.

Low-Stakes Writing: Reaction and Response

Initial and Closing Letters

Initial letters informed us of students' anxiety and their expectation of what good writing entails, as well as their personal goals. The following are representative:

- I have written a number of research papers...I know, of course, that my writing has improved since my undergraduate studies and I believe it is beginning to approach some of my personal goals if I can continue to work meticulously on content as well as grammar. A well written research paper entails a great deal of secondary source material which effectively support your argument as well as good

original research and analysis which will provide clear insight into the questions that writer would like to address. I have never considered writing for publication due to my limited experience with original research and, as a result, the lack of confidence in my own work this leads to. I hope to overcome my anxiety concerning my writing something that is worth publishing. I hope to be able to organize my thoughts well enough to write a clear and concise research paper. I hope to produce a paper that will be rich in content as well as one that is easy to read. Lastly, I hope to eventually see myself as a writer.

- I've always thought of myself as a fair writer, who can do better if I really apply myself. I don't really like writing too much because I'm afraid of not being able to express my thoughts intelligibly or sounding like an eighth grader rather than a graduate student. I'm afraid that I won't use that proper vocabulary and/or use poor grammar. I know I can be a better writer. I believe my work is acceptable. A well-written research paper first requires time. One should properly prepare and research the information carefully that's need to write the paper. A good thesis statement is essential; an outline should entail detailed information about the topic. All references should be cited and the paper should have a bibliography. Writing for publication was never something I could imagine doing.

- It is difficult for me to transfer my thought into words at times, and this causes problems with my writing ability. I believe that a well-written research paper entails backing up my feelings with reputable, documented research. Clear, consistent sentences are also of particular importance. If thoughts cannot be expressed clearly, then the reader will not have gained a meaningful understanding of the work that is presented. I would like to work on grammar and punctuation. I am also concerned about run-on sentences. I want to improve in these areas. I have never considered writing for publication. I always thought of college professors and others held in high prestige to be the ones to do that kind of writing. It is a great challenge to know that I am expected to submit my work. It is also very stressful and pressure-filled.

Discussion Board Journal

The journal entries helped us keep abreast of some student concerns as they progressed. In fact, students did not respond well to Db. They said that they saw it as an unnecessary distraction, not as something that would connect them to each other and to us. Students found Db to be one expectation too many and either did not post, posted sporadically, or posted all at once toward the end of the course. Knowing the stress and anxiety that this course generates, I had mixed feelings about taking a hard stand on Db. I wanted them to reflect on their ongoing experience, but realized that their stress levels and focus on their writing made this additional task difficult. Negative student reaction to Db has decreased in subsequent offerings of the course, perhaps because students are more familiar with using Discussion Board, and expect to feel more supported by student responses to them. An ongoing concern on my part is whether and how to enter into this discussion as instructor. I have consistently seen Db as the students' place and have been afraid that, if I enter in, students will begin to address me rather than each other.

Representative student postings on Discussion Board follow, indicating student stress but also the partnering they experienced with the writing fellow and me:

- As I go through the process of writing this journal, I still believe that it's (writing an article) one of the most difficult things I have to do in my academic career. I believe it's because of the fact it's an article that will be read by so many other people and I am afraid it won't be good enough for publication.

- This has been a stressful semester thus far. However, having your support and constructive criticism has pushed me along this grueling process. Going into this course I really had no idea about writing a journal article. The support I have received from you in regards to picking my topic and what to look for in my research and writing my reviews [of literature] has been significant. I am still unsure in some respects but I think it is because I have yet to finish.

- Working with you both has been a wonderful experience. You are both very helpful. When I am confused with my writing you guide me and direct me in the right track. I feel I have improved my writing, which is my weakness, and you have guided me through a difficult

piece of writing that has increased my confidence and professionalism.

- At times I was scared by all the work that needs to be done. Other times I feel confident because I could count on my professors to guide me through it. I feel it is slowly coming along.

Email

The informal email notes to both of us were surprising. Students sometimes shared personal information about themselves and their feelings as if email writing enabled them to write what they did not write in their journals or could not tell us in person. They emailed their questions, their problems, and their anxieties. The emails began to be very personal, as did our responses. I became involved in a kind of dialogue with students that I had not experienced so consistently in person; this intrigued me as I expected this less frequent contact with students to distance us uncomfortably. We *were* more distanced, but the distance involved, maybe allowed, the possibility of a new kind of connection that seemed more personal rather than less. This writing possibility brought them closer and allowed them distance at the same time. It enabled us to be positive and supportive to them whenever they requested it; the emails were more immediate interactions than the face-to-face meetings.

High-Stakes Writing: Reaction and Response

The sequential writing steps of the high stakes writing assignment, moving toward a professional, potentially publishable article, were described over and over orally during tutorial sessions and, often, in response to email questions. I think managing the article as sequential parts is a good approach; the rewriting until each part is at least acceptable is also a good approach. Students sometimes hated the revision, wanting just to be done with it. We talked about its often-annoying importance. Students were individual in their need for explanation and then rewriting, the speed of their progress, but they all finished. In the end, I think, they were each proud of their product, even eager to share it in the poster session, wanting to be published for the first time... which brought the necessity of explaining how difficult it is to be published in early childhood journals for professor as well as students (approximately 15% of what is submitted) but that some students have been published... and that there were more journals than one for submission. We described the greater likelihood of being published in ERIC (approximately 85%) and the assurance of being published in a Lehman collection (100%).

Experiential Education: The Tango as Metaphor

Integrating tango, and reflecting on it as a metaphor for a course in research writing, did not prove as difficult as I initially thought it might be. Tango requires partnering; it requires dialogue. Tango is a difficult dance to manage and is danced differently dependent on its partnering. It is often edgy, confrontational; sometimes gentler, the partners in synchrony. Yet it flows through practice and adjustments toward completion. The research-writing course also required partnering: between instructor partners, between student partners, between students and instructors. The course required ongoing dialogue between and among partners. Each partnering required a different dialogue that at times became edgy and confrontational and, yet, the work flowed as students practiced a new form of writing, adjusting their conceptualization and, over time, their product.

Students described their imagined connections between tango and writing. The following descriptions are representative:

- The writing process is a struggle just like learning to tango. Form is extremely important. You have to learn about grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and how to control the paper, choosing the exact right word or phrase (just like placing your foot on the exact right spot on the floor in tango). A sentence shouldn't have any extra words and a paragraph shouldn't have any extra sentences. Once you learn the skills, your artistic soul can fly.

- I can only compare writing to tango in terms of the fluidity with which the dancers move to the music and the way thoughts flow in a writer's head. You pick up a pen and sometimes you write furiously when the thoughts come quickly. Other times you slow your pace, when you have to reflect on what you have written.

- I believe that writing can be looked at as a dance. The interaction of your thoughts and words moving around in your mind to eventually express a beautiful product on paper regardless of content can be as intricate and complex as the tricky physical movements of the tango. I am looking forward to a productive partnership throughout this semester.

- Writing involves many steps. It is a series of frustrations and successes. The good writer does not give up on these challenges and

> continues to make mistakes in order to become great. This takes many years (or dance lessons), grade levels, and writing lessons to be perfect. I do hope to dance gracefully in the end, though I do have a tendency to be clumsy.

The End of the Dance

The course worked, though I continue to work on it. The WAC component of the course was a wonderful addition, particularly due to the writing fellow's way of partnering. Her expertise and manner of sharing it with students was not only helpful to them as she scaffolded their efforts, but enjoyable. I worried, at first, that students would be overwhelmed with our double teaming, with two "dance" instructors as it were, but they soon relaxed and seemed to know that they were experiencing something special. It is up to me, as I continue to teach the course, to integrate the WAC approaches as I have absorbed them, alone. Writing fellows cannot continue with the same professor in perpetuity. They move on to introduce new professors to their rich ways of increasing writing across the curriculum.

A variety of writing experiences that the writing fellow and I implemented throughout this course (the letters, journal entries, and informal email notes) continues to be added to the sequential writing steps that had already been part of this course. The art component of the course continues as well; just the art form, and the teaching artist with whom I work, changes each semester as it has in the past. My job will be to conceptualize how each particular art form can be integrated with the writing work of this course. The early childhood graduate program coordinator and I have also restructured the program around student cohorts so that students who begin with the integration of the arts and intensive writing in the beginning course will conclude with these experiences in the ending course. What needs to change is their experience with each through the middle of the program. This is difficult and unresolved given the number of sections offered and the number of adjuncts who teach them.

What also needs to change is the Blackboard component of the courses I teach. My skill in using Blackboard has increased and, hopefully, will continue to increase. I have learned how to group students on Blackboard it so that small groups, with something in common can talk with each other on a small subset of Discussion Board. I have learned how to use Discussion Board generally, formulating questions that are meaningful as the course and student work moves along.

Final Reflections

In their closing letter students write of their experience in this writing course. They describe the felt difficulty of the writing work as well as their sense of accomplishment:

- I think now that I understand how to write an article for publication, which is truly a great thing, even though it has not been a lot of fun. More like pulling teeth. I've never written a paper this long. I've never researched anything like this. I've never used quotes and references like I have for this paper. This is all new to me. I've never used APA style references. And I gained twelve pounds while I was not writing this paper and torturing myself for weeks. I think that I needed more supervisions, but that's my problem not yours. Writing required self-discipline and I just ran in the other direction until there was nowhere else to go. You were available, I wasn't.

- I can honestly say that this was one of the most stressful assignments I've had in a long time. This semester has pushed me to realize goals I never thought I would do. I've done research papers before, but this one is definitely the hardest. I know I could have done much better [but] I look forward to completing this semester with a great sense of accomplishment.

- I have learned humility. Learning to take suggestions positively as opposed to being offended by them has certainly changed my view for the better. The face-to-face meetings made me realize how I should speak to my own students about their writing. People are very attached to their words, and what someone says can make or break confidence in their writing.

They describe the value of partnering:

- I have gained a new sense of understanding what a partnership consists of. I see the coming and going between two people as well as the connection that is shared within a partnership. I can see the professionalism within all of us as well as the camaraderie we share.
- The partnering we shared with each other was enormous. I thought we were unique in that we were all extremely supportive of each other.

I close with the comments of one student who understood tango, writing, hope, and loss:

- Tango, it is said, is a dance of pain in response to the feeling of disenfranchisement of immigrants, the feeling of being a "stranger in a strange land." In this, too, the writing process resembles a tango because in our writing we are always looking for belonging, in the sense of being accepted and understood. This perspective comes from an historical context as well as a cultural context. As tango changed our history over time, it has come to be seen as a romantic, albeit bittersweet, statement about the relationship between man and woman. Writing is a bittersweet relationship between loving ideas and stating them empirically. In the end of this process I hope to find my own voice, tamed and honed to speak with the ornament of educational jargon, the wisdom of meaningful philosophy, and the experience of the writing process. The best and the worst thing about this course is the freedom it provided. Writing is the most basic kind of tango, the most primitive and antagonistic dance. You are essentially wrestling with yourself and the material. You go through a kind of tearing apart and putting together. When you finish you are exhausted and if you live up to or go beyond your standards for yourself, you feel a little elation and a little hope. Now that it is over, I feel terribly, terribly sad.

Tango provided the metaphor for partnering and dialogue. The partnering and dialogue experienced in the course enabled writing skills to develop into a professional article worthy of submission. They enabled confidence to develop in teachers who grew in seeing themselves as worthy of conceptualizing, researching, writing, and submitting their work for publication.

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WE BUILT THIS CITY: PLAYING WITH VOICE IN A U.S. URBAN HISTORY CLASS

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Context: The Changing Face of Writing for Students, for History

Recently, I took part in a faculty workshop on using digital tools for teaching. Some participants were wary of adopting such technologies. They worried that students use an unacceptably informal style of communication in online forums including email, discussion boards, and Twitter. While people disagreed on whether this practice was a problem, everyone there seemed to agree that students (and others) should use different "voices" when writing for different audiences. Some suggested that they expected a more formal tone in emails addressed to professors than to friends. Others said they didn't mind if students take an informal tone in an email ("Hey, Professor") but that they expected a more distant writing style in the papers they received from students. Still others encouraged some formal, high-stakes writing and some informal, low-stakes writing in their classrooms, allowing more leeway in the latter case.

I followed this conversation with interest because it touched upon several issues that I have been considering lately as a teacher. First, I have been thinking about the question of rhetorical style, of experimenting with different voices and target audiences in written assignments. Second, I am concerned with providing my students with critical reading and thinking skills that they can use outside of the classroom and capitalizing on the skills they bring *into* the classroom, including digital literacies. These two considerations relate to my central concern as a college instructor: finding effective ways to present material to students.

As I have gained experience as a teacher—as an adjunct at various CUNY campuses, as a visiting professor at Barnard and Connecticut Colleges, and for as a member of the history department at Lehman—I have worked to integrate these concerns and goals into my syllabi. I have played with different types of assignments, with various presentation formats, and with in-class exercises, all in an effort to impart the events of the past to my

students in a compelling, enduring, and relevant fashion. I have found that encouraging students to explore various voices and rhetorical styles can foster student engagement, improved writing, and a firmer grasp of the historical material than some of the more traditional approaches I have used in the past.

Case Study of an Experimental Writing Assignment

I implemented a non-traditional assignment in a course I taught on the history of United States cities. The class covered US urban history from the colonial period to the present, addressing such topics as politics, economics, infrastructure, popular culture, demographics, and social structure over time. I developed the syllabus and assignments for this course as part of a year-long Writing Across the Curriculum program in which I participated. The program included monthly seminars on WAC strategies and techniques. I was assigned a writing fellow, Carla DuBose, a doctoral student in history at the CUNY Graduate Center. Carla worked closely with me in crafting the syllabus and assignments for the course. The WAC component, and the advantage of Carla's expertise, provided me with the perfect opportunity to test out some new approaches to using writing in the classroom to achieve my teaching goals.

Before the semester began, I sat down with Carla and discussed my goals with her: to present change over time and the patterns of urban history in a way that would be compelling and relevant to students. We also talked about my interest in reaching students beyond the classroom—to help them to develop skills and knowledge that they could carry beyond a history class, and also to foster and utilize the skills and knowledge that they bring with them. Together, we brainstormed ways to craft the course to best achieve these objectives. We came up with an ambitious "Build Your Own City" assignment that asked the students to spend the semester "creating" the history of a fictitious American city. The assignment consisted of a series of low-stakes writing exercises and four high-stakes papers. The assignments were entirely scaffolded; each built on the previous one and they were combined in the end when students produced a final paper that drew on the previous installments.

Historical Writing, Persuasive Writing, and the Role of Voice

Each high-stakes paper asked the students to use a different "voice" or rhetorical style to convey an era in their city's history. I had implemented

these types of papers before. In my American history survey, I have asked students to take on a role: a patriot trying to convince a relative to support the American revolution; a foreign journalist visiting the United States on the eve of the Civil War and writing an article about its causes; a student visiting her parents for Thanksgiving during the tumult of the 1960s and explaining her support for the student movement.

This approach serves several purposes. It engages students with the material in a more compelling way than asking them to write a report or a "data dump." It encourages students to understand the past on the terms of the people who lived it—to engage the past historically rather than ahistorically. In my experience, it evinces better writing since students are apt to write more engaging, clearer prose when they feel a connection to the subject they are writing about. Furthermore, it discourages plagiarism since students are forced to put the concepts in their own words and to write in a style that is not easily found, cut, and pasted from online sources.

Finally, playing with voice addresses my interest in providing course material and skills that are relevant to students both within and outside of the classroom. In the past, I have been frustrated in trying to train undergraduate students to write like historians. Few of my undergraduate students intend to pursue a career as an historian, so it makes little sense to spend an entire semester teaching them to write like one. I would much prefer that students emerge from my class with stronger analytical skills, with a grasp of the content we covered over the course of the semester, and with a clearer, more compelling rhetorical style, than with the ability to write like an historian. In addition to these advantages, the "build-your-own-city" assignment also highlighted my central teaching priority: showing students the patterns of history and, at the same time the importance of context—where those patterns diverged. I strive to help students identify and evaluate historical *patterns* as well as *particulars*. History does not repeat itself but it does echo and it is my job to point out and make sense of the instances of reverberation.

Thus, in creating their own cities, I hoped that students would examine and process the common patterns, thematic and chronological, shared by the cities we were studying and create a composite city that incorporated those patterns. At the same time, I wanted them to contextualize the unique aspects of their cities in the historical shifts we examined. The written assignments were also set up to emphasize coverage. Each installment focused on a particular period in the history of American cities and the due dates fell at the end of our chronological units. My hope was that students would process the

material that we had covered in class and that their papers would demonstrate their understanding of the course content and themes.

Building a City: Steps to Success

The assignment was designed to achieve other goals for learning as well. For example, I scaffolded the assignment in part to encourage students to circle back to details and material from earlier in the semester, to see the patterns that echo even within our relatively narrow subject and chronological field. And by encouraging creativity and different voices for different installments, I hoped to capitalize on the strengths that students entered the classroom with, and to provide them with skills—critical thinking, document analysis, extrapolating information—which they could apply outside of this course.

In order to successfully create a fictional city, students first needed to understand the patterns of development shared by many American cities. To this end, we spent the first week of class doing some brainstorming and low-stakes writing exercises in which we came up with definitions for "urban" and "city" and agreed on certain characteristics that many cities share. For example, we agreed that cities are generally populous, they are center of commerce, they offer cultural activities, and usually house a diverse population. After we brainstormed characteristics and read some scholarly articles on urban development, we came up with a working definition and a list of characteristics for the students to use in creating their own cities. These exercises also brought us to the important historical point that the very definitions of urban and city change over time—the American colonial seaports shared many characteristics with *each other* but bear little resemblance to the metropolis of the twentieth century or to the suburban, edge cities of the twenty-first.

After we came up with our definition and characteristics, I gave the students a handout detailing the entire assignment and the criteria that their "invented" city must meet. We went over in some detail the challenge of balancing the creative and academic components of the assignment. This step was important because I wanted to make sure that their creations not be anachronistic or fantastical. As I reminded them over the course of the semester, the assignment was a series of history papers, not an exercise in creative writing.

The handout listed the following criteria for the students' cities:

- It must be an American city.
- It must have a long history—its founding should occur sometime during the second half of the 1600s.
- It must be grounded contextually in U.S. Urban History (in other words, the developments you create for your city must make sense in the context of the development of actual American cities).
- It must adhere to at least some of the criteria we have established in our definition of a city.
- Its history must reflect change over time.

In the second week of class, I asked students to turn in a one-paragraph description of their city, its founding dates and details, and its economy and demography in 1776. Four papers followed over the course of the semester, each asking them to address their city's history at a different moment in time, using a different voice.

The first paper took the form of a pamphlet celebrating the city's bicentennial. By the time this paper was due, we had covered several aspects of urban development from the colonial period to the late nineteenth century. Students were asked to take on the voice of a city booster, describing the city's first 200 years. I guided them to describe the economic basis of their cities, problems its government faced and surmounted, early development of infrastructure and services, and demographic makeup over time. We had addressed these topics in detail through our course materials. Students were expected to reference details from class lectures and discussions and our course readings. Indeed, for this and the two subsequent assignments, I required students to incorporate at least two secondary sources and two primary sources from our course syllabus.

For the second paper, students composed a tour guide to their city, set in the 1920s. Again, this paper drew on the themes and material that we had addressed in class. And again, I guided students in terms of the topics to include in their guidebooks: the history of their city to that point, plus a discussion of some specific neighborhoods, cultural activities available in their cities, ethnic and immigrant enclaves, city governance, and infrastructure. Like the previous paper, students were required to include primary and secondary sources as their evidentiary material for this paper.

The third paper was a 1970s newspaper account of the impact of post-WWII federal policies, suburbanization, and deindustrialization. I asked students to describe specifically the twentieth-century policies of the federal government vis-à-vis U.S. cities, highway development and deindustrialization, and their impact on their city's economy, demographics, and infrastructure. We had spent the previous weeks covering these issues in class and again, students had to reference course materials in their papers.

Finally, the last paper asked them to take on the voice of the historian. It required the students to engage the discourse and approach of academic historians (many of whom we had read over the course of the semester) in tracing the entire history of their city from the colonial period to the present. While students were allowed to draw from their own work, completed in the previous three papers, this final assignment required them to change the tone and approach to reflect the new voice, an academic approach rather than a familiar or journalistic one. This paper required students to incorporate five primary and five secondary sources and was 7-10 pages, twice the length of the earlier papers.

Response and Flexibility: Offering Feedback to an Experimental Assignment

Carla and I took a flexible approach throughout the semester, modifying the assignment to address issues and concerns highlighted by the various installments. Here, the low-stakes, in-class writing assignments proved particularly useful and we devised a few throughout the semester in order to help students address potential problems and challenges in the high-stakes assignments. For example, we created the second low-stakes assignment in response to the difficulty some students had in taking on the voice of a booster in the first paper. Many of them wrote the booster pamphlet as a straight report rather than reflecting a booster tone.

So in preparation for the second paper, we spent some time in class going over the elements of a tour guide and what aspects of industrial urban development would relate to these elements. Students brainstormed these details on a triple-columned chart (column 1 for elements of a tour guide; column 2 for what they would want to see as a tourist to an early 20th-century city; column 3 for details from class that related to columns 1 and 2). Then we came together as a class and shared our findings. Students thus had a worksheet to consult while writing their papers. Some examples from columns 1 and 2 included: history, main attractions, shopping, hotels and

accommodations, cultural institutions, maps, and neighborhoods. We had studied the history of urban hotels, high and low culture, department stores and retail sectors, and immigrant neighborhoods and these topics all went in column 3 of the chart.

I had hoped that this exercise would help students to focus and organize the course material and also to adhere more to the style of a tour guide than to a straight report. As I explained to them, I wanted them to explore these different formats not as a gimmick but because I hoped it would engage them more with the writing as well as lead them to address different aspects of city culture and development.

Successes and Failures: Examples from the Scaffolded Exercises

For the most part, the exercise worked. Their papers showed significant incorporation of the details that we had brainstormed in class. They also showed more creativity/voice than the booster pamphlets. Students created little booklets and trifolds; they used subheadings on the model of guidebooks; and they selected topics that would be likely to show up in a tour guide (technological feats, parks and playgrounds, settlement houses, ethnic neighborhoods, transportation, cultural institutions and other elements of the industrial city that we had addressed in class).

Students did not always achieve the voice and style of a 1920s guidebook. In many cases, they took on a more contemporary tone. But I was able to overlook this shortcoming because for the most part, the students' papers met the objective I had set for them—to show a command of the course content and an understanding of the patterns and characteristics shared by American cities at different points in time. Here, the voice served as a vehicle for the process of selecting the information to include in the paper. For example, the tourist guide for "Shermanton," included a discussion of the city's bohemian enclave, "Little Paris." Residents, it explained:

> …spend evenings at the two new dance halls, *Pride* and *Chat Noir,* or hang out at saloons and poolrooms. These young men and women are almost always dressed in the latest risqué fashions, and if you muster up the courage to ask, they may point you in the direction of the "it" parties of the night.

Some of this student's language was a bit anachronistic. But she showed a fine grasp of the course content and an ability to extrapolate it. She incorporated material from class where we talked about mass amusements such as saloons and dance halls and she used a course reading that mentioned the nightlife entertainments of urban working youth at the turn of the twentieth century.

Another tourist guide, for the city of "New Manchester," described such attractions as the art museum, the vaudeville theater, and a new skyscraper, "complete with mosaics, elegant electrical fixtures and luxurious rooms open for the public. The twelve-story high edifice is beautifully illuminated at night." Of the museum, she wrote:

> City planners… hoped to enrich the lives and culture of the city's citizens. Admission was free and the Museum was originally open on weekends and Friday nights, so that busy workers may take their families and enjoy their day off with some appreciation of the arts.

Again, this student managed to strike the informal tone of a tourist pamphlet but still include pertinent and historically accurate information that she had learned from class lectures and readings.

In some cases though, students concentrated too closely on the history of a particular city, for which they just plugged in a different name, rather than creating an imagined city that incorporated the themes and details we addressed in class. For example, one student paraphrased a contemporary tour guide to Boston. While the paper was in her own words, it showed little connection to our course material. I sat down with this student and together we brainstormed the characteristics and patterns that we had been studying up to that point. I asked her to rewrite the paper, using the notes from our brainstorming session as a guide. The result was a much improved, composite portrait of an early twentieth century American city, one that drew on our class discussions, lectures, and readings. And for me, it provided a cue to work more closely with students on reviewing the patterns that we were addressing in class, pointing out the forest from the trees.

In fact, I decided to do a similar exercise with the entire class in preparation for the third paper, the newspaper article on the impact of deindustrialization. I created a worksheet that included several questions about the patterns of deindustrialization, and about the impact of federal

policies, the automobile, and suburbanization on postwar American cities. Students filled out the worksheets in small groups, consulting their class notes and readings. This exercise was very helpful in focusing the students and their third papers were more tightly organized and persuasive than the previous two installments. The students also adhered very well to the format of a newspaper article and some even created a newspaper section with several "articles" exploring different aspects of the postindustrial city.

For example, a "newspaper" entitled *The Confederate Connection* explored the post-industrial development of the fictional southern city of Bostwickville. The newspaper included articles entitled "Factory Closed Down for New Highway," "Unemployment Soars," "Bostwickville Dubbed the Newest Metropolis in Virginia," and "Slum Spurs Racial Conflict." This student did a nice job of exploring the potential of the non-traditional format while still providing a lot of grounded, historically accurate information about the patterns of post-war urban development, and the problems faced by many late twentieth-century American cities.

Another student really embraced the creative aspect of the assignment, using Microsoft Publisher to create a newspaper page. She incorporated appropriate images and even advertisements from the 1970s. An article entitled "Deindustrialization," described the decline of businesses around the now-shuttered factories of her city, "Hagenmister." It also mentioned plummeting housing values, white flight to the suburbs, and the loss of industry to others parts of the country. "Factories are being downsized, relocated or completely closed because of the changing of the times and the growing of the nation. It's more profitable to open factories in low-wage areas and in new, rapidly growing regions," she wrote, reflecting the secondary source articles that we had read about deindustrialization and its impact on the traditional American city. This student thus showed an engagement with and understanding of the trends and patterns of the post-industrial city. And I was gratified to see her blend outside skills and interests with the content that she had learned in my class.

Successes and Failures: Examples from an Experimental Assignment

For the final papers, we again did a low-stakes exercise that asked students to identify patterns of American cities in various periods that we had studied (the colonial seaports, the commercial city of the early nineteenth century, the industrial city, the postindustrial city, the sunbelt city, the contemporary city). This exercise served as a review of the course material, particularly

useful because the final paper took the place of a final examination. I asked students to turn in this worksheet (and the earlier ones as well), which allowed me to identify any students who were having trouble digesting the course content.

The final low-stakes assignment also sought to address a shortcoming of earlier papers: students did not always effectively incorporate evidence in making their arguments. So the worksheet asked students to identify examples from our course readings to illustrate each characteristic/pattern of the colonial seaports that they identified. They did the same for the commercial, industrial, postindustrial, sunbelt, and contemporary city. As a result, the final papers showed a more effective incorporation of evidence than any of the previous installments.

For instance, a student who wrote about the fictional town of "Preston" cited a primary source document from our syllabus, a sermon by New England minister Edward Johnson that described the basis of trade in colonial Boston:

> Towards the 1730s, goods from the Caribbean and, eventually, the Southern colonies met at Preston, where groups of artisans, merchants, and workers congregated as a result… Edward Johnson… describe[s] the types of art and work that developed: 'carpenters, joiners, glaziers, painters… gun-smiths, lock-smiths… feltmakers, braziers.'

Here and elsewhere in the paper, this student showed his understanding of our course readings and was able to integrate them into his own interpretation of the American urban past.

Reflections and Evaluations

At the end of the semester, students filled out an evaluation form assessing the course in general and the build-your-own-city assignment in particular. Overall, the students enjoyed the assignment. Here are some quotations from their final evaluation forms:

> "It was *definitely* more fun than the average set of exams."

> It was "fun and at the same time we were able to learn more about cities by creating our own. I think it was a great assignment."
>
> "The assignment is… very enjoyable."

As for the course goals, a number of students said the assignment helped them to understand the material and to see the patterns and characteristics of American urban development:

> It "helped me understand history contextually."
>
> It "forces an assessment of urban development over time and acknowledge what the 'essence' of an American city is. It also accomplishes more than an exam would."

Even the one student who said, "I did not really like it," saw it as "a way to reinforce what we learned from the lectures and reading." And overall I felt that the assignment was successful in achieving my goals. I also appreciated the flexibility it offered for on-the-fly revision and tweaking to address the particular challenges and issues that students faced in writing the papers.

Revision and the Purpose of Learning History

Indeed, the process of revision was built into this assignment and I will continue to revise it the next time I teach American Urban History, applying some of the lessons of the first run to future performances. I found the low-stakes, in-class exercises that we did very helpful and I will definitely repeat them in the future, in anticipation rather than in reaction to the challenges of the assignment. In the past, I have been so concerned with covering all of the material that I have been reluctant to take up too much class time with the mechanics of the assignments. After going over the initial assignment, I have generally told students to feel free to come to me after class or during office hours with any questions they have. But rather than using up valuable class time that would otherwise have been spent presenting content, the in-class exercises actually provided a *means* for presenting the content, and in an effective and relevant way. This was an added and unexpected bonus: I felt that the elements of this course. Lecture, readings, assignments, and discussions were more integrated than in any course I have taught.

And I found that being as clear as possible about what I hoped the installments would achieve (highlighting the patterns and characteristics of urban development) was helpful in focusing the students. Modeling the assignment also gives students some guidance in applying their creative skills to writing about the past. For example, I think that the newspaper article was more successful than the previous two installments largely because of the exercises we did in class to prepare for it. But I'm sure it helped that students are more familiar with a newspaper article than they are with the other formats. In the future, I will try to address this issue by providing them with samples of the formats that I am asking them to follow.

The creative aspects of the assignment frustrated some students. As they explained in their final evaluations:

> "I had a hard time balancing creativity with staying with a historical context."
>
> "Being creative and scholarly at the same time is difficult."

For these students, the struggle with creativity may have overridden the main goal of getting them to understand urban characteristics and change over time. Clarity, examples, and modeling will help to address this challenge.

In fact, I think it would be useful to model a class-wide city that we build together over the course of the term. The video game "Sim City"—in which one can create, develop, and manage a city—might help here and I think it would be interesting to incorporate it into the class.

The Future of the Experiment

In general, I am struck by the potentials that digital technologies offer. Online discussion boards, YouTube, wikis, and podcasts provide a wealth of interesting approaches to building an imaginary city as well as giving students the opportunity to collaborate and interact with each other as they develop the assignment. And, again, using technology would allow many students to apply outside skills and talents to our course and to share them with their classmates.

It would also encourage students to interact more and share their projects with each other. Even without asking students to collaborate on their imagined cities, I was impressed and pleased to see a few of the students reference each other's cities in their papers. I can imagine how much more of this interaction could take place if students posted information about their cities to wikis, or created Facebook-type pages for their cities. Wikis could include pictures, interactive text, maps, neighborhood blogs, and a host of other information on the history and contemporary issues of students' imagined cities. I would encourage, even require students to visit each other's wikis and compare and contrast the development of their city with that of their classmates.

I have some experience working with student wikis through a course I teach for the Macaulay Honors College every spring entitled "The Peopling of New York City." This course is organized around the in-depth examination of a New York City neighborhood and students in the class collaborate on building a wiki that explores the neighborhood, its history, demographics, culture, politics, and institutions. The students in "The Peopling of New York City" focused on the neighborhood around Yankee Stadium.

Their wiki showed the development and contemporary conditions in the neighborhood but it also reflected a real collaboration on the part of the students. They edited each other's content online, they commented on each other's posts, posted video and pictures, and invited each other to view new content. And on their own initiative, they created a green link on their website through which they explored the environmental aspects of the neighborhood and the city at large. They took this link a step further, encouraging each other to get involved in small moves toward improving the environment (recycling, riding their bikes, helping in tree-planting and other voluntary green initiatives) by documenting their activities on the wiki.

This experience really highlighted for me the potentials for using digital tools to support students in engaging with me, but more importantly with each other and with the course material. Technology also adds another format, another platform for playing with the rhetorical voice which makes it another vehicle for making this build-your-own-city assignment fruitful.

As I review the experience of implementing this assignment, I am reminded of the real value of acknowledging and taking advantage of the different stances and voices that we assume as teachers, and students, in our formal and informal communications. My goals as a teacher—of instructing students

in analyzing and understanding historical events and developments, of honing skills in writing and critical thinking, and of fostering the knowledge and talents my students bring to the table—are well served by exploring not only the events of the past and the way in which we interpret them, but also in how we present them, and ourselves.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Marcie Wolfe is the former Executive Director of the Institute for Literacy Studies (ILS), an organized research unit of The City University of New York located at Lehman College, Bronx, NY. As Executive Director, Wolfe was principal investigator for the ILS's numerous funded projects related to instruction and assessment in literacy and mathematics education, and, in addition, was a founding coordinator of Lehman College's Writing Across the Curriculum Initiative. Ms. Wolfe taught in Lehman's English Department and Adult Degree Program, as well as in New York City high schools and adult literacy programs. She served on the original leadership team that launched CUNY's WAC initiative in 1999, and was a co-director of CUNY's high school/college collaborative program, Looking Both Ways. Wolfe's scholarship on faculty development, literacy, and the teaching of writing has been published by The City University of New York, the National Writing Project Quarterly, Focus on Basics/World Education, the Literacy Assistance Center, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, and the Institute for Literacy Studies. She is also the author of numerous conference papers, curriculum guides, book reviews, and technical reports. Now retired from her role as ILS Executive Director, Wolfe is adjunct faculty in Lehman College's Department of Middle and High School Education and a consultant for the National Writing Project.

Jessica Yood is an Associate Professor in the English Department at Lehman College and at the CUNY Graduate Center. One of the first coordinators of Lehman's WAC program, Prof. Yood also served as a leader for CUNY-wide WAC initiatives from 2000-2011. Yood's curriculum and teaching guides have been used in WAC professional development, in the M.A. program in Composition and Rhetoric, and for digital humanities initiatives at Lehman College and CUNY-wide. Her scholarship on rhetorical and cultural theory and the history of English studies is published in book collections and several journals including *College English*, *Enculturation, JAC: A Journal of Rhetoric, Culture, and Politics, Composition Forum*, *JBW: The Journal of Basic Writing,* and *The Society for Critical Exchange.* She is currently working on a book about a sabbatical year she spent as a student of first year composition. She blogs about this book and about literacy, contemporary culture, and higher education at www.jessicayood.com. In 2015 Prof. Yood was named Lehman College Teacher of the Year.