PROLOGUE

At the beginning of the ITW Spring Seminar on collaborative learning, I suggested that the eighty-five participants should consider submitting to the JOURNAL their assigned essays along with forthcoming seminar writing activities and a post-seminar revision of the original essay. After all, I reasoned, literal and symbolic publication *is* the final stage of the writing process. Leader of the seminar Professor Ken Bruffee of Brooklyn College applauded the idea; most participants laughed nervously, feeling already, I imagine, a bit unsure about sharing their writing with other seminar participants, let alone with a thousand readers.

I knew from what went on in and around the IUPUI Writing Program office the week prior to the seminar that perhaps we — the teachers of writing, the accomplished writers — were not all that different from our students when time for *sharing* our written products neared. Anxiety, insecurity, frustration in making our essays read better than they were written, second thoughts about bailing out of the seminar, a not-so-convincing bravado attesting to our writing genius — I witnessed and underwent all these emotions. We may have more in common with our students than we sometimes think.

But what really struck me before soliciting the manuscripts was what we might see as readers, writers, and composition researchers if we were to have before us a body of written material *by* composition and language arts teachers. Answers to certain questions and notions about the writing process, revision, evaluation, collaborative activity, and cognitive connection might well be provided with us on the other end — as writers and sharers of that writing rather than as teachers and evaluators.

Does the writer's descriptive outline (in Bruffee terms what each paragraph *says* and *does*) differ dramatically from her readers' outlines? If so, in what ways? Why? What kinds of language do the peers/colleagues use to evaluate the essay? Is this language distinctly different from the evaluative coding on students' products? Are the criteria exercised in professional peer evaluation identical to those usually on students' products? Do *we* as true peer evaluators and partners in collaborative learning read more as readers

and less as editors? With peer input in mind, does the writer enter again the composing process and revise her essay both externally and internally, to use Donald Murray's terminology? Or do the peers' descriptive outlines and evaluation invite changes only at the word/sentence level? Or, as our students often do, does the writer stubbornly cling to her original version, minimizing the received reader-based advice? Or, similarly, does the writer's private control of the written communication preclude peer/colleague trust? Other questions came to mind then, even more now — the answers to which could help us perfect the collaborative structure in our classrooms.

Although I was quite willing to devote half of this *JTW* to these seminar gleanings, I was disappointed that only six participants submitted their work. I hope the end of a long school year with all the accompanying paper work, 1982-83 burnout, and planned vacations limited the number of manuscripts I received. Nonetheless, I commend the following teachers for extending the seminar beyond a spring weekend in Nashville: Sue Landau (North Central High School); Gail M. Eifrig (Valparaiso University); Mary Brunk (Lafayette Jefferson High School); Nancy Stahl (IUPUI); Webster Newbold (Anderson College); and Barbara Zimmer (IUPUI).

I have chosen the work of the last two teachers simply because their pages included most of what I asked for: the original three paragraph essay and descriptive outline brought to the seminar; two descriptive outlines by seminar peers; a peer evaluation; a post-seminar commentary by the author on both seminar activities and peer input into the essay; and finally a revised essay. Second, the peer responses to their work seemed to invite more notions of reader-writer relationships than the others.

I leave the analyses for you and welcome short responses for, perhaps, next issue's *Prologue.*

Ron Strahl

BARBARA ZIMMER
IUPUI

I. Original Essay

"It's boring. It's unclear. What are you trying to say?" Hit with these comments in the collaborative classroom the student writer may well turn off with negative emotions: depression, frustration, or anger. He may, on the other hand, exhibit a maturity far beyond his years and ask or wonder why his writing is unclear. That will be the beginning of his collaborative learning and the beginning of letting go in a sense of his own personal ownership of his communication. Once the peer evaluation is taken into account and the writing is changed to reflect, does the writer really "own" the writing? Is it really his? Does collaborative learning in the writing classroom imply collaborative writing as well? And if it does, is our essential reward of careful writing, the pride in having produced a superior product, diminished?

Writing in the classroom is, of course, only a prelude to writing in the workplace. While some written communications (like letters and memos) in business, government and education are produced by one individual working alone, others, such as proposals, annual reports, research projects, and even news releases, are necessarily written collaboratively. Because no one person can be an expert in all areas covered by these larger kinds of writing and because they reflect the organization's image and credibility, they are usually the result of the work of several people. Usually, also, they carry no by-line, no signature. A grant proposal for a project on school finance may have an introduction to the problem written by a tax expert, the justification for the particular organization's expertise written by someone else, the budget defense written by the treasurer, and the plan of action written up by any one of them, but only after intense discussion by all of them on exactly what that plan of action should be. Each section of the draft is carefully scrutinized for clarity and precision; the writing team may need to thrash out how much emphasis to put on lack of public confidence in education or whether there is need to mention Indiana students' comparative rank in SAT scores. When the team is satisfied that this is the best effort, the final draft is produced. Satisfaction for each individual comes when the funding source approves the grant and the project work can begin.

Individuals not schooled in collaborative writing find it difficult to function in this real world. Good writers who have developed a distinctive style may be even more susceptible to this difficulty. A beautifully constructed cumulative sentence containing several absolute constructions is often greeted by a peer evaluation which questions the punctuation, wonders what the meaning is or, worse, suggests breaking up the "too long" sentence. What is the writer to do? If he is not schooled in the collaborative model, he may argue, thinking that he knows better or he may give up, thinking that his colleagues could not possibly understand the thought. In either case he is not making a positive contribution to the writing effort, fulfilling the purpose of the written communication to a particular audience. Such an individual will not, no matter how great his contribution of information to the final product, ever feel the pride of creation. Perhaps, then, the pride of creation as such is antithetical to the goals workaday business communications strive for.

II. Author's Descriptive Outline
Paragraph 1
    Does: Introduces idea and dichotomy.
    Says: Collaborative learning in writing classroom implies collaborative writing.
Paragraph 2
    Does: Shows examples of prior experience.
    Says: People schooled in collaborative writing expect it.
Paragraph 3
    Does: Shows example of recent experience.
    Says: People unschooled in collaborative writing find it difficult.

III. Peer's Descriptive Outline
Paragraph 1
    Does: Establishes two views of collaborative writing: Diminishing pride/preparing for life, by raising questions about each.
Paragraph 2
    Does: Explains how collaborative writing works in the workplace through experiences of grant writing and thus shows why it is a necessary & valuable skill.
Paragraph 3
    Does: Gives explanations of the problems a person encounters when he isn't experienced in collaborative writing/leads to the conclusion that, despite the positive aspects, it can lead to a lack of pride in creation.

IV. Peer's Descriptive Outline
Paragraph 1
    Does: Introduces a problem and implies thesis by a series of rhetorical questions.
    Says: When students begin to respond to criticism with constructive questions, they enter into collaborative learning and relinquish ownership of their text. Is this process an essential step in learning to write in the business world?
Paragraph 2
    Does: Begins to answer rhetorical question by describing a situation, providing specific examples.
    Says: Business writing is always a collaborative effort.
Paragraph 3
    Does: Asserts thesis by answering rhetorical question.
    Says: Writers schooled in independent, personal writing do not function well in the business writing process. Therefore, learning (collaboratively) to relinquish *ownership* is essential to successful participation in business writing projects.

V. Peer Evaluation
Strengths
    1. Organization — sets up problem, poses questions, gives concrete examples of abstract notion.
       Answers questions — establishes point of argument.
    2. Voice of experience, authority through knowledge demonstrated by use of examples.
    3. Logically sound argument.
    4. A new way of looking at an old question — real world evidence that shatters the traditional academic model.

Suggestions
1. Don't change organization or content — solid already.
2. I am sensitive to the generic "he" for student — could you alternate he and she, or go to plural — or use "writer" or "student" consistently?
3. I'm interested (in p. 1) about how we deal with the students who turn off with negative emotions — do you have suggestions to offer that would help us foster this *mature* response? If not, maybe better to start essay with the student who responds by asking why.
4. Sentence level revision (obviously in process). Maybe some more contrast of short, direct sentences to balance the longer more heavily embedded or modified sentences. At some points I find myself re-reading because subject and verb are quite far apart.

I like it — substantive, concrete, provocative, informative.

VI. Author's Commentary

I began with the idea of comparing collaborative writing I had done previously with a recent, much more difficult, task of collaboratively writing a Writing Center progress report. In compliance with the pre-seminar instructions, I talked it over with one of my peers and got a whole new insight into "ownership." "After you wrote it up [the Writing Center report], it wasn't mine anymore," she told me. At about the third draft, again according to instructions, I read it to my husband who made the comments which introduce the essay. That draft was still in first person and contained mostly generalizations about feelings toward the writing process. His comments made me remember distancing and also led me to think about "peers." Who actually are my writing peers? My colleagues who teach writing? Other writers who do it well but have not actually thought about how they do it? In that connection, Ken Bruffee's article on liberal education has given me much food for thought.

The essay I brought to the seminar was well distanced from the drafts. This was brought home to me by the descriptive outlines of my peers which were quite different from my own. They showed me what the essay actually said. And I was pleased and encouraged by their reception of it.

The seminar peer evaluation was most valuable to me in my revision. The comment (3) about students with negative emotions made me realize what my audience would be looking for in the conclusion which, as instructed, I had not included. Finding graceful ways to eliminate the generic "he" was fun, and I hope always to remember to do so in future. I have tried to vary my sentence structure and to limit the number of heavily embedded sentences; the peer evaluation brought home to me, again, that compacting information is not always helpful to the reader. The conclusion is now the weakest part of the essay because it has had no peer evaluation. I have always thought that peer comments are essential before I revise, and the seminar reinforced that notion.

VII. Revised Essay

"It's boring. It's unclear. What are you trying to say?" Hit with these comments in the collaborative classroom, the student writer may well turn off with negative emotions: depression, frustration, or anger. The student may, on the other hand, exhibit a more positive attitude and ask why the writing is unclear. That will be the beginning of collaborative learning and the beginning of letting go, in a sense, of the personal ownership of the communication. Once the peer evaluation is taken into account and the

writing is changed to reflect it, does the writer really "own" the writing? Is it really his or hers? Does collaborative learning in the writing classroom imply collaborative writing as well? And if it does, is an essential reward of careful writing, the pride in having produced a superior product, diminished? Or is the collaborative writing classroom really the only practical preparation for the world of work?

Writing in the classroom is, of course, only a prelude to writing in the workplace. While some written communications like letters and memos are produced by one individual working alone, others, such as grant proposals, annual reports, research projects, and even news releases, are necessarily written collaboratively. This is true not only in business, but in government, education, and a variety of other institutions as well. Because no one person can be an expert in all areas covered by these larger kinds of writing and because they reflect the organization's image and credibility, they are usually the result of the work of several people. Usually, also, they carry no by-line, no signature. A grant proposal for a project on school finance may have an introduction to the problem written by a tax expert, the justification for the particular organization's expertise written by someone else, the budget defense written by the treasurer, and the plan of action written up by any one of them, but only after intense discussion by all of them on exactly what that plan of action should be. Each section of the draft is carefully scrutinized for clarity and precision. The writing team may need to thrash out how much emphasis to put on lack of public confidence in education or whether there is need to mention Indiana students' comparative rank in SAT scores. When the team is satisfied that this is the best effort, the final draft is produced. Satisfaction for each individual comes when the funding source approves the grant and the project work can begin.

Individuals not schooled in collaborative writing find it difficult to function in this real world. Good writers who have developed a distinctive style may be even more susceptible to this difficulty. A beautifully constructed cumulative sentence containing several absolute constructions is often greeted by a peer evaluation which questions the punctuation, wonders what the meaning is or, worse, suggests breaking up the "too long" sentence. What is the writer to do? Writers not schooled in the collaborative model may argue, thinking they know better, or they may give up, thinking that their colleagues could not possibly understand the thought. In either case, these individuals are not making a positive contribution to the writing effort. And, no matter how great their contribution of information to the final product, if their writing is revised by others, they will never feel the pride of creation. Perhaps, then, the pride of creation as such is antithetical to the goals workaday communications strive for.

What are those goals? And if we can articulate them clearly, can we perhaps elicit more positive student responses to the collaborative classroom? Clearly, although the purposes of written communications in the world of work are as varied as those of student writers, the major difference lies in the area of style — style in the broadest sense, as a reflection of the writer, the essentially honest, logical, rational, compassionate person that the writer is. The style of a communication from a government agency or educational institution or business enterprise must reflect the organization, the essentially competent, experienced, reliable and accountable organization. No one individual, then, can write up a grant

proposal, for example, without intensive peer criticism, any more than one individual can have all the expertise necessary to write it. The final product should reflect the organization, not the individual who wrote it. Business leaders indicate a lack of understanding of this concept among their employees and a need for the training which emphasizes it. Individual pride of ownership, pride of creation, is out of place unless it is shared with colleagues. "Owning" a piece of writing or a project is a false goal for students who are preparing for work in the public or the private sector. Their competitiveness for the GPA makes them wary of cooperation in the collaborative classroom. Assignments geared toward real work situations and grading policies which recognize individual contributions to group efforts would do a great deal toward helping students learn the essentials of real life writing.

WEBSTER NEWBOLD
ANDERSON COLLEGE (now at Ball State University)

I. Original Essay

I have long felt that collaborative classroom work emphasizing peer criticism by students in freshman college writing classes is a useful means of broadening the base of the composition classroom experience and giving novice writers an additional perspective on their own composing process. In most of the intermediate college composition courses I've offered in recent years, I've included an exercise called the rotation essay, which has demanded both collaborative writing and peer evaluation. Briefly described, the rotation essay calls for students working in groups of four or five to plan a brief essay and write one paragraph of it before passing it around the group for completion. Each student writes part of each essay, then evaluates the essay she planned originally in terms of organization, thesis and paragraph development, etc. This project has generally enjoyed popularity, but mainly in the writing phase; I often noticed that students' evaluations of these essays were uninspired, to say the least. Last semester I determined to put special effort into priming the evaluative process by demonstrating how several of the papers might be criticized according to a clear set of guidelines. The success of this strategy has convinced me that peer evaluation is most satisfactory as a composition teaching tool if students are presented with clear and ordered means for judging the merits of their essays.

The approach I had taken up to last semester left too much initiative for evaluation with the students themselves, who rarely have the training or inclination to productively judge others' work or their own. In their experience, educational value emanates from teachers, parents, pastors, etc. (to wit, "adults"), not from students like themselves. I did nothing to change this perspective by simple exhortations to "think about" the pieces before them, to "tell what's good and bad about them," and to "be specific" in the process. When I said that a "short paragraph" should be sufficient, I should not have been surprised at the ingenious brevity of the evaluations I got back. To be sure, a few students produced full and thoughtful critical remarks, but sentences like "Grammer [sic] not too correct," or "Flows real good," were more the rule. These responses were clearly disappointing to me and unhelpful in enabling students to take a fresh look at their own writing.

This past semester I decided to try to give my students better means to evaluate their rotation essays, and the effort bore fruit. I took three essays with representative strengths and weaknesses in structure and content, made transparencies from them, and projected them on the screen. At the same time, I listed on the blackboard three main areas to criticize (overall planning, paragraph effectiveness in the paper's body, and thesis development in the introduction and conclusion), with several questions under each head which the student could ask herself to direct attention toward critical points of success or failure. For example, "Does the thesis in the outline match the thesis in the introduction?" and, "Do the topic sentences of the body paragraphs support the essay's thesis?" Using these general headings and specific questions, I then went through each of the three essays, identifying strengths and weaknesses and making suggestions for revision. This strategy of demonstration and direction produced a noticeably higher quantity and quality of student comment generally, with many showing a good understanding of the interdependency of the parts of an essay and sensitivity to the appropriateness of subject matter in the paragraphs; these students were successfully using some basic tools of analysis. Most encouragingly, they seemed to be more at home with the process of evaluation and more confident in their ability to do it.

II. Author's Descriptive Outline
Proposition. Peer evaluation of writing works best if students are given clear and specific guidelines on how to do it.
Strategy. Contrast previously unsuccessful method with recently-adopted more successful ones.
Paragraph 1
    Does: Introduces proposition by (1) generally affirming value of peer evaluation; and (2) describing particular exercise continuously used to promote peer evaluation, unsatisfactory aspects usually found in previously-used method, and recent effort to revise method of presenting exercise, which leads to proposition.
    Says: Students' evaluations of peers' work in rotation essay exercise were more successful when I changed the way I presented the assignment.
Paragraph 2
    Does: Describes situation before change in strategy by giving details of students' weaknesses and inadequacy of my assignment to stimulate desired process.
    Says: Students' weakness in preparation for evaluating peers' and own work led to superficial responses; my weakness in directing their thinking failed to overcome these problems.
Paragraph 3
    Does: Describes new strategy for assigning peer evaluations; contrasts details with previously unsuccessful ones; affirms proposition by showing success of new strategy's directed approach in overcoming a variety of problems and in making possible new achievements.
    Says: My more ordered and directed introduction of the nature of the evaluative process enabled students to do better in their assignments.

III. Peer's Descriptive Outline

Proposition. Students will have more success with peer evaluation when they are given clear and ordered assessment objectives.

Strategy. Explains peer evaluation before and after instruction in assessment guidelines.

Paragraph 1

Does: Introduces the proposition by explaining the author's success with collaborative writing and problems with peer evaluation.

Says: I was having success in my writing classes with collaborative learning, but I needed new strategies for the peer evaluation phase.

Paragraph 2

Does: Explains how students made weak responses during peer evaluation when asked "tell what's good or bad" about a paper.

Says: This approach didn't work well.

Paragraph 3

Does: Explains a classroom procedure where the teacher uses sample essays to develop evaluation guidelines with students, before peer evaluation.

Says: Students can evaluate their classmates' papers better after they are given specific guidelines for assessment.

IV. Peer Evaluation

Generally well-written and clear — very good.

Second paragraph begins to talk in detail about students' views on "educational value" but doesn't really incorporate this into topic. Should it be left out?

V. Author's Commentary

In general, I found the writing of this short essay and discussion of it with my peers to be a quite rewarding activity. Having something modest but genuine to say, saying it coherently, and receiving approbation for the whole exercise proved personally satisfying — and it has encouraged me to give more emphasis to collaborative learning and peer evaluation techniques in my writing classes.

My short essay deals with the relative success I had with a peer evaluation exercise before and after I changed the way I introduced the assignment. I took care to present a balanced structure, patterned on the comparison-contrast method of exposition which I often teach in class. I also took care with word choice and style generally, and revised for smoothness and overall correctness. My evaluator responded very positively to all this, and I have to admit a certain ego boost resulted from this professional pat on the back. She did, however, point out one place in the second paragraph where I begin to talk about students' backgrounds and expectations but fail to develop the point, misleading the reader somewhat and threatening the balance between the second and third paragraphs. This seemed immediately apparent as I reread the section; moreover, I detected a certain condescension toward my students which unhelpfully widened the gap between us and did not contribute to but rather subtly undermined the goals of the paper. The perspective of my peer evaluator was instrumental in enabling me to see and correct this weakness, and to gain renewed understanding of the effectiveness of collaboration in helping writers overcome problems, some of which they may not even know they have.

Probably because I was fairly careful with the original planning and execution of my essay, neither my descriptive outline nor the one done by my peer suggested any substantial changes. But I found this phase of our assignment challenging — not so much because it was difficult, but because I recognized it as a valuable tool for aiding revision that should be creatively included in my classes. I am sure that many of my students who have difficulty thinking of an essay as a coherent unit will be encouraged to do so by descriptive outlining, which enables a writer to unite process and product and see his work whole in a helpful way.

Finally, the Seminar has stimulated me to re-confront issues of teaching writing that have lain dormant for some time under the crust of day-to-day educational chores. Reading our essays aloud to each other in the small working groups reminded me of some assumptions and patterns in my composition teaching which I had questioned before and needed to again. Of our five group members, one presented a very personal, detailed, and witty account of her experience, another read a more generalized essay that held its topic at a distance, and the rest of our papers fell somewhere in the middle between these approaches. I recognized at once in these obviously competent writers the same pattern of variation I had witnessed often in my writing classes on a less sophisticated level; there I had attempted to guide the writers with styles of extreme particularity or generality toward the center, toward a correct "good essay" model where objective concepts were supported by "appropriate personal details." This experience with my peers has generated the following questions, none of which I can well resolve but all relevant to my purposes and goals as a writing teacher:

Should I accept variety in college student writing patterns as I accept differences among my peers?

Am I helping to develop successful writers by expecting my students to aspire to a single "good essay" model?

Do many students develop fear or antagonism toward writing because they cannot reconcile their personal styles with the "good essay?"

Should I continue to furnish example essays for particular assignments? Do I need to revise my expectations for individual conformity to a model style or organizational pattern?

How far should I take individual differences into account when evaluating students' writing competency?

Would men and women in my classes become better writers if I treated them more like peers and less like students?

VI. Revised Essay

I have long felt that collaborative classroom work emphasizing peer evaluation by students in freshman college writing classes is a useful means of broadening the base of the composition classroom experience and giving novice writers an additional perspective on their own composing process. In most of the intermediate college composition courses I've offered in recent years, I've included an exercise called the rotation essay, which has demanded both collaborative writing and peer evaluation. Briefly described, the rotation essay calls for students working in groups of four or five to plan a brief essay and write one paragraph of it before passing it around the group for completion. Each student writes part of

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