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Why So Many Bright Students and So Many Dull Papers?: Peer-Responded Journals as a Partial Solution to the Problem of the Fake Audience

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I. The Problem Dis-covered

Descend, please, into a memory. Recall the first day of class when you were a college student —any course, as long as it assigned papers. As numerous handouts are making the rounds and the instructor is scribbling something on the board, you explore the syllabus, trying to get a sense of whether or not this course is for you. At the bottom of the page, you notice the category entitled "Writing Assignments." It says something like "Three short papers and one long one." I ask you: At this moment, does your heart leap up? Do you think to yourself, "I just can't *wait* until October 1, when that first paper is due!" I think not.

Most students look upon these academic papers as a burden. They are part of the academic bargain, in return for which they will receive not cash but credit. They approach these exercises, for the most part, with an air of compliant servitude. As a result, perfectly bright students turn out a great many perfectly dull papers—acceptable as a response to the assignment, but pedestrian, even to the extreme of foot-sore.

Let the years pass. You are now a college professor. Your class can be any course, as long as it assigns papers. You have assigned the three short papers and a long one, the first of which is due today. It is the end of the class hour. Students are filing out of the room, having turned in their essays. You have carefully straightened out the stack of submissions and are about to reach for your brief case. I ask you: At this moment, does your heart leap up? Do you think to yourself, "I just can't *wait* until I get home and finish dinner so that I can get started on reading these essays!" I think not.

Like their students, most teachers look upon these academic papers as a burden. They are part of our pedagogical responsibility—our side of the bargain. We probably have no greater sense of "earning our pay check" than when we are writing comments in the margins of these essays. Once again, there is a suggestion of servitude in the air.

If you are a committed history teacher or sociology teacher or teacher of literature, you probably write a great many comments in the margins and

a more substantial, paragraph-length comment at the end. These comments often require a great deal of life-blood. Writing them serves many good purposes: (1) We show the student that we really read these essays, thus making the student more willing to put effort into other such assignments; (2) we have an opportunity to share our wisdom and demonstrate our perspectives on the essay's topic; (3) we can prevent our students from repeating in the future the grievous errors they have made in this particular effort; and (4) we level the moral playing field, since we now are working just as hard as they did, despite our indisputable power advantage. It is good for everyone, we believe, that we bother to write these comments. Unfortunately, I fear we are fooling ourselves.

These comments, I estimate, are no more than 10 to 15% cost effective. Consider, as an example, the case of a term paper that is due on the last day of class. You announce that you will place the papers, once you have finished with them, in a box by your office door, so that they may be retrieved during exam period. You spend hours covering all those pages with ink—heartfelt, professional, perceptive, incisive comments. You place the papers in that box and go away for your vacation. At the beginning of the next term, you note with hollow sadness that 50% of the papers were never retrieved. Fifty percent of those comments will never be read.

But what of the 50% who did pick up their papers and therefore have the opportunity to benefit from your commentary? They have at least three significant barriers in the way of their getting from your comments what you intended to give:

1. The comments are contextualized by the grade. On page 2, a student reads in the margin, "I don't see what you're getting at here." If the grade is "A," this comment is dismissed as relatively trivial; if the grade is "C–," this comment shouts with indignation; and if the grade is "B+/B," the comment is of uncertain weight. ("Was *this* where I started to lose it?")

2. Students quite naturally have special, closet relationships with their teachers where these comments are concerned. The comments are private: if the student wishes, no one will see them except student and teacher. As a result, students can inflate or deflate their importance based exclusively on their psychological needs to do so. Your intention gets lost in their needs.

3. Your relationship to these comments as creator cannot possibly be the same as theirs as reader—because of the difference between the two procedures. Your procedure was to read for a bit, and then comment, and then read more, and then comment more, and so forth. But when they pick up that paper, do they start reading at the beginning of the text and "insert" your

> comments as they go, as you did when you wrote them? Never, I would wager. They read comment after comment after comment—interrupting themselves only if necessary to see what in their paper had prompted such a response. As a result, they are reading all these comments as a continuous text. You did not and could not produce them *as a continuous text*. Their reading experience differs significantly from your writing experience.

So far I have painted a rather depressing picture:

- Students (for the most part) do not want to write these papers;
- Teachers (for the most part) do not want to read them;
- Teachers (if pedagogically industrious) must summon a great deal of energy to write painstaking comments; and
- For a number of reasons, these comments do not accomplish nearly enough of the intended good.

Why then do we continue this highly labor-intensive, only occasionally fulfilling procedure? I could offer a number of reasonable justifications:

- For the student, to write is to think. Therefore this process foments individualized intellectual effort on their part.
- The task is an active one for the student, as opposed to the more passive experience of attending class or taking exams.
- It represents the most sustained, most concentrated thinking opportunity students can have in such a course.

But the main reason may simply be that this is the way we have always done it.

At some level, we know there is something wrong. I remember vividly an appointment I had (as Director of Writing Programs) with a Department Chair, to talk about increasing the amount of writing to be assigned by his faculty. Before I could say a word, he said, with a sense of urgency, "You know, I have always assigned a great many papers to my students, and I write tons of comments on them. [Thoughtful pause.] Well, come to think of it, as the years have gone on, I don't write as many comments as I used to. [Longer, more thoughtful pause.] Actually, these days I hardly write any comments at all." This is not the portrait of a man in ethical decline; it is a portrait of a man with a slowly increasing sense of reality. As time had passed, he realized more and more how little effect he was achieving for his substantial commenting effort.

The efficacy of our comments should be held up to question. What is the root cause of the problem?

II. The Cause

I believe most of the malfunctions of this paper mill can be traced back to a single, underlying cause: the fake audience.

When a professional in any field writes, that person tends to be an expert. The expert writes so that those who do not know something may come to know it. Readers in the professional world read in order to find out what someone better or differently informed has to say. We have a technical term for this rhetorical relationship: We call it communication.

I would argue that it is fantasy to believe that students writing assigned papers for teachers are primarily engaged in the rhetorical act of communication. They do not think, having been two days at the library, that they have become the "experts" in this field and will now produce an essay in order to fill full the empty vial of teacher with the milk of human knowledge. Their belief takes them too far in the opposite direction: They tend to think that teacher knows 100% of what can be known about this subject. There is no perceived need for "communication"; instead, the rhetorical task at hand here is the duller, narrower, more burdensome one of "demonstration." Students must *demonstrate* to teacher that they control a modest amount of that which teacher knows expertly.

Given the limitations of this demonstrative task, it is sufficient for students to treat their experience with the library (or the laboratory or the assigned text, etc.) as a hunting and gathering effort. The results need merely be "displayed" on the pages here and there, so that their capture can be recognized and rewarded. If all the right words or names or dates or concepts are included in those pages somewhere, teacher will know how to put them together. That will be true even if student has not yet figured out how to put them together. As a result, a paper full of "information" cannot fail. It can receive a lower grade than desired; but it cannot fail. Students are therefore taught the value of *information*, without understanding the need for synthesizing that information into *ideas*.

This happens naturally when there is no real audience in sight. Peter Elbow, as usual, has put it succinctly: "[Students] see writing as an exercise in trying to say 'what teachers want' rather than working out their own thinking."[1]

And yet, is it not true that one of the best ways to get students to think is to get them to write? The solution to our problem is not to get rid of writing assignments, but rather to get rid of the fake audience.

The most handy, real audience is literally at hand. Your students make a far better audience for their own writing than you do. Consider what is at stake for them: from you they get a grade and a certain amount of admiration or disdain—the kind that they have long since learned how to file away in the

mind for future reference only; but from each other they get an intellectual reputation that means a great deal to them on an on-going basis. They will not hesitate to hand the teacher platitudes, un-processed data, and anything else they think teacher "wants"; but they avoid all such bullish products when communicating with their peers. Only older people (they think) are taken in by such marshmallowy, cotton-headed filler.

The most well-known example of the difference a real audience can make was given us by the revered rhetorician from the University of Chicago, Wayne C. Booth, in his 1963 article, "The Rhetorical Stance":

> Last Fall I had an advanced graduate student, bright, energetic, well informed, whose papers were almost unreadable. He managed to be pretentious, dull, and disorganized in his paper on *Emma,* and pretentious, dull, and disorganized on *Madame Bovary.* On *The Golden Bowl* he was all these and obscure as well. Then one day, toward the end of term, he cornered me after class and said, "You know, I think you were all wrong about Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* today." We didn't have time to discuss it, so I suggested that he write me a note about it. Five hours later I found in my faculty box a four-page polemic, unpretentious, stimulating, organized, convincing. Here was a man who had taught freshman composition for several years and who was incapable of committing any of the more obvious errors that we think of as characteristic of bad writing. Yet he could not write a decent sentence, paragraph, or paper until his rhetorical problem was solved—until, that is, he had found a definition of audience, his argument, and his own proper tone of voice. [2]

It is these three crucial rhetorical components—"a definition of audience, his argument, and his own proper tone of voice"—that become far more available to a student when they have a real audience of fellow students, replacing the essentially artificial audience of the instructor. Booth's student broke out of his rhetorical handcuffs not simply because he finally "had something to say," but because he had both a *need* to say it and an audience that, he thought, *needed* to hear it. That made the communication "real."

A solution to the underlying problem appears: produce an audience that will learn something new from students by having them write for each other, in groups; and have the response to that writing be *exclusively* from them. The advantages are many. Among them: they will do far more writing than usual; they will receive multiple responses, many more pages and more points of view than you could ever produce for them; they will believe, for the most part, that the responses are genuine, not "academic"; and you will be relieved of the heavy task of writing all those responses.

But a number of possible disadvantages jump to mind just as quickly.

Among them: won't they suffer from listening to their amateur responses and not hearing the professional one from you? Won't they complain bitterly about having to produce so many pages of written work? Won't they complain that they are not getting the benefit of your wisdom, which is, after all (they think), what they are paying for? Won't you be deluged with such a mass of paper that you will end the term far more burnt out than usual? Won't the sociological problems of making students work in groups, damage or destroy this effort, as it so often does in other similarly well-meaning efforts?

Here is a suggestion for a structure for a course in any field, derived from more than a decade of experimentation and revision that is now working well for a few hundred professors at a number of strikingly different institutions—small colleges, state universities, private universities—that service between them the whole range of student abilities. The underlying principle is simple: have the students write constantly for real audiences. By "constantly" I mean at least once a week, but, yet better, twice a week. By "real audiences," I mean almost anyone but the teacher.

If this is woven into a solid course structure, and if the concomitant problems are carefully avoided or can be readily remedied, then I predict all of the following may result:

- Your students will turn out some of the best writing you have ever seen from undergraduates;
- They will learn significantly more from your courses than they have ever learned before;
- They will be significantly more intellectually engaged throughout the term than you have ever seen them before, especially in class;
- Each of them will have a better sense of how other students think and, therefore, of how he or she fits into the intellectual community;
- You will understand far better what they as a group are and are not learning during the term, in time to do something about it;
- You will get a far more detailed impression of how each of them is doing with the material;
- You will greatly increase the sense of curiosity and even delight with which you approach the task of reading their writing;
- You will be greatly relieved to be released from the burden of copiously responding in writing to their efforts in writing; and
- You will never go back to the traditional way of doing things, unless class size forces the issue.

III. The Peer-Responded Journal: A Non-Prototype Detailed

In any discipline, there are an infinite number of ways to structure "real audience" courses. The variables are obvious—different teachers, different

students, different subject matters, different class sizes, all of which may require different class structures. I change my structure for each of my courses, varying it to suit the subject material and the size of the class. Perhaps the clearest way of displaying both the potential strengths and the possible pitfalls might be to explain one such course in detail. It should not serve as a prototype; but it will raise most of the generic issues.

This approach suits any kind of course material; but it probably is too cumbersome to use if more than 25 students are enrolled. I would not want to do more than two of these simultaneously, either as teacher or student.

Very few of the details are entirely new.[3] We have for many years now been putting students in groups and having them write "journals." What is new here is the particular combination of techniques that serve the specific rhetorical end of creating valid audiences, which in turn encourages real communication to take place.

In just three sentences, here is the skeletal structure. At the beginning of the term, you establish writing groups of three or four students each, to be regrouped two or three times during the term. Once a week everyone writes a journal type entry in response to the material assigned for the course. Once a week each student writes in response to the journals of the other people in their writing group. This is the kind of writing that Peter Elbow has termed "low stakes."[4]

Weekly reading journals are not a new technique; they have continually grown in acceptance over the last 25 years. Usually, students produce a page or two of comments on the weekly reading assignments (or sometimes create a list of questions about the material), which they submit to the instructor for brief comments. The main advantage is that students engage with the course materials *before* the instructor has his or her say. Unfortunately, that benefit is offset by a number of problems. The instructor is burdened with a great many pages to respond to, even if that response is brief. Students tend to think of the journal as just another assignment, as a number of pages that must be produced to fulfill the "contract" established by the instructor for completing the course. Most significantly, the sole audience for this journal is still the instructor, who (the students assume) will be judging how well each student "performed." Therefore the activity remains in the realm of "demonstration" more than it crosses over into the realm of "communication."

The peer-responded journal retains the advantages of the regular journal, while eliminating many of its problems and creating a large number of new advantages. Surprisingly, it turns out not to be an excessive burden for either student or teacher.[5]

Let us say the class meets Monday and Wednesday for 75 minutes. (If the course meets for more than two days a week, choose any two non-consecutive days to represent the Wednesday and Monday of this example.) On almost ev-

ery Wednesday, each student submits a two-page informal journal entry in response to the readings (listenings, problems sets, lab assignments—whatever) to be discussed both that day *and* the following Monday. (This transforms the Monday–Wednesday week into a Wednesday–Monday week.) These entries should not take the form of a mini-paper. They should not display a traditional beginning, middle, and end. They should not propose a thesis and support it thoroughly and in an orderly manner. Above all, they should not condescend to the material or sound like a book report. Instead, they should represent the student's *struggle* with the material. Students should write about what they do not understand, or about what they *half*-understand, or how this week's material might connect to last week's. They can spend the whole two pages on one point or start anew every other paragraph. They can problematize or extend or complexify or reduce—anything, as long as they struggle.

By "two pages" I mean two *full* pages—about 500 words. I define it as "one sentence on page 3." Curiously enough, this makes a real difference. Two pages seem to be just enough space and time to get students seriously engaged with the material. You will be able to see this for yourself, when your less engaged students hand in less than two full pages.

The benefits are striking. Students come to class prepared, having read the material (or at least part of the material) on time. Even more important, they come to class already *engaged* with the material, having been forced by the writing assignment to form opinions and articulate difficulties. The normal student passivity—("I turned the pages and followed the assignment; now teacher will tell me what I should have been making of it all")—gives way to a more energized and personalized sense of involvement.

We usually reward students only for "success": Their grade depends on how many math problems they got right, or how smoothly the chemistry experiment was transacted, or how well they comprehended historical influences or analyzed a piece of literature. We faculty members, in contrast, are paid more for our struggles than for our successes. We do well to turn out a single publishable document in a year's time. Most of our effort is expended in preparing, in struggling, in doing and re-doing. Since we, the senior members of the intellectual community that is the university, are paid for spending most of our time struggling in the direction of success, why not "pay" the junior members of that community, our students, for their own version of that struggling?

Given the informal, discursive, and fragmented nature of these journal entries, students are usually best left to discover their various topics by themselves. However, on occasion—or in some kinds of courses—it can prove helpful to offer them a prompt. (e.g. "This week as you generate your journal entry, please consider the problem of X .") There is a danger here: The more specific the prompt, the more the journal becomes a teacher-directed specific

"assignment," and less an opportunity for the student to explore in their own ways the assigned materials. A particularly successful kind of prompt is that which asks the student to connect this week's material to issues raised earlier in the course.

On these Wednesdays, each student submits a copy of the journal entry, not only to the instructor but also to the two or three other people in the assigned journal group. The instructor should read each journal entry *but should never make comments nor return them to the students.* This restriction is of the utmost importance. Even a single written comment from the instructor will re-establish the instructor as the true "audience" for this activity. Write "nice" in the margin once and turn the journals back to their authors and they will spend the rest of the term with the looming presence of teacher in mind, trying to elicit a second "nice." The true audience for these journals must remain the students. Get out of the way.

Most of my classes do not "believe" the reality of this peer-response structure for about three or four weeks. They continue to write as if I were the real audience. But as that first month draws towards an end, they realize that they really will *not* be hearing from me. They also realize that their group-mates are reading with the same curiosity and interest (and intellectual nosiness) as they are. The game is on. Everyone bears down—producing more bear than bull.

I re-distribute the membership in the response groups two or three times during the term. After three paper exchanges, students develop expectations concerning the kind of response each group-mate is likely to offer. Creating a new group mix at that point keeps the audience fresh and increases the inter-student intellectual texture geometrically. By the end of the term, each has been intellectually intimate with a large number of classmates.

Since it is not an easy mathematical task to maximize randomness in the re-arranging of these groups, I have made available in a version of this article on my Web site (www.GeorgeGopen.net) a great many such models for different sized classes. Please feel free to make use of them.

Students exchange these journals on Wednesdays. On Mondays, they submit a two-page engagement/response for each of the two-page journals they received. These response documents must not be allowed to imitate the condescending, magisterial manner of the usual comments of an instructor—("Good idea, but needs development"); instead they must strive to become part of a legitimate dialogue between intellectual equals. Discourage any use of the third person. When a student writes, "Jamal is right on here when he says …," that student-responder is writing for you and not to Jamal. As a model I suggest the 1:00 a.m. study session for the next day's history exam, when your classmate asks you what you see as the real significance of the decision in *Marbury v. Madison.* The tone, nature, and intention of your reply, is the sort

of effort I am looking for in these journal responses.

Each student, therefore, will be writing at least two pages for every Wednesday and at least four or six pages for every Monday. For the semester, this can amount to almost 100 pages per student of informal, intellectually engaged writing. Students will be held responsible by their group-mates for seeing that they produce the work on time and get copies to all the appropriate readers. All apologies, excuses, and requests for extensions should be directed not to the instructor but to the other students in the journal group.

You collect and read all this prose, but need not keep track during the term of who has turned in what. It is up to them to keep their folders up to date. If you try to keep score yourself as you go, you will drown in the detail. At one or two points in the term, you might well inform them any work you are missing.

You should not grade any single journal or response—even for your own purposes. Relax. Just read. You will know who they all are by mid-term. And since you already know that you will not be writing even a single word of enthusiasm or dismay, you have to learn how to read these documents *without* a pen in hand. That is, for some people, the only way to avoid the dangers of the hand-gun syndrome: if you have it, you will use it.

To my knowledge, the single downside of this process that has no corresponding upside is the minor annoyance of the paper shuffling. Getting all those submitted papers into the appropriate folders or binders in your office is neither instructive, uplifting, nor a lot of fun.

IV. Grading

The problem of the teacher being what I have called a fake audience is exacerbated when grading enters the picture. It is the grade, more than any other single factor that convinces students that the power structure dictates student writing is done primarily to demonstrate student achievement to the teacher. But that is not the worst of it. Edward White warns of the danger of believing there is such a thing as a "true grade" or a "right grade."[6] As a law student in 1968, I served as research assistant to a professor at the Harvard Law School who headed a committee to review the school's grading policy. At the time, all 550 students in each class were ranked in single file, which required extending GPAs to a third or fourth decimal point. Rank in class was a strong determinant of success in the job market. One third of the students in the most recent class had cumulative GPAs between 69.0 and 69.9. Therefore, there was a difference of only one point between the bottom of the top third and the top of the bottom third of the class. The committee, to its horror, discovered the following:

- The same exam book given to five professors would usually receive at least three different grades and often five;
- The same exam book given to the same professor at a later date would more often than not receive a different grade than before; and
- The grade on an individual exam could vary substantially depening on *when* it was read. The "when" could depend on a number of factors, including the time of day, whether it was read before or after eating a meal, how many other exams had already been processed, and the quality of the exam that was read immediately preceding it.

In other words, there was no way to give an "accurate" grade. There was no "accurate" grade. To rank people from #1 to #550 was a fraudulent act.[7]

The further we can get, therefore, from grading individual written efforts, the fairer grades at the end of the term will tend to seem (and probably tend to be), and the less burdened teachers will be by what is unavoidably a flawed evaluation system.

Instead of assigning a grade to any individual journal or response, I assign a large percentage of the term grade—25 or 30%—to the journal viewed as a whole. These are the instructions I issue students concerning these grades:

- If you produce a sufficient quantity of prose on a weekly basis in the manner requested, it will be hard for you to get below a B–.
- If, in addition to (1) above, you are engaged, you struggle, you open up, and you deal with the difficult, it will be hard for you to get below a B.
- If, in addition to (1) and (2) above, you demonstrate significant improve ment from the beginning of the semester to its end, it will be hard for you to get below a B+.
- If, in addition to (1), (2), and (3) above, you demonstrate intellectual imagination, it will be hard for you to get below an A–.
- If you want an A, do all the above in the extreme.

All of these matters are essentially within your control. They are the sole bases on which the final grades will be assigned for your journals.

I assign another 25–30% value to their responses to each other, taken as a whole. The same grading criteria apply. That puts 50–60% of the course grade squarely within students' control. If they work steadily, they will do reasonably. If they engage with energy, they will do well. If they allow themselves to be swept up into the intellectual exchange, they will do very well. This becomes a major incentive for them, not only to take part, but to take part willingly.

It might seem that this procedure should produce at term's end a night-

mare for the grader. That turns out not to be the case. To assign the overall grades for the journals and for the responses takes me on average from four to seven minutes per student. Because I have been reading these documents all term, I have a strong sense of who each of these people are and how they have been doing. At term's end, here is all I have to do:

1. I check to see if all the journals are there. (Approx. 15 seconds)
2. I check to see that most of the responses are there. (Approx. 20 seconds.) If one or two responses are missing (which is often caused by the other student not producing the journal for them in time), I let it go. Any student who has written all the journals and 95% of the responses has, in my opinion, written enough.
3. I look again at the first journal or two and at the last journal or two, in order to judge improvement. (Approx. 2–3 minutes.)
4. I do the same for the responses. (Approx. 2–3 minutes.)
5. I record the grades. (Approx. 5 seconds.)

It is a satisfying activity to see how far my students have come in 14 weeks. The whole term's work is actually easier to grade than any single piece of it might be. Peter Elbow has argued, "It's much less onerous to read lots of student writing when the grade is quick and easy to give and we don't have to comment" (128).[8] It is even easier when no grade is assigned at all for any individual paper. And, echoing Toby Fulwiler, in speaking about his letter-writing course structure, "The only fair assessment of this particular assignment is quantitative" (22).[9]

Elbow continues, "… some readers will naturally ask, 'But how can I calculate a conventional grade for the course if I only have minimal grades to work with?' … If we only have two or three graded assignments and they are graded on only two or three levels, then we have no basis for calculating the final grade for the course. But if we have *lots* of minimal grades—which is easy and natural with lots of low stakes assignments—then it is no problem to derive a conventional final grade" (132). And I add, if we have *constant* low stakes writing, with *no* individual grades assigned, then (1) students are never considering the effect of the grade for any individual writing effort, and (2) grading the whole semester's progress at its end becomes almost obvious. When you add it all up, it comes to a very happy composite total: lots of writing, no grades given during the term, no commentary written during the term, astounding student progress, no teacher burn-out, a great deal of thinking and education, and a profitable time was had by all.

It is one thing to tell students they are the real audience for each other; it is quite another to manufacture the environment in which that actually can happen. But the clincher for the whole deal is letting them pay themselves

when it comes to the grading process. Anyone who wants a B+ can get it, just by making the proper effort. Does this produce grade inflation? I think not. My term grades certainly have risen since I began using this approach; but that is because my students' performance has greatly improved. When almost everyone deserves a B+, A–, or A, I see no problem in giving them those grades.

V. The Intellectual and Pedagogical Gains

The nature of this structure is not nearly as surprising as the nature of the results. All the many benefits listed here are actual, not putative. They have all happened in my own classes and are supported by reports from many others, in various kinds of departments and institutions.

1. Students come to class not only with (at least part of) the assignment read, but with a genuine dialogue already begun in an actual intellectual peer community.

2. Writing becomes a natural part of the thinking process by being made a natural part of the structure and procedure of the course. Students write to learn.

3. The concept of "page requirements" tends to fade away as the term progresses. I often receive three or four pages instead of two.

4. Students tend to be far less grade-conscious and far more engaged in the course's intellectual activity. (They indicate this on their course evaluations.)

5. Students get an invaluable chance to see how others are struggling with the material just like they are. They get a better sense of who they are and how they fit into their intellectual community. They learn techniques from each other that the instructor would not think to teach them. They get to see what a wide range of reader response there can be, even in a community of three or four.

6. After a few weeks, inter-referentiality sets in. Student X comments to Student Y that her point in the third paragraph really responds to what Student Z was writing about last week and interestingly bounces off what the teacher said in class on Wednesday. Once the students are recombined into different groups, the referentiality extends even further backward: "In my former group, we said …" It extends even into the classroom discussion.

7. Stunningly, by mid-term the quality of the informal journal writing has ascended to levels of power and elegance that far exceed the quality of the

term papers usually produced by the same students; and the writing quality of the journals is often exceeded by that of the responses. To supplement Wayne Booth's experience, quoted above, I can offer my own anecdote. One of my colleagues who had adopted the peer-responded structure for formal papers in her class reported to me that one of her students had handed in only a single copy of his paper when he should have submitted enough copies for his whole group. When she asked him to supply the additional copies, he responded with a good deal of anger, "This isn't fair! If I had known this was a peer-group assignment, I would have written a *much* better paper."

8. Throughout the term, you get to read (and hear) what students really do and do not understand about the course material. When you read the journals on Wednesday night, you will be surprised by what they missed, what they misconstrued, and what they understood without any effort. This can become a real pedagogical advantage, allowing you to change what you had planned to do in next class.

9. By our not responding to our students' writing, they are freed to "tell their story" in the way they wish to tell it—not in the way they think we wish to hear it. Being heard becomes the essential part of the experience, which brings with it a psychological gain far more powerful than we tend to realize. That gain was strikingly demonstrated in the research done by Mac O'Barr, a sociologist at Duke, and John Conley, a law professor from the University of North Carolina.[10] They received permission to lurk in the hallways of a small claims court and interview litigants as they departed from their courtroom experiences. One angry woman, when asked what she thought of the process she had just been through, bitterly complained that the judge had not listened to her and refused to let her finish presenting her side of the story. She was totally dissatisfied with her day in court. *And she had won*. After many months of these experiences, O'Barr and Conley concluded that people feel that court—especially small claims court—is a place not to seek justice, but to be fully heard. This intense human need is almost fully satisfied by the peer-responded journal course structure, where the presence of the non-judgmental teacher-judge becomes enabling rather than intimidating. It produces what Peter Elbow calls a "safe audience," not a "dangerous audience,"[11] which induces a climate in which telling one's story is quietly facilitated. The students texts are no longer "appropriated" by the instructor.[12]

10. You will, I predict, enjoy reading your students' writing more than you ever have before. When those journals are being handed to you on Wednesday,

you may actually think, "I just can't wait until I get home and finish dinner so that I can start reading what they have to say this week!"[13]

VI. Other Problems You Would Think to Have But Probably Will Not

With so many pages for students to write and instructors to read, it would seem likely that the course would sink under its own weight. That turns out not to be the case. Here are a few of the fears that seem logical but prove unwarranted.

1. Won't the students complain bitterly about having to write so many pages?

Surprisingly, this has not yet happened. Students greatly enjoy reading each others' work. (They tell me this explicitly on a regular basis.) They recognize that the "price" of that benefit is their turning out writing of their own. The steady stream of writing becomes a procedure for thinking. They accept it in the same way they do the presence of problem sets in math or labs in chemistry. Much of the normal anxiety that attends writing assignments is allayed by the absence of individual grades. Best of all, the course becomes a much richer intellectual experience than it otherwise would have been. A great majority report on the course evaluation that it was "worth the effort."

2. Won't the teachers complain bitterly about having to read so many pages?

Although the first two or three submissions may demand slow reading—in order to discover the intellectual personalities of the individual students—reading speed increases dramatically thereafter. The total time during the term reading all their journals and responses is likely to be far less than that required for responding to "three short papers and a long." It really *is* interesting to see what they have to say to each other. It becomes part of your class preparation time. Reading becomes far more of a pleasure when you do it without a pen in your hand. The course becomes a richer experience for you, too.

3. Won't students become anxious about not receiving any grades until the end of the term?

In the first class meeting, I announce that anyone who is troubled by not knowing "where they stand" may come to my office and discuss their progress. They rarely come. Constantly reading their classmates' work, they tend to know if they are holding up their end of the bargain.

VII. The Advantage of Recursivity

In our effort to achieve maximum "coverage" in courses in any discipline, we tend to move as briskly as possible from one assignment to another.

I think there is a great need for recursivity in education—and very little opportunity to experience it. In a standard course structure, the student usually encounters a given unit of material only twice—reading it and listening to the professor talk about it With the peer-response journal structure, opportunities for recursivity abound:

1. Student reads two days' assignments
2. Student writes the journal.
3. Instructor gives first class on the assignment.

4–6. Student reads the journals of three group-mates.

7–9. Student responds to journals of three group-mates.

10. Instructor gives the second class.

11–13. Student reads the responses from three group-mates.

These multiple opportunities to re-encounter material produce possibilities for significant learning experiences that are usually unavailable under the traditional schemes. Notice how much more work gets accomplished by students; and notice how relatively little additional effort needs to be made by the instructor. Here is an example of this recursivity at work.

The assignment for the week was to analyze the structures and substance of three poems, including "The Garden of Prosperpine," by Charles Algernon Swinburne. This poem comes to its climax expressing the great relief one can take from the fact that death exists. Here is its penultimate stanza:

> From too much love of living,
> From hope and fear set free,
> We thank with brief thanksgiving
> Whatever gods may be
> That no life lives forever;
> That dead men rise up never;
> That even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Roberta wrote a three-page journal entry, but devoted only three sentences to the Swinburne poem:

> I found Swinburne's poem, "The Garden of Proserpine," to be methodical, drawn-out, and boring. Surely there is more to it than that, so how am I misreading it? Will somebody please enlighten me?

In most classes, that might be it for Roberta and Swinburne. The instructor might or might not spend much time on the poem; and Roberta might or might not attend that class. But in this class, Roberta had to re-encounter the poem numerous times as she read and responded to the journals of others who were engaging with it, and then read their responses to her own journal. Watch how that recursivity gave her a chance to re-encounter the poem and grow in the understanding of both it and herself. Here is an excerpt from Lonny's response to Roberta:

> I'm with you in thinking that "The Garden of Proserpine" was pretty methodical and boring. As I wrote to Mark, I enjoyed how the poem *sounded,* but I didn't pay too much attention the first few times to what the poem was saying. But if there's one thing that I have learned in this class, it's that even the poems that seem the most straightforward have so much meaning hidden behind their surfaces once you start digging around.

Roberta then read Ted's journal, who had written four pages on potential religious interpretations of the poems. In his response to Roberta, he applied what he had already written to that which she had written.

Then Roberta got a different perspective, as she read the response from Sandra:

> I struggled some with the Swinburne poem, too. It seemed to offer very few surprises. It just repeated over and over that the only sure thing is death. Maybe the answer lies within that. The poem's structure, word choice, alliteration, etc., also seem to point toward that one bleak path, death. I asked myself how the CCC rhyme scheme functioned. It seemed to just make you wait for a depressing end/last line. For example, some of the last lines were "And no such things grow here," "In the end it is not well," "Weeps that no loves endure." In other words, death will come eventually. The second to last stanza seemed to present the idea of being glad that we have to die!?!

And on went Sandra for two more pages.

Roberta had to rethink her dismissal of the Swinburne poem as boring—not just because she was reading the work of Lonny and Ted and Sandra, but also because she had to write back to these three people. Here are excerpts from her response to Lonny:

> As you could probably tell from my journal, I did not take too fondly to that poem. What I found, interestingly enough, is that reading the Proserpine poem this time around was not nearly as painful, now that I under-

> stand who Proserpine is. In addition, I am wary about "conscending" to the material because I am sure that it can be a great poem in its own right. On with my discussion …

Notice that Roberta now speaks of the poem as having been "painful"—which is significantly different from "boring." Something is happening.

Then she responded to Ted at some length. Here is her opening gambit:

> I appreciate your approach to relating these three poems because it allowed me to take a look at them in a different light, particularly "The Garden of Proserpine." You seem to have come up with quite a few examples of strong anti-religious (is that the way to phrase it?) language used in the poem. It makes sense then that the central character of the poem is out of mythology; not so much because mythology is "anti-religion," but just on a different plane or level than religion based on the Bible. For me, the poem seems to be about a guy with no hope to live. He sounds like a guy who is terminally ill, just waiting for the relief which death will bring. He is tired of the emotions associated with living, and he is looking for an escape.

She was starting to understand something about why the poem was written. Then, in responding to Sandra, she finally began to understand her original rejection of the Swinburne poem:

> With poetry, I usually wonder what it is that I can take away from it, or what does it add to me as a person? This is part of my problem with this poem—the poem is just so bleak. If neither sorrow, nor joy, nor love last, what does a young person like myself have to look forward to here and now? In fact, I resent Swinburne for trivializing life. Yes, it is such a small speck of the eternal, if one believes in the eternal, but why not enjoy it for what it's worth. Swinburne is just such a downer is he not?

It is an "aha!" moment. She had gone from "boring" to "painful" to "I resent Swinburne for trivializing life." Here she is, Roberta, 20 years old, busily, almost frantically, trying to open doors and create opportunities and *prepare* for life; and along comes Swinburne with his poem that says, "Thank God it all ends some time." Of course she might well resent the poem; but at least now, because of the recursive opportunities to write (for "write" understand "think") about it, she has had a chance to recognize and deal with that resentment.

Compare that to Roberta's encountering this poem in a traditionally

structured class: she would have read the poem, somewhat passively, and then listened to the instructor lecture about it or lead a discussion about it. She would have taken notes, perhaps. And that would have been it. Perhaps she would have re-encountered it in studying for an exam.

It seems, then, that multiple, peer-responded writing assignments not only help students to become better writers, but also to become more thoughtful, more mature thinkers. That is a substantial gain. And equally large is the gain on the part of the instructor—the ability to watch what is going on in the minds of the students.

VIII. Instructor Feedback

You may be wondering how all this writing and responding can be taking place without any direct feedback from the instructor. In some ways students are better off with the decreased magisterial feedback, and they do get plenty of feedback. A student who writes 20–30 pages of journals during a term will receive back 60–90 pages of comments from fellow students. The same student would be likely to receive a total of 2–3 pages back from the instructor. Quantity tends to compensate for whatever particular points of professional insight might have been lost along the way.

It is more than difficult to try to combine the two—student feedback and professorial input. When the two are simultaneous, all the instructor's comments seem to put themselves forward as "the right ones"; that leaves the student comments to succeed or fail to live up to the instructions. It also puts extraordinary pressure on the instructor to be not only brilliant but also comprehensive in his or her commentary. Let the students have their say. If they have missed something crucial, you can always produce that insight in the class hour.

Feedback from the instructor can be made in other forms. I discuss the journals and the responses generically in the classroom setting. I tend to take a few minutes of class time when the first sets of journals and responses are submitted, letting the class know whether they as a whole are producing the "struggle" and "engagement" requested—as opposed to writing mini-papers and "judging" the work of others. I repeat this in-class assessment when the second set of journals/responses appear, if necessary. If a given student continues to have problems, or if any inter-personal difficulties (which tend to be rare) develop, I meet individually with that particular student.

If several students have noticed the same interesting thing in their journals, it does no harm to mention this in class, or to expand further on the observations. I have found, however, that it does great damage to single out a particular person for praise on the basis of some stunning insight reported in his or her journal. If I want to share that insight with the class as a whole, I tell a benevolent lie and report that "a number of people brought up this interest-

ing point." The actual author receives the deserved praise, but the rest of the students do not feel they must now impress me so that they might be the star of some future class hour.

I meet with each student individually in about the fourth week of term—and usually again in the ninth week. Behind those closed doors it has proved perfectly appropriate to comment on how the student is faring on the journals and the responses.

IX. Electronic alternatives

The existence of e-mail multiplies the number of ways in which students can communicate with each other. The advantages of e-mail are clear—less paper waste, less paper shuffling, easy delivery. One significant advantage of hard copy should be mentioned—the sociological bonding that results in every class hour, as the group members have to face each other while shuffling papers back and forth. (On e-mail, some group members remain faceless throughout the term.) It is a joy to walk into class and find your students already engaged in small groups, not only shuffling the papers, but often talking about the subject matter. Class has already begun, without you having uttered your first word.

X. Regulation and Cancellation

This journal process should take place every week, with the exception of the weeks in which formal writing is due. Instructors who have used the journals only now and again find that the cumulative effect of the good work habits fails to materialize. Ironically, students come to view intermittently assigned journals as an extra assignment burden. They also lose the benefits gained from the close-knit group experience generated by the continually interchanged writing.

Towards the end of the term, it may prove efficacious to cancel one or two of the final journal assignments, when students are burdened by increased responsibilities in other courses. Caution: those cancellations should be done at the last moment. They should not be written into the course syllabus, but rather should appear as a gift. Instructors who have written into the syllabus an early end to the journal assignments have reported that students quickly revert to their passive reading behavior and often come to class unprepared. That tends not to happen when they receive their vacation as an unexpected windfall.

XI. The Inclusion of Formal Writing

As transforming as all this informal writing can be, it does not eliminate the need for formal writing experiences. At some point in the term, as Peter Elbow suggests, low stakes writing should be complemented by high stakes

writing. The peer-responded journal structure does, however, make possible a collaborative form of formal enterprise that does not function as well under more traditional course structures. I assign one eight-page paper per term.

I believe strongly in the efficacy of collaborative learning. Formal group projects, however, have traditionally run into a number of serious problems: Someone in the group does not make a reasonable contribution; someone in the group has too much drive and tries to commandeer the project; more than one person tries to be in charge; and there is a constant sense of unfairness concerning how much of a contribution everyone is making.

Formal group projects can work wonderfully well, however, under two conditions: (1) The students have already learned how to function in groups; and (2) the assignment is structured so that each person feels everyone is doing an individual piece of work, feels everyone is working with each other individual in the group, and feels the group is working together as a whole unit. The peer-responded journal structure takes care of the first of these. Let me add to that a structure to accomplish the second objective.

I divide the class into groups of four students, populated differently from any of the previous journal groups. In order to produce a combination of individual work and group work, I structure the paper assignment in one of two ways, depending on the course material: Either there is a central text or group of texts, for which each person will find a different perspective; or there is a perspective or technique in common that each person will apply to a different text. The important elements are that they share something and that everyone has something to call their own.

The procedure for producing this formal work encompasses five stages, which stretch throughout the 14 weeks of the term.

Stage 1: In week #2 the groups meet to select their communal task or topic, often from a list of my suggestions. I make it a rule that no two groups may choose the same topic: first come, first served. This creates a moment of high anxiety, as groups scramble to get their selection in before they are scooped by some other group. Anxiety serves well as a catalyst for bonding. Whether they get their choice or not both can add to the communal experience: If they get their choice, they have now succeeded as a group; if they fail to get their choice, the bonding is even more potent, since shared suffering forms even stronger bonds than shared success.

Stage 2: In week #3 each group meets with me, as a group, to discuss the shape and substance of the project and to choose who will do what. More bonding.

Stage 3: In week #9 each individual turns in a working draft of his or her essay. This is a task each has done as an individual; no group work was necessary.

By "working draft," I do not mean what they have come to know as a "rough draft." It should be only about 65% the length of the final essay. It should comprise lots of starts and stops at composing various parts of the text. It should probably lack an opening and closing paragraph. It should be dotted with square brackets—[ ]—in which are comments and questions from the author to the others in the group. Examples: ["Have I gone into enough detail here for you to understand my point?"] ["Do you think this connects well enough with Part II that precedes it?"] ["I'm having trouble squaring this with the point I made on the top of p.3. Any suggestions?"] These working drafts are submitted to me and are circulated amongst all members of the project group. I make no comments on them.

Stage 4: In Week #11 each student produces seven pages of commentary on each of the working drafts in the group. These should be written in the nature and spirit of the responses to the journals used in the rest of the course: No condescension; no meanness; no speaking ex cathedra. In trying to generate as much volume here as possible, I assign a grade to this commentary, worth about 5% of the term grade. Anyone who generates seven pages of genuine commentary per draft receives an A. One may also get an A by writing truly insightful comments that do not extend all the way to seven pages. In this stage, each individual will be interacting one-on-one with every other person in the group. That is a good half-way step between functioning as an individual and functioning as a group.

Stage 5: Week #13 marks the due date for the final project. All four essays are to be submitted together as a single, bound document, with continuous pagination and a table of contents. Students must collaborate as a group for two purposes: (1) They must decide which order will best present these essays. Each essay but the last one should end not with the circular "So here is what I told you I would tell you" paragraph so commonly found in such essays, but rather with an elegant move that brings one essay to closure while simultaneously introducing the next. (2) They communally produce a four-page Introduction, *not* to advertize the contents of the individual essays, but rather to examine the experience of collaborative effort.

To review the sociological progression here: First a number of strangers are made into a viable small group by sharing in a selection task they can do as a group and sharing in its outcome. Then the groups gains further identity by meeting with the instructor to discuss the project. Then each person works individually for half a term, preparing the working draft. Then each person works one-on-one with each of the others by writing commentary. Finally, the group functions as a whole, ordering the essays, writing a communal Introduction, and attending to all the details of presentation.

I usually allow about 40% of the term grade to attach to this term-long project, divided as follows: a grade for the student's individual essay (25%); a grade for the effort each student made in commenting (5%); and a grade assigned to the volume as a whole, which applies to each individual member of the group (10%). This latter grade, however, cannot be used to lower the course grade of any individual. In other words, it can help them, but it cannot hurt them. Again the grading has been put more in the control of the individual student than is usually the case.

I cancel the journal/response assignment for any week in which writing is due for the final project. Since I usually do not assign journals for Week #14, and often cancel one week in the last third of the term (perhaps Week 10 or 12), they wind up writing nine journal/response weeks and one final project, for a total that approaches 100 pages. By the end of the term, they have learned a remarkable amount from each other, in addition to whatever they have learned from me.

Taken together, this group project and the peer-responded journals create a different kind of intellectual atmosphere in the classroom. Students engage with the course material and with each other in active, energetic ways. It forces a shift away from the traditionally competitive academic experience and in its place valorizes the collaborative.

I have given workshops on this course structure at a number of different kinds of institutions—everything from modest small colleges to large state universities. One question I have been constantly asked deserves note here: people wonder whether this structure, which works so well on my students at Duke University, as bright a group of undergraduates as can be found, will work for a broader range of student abilities. They have, in time, answered their own question by the remarkable successes they have experienced with their own students. What we are after here is (1) the richer engagement of students in the learning process, and, as a result, (2) marked improvement in the students from the beginning of the term to the end. These things happen no matter what level of comprehension and ability the students have at the start. It is the net gain that counts.

I have always loved teaching, and my students have always understood that. As a result, I regularly used to receive glowing evaluations, with most of the commentary focused on how well I had performed. Since shifting to this peer-response structure, my evaluations have changed significantly. Now they say things like "This is the richest, most exciting intellectual experience I have had in college. I was so lucky to have found such an outstanding group of fellow students. And oh yes, the professor was good, too." I have become a footnote in my own evaluations—which is just where I want to be.

Endnotes

1. Elbow, Peter. "Grading Student Writing: Making It Simpler, Fairer, Clearer." *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* Mary Deane Scorcinelli and Peter Elbow, eds. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. Number 69, 1997. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 127-140.

2. Booth, Wayne. "The Rhetorical Stance." 14 *College Composition and Communication.* (1963), 139-45.

3. The bibliography on response to student writing and the use of peer journals is extensive. Much of what has already been said can be used to vary or complement the model I am proposing. To survey the field, start with Chris. M. Anson, John E. Schwiebert, and Michael M. Williamson's *Writing Across theCurriculum: An Annotated Bibliography.* Westport CN: Greenwood Press, 1993. Chris Anson has been prolific in his contributions: *Writing and Response: Theory, Practice, and Research,* Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1989; *The WAC Casebook: Sources for Faculty Reflection and Program Development,* NY: Oxford University Press, 2002. Of special help would be John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Theory, and Active Learning in the Classroom,* San Francisco: Jolley-Bass, 1996, which has an excellent bibliography for further exploration. It is also interesting to contemplate the work on teacher responses to student papers, to see how much of that good advice is naturally implemented by peer response when the teacher falls silent. The best place to start such a search is with Nancy Sommers' ground-breaking article, "Responding to Student Writing." 33 *College Composition and Communication* (1982), 148-56.

4. Peter Elbow. "High Stakes and Low Stakes in Writing" Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines. Mary Deane Scorcinelli and Peter Elbow, eds. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. Number 69, 1997. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 5-13. "When I am clear and honest with students about the fact that I need to require more writing from them than I can comment on, I help them fairly quickly get over any feelings of deprivation or resentment. Most students come to appreciate and benefit from the freedom of this private writing." (9)

5. An interesting effort parallel to this, but different, is explained by Toby Fulwiler in his "Writing Back and Forth: Class Letters." *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines*. Mary Deane Scorcinelli and Peter Elbow, eds. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. Number 69, 1997. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 15-25. (In fact, all the articles in this excellent critical anthology are worth reading.) Fulwiler writes letters back and forth with his students on a weekly basis. "Weekly letters promote the give and take of learning rather than the finality of testing and measuring"(15). He calls these letters "journals with an audience" (20). "Letters lower your expectations. (It's just a letter.) A letter is a sample of what's on a writer's mind at the moment of writing, not of his or her comprehension or literacy or worth. There can always be another

letter—better, more thoughtful, more complete, literate, clever, or profound. Letters leave the door open. The only fair assessment of this particular assignment is quantitative" (22). To use this letter format, however, the instructor must produce a substantial amount of prose on a regular basis and is burdened with a perceived need to respond to everything of value that is raised by the voluminous student writing. The model I propose is far less burdensome on the instructor and removes the sense of a need for thorough "coverage" of every student idea raised. The writing produced is quite literally "journals with an audience." For further discussion on letter-writing assignments, see Art Young's "Mentoring, Modeling, Monitoring, Motivating: Response to Students' Ungraded Writing as Academic Conversation" in *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* Mary Deane Scorcinelli and Peter Elbow, eds. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. Number 69, 1997. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 27-40.

6. Edward White. "Language and Reality in Writing Assignments," 41 *CCC*, 1990,

7. For published research on this problem, see C. Raimondino, "A Factorial Analysis of the Evaluation of Scholastic Compositions in the Mother Tongue," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 30 (1959) 242-51 and P. Diedrich, J.W. French, and S. Carlton, "Factors in Judgments of Writing Ability," *Educational Testing Service Research Bulletin* (Princeton, NJ, 1961), and F.I. Godshalk et al, *The Measurement of Writing Ability* (NY: 1966). These studies are considered by E.D. Hirsch in the final chapter of *The Philosophy of Composition,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

8. Elbow, Peter. "Grading Student Writing: Making It Simpler, Fairer, Clearer." *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines*. Mary Deane Scorcinelli and Peter Elbow, eds. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. Number 69, 1997. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 127-140.

9. See endnote 5, above.

10. John M.Conley and William M. O'Barr. *Just Words: Law, Language, and Power.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

11. Peter Elbow. *Writing with Power.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, 184.

12. Elbow (1981) 149, in commenting on the work of Nancy Sommers, Lil Brannon, and C.H. Knoblauch on the "appropriation" of student texts by teachers. See Lil Brannon and C.H. Knoblauch, "On Student's Rights to Their Own Texts: A Model of Teacher response." *CCC* 33 (May 1982) 157-166: "By making elaborate corrections on student writing, teachers appear to be showing the discrepancy between what the writing has actually achieved and what ideal writing ought to look like, perhaps with the conviction that any student who perceives the difference can also narrow it. But this correcting also tends to show students that the teacher's agenda

is more important than their own, that what they wanted to say is less relevant than the teacher's impression of what they should have said" (158). This also increases the sense of the teacher actually "listening." Donald Murray has spent a career increasing the listenability factor: "Listening is not a normal composition teacher's skill. We tell and they listen." Donald M. Murray. "Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader." *CCC* 33 (May 1982) 140-147.

13. See M Elizabeth Sargent, "Peer Response to Low Stakes Writing in a WAC Literature Classroom." *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* Mary Deane Scorcinelli and Peter Elbow, eds. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. Number 69, 1997. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 41-52. This is an excellent article from someone who sees many, and I do mean many, of the same advantages as I have found and has bravely allowed her students to enter into the process of constant peer response. The major difference: she maintains a great deal of control over the first few weeks of the process, highlighting and commenting on their first efforts to model what good peer response should be like. There cannot be many people with the combination of energy and devotion that she manifests throughout the process. I have trusted my students to figure it out on their own more than she has. I use far less energy than she does, but seem to gain the same results. I urge you to read what she has to say.

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