BETTER WRITING THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP LEARNING: HELPING TO SOLVE THE ILL-STRUCTURED PROBLEM

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Accomplished writers understand that they are serving what amounts to a life-long apprenticeship in which they continually learn all they can from experience and from other writers. They also understand, and take pleasure from, the fact that writing is by nature "a variety of what is termed *ill-structured problem solving*" (Petraglia "Writing" 80, emphasis in original). As Joseph Petraglia says, "In ill-structured problem-solving, contingency permeates the task environment and solutions are always equivocal. The idea of 'getting it right' gives way to 'making it acceptable in the circumstances'" (83). Strangely, while most accomplished writers and writing teachers would agree with Petraglia about the contingent nature of writing, most universities continue to approach the teaching of writing as a well-structured problem—of the sort one can solve with generic skills, readily transmitted from teacher to student. Likewise, the instructors hired to teach multiple composition classes, each consisting of twenty or more students, often teach these generic skills as if their students formed a homogenous, well-structured group, with similar strengths, weaknesses, and levels of interest. As research into human cognition has shown, "tasks in which situational variables are containable and solutions are predeterminable (i.e., as in well-structured problems) are the sorts of task that formal schooling is best able to accommodate" (87). Therefore, as Petraglia argues, "If one accepts the twin premises that writing is a variety of ill-structured problem solving and that formal instruction is best suited

to teaching students to solve well-structured problems" (88), one must question the effectiveness of teaching writing in the college composition classroom. Carl Rogers would appear to agree, saying, "I have come to feel that the only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-directed, self-appropriated learning" (qtd. in Schön 89). If Rogers and Petraglia are right, then the well-intentioned efforts of composition instructors to teach students to write are futile and possibly harmful whenever these efforts block, rather than facilitate, student writers' self-discoveries. Unfortunately, the nature of university composition instruction works against self-directed learning. As Sharon Crowley has said, "Most of the people who teach composition in American colleges and universities are undervalued, overworked, and underpaid" (5), which makes them unlikely to have the time or energy to serve as mentors to individual writers. Composition courses themselves, being compulsory, tend to inspire negative attitudes in writing students, Crowley says (242), and the standardized curriculum makes it difficult for instructors to tailor teaching to accommodate individuals' needs and abilities. Thanks to tradition and economic forces, universities will likely continue to rely on the composition classroom as the primary site for writing instruction (Crowley 249). However, they should create (or expand upon existing) sites where motivated students can learn to cope with ill-structured writing problems as accomplished writers do—through self-directed, self-appropriated experience and individualized instruction from more-experienced writers. In short, whether via writing workshops, professional internship programs, discipline-specific directed studies, or writing centers, universities would do well to embrace various models of apprenticeship learning.

Self-directed Learning

A number of learning theorists speak to the importance of fostering self-directed, experiential learning. For example, Petraglia says, "To the extent that rhetorical writing can be learned, it will only be so by students building individual models

of how to be rhetorically effective and adapting those models to everyday situations where writing is called for or can serve a strategic purpose" ("Writing" 97). Richard L. Hopkins adds, "When we learn something from experience, we are shaken, jarred, unable to make things fit into our previous structure of experience. The learning process consists of our efforts to right ourselves, to put things back in order" (87). To embrace self-directed learning, writing instructors must acknowledge and respect each student writer's sense of self. They must accept, as Hopkins points out, that "Every student sitting in every classroom is experiencing a different reality. Each is an embodied, uniquely experiencing person in a spatial-temporal continuum through which past moves into future, a learner-in-the-world" (53). Writing instructors must also recognize, and even celebrate, that students learn at different rates, think along different lines, and bring with them different sets of needs and levels of ability. In the type of experiential learning Hopkins proposes, "students would become the agents of their own development; faculty would serve as resource persons rather than 'conduits' [of knowledge]" (132). This approach closely resembles what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger call "situated" learning, in which "understanding and experience are in constant interaction—indeed, are mutually constitutive" (51-52). Both experiential and situated learning share many of the goals and methods of self-directed learning, particularly that of returning primary responsibility for learning to the student. One scholar defines self-directed learning

> as an approach to learning, training and upgrading based on the individual's ability to sense what is relevant and important and use them; to be flexible in viewing things, independent in thinking, curious, initiating and persistent. ...[T]he main thrust of the concept is that the learner himself or herself takes the initiative to learn and develop. Self-directed learning puts the learner, not the teachers or the system, in the center. (Ravid 103)

As it happens, self-directed learning is the preferred method of high achievers. Dean K. Simonton observes that the education of great minds in the arts and sciences "will have been largely self-directed; it will have been specifically tailored for each aspirant's unique career path" (166). For geniuses such as Albert Einstein, Simonton says, this self-directed learning usually takes "the form of omnivorous reading" (165) or independent experimentation that follows a path broken by the learner's curiosity. Simonton adds, "Whatever the particular guise of an individual's self-education, the implication is clear: The aspiring person often must sacrifice formal course work whenever it interferes with this cardinal need" (165).

That a teacher, mentor, or more experienced peer can intervene in a student writer's *self*-directed learning might seem paradoxical, especially if the apprenticeship takes a traditional form in which the mentor (or master) has almost godlike power over the protégé—the kind of power, for instance, that some dissertation directors assume. Mentors, however, can play a crucial role in fostering self-discovery. Gad Ravid, for instance, cites scholars who argue that, "as opposed to learning in isolation, self-directed learning is associated with various kinds of helpers such as teachers, resource people, and peers" (103). Most apprenticeships pair a highly experienced (often older) mentor with a talented, but less (or differently) experienced (and often younger) protégé, who comes to the mentor seeking advice, encouragement, or approval. John Carruthers says that to be considered an apprenticeship, the learning relationship must satisfy three criteria: "[T]he protégé must be attracted to the mentor; the mentor then takes some action on behalf of the protégé; [and] the mentor shows positive affect in favour of the protégé, usually by offering encouragement and support" (12). The apprenticeship forms on the basis of a mutual agreement (formal or informal), with the protégé pledging "I'll learn if you'll teach me" and the mentor pledging "I'll teach if you'll learn."

Each learns from the other, but even between peers there is some disparity in terms of their knowledge, perspective, or

specific abilities; otherwise, they would have little to offer one another. Together, as suggested by L.S. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), the mentor and protégé can eliminate some of the disparity. The ZPD defines the difference between a child's *"independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"* (Vygotsky 86, emphasis in original). As Petraglia says, "Within the ZPD, children act as apprentices, guided toward greater proficiency in performing by mentors who are more experienced participants in the activity than the learner" (*Reality* 45). Experience gained within the ZPD, with the help of a mentor, becomes part of a child's knowledge base, thus narrowing the knowledge gap between mentor and protégé. Donald A. Schön refers to this gap as a "frame conflict." As he says,

> the meanings held by coach and student tend to be incongruent. The coach's language refers to things and relations in a particular kind of world—familiar to the coach, strange as yet to the student . . . . The frame conflict of student and coach differs from other kinds, however, in that these two parties come together with the manifest intention of resolving their conflict. (218-19)

The desire to eliminate this disparity in knowledge is largely what motivates the protégé to enter into an apprenticeship.

One reason an apprenticeship can help writers cope with ill-structured problems is that it not only tailors learning to fit individual needs but also encourages trial, error, and on-going course corrections. In plainer words, we gain an intimate knowledge of writing by doing it, reflecting on our failures and successes, and trying to do better the next time—with feedback, as needed, from someone who has navigated through similar intellectual terrain. We learn to write by applying a process of "on-line anticipation and adjustment," of "continuous detection and correction of error," that Schön calls "reflection-in-action"

(26). In learning to write, then, we are like the novice architect Schön describes,

> who is expected to plunge into designing, trying from the very outset to get the sort of experience that will help him learn what designing means. He cannot make an informed choice to take this plunge because he does not yet grasp its essential meanings, and his instructors cannot convey these to him until he has the requisite experience. Thus, he must jump in without knowing—indeed, to discover—what he needs to learn. (93)

From the initial plunge (or series of plunges) into writing, during which failure at various levels is likely, writers learn lessons—among them, to persevere—that they can apply to subsequent projects. Meanwhile, they also learn to become better improvisers, which Schön believes is an essential aspect of professional artistry. Faced with an unfamiliar situation, in which competing ideas and agendas pose a new and difficult challenge, the professional improvises a solution that draws the diverse parts into a harmonious whole. This act, Schön says, is comparable to the artistry of jazz musicians, who by "Listening to one another, listening to themselves, . . . 'feel' where the music is going and adjust their playing accordingly" (30). Ordinary conversation, in which "participants pick up and develop themes of talk . . . is collective verbal improvisation" (30), as is the more purposeful conversation between mentor and protégé.

In terms of power, the apprenticeships in which these conversations occur can replicate the traditional apprenticeship, but they do not have to. As Eve Shelnutt says, "The forms apprenticeships take among writers are as varied as the personalities involved" (151). Learning theorists use a number of terms to describe apprenticeship learning, including *situated learning*, *experiential learning*, *reflective practicum*, *internship*, *mentoring*, and *coaching*. In referring to the person serving in the mentor role, they use such titles as *master*, *boss*, *manager*, *director*,

coach, *counselor*, *consultant*, *critic*, *teacher*, *trainer*, *tutor*, *guide*, *peer*, and *friend*. These terms illustrate the widely differing degrees of involvement—pragmatic and affective—that are possible in an apprenticeship. They also mirror, and perhaps determine, the type of relationship a mentor and protégé share. By themselves, though, such terms do not adequately describe or define the relationships they represent. After all, a master artist with great power can wield power lightly and humanely while a peer can usurp power and subtly dominate.

In an article on directive versus facilitative teaching, D.R. Ransdell distinguishes between two approaches to teaching writing—authoritative and facilitative (269)—while a number of composition theorists have written about collaborative approaches to teaching. These three terms can apply to apprenticeships, which may span all three approaches, shifting as circumstances dictate. The mentor may act as authority, facilitator, and collaborator at different times, and the protégé may play variations of these roles as well. But as descriptors of broad categories, based on underlying pedagogical assumptions, these terms can help us to make useful distinctions among the types of apprenticeships, which differ primarily based on the following aspects:

- how power is divided
- to what extent the mentor intervenes in the protégé's creative processes
- who does the learning
- whether a specific product or the protégé's development is the primary goal of the relationship, and
- what strategy best describes the mentor's approach to teaching.

The Authoritative Model

Objections to apprenticeship learning—particularly among liberatory pedagogues in university composition programs—usually focus on the hierarchical distribution of power. In the sort of mentor-protégé relationship that gives apprenticeship a bad name, power rests heavily with the mentor who, in setting the terms for learning, may act as a dictator. The protégé, dependent on the mentor's advice and approval, holds a much weaker position and must submit to the mentor's will, trusting the mentor to look out for his or her best interest. In this way, the authoritative model validates the mentor's knowledge while invalidating the protégé's. If this were all we knew about the authoritative model, abandoning it altogether might be an easy decision. Complicating matters, however, are indications that it is an efficient and highly effective learning strategy. As Dean K. Simonton observes, "A study of Nobel laureates found that more than 50% had served an apprenticeship under at least one other recipient of that honor.... Those who work directly under illustrious predecessors often launch their careers earlier and exhibit a more prolific level of output for the rest of their lives" (382).

Authoritative apprenticeships tend to be highly discipline-specific, and this is one of their chief advantages. After all, learning to write as a professional means entering a particular community of practitioners "bound by intricate, socially constructed webs of belief, which are essential to understanding what they can do" (Brown, Collins, and Duguid 33). To write effectively within a discipline, "a student, like an apprentice, must enter that community and its culture" (33), and a mentor eases the student's entry by introducing him or her to the discipline's tools, practices, and webs of belief. Among other advantages reaped by protégés, Carruthers says, are "access to the mentor's network; acquiring skills and knowledge; improved promotion opportunities; status; [and] obtaining a role model" (17). Some qualities that make the authoritative apprenticeship so effective,

though, also heighten the potential for abuse of the mentor's power. Researchers Oscar Mink, Keith Owen, and Barbara Mink refer to the authoritative apprenticeship as the "prescriptive model," saying that the mentor or coach "gives goals, defines roles, writes procedures, controls behavior, evaluates performance, directs, [and] relies on extrinsic motivation (e.g. fear)" (5).

The relationship of a boss and employee most clearly embodies this type of apprenticeship. In studying how business executives learn, Morgan W. McCall, Michael M. Lombardo, and Ann M. Morrison found that "Most of the time . . . when another person was a significant learning event, that person was a boss. And with good reason. Bosses, after all, have the authority to affect directly the daily lives and often the career advancement of those who work for them" (69). In such circumstances, a desire to please the mentor (and perhaps keep a job) may be the protégé's primary motivation to learn. For the professional protégés, "learning was not a nicety—something to be done out of interest or because it might be helpful . . . . These executives were playing for keeps, and that was critical to the learning process" (63).

By choice or necessity, working writers likewise chafe under and benefit from the help of authoritative mentors. Journalists automatically engage in such apprenticeships because of the way their profession divides labor. Experienced editors act as mentors for reporters, assigning stories, setting deadlines, revising prose, and ultimately deciding whether an article gets published or killed. In the process, the reporters learn the types of stories the editor will (or will not) accept. To avoid fruitless work (and other penalties), they adjust their writing to meet the editor's standards. By doing so, assuming their mentor knows the field, they develop a more professionally acceptable and, therefore, more marketable style. Knowing the value of such experience, most journalism programs require their majors to undergo a professional internship—actually working for a newspaper, magazine, or television station before graduation. In my own

case, I worked for the *Boulder Daily Camera* for a semester, learning more from this experience than I had from three semesters of journalism classes. Some English majors at TCU serve internships with publishers, such as Harcourt-Brace or TCU Press, gaining valuable experience under professional writers or editors. Other academic writers, especially graduate students, relinquish their authority to mentors or dissertation directors, who help them develop a discipline-specific style that may lead to publication and, eventually, to tenure-track jobs. Creative writers in master of fine arts programs likewise undergo an apprenticeship that includes time spent under the tutelage of a writer-in-residence. Depending on how this mentor runs the workshop, he or she may act as an authority, passing judgment on and prescribing changes in the students' styles. Later in their careers, these former students may briefly apprentice themselves to agents or editors, who often dictate the revisions authors will make in a piece if they wish to publish it.

The primary goal of most authoritative mentoring is the final product, such as a fully competent employee or a publishable piece of writing. Learning is secondary—what the protégé does in order to obtain the knowledge or skills needed for success. To achieve this end, the protégé's creative or scholarly judgment often gives way to the mentor's. The key assumption is that the mentor knows what the final product should look like; therefore, her teaching style will often resemble the direct transmission or conduit model. Having already achieved a high level of mastery, the mentor issues detailed instructions or demonstrates a crucial skill—for example, how to write a dissertation or book proposal. The protégé follows the instructions or imitates the performance to produce work the mentor finds acceptable. In this way, the protégé can learn a great deal quickly and achieve success, but often at the cost of her sense of independence and self-efficacy. Even so, given a chance to reap such benefits, she may willingly submit (if only for a short time) to the control of a mentor. As Schön says, "She is conscious of the paradoxical requirement that

she give up freedom . . . in order to gain the freedom that comes with new levels of understanding and control" (123).

The authoritative model works well for writers situated in the high-pressure, results-oriented activity of the business world, the professions, and graduate programs, but it may prove less effective in the type of classroom-based education most undergraduates experience. After all, in undergraduate education, learning is generally the primary goal; the written products that demonstrate such learning are of secondary importance. Also, as Hopkins observes, "One of the more seriously problematic aspects of the conduit [or authoritative] model is that curricular emphasis and student interest are seldom in phase . . ." (171). Therefore, he would replace the "syllabus-driven transmission belt of the conduit model" with "something much more open, responsive, and dialogical" (151), something which would resemble the facilitative model.

The Facilitative Model

Unlike an authoritative mentor, the mentor in a facilitative apprenticeship focuses attention on a protégé's learning experience, or process, and downplays the finished product that results. Such a facilitator does not dominate the protégé through a blatant display of power, but like the authoritative mentor he or she often possesses a clearly superior level of knowledge or skill—to which the protégé defers. Alluding to teachers who act in such a capacity, Hopkins says, "[T]hey have some 'power of office,' but their authority is earned over time, through displays of trustworthiness and integrity and demonstrations of the ability to listen, resolve conflicts, and tease out intelligibility even from inarticulate messages . . . . So the use of authority is not commensurate with authoritarianism" (151). The mentor uses his or her authority, Hopkins says, "to dissipate authority as a control device and strengthen it as a helping device" (154); in the process, at least theoretically, the mentor enhances the protégé's own confidence and sense of authority.

This approach to the teaching of writing resembles the sort of situated learning Aviva Freedman describes, in which a teacher engages "the learner actively, prompting, guiding, and sometimes redirecting. As the literature on situated learning points out, this enables learning to take place through active engagement in a process—rather than through the passive reception of already formulated information" (128). In taking this approach, also known as the "empowerment" or "unfolding" model, Howard Gardner says that mentors tend to view a learner as a seed,

> which, though small and fragile, contains within its husk all the necessary "germs" for eventual artistic virtuosity. The role of the naturalist or gardener who tends the seed is primarily preventive: to shield the young shoots from malevolent influences—violent winds, fiendish crows—so that the seeds have the opportunity to unfold on their own into uniquely beautiful flowers. (Gardner 208)

To avoid becoming such a malevolent influence, the mentor intervenes as little as possible into a protégé's creative processes. Acting as a resource or advisor, the mentor tries to channel the protégé's efforts toward self-discovery. Sometimes she does so by breaking a large project into a series of smaller, stage-managed challenges that allow the protégé to take controlled risks, make mistakes, and learn from these mistakes before risking humiliation, a failing grade, job loss, or commercial failure. When the protégé is ready to risk these consequences, the mentor may encourage the protégé to show her work to a more critical audience. Twenty years ago, I entered into such a relationship while attempting to write a first novel. My mentor, a novelist and creative writing professor, seldom touched my manuscript. Instead, he encouraged, commented, challenged, and helped set goals (ten pages a week during a summer workshop). When I finished the first eighty pages, he had me write eighty more; and we proceeded in this way until I completed a first draft of 250 pages. Meanwhile, he encouraged experimentation and guided

my efforts with subtle nudges (showing disapproval of the worst passages through expressions of humor, pain, or distaste). When I finished a third draft, and it came time to market the book, he arranged for a reading at Random House and took the book to Hollywood, nearly netting a movie contract. As it happens, the book didn't sell, but my mentor did what he could to help without taking over the project. The rest was up to me.

Universities sometimes offer their undergraduates such experiences, though one could argue that they do not do so often enough. For the most part, these opportunities are available only to a select few, such as honors students. Honors students at TCU, for instance, participate in directed studies with professors in their chosen disciplines. During their junior and senior years, these students work on long-term scholarly or creative projects that they initiate themselves, consulting with a director and three committee members who serve as facilitative mentors by giving advice, encouragement, and feedback about ideas. Each spring, during Honors Week, the students present their projects to the university community at large, receiving criticism from judges and competing for awards. Students often point to the honors project as the single most significant event in their university education, one that best prepared them for the challenges of graduate school or professional life. Students who do not qualify for the honors track have fewer opportunities for this kind of preparation, and they must often aggressively pursue them.

For several years, I've engaged in facilitative apprenticeships (in the form of directed studies) with one aspiring author per semester. In each case, the student has sought me out, insisted on telling me about his or her book idea, and managed to persuade me (despite an already full plate) to sponsor the project. Together, we determine a reasonable goal (usually eighty to a hundred pages), set deadlines, and schedule regular appointments for feedback. Recently I acquired a protégé who started working on a fantasy novel at age thirteen and now, at nineteen, has two thousand hand-written pages. She tells a good story, so my main task as her mentor is to help her discover words, phrases,

chapters, and characters to cut. So far, none of my protégés has published a book, but three have published short stories or personal essays in magazines and textbooks, and most have met their goals, claimed to learn from the experience, and afterward said they felt like real writers. Their achievements came not because of anything I "taught" them, but because each was a self-directed, self-motivated learner. That I learned a great deal from working with these writers—about writing and teaching—is undeniable, though as the facilitative mentor my learning was an unintended side-effect of the relationship.

Facilitative apprenticeships are more likely than authoritative to involve voluntary participation by a self-motivated protégé, who comes into the relationship with a clear idea of what he or she hopes to accomplish. In my experience, student writers are most apt to develop such relationships (and accept opportunities for self-transformation) under circumstances that involve previous one-to-one contact with a professor. Such contact often begins in the composition classroom, where talented, motivated students stand out and may find a teacher willing to spend the extra time it takes to mentor them. Most composition teachers, experienced in struggling with the ill-structured problems posed by writing projects, certainly qualify to serve as mentors to their students. And the result of such interaction can be a rich learning experience for both students and professor. For these reasons, I would argue, composition teachers ought to look for opportunities to mentor their student writers whenever possible.

Practical and institutional forces, however, tend to limit the number of facilitative apprenticeships. First, the syllabuses of composition courses are seldom flexible enough to accommodate writing projects that are of great length or that focus on topics initiated by the students. As Sharon Crowley has pointed out, most composition courses still assign some version of the standard "academic essay," which assumes that

> rhetorical situations are similar or the same across a certain range of possible settings, that instructors can forecast the

> parameters of such settings, and that students can adequately meet the terms of any given discursive situation by applying a handy set of discursive formulae. Over forty years ago, Wallace Stegner pointed out the absurdity of these assumptions when he reminded readers of *College English* that "anyone writing honestly creates and solves new problems every time he sits down at his desk. Nobody can solve them for him in advance, and no teacher had better try." (233)

And yet, as Crowley implies, composition teachers do try to solve these problems in advance by issuing one-size-fits-all assignments—a natural consequence, perhaps, of the institutional need to standardize first- and second-year composition courses. To the extent that such assignments ask writers to solve neat, well-defined problems, by applying "a handy set of discursive formulae," rather than challenge writers to solve messy, ill-structured problems, they short-circuit both the writers' growth and the need to seek out mentors.

Another force working against mentoring is student attitudes. As veterans of the composition classroom know quite well, first- and second-year students seldom take full advantage of opportunities to form mentor-protégé relationships with their teachers (even when the teachers are open to them). As Crowley has said, the compulsory aspects of the first-year composition course sometimes lead to resentment on the part of students, who "employ high-school resistance tactics on their teachers" (242). Although individual conferences with student writers may serve as a starting point for the building of a facilitative apprenticeship, these conferences may prove counterproductive if teachers must compel students to attend—after all, compulsion is incompatible with the voluntary nature of facilitative apprenticeships. Finally, as long as institutions view composition as a low-status, required course taught primarily by adjuncts and graduate students, and student writers view it as an ordeal to get past as quickly and painlessly as possible, apprenticeships will be unlikely to form.

Under such circumstances, the independent study represents the most viable formal venue through which students outside the honors program can work on a special project, over a long period of time, with a particular professor. Unfortunately, because independent studies are not cost-effective, universities tend to discourage them by failing to reward professors for the extra effort expended. Instead of raises or release time, the rewards often take the form of the professors' satisfaction in seeing students grow or in being able to help someone the way a mentor once helped them. However, already overburdened—striving for tenure or promotion—the professors must often choose between helping a protégé or getting their own work done. This situation will, quite naturally, tend to limit ordinary students' opportunities to experience facilitative apprenticeships.

The Collaborative Model

In the face of such limitations, possible solutions to the dilemma of learning how to cope with the ill-structured problems posed by writing projects may involve variations on the third form of apprenticeship—the collaborative model. Collaborative apprenticeships form among peers who act as colleagues, each contributing creative vision to a project, each sharing (by consensus) in the decision-making, each bringing something useful to the partnership (for example, specialized knowledge, perspectives, or skills), and each learning from the other.

In plainer words, when it becomes necessary or beneficial, students often take learning into their own hands by mentoring each other. Lave and Wenger argue that "where the circulation of knowledge among peers and near-peers is possible, it spreads exceedingly rapidly and effectively. . ." (93). Such was certainly true of the creative writing program where I did my graduate work. The writer-in-residence, who served as guru to sixty graduate students, was so remote and absorbed in his own writing that his students developed informal workshop groups to learn what we could from one another. As Gardner says, a creative

person "determines which skills he needs in order to achieve his purposes and works tirelessly to develop and perfect them . . . . He may also feel the need to discover new sets of peers who can educate him about what currently concerns him" (355).

Writers who take part in collaborative apprenticeships generally do so willingly, without being forced into working together by a teacher, and select a partner through mutual need and interest. Of course, compulsory collaborative apprenticeships do occur. In a sense, such learning relationships are what composition teachers attempt to institute in the classroom by placing their students into workshop groups. Sometimes these groups gel, thanks to a good mix of personalities, abilities, and motivations, and the students not only learn from each other but also continue to work together outside the classroom. Sometimes, too, an especially strong writer will find him or herself in demand, engaging with peers in rather one-sided collaborations that resemble authoritative or facilitative apprenticeships. For example, Sarah Smith, who later published the first essay she wrote for my second-year composition class, is not only a fine writer but also an astute yet humane critic, whose fellow students sought feedback from her during and after class (and whom I later hired as a peer consultant in the writing center). Many times, though, student writers are openly skeptical about the value of workshop groups and resist opportunities for collaborative learning, perhaps because they view their fellow students as competitors for grades or believe they have little to offer. In any event, collaborative apprenticeships would appear to be most effective when writers come together willingly, out of mutual need, the relationship lasting only for as long as each peer continues to find it worthwhile.

John Baird describes a collaborative apprenticeship program in which he served as a mentor to fellow classroom teachers seeking to become active researchers. Baird calls this type of mentorship a "shared adventure: an endeavor that involves thoughts, feelings, and emotions, where the pursuit of productive

personal challenge occurs congenially through a process of collaborative reflection" (56). In Baird's program, neither he nor his protégés began with any clear-cut goals beyond a desire to do research. Baird shared in each of their experiences by helping his colleagues develop specific goals, by "listening carefully to their needs, concerns and ideas, and responding in . . . a sensitive and helpful manner" (52), and by "showing enthusiasm for their endeavors and interest and concern for their progress" (52). These relationships were more egalitarian than those between boss and employee or teacher and student because, Baird says, they were "not significantly influenced by any disparity in our professional status or power, or by a need for me to accept accountability for the nature and extent of the person's development" (54).

In many ways, Baird's shared adventure is similar to the dialogic relationship between consultant and student in the writing center—or what John Trimber calls the "co-learner" (24-26) model. The collaborative apprenticeship is what writing centers are selling, so to speak, and to some extent what they deliver. I would stipulate "to some extent" mainly because, depending on the circumstances, writing center consultants may serve as authoritative or facilitative mentors, maintaining their "expert" role rather than fully participating in collaborative learning. And this is true, I believe, even of undergraduate consultants such as Sarah Smith, whose skill as a writer creates a disparity in knowledge and ability among her and most of her "peers."

Many writing center interactions, though, meet the criteria for collaborative apprenticeships. For example, both the consultant and writer contribute ideas; share in decision-making; bring important skills, knowledge, and perspectives to the discussion; and learn from each other. Except in rare cases where a professor insists that a student visit the center, the interactions are voluntary, the writer sets the agenda, the relationship continues only as long as the writer desires to work with the consultant, and the consultant does not "grade" or evaluate the project. Instead of focusing on general techniques or lessons

about writing—the kind a classroom teacher might convey to larger groups of students—the consultant attends to issues of concern to the writer that pertain to a particular rhetorical situation (or piece of writing). The piece might be a poem, a letter, a book proposal, a dissertation chapter, a graduate school application essay, an editorial, a chemistry report, a one-act play, or a first-year composition essay on a predigested topic such as gun control. In many of these cases, the rhetorical exigence comes out of the writer's own need or desire to communicate or create. In others, such as the gun control paper, the rhetorical exigence may have originated with the teacher who assigned the essay but has now become the student's problem. Even in the latter case, though, the act of seeking assistance at the writing center means the writer is to some extent self-directed and self-motivated. And if we accept the notion that each piece of writing is an ill-structured problem, which poses issues impinging on a particular rhetorical situation and which no prefabricated advice or technique can solve, then we can see each tutorial as a chance even for veteran professional consultants to learn more about writing.

Consider, for instance, what happens when a writer brings to a writing center a project that, on the surface, looks like a simple, well-defined exercise but turns out—in concept or execution—to be deceptively difficult. Along with the writer, the consultant finds herself stretching (or bending) her mind in an effort to understand the problems posed by the piece of writing in order to help the writer arrive at potential solutions. This effort becomes, in a real way, a shared adventure onto unfamiliar ground—an exploration that challenges the consultant's intellect and abilities, letting her know that she has left tutoring-as-usual behind and must improvise and learn as she goes. Sometimes these rhetorical situations occur because the writer is trying to push beyond his or her current ability level or beyond the boundaries of a particular genre. Sometimes they occur because teachers have issued assignments that sound straightforward but, on reflection, are complex tangles. Sometimes students come up with quirky ideas

that make a certain amount of sense, such as one student's comparison of J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield to Shakespeare's Hamlet. And sometimes a student writes or thinks as well (or better than) the consultant does, challenging the consultant to improve on the writing or ideas, and so the consultant must push herself beyond her normal patterns of thinking in order to offer help. One undergraduate I work with—Dustin—writes literary analyses with the sophistication and style of an advanced graduate student, and yet he is seldom satisfied with the depth of his writing. We often do multiple sessions on a single essay because his attempts at digging deeper make the essay structures unwieldy, and together we seek to organize his ideas in more elegant ways.

By working together, discussing, questioning, modeling, and remaining open to small corrections or major changes in thinking, both consultant and writer can gain insight into their own and their partner's composing processes. Or, using Schön's term, by working together they decrease their frame conflict. When this collaboration works well, each adds what he or she learns to an existing repertoire of technique and understanding, building a knowledge indebted to but also independent of the other's. This stretching, striving, and learning is, I suspect, what attracted most writing center professionals to their work and provides a good reason for continuing to do it. As far as I'm concerned, what I learn as a writer, consultant, and teacher from these shared adventures is one of the intended products of tutoring—of lesser importance than the learning of student writers, but still important because it keeps me vital, engaged, and eager for the next interaction.

Ideally, all students who take university composition courses would come equipped with high levels of motivation to learn and grow as writers, and all teachers of composition would have the time, energy, and desire to mentor every student. In reality, however, as Crowley has suggested, many students resent taking required composition courses and resist the efforts of their teachers, while the teachers, already overworked, must limit the number of their protégés. Crowley's "modest proposal"

identifies what is perhaps the key ingredient to efforts aimed at improving the quality of experience for students and job conditions for teachers in first-year composition—self-directed learning. As she says, "Let's just stop insisting that every student who enrolls in a two-year college or four-year university must take a required composition course" (241). Crowley proposes instead that universities "trust students to determine whether or not they 'need' an introductory course in writing" (246) and allow students to "self-select the course" (247). She adds, "It should be apparent by now . . . that I don't think it likely that very good writing courses can be invented or maintained within a university requirement" (246).

Too often, the prefabricated, generic lessons of the composition classroom give students the impression that writing is a neat, well-structured activity with which only inferior writers struggle. As we've seen, such courses tend to block, rather than facilitate, the sort of self-directed, experiential learning that trains writers to cope with the ill-structured problems posed by writing projects. And yet, as Crowley acknowledges, most universities will continue—for economic and political reasons—to attempt to deliver writing instruction through the required composition course (249). Charles A. Hill and Lauren Resnick say, "If we really want to help people as they use writing to try to improve their lives, we need to find ways to work with people as they initiate, agonize over, and struggle to complete the kinds of writing tasks that matter to them as they are facing them" (156). If we really want to help students improve as writers, we need to encourage them to take advantage of the opportunities for self-directed learning available in such settings as professional internships, directed studies, and writing centers, where they can confront the ill-structured problems posed by a particular writing task under the experienced eyes and ears of a mentor. And wherever possible, we need to create fresh opportunities for such learning. After all, as Wallace Stegner says, "Writers teach other writers how to see and hear" (27). Whether such lessons come by way of authoritative, facilitative, or collaborative

apprenticeships will depend on a particular writer's circumstances and goals. Apprenticeship learning is not for everyone, of course, especially for student writers who lack the necessary motivation and self-direction. Under circumstances that unite mentor and protégé in a relationship of mutual trust and shared discovery, however, an apprenticeship can be a highly effective way of gaining the rhetorical sensitivity one needs to become an accomplished writer.

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