Process Pedagogy

L A D   T O B I N

✧ O BRAVE NEW WORLD . . .

I took my first composition course in 1971. During that semester we wrote a dozen papers—an argument, a compare and contrast essay, a description, a research paper, and eight *explications de textes* (which were "close readings" of stories, novels, poems, and plays). Almost all of the papers were five-paragraph essays (an introduction with a thesis statement, three supporting paragraphs which each had to contain three supporting points which each had to be supported by three details or examples, and a conclusion); the exceptions were the compare and contrast paper (in which we could choose between what my teacher called an AAABBB form or an ABABAB form) and the research paper (which had its own rules and restrictions governing everything right down to the size, color, and number of notecards you had to use).

We almost always wrote our essays the night before they were due, usually getting going after midnight, and swore to—and at—ourselves the whole time that we would never again put off a paper till the last minute. We didn't get our essays back for a week or so because, I am convinced, my teacher carried them around in his briefcase until the night before he returned them, at which time he reluctantly took them out, graded them, corrected them, meticulously marked them up in the margins, wrote a long end comment explaining or justifying the grade, and swore to—and at—himself that he'd never again put off grading till the last minute. We did no revision, except for the one paper we could choose to rewrite each quarter for a revised grade.

Class time was divided between animated, thought-provoking discussions of the assigned literary texts and our teacher's listless lectures on composition topics, including thesis writing; kinds of evidence; outlining; introductions, transitions, and conclusions; sentence structure; grammar and usage; and proper citation form. We never wrote during class; never read our own essays aloud; never peer reviewed, workshopped, or even read each other's essays; never were asked to write before we outlined; and never talked about how writers found their ideas, got unstuck when they were blocked, or used revision to discover new meaning, focus, or form.

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As odd and as counterintuitive as it seems to me now to teach writing without ever talking about writing, I need to confess several things. First, though I found that approach to writing instruction exceptionally uninspiring, I learned certain stylistic conventions, organizational strategies, and forms of argument that turned out to be useful to me throughout my college career. Second, the explications that I wrote made me a more perceptive and enthusiastic reader and critic. And third, when I taught my first composition course sometime in the mid-1970s it looked almost exactly like the course I just described. Even though I had not much enjoyed my own experience as a composition student, I could not think of any alternative to organizing the course around the identification and appreciation of the rhetorical features of good writing.

And so when I think back to the time in the late 1970s when I first discovered process pedagogy in the form of books and articles by Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, I am moved to the language of a conversion narrative (or at least to the "O Brave New World" speech from *The Tempest*). In his 1972 manifesto, "Teach Writing as a Process Not a Product," Murray sounds like the visionary I immediately recognized him to be:

> What is the process we should teach? It is the process of discovery through language. It is the process of exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language. . . . Instead of teaching finished writing, we should teach unfinished writing, and glory in its unfinishedness. . . . This is not a question of correct or incorrect, of etiquette or custom. This is a matter of far higher importance. The writer, as he writes, is making ethical decisions. He doesn't test his words by a rule book, but by life. He uses language to reveal the truth to himself so that he can tell it to others. It is an exciting, eventful, evolving process. (*Learning by Teaching* 15)

This was the sort of stuff I expected to find in Whitman or Emerson, not in a book on writing instruction. And Murray's *A Writer Teaches Writing* (first published in 1968), with its talk about cultivating surprise, writing for discovery, encouraging risky failures, and teaching writing as if your students were not students but *real writers*, did nothing to dampen my enthusiasm.

Elbow's book *Writing Without Teachers*, first published in 1973, was no less eye-opening for me: "Most books on writing try to describe the characteristics of good writing so as to help you produce it, and the characteristics of bad writing to help you avoid it. But not this book," Elbow writes on the first page, and then continues:

> Instead I try for two things: (1) to help you actually generate words better— more freely, lucidly, and powerfully: not make judgments about words but generate them better; (2) to help you improve your ability to make your *own* judgment about which parts of your own writing to keep and which parts to throw away. (vii–viii)

To accomplish these goals, Elbow suggests that writers "freewrite" (write nonstop without worrying about correctness, form, logic, etc.); play with words

and ideas; form writing groups; and rely less at first on doubting and more on believing, less on criticism, more on imagination.

All this caught me off guard. I was only teaching writing because that was the price I had to pay to be in the field and occasionally get a chance to do what I really wanted to do—study and teach literature. I had left the graduate program in English Language and Literature at the University of Chicago because at that time the job market for lit Ph.D.s was terrible ("The more things change, the more . . .") and taken a job teaching high school English on Chicago's southwest side. From there, I had moved to a small New England college where, based on my Master's degree from Chicago, high school teaching experience, and limited success as a freelance writer, I was hired as an adjunct instructor and founding director of the college writing center. During those first years, I taught writing conscientiously, diligently, even passionately, but I never imagined it had much or anything to do with imagination, play, surprise, or experimentation. I had never thought of my students as *real writers*. I had talked a great deal about what writing ought to look like when it was read but I had never thought to demystify the process by talking about the craft, mechanics, rituals, logistics, atmospherics of the process.

I had never once asked my students the kinds of questions that I now discovered process practitioners were asking: "What time of day do you write? Where? Do you write your first drafts in long hand or directly on the computer? Do you take breaks for snacks? Do you rely on caffeine and other stimulants for energy and inspiration? Do you show your work-in-progress to other writers? Do you read your work aloud? Have you identified which of your composing strategies work for you and which ones don't?" To be honest, I had never thought much about any of this for my own composing process. I was still working on the think, outline, write, revise model. And so when I came across Murray's and Elbow's elegantly logical, nuts and bolts advice about the conditions that foster good writing and the ones that seem to inhibit it, I was intrigued—and hooked.

From those first two books, I went on to the journal articles in which Murray explained and extended the process approach, most notably "Write Before Writing," "Writing as Process: How Writing Finds Its Own Meaning," "Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader," and "The Maker's Eye: Revising Your Own Manuscripts" (now all collected in *Learning by Teaching*); to Elbow's *Writing with Power*, which clarifies his argument that creating and criticizing are very different skills that usually conflict with each other; to Ken Macrorie's books, *Telling Writing* and *Writing to Be Read*, in which he argues for writing freely, for telling truths, and for finding your authentic voice; to Ann Berthoff's explanation of the dialectic relationship between writing and thinking and the uses of chaos in meaning-making; to Janet Emig's learned essays from the 1960s and 1970s (now collected in *The Web of Meaning*), in which she identifies an intellectual tradition and philosophical basis for a process pedagogy; and to Natalie Goldberg's Zen-inspired writing exercises and prompts.

Scholars and teachers new to composition studies may be a bit baffled when told that when I discovered these ideas in the late seventies (which was already fifteen years after Emig's breakthrough essay, "The Uses of the Unconscious in

Composing," *The Web of Meaning*) and began implementing them in the early eighties (which, again, was years after teachers like Murray, Elbow, Macrorie, Emig, Berthoff, and William Coles had been practicing process for years), they still represented something of a pedagogical revolution. After all, it hardly seems daring any longer to suggest that in a writing course we ought to talk about the practice of writing or that we ought to devote at least as much time and attention to the production of texts as to their consumption. And yet, as many composition scholars (including Maxine Hairston in "Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing") have pointed out, the argument that writing should be viewed and taught as an activity represented a true paradigm shift for the field.

It also represented an approach so controversial as to serve as a kind of disciplinary shibboleth: in the late 1970s and early 1980s you were either one of the process-oriented teachers arguing for student choice of topics and forms; the necessity of authentic voice; writing as a messy, organic, recursive form of discovery, growth, and personal expression; or you were a teacher who believed that we needed to resist process' attack on rules, conventions, standards, quality, and rigor. Or if you listened to what each side said about the other, you were either a soft-headed, mush-minded mystic clinging to 1960s nostalgia or an old fuddy-duddy schoolmarm or master clinging to canned assignments, dying forms, and outdated autocratic methods. By the mid-1980s, process pedagogy was so prominent that you were, as Ken Kesey used to say about the acid tests of the 1960s, either on the bus or off it.

In fact, the binary camps organized around attitudes about standards and authority may seem reminiscent of 1960s political battles because in many ways it was the result of 1960s political battles, a point persuasively argued by James Marshall in "Of What Does Skill in Writing Really Consist?: The Political Life of the Writing Process Movement" and in Thomas Newkirk's "The Writing Process—Visions and Revisions" in *To Compose: Teaching Writing in High School and College*:

> The writing process movement reflects the political era in which it was born, the turbulent years between 1966 and 1975. True to those times, much of the process pedagogy has an anti-institutional bias. The student was portrayed not as someone entering the academy, learning the practices of academic writing; it was more common to view academic writing as the enemy because it seemed to suppress the individual voice of the writer. The movement was clearly a challenge to literature specialists who controlled English departments; the attempt was to ask students to read their life experiences as text rather than to restrict their attention to the literary canon. And it was a challenge to the authority structure of the classroom and the "transmission" model symbolized by the podium placed before rows of immovable seats. (xvi)

What process theorists were reacting against was as important to the movement as what they were arguing for. Process pedagogy was decidedly anti-establishment, antiauthoritarian, anti-inauthenticity. Process teachers did not

hate all written products; they only hated the kind of written products they claimed the traditional process inevitably produced—the canned, dull, lifeless student essay that seemed the logical outcome of a rules-driven, teacher-centered curriculum that ignored student interests, needs, and talents. For Emig, process was the fight against the "fifty-star theme"; for Macrorie, the enemy was the pretentious, inauthentic school prose he dubbed "Engfish." Elbow talked about how premature editing and the "two-step method" (think, then write) lead to "dead" writing. And, perhaps as a takeoff on Linda Flower's notion of writer-based and reader-based prose, process advocates began to talk about school writing as "author-vacated" prose. Bad, boring, uninspired student writing was not inevitable; it was only a symptom of a bad, boring, uninspired writing process that, in turn, was a symptom of bad, boring, uninspired pedagogy.

Process practitioners claimed that their emphasis on craft, voice, and technique could lead to something we had rarely thought to ask or hope for—lively, engaging, dynamic, strongly voiced student essays. Murray, who championed the weekly, one-to-one teacher-student writing conference, wrote with a Zen-like appeal of teaching by not teaching and, amazingly, about the thrill of reading dozens, hundreds, even thousands of student essays in which he learned more than he taught:

> It was dark when I arrived this winter morning, and it is dark as I wait for my last writing student to step out of the shadows in the corridor for my last conference. I am tired, but it is a good tired, for my students have generated energy as well as absorbed it. I've learned something of what it is to be a childhood diabetic, to raise oxen, to work across from your father at 115 degrees in a steel-drum factory, to be a welfare mother with three children, to build a bluebird trail, to cruise the disco scene, to be a teen-age alcoholic, to salvage World War II wreckage under the Atlantic, to teach invented spelling to first graders, to bring your father home to die of cancer. I have been instructed in other lives, heard the voices of my students they had not heard before, shared their satisfaction in solving problems of writing with clarity and grace. I sit quietly in the late afternoon waiting to hear what Andrea, my next student, will say about what she has accomplished on her last draft and what she intends on her next draft. (*Learning by Teaching* 157)

These ideas—that students actually have something important and original to say and will find ways to say it if we can just get out of their way, give them the freedom to choose their own material, and show them that we are interested—run throughout early process pedagogy. It is not so much a matter of teaching students new rules or strategies but of helping them gain access to their "real" or "authentic" voice and perspective that traditional school has taught them to distrust and suppress. Macrorie, who railed against "phony and pretentious" writing, argues that we had more access to vigorous, honest, engaging writing before we were ever schooled and socialized (*Telling Writing* 14), while Elbow suggests that his theory is based on the "assumption that vir-

tually everyone has available great skill with words. That is everyone can, under certain conditions, speak with clarity and power" (*Writing with Power* 7).

At the time I first came across these arguments, I was still assigning topics and dictating forms. When I talked to colleagues about writing instruction, it was usually to commiserate about the drudgery of grading or to complain that only a few students in my classes seemed to be very good writers. "It's not that Johnny can't write," process pedagogues were suddenly saying to the rest of us, "it's just that you, Professor Stuffed Shirt, can't teach. *My* students write wonderful essays." I was somewhat skeptical but mostly I was envious. And so I started the next semester by telling my students they could write their first essay on any subject, in any form, and that I would read and respond to their first drafts but that I would not grade them.

It is not as if all of my students suddenly leapt up in applause and hoisted me upon their shoulders, cheering (they didn't); it's not even as if those first drafts were all that good. But the energy and balance in the classroom, as well as my role as a teacher, were clearly changed, and I felt there was no going back. Instead of choosing topics, teaching conventions, correcting, and grading, I now had the responsibility (and, hokey as it might sound, the opportunity and even pleasure) to read and respond to each evolving student essay as perceptively and creatively as possible. My primary job was not to tell the writer where she had gone wrong or right but to help her see what she had accomplished and what the essay might become in its next incarnation. I was now reading not for error and assessment but for nuance, possibility, gaps, potential. For the first time, I realized that student essays were texts to be interpreted, discussed, marveled at, and that writing students were, amazingly enough, writers.

What made the process movement all the more remarkable was that it was not just occurring in college English departments; it was happening everywhere writing was taught and practiced, from preschool through the work place. What Murray, Elbow, Coles, Emig, Macrorie, and others were suggesting for college composition, educators like Donald Graves (*Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*); Lucy Calkins (*The Art of Teaching Writing*); Nancie Atwell (*In the Middle: New Understanding About Writing, Reading, and Learning*); James Britton (*The Development of Writing Abilities 11–18*); and Tom Romano (*Clearing the Way: Working with Teenage Writers*) were advocating for children in schools K–12. In elementary schools where process pedagogy came to be known as the "whole language" movement, the key issues were whether students should be given basal readers, spelling tests, drill-and-skill lessons, and instruction in phonics and vocabulary or whether they should learn to read and write in the process and context of *real* reading and writing. Again the assumption was that students could write if, Graves explained, we designed a pedagogy that built on the skills, strengths, and interests they already possessed:

> Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils . . . anything that makes a mark. The child mark says, "I am." "No, you aren't," say most school ap-

proaches to the teaching of writing. We underestimate the urge because of a lack of understanding of the writing process and what children do in order to control it. Instead, we take the control away from children and place unnecessary road blocks in the way of their intentions. Then we say, "They don't want to write. How can we motivate them?" (*Writing* 3)

Again, the key assumptions were that students are writers when they come to the classroom (even in kindergarten) and that the writing classroom should be a workshop in which they are encouraged through the supportive response of teachers and peers to use writing as a way to figure out what they think and feel and eventually to "publish" their work to be read and celebrated by the community of writers they have become.

There are critics who have suggested that this wasn't such a big deal, that we always recognized writing as a process (Faigley), that process pedagogy never displaced "current-traditional" instruction (Crowley, "Around 1971: The Emergence of Process Pedagogy"), or that all that changed in the 1970s was the emphasis and the terminology. It is probably true that some of us in our nearly evangelical zeal exaggerated the contributions of Murray, Elbow, Macrorie, and Graves, but it is also true that, having long ago adopted the assumptions, attitudes, and methods of process pedagogy, many of its critics too easily forget the revolutionary nature of the movement. Just like critics of psychoanalysis who tell you how far we have moved beyond Freud's quaint practices and beliefs but who still talk comfortably about the unconscious, slips of the tongue, dream interpretation, or repression, there are those who claim that process has had its day and then acknowledge that in their teaching they still employ freewriting and journals and peer response groups and the idea that writing generates as well as reflects meaning.

Of course, these critics are right in suggesting that "process versus product" is in some ways a misleading slogan: even the most process-oriented teachers acknowledge that a meaningful process ought to lead eventually to some sort of written product, and even the most product-oriented teacher accepts the fact that writing occurs in series of steps and stages. In fact, we can find all sorts of acknowledgment going back at least to Aristotle that writers need to proceed in stages and steps. The way I taught writing in 1975, when I paid no attention to invention, freewriting, peer review, or revision, was still based on the assumption that successful writing was the result of some sort of process: think, outline, gather evidence, write, proofread. It is a mistake, as I will try to point out in the next section, to idealize the process movement and to pretend that process teachers invented invention or rhetoric or writing instruction, but I bristle at the suggestion that the process approach was just a slightly different version of what came before. You might as well say that walking into a course in art history or art appreciation and handing each student a paintbrush, palette, and smock and telling them to get started is just a slightly different version of what art historians or critics usually do, for the elegantly radical changes these practitioners were suggesting in our field's attitudes and practices were no less dramatic or far-reaching.

↭ PROCESS GOES TO SCHOOL

Determined to gain a scholarly footing in the field and determined to change my adjunct status for a tenure track position, I returned to grad school in the early 1980s, this time in composition studies. I chose the University of New Hampshire since it was close to my job and one of the bastions of process pedagogy: UNH was the home not only of Don Murray but also of Don Graves, whose work on the writing process of seven-year-olds had done for elementary school teachers and students what Murray's work had done on the college level, and of Tom Newkirk, whose books, articles, and edited collections had sketched out the boundaries of process pedagogy for the elementary, secondary, and college classroom.

When I arrived in grad school, I had an experiential, empirical belief in process but no real scholarly basis for my approach. I soon found that I was not alone. Process pedagogies were popular because they critiqued old, traditional forms; because they seemed open, new and daring; and because they seemed to work better than the system they replaced. But they hardly represented a theoretically consistent or unified approach. Now scholars scrambled to identify and establish the theoretical and scholarly raison d'être for process pedagogy by arguing that this approach was actually (or merely) the modern culmination or manifestation of the ideas of Plato or Coleridge or Virginia Woolf or John Dewey or the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. And of course in some sense all of these scholars were right, as were those who pointed out how freewriting grows directly from Freud's definition of free association or how the notion that writing does not merely reflect what the writer knows but actually generates meaning through the identification of the writer's own unconscious thoughts is the very cornerstone of psychoanalytic practice.

However, it was not these philosophical or historical studies that were at the center of process scholarship: that center was the quickly proliferating body of scholarly articles and dissertations on the nature of the writing process and of writers at work. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, hundreds of scholars in the field began to publish studies of writers writing. The scope and breadth of this scholarship were stunning: researchers began to focus on writers at all stages of their education, at all stages of the process, at all levels of ability, and in all sorts of environments.

Though the relationship was not always logical or direct, process research and process pedagogy clearly informed each other. As Stephen North points out in *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, practitioners were apt to pick and choose research findings to cite in a somewhat arbitrary or even self-serving way, while much experimental research on process was flawed because its findings had little to do with what happens in actual classrooms. Still there can be little doubt that the research grew out of and into the changes we were witnessing in the classroom. Studies such as Gordon Wells' *The Meaning Makers: Children Learning Language and Using Language to Learn*, Graves' "An Examination of the Writing Processes of Seven Year Old Children," and Atwell's *In the Middle* reinforced whole language pedagogy at the preschool, elemen-

tary, and middle-school level, respectively. Two highly influential books—James Britton's *The Development of Writing Abilities (11–18)* and Janet Emig's *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders*—pointed the way toward new ways of assigning and responding to the writing of secondary school students; and studies of the works of professional writers, such as Carol Berkenkotter and Murray's "Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Publishing Writer, and Response of a Laboratory Rat—or, Being Protocoled," and Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami's *Writing in Nonacademic Settings*, helped us to reimagine the writing that goes on outside of school.

Most significantly for college composition, though, were the thousands of case studies, experimental projects, and ethnographies of college composition students. Of particular significance were (1) the studies of the least accomplished writers, including Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*, David Bartholomae's "The Study of Error," and Sondra Perl's "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers"; (2) the important scholarship that compared and contrasted the composing processes of novice and skilled writers (such as the work of Nancy Sommers and Linda Flower); (3) the research that viewed writing as a cognitive act and that focused on what was going on in a writer's mind when, for instance, she framed a problem (Flower and Hayes), was on the verge or point of utterance (Britton, "Writing to Learn and Learning to Write"), was translating inner speech to written discourse (Moffett), or was blocked or stuck (Rose); and (4) the persuasive body of scholarship (including works such as Kenneth Bruffee's "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind," Karen Burke LeFevre's *Invention as a Social Act*, Anne Ruggles Gere's *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications*, and John Trimbur's "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning") that examined the social nature of composing and the ways in which language, meaning, and texts are always and inevitably socially constructed.

In spite of this very wide range of scholarly approaches, it was the version of process that emphasized freewriting, voice, personal narrative, and writing as a form of discovery—that is, the version articulated by Murray, Elbow, Macrorie, Graves, and other so-called "expressivists"—that had the greatest influence on classroom practice and drew the most impassioned support and criticism. For that reason, it was not unusual to hear "process" and "expressivism" used almost interchangeably, as if expressivism were the only kind of process and process teachers were only expressivists. In fact, a teacher could emphasize the organic nature of the composing process but not assign or even allow personal writing, just as a teacher could insist on personal expression while still clinging to a traditional two-step (think first, then write) notion of the process.

To some historians of composition, especially those historians critical of expressivism, the different approaches that emerged in the 1970s mark significant and competing divisions within the process movement. James Berlin, for example, faults the "Neo-Platonists or Expressivists" for identifying truth within the individual "attainable only through an internal apprehension" ("Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories" 773–774) and

for fostering naive notions of self, truth, and authenticity. In Berlin's narrative of progress, "the New Rhetoricians," a group that includes scholars such as Anne Berthoff, Andrea Lunsford, Linda Flower, and apparently Berlin himself, have displaced expressivist pedagogy by recognizing the social construction of knowledge and by developing a theory of composing that "treats all the offices of classical rhetoric that apply to written language—invention, arrangement, and style—and does so by calling upon the best that has been thought and said about them by contemporary observers" (776).

Similarly, Lester Faigley argues that there are four clearly defined, competing theories of process: expressive, cognitive, social, and Marxist. In order to fit various theorists into the various categories, however, Faigley overlooks areas of agreement or overlap, such as cognitive aspects of expressivism or social aspects of cognitivism. Murray and Elbow, for example, while emphasizing an expressivist sense of the agency of the individual writer or the power of voice, also pay careful attention to audience and to the ways in which response shapes revision as well as invention. I am not suggesting that there are no significant differences in the underlying assumptions of scholars in these different camps; however, the differences in theory are less clear and less significant in the classroom, where most process practitioners borrow liberally from research of various kinds at various times in the course for various purposes. As a teacher in the early 1980s whose pedagogical approach had been completely transformed by expressivist pedagogy, for example, I found the reading I was doing as a grad student about social and cognitive approaches to be immediately relevant and useful.

My point is that the bitter debates that were raging in the professional journals between advocates of various theoretical camps caused much less conflict in the classroom, where practitioners usually found something to borrow from each approach. In my own case, I remained committed to an expressivist approach with, I will admit, something of the convert's zeal, but I still found many classroom strategies to borrow from cognitive scholars (such as Flower's explanation of how students move from writer-based to reader-based prose), from social constructivists (such as the collaborative writing assignments recommended by Gere or Bruffee), and from cultural critics (such as the use of advertisements and popular culture as a way to alert students to the ways in which language manipulates and sustains power).

I should also confess that I was open to new approaches because expressivist pedagogy, while it represented an immeasurable improvement over what I had been doing, was not a panacea for the frustration and failure that inevitably crop up for writing teachers and students. This frustration, combined with the backlash to the evangelical rhetoric and claims of process teachers that developed during the late 1980s, led to some powerful critiques:

- *Process pedagogy has become so regimented that it has turned into the kind of rules-driven product that it originally critiqued.*

As process pedagogy became more widely practiced and more widely disseminated in textbooks and in-service workshops, it is undeniably true that it

became much more domesticated and much less daring. Early process pedagogy offered a view of composing that was not fixed or static. Murray, following the lead of creative writers, celebrated surprise, discovery, even failure. Elbow talked about writing as growth. And Perl, in "Understanding Composing," pointed out that composing was not linear but "recursive"; that is, writers did not think and then neatly transmit that complete thought; instead the writing helped them clarify their thinking, just as in a messy, back-and-forth way, the thinking led to more writing. However, much of that perspective was lost in the translation of process pedagogy into a regimented sequence that divided *the writing process* into neat stages of prewriting, writing, and revising.

I still remember the day in the mid-1980s when my office mate, a very traditional teacher who had always required each student to go through a series of prescribed steps that she would check off before moving to the next (i.e., an approved thesis was required before the student could move on to the outline; an outline was required before the student could write the five-paragraph essay, etc.) came back from summer break to announce that she had finally been won over. I remember being surprised and pleased that Evelyn had come over to the process side of the force, but not so surprised or pleased when the next week, from the other side of the partition, I heard her explaining her version of the method to one of her students: "You have not done any freewriting here. You can't just jump from brainstorming straight to composing. You can't skip steps."

So while I would not dispute the fact that process pedagogy has in many cases become a regimented product, I would point out that this regimentation has more to do with the quirks of some individual teachers and the nature of the textbook business than with some inherent flaw in the process approach.

- *Process pedagogies are irresponsible because they fail to teach basic and necessary skills and conventions.*

This has been a concern from the very beginning—that process was too soft, too touchy-feely, too student directed to do its job: teach students how to write. By discarding phonics and spelling tests and basal readers and grammar lessons in first-grade classrooms, whole language teachers were accused of shirking their responsibility and failing their students who needed skills, content, and direct instruction if they were to succeed in second grade and beyond; similarly, by allowing students to choose their own topics and forms and by not emphasizing the teaching of grammar, usage, audience analysis, and proofreading, college composition teachers were accused of failing students who needed to learn the conventions of academic discourse.

Some critics, such as George Hillocks, argue further that the "natural process" approach is flawed because the teacher, playing too much of a passive role, fails to provide enough structure, guidance, and direct instruction about particular conventions and strategies. Where, Hillocks asks, is the proof that process works? An important question, of course, but hardly an innocent one. Given the wide range of differing and necessarily subjective opinions about what constitutes good writing, it is unclear what could possibly constitute proof

in this case. In addition, since process practitioners aim not simply to help a student write several successful essays but to change fundamental attitudes and practices ("focus more on the writer than on the writing" is a common process slogan), the success of the approach needs to be measured by something other than standardized pretests and posttests of writing ability. If process pedagogy works, its proponents argue, students will adopt more productive attitudes and practices (e.g., starting earlier, employing freewriting and other invention strategies, seeking feedback, relying on revision, etc.) that may take time to integrate but that will remain long after the course has ended.

But beyond that, defenders of process explain that many of the critiques of irresponsibility are founded on distortions and exaggerations of actual process approaches. The whole language movement has never ignored standards or skills, Regie Routman explains in *Literacy at the Crossroads: Critical Talk About Reading, Writing, and Other Teaching Dilemmas*, a compelling critique of whole language critiquers. Similarly, in *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*, Newkirk responds persuasively to critics who believe that the process pedagogies that allow personal writing are without sufficient rigor or content by demonstrating the enormously complex rhetorical task this kind of writing requires.

- *Process pedagogy is outmoded because it posits a view of "the writer" that fails to take into account differences of race, gender, and class.*

To some extent, this criticism is also based on a distortion of what early process theorists actually said about the process. Murray and Elbow, for example, go out of their way to make the point that different writers work in different ways, that no one model will work for every student and every teacher. However, it is true that early process texts refer often to "the writer" or "the writing process." But the critique that process pedagogy offers an essentialist view of the writer has merit not because of what process theorists said but because of what they didn't say. That is, early process manifestos said very little about differences in race, gender, and class and therefore may be faulted (as they have been by, for example, Lisa Delpit and bell hooks) for implying that those differences were not relevant or significant.

- *By focusing on the individual writer, process pedagogy fails to recognize the role and significance of context.*

This is an extension of the critiques of Faigley, Berlin, and LeFevre about the ways in which expressivist pedagogy overlooked the social nature of composing. By focusing so much on individual writers, expressivists are faulted for not focusing on the factors that shape composing. To some critics (Bartholomae, for instance, in "Study"), this meant that a writing class should focus more on the immediate context of the university and that the process should be the introduction to and eventual mastery of academic discourse. To others, this meant that the class should focus on the multiple systems, codes, and cultures that form a writer's environment and shape her discourse (e.g., Cooper); and

to still others (e.g., Berlin), this meant that writing teachers should focus more on the larger context of late Western twentieth-century capitalism and that the process should teach students to resist the ways in which they are being controlled and manipulated by the dominant languages in the culture.

As I moved through graduate school, my reading of composition journals, and attendance at national conferences, I found these critiques all had roughly the same effect on me. They made me say "Yes, but. . . . " I could see the logic of the criticism; in fact, I ended up writing a dissertation and a book (*Writing Relationships: What Really Happens in the Composition Class*) that in many ways criticize process theorists for idealizing their results. I had run into enough disappointments as a process teacher to know that it was never as easy as putting the desks in a circle, announcing that we had decentered our authority, telling students to write what they wanted, and watching as they worked together harmoniously in peer groups to push themselves toward better and better revisions.

Still, even as I criticized process theorists for not talking enough about failure, conflict, competition, resistance, and the various contexts that inevitably shape texts, even as I found much of the social aspects of composing to be useful and compelling, I still found nothing that displaced or disproved the fundamental vision offered by the first process practitioners.

✤ POSTPROCESS, ANYONE?

A few years ago I was invited to a regional conference of rhetoricians and composition experts. The invitation stated that now that we had entered an age of "postprocess" it was important for us to come together and figure out what to do next. Since I thought reports of the death of process pedagogy were premature and presumptuous, I was more than a little irritated and defensive. It turned out, I learned once I got to the conference, that we all were in agreement that process had been fine in its day—after all it had displaced the old hulking, decaying materials and methods of the preprocess days—but its time had come and gone and we were now left with a terrible void. Process, according the postprocess theorists, had left us with no content.

Students can't write about nothing, the argument goes, which apparently is what they were writing about when the course was organized around their choice of topics and issues. However, what would count as content in a postprocess stage is not quite what counted as content in a preprocess stage: there was no one at the conference arguing for a return to a course organized around canonical works of literature; the postprocess courses that were proposed at the conference were about cultural critiques and "contact zones"; there were courses about the semiotics of the cosmetics industry, the rhetoric of Japanese-American trade agreements, the politics of medical research on AIDS.

During the morning, I sulked; by lunch, I simmered; and at the afternoon session (at which we were supposed to divide into groups and come up with

new postprocess courses), I threw a tantrum. "I refuse to develop a postprocess course," I told my group mates, "because I refuse to accept the whole premise of this conference—that process is dead. These courses are fine as electives or as units within a writing course, but how can anyone seriously argue that they can replace process pedagogy as our core?"

I could have gone on. I could have said that organizing a course around a huge collection of readings that are chosen and controlled by the teacher and that reflect the teacher's interests and agendas sets back composition pedagogy thirty years—no matter how hip or leftist or progressive the readings are meant to be. And I could have said, if we learned anything from Murray, Emig, and Elbow, we know that you don't teach students to write by telling them that their views on issues that concern them or their narratives about events that shaped them—their experience caring for a grandparent with Alzheimer's, their solutions for the problems of homelessness, even their stories about winning the big game or pulling a great Halloween prank—don't count as content or count only as naive opinions to be corrected during the course.

Fortunately, I didn't say all of that because the people in my group who first looked only irritated by my harangue now were looking seriously worried about my mental health and their own well being. "I just wish that we had the nerve to do what some of the first process teachers did in the early seventies," I concluded. "I wish we had the nerve to throw everything overboard—paper assignments, the modes of discourse, a course reading list, grading, lectures on grammar and usage—and just leave the student's writing at the center of what we do every day and every class."

This elicited a few patronizing smiles, as if I had just said I wished that we could go back to a time when life was simpler, when we didn't have electricity and telephones and automobiles. "Yes, well, that might be interesting," one of my group mates said dismissively, "but our task today is to develop a post-process course that has some *real content*, OK?"

Like all binary oppositions, the distinction between content and noncontent can be easily deconstructed. But it is not the only topic on which process' proponents and its critics are each guilty of exaggeration. Actually I don't want to go back to the time when I first discovered process and when I did, in fact, throw everything out of my course except student writing. It was exhilarating at first, but after a while I found the course a little thin and a little insulated; slowly, over the years, I rediscovered the value of a well-placed writing prompt, an instructive or inspirational reading assignment, a cogent minilesson on some aspect of rhetoric, a unit on collaborative writing or cultural studies, and I introduced or reintroduced some of those materials and methods into the course.

My refusal to admit all this to my group mates grew out of my desire to counteract what I took to be their too-easy dismissal of process' contributions. But, of course, in some sense, process had it coming. After all, those of us who supported process pedagogies often misrepresented preprocess approaches as retrograde and ineffectual when, in fact, much of what we know about the teaching of writing long preceded the process movement. Further, much of the

most interesting contemporary scholarship, such as Lunsford and Ede's landmark research on audience analysis or the perceptive observations of Wayne Booth, Gary Tate, and Daniel Reagan on the use of literature in a writing course, applies a process sensibility to questions that go back long before the process movement to classical rhetoric.

Dividing the history of our field into preprocess, process, and postprocess is as reductive and misleading as dividing the composing process into prewriting, writing, and revising. In fact, many of the postprocess critiques of the '90s rely heavily on process methods, just as process pedagogy continues to make use of traditional ideas about invention, development, thesis definition, notions of authorship, and so on (an argument that Crowley persuasively develops in "Around 1971"). However, while the original resistance to process had come primarily from traditional teachers trying to hold on to the past and from process teachers suggesting friendly amendments, the postprocess critiques were more likely to come from scholars on the left trying to move composition toward cultural studies (e.g., Harris), poststructuralism (e.g., Schilb), and, in some cases, the replacement of required composition courses with elective offerings in rhetoric (e.g., Crowley, "A Personal Essay on Freshman English").

It is not hard to see the postprocess movement of the late 1990s as an extension of the critiques in the mid-1980s. The criticism of process for promoting a view of writing that was too rigid and that ignored differences of race, class, and gender became an outright rejection of process for its naively positivist notions of language, truth, self, authorship, and individual agency. Similarly, the criticism of process for not providing students with sufficiently significant and challenging content and context became a rejection of process as ahistorical or arhetorical. As a product of contemporary critical theory, these critiques make some sense to me. As a classroom teacher, though, I have my doubts, for while positivist notions of agency, authorship, voice, and self may be philosophically naive, they can still be pedagogically powerful. In other words, it may be enormously useful for a student writer (or any writer for that matter) to believe at certain moments and stages of the process that she actually has agency, authority, an authentic voice, and a unified self.

As the administrator of a university writing program that employs seventy instructors each year (after finishing my Ph.D., I took a job developing and directing the writing program at Boston College), I have had to develop an appreciation for differing approaches to these issues. In the end, however, the underlying philosophical assumptions still seem less significant to me than the way in which a writing teacher answers this question: should a writing course be organized around production or consumption? It is around this very basic question that (at least) two paths diverge, and how a teacher chooses usually makes all the difference.

Process pedagogues are still apt to devote most class time to responses to student works-in-progress; to discussions of "the process" (that is, to the methods that successful writers use to find and focus topics, to discover their meaning and voice, to productively give and take peer review); and to writing exercises. They are likely to emphasize invention strategies, the necessity of re-

vision after feedback, and reading assignments designed to support the students as writers. On the other hand, preprocess and postprocess teachers are apt to assign more reading and to devote more class time to discussions, interpretations, and assessments of the works of professional writers, to the identification of the characteristics of effective writing, to the teaching of rhetorical conventions and strategies, and to writing assignments designed to support the students as readers.

There is of course value in both (or all three) approaches, and my own current classroom approach shows a high degree of pedagogical diversity (or dilettantism). In most respects, I still remain clearly committed to a process design: I allow students to choose most of their own topics and forms and to work on essays for long periods of time punctuated by frequent feedback and revision. And I devote most class time to workshops, group work, writing activities, and discussions of invention and revision strategies. But I am no longer as rigid or as pure about teaching by not teaching. I have gone back to my earliest days by reinserting some of my old minilessons on how to identify your audience, how to establish a credible ethos, how to cite sources, and even how to write a five-paragraph essay (I figure it comes in handy on essay exams). At the same time, I find myself borrowing postprocess language and methods to help students see how texts and writers and readers are always and inevitably embedded in multiple contexts and cultures.

In my current incarnation, I am likely to ask my students to read a Nike ad alongside an essay by Orwell or Woolf and to introduce Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia alongside Strunk and White's advice about word choice. But no matter how much I draw on current-traditional rhetoric or postprocess theory, I still strive to keep my students' evolving drafts and their sense of themselves as evolving writers at the very center of the course. For that reason, the model offered by early process practitioners remains, in spite of the important critiques, amendments, and clarifications offered by the theorists who preceded and followed them, as elegant, daring, and compelling as any pedagogical design I've yet come across.

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