

NOTES OF A NATIVE SON

AN ACADEMIC MEMOIR



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MICHAEL MICHAUD

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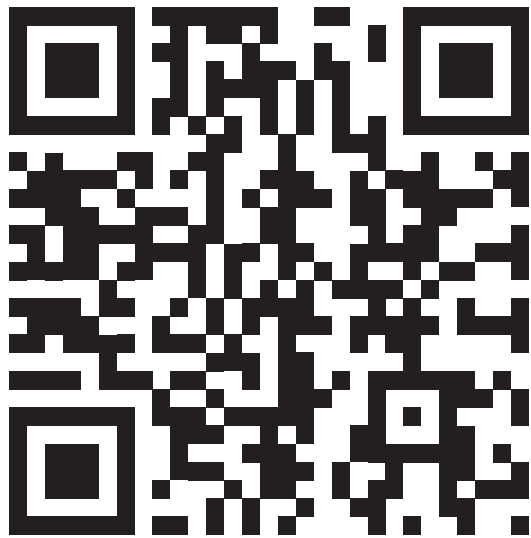
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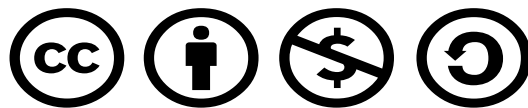
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NOTES OF A NATIVE SON

by

Michael Michaud

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By Michael Michaud

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I couldn't see a way to tell both stories simultaneously and do each justice. Jeff provided me with the space to tell one of the two stories, and for that I am grateful.

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I'd like to thank my collaborator Sarah Read for many years of productive discussions that inevitably touched the production of this book, and Kevin Roozen, who affirmed the value of the project at a moment when it (or I) needed affirmation.

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	VI
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I: IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH	4
CHAPTER II: A BRIEF DIGRESSION ON PIONEERS	11
CHAPTER III: COMING TO VOICE, PART I	15
CHAPTER IV: COMING TO VOICE, PART II	20
CHAPTER V: COMING TO VOICE, PART III	26
CHAPTER VI: ON MEETING GREAT AND FAMOUS MEN	30
CHAPTER VII: TEACHER, WRITER, SCHOLAR, PART I	37
CHAPTER VIII: TEACHER, WRITER, SCHOLAR, PART II	43
CHAPTER IX: TEACHER, WRITER, SCHOLAR, PART III	51
CHAPTER X: : A UNH WRITING TEACHER TEACHING A UNH WRITING COURSE	57
CHAPTER XI: INTERNALIZING THE TRIBE'S FOUNDATIONAL MYTH	60
CHAPTER XII: MY TOP 5 LIST OF THE UNH WRITING TRIBE'S KEY BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WRITING AND ITS TEACHING.	65
CHAPTER XIII: MY TOP 5 LIST OF KEY TRAITS OF A UNH WRITING TEACHER	76
CHAPTER XIV: QUARTER-LIFE CRISIS	87
CHAPTER XV: A BRIEF LOST-IN-THE-WILDERNESS PERIOD	90
CHAPTER XVI: A LEARNING STORY	93
CHAPTER XVII: CRACKS IN THE FAÇADE	99
CHAPTER XVIII: BUYING INTO BINARIES	103

CHAPTER XIX: DIVIDED	107
CHAPTER XX: CAN'T GO HOME	112
CHAPTER XXI: A WAY OUT, PART I: THE DISCOVERY OF OPTIONS	116
CHAPTER XXII: A WAY OUT, PART II: A USABLE PAST	121
EPILOGUE	129
ENDNOTES	132
REFERENCES	140

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	2
FIGURE 2	5
FIGURE 3	10
FIGURE 4	12
FIGURE 5	13
FIGURE 6	18
FIGURE 7	22
FIGURE 8	23
FIGURE 9	24
FIGURE 10	27
FIGURE 11	28
FIGURE 12	29
FIGURE 13	32
FIGURE 14	35
FIGURE 15	39
FIGURE 16	46
FIGURE 17	47
FIGURE 18	48
FIGURE 19	49
FIGURE 20	52
FIGURE 21	53
FIGURE 22	58

FIGURE 23	61
FIGURE 24	67
FIGURE 25	70
FIGURE 26	70
FIGURE 27	71
FIGURE 28	73
FIGURE 29	75
FIGURE 30	80
FIGURE 31	86
FIGURE 32	89
FIGURE 33	95
FIGURE 34	97
FIGURE 35	100
FIGURE 36	102
FIGURE 37	113
FIGURE 38	123

EPIGRAPH

I think *when* you enter a disciplinary field is significant. The cultural and historical point of entry continues to shape and influence your thinking. You don't leave that culture behind. You don't replace it. If you are a learner, you expand it, you deepen it, you complicate it, you re-envision it. But that culture remains part of you.

~ Donna Qualley,
"Discovering from the Specifics"

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to their book, *1977: A Cultural Moment in Composition* (2007), a microhistory of writing instruction at the Pennsylvania State University,² Brent Henze, Jack Selzer, & Wendy Sharer pose the following questions and then speculate about their answers:

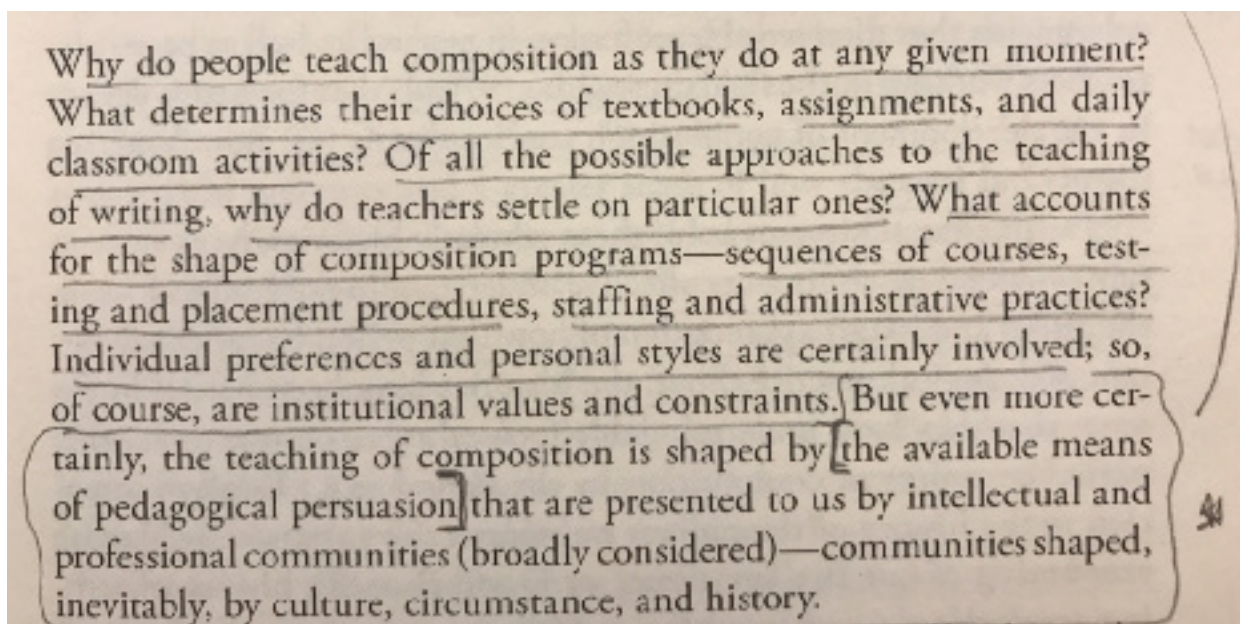


Figure 1 (transcription): “Why do people teach composition as they do at any given moment? What determines their choices of textbooks, assignments, and daily classroom activities? Of all the possible approaches to the teaching of writing, why do teachers settle on particular ones? What accounts for the shape of composition programs—sequences of courses, testing and placement procedures, staffing and administrative practices? Individual preferences and personal styles are certainly involved; so, of course, are institutional values and constraints. But even more certainly, the teaching of composition is shaped by the available means of persuasion that are presented to us by intellectual and professional communities (broadly considered)—communities shaped, inevitably, by culture, circumstance, and history” (3).

Following Henze, Selzer & Sharer, this essay is an inquiry into the available means of persuasion that have shaped my own development as a teacher of composition—an attempt to sort through my twenty-plus year association with the professional community that has most shaped my pedagogical trajectory and orientation, the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Department of English and, in particular, its tribe of writers, writing teachers, and writing scholars. Because intellectual and professional communities shape the identities of composition *teachers* and not just the *teaching* of composition, this essay is also an effort to think through

the ways in which the UNH writing tribe has shaped me into a certain kind of teacher, writer, scholar, and person in the world.³

My enculturation process began with my initiation into the tribe in Freshman English in the spring of 1993. From there, the journey ran through four years of undergraduate education as an English major; two tours of graduate education at, first, the University of Iowa and, second, UNH; and then alumni status. During this journey, from Durham, New Hampshire, to Iowa, from Iowa to Boston and then back to Durham and, finally, to Providence, Rhode Island, where I now teach in the English Department at Rhode Island College, I learned and then worked to spread the gospel of the tribe while simultaneously negotiating and renegotiating my changing role within and orientation towards it. And all this time, I tried to teach my students the single most important thing the UNH writing tribe has taught me, the very thing I will attempt to enact in these pages: that through the act of writing, one can make greater meaning of one's own life.

This is my story.

CHAPTER I

IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH

I. WHY WRITING IS IMPORTANT

Writing is most important not as etiquette, not even as a tool, but as a contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person's background and talents.

Figure 2 (transcription): "Writing is most important not as etiquette, not even as a tool, but as a contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person's background and talents. "

~ Donald Graves,
Balance the Basics: A Report to the Ford Foundation, 1978

Discovering the passage above and the report from which it is drawn while conducting research for a book I am writing on the history of the University of New Hampshire English Department was like stumbling on a box of old family letters written by a vaguely known relative.

Don Graves' words—written in 1978, fifteen years before I enrolled at UNH as an undergraduate student and discovered the curricular instantiation of this philosophy—give voice to the generous, humane, romantic, reformist, and deeply democratic tradition I encountered in the UNH English Department as an undergraduate English major in the early- to mid-1990s. My fortuitous introduction to "a contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person's background and talents" (6) began in the spring of 1993 when I enrolled in UNH's required first-year composition course, Freshman English.

Having narrowly survived macroeconomics, calculus, and computer science, Freshman English was an oasis in the otherwise arid academic desert that was my first year of college. I had signed on at UNH as a business major, but quickly discovered that I was neither good at nor much interested in the business of business.

I liked Freshman English, though, because it wasn't like my other classes. First and foremost, there were no lectures or tests, no one cramming your head full of endless amounts of information and then examining you to see whether they had succeeded in packing you full of all the things they already knew. In Freshman English there was reading, there was writing, there was thinking and talking and sharing. Lucky for me, these were things I was good at, things I could do, things I *enjoyed* doing, things that, in doing them, let me feel smart in ways that I

didn't always feel in school.

In his article "Barriers to Revision," UNH English Professor Thomas Newkirk, a key architect of Freshman English program as I experienced it at UNH and twice the director, describes the details of the course in this way (and yes, the structure Newkirk describes below was still pretty much in place when I took the course in the spring of 1993):

Unlike the traditional writing course where students usually receive only written responses to their work, in [Freshman English] students [meet] once a week with the instructor to discuss problems and possible revisions. Students [write] a three to five page paper each week and [are] allowed to choose their own topics. A major revision of a piece [is] counted as a new paper, and students [are] graded on their best two papers at the end of the course. (50)

In this description of what I would later come to think of as not just Freshman English but, instead, something far more profound and iconic, a *UNH writing course*, it's worth noting the lack of any clearly identifiable body of *content*. "Students [write] a three to five page paper each week and [are] allowed to choose their own topics." This approach was a revelation to me, something entirely new under the sun. The subject of Freshman English was . . . me. Or, more precisely, the topics that I chose to write about. What a relief to find such a course after the previous semester, during which I had spent days and nights slogging through papers on topics that I wouldn't have chosen to write about had I been given the choice.

But there was more to Freshman English than just three- to five-page papers and choosing one's own topics. Here's an excerpt from *The Freshman English Handbook*, an in-house booklet that was distributed to students enrolled in Freshman English during the 1990s:

In [Freshman English], you will learn that good writing is much more than just putting together grammatically correct sentences that merely *sum* up information and ideas. Since Freshman English focuses as much on the *drafts* you write as on the finished products, you will rediscover writing as a process of inquiry that allows you—through the act of composing itself—to think and work your way through issues and ideas and to articulate them in depth and detail. By writing in this way, you will not merely reflect the ideas of your teachers and other "authorities;" you will learn to actively and critically engage those ideas and formulate your own. In doing so, you will begin to play an integral role in your own learning and in the processes of academic inquiry. When you write as an act of discovery—questioning and analyzing as you compose—you will learn to become a *maker* rather than passive absorber of knowledge, a critical thinker

and evaluator of words, ideas, and images, rather than just a consumer of facts and figures. (n.p.)

As this passage makes clear, in addition to being a class in which the main content was me and my interests, and in addition to being a course, per Donald Graves, that was guided by the idea of “a contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person’s background and talents,” Freshman English was an enterprise that was informed by a deep belief in student-centered teaching and a desire to empower students as *knowers*. According to the handbook, Freshman English was to shape me into a certain kind of person, one I perhaps hadn’t been before. I was to become a *maker* rather than a passive *absorber* of knowledge, a *critical thinker* and not merely a *consumer* of facts and figures. Freshman English was interested in not only writing (and reading), but in subject formation, in epistemological transformation.

The passage from *The Freshman English Handbook* also makes reference to “the processes of academic inquiry,” and so it’s worth asking, because first-year composition classes are usually charged with introducing students to academic writing and research, what, if anything, I learned in the class about such work. The answer is that I don’t know. I never associated Freshman English with the term *academic*. I was having too much fun thinking and writing about things that felt decidedly *nonacademic*—friends back home, love, loneliness, and my new obsession, the rock-and-roll band The Doors. If anything, Freshman English seemed decidedly *antiacademic* in the sense that it produced in me feelings (i.e., pleasure, curiosity, joy) that were the opposite of those I associated with academic work (i.e., boredom, insecurity, fear). I liked Freshman English precisely because it seemed so different from most or even all of the other courses I was taking or had taken at UNH up to that point.

If I didn’t associate Freshman English with academic work, that may, as I discovered recently, have been by design. Despite what *The Freshman English Handbook* has to say about teaching “the processes of academic inquiry,” for some at UNH, including two-time Freshman English Director Tom Newkirk, Freshman English was never intended to be an academic endeavor of the traditional sort. In the introduction to his edited collection *Nuts and Bolts: A Practical Guide to Teaching College Composition*, Newkirk recounts the history

of Freshman English at UNH from the early 1970s to the present in a section appropriately named "The Purification of Freshman English." "The central question in this history," Newkirk writes, "is this: what is the function of a writing course in the institution that requires it?" (3). The traditional answer, Newkirk acknowledges, is that a writing course is to function as a service to the university, a place to help students learn to write for other academic courses; to teach them the conventions of academic argument, research, and citation; and to provide a refresher in the conventions of correct grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. "But what," Newkirk asks, "if those chosen to teach the course come to reject many of the features of academic discourse, particularly the impersonality and exclusivity that seems to characterize much of it?" Further, Newkirk wants to know, what happens "if a writing course pits itself against the institution that surrounds and supports it? Can a writing course in the academy be antiacademic (which is not the same thing as anti-intellectual)?" (3).

The answer, of course, is, *Yes, it can*. The version of Freshman English that I encountered at UNH that spring semester of 1993 was, in fact, antiacademic (but not anti-intellectual). And there's more. Freshman English wasn't just *implicitly* antiacademic, it was *explicitly* so, as the passage from Newkirk illustrates. If, to be academic, one must create in advance a plan of what one wants to say and write in traditional academic forms and genres, in Freshman English, one learned to dive in, to freewrite one's way towards meaning and form. If, to be academic, one must adopt an "author-evacuated" tone in one's writing, in Freshman English, one worked to craft a unique voice in one's writing. If, to be academic, one must enter into an existing conversation in a scholarly field and situate one's own interests and arguments accordingly, in Freshman English, one threw the needs of some abstract scholarly audience to the wind and followed one's own interests. And if, to be academic, one must write with the authority of others, in Freshman English, one learned to write out of one's own authority.

In sum, to embrace the vision of writing furthered by the UNH Freshman English program as I experienced it was to turn away from traditionally academic ways of knowing and doing. It was to define oneself as an outsider within the academic community. Adopting this stance was, I learned from my earliest days in the tribe, a key element of membership.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I very much doubt that during the time when I was enrolled in Freshman English I understood the theory behind the practice of Freshman English as I have described it here. What I knew was that I found Freshman English to be the most worthwhile use of my time and energy since arriving at UNH. I was learning to read and write in ways that felt deeply meaningful. As a result, the course came to occupy a space in my head beyond just the Monday/Wednesday/Friday mornings when my section met in the cool basement of Hamilton Smith Hall. Whether the course was preparing me for the kinds of academic work I would face elsewhere in the university or not I couldn't have said or, frankly, much cared. What I could say was that Freshman English was teaching me to care about learning and about writing in ways that I hadn't prior to enrolling in the course. That was enough for an eighteen-year old away from home for the first time, trying to make his way in the world.

Freshman English was also teaching me that I just might have a knack for getting words down on paper in a way that held an audience's attention. At the end of the term, for my own entertainment and edification, I wrote an eighteen-page short story, a murder mystery entitled "The Stalker," to include in my final portfolio. Despite its length, my TA read the entire thing, generously jotting comments in the margins along the way and including a brief endnote on the back page that contained the following words—words that served as both an invitation and encouragement (see next page):

Mike,
This is absolutely wonderful—your writing, your eye for detail & dialogue is amazing. At times the story runs on a bit long & I lose track but all it needs is some paring away. You should sign up for an upper level creative writing workshop for next semester—If you're interested I can help you get permission to get in—really, amazing stuff...

Figure 3 (transcription): "Mike, This is absolutely wonderful—your writing, your eye for detail and dialogue is amazing. At times the story runs on a bit long and I lose track but all it needs is some paring away. You should sign up for an upper level creative writing workshop for next semester—If you're interested I can help you get permission to get in—really amazing stuff . . ."

Not right away, but in time, I would gather the courage to take her up on her offer.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF DIGRESSION ON PIONEERS

In an interview I conducted with him in 2014, Thomas Newkirk describes his role in the early changes in the teaching of writing that were taking place at UNH when he first arrived in 1978:

“I was not a key player in it. I wasn’t of that generation. I was kind of the next generation. I remember Don Murray said something to me once that I never forgot. He said: ‘We’re the pioneers, you’re the engineers.’ Lad Tobin and I talked about that and I think that to some degree it’s true because what we were trying to do, folks like Lad or me or Nancie Atwell, we were trying to work out the applications of a paradigm shift that we didn’t create.” (Newkirk, “Democratizing Writing”)

Newkirk’s invocation of the phrase “paradigm shift” is not inappropriate here. In their own ways, on campus and beyond, Murray and Graves were pioneers.

Murray arrived at UNH in 1963, drawn away from a career as a freelance writer by the promise of affordable healthcare for his growing family. His first book, *A Writer Teaches Writing*, grew out of his work with New Hampshire school teachers and helped earn him a national reputation in the field of English education several years before the writing process movement got underway.⁴

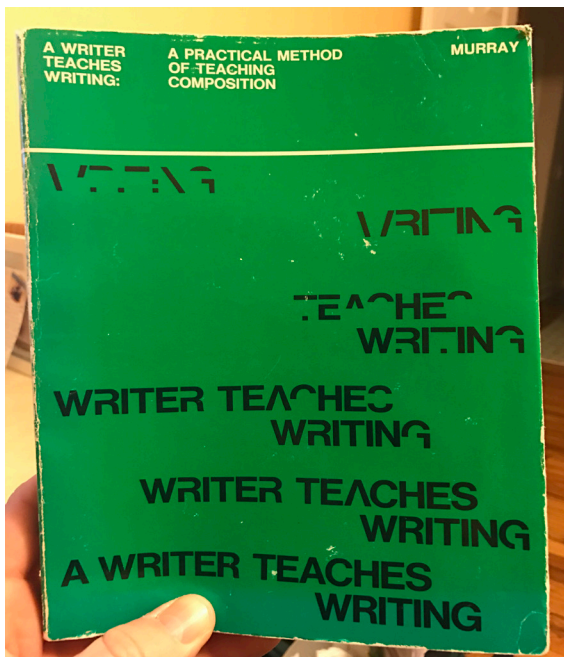


Figure 4:
A Writer Teaches Writing (1968)

Further, Murray’s article “Teach Writing as a Process Not Product,” originally delivered as a luncheon address to the New England Association of Teachers of English on October 28, 1972, and published in their journal *The Leaflet* that fall, gave the writing process movement an early battle cry as it gathered steam during the 1970s.

In these two publications, but also in his many textbooks, book chapters, presentations, lectures, and workshops, Murray, a latecomer and outsider to academia,⁵ democratized writing with his insistence that anyone could write and brought

a writer's sensibility to the teaching of writing at a time when most writing courses, at UNH and elsewhere, were taught by teachers trained in the study of literature.

A former elementary school teacher, principal, and minister, Donald Graves, who arrived at UNH in 1973, was a pioneer of a similar but different sort.

Graves' dissertation, "Children's Writing: Research Directions and Hypotheses Based Upon an Examination of the Writing Processes of Seven Year Old Children," stands with the work of Janet Emig among the earliest formal studies of the composing processes of student writers in the United States.

Several years after joining the faculty at UNH, Graves secured a National Institute of Education grant to investigate the writing processes of elementary school children, and from that work came his groundbreaking book of international acclaim, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*.

Like Murray, Graves worked to democratize our sense of who counts as a writer, showing teachers, parents, and school administrators how young children working under the right conditions not only could write but would want to do so. He also encouraged and empowered classroom teachers to think of themselves as teacher-researchers, urging them to investigate how their students learned and to share their findings with one another and with university researchers like himself.

Murray and Graves were pioneers—at UNH and beyond. Away from campus, they interfaced with myriad audiences including teachers, school administrators, journalists, parents, and primary- and secondary-school students. On campus, they worked to transform the way writing was taught and studied at UNH. Murray completely reshaped the journalism program, created new undergraduate writing courses and the first graduate courses in writing pedagogy, consulted with departments outside his own on writing across the curriculum, helped create the version of Freshman English that I would experience, collaborated to create a writing

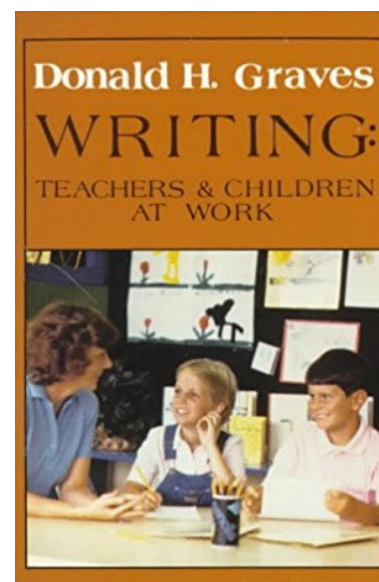


Figure 5:
Writing: Teachers and Children at Work (1983)

concentration in the English MA program, and helped establish the English PhD program in composition. Graves founded the UNH Writing Laboratory in the Education Department and through his many grants provided myriad opportunities for countless graduate students to enter the fields of English and English education. He helped found a new PhD program in literacy within the UNH School of Education and mentored and trained a new generation of writing teachers and researchers, giving them the tools to both teach and investigate reading and writing.

Like Newkirk, I have come to think of Murray and Graves as the founders of the UNH writing tribe. No one works alone, though. There have been many “engineers” in the tribe who have helped to build the tradition—too many to name here.⁶ But as Newkirk suggests, to a considerable extent, Murray and Graves, with their charismatic personalities and nonacademic backgrounds, created the conditions in which the tribe could emerge, grow, and sustain itself. Thus, it is almost entirely to their work that I will turn in these pages as I try to articulate the key values, practices, and beliefs of the tribe.

CHAPTER III

COMING TO VOICE, PART I

Notes of a Native Son

A year or so after my Freshman English TA invited me to join the UNH writing tribe, I finally called it quits on business and drank the Kool-Aid of English. Much of what I experienced in the years that followed fell under the rubric of what James Berlin has reductively dubbed *expressionistic rhetoric*, “Discovering the true self in writing” (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 485). Here’s Berlin, explaining how what he calls “expressionism” works in practice:

Authentic self-expression can thus lead to authentic self-experience for both the writer and the reader. The most important measure of authenticity, of genuine self-discovery and self-revelation, furthermore, is the presence of originality in expression; and this is the case whether the writer is creating poetry or writing a business report. Discovering the true self in writing will simultaneously enable the individual to discover the truth of the situation which evoked the writing, a situation that, needless to say, must always be compatible with the development of the self. (Berlin, “Rhetoric and Ideology” 485)

Authenticity. Genuine self-discovery. Self-revelation. Originality in expression.

Discovering the true self! Whether I believe in Berlin’s characterization of expressionism or not (more on this later), these were the very things that, as a twenty-year-old looking for adventure and living a thousand miles from home, I was after when I signed on as an English major at UNH. And besides, expressionistic rhetoric was not a term that was much bandied about in the halls of Ham-Smith, as we called it, when I was an undergraduate English major. These other ideas—authenticity, self-discovery, self-revelation, originality, discovering the true self—these were in the water, though, and they were condensed into a single notion that was expressed in a single phrase that my classmates and I did hear quite frequently: *coming to voice*. As English majors and writers, our task was to develop our own unique voices. But what did this mean?

Donald Graves calls voice “the imprint of ourselves on our writing” (*Writing* 227). Donald Murray goes further, calling it “the most important element in writing,” the thing that “attracts, holds, and persuades readers” (*Craft* 207). Voice, Murray explains, is

the magic ingredient in writing. It carries all the meanings that are not within the world. It allows the individual writer to speak to the individual reader. It is style and grace and tone, and it reveals the character of the writer as well as the content of the text. (*Expecting* 223)

Both Graves and Murray connect voice to character or identity, which underscores the extent to which my acculturation process as an English major was not just about reading and writing, but also about subject formation. To develop a sense of voice as it was taught in the UNH writing tribe was to learn to become a certain kind of person *and* to learn how to convey a sense that you were that kind of person on the page.

What kind of person, you ask?

One who was authentic and original.

Honest.

Curious.

Empathetic.

Open to discovery and revelation.

The project of coming to voice, of searching for the authentic and discovering the true self, was what unified the English major for me during my undergraduate years at UNH, and it was an extension of what I had begun in Freshman English. I was unabashedly committed to the endeavor. Behind closed doors, my professors may have argued about the balance in the curriculum between literature, creative writing, linguistics, journalism, and expository writing, but I found unity in the disciplinary diversity because what brought it all together was *me*. Everything I read, wrote about, and discussed was filtered through the lens of my own emotional, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual needs. Whether I was reading a novel like *Giovanni's Room*, writing a paper about *Othello*, drafting an argumentative essay about patriotism, or penning a short story based on my experience working at the local sporting goods store, it all fit. I was at the center of the curriculum, and in this way what I experienced in the UNH English Department was a rare thing because professors are usually far more interested in teaching content than they are in teaching people. As Newkirk and many others have pointed out, the task of the undergraduate is to listen, to develop a beginner's knowledge of what other people already know, and to be able to demonstrate that knowledge. As an undergraduate English major at UNH, though, my field was *me*, and that, as I understand now that I am a professor myself, was a rare gift.

Don't take my word for it, though. Indulge this brief digression as a form of evidence for my claims:

Dan Melzer, a scholar and researcher of writing, recently conducted a national study of collegiate writing assignments. To set up the presentation of his findings, Melzer quotes the scholar David Bartholomae who, writing in the early 1980s and without data to support his assertions, laid the groundwork for what Melzer would later discover empirically. Here's a passage from Bartholomae's well-known essay "Inventing the University" that Melzer includes in his book:

Much of the written work [college] students do is test-taking, report or summary, work that places them outside the working discourse of the academic community, where they are expected to admire and report on what we do, rather than inside that discourse, where they can do its work and participate in a common enterprise. (qtd. in Melzer 144)

Twenty-five years after Bartholomae wrote these words, Melzer found hard evidence to support them. Of the 2,101 college writing assignments he collected for a research study, 83% asked students to engage in what he calls *transactional* writing (i.e., writing to inform, explain, etc.).

CCC 61:2 / DECEMBER 2009

Table 1. Distribution of the Functions of Writing

Function	Number of Assignments	Percentage of Total
Transactional (total)	1,751	83
Informative	1,399	66
Persuasive	352	17
Expressive	62	3
Exploratory	279	13
Poetic	9	.4

Figure 6: Dan Melzer's "Table 1. Distribution of the Functions of Writing"

“Most [transactional writing assignments],” Melzer explains, “give students an extremely limited view of academic discourse, instead asking them to simply display the ‘right’ answer or the ‘correct’ definition to the instructor through a recall of facts” (22).

What does this mean in layperson’s terms?

It means that most of the time, when college students are asked to write by their professors, it’s to parrot back what they (the professor) or the textbook have said.⁷

What Melzer found in his research on college writing assignments circa 2014, almost thirty years after Bartholomae, is surely depressing. Most college writing is not an act of expression, exploration, or even persuasion. It’s an act of regurgitation. And because writing is a form of thinking, this means that most college students aren’t doing a great deal of original thinking, functioning instead, as *The Freshman English Handbook* would have it, as “passive absorbers of knowledge,” not knowledge makers—“consumers of facts and figures,” not “critical thinker[s] and evaluator[s] of words, ideas, and images.”

CHAPTER IV

COMING TO VOICE, PART II

Melzer's research on the blandness of college writing helps me to understand and appreciate the uniqueness of the *coming to voice* curriculum I experienced as an undergraduate English major at UNH. In contrast with the assignments Melzer examined for his research, most of the writing I produced was exploratory in nature, or at least it felt so to me. In course after course, when I was asked to write, it was to test ideas, engage in inquiry, take risks, draw on personal experience, reflect on what I was learning, and then share all of this with instructors who tried to function not so much as evaluators, but as mentors or coaches whose goal was the advancement of my development.

A contribution to the development of a person...

In my first semester as an English major, I experienced just this kind of interaction in Bob Connors' Fiction course, which focused on images of men and masculinity in American literature. Each week we wrote one-pagers on the novels we read and Connors wrote back in a neat hand in blue ink on the bottom and back of our pages—prodding us, questioning us, arguing with us, praising us, and, sometimes, even applauding us. Connors' comments were a gift that told me I was welcome and would be listened to.

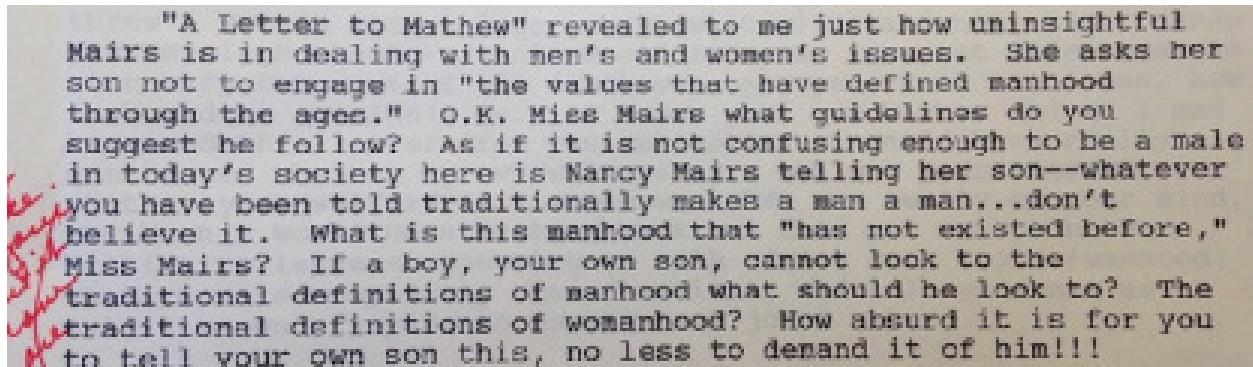
In another course I took that first term, Writing about Literature with Steve Barrett, we read Native American literature and met regularly in conference to discuss our papers. Steve insisted that we purchase a cassette tape to record our conference conversations. Every other week or so, I carried my tape and writing folder to his windowless office in the basement of Hamilton Smith to listen to Steve work through my latest draft. Like Connors, he praised and criticized as he showed me how to do new things with words. After our conferences, I went home and listened to him again on my tape as I worked to revise my essays.

During my junior year, I enrolled in English 501: Introduction to Prose Writing with Pam Barksdale. Pam asked us to purchase and read a collection of essays called *Plaintext* by a writer named Nancy Mairs. In it, Mairs wrote mostly about living with multiple sclerosis, but there's a piece on manhood and masculinity in the collection, called "A Letter to Mathew," that she wrote as a kind of "open letter" to her son. In this essay, there was a passage that enraged me, sending me scrambling to my computer to type a response. Here's the passage from Mairs that

drew my ire:

I am demanding something of you that takes more courage than entering a battle: not to enter the battle. I am asking you to say no to the values that have defined manhood through the ages—prowess, competition, victory—and to grow into a manhood that has not existed before. (61)

Here's my response, excerpted from my one-pager for Pam:



"A Letter to Mathew" revealed to me just how un insightful Mairs is in dealing with men's and women's issues. She asks her son not to engage in "the values that have defined manhood through the ages." O.K. Miss Mairs what guidelines do you suggest he follow? As if it is not confusing enough to be a male in today's society here is Nancy Mairs telling her son—whatever you have been told traditionally makes a man a man...don't believe it. What is this manhood that "has not existed before," Miss Mairs? If a boy, your own son, cannot look to the traditional definitions of manhood what should he look to? The traditional definitions of womanhood? How absurd it is for you to tell your own son this, no less to demand it of him!!!

Figure 7 (transcription): "'A Letter to Mathew' revealed to me just how un insightful Mairs is in dealing with men's and women's issues. She asks her son not to engage in 'the values that have defined manhood through the ages.' O.K. Miss Mairs what guidelines do you suggest he follow? As if it is not confusing enough to be a male in today's society here is Nancy Mairs telling her son—whatever you have been told traditionally makes a man a man . . . don't believe it. What is this manhood that 'has not existed before,' Miss Mairs? If a boy, your own son, cannot look to the traditional definitions of manhood what should he look to? The traditional definitions of womanhood? How absurd it is for you to tell your own son this, no less to demand it of him!!!"

I was learning to write with sources—one can say at least that of the prickly, arrogant twenty-year-old version of myself that I now discover in these words. But I was also learning to care about ideas, debate, and argument, even though these were not terms with which English 501 really engaged, or by which Pam had defined the work of the course. On the syllabus, she had described English 501 in developmental terms that would have made Donald Graves proud:

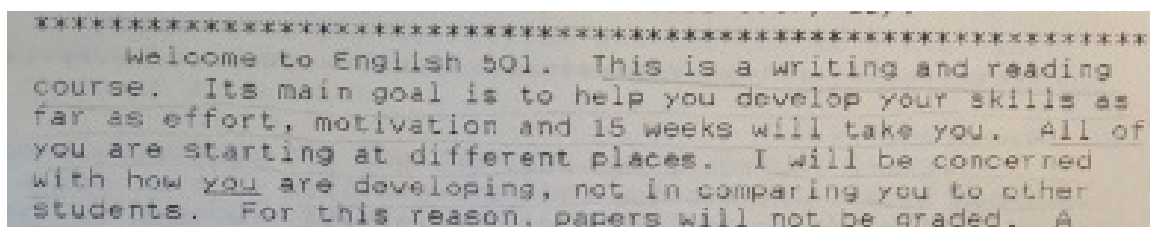


Figure 8 (transcription): “Welcome to English 501. This is a writing and reading course. Its main goal is to help you develop your skills as far as effort, motivation and 15 weeks will take you. All of you are starting at different places. I will be concerned with how you are developing, not in comparing you to other students. For this reason, papers will not be graded. A

The goals of English 501 extended well beyond just helping my classmates and me develop skills, though. An unstated goal was to help us come to voice. The means of accomplishing this were the essays and stories we read and wrote but also, and perhaps more importantly, the conversations we carried on in class, in conference, and in the margins of our work—with one another, with the texts we read, and with Pam.

As an example, here’s how the conversation I was having with Nancy Mairs went when Pam joined in (the following was written in a firm hand in red ink on the back of my one-pager):

Well, I see it as more complicated than that Mike. [Mairs’] son doesn’t really affect [her] as a woman. But if he should choose to follow the “old school” i.e. man watches TV, woman serves up the meat and potatoes; man goes out to work, little woman shops and does laundry; children get sick and mom stays home from work; man takes out the garbage and BBQs and thinks he’s “helping her out”; man brings home the \$, woman gets to have a “house allowance.” It goes on and on. I have 3 sons. I would do all I could to help them not to internalize these values. Why? Because it makes for misery.

Pam then pivots and addresses me directly:

I do hear what you’re saying, Mike. I see you as writing from your perspective with which I sympathize. Men, young men, are really in a difficult spot right now, and are sick to death about hearing “feminism, etc.” They are asking, “What about me? I am a good guy. I wouldn’t and am not like that.” What 20 year olds don’t realize is how very far we’ve traveled since the ‘50s when the “traditional” male reigned supreme. What both genders need to appreciate is that we need healthy, balanced relations. Simply that. The battle of the sexes isn’t over, but the battle belongs to sensitive, thinking people.⁸

Notes of a Native Son

What does a contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person's background and talents—an abstract idea, really—look like in practice? How do teachers and students talk to one another when they're not pigeonholed into the roles of answer-giver and answer-receiver? How do students come to voice?

I have 3 sons. I would to see I couldn't
~~help~~ them not to internalize those values.
Why? Because it makes for misery.
There is no man alive who is happy if his
wife is oppressed & miserable. It
leads to divorce and unhappiness, not just for the
wife & kids, but to that original little boy who's writing to.
I do hear what you're saying, Mike.

I see you as writing from your perspective
with which I sympathize. Men, young men,
are really in a difficult spot right now, and we
sist to death about hearing "feminist etc. They are
asking "What about me? I do a good job. I understand
and am not like that."

What 20 yr. olds don't realize is how very far
we've traveled since the '50's when the "traditional"
male reigned supreme. It was a time of good ol'
American values, oppression & repression. The 50's
weren't that long ago - or the 60's.

What both genders need to appreciate is that
we need healthy, balanced relations. Simply
that. There is no such thing as one over the
other. But just as the '60's revolution was a
response to the '50s it was extreme etc.,
dramatic reactions had to occur to get the
genders more in balance w/ one another.

The battle isn't over, but the battle
belongs to all sensitive, thinking people.

Figure 9: Pam Barksdale's end-notes on my one-pager on Nancy Mairs' essay "A Letter for Mathew"

I've just shown you.

And here's the important thing: this sort of thing happened in the UNH English Department all the time during my undergraduate years. It happened in Lisa McFarlane and Bridgette Bailey's Introduction to American Studies course and in Sandy Marster's Newswriting class. It happened in African American Literature with Lester Fisher and in Writing Fiction with Sue Wheeler. And it happened in Major American Authors with David Watters and in The Civil Rights Movement with Art Hilson. We were always in exploratory mode, always in

process, always writing expressively, always working to develop our voices. At UNH, in the English Department, I fell in love with school because we weren't *doing* school. We were doing something else that was far more interesting and meaningful.

At UNH, in the English department, I fell in love with school because we weren't *doing* school. We were doing something else that was far more interesting and meaningful:

Authenticity.

Genuine self-discovery.

Self-revelation.

Originality in expression.

Discovering the true self.

I ate it up.

CHAPTER V

COMING TO VOICE, PART III

And so, you ask, what ultimately was the outcome of all these contributions to the development of this person, *me*?

The outcome was *change*.

In Freshman English, I may not have understood what it meant to become “a *maker* rather than a passive absorber of knowledge,” a “critical thinker and evaluator of words, ideas, and images rather than just a consumer of facts and figures,” but by the time I graduated, the ambitious epistemological shift that the folks in the English Department had envisioned for me was beginning to happen. I was coming to voice.

Where’s the evidence, you ask?

Turn with me, if you will, to the September 29, 1995, edition of *The New Hampshire*, UNH’s student newspaper, where there is an editorial (his first) written by Mike Michaud entitled “Freshman: Tobacco Companies Want Your Money.” Scan over to the third column and read.



Figure 10 (transcription): “If you are a member of the teenage population you need to realize that right now, as you read this (if you’re still with me), there is a group of men and women sitting around an oval table in a high-rise building somewhere in America, who are trying to get you to smoke. They don’t care if you get cancer. They don’t care if you die. It won’t happen to them, because they don’t smoke.”

This is coming to voice.

Next, pick up a copy of the UNH English Department's annual literary magazine, *Voices*, the Fall/Spring 1995-96 edition. Flip to the piece midway through called "A Collage on Chaos, Order and Truth in America" by Mike Michaud. The essay is an homage to my then-current literary hero, Joan Didion. It begins:

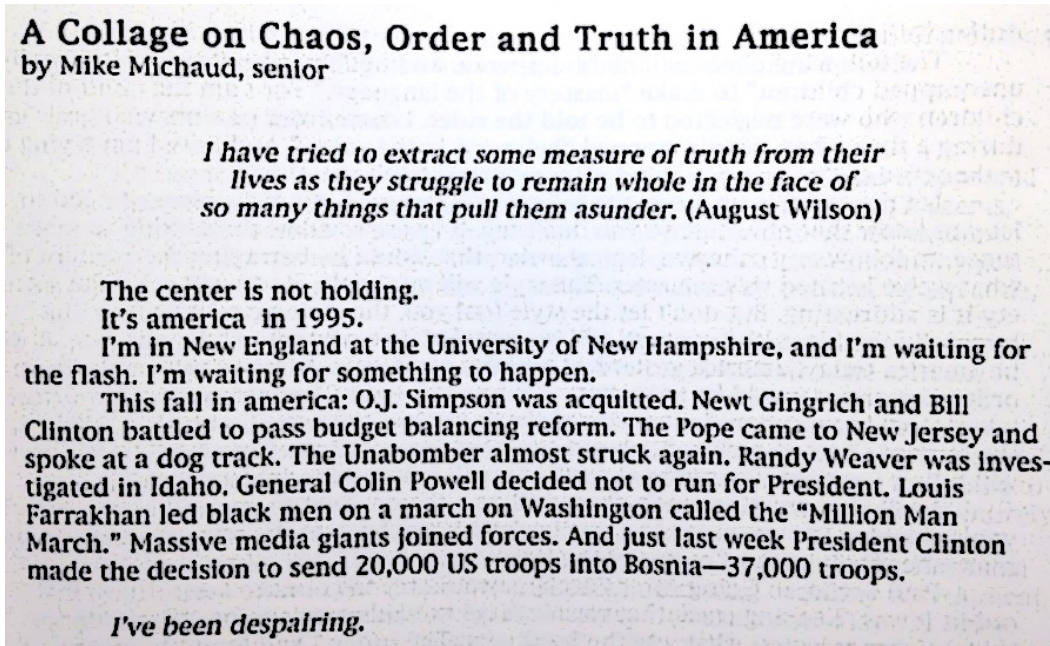


Figure 11 (transcription): "The center is not holding. It's america in 1995. I'm in New England at the University of New Hampshire, and I'm waiting for the flash. I'm waiting for something to happen. This fall in america: O.J. Simpson was acquitted. Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton battled to pass budget balancing reform. The Unabomber almost struck again. Randy Weaver was investigated in Idaho. General Colin Powell decided not to run for President. Louis Farrakhan led black men on a march on Washington called the "Million Man March." Massive media giants joined forces. President Clinton sent troops into Bosnia. *I've been despairing.*"

This is coming to voice.

Now turn to the spring 1996 edition of *Main Street*, UNH's student magazine, where Mike Michaud is listed as an assistant editor and where his essay "I Still Have Hope," a reflection on racism in America, appears on page 30. Skim down to the essay's final lines:

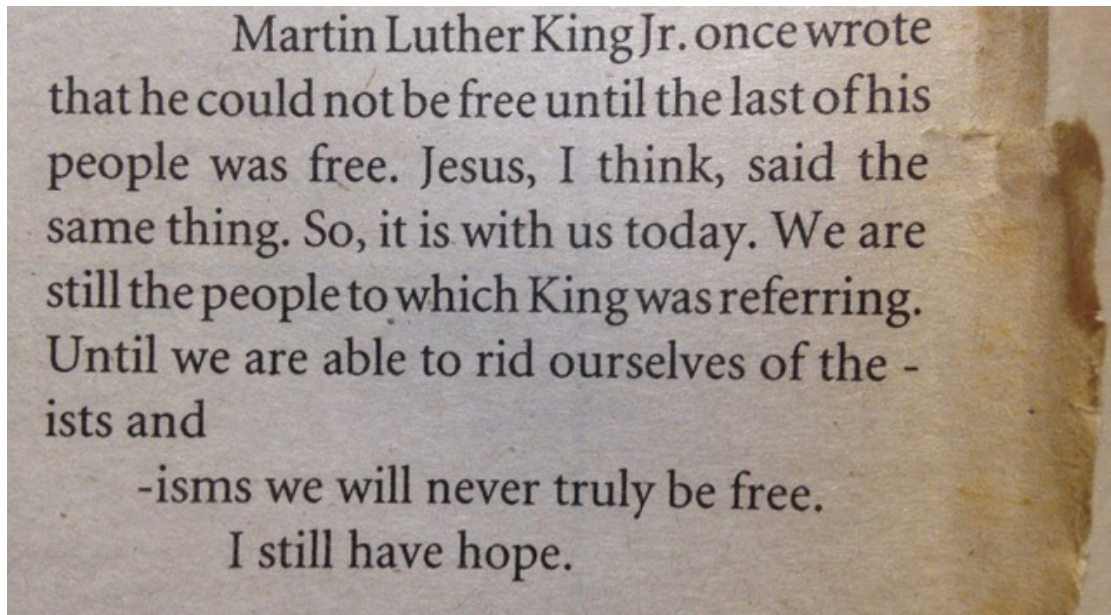


Figure 12: Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote that he could not be free until the last of his people was free. Jesus, I think, said the same thing. So, it is with us today. We are still the people to which King was referring. Until we are able to rid ourselves of the -ists and -isms we will never be truly free. I still have hope.

This is coming to voice.

The writing ain't always pretty—what with all the talk of *hope* and *despair*—but these passages demonstrate my *desire* to be heard and my efforts to use my voice in my community to think and argue about issues that mattered to me.⁹ That's what coming to voice looked like. That's where a *contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person's background and talents* had led as I prepared to graduate and leave the tribal homeland behind.

CHAPTER VI

ON MEETING GREAT AND FAMOUS MEN

In the spring of 1996 I began to prepare for the next phase of my education: graduate school. I was accepted into the Master of Arts in Teaching program in English Education at the University of Iowa. Dr. Bonnie Sunstein, a tribeswoman from UNH, had offered me a research assistantship to come work with and learn from her. I would have the opportunity to prepare for my chosen career in high school teaching while also learning about academic research and writing. I was sad to leave UNH behind, but couldn't wait to head west. Working with Dr. Sunstein, one of the writing tribe's many "engineers,"¹⁰ offered a means towards further enculturation. But before I left, there was one item of unfinished business to which I needed to attend.

On a sunny spring afternoon in late April of my senior year, I stopped by the UNH bookstore to purchase something by Donald Murray, a man whose name I had begun to hear about now that I was accepted to graduate school but whose work I had not yet encountered. I didn't know which Murray book to buy. I only knew that before I left Durham, I wanted, I *needed*, to buy and read something he had written. And I needed to try to meet the man in person. I felt drawn to Murray in some way I couldn't quite explain but which likely had something to do with a young man's need to seek the wisdom and approval of tribal elders. I wanted, even if just in some small way, to make Murray a part of my life before I left town. Reading one of his books would be the first step in that process. Meeting with him to talk writing and teaching would be the second.

As I browsed the "UNH Authors" shelves at the front of the bookstore, I discovered titles by Murray, but also by other members of the tribe whose names I knew or had heard of: Charles Simic, Mark Yount, Andy Merton, Tom Williams, Rebecca Rule, Margaret Love-Denman, and Sue Wheeler. A few of these folks had recently been my teachers. These were the fruits of their labor—the fruits of *our* labor. I wanted to stuff a copy of each book into my backpack, head back to my apartment, lock myself in my room, and read until my eyes wouldn't stay open any longer. Instead, I picked up a copy of Murray's *Expecting the Unexpected* and decided it was the one. I also picked out a book of poems by Charles Simic—my first poetry monograph—and carried it to the register. I paid for my purchases and then headed out into the bright April sun. A few minutes

later, curled up on a bench in the courtyard out front of Dimond Library, I dug into my purchases.

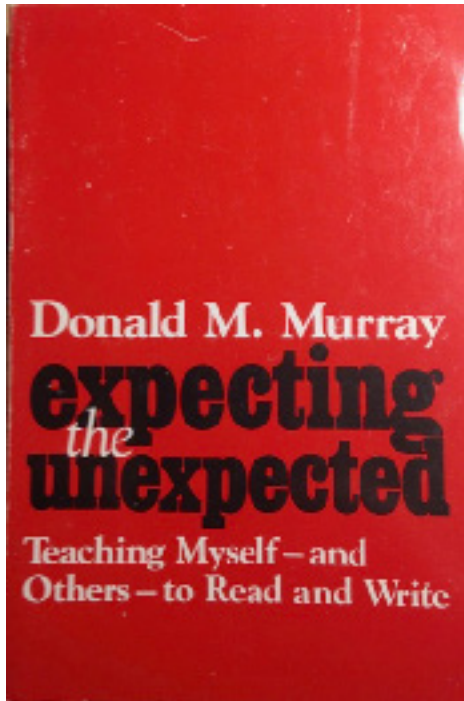


Figure 13:
Expecting the Unexpected: Teaching Myself—and others—to Read and Write (1989)

As it turns out, *Expecting the Unexpected*, a collection of Murray's early writing, was an excellent introduction to the man and his work. In her 1990 review of the book, Susan McLeod writes of Murray's "warm, witty, self-deprecating, personal" voice (417). *Expecting the Unexpected*, she claims, "makes us aware of how much Murray has contributed to our understanding of how practicing writers work, as well as how far we have come in the teaching of writing (and what an influence he has had) since he published his first book on the subject" (418). Most significantly, McLeod suggests, the essays collected in *Expecting the Unexpected* "illustrate what is most outstanding about Murray's work: he has the ability to engage us personally as he reveals his experiences in war, his pain at his daughter's death, his joy and frustration and vulnerability in writing and in teaching writing" (418).

McLeod liked the book. So did I.

Picture me there in the granite courtyard between the Romanesque Thompson Hall and the colonial Murkland Hall. See me hovering over *Expecting the Unexpected* with its fire-engine-red cover as coeds chased Frisbees on the huge lawn behind me and cars with windows rolled down and music blaring cruised past on Main Street below. See me with my favorite uni-ball pen (black ink), underlining and circling passages, scribbling comments in the margins, folding down corners of pages. Watch me as I stop from time to time to copy a passage from the book into my journal.

What was I finding?

Exactly what I was looking for.

Meaning.

Purpose.

Revelation.

And the one thing that all English majors seek: capital-T Truth.

As I waded into *Expecting the Unexpected* that afternoon, my mind wandered back and forth between two lines of thought. First, I considered my recent student past. When Murray wrote, “Surprise should be encouraged and cultivated in the writing classroom” (xi), I knew what he was talking about because surprise had been encouraged and cultivated in the many writing classrooms I had recently inhabited. When he wrote, “We [teach] by respecting individual diversity of vision, connection, thought, and voice” (xi), I understood because these things had been respected and encouraged by my own writing teachers. When he wrote, “there are few rights and wrongs but many ever-changing options” (xi), I knew this too—had learned it myself through the many stories and essays I had composed as an undergraduate. When he wrote, “if we are to survive as individuals and as a society we need to rid ourselves of our learned fear of surprise and embrace the unexpected” (xi), I nodded in agreement because I too had learned to swear off the fear of surprise and to cultivate the unexpected—in writing and in life. And when he wrote, “As a writer and teacher I expect the unexpected,” I understood because I had worked under the tutelage of writers and teachers who, like Murray, lived these same values—who had, in some cases, learned them from Murray himself (xi). In sum, as I read with an eye towards my recent past, I felt Murray pulling together and helping me make sense of a good deal of what I had just experienced as an English major. He was handing me the blueprint, so to speak, for the past four years of my life, naming the things that, until now, had been experienced but not narrated.

As my mind drifted backward to take stock of my student past it also moved forward to my teacher future. “Writing teachers are radicals—and should be” (xii), wrote Murray and I underlined these words and placed an exclamation point next to them. *Radicals*. I liked the sound of that! “We seek—hunger for—diversity, difference, contradiction, conflict, evolution, doubt, questions without answers, answers without questions, and we find it, for the world is changing” (xii). “YES!” I wrote in the margin. YES to diversity! YES to contradiction! YES to

conflict and doubt! And a big old YES, YES, YES, to questions without answers and answers without questions! “We must expect unexpectedness” (xii). Of course we must! Preach, brother!

And so I went: back and forth in time, shuffling between selves, sitting in the courtyard reading until it was time for dinner and then continuing right through the evening meal, reading until I couldn't see anymore because it was getting dark and then heading home to open Simic's book of poems over a bowl of cereal and sitting and reading out loud in the early part of a warm spring evening.

And what about the visit to see Murray, you ask? How did that go?

A few days after my trip to the UNH bookstore, I met Murray at his home in the faculty neighborhood in Durham, which, as it turned out, was less than a mile from the apartment above Young's Restaurant on Main Street where I lived at the time. Murray's wife, Minnie Mae, met me at the door and welcomed me in, and then Murray appeared and whisked me away to his office. I remember thinking, as we walked and chatted and as I took everything in, that visiting Donald Murray felt less like a pilgrimage to the home of a great and famous man and more like a visit to your grandparents' house. The Murrays' home was unspectacular and decidedly suburban, cluttered with the flotsam and jetsam of a life long-lived and children grown.¹¹ The visit was feeling too normal for the significance with which I had invested it. There was anticlimax all around but I had come this far, there was no turning back now.

Murray led me downstairs and along a path he had cleared through the basement rubble. Soon we arrived at his office, which was separate from the main part of the basement and finished so that it looked like a regular room. There was a big wooden desk and file cabinets; books and papers were stacked everywhere. On the wall behind the desk were white shelves stacked with rows and rows of CDs—classical music, he explained when he caught me glancing at the collection. To our left there was a big sliding glass door that led out onto a yard that backed up to some woods.

Murray was a big man—bigger, I think, than I had anticipated. He seemed familiar, cut from the same “Greatest Generation” cloth as my own grandfather. He offered me a seat and then sat down behind his desk. As we got down to business I discovered that I had failed to set

an agenda for our summit. What were we to talk about? I didn't know. I had just wanted to meet him. Up until that moment, that had seemed like enough.

Lucky for us both, Murray was prepared. He had made copies of several of his recent publications and placed them in a manila folder with my name on it. He handed the folder across the desk and I opened it and glanced at the titles of the articles, all of which were about writing.¹² As I skimmed the contents of the folder, Murray asked about my experiences at UNH, which professors I had taken, what I was writing, what my plans were for the future. He filled in the gaps in our conversation, his grandfatherly questions and stories easing the awkwardness of the moment.

After about a half hour or so, Murray directed my attention to a laminated placard he had placed in the folder. It was long and thin and on one side, typed in a small font, was a string of quotations about writing while on the other side, in a much larger font, were four Latin words and their translation:

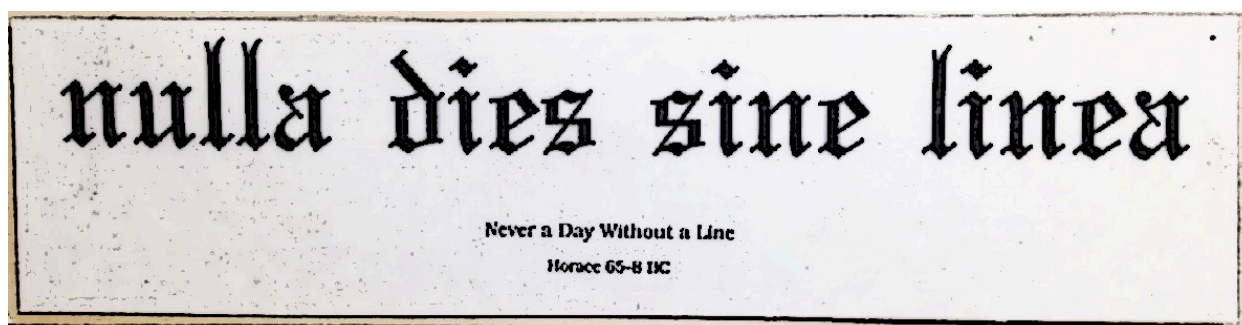


Figure 14 (transcription): "nulla dies sine linea. Never a day without a line (Horace 65-8 BC)."

"That's for you to put on your desk, to keep you writing" Murray said, standing up to signal that our meeting had come to an end. "You're going to make a fine English teacher, Mike. I wish you the best and hope we can stay in touch."

I stood and we shook hands. "You'll have to say hello to Bonnie Sunstein for me when you arrive in Iowa City," Murray added. "She's one of my favorite people." And with that he gestured towards the door and we walked back upstairs together and said our goodbyes. The visit wasn't quite what I had expected (what *had* I expected?), but I had done it. I had met the

great man, shook his hand, made my pilgrimage to his door.

I was ready, now, to begin the next part of the journey.

CHAPTER VII

TEACHER, WRITER, SCHOLAR, PART I

Notes of a Native Son

In the late summer of 1996, I traveled west to the University of Iowa to learn how to become a high school English teacher and to further my education as a writer. These were the two identities I held most strongly at this point in my life: pre-service teacher and aspiring writer. The first I shared with others (if asked), the second I kept mostly to myself.

But during my two years at Iowa my sense of self and, subsequently, my intentions and desires began to shift. As I traveled to my first academic conference, worked as Dr. Sunstein's research assistant, attended lectures by visiting scholars, immersed myself in and began to experiment more seriously with scholarly writing, taught my first college courses, and met and socialized with doctoral students, I gained access to a side of higher education about which I had previously known nothing. I felt simultaneously drawn to and repelled by this new world. I was a serious student and I sensed that graduate education beyond the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree I had come to Iowa to pursue was maybe something that interested me. But I found many of the doctoral students I met both pedantic and annoying. My desire to pursue a PhD was further complicated by my sense of myself as a member of the UNH writing tribe, which, at this time, I associated primarily with teachers of writing and writers (the latter of the creative sort). These two identities, *teacher* and *writer*, seemed to conflict with this other identity I was beginning to imagine for myself, *scholar*. I associated the first two identities, teacher and writer, with practical matters, rooted in the real world (which I perceived to be a good thing). I associated the identity of scholar with abstraction and with theory (both of which I was suspicious). Despite the example of my mentor, Dr. Sunstein, and of other writing scholars I was meeting on the pages of the books and journals I was reading for my graduate courses, I struggled to envision a way that I could be all three things at once—*teacher*, *writer*, *scholar*—and couldn't imagine that in becoming the latter, *scholar*, I wouldn't have to somehow give up on the former, *teacher* and *writer*.

These boundaries I was drawing up in my head shaped virtually everything I did during my time at Iowa. As I fought to maintain allegiance to my limited understanding of my UNH writing tribe, I simultaneously began to tentatively give myself over to new, more scholarly ways of being and thinking. This process of negotiation manifested itself in conversations with friends, in the classroom, and, perhaps most obviously, on the pages of the papers I wrote for my

graduate courses.

A writing scholar named Roz Ivanič has actually looked into what I'm trying to describe here. Ivanič studies the way writers construct and negotiate identity during the act of writing. Her central thesis: *writing is an act of identity*. When we write, we work to construct a vision of ourselves on the page, to be a certain kind of person, while simultaneously aligning ourselves with or distancing ourselves from different audiences or communities (31). In the framework Ivanič has developed to analyze writing and identity, there are three elements to consider.

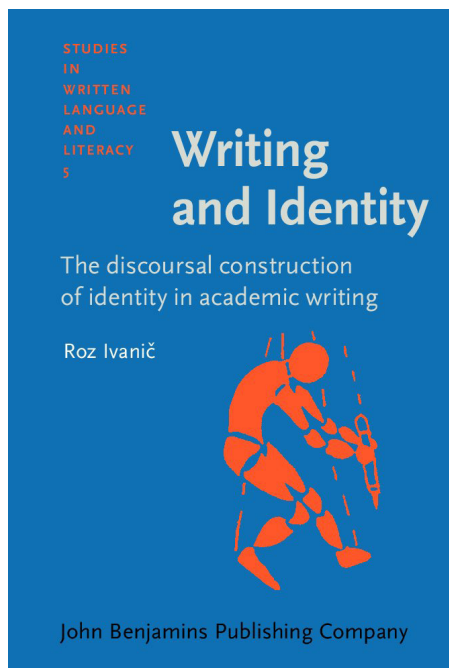


Figure 15: *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing* (1998)

First, there is what she calls the *autobiographical self*, which “is associated with a writer’s sense of his roots, of where he is coming from” (24-25). The autobiographical self is the sum total of all of the experiences a writer has had in his life, as well as his cumulative sense of who he is as a person (e.g., one who is committed to social justice, one who is a cutthroat dealmaker, one who struggles with authority). We inevitably bring our autobiographical selves to each act of writing, Ivanič claims.

Second, there is the *discoursal self*, which is the “impression—often multiple, sometimes contradictory—which [a writer] consciously or unconsciously convey[s] of themselves in a particular written text” (25). The discoursal self is the person we are *trying to be* when we write (e.g., a recent medical school grad trying to be a doctor, a college student trying to be a student of her major, a job applicant trying to be the desired employee). The discoursal self is shaped by what Ivanič calls the “possibilities for self-hood” in a given writing situation, which is to say the social context (27). When constructing a discoursal self, we write as the person the situation necessitates.

Now here’s where Ivanič’s theory gets interesting: when one’s autobiographical self meshes well with the discoursal self that a writing situation necessitates, the writer will build a self-as-author that is convincing and persuasive. Often, though, this is not the case. Often, the

person we feel we *are* does not jive with the person we are asked to *be*, and we are not able to build a convincing self-as-author on the page. From the perspective of the writer, this is when writing becomes a challenge. From the perspective of the researcher, as we will see, this is when writing becomes interesting.

If I drew on Ivanic's framework to better understand my experiences at Iowa, I would begin by trying to reconstruct the *autobiographical self* I brought to the page each time I sat down to write. At this time in my life, my autobiographical self was shaped, to a considerable extent, by my understanding of myself as a *writer* (of the creative sort) and as a member of the UNH writing tribe. More specifically, the sensibility I developed as an undergraduate English major under the tutelage of Pam Barksdale and others was that of an *essayist* in the tradition of Michel de Montaigne or, more contemporaneously, Joan Didion, George Orwell, or Annie Dillard (and the following sometimes-essayists, my Big 3: Kurt Vonnegut, James Baldwin, and Raymond Carver).

According to Philip Lopate, editor of *The Art of the Personal Essay*, the essay, and the personal essay in particular, represents, reflects, and creates a particular mode of thinking and being in the world—a sense of identity—for those who write it. Noted for its intimacy, candor, curiosity, openness, sense of irony and playfulness, and capacity for self-reflexivity, self-contradiction, and self-consciousness, this genre, Lopate notes, “cannot help but have an influence on the personal essayist's life” (xliv). To further illustrate this point, Lopate calls upon the words of Montaigne, who famously asserts that

in modeling this figure upon myself, I have had to fashion and compose myself so often to bring myself out, that the model itself has to some extent grown firm and taken shape. Painting myself for others, I have painted my inward self with colors clearer than my original ones. I have no more made my book than my book has made me. (Montaigne, qtd. in Lopate xliv)

Through the act of writing, the act of making his book, Montaigne suggests, he has composed *himself*, taking on an identity that, like the form of the essay itself, is curious, playful, reflective, provocative, open to experimentation, sometimes contradictory, and attracted to the pursuit of seemingly random but ultimately fruitful digressions. This was the identity I came to aspire to during my undergraduate years at UNH, and it made up the core of the autobiographical

self I inhabited by the time I graduated.

Now, here's where things get interesting: I was largely unaware that I had borrowed or adapted or conformed to this autobiographical self, *the essayist*. I assumed it was just who I was and that, as such, it was the requisite self I should bring to pretty much every composing situation I encountered, regardless of the needs of the situation or, per Ivanic, the discursal self that the situation necessitated. To get a sense of myself as *the essayist*, let's look at an excerpt from my essay "A Collage on Chaos, Order and Truth in America." The passage below comes from a subsection of the essay called "I Like The Unabomber":

The Unabomber is a man with a bomb, who, I think it's safe to say, lives in this country and is pretty pissed off. Back in September, he threatened to kill lots of people if this manifesto he wrote to *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* didn't get published. I like the Unabomber. At the same time I sympathize with the families who have lost a loved one to his violent tactics, but, I still like the Unabomber.

To tell the truth though, I'm not entirely sure what to make of him. He's out there, angry, killing people. But I think he has some good things to say. In his manifesto he began like this: "The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have ... destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to widespread psychological suffering and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world."

I tend to agree.

The discursal self I have fashioned here nicely enacts the stance of the essayist. There's the casual tone, the built-in reflection, the rambling movement, the playfulness with language and structure, and the sense of provocation. Here is a writer thinking through something difficult or complex and sharing these musings in a kind of ironic way with his readers. Lopate suggests that "The hallmark of the personal essay is its intimacy." The writer, he argues, "seems to be speaking directly into your ear, confiding everything from gossip to wisdom" (xxiii). My writing in the passage above also has that quality to it as I work to confess what strikes me now as an awfully strange attraction to a mass murderer.

The fact that my rambling and sometimes inchoate essay was chosen for inclusion in the UNH English Department's literary magazine—was, in fact, selected for inclusion by an editorial

committee of UNH English professors and students—only confirms the aptness of this writerly self for the moment. There was, as Ivanic might put it, a kind of “happy coincidence” between the autobiographical self I had come to inhabit and the discursal self that was frequently expected of me by my peers and professors. And here’s the important thing: that I had become this sort of person was not unique to just me. Coming to inhabit this kind of autobiographical self was a part of my enculturation process into the UNH writing tribe during my undergraduate years. We were a band of Didionians, Dilliardites, and Baldwinians. We were *taught* to become this kind of writer, this kind of *self*, and doing so went all the way back to Donald Murray, who himself identified most strongly as a writer, an *essayist*, and not a scholar or academic. Murray had little patience for academic writing traditionally defined, frequently taking jabs at egghead English professors, and even proposing, in his article “Write Research to Be Read,” that they needed to rethink the way they write about their research.¹³ Murray wanted academics to write *not* like academics but like writers, as he understood the term. As it went with Murray, so it went for many of the rest of us.

One’s autobiographical self, Ivanic asserts, is “associated with a writer’s sense of their roots, of where they are coming from” (24). My roots were in the essay and in the tradition of essayistic writing that Donald Murray and others inscribed into the UNH tradition. When I left UNH, regardless of who a given writing situation required me to be, the self I was *going* to be was the one my tribe had taught me to be.

CHAPTER VIII

TEACHER, WRITER, SCHOLAR, PART II

In some instances, the discorsal self of the essayist that I constructed in my graduate papers while enrolled at the University of Iowa worked well. Of the three kinds of courses I took—English, English education, and education (the last for credentialing purposes)—it worked best, not surprisingly, when I wrote for my English or English-education professors. Their courses frequently asked for creative forms of writing, requesting a kind of discorsal performance at which I excelled and that didn't ask me to be anyone on the page other than the essayist I knew myself to be.

One such assignment, for a course called Teaching Literature to Adolescents, asked me to experiment with writing the first chapter of an imagined book aimed at adolescent readers. In several other English-education courses, I was asked to produce literacy narratives in which I was to narrate and reflect upon important moments of reading or writing development in my life. At these too I excelled. Here's a passage from one of my literacy narratives that illustrates the way I was able to construct a discorsal self for a graduate course at Iowa that meshed well with the autobiographical self I had learned to construct in my undergraduate courses at UNH:

As for my reading history, reading has always been an assumption in my life. I could bore you forever going on about the great books that I've read, or that mom and I used to read when I was a kid, but I won't. I have a history as a reader, and I have a successful history as a reader because reading was encouraged in my house.... Trips to the public library were encouraged! Library cards were encouraged! All these things were encouraged at the same time that my mother and father made it a priority to situate themselves within affluent towns with high-quality school systems which, socioeconomically speaking, we were always just on the margins of.

For a good deal of my time in Iowa, I continued to perform this essayistic discorsal self that I had learned at UNH. I was, after all, surreptitiously trying to become a writer (of the creative sort). I kept a writer's notebook, submitted poems and stories to literary journals, and attended readings by famous writers at the Prairie Lights Bookstore in downtown Iowa City. In my work, I continued to emulate my writerly heroes—Raymond Carver, Kurt Vonnegut, and James Baldwin—and for many of the audiences I faced, the kind of discorsal self I was good at producing worked. Ivanic explains: "Writers construct a 'discorsal self' not out of an infinite

range of possibilities, but out of the possibilities for self-hood which are supported by the socio-cultural and institutional context in which they are writing" (28). In many instances, the socio-cultural and institutional contexts in which I wrote at Iowa, in and out of the classroom, allowed me to enact the autobiographical self I had learned at UNH, but not in all instances. The education classes in particular asked me to construct a different kind of self when I wrote. One such course was Human Relations for the Classroom Teacher, which I took during the second semester of my first year.

Human Relations consisted of a once-a-week lecture with the professor and a twice-a-week seminar with a graduate teaching assistant. I don't recall the name of my professor, but my TA was named Mark Schuster and his needs, as a reader, were quite unlike those of my English and English-education professors. Despite our differences—Mark, a New Yorker/Me, a transplanted New Englander; Mark, an academic-in-training/Me, a writer-in-training; Mark, worldly and urbane/Me, unsophisticated and green behind the ears—Mark and I hit it off, striking up a friendship outside of class almost from the first week of the term. But to read the papers that I wrote for him and the comments Mark wrote back is to witness the kind of conflict that can result when a writer tries to enact a discorsal self that is *not* supported by the socio-cultural and institutional context in which he is writing. The disjuncture between who I wanted to be on the page and who Mark needed me to be nicely illustrates the larger sense of identity negotiation I experienced at Iowa as I tried to hold onto my UNH writing tribe's essayistic sensibility while simultaneously accommodating demands that I think and act and write in more traditionally academic ways.

Ivanic argues that we can profitably view students' attempts to write for school as "site[s] of struggle" where "[w]riters may not [always] be willing to compromise their identity by becoming party to the dominant practices of the community" (331). My papers for Mark and our interactions over my words exemplify the sort of struggle Ivanic describes. They paint a picture of a writer who is unwilling to, or at least ambivalent about, conforming to "the dominant practices of the [academic] community" as embodied in and demanded by an instructor who was, at the time, a doctoral candidate and thus exquisitely attuned to the mores and norms of

academic language. The passage below and Mark's comments on it, taken from the margins of a paper on the musical *Rent* I wrote for his class, make plain my struggle (and failure) to fashion a discursal self that Mark found acceptable.

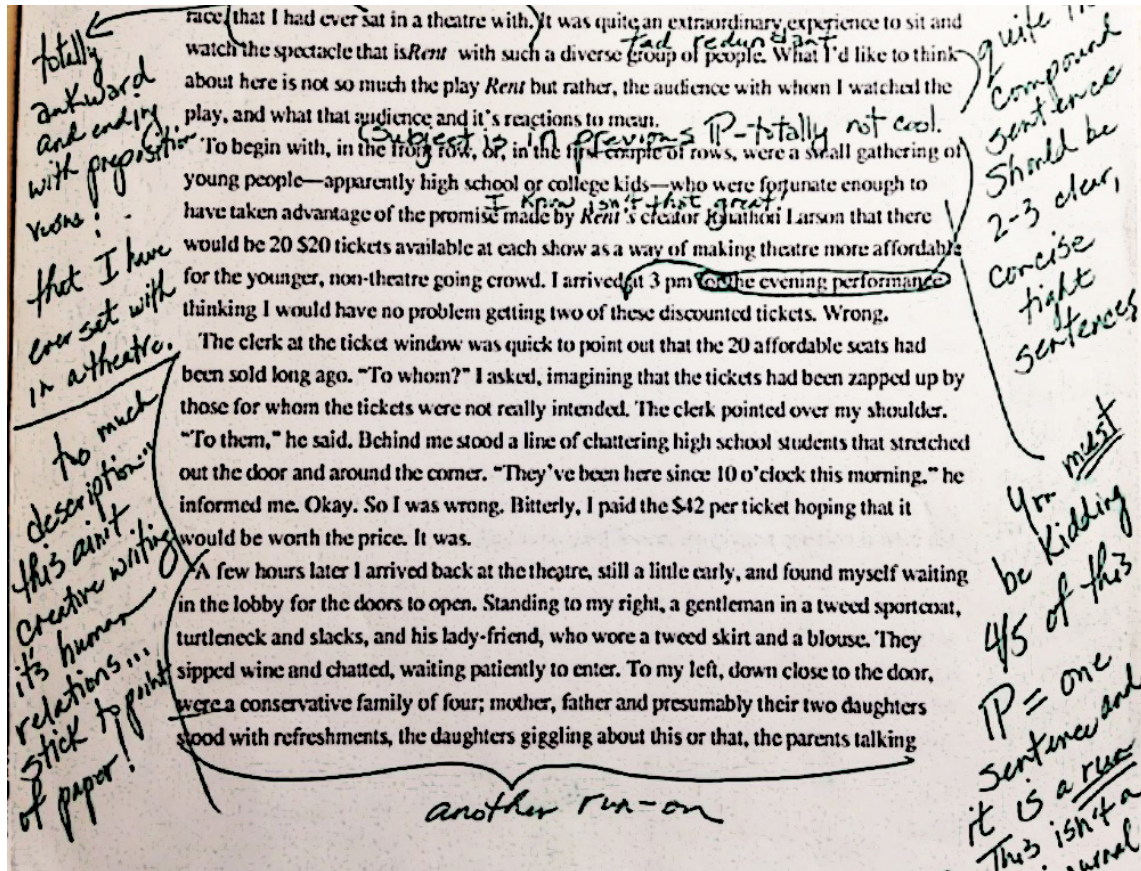


Figure 16: My paper on *Rent* for Human Relations for the Classroom Teacher

What do I see in this exchange between Mark and me? Well, there's the obvious: Mark's concerns with matters grammatical (e.g., "ending with a preposition," "Subject is in previous paragraph," "another run-on"). But what stands out to me are the comments Mark makes that signal moments where I've made more egregious errors by breaking with the appropriate conventions of the situation:

quite the compound sentence should be 2-3 clear, concise tight sentences

too much description . . . this ain't creative writing

You must be kidding 4/5 of this paragraph = one sentence and it is a run on. This isn't a journal

These criticisms, and the impatient tone in which they are conveyed, signal Mark's refusal to accept the autobiographical self I was presenting to him and his insistence that I enact a different kind of discursive performance, one less suited to "creative writing."

If I wasn't getting the point, Mark makes his needs as an academic reader more explicit in a marginal comment on another paper I wrote in Human Relations that term—one about my experience serving as a conversation partner for an ESL student:

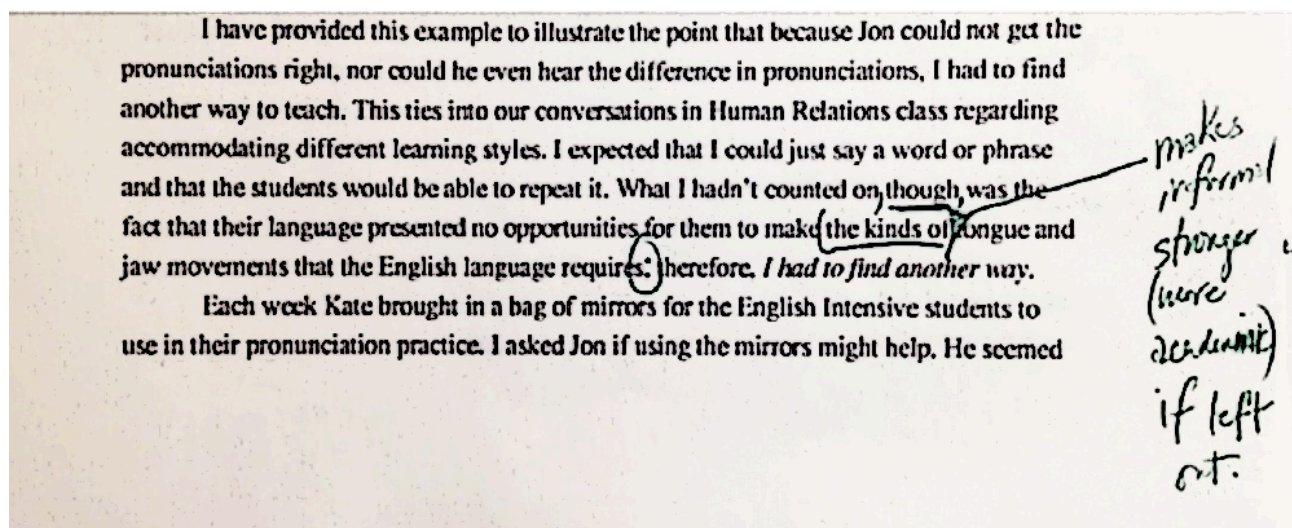


Figure 17: Passage from a second paper for Human Relations for the Classroom Teacher.

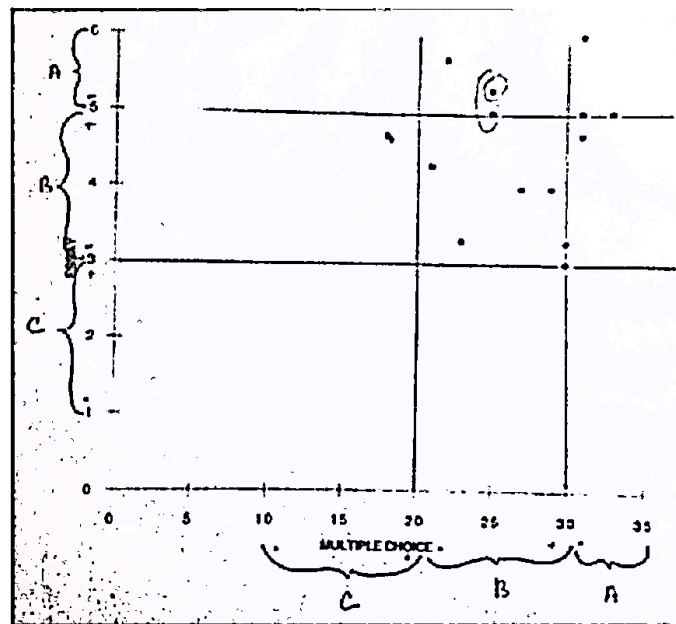
As this example illustrates, in my writing for his class, Mark wanted me to write less formally, in a less conversational tone, and to be "more academic," as he puts it here. But as an MAT student in a graduate program who thought of himself principally as a future teacher and a writer (of the creative sort), I wanted to write like the essayists who were my heroes. Ivanic explains: "Some writers accommodate willingly to their readers' expectations as regards the conventions of academic writing and the identities these set up: a happy coincidence of desire and demand. Some resist the pressure to conform, and are determined to establish what they see as their own identity against the odds" (217). In Human Relations for the Classroom Teacher, I attempted to assert my essayistic identity "against the odds." I was disciplined accordingly. Both papers mentioned above received low grades and had to be rewritten.

By the time I enrolled in another course that was required for teacher credentialing,

Notes of a Native Son

Educational Psychology, a year later, I was more willing to accommodate myself to the conventions of academic writing traditionally defined. In Ed Psych there were no papers, creative essays, reflection letters, or opportunities to write in the ways that felt most familiar to me. The coursework consisted of challenging weekly Thought Questions that required me to summarize and analyze course material, and a writing-intensive midterm and final exam designed to assess mastery of course content. The essayistic autobiographical self that I usually brought with me to my writing in English and English-education courses would have proven entirely useless in this class. We were doing science, not the personal essay. Our instructor was a scholar and empiricist, the kind of man who took pleasure in creating graphs to visually represent the grades my classmates and I earned on his exams. Seriously. Not kidding about this.

131 FALL 97 REGISTERED
MILITARY ACADEMY



[Page 1]

Figure 18: Midterm exam grades, Educational Psychology

Interestingly, by the time I reached Ed Psych I seemed to be *getting* it—figuring out when and where I might draw on my familiar essayist self and when and where I should check my inner essayist at the door. Or perhaps it was simpler than that. After all, as an undergraduate at UNH I had survived four years of education and numerous general-education courses, many of which were more of the notes-and-exams variety. Perhaps I was just more *willing* to enact a different sort of self on the page that semester in Ed Pysch. Instead of my typical off-the-cuff, digressive, confessional style, I was willing to write like my professor and the author of our textbook. The result looked something like this:

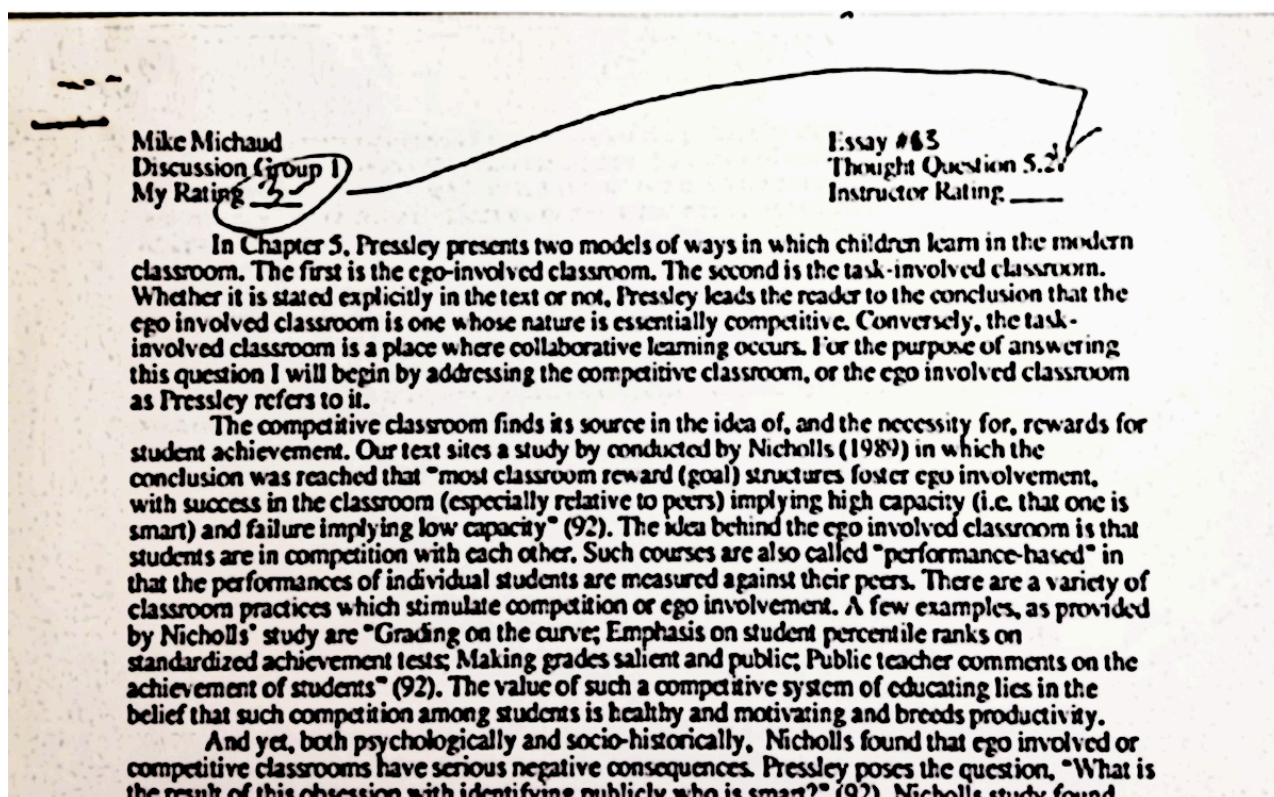


Figure 19: Sample paper, Educational Psychology

What do I now see in Essay #3? First, there's the way I interact with sources—in this case Pressley, the author of our textbook, and Nicholls, who is cited by the textbook. Second, there is my use of metadiscourse (e.g., "The first is," "The second is,") and my inclusion of a forecasting statement (e.g., "For the purpose of answering this question I will begin by"). Third, there's the fact that the first-person pronoun *I* appears only once in the passage and there only within the

forecasting statement. Finally, there's the stiff, formal tone or style of the writing (e.g., "There are a variety of classroom practices which stimulate competition or ego involvement"). As this passage shows, in courses like Educational Psychology, I was more willing to check my "I" at the door and deliver the kind of discursal performance that would earn me the grades I desired. In the process, my autobiographical self was expanding as I learned to accommodate myself to more traditionally academic ways of thinking and being and writing.

The attention to detail that I summoned in my weekly essays in Ed Psych suggests that I may have actually been finding some degree of pleasure in becoming the kind of writer who could produce prose like the kind I find in the paper above. A key factor in my motivation may have been the fact that I was fascinated by the material we were learning about in Ed Psych (how motivation affects learning, how learning styles differ, etc.). I wanted to earn my professor's respect and approval and to show him that I was capable of both understanding the challenging material we were learning and conveying a sense of my understanding in writing. And if I am to be totally honest, I probably also felt that writing in this more academic manner made me feel smart (or smarter). That, of course, counts for something, too.

Ivanic explains that her project is one of investigating "what versions of self" writers "construct for themselves discursively," as well as which "they disown and why" (333). By my second year at Iowa, it seems I was more willing to "own" a traditionally academic discursal performance. Ivanic's third category of writerly identity, *self-as-author*, draws attention to the extent to which a writer feels *authorized* or *authoritative* enough to write (or speak) in a given way in a given situation. Viewed through the lens of self-as-author, the above passage from my Ed Psych essay suggests that I was feeling "enough of a sense of self-worth" to write with authority in situations which required a more traditionally academic discursal performance. To be clear, though, my voice was changing because *I* was changing. I was beginning to learn how and when to be a writer (i.e., essayist) and how and when to be a scholar.

CHAPTER IX

TEACHER, WRITER, SCHOLAR, PART III

And then, miraculously, I began to learn that it might be possible to be more than one thing at once—to integrate the teacher self I was in the process of developing with the writer self I was currently revising and the scholar self to which I was gradually acclimating. This process was complex and unfolded in uneven waves, but I can point to a course I took with Dr. James Marshall during my final semester at Iowa, an English-education course, Language and Learning, as a moment when the synthesize began—that is, when I began to integrate the new academic identity and voice I was developing outside of my home bases of English and English education with the one I was trying to develop inside of these two areas.

In Dr. Marshall's class, we read the work of a recent Iowa graduate, Margaret "Peg" Finders, whose book *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High* was garnering much praise and attention in the literacy-research community at this time. Dr. Finders came back to Iowa to give a lecture on her research, and it made an impression on me to the point that, later in the term, I found myself drawing on her work as a model for my final paper in Dr. Marshall's course. In Finders' writing I was finding a way to write academically that seemed to allow a synthesis of the roles I was struggling to integrate: teacher, writer, scholar. Here, for example, are several passages from a Finders article, drawn from the research she conducted for *Just Girls*, that illustrate the synthesis I am trying to describe. The first comes from the article's introduction and contains an excerpt from an interview transcript that Finders uses as an epigraph. The second comes from a section near the end of the article, where Finders traces conclusions and implications from her research.

Margaret Finders (M. F.): When I write about you, what do you want me to say? How should I describe who you are?
Tiffany:¹ Um. Say we're just girls.
Lauren: Yeah, just regular girls.
Angie: Not Woof-Woofs.
Tiffany: Not babies. Just regular girls.

Figure 20 (transcription): "Margaret Finders: When I write about you, what do you want me to say? How should I describe who you are? Tiffany: Um. Say we're just girls. Lauren: Yeah, just regular girls. Angie: Not woof-woofs. Tiffany: Not babies. Just regular girls." (93)

“STUDENT-CENTERED PEDAGOGY” AS A TERMINISTIC SCREEN

As this study unfolded, I grew more and more uneasy about a pedagogy I had embraced in my 13 years of teaching language arts in a junior high school. Quite willing to problematize the notion of the autonomous self, I had nonetheless held to a pedagogy that did little to take into account the self as situated in a complex web of social relations. I selected Northern Hills as the research site because I knew and highly valued the teachers and the pedagogy that they embraced.

Figure 21 (transcription): “As this study unfolded, I grew more and more uneasy about a pedagogy I had embraced in my 13 years of teaching language arts in a junior high school. Quite willing to problematize the notion of the autonomous self, I had nonetheless held to a pedagogy that did little to take into account the self as situated in a complex web of social relations. I selected Northern Hills as the research site because I knew and highly valued the teachers and the pedagogy that they embraced. The philosophy and atmosphere matched what I valued; yet after one year of documenting the literate lives of some of the adolescent girls who attended Northern Hills, I am less sure of the pedagogy that I so completely had embraced.” (120-121)

What did I find in these passages that was appealing?

I liked the occasional literary inflections in Finders’ academic prose—the way that, for example, she decided to start the article with a provocative epigraph that brought the voices of her research participants into the work. As someone who had long thought of himself as an essayist, I was drawn to the tentativeness and at times confessional nature of her writing (e.g., “I struggled to represent them,” “I am less sure of the pedagogy that I so completely had embraced”). I appreciated the way that Finders represented herself as someone who was in process and who had made the decision to convey a sense of that in-processness in the writing. I was drawn to the “I” in Finders’ article, to the personal voice of the writer/researcher, which was not suppressed or disguised as it is supposed to be in academic writing, but was instead present throughout the piece. In sum, Finders offered me a vision of how to integrate my evolving autobiographical self with a discursive self that was suitable to the audience of the literacy-

research community, and she offered this at a time when I was both prepared for and in need of such synthesis. Most significantly, Finders offered a way to not have to choose: teacher? writer? scholar? One could be all three.

Of course, there were plenty of other models of synthesis around, including my mentor, Dr. Bonnie Sunstein, who, in her life and her writing, embodied an integrated identity of teacher/writer/scholar. But for some reason I hadn't recognized these other syntheses until I discovered Finders. Once I did, I began to see that this integrated teacher/writer/scholar self was something to which I aspired, but also—and here's the important part—an element of the identity of my UNH writing tribe. There was, I was beginning to see, a wing of the tribe that I had not been exposed to as an undergraduate student. We weren't just writers and/or writers-teaching-writing. We were also writers-teaching-and-studying-and-writing-about-writing. Some of our members had found a way to integrate the various elements of their professional identities and succeed in higher education. Perhaps I could too.

Following their lead, in Dr. Marshall's class I began to experiment with constructing a new, more integrated discoursal self. I wrote passages like these:

Much of what we have read this semester leads us to the conclusion that yes, the home is more important than the school in determining students' academic success. Yet somehow, as an educator, I'm hesitant to utter this aloud. In some ways, Moynihan's argument is common sense: your home environment effects [sic] your academic success, as well as your chance of success in virtually ever other arena. The problem with Moynihan's argument is that it is often picked up by conservative critics of education to prove how little a difference spending more money on schools actually makes in the success of individual students.

What I have just done is illustrate that which happens when educators confront students with E.D. Hirsch-like lists of "Things to Know." Such lists typically serve to frustrate students by reminding them of what they *don't know*, and consequently, *how much more* they still need to learn. These lists raise questions for students, in the way that Hirsch's list raised questions for me, but these questions typically cause students to feel more guilt over what they have forgotten, or never learned in the first place, than to motivate them to learn more.

What do I see in these passages? First and foremost, I note that I'm engaging with the

words of others. It's not just me writing. I'm writing as part of a conversation. Also, I'm working in the realm of argument and analysis. I'm not just telling stories and reflecting on their meaning. I'm weighing claims, turning them over, and thinking through the assertions I want to make in return. I note also that the syntax of these passages is different. The sentences are longer, punctuated by dependent clauses, and more formal in tone than the off-the-cuff, ironically punctuated sentences that I produced when writing in a more essayistic register. At the same time, and unlike the sentences I produced for *Educational Psychology*, the "I" is still present in these passages. I've not surrendered my sense of voice or buried it behind the passive voice, a move that is characteristic of much academic prose. Like Dr. Finders, I've preserved some of the tentativeness that is characteristic of essayistic discourse and also, I'm writing about my sources in a way that attends explicitly to my own reactions to and feelings about them—not a typical move in business-as-usual academic prose.

As these passages illustrate, by the time I was preparing to leave Iowa, I was beginning to experiment with a new way of writing—creating a new style, a new voice, and a new kind of discursal performance. I was able to do this because I was in the process of building a new kind of autobiographical self. In her framing of this concept, Ivanic notes that because our roots, "where we are coming from," are always in flux, one's autobiographical self is "constantly changing as a consequence of [the writer's] developing life-history" (24-25). So it was with me. My exposure to the work of teacher/writer/scholars like Peg Finders and my mentor Bonnie Sunstein was showing me that becoming a scholar was not necessarily at odds with my ambitions to become a teacher and a writer. Most importantly, one could take on the identity of a scholar and still retain membership in the UNH writing tribe.

Standing in the UNH bookstore that day in the spring of 1996, I had understood my tribe to be one of writers and writers-teaching-writing. Leaving Iowa in the spring of 1998, I was beginning to see that we were also writers-studying-writing (its teaching, its learning). This was an important step in my professional journey, and yet I think I was still undecided on the extent to which I wanted to align myself with the scholarly wing of my tribe. Having worked during my second year at Iowa as a TA in the Rhetoric Department, teaching freshman composition for the

Notes of a Native Son

first time, what I wanted most as I neared graduation was to practice my craft: to teach English. I desperately wanted to get into my own classroom in a high school somewhere back on the East Coast, to design my own writing assignments, to organize my own peer-writing workshops, to conduct my own writing conferences, and to respond to my own students' writing.

But what theories would guide my practice? And what kind of writing teacher would I be?

CHAPTER X

A UNH WRITING TEACHER TEACHING A UNH WRITING COURSE



Figure 22: Thompson Hall, University of New Hampshire

I would be a UNH writing teacher!

And I would teach a UNH writing course!

What does this mean?

At UNH, as an undergraduate, I had experienced a UNH writing course (experienced many, in fact). At Iowa, as a graduate student and under the tutelage of Dr. Sunstein, I had learned how to teach a UNH writing course. When I arrived back on the East Coast, in the high school in Massachusetts where I taught for one year and at the many colleges and universities in New Hampshire where I taught as an adjunct instructor for two years, I worked to deliver a UNH writing course. But here's the important thing: once I reached the moment of having my own classroom, of being a *UNH writing teacher* teaching a *UNH writing course*, I both knew and didn't know that that was what I was up to. I knew because becoming such a person doing such work was what I had aspired to ever since picking up a copy of Murray's *Expecting the Unexpected* that warm spring afternoon of my senior year. All the years I was preparing to

teach, I was fully aware that the course I was planning for—no, *dreaming of*—was a UNH writing course. And during my early years in the classroom, as I worked to learn how to actually teach a UNH writing course, I was cognizant of the fact that that was what I was doing. What I didn't know at this time, though, was what most of us don't know when we pursue a goal or objective with a single-minded determinism: *I didn't know what I didn't know*. And what I didn't know that I didn't know was that a UNH writing course was not the only way to organize a writing course and certainly not the "right" way.

I'll return to *what I didn't know I didn't know* in time, but for now, what I'd like to think and write about is what, at this stage of my career, I *did* know or was coming to know about being a UNH writing teacher teaching a UNH writing course. I won't talk much, if at all, about the *practices* of a UNH writing course as I had come to understand it because that's territory I've already covered (students produce five pages of new or revised writing each week on a topic of their choosing, weekly conferences, peer workshops, emphasis on revision and reflection, etc.). What I instead want to think and write about here is what becoming a UNH writing teacher teaching a UNH writing course entailed culturally as I understood it at this time in my life and for some years after. As far as I can tell, it entailed at least three things:

1. internalizing the tribe's foundational myth,
2. adopting the tribe's beliefs and assumptions about teaching writing,
3. enacting the tribe's teacherly identity.

Let's take these one at a time.¹⁴

CHAPTER XI

INTERNALIZING THE TRIBE'S FOUNDATIONAL MYTH

First and foremost, becoming a UNH writing teacher teaching a UNH writing course involved internalizing a myth about how school in general and the teaching of writing in school in particular works (or, more accurately, fails to work).¹⁵ Here's the basic story as it has been set down by Donald Graves:

Final reflection

Before children go to school, their urge to express is relentless. They learn to speak and to carry messages from one person to another. They burst into their homes to tell what just happened outside. They compose in blocks, play games, mark on sidewalks, and play with pencils or crayons. For most children, early audiences are receptive: adults struggle to make sense of the child's early attempts to communicate.

When children enter school, their urge to express is still present. A few enter already scarred from attempts to communicate with others. But the urge to be, to make a mark on the universe, has not left them. As children grow older and spend more time in school, many become still more disenchanted with writing. They can't keep up with the rest of the class and equate their struggles with handwriting, spelling, and early conventions as evidence that their ideas are unacceptable and that they are less intelligent than others. Even for these children, the urge to express, to make worthwhile contributions, to express a meaning that affects others, does not go away.

Figure 23 (transcription): "Before children go to school, their urge to express is relentless. They learn to speak and to carry messages from one person to another. They burst into their homes to tell what just happened outside. They compose in blocks, play games, mark on sidewalks, and play with pencils or crayons. For most children, early audiences are receptive: adults struggle to make sense of the child's early attempts to communicate.

"When children enter school, their urge to express is still present. A few enter already scarred from attempts to communicate with others. But the urge to be, to make a mark on the universe, has not left them. As children grow older and spend more time in school, many become still more disenchanted with writing. They can't keep up with the rest of the class and equate their struggles with handwriting, spelling, and early conventions as evidence that their ideas are unacceptable and that they are less intelligent than others. Even for these children, the urge to express, to make worthwhile contributions, to express a meaning that affects others, does not go away." (Graves, "All Children Can Write")

This story makes a profound but simple claim:

When it comes to learning how to write, schools are the problem.

It's a powerful argument embedded in a potent narrative, and so, like all such claims, it's one that is difficult to resist (or even recognize). Graves' claim says that students are human

beings who want to communicate and, further, that wanting to communicate is the natural state of affairs for humans. But then, it says, something gets in the way of humans' natural condition, and that thing is the school. Schools and teachers, the story goes, teach previously enchanted students disenchantment (via such presumably mundane activities as instruction in handwriting and spelling).¹⁶ Soon, enchantment is over. But even for the most disenchanting, Graves insists, the innate desire to communicate does not go away.

Graves' narrative positions students as individuals who are in need of being saved from the schools that have or inevitably will be the cause of their disenchantment. In constructing students in this way, the narrative also carves out a role for teachers. Teachers—some teachers—are to be the savers, the agents of re-enchantment. If you choose to believe this story, as I and many others have and do, you bear a considerable burden: you always start from behind. The students at your classroom door on the first day of a new semester or school year appear not as blank slates but as fallen souls. It's your job to bring them back, to carve out an anti-school space within the school where you can show (or remind) them how meaningful and fun work with language can be. In short, it's your job, as my fellow UNH tribesmen and women might put it, to help students discover (or rediscover) their voice.

As Graves frames this narrative, it relates specifically to young children, but there is another version of the tale that speaks more specifically to those who work with older students. While he was not a graduate of UNH or a member of its faculty, the writing teacher Ken Macrorie, an honorary UNH writing tribesman, at least in my mind, sketches a story that is similar to Graves'—one that, like Graves', has significantly influenced the UNH writing tribe.

For his part, Macrorie was dealing with students at the other end of the educational spectrum, college students, and in his book *Telling Writing*, he reports on the consequences of their many years of educational disenchantment, drawing on their writing, which he dubs "Engfish," as evidence for his claims. Here is an example of Engfish produced by one of Macrorie's students:

I went downtown today for the first time. When I got there I was completely astonished by the hustle and the bustle that was going on. My first impression of the downtown area was quite impressive. (12)

What makes this passage English?

Macrorie explains:

The writer said not simply that he was astonished, but completely astonished, as if the word astonished had no force of its own. The student reported (pretended would be a truer word) to have observed hustle and bustle, and then explained in true English that the hustle and bustle was going on. He managed to work in the academic word area, and finished by saying the impression was impressive. (12)

For Macrorie, English serves as evidence of writers committing the worst kind of sin: failing to write honestly.

The remedy?

While for Graves the writing teacher's task is recapturing a sense of the enchantment that children held about writing *before* they entered school, for Macrorie (who was apparently unaware of the disenchantment of your average elementary schooler), the problem could be remedied by recapturing the sense of wonder with which young children wrote. Macrorie cites the following passage, written by a child, as an example of the kind of anti-English he hoped his college students might relearn to write:

I can play huhwayun music on my gettar. It is like when grandma took a sick spell. Now she was shut up tight as a jar with a lid on. She gave a scream. When she gave that scream it was high. But it got lower and lower. Huhwayun music sounds something like that when she was getting lower. (13)

For Macrorie, the difference between this kind of writing and the English cited above is simple and profound: "One is dead, the other alive" (13).

In the second passage, Macrorie argues, "the words speak to each other—high speaks to lower. And the ideas and things speak to each other—the Hawaiian guitar is like grandmother, and when she was sick it was like a jar with a lid on. The whole passage speaks to the reader. It is not pretentious. It is not phony. It is not private" (13).

So how does a student get from "I can play huhwayun music on my gettar" to "My first impression of the downtown area was quite impressive"?

The answer, Macrorie argues, is simple: school. For Macrorie, like Graves, school is the problem when it comes to learning how to write. And so it went (and still goes) for me. Whether my own experience as a student or the experiences of the students I was teaching actually supported the idea that schools were the problem in their writing lives was not a question I asked or considered at the time when I was in the process of becoming a UNH writing teacher teaching a UNH writing course. What I knew with conviction was that when my students arrived at the classroom door, most brought a dreary and uninspired vision of writing—one shaped by too many years spent writing about too many topics that didn't interest them in a form, usually the five-paragraph essay, that too often compressed the complex activity of thinking and writing into a simple, prefabricated process. A UNH writing course, as I taught it, was designed to free students from this prison, to give them back their love of and facility with language, just as it had done for me so many years before in Freshman English.

At this point in my professional development, I embraced the tribe's foundational myth and taught accordingly. But myths are dangerous things, especially for those who don't realize how they're shaping their practice. In time, my embrace of the tribe's foundational myth would be challenged, but during my early years in the classroom, as I worked to become a UNH writing teacher teaching a UNH writing course, I embraced it fully and without question.

CHAPTER XII

MY *TOP 5 LIST* OF THE UNH WRITING TRIBE'S KEY BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WRITING AND ITS TEACHING

Having embraced the UNH writing tribe's foundational myth, I began to operationalize its key beliefs and assumptions about writing and its teaching, to which I was first exposed as an English major at UNH and about which I had been learning in a more studied way since first cracking Murray's *Expecting the Unexpected*. In what follows, with a nod to Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (1995),¹⁷ I offer my Top 5 List of the UNH writing tribe's key beliefs and assumptions about writing and its teaching.¹⁸ Stay with me, reader, for this first of two detours from our story's central narrative.

1. *Anyone can write.*

For Donald Graves, arguing that children were writers was a life's work, anchored in the larger belief that "all children can learn" ("Back to School"). For Donald Murray, the idea that anyone can write was, I believe, more personal, rooted in his desire to come to terms with his own frustrated experiences learning to write in school. Throughout his career, Murray was drawn to students on the margins, the square pegs in education's endless procession of round holes—students who, perhaps, reminded him of himself during his younger days.¹⁹ "Unmotivated students may be motivated to write when they find writing an adventure," he writes in "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery" (141). And, later in that same essay: "Stupid kids may not be stupid. Students classified as slow may simply have the illusion writers know what they are going to say before they say it" (141).

In his essay "Teach the Motivating Force of Revision," Murray writes, "I prefer to teach beginning students, especially remedial students. The reluctant writers have no idea of the importance and excitement of writing, no suspicion that rewriting will let them see their worlds more clearly than they ever have before by using the lens of language" (58). Later in this same essay, both to emphasize his point and to tip his hat to the reader as to his own troubled beginnings, Murray creates the following imagined exchange between a professor and a student (the professor speaks first):

**"What do you do outside of school?"
"Hang around."
"Where?"
"At a fillin' station. The Amoco on Hancock Street."
"Interested in cars?"
"Nope."
"Well, what happens at the station?"
"Not much."
"Nothing interesting?"
"Well, these guys came in the other night, asked me to go for a ride with 'em."
"Well?"
"You read about it in the papers. They killed a guy. I didn't know they had a gun."
"Why didn't you go with them?"
"I don't know. Too lazy I guess. I've wondered about it."
"Could you wonder on paper?"
"I guess."
That happened to me. Not as a teacher. As a student. But no teacher ever drew it out of me—but they could have. And if they had, I might have graduated from high school. There is potential even in the most unlikely student, and it may take a teacher all of ten minutes to tap it. The potential might have been realized in a series of drafts exploring a casual decision made during a boring teenage evening.**

Figure 24 (transcription): "What do you do outside of school?" "Hang around." "Where?" "At a fillin' station. The Amoco on Hancock Street." "Interested in cars?" "Nope." "Well, what happens at the station?" "Not much." "Nothing interesting?" "Well, these guys came in the other night, asked me to go for a ride with 'em." "Well?" "You read about it in the papers. They killed a guy. I didn't know they had a gun." "Why didn't you go with them?" "I don't know. Too lazy I guess. I've wondered about it." "Could you wonder on paper?" "I guess." That happened to me. Not as a teacher. As a student. But no teacher ever drew it out of me—but they could have. And if they had, I might have graduated from high school. There is potential even in the most unlikely student, and it may take a teacher all of ten minutes to tap it. ("Teach the Motivating Force of Revision" 58)

Anyone can write: a belief and, in Murray's case an act of retribution.

2. The content of a writing class is students and their writing.

"Most students rent their pieces and the teachers own them," Graves wrote in his article "Renters and Owners: Donald Graves on Writing" (475). He and Murray set about changing that. They wanted to make students owners of their writing. How did they do it?

Not at first, but eventually, Murray tossed overboard everything that was then known or believed about the teaching of writing—assigned topics, grades, even teachers. In "Perhaps the Professor Should Cut Class," he and collaborator Lester Fisher report on their experiment in a "teacherless" writing class:

We eliminated all class meetings, reduced the preparation time, and placed the emphasis on individual conferences. We designed a course to respond individually to each student's writing. The student's writing became the text in the course, and the teaching method became the teacher responding in

conference to the student's writing. (Fisher and Murray 169)

This was something sort of new in 1973—new, at least, at UNH. While the teaching of writing in U.S. colleges and universities was beginning to change at this time, many instructors were still wedded to a conservative approach focused on teacher-directed topics and mechanical correctness. This kind of teaching, long referred to as current-traditional rhetoric by insiders in the field of writing, required explicit instruction in conventions of grammar, punctuation, and usage and tended to be teacher- and not student-centered. Students wrote themes on topics like “The Jump from High School to College,” or “Public Opinion and the Executive,” or “Homecoming” (these are titles of actual student themes I discovered in the UNH archive, written in the years before Murray and Graves arrived on campus). In their themes, frequently produced in one draft during class, students manufactured “Engfish,” as this excerpt from a UNH student paper called “Leaving Cherished People and Things Behind” illustrate:²⁰

All old friends and memories are left behind when college life begins. They may still be in high school, working for a living, or furthering their education in other colleges. Leaving them behind isn't always the easiest thing to do.

While the content of this student's theme may have been of his own choosing, it's hard to believe he felt a great deal of enthusiasm for the topic (which was assigned). Murray and Graves wanted to change this. They wanted students to find their own topics *and* be invested in them *and* be surprised by them *and* learn from them. Traditional assignment prompts of the kind English teachers gave out in school, like “Write a short essay on what it's like to leave cherished people and things behind,” were, they argued, a hindrance to good writing. “The assignment gives the student too much,” Murray and Fisher write of such prompts in “Perhaps the Professor Should Cut Class.” “It does his work for him” (Fisher and Murray 171). The goal of a UNH writing course, on the other hand, was to give the student the opportunity and obligation to find “his own subject, aimed at his own audience,” and to “select a form which delivers his information and its meaning to his audience” (169).

Subject.

Audience.

Form.

Information.

Meaning.

One could do a lot worse than these in a writing course.²¹

3. *Writing is thinking.*

Murray spent more time on this point than Graves, and while he wasn't the first or last to argue that meaning can (and maybe *should*) be discovered during the act of writing, he made this point in so many different ways that I'll focus mostly on his words in what follows, which I will playfully dub "Three Claims, Three Metaphors, and a Story."

Three Claims

The claim that writers discover meaning through the act of writing contradicts the most basic composing advice students are given in school: make an outline before you begin. Murray was drawn to a more inductive approach, a method that, for my money, is most succinctly expressed in the following three assertions:

- "We use language not so much to report what we know as to discover what we know" ("Why Teach Writing and How?" 1235).
- "The writer finds out what he has to say by writing" (Fisher and Murray 170).
- "For most writers the act of putting words on paper is not the recording of a discovery but the very act of exploration itself" ("Explorers of Inner Space" 908).

Three Metaphors

Here are a few of my favorite Murray metaphors for explaining how the idea that *writing-is-thinking* works:

Now, as I come to the end of this article, still another private experiment with the process of writing, I begin to see, like a photograph slowly evolving in the developer—shadow turning into line—what I have to say because I have dared to try to say it.

Figure 25 (transcription): "Now, as I come to the end of this article, still another private experiment with the process of writing, I begin to see, like a photograph slowly evolving in the developer—shadow turning into line—what I have to say because I have dared to try to say it." ("The Explorers of Inner Space," p. 911)

The fact is that most writers, most of the time, do not know what they want to say before they say it. Some may not even know what they have said after they have said it. Writing is not necessarily built by accretion, but scholarship. It may be the piling up of blocks, but it may also be the shooting of an arrow at a moving target only dimly perceived.

Figure 26 (transcription): "The fact is that most writers, most of the time, do not know what they want to say before they say it. Some may not even know what they have said after they have said it. Writing is not necessarily built by accretion, but scholarship. It may be the piling up of blocks, but it may also be the shooting of an arrow at a moving target only dimly perceived." ("Teach the Motivating Force of Revision," p. 59)

**I
tried to protect myself in a way they
cannot completely understand, allowing
my subconscious to work, avoiding in-
volvement, waiting for the moment
when the line tightens and I must draw
in my catch. (All metaphors are danger-
ous or I would describe the feeling of
the growing idea as intellectual indiges-
tion, a strange, rumbling, eruptive dis-
comfort.)**

Figure 27 (transcription): “I tried to protect myself in a way they cannot completely understand, allowing my subconscious to work, avoiding involvement, waiting for the moment when the line tightens and I must draw in my catch. (All metaphors are dangerous or I would describe the feeling of the growing idea as intellectual indigestion, a strange, rumbling, eruptive discomfort).” (“The Explorers of Inner Space,” p. 909)

And a Story

This is verbatim from Murray’s article “Teach the Motivating Force of Revision”:

Yesterday a student asked me in conference, “What are you doing?” It was a fair question. I was dressed in what passes for University of New Hampshire faculty style—L. L. Bean shirt and Dunham boots—leaning back in my chair, feet on my desk, chatting about old cars and how he felt about them. It might not seem that I was doing anything, and he was paying for the course out of his own pocket.

“I’m following your piece of writing.”

He looked puzzled.

“To see where it may take you.”

“But I’m kind of tired of it. I don’t know if I want to write about that old Volvo any more.”

“Fine. No need to. I’m just kind of interested in that guy who is so

involved in that car he can describe it in hundreds of details. I can see the car now, in this draft, but I'm getting more interested in the guy who saw a vision of a fine car in that rusty hunk of junk. It might be a story."

We sit quietly for a couple of minutes.

"But I can't write a story."

"What do you mean?"

"Well I don't know exactly what I want to say. I haven't got any themes. I mean writing fiction, you have to know so much." He draws a huge map in the air, "Like Tolstoy. A whole world. How everything fits in."

We chat about how writers discover what they have to say, how little they know, how essential is my ignorance of what happens in the next chapter of the novel I am drafting. I point out that he may discover an article on rebuilding junk cars, on mechanics who gouge the unsuspecting, on how to save money repairing a car. We even discuss the possibility of a girl who waves to the fellow working on the car which makes him write a story in which there is no Volvo at all. Our fifteen minutes is up. He turns at the door, "What do you want me to do?"

"Write."

"Well, what? What do you expect me to do?"

"Whatever you want. I want to be surprised. You don't know what you're going to write, how can I know? It wouldn't be any fun if I did." (58)

4. Writing teachers must also be writers.

Murray and Graves saw a connection between a teacher's ability to teach writing and her engagement with the practice. In making this argument, they frequently drew on the analogy of other kinds of teachers practicing their craft. Here's Murray: "It is hard to imagine a music teacher who has never made music, or an art teacher who has never drawn a picture but, unfortunately, it is normal to have writing teachers who have written only academic papers—and shockingly few of those" ("Teach the Motivating Force of Revision" 59). And here's Graves, making roughly the

same point:

Seldom do people teach well what they do not practice themselves. It would be unheard of for teachers of music or art not to practice their craft. For some reason, the craft of writing is seen as an exception. What is not valued by teachers in their personal lives will not be introduced into the lives of children" (*Balance the Basics* 15).

That last line seems to get right to the heart of it: one might assume that teachers value reading in their personal lives, perhaps even cultivate an identity as a reader. It's easy to imagine how that identity of "reader" carries over into one's classroom. Why shouldn't it be the same with writing? It *should* be the same, both Murray and Graves contended.

I'll give the final word on the teachers-must-be-writers point to Graves, who was a masterful storyteller and builder of metaphors. Here he is at his most persuasive on why teachers of writing must also be writers:

We need to have teachers who write themselves, I just can't stress the importance of that enough. And teachers need help with their own writing — where they have their writing responded to as they would hope to be able to respond to students' writing. The reason that many teachers don't write with students is (1) it's never occurred to them; (2) they've never ever seen a human being doing it in their entire lives. But for me the metaphor is, when you write you undress, and if you want to be able to write well you have to be willing to be a professional nudist. Now there's nothing more upsetting than to have someone walking around fully clothed in a nudist camp, and that often is the teacher, saying 'Hmnn, well, that's a funny navel', 'Hmnn, didn't the Lord give you a better body than that one?' I think that's immoral.

Figure 28 (transcription): "We need to have teachers who write themselves, I just can't stress the importance of that enough. The reason that many teachers don't write with students is (1) it's never occurred to them; (2) they've never ever seen a human being doing it in their entire lives. But for me the metaphor is, when you write you undress, and if you want to be able to write well you have to be willing to be a professional nudist. Now there's nothing more upsetting than to have someone walking around fully clothed in a nudist camp, and that often is the teacher, saying 'Hmnn, well, that's a funny navel', 'Hmnn, didn't the Lord give you a better body than that one?' I think that's immoral." ("Renters and Owners" 474)

5. *Diversity is a strength in the writing classroom.*

Near the end of his essay “A Writer’s Geography: One Writer at Work,” Murray writes, “In closing I would like to go back over this expedition and point out some things I see that may have implications for the classroom. I expect you will see others—and not agree with all of mine. Good. My theology is based on difference” (193).

That last line, *my theology is based on difference*, captures a key belief of the UNH writing tribe about the value of diversity. Of course, Murray’s claim here is meant in the context of teaching, as in, “You’ll see different implications for the classroom in this essay than I do and that’s okay,” but around the time I encountered this passage I was also working my way through Murray’s two memoirs, each of which recounts numerous painful school memories from his early life. In *My Twice-Lived Life*, Murray describes himself as “one of the dumb kids sitting in the back row,” (141), but also a “secret scholar” (134) who “accepted the documented fact that [he] was stupid,” despite the reality that he “was placed in the highest levels of a thirteen track system because of [his] IQ test” scores (132).

Murray’s early experiences in school led him to a theme that he returned to throughout his career, and one that is captured in the title of an article he published in a New Hampshire newspaper in the late 1970s: “Not-So-Good-Old-Days.” According to Murray, “the good old days in education weren’t so good—not for most of us” (10). School was “something to be survived,” mostly because it was a process of trying to fit a whole bunch of square pegs, like Murray, into a curriculum of round holes. Murray was hopeful about and encouraged by the reforms in teaching that he saw taking place during his lifetime, though, as he explains here in this passage, taken from his autobiography, *My Twice-Lived Life*:

The teachers these days are far better educated than my teachers were, far more dedicated to teaching, far more willing to try new methods of teaching, and determined to reach out to the students ignored in the days of my youth, the students who come from disadvantaged homes, students with learning disabilities, students from different ethnic or language backgrounds, students with emotional, mental, or physical limitations.

Figure 29 (transcription): "The teachers these days are far better educated than my teachers were, far more dedicated to teaching, far more willing to try new methods of teaching, and determined to reach out to the students ignored in the days of my youth, the students who come from disadvantaged homes, students with learning disabilities, students from different ethnic or language backgrounds, students with emotional, mental, or physical limitations." (141)

The inclusion of different types of students in the classroom was, as Murray (and Graves) saw it, a positive development.

CHAPTER XIII

MY *TOP 5 LIST* OF THE KEY TRAITS OF A UNH WRITING TEACHER

My review of the work of the UNH tribal elders, combined with my longtime tribal affiliation, has led me to the belief that, while not everyone enacts the identity of a *UNH writing teacher* in the same way, there are some common traits that many UNH writing teachers share. Our having developed these traits is, I imagine, similar to most processes of subject formation: none of us was *born* a UNH writing teacher, but there was something in each of us that was *drawn* to the role. In what follows, I pursue a second and final digression from our story's central narrative to attempt the admittedly impossible task of explicating the key traits of a *UNH writing teacher*.

1. *We listen.*

As anyone who has graduated from college can tell you, professors are talkers. They *profess*. But Murray and Graves cultivated and encouraged a different way of being in the classroom, one that flipped the script. Students were to talk; professors were to listen (and respond).

Murray spent a considerable portion of his career learning how to become a listener. In his essay "The Listening Eye," he writes,

I feel as if I have been searching for years for the right questions, questions which would establish a tone of master and apprentice, no, the voice of a fellow craftsman having a conversation about a piece of work, writer to writer, neither praise nor criticism but questions which imply further drafts, questions which draw helpful comments out of the student writer. (152)

To the reader's delight, Murray shares his list of "the right" questions:

- What did you learn from this piece of writing?
- What do you intend to do in the next draft?
- What surprised you in the draft?
- Where is the piece of writing taking you?
- What do you like best in the piece of writing?
- What questions do you have of me? (151)

Why did Murray emphasize listening? My sense is that he felt profoundly uncomfortable with the role of professor, or, more specifically, with the act of *professing*.²² He didn't feel he knew all the capital-A answers, didn't believe he knew the capital-T truth, and as someone who came to academia late and without a PhD, seemed to feel he had as much to learn from his students as they from him. He attempts to explain all of this here:²³

Those of us who teach the writing process are comfortable with constant change. This sets us apart from many people in the academic world who teach in a traditional or classical mode, believing there are truths which can be learned and passed on from teacher to student, from generation to generation. Their conception has its attractions; it is the one I was taught. But my life as a writer and as a teacher of writing leads me—as similar experience has led others—to a different tradition which some call developmental or truly humanistic. (“Writing as Process” 25)

The listening posture, this capacity to ask questions and learn from those one is teaching rather than pass along eternal truths, is a key trait of a UNH writing teacher. My use of the term posture here is intentional as it allows me to wrap up this first point I am trying to make with an admittedly long passage in which Murray captures a sense of the embodied nature of listening that is characteristic of UNH writing tribesmen and -women:

I realize I not only teach the writing process, I follow it in my conferences. In the early conferences, the prewriting conferences, I go to my students; I ask questions about their subject, or if they don't have a subject, about their lives. What do they know that I don't know? What are they authorities on? What would they like to know? What would they like to explore? I probably lean forward in these conferences; I'm friendly, interested in them as individuals, as people who may have something to say.

Then, as their drafts begin to develop and as they find the need for focus, for shape, for form, I'm a bit removed, a fellow writer who shares his own writing problems, his own search for meaning and form.

Finally, as the meaning begins to be found, I lean back, I'm more the reader, more interested in the language, in clarity. I have begun to detach myself from the writer and from the piece of writing which is telling the student how to write it. We become fascinated by this detachment which is forced on us as a piece of writing discovers its own purpose.

After the paper is finished and the student starts on another, we go back through the process again and I'm amused to feel myself leaning forward, looking for a subject with my student. I'm not coy. If I know something I think will help the student, I share it. But I listen first—and listen hard (appearing casual)—

to hear what my student needs to know. ("The Listening Eye" 154-155)

2. *We don't lead, we follow.*

This second element of a UNH writing teacher's identity is similar to, perhaps even an extension of, the one I described above. To be sure, following students—following their ideas, their purposes, their desires—is an outgrowth of the listening impulse, but I'd like to linger on this notion of *following* because I think it's a key element of tribal identity and because, like listening, it's a trait that runs counter to the disposition of the typical college professor.

In addition to professing, professors lead or direct. They instruct. They tell people what to do. Not so with a UNH writing teacher. We listen and respond. We are nondirective (or we try to be). We follow students and coach them as best we can, trying to show them what they are capable of and, when they have written, what they have done. The basic idea is this: students write about topics they find interesting and we follow them wherever they go—advising, consulting, encouraging, teaching, sometimes criticizing, but mostly supporting and enthusing about them and their projects.

For Graves, the disposition of following and responding was rooted, at least in part, in his research. In *A Researcher Learns to Write*, Graves reminds readers that making generalizations, "finding something in one human being that can be used with another," is the purpose of much academic research, but at Atkinson Academy, the site of his well-known study of children's writing, he faltered in his ability to generate generalizations about children's writing processes ("Don't Underestimate" in *A Researcher Learns to Write* 169). As the project progressed, Graves found that "individual exceptions within the data increased," because "every child had behavioral characteristics that applied to that child alone" ("Don't Underestimate" in *A Researcher Learns to Write* 169). Initially, Graves reports, this finding was depressing and discouraging. But when he stepped back and reconsidered his understanding of the purpose of academic research, he began to realize that discovering and tracking similarities in the data to make generalizations might be considered not the end goal in the process but, rather, "a first step" to the larger, perhaps more important process of "seeing the true differences that are

present in every person" ("A Case Study" in *A Researcher Learns to Write* 143).

At Atkinson, Graves discovered it wasn't just that it was challenging to generalize about children engaged in the writing process; it was also difficult to generalize about the writing process *itself*. Writing, he found, did consist of a number of identifiable steps, or what Graves sometimes called "ingredients" (i.e., topic selection, rehearsing, information access, spelling, handwriting, reading, organizing, editing, and revising), but it was difficult to identify a progression through which writers passed when they wrote. "There is no set order to the writing process," Graves concluded. "It is highly idiosyncratic and varies within the writer from day to day" ("A Case Study" in *A Researcher Learns to Write* 146). It is exactly this "highly idiosyncratic" and variable process, Graves concluded, that necessitated what Newkirk and Kittle have dubbed Graves' "waiting, responsive type of teaching" (29). Here's Graves, himself, explaining how this responsive style works:

Behaviors of Writers Are Idiosyncratic and Highly Variable

The teaching of writing is a response to what a writer shows either in oral or written statements. Until a child writes or speaks, it is difficult for the teacher to know what to do because of the inherent idiosyncracies or variabilities of each writer. Just as quarterbacks don't make a move until the defense is read, teachers don't respond until the child shows where he is in both information and process on that particular day.

Figure 30 (transcription): "The teaching of writing is a response to what a writer shows either in oral or written statements. Until a child writes or speaks, it is difficult for the teacher to know what to do because of the inherent idiosyncrasies or variabilities of each writer. Just as quarterbacks don't make a move until the defense is read, teachers don't respond until the child shows where he is in both information and process on that particular day." ("A Case Study" in *A Researcher Learns to Write*, 158)

For Graves, cultivating the disposition of one who waits, watches, follows, and responds was necessitated by the very nature of the act of writing itself. Any other approach—one, say, more top-down—would fail to recognize the needs of actual students engaged in actual acts of composing. "Teachers who *respond*, who follow what children say and do, will be able to see differences among writers and to help the individual child write," Graves concluded (emphasis

original (“A Case Study” in *A Researcher Learns to Write* 159). Elsewhere, he is more direct: “There is always the issue of when to intervene and when not to intervene in a writer’s work. I lean toward not intervening, to giving the writer more responsibility, more credit for knowing more about the subject” (*A Researcher* 185).

We have, Graves and Murray have taught us, much to learn from our students if we will just listen, wait, and *then* respond.

3. *We adopt a learning mindset.*

The irony, of course, is that given their stature in their respective fields, neither Murray nor Graves needed to adopt or enact a learning mindset. And given their status as college professors, such a role was almost anathema—professors don’t *learn*, they *teach* (students learn).

And yet both men self-consciously framed themselves as learners throughout their careers and both wrote extensively about their learning. What does a learning mindset of the kind they adopted look like in practice? Here’s Murray, in a passage taken from the first chapter of his popular textbook *The Craft of Revision*:

This book is different because the author is still learning to write. Each page reflects what I am learning as I write and rewrite this textbook. Write along with me. Try your own experiments in meaning, use your language to explore your world as I use my language to explore my world.

It is all a matter of trial and instructive error. I try to say what I cannot yet say and fail but find the failure instructive. It shows me another way to attempt to say what I have not before said. Fail with me. (5)

Let’s look at all the learning mindset packed into this short passage. First, there’s the paradox of a textbook writer (who had, by the time he wrote this book, already written many others) confessing that he’s still learning how to write his own book *while* writing it. This move deconstructs Murray’s authority and reconstructs him as one who is still *in process*, still learning. Next, there’s the invitation—from a Pulitzer Prize winner!—to write *with* him. Here, Murray continues to downplay his authority while simultaneously intimating that there might be something he can learn from you, dear reader (and writer). Next, there’s the idea, inherent

in almost all of Murray's work, that writing is a process of making "experiments in meaning." Writing, in other words, is itself a learning act. Finally, there's the paradoxical injunction "Fail with me," which implies that readers should expect not just that the accomplished writer composing the words they are reading will fail, but that they themselves will also fail—that failure is an *expected* and *necessary* part of the learning process.²⁴

Graves too embraced a learning mindset, but he took it one step further, encouraging the students and teachers with whom he worked to share what he called "learning stories"—classroom tales which he believed could inform "the writer as well as the reader" and were "essential for teacher growth and joy in teaching" (Newkirk and Kittle 167). Graves told four kinds of learning stories: stories about what he was learning from children, stories about what he was learning from teachers, stories about what he was learning about conducting and disseminating research, and stories about what he was learning about himself as a writer. Let's look at an example of the kind of story Graves told most often: the kind where he related what he was learning from children.

The purpose of much of Graves' research, as he explains in his article "Let Children Show Us How to Help Them Write," was "to describe in detail the 'what' of composing in order to explain the 'why'" (85). In order to describe the "what," Graves had to learn from children what they were doing when they wrote, and at Atkinson Academy, he and his research team spent two years doing just that. In *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, Graves tells countless learning stories about the children (and teachers) he was observing.²⁵ Flip to any page in the book and you'll find a learning story like this one about a child named Debbie, age nine:

Ms. Ballard marked Debbie absent on three successive days in the register before she actually missed her presence in the room. Debbie is quiet, plainly but neatly dressed, and speaks with few other children, with the exception of Katherine, her closest friend. Debbie is hard to notice. When Ms. Ballard made a list of her twenty-seven children's names from memory, Debbie's name was among the three she couldn't remember. Debbie slips by, as do her problems in writing. Debbie has a difficult time choosing good topics, and her spelling stands in the way of any fluency in writing. (199)

A few pages after introducing Debbie, Graves tells another learning story about Ms.

Ballard's attempts to help Debbie develop greater writing fluency. Then he provides an extended bit of back-and-forth between Debbie and Ms. Ballard, excerpted from one of their writing conferences. Finally, he closes, as we see in the passage below, by shifting from storytelling to analysis and assertion, the end goal of telling a learning story:

Both Fiona and Debbie believe they cannot write because of a problem in a basic skill. Before they wrote in spite of their problems; now they equate their skill problems with not being able to say something worthwhile. The lack of skill has removed the possibility of saying something worthwhile about a subject they feel they can control. (203)

And so it goes throughout the book, which functions, in some ways, less as a research monograph and more as an extended series of learning stories about all that Graves was learning from his interactions with children and teachers during his two years at Atkinson.

Both Graves and Murray embraced the identity of *learner* throughout their careers, relishing the chance to tell stories about what they were learning—about writing, about teaching, and about teaching writing. In so doing, they encouraged their followers to adopt a learner's mindset as well, shifting the traditional and familiar academic game from one where what matters is what you *know* to one where what matters is what you are *coming* to know.

4. We are oppositional to the traditional values of school.

I've already touched on this point above when I talked about the tribe's foundational myth. Graves and Murray both believed that schools needed to change in order for students to learn how to write. Coming from outside of higher education and joining the academic community later in life, they were both reformers at heart.²⁶

Graves' reform agenda stemmed in large part from the fact that he felt that schools so frequently shortchanged writing and writing instruction. Reading reigned in the 1970s when Graves began his research into children's writing processes, and he saw this as one of the primary reasons why children struggled so much with writing. In his 1978 Ford Foundation Report *Balance the Basics: Let Them Write*, Graves cited a range of sources to demonstrate the unequal societal investment in reading over writing. Even teacher-certification requirements,

he found, furthered the imbalance between teaching reading and teaching writing, with few programs requiring of pre-service teachers even one course in writing and pedagogy. "Although writing is frequently extolled, worried over, and cited as a public priority," Graves argued, "it is seldom practiced in schools" (13).

Murray wanted to reform schools for many reasons, but principle among them was his contention that schools teach writing, if they teach it at all, poorly. How do they do this?

1.They teach the written product, not the writing process.

Murray: "Instead of teaching finished writing, we should teach unfinished writing and glory in its unfinishedness" ("Teach Writing" 12).

2.They give students assignments for which they feel little to no motivation.

Murray: "When you give [the student] an assignment you tell [the student] what to say and how to say it, and thereby cheat [him] of the opportunity to learn the process of discovery we call writing" ("Teach Writing" 13).

3.They neglect or ignore students who may have interesting things to say.

Murray: "We command our students to write and grow frustrated when our 'bad' students hesitate, stare out the window, dawdle over blank paper, give up and say, 'I can't write,' while the 'good' students smugly pass their papers in before the end of the period" ("Write Before Writing" 28).

4.They rob students of the opportunity to own their own words.

Murray: "[The teacher] not only denies his students freedom, he even goes further and performs the key writing tasks for his students. He gives an assignment; he lists sources; he dictates the form; and, by irresponsibly conscientious correcting, he actually revises his students' papers" ("Finding Your Own Voice" 118).

5.They fail to respect students and their discursive intentions.

Murray: "We have to respect the student, not for his product, not for the paper we call literature by giving it a grade, but for the search for truth in which he is engaged. We must listen carefully for those words that may reveal a truth, that may reveal a voice.

We must respect our student for his potential truth and for his potential voice. We are coaches, encouragers, developers, creators of environments in which our students can experience the writing process for themselves" ("Teach Writing" 13).

Both Murray and Graves set about reforming schools so they could reform the teaching of writing within them. They sought to create an antischool space within schools where writing could receive equal weight with reading and could be taught effectively. That was their major project, and it became the major project of many in the UNH writing tribe.

5. We are enthusiastic about students and their writing.

During an interview I conducted with Donald Murray while I was in the doctoral program at UNH in the early 2000s, Murray described Carroll Towle, one of his own teachers from his years at UNH (1946-48), as an *enthusiast*: "Towle was enthusiastic about you and enthusiastic about your work," Murray explained. Towle passed enthusiasm down to Murray and Murray passed it down to the rest of us in the tribe. We were all to be enthusiasts, including Graves, who was a born enthusiast who never had to work a day in his life to develop this trait.

Of course, as with many traits of a UNH writing teacher, an enthusiastic outlook toward students and their work runs counter to the tradition among college professors. First and foremost, professors are enthusiasts about their subjects. The good ones are able to convey a sense of this enthusiasm to their students, perhaps lighting a fire in their charges to look further into, say, vertebrate biology, integrodifferential equations, or Russian films of the early Soviet era. But rare is the college professor who feels some level of enthusiasm for her young charges *themselves*. Rarer still is the prof who feels enthusiasm for their *writing*.

Murray and Graves taught us to delight in our students and their words. For Murray, embracing an enthusiastic outlook may have been the torch he carried for Towle,²⁷ paying it forward for all Towle had done for him,²⁸ or it may have been a kind of revenge that Murray enacted on those many colleagues he encountered as a professor at UNH who seemed to dread their interactions with students and their writing. In his essay "Why Teach Writing—and How?", Murray suggests as much, arguing that perhaps he and his writing colleagues "should keep the joy of teaching writing a secret from our literature-oriented colleagues; perhaps we should not

reveal our secret eagerness to read each batch of weekly papers" (1237). He continues:

Perhaps we should continue to look like martyrs as we lug home our students' papers; perhaps then our colleagues will leave the writing courses to us, and they will not discover that writing not only should be taught and can be taught, but also that it is especially satisfying to teach.

Figure 31 (transcription): "Perhaps we should continue to look like martyrs as we lug home our students' papers; perhaps then our colleagues will leave the writing courses to us, and they will not discover that writing not only should be taught and can be taught, but also that it is especially satisfying to teach." ("Why Teach Writing—and How?" p. 1237)

As has perhaps been the case too often in this essay, the last word here will go to Murray who, in "Why Teach Writing—and How?" offers seven reasons why we need to teach writing to our students, closing with this eighth simple and blasphemous reason: "It is fun" (1237).

Such admissions might be viewed by others as "unsophisticated—almost unprofessional," Murray concedes, but for him there was enormous fun in "reading a page which is honest, specific, and clean; of hearing a student speak with self-respect and authority for the first time" (1237). So it is with the rest of us. As UNH writing teachers, we look forward to reading our students' writing, remind our cranky colleagues that we're not so much *grading papers* as we are *responding to student work*, and remind ourselves, when the going gets tough, that there is a human being on the other side of the words we're reading who wants and needs to be heard.

We will meet her and her words with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XIV

QUARTER-LIFE CRISIS

Notes of a Native Son

After graduating from the University of Iowa in the spring of 1999 and having come some distance towards internalizing the UNH writing tribe's foundational myth, learning its key values and assumptions, and learning how to enact its teacherly identity, I returned to New England and found a job teaching English at Braintree High School, just outside Boston, five or so short miles, as it turned out, from Wollaston, Massachusetts, where Donald Murray was born and grew up.

The woman who hired me, the English Department chair, was far advanced in her tenure but enthusiastic about my potential. She offered a mixed schedule that included a section of Honors American Literature, an advanced writing course, and two sections of Freshman English. Shortly after my hiring was finalized, she invited me back to the school for a tour and to retrieve the books I was to teach that fall. My troubles began near the end of the tour when we arrived in the book room, which was located in the basement of the school and smelled of dust and old paper. As we walked the tight aisles through the shelves, I scanned the stacks of well-worn paperbacks that I both knew I would need to teach at some point and simultaneously felt myself dreading the thought of ever teaching. It was largely, but not entirely, a conservative collection in the book room—"the classics," as some might say. As we made our way through the aisles, my department chair dropped dog-eared copies of the books I was to teach that fall into a box she had brought down from the copy room. When we were done, my summer reading card now full, I carried my box up and out of the basement and headed out into the bright sunshine of an early summer day. I drove home with a nervous, sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach and left the box in the trunk of the car when I got home.

Every weekend that summer, I took a few of the books I was to teach with me to the beach. Some I hadn't read since high school, others I had never read. In late July, a few failed weeks into *The Red Badge of Courage*, something finally clicked in my head.

For three Sundays, sitting in the sand on lazy summer afternoons as children and families played all around me and my girlfriend sat at my side devouring chick-lit novels, I had tried to force myself through Stephen Crane's experiment in realism (or was it naturalism? I could never keep them straight). For three Sundays, I had failed. I was coming to accept that I couldn't do

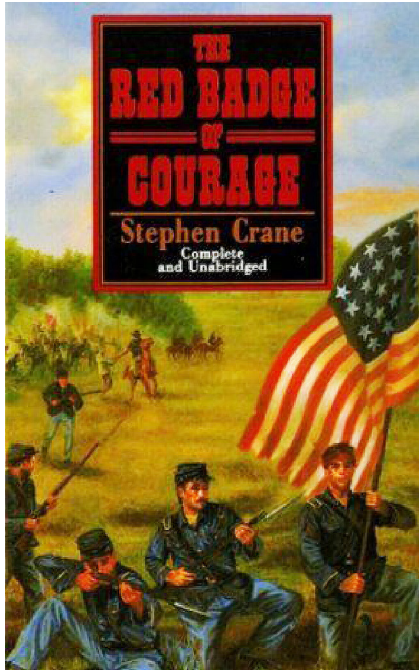


Figure 32:
Red Badge of Courage
by Stephen Crane

it. I couldn't teach this book, couldn't teach many of the books I was scheduled to teach. I didn't think that reading them was necessary or useful or that writing essays about them was a worthwhile use of a person's time. The students would just read the Cliff's Notes and write meaningless five-paragraph themes. I would suffer through their papers and assign meaningless grades. We would all be miserable. And if this was what I felt, how could I, in good conscience, stand up in front of a group of young people and pretend that I didn't feel this way?

I couldn't.

The following Monday, just a month shy of the start of the new school year, I called my department chair and told her I wasn't coming.

CHAPTER XV

A BRIEF LOST-IN-THE-WILDERNESS PERIOD

Without a teaching job for the fall, I was set adrift on an open sea of possibility. All I had known of life was school. Now, with a new academic year fast approaching and no role for me to play in it, I had no idea what to do with myself. After earning an undergraduate degree in English at UNH, traveling halfway across the country to pursue a master's degree at Iowa so I could become a high school English teacher, and then traveling back across the country to land a job actually teaching at a high school in Massachusetts, I suddenly seemed to feel that teaching English wasn't for me. But if I wasn't going to teach, what was I going to do? And what about my membership in the UNH writing tribe? If I moved on to another career, would that too be lost?

In the short term, the reality was that there were bills to pay and student loans coming due. Upon hearing about my changed plans for the fall, an older friend who was launching an internet startup company on the New Hampshire seacoast selling computer peripherals offered me a job. I jumped at it and began the work of convincing myself that I was excited to do something entirely different, something spontaneous and unexpected and potentially more lucrative than teaching high school English.

Within the first week, maybe within the first day, maybe within the first *hour*, I knew I had made a mistake. I didn't want to buy and sell things. I wanted to shape minds. I wanted to share my passion for language and ideas. I wanted to be part of an organization whose *raison d'être* was learning, not profit. And I wanted to extend the work of my tribe.

Realizing this, now that I couldn't have it, was oddly clarifying. In the evenings after work, I combed the paper, searching for a long-term substitute teacher gig. Miraculously, I found one not far from where I was living at the time and went for an interview. I was offered the position on the spot, and the next day I delivered the news to my friend that I was leaving. I had been there just a few months. He was upset and he let me know it, but he said something that I needed to hear, something that has stayed with me: *Stop wasting everyone's time and figure out what you want to do with yourself. Then go do it.* It was good advice. I told him I would try my best to take it.

The rest of that academic year, I worked at Billerica Memorial High School in

northeastern Massachusetts, teaching American literature and Freshman English. While I was relieved to have escaped selling computer peripherals, my time at Billerica confirmed my sense that teaching high school English was not what I wanted to do with myself (but I still finished out the year). The idealized version of the work that I had been presented with (or chosen to believe in) during graduate school failed to materialize once I was inside an actual high school with actual students, colleagues, and administrators. The system was too entrenched. There were so many rules—rules I was supposed to enforce. High school was a drag—for all of us.

As my long-term sub position wound down that spring and I faced the looming question of what I was going to do with myself come fall, I decided to scour the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for college teaching gigs. I had enjoyed teaching freshman comp at Iowa during graduate school. Perhaps college teaching was something I needed to consider more seriously.

I reached out to members of my UNH writing tribe and they put me in touch with friends and colleagues around the region. Soon the phone was ringing with requests for interviews, and by early summer I had part-time teaching gigs lined up at four different colleges in New Hampshire, including UNH, where I was to teach two sections of Freshman English. It had been less than ten years since I had taken the course myself. I was going home.

CHAPTER XVI

A LEARNING STORY

That year that I worked as an adjunct English instructor, one of two I spent happily criss-crossing New Hampshire to teach writing and literature to about as diverse a range of students as one is going to find in the great Granite State, I labored in the spoiled vineyards of low-status college teaching, basking in the dim glow of contingent labor. My status never bothered me, though. I loved the work. And when I wasn't teaching, I was writing—drafting short stories, sketching essays, and submitting poems. Happily, college teaching also meant a return to the writing life.

One afternoon in the spring of that year, I found myself standing before a bulletin board in the basement of Hamilton Smith Hall, staring at a poster that announced a call for papers. Some of my fellow Freshman English instructors were putting together an edited collection on teaching, and they were inviting stories from the classroom. I took the poster down, folded it, and slipped it into my bag. I would submit something, I decided. What did I have to lose?

My first academic publication, if one can call it that, appeared in the book that resulted from that call for papers. *What to Expect When You're Expected to Teach: The Anxious Craft of Teaching Composition* (Bramblett and Knoblauch) is a compendium of Gravesian learning stories told by UNH writing tribesmen and -women who are still relatively new to the tribe's work. The book is chock-full of essays with titles like "'This is Duct Tape': Holding it Together During Your First Semester." My chapter, "Waiting for Surprise," is worth lingering over for a moment because it provides a vivid sense of who I had become as a teacher, writer, and scholar by the time I wrote it.

Having accumulated just enough teaching experience to be dangerous, in "Waiting for Surprise" I grapple with two problems I was encountering teaching a *UNH writing course* with the help of my bible, Murray's *The Craft of Revision*. First, there was the problem of surprise. Murray was a strong advocate of surprise in the writing classroom, of *writing-to-learn*, so I was too. The problem, I was finding, was that many students struggled to reorient themselves to this new paradigm. "I like to make an outline before I write so I know where I'm going and don't waste any time," one student would inevitably announce in class, and suddenly other heads would be nodding in agreement. I would counter, explaining that with write-to-learn, where

vi	Contents
3	Waiting for Surprise Michael J. Michaud 20
	<i>"The fact that so many of my students write essays that center around the importance of teamwork and overcoming adversity seems to confirm that Little League and varsity coaches alike are getting their messages across. . . . I would be proud to have a son or daughter compose an essay that shows the way he or she learned the value of hard work and team effort. So why is it I wonder each time I receive another sports narrative, that I cannot stand reading such essays?"</i>
4	Minimum Requirements Alison Knoblauch 24
	<i>"She remembers back a few years . . . to her own college career and her amazement at how few hours there truly are in the day. So she gives them time in class to revise, gives them so much feedback, suggestions, even meets one on one with her students to discuss their papers. And what does she get? In a word . . . mediocrity."</i>
5	Teachable Moments Chrissy Cooper 29
	<i>"If you have a clear vision of yourself as a teacher, have clear expectations, and clear lessons, you're halfway there. The other half of teaching, however, isn't learned through teaching classes—it's passed along by practicing teachers, and it's learned on the job."</i>
6	Life and Breath Kathleen Toomey Jabs 32
	<i>"When I called her name, Melissa slid out of her desk, stood up, nodded at some of her group mates across the circle, and held up the ventilator. 'I have cystic fibrosis,' she said, 'and this is part of my treatment.' "</i>

Figure 33: Excerpt from Table of Contents, *What to Expect When You're Expected to Teach: The Anxious Craft of Teaching Composition* (Bramblett & Knoblauch)

you're going reveals itself *during* the act of writing. "That," I would say, "is what makes writing interesting—even makes it *fun*." This sort of statement elicited mostly confused looks from the students, which clearly signaled how not-fun my words sounded in their ears. Teaching first-year college students to use writing to surprise themselves and to learn was, I was discovering, a lot more difficult than I had anticipated. "What if I don't discover anything?", a student would inevitably ask. It was a good question. I didn't have a good answer. I couldn't recall a time when I didn't surprise myself or discover something new when I wrote.

My second problem teaching a *UNH writing course* had to do with the fact that, given the chance to write about whatever they wanted, students frequently wrote about topics that I found unsurprising, predictable, and, if I am to be honest, offensive to the aesthetic sensibilities I had developed as an English major and continued to hold to as an English teacher. One such topic, and the one I take up in "Waiting for Surprise," is the *sports narrative*. "Always written by former athletes and usually written by males (but increasingly popular among female students as well), the sports narrative," I explain,

concerns itself with some kind of adversity the student conquered on the playing field or arena, usually during high school. Its setting is the BIG season, the BIG game, or the BIG play. Its "moral" or "life lesson" is predictable and ranges from "this experience taught me that no matter the obstacle, you should never stop reaching for your goals" to "from this experience I learned that anything is possible with teamwork." (Michaud 20)

Despite the fact that I had been an athlete my entire life and so should have been sympathetic to sports narratives, my problem with them was that (a) the writer composing the narrative almost always failed to do so in a way that enacted the essayistic sensibility that good nonfiction writing necessitates, and (b) student writers of sports narratives rarely surprised themselves (or me) with any new insights or revelations. Sports narratives seemed to offer few opportunities for serious, non clichéd meaning-making, always ending with some pat message about the importance of good coaching or winning not being the most important thing.

The more of these papers I read, the more I came to question a writing pedagogy that allowed students the freedom and flexibility to compose such utterly mundane essays. And yet

always in the background was my own experience in Freshman English, where I had been given the chance to write about topics of interest to me and had thrived. And always, there was the tribe's key belief: *the content of a writing class is students and their writing*. My job was to listen, follow, and respond. These responsibilities felt increasingly unsatisfying, though, now that I was tasked with enacting them.

So where did my ruminations in "Waiting for Surprise" ultimately lead me? What did this learning-story-disguised-as-an-essay teach its author and what did he hope it might teach others?

My story taught me the only thing, really, that I was capable of learning at the time: that the problem was not my students and not the pedagogy I was enacting. It was me. *I* needed to be more patient. *I* needed to accept that I too had once been a nineteen-year-old former high school athlete who might have written a sports narrative and imposed upon it some pat message about hard work paying off (without the least sense of irony). In "Waiting for Surprise," I could only conclude that the solution to the problem I was facing was that I needed to change—I needed to "try to be more patient with those sports narratives" (23). In the closing section of my essay, I write,

Even with a renewed sense of patience, I don't expect that my frustration over receiving sports narratives, or similar essays, in my first-year writing courses is going to dissipate any time soon. But I have learned this: that to expect my students will learn how to "surprise" themselves in writing—how to make discoveries *through* the act of writing—in one semester, when it took me several years to learn is simply unrealistic. Like my students, I, too, will have to wait for the surprise to come, and while I won't give up on the importance of discovery and surprise in a piece of writing, and I won't give up trying to foster it in my students' work, I won't be so disappointed if, in the span of a single fifteen-week semester, it doesn't come.

Figure 34 (transcription): "Even with a renewed sense of patience, I don't expect my frustration over receiving sports narratives, or similar essays, in my first-year writing courses is going to dissipate anytime soon. But I have learned this: that to expect my students will learn how to "surprise" themselves in writing—how to make discoveries through the act of writing—in one semester, when it took me several years to learn is simply unrealistic. Like my students, I, too, will have to wait for the surprise to come, and while I won't give up on the importance of discovery and surprise in a piece of writing, and I won't give up on trying to foster it in my students' work, I won't be disappointed if, in the span of a single fifteen-week semester, it doesn't come." (23)

It's a nice note on which to end, but as I view the photograph of myself that is my first academic publication from the vista I occupy today, two perhaps contradictory notions occur to me. First, I see the place where I arrive at the end of "Waiting for Surprise" as a healthy one for a new teacher. I don't blame my students for the problems I am experiencing. I turn the issue back on myself, asking what role I am playing in the situation. This seems like the sort of reflective capacity that most of us would like to see in our teachers (and not just the young ones).

Second, though, I note the lack of options that the younger me seems to find in his situation—the lack of awareness I seem to have about the pedagogical choices I have made that have brought me to this place of frustration. I seem so invested in recreating for my students something approaching the experience I had as an undergraduate, so wrapped up in being a *UNH writing teacher teaching a UNH writing class*, that I cannot imagine what else I might have asked my students to do if not write expository essays towards the goal of self-discovery and greater self-awareness.

And this is because when I wrote "Waiting for Surprise," I really *couldn't* have said what else I might have asked them to do. My knowledge of writing pedagogy extended only to the outer edges of the forest of awareness that the tribe had given me up to that point. Soon, though, this would change.

CHAPTER XVII

MORE CRACKS IN THE FAÇADE

Fervent believers always set themselves up for a fall. The curtain gets pulled back. The cracks in the façade begin to appear. And when they do, one must adjust to the new normal, figure out where one stands in relation to the world as it is now configured, accept a new reality.

So it was with me at this time. While it's true that I was already beginning to experience some level of cognitive dissonance with regard to the teaching of a *UNH writing course* before I set foot back in the classroom at UNH as a doctoral student in the fall of 2002, the coursework in which I engaged while in the program opened the floodgates to serious reflection, reconsideration, and rethinking as regards the methods and goals of writing instruction.

I met, on the page, the person most responsible for the intellectual flooding during my first semester back in graduate school in a course on the history of teaching composition. James Berlin was one of the preeminent scholars in the larger tribe of composition and rhetoric to which I had now, as a doctoral student, apprenticed myself. In his essay "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," I discovered that Berlin was an opponent of the kind of composition teaching I had learned from my UNH writing tribe, which he dubbed *expressionistic rhetoric*, and I found a taxonomy which opened my eyes to the several different approaches to the teaching of composition that Berlin found in the field at the time he was writing. I was also confronted with a challenge:

One conclusion should now be incontestable. The numerous recommendations of the "process"-centered approaches to writing instruction as superior to the "product"-centered approaches are not very useful. Everyone teaches the process of writing, but everyone does not teach the *same* process. The test of one's competence as a composition instructor, it seems to me, resides in being able to recognize and justify the version of the process being taught, complete with all of its significance for the student.

Figure 35 (transcription): "One conclusion should now be incontestable. The numerous recommendations of the "process"-centered approaches to writing instruction as superior to the "product"-centered approaches are not very useful. Everyone teaches the process of writing, but everyone does not teach the same process. The test of one's competence as a composition instructor, it seems to me, resides in being able to recognize and justify the version of the process being taught, complete with all of its significance for the student." (777)

These words stopped me in my tracks. I was struck both by Berlin's forceful, unambiguous tone (e.g., "should now be incontestable") and his message: the process/product dichotomy, which functioned as a guiding binary within my pedagogical imagination, was "not very useful."

Not very useful!?

Since the publication of elder Murray's foundational—no, *canonical*—1972 article "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product," the UNH tribe had been guided by this if nothing else: *process, not product*.

But here, now, was Berlin tossing that idea overboard.

Process? Product? Not very useful.

And then there's the part, "The test of one's competence." This too troubled me. But I could pass this quiz, I told myself. I was competent. I could recognize and justify my approach and articulate its significance for my students. I was a *UNH writing teacher teaching a UNH writing course!* I was making a *contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person's background and talents!* Surely that was enough?

I wanted it to be, but sensed that it was not. For here was Berlin, naming and categorizing *four* different approaches to the teaching of composition, two of which I knew absolutely nothing about. It was easy to choose a pedagogical approach when there were only two on the table: positivist or current-traditional rhetoric (i.e., the "product" folks—the bad guys, grammar-obsessed, focused mostly on organization and form) and what Berlin called neo-Platonic or, later, expressionistic rhetoric (i.e., the "process" folks—the good guys, truth- and meaning-obsessed, focused on the procedural elements of writing and especially invention and revision). But with *four* approaches now on the table (and who knew how many more), teaching writing suddenly seemed more complicated than I had imagined. Furthermore, there was the fact that Berlin, esteemed scholar and revered teacher in the larger scholarly tribe that I was seeking to join, aligned himself with an approach that was not my own and about which I knew almost nothing (i.e., the New Rhetoricians, later social-epistemic rhetoric).

As an early-career writing instructor and newcomer to the larger tribe of composition and

rhetoric, Berlin's arguments and his taxonomy, the map of the field he draws in "Contemporary Composition" and develops further in his later article "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," threw me for a loop. Before Berlin, I had no map. I had *the way of the tribe*. After Berlin, I began to get a sense of the larger terrain in which I was operating. Or, more accurately, I began to get the sense that I was, in fact, operating in a larger terrain.

That there was a good deal more out there than I knew when I enrolled in the doctoral program at UNH was both revelatory and disconcerting. Rather than assume the fault was mine or deduce that perhaps I had just not been around long enough to get a sense of the bigger picture, I felt, somehow, that my tribe had kept important information from me. But now, interestingly, it was giving it to me via my coursework back in the tribal homeland. Here's the point: while studying writing and pedagogy at UNH and teaching what I understood to be a *UNH writing course* to UNH students, my UNH writing tribe was simultaneously, in the classrooms where I sat as a student, giving me experiences which were causing me to call into question the foundations upon which a *UNH writing course* was built.

The irony that the seeds of my discontent (and eventual revolt) were being sown right there in the warm glow of the tribal vineyards did not escape my notice.



Figure 36: Hamilton Smith Hall, University of New Hampshire
Hamilton Smith Hall, University of New Hampshire

CHAPTER XVIII

BUYING INTO BINARIES

Encounters with James Berlin and others during my years in the doctoral program at UNH gave me reason to question my beliefs and rethink the pedagogical choices I was making in the classroom. Soon, I was transitioning from teaching a *UNH writing course* to teaching . . . something else, something not yet clearly defined or clarified in my mind, but different, to be sure, from what I knew and had done in the classroom before I had enrolled in the doctoral program.

What Jim Berlin offered was a challenge to the worldview inherent in a *UNH writing teacher teaching a UNH writing course* as I understood it. From my earliest days in the tribe, membership had entailed not just learning to write in certain ways but becoming a certain kind of person who believes certain things about the nature of truth and reality and inhabits a certain kind of worldview. The challenge Berlin offered me at this moment in my professional development is laid bare in a passage from his article “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Classroom” where he sets the approach to the teaching of writing that he explicitly associates with Donald Murray (and by extension, in my mind, the UNH writing tribe), expressionistic rhetoric, side-by-side with the approach he favors, formerly New Rhetoric now social-epistemic rhetoric. Expressionistic rhetoric, Berlin explains,

grants that rhetoric arrives at knowledge, but this meaning-generating activity is always *located in a transcendent self, a subject who directs the discovery* and arrives through it finally only at a *better understanding of the self* and its operation—this self comprehension being *the end of all knowledge*. For social-epistemic rhetoric, the subject is itself a social construct that emerges through the linguistically-circumscribed interaction of the individual, the community, and the material world. There is no universal, eternal, and authentic self that beneath all appearances is at one with all other selves. *The self is always a creation of a particular historical and cultural moment.* (489, emphasis added)

This passage is the most concise and succinct statement I have found to capture the shift in outlook, worldview, or perspective that took place in my head during my time back in the classroom at UNH. If I spent my undergraduate years pursuing “a better understanding of the self” and even “a transcendent self,” if, during this period, I was primarily interested and engaged in “self comprehension” as “the end of all knowledge,” I spent my graduate years coming to terms with, “There is no universal, eternal, and authentic self” and, “The self is always a creation of a

particular historical and cultural moment.” I suppose I’m not alone in this, but it was not an easy, smooth, or painless transition nonetheless.

If Berlin challenged my worldview, others challenged my sense of what a writing course should seek to accomplish or be about. In a composition theory course I took during my second year in the doctoral program, I read the now-canonical Elbow/Bartholomae debate about the purposes of first-year composition in the university. While I had counted myself a follower of Elbow since first encountering his work in grad school at Iowa—had, in fact, considered him an honorary member of the UNH writing tribe—I was surprised to now find myself aligning with Bartholomae in the “debate”—Bartholomae, who argued for this other kind of first-year writing course, a course that I myself had not even experienced and that took as its purpose the vague but seemingly more appropriate task of helping students learn how to “invent the university.” The next semester, in a history of composition course, I encountered Sharon Crowley, who went beyond both Elbow and Bartholomae to argue that the entire endeavor of first-year composition upon which the field of composition and rhetoric was expending so much time and energy—Freshman English itself!—should be thrown overboard. As I read Crowley, I was surprised to find that I was actually persuaded by her arguments! Abolition seemed to offer a fast and simple resolution to the many complications of teaching Freshman English that I was now experiencing. Like ripping off a band-aid, we could abolish the course and move on to more seemingly important matters of disciplinarity.

As I proceeded through my coursework, I felt myself continually presented with binaries like the ones I have described above, always compelled to choose, both in belief and in the practice of my classroom, between false choices. A unified modernist self or a divided postmodern one? Expressionistic or social-epistemic rhetoric? Personal or academic writing? Freshman English or abolition? What was worse, all of these choices seemed to force a further choice between where I had come from (i.e., my UNH writing tribe) and where I was headed (i.e., somewhere as yet unknown). The question I found myself returning to again and again as my theoretical and pedagogical perspectives expanded and shifted during the period of my doctoral training was whether my tribal affiliation could hold—whether it was flexible enough to accommodate the

transgressions in belief and practice that I was undertaking. It was a worrying thought: if I was drifting away from being a *UNH writing teacher teaching a UNH writing course*, could I still be a member of the UNH writing tribe?²⁹

CHAPTER XIX

DIVIDED

In PhD programs, around the time of oral examinations, the dissertation defense, and the job search, there is often talk of “pulling things together”—of rising above the hours and days and months spent reading and talking and listening and writing to find a clear vista from which to view the field, a solid outcropping upon which to stand and stake one’s positions. Or, at least, this is the kind of talk I recall hearing around Hamilton Smith Hall at the time when I was transitioning from the coursework phase to the exam/dissertation/job search phase of my program.

And yet all I felt at this time was divided. Divided between my UNH writing tribe’s beliefs about writing and its teaching as I understood and interpreted them and as they were embodied in a *UNH writing course*, and the new beliefs I was trying on while sailing with that impossible pirate and utopian mariner Jim Berlin and his crewmates into what were for me new and previously uncharted epistemological, theoretical, and pedagogical waters. It’s a terrible thing to be told by friends and colleagues that one thing is supposed to be happening in your life, but to know and feel inside that something else is happening entirely. And yet that’s how I felt.

My feelings of frustration at that point in my professional journey are perhaps best captured in my inability to answer a simple but fundamental question, one I felt I should have been able to answer by the time I was graduating with a PhD in composition:

How should we teach writing (and why)?

I had entered the doctoral program at UNH fervent in the belief that I knew the answer to this question. I soon came to see that there were far more answers to it than I had imagined and, further, that answering the question in *this* way meant aligning oneself with *this* cohort of thinkers or theorists and *this* worldview or sensibility (and not *that* one). In beginning to shift my beliefs and allegiances towards non-UNH tribesmen and -women, folks from the larger tribe of composition and rhetoric who I had met on the pages of journals and books during my enculturation period, I felt that I had much to gain but also much to lose. I had lived a *UNH writing course* since I was eighteen years old, and my experience of a *UNH writing course*, first as a student and then as a teacher, had been life-changing and identity-forming. Moving away

from a *UNH writing course*, as I was now by adopting new textbooks and crafting new syllabi and assignments, felt like letting go of a version of myself and turning my back on the tribe that had made me who I was—that had made a significant *contribution towards the development* of this *person*: me. It felt, in short, like betrayal. At the same time, trying to ignore or forget what I had recently learned from folks like Berlin, Bartholomae, and Crowley seemed equally untenable.

But why, in the first place, did I feel that I had to choose? Why couldn't I find a way to think myself out of these binaries? Why couldn't I find a contented *both/and*?

It's a good question and one for which I don't necessarily have an answer. In part, I'm convinced it's something I put on myself and even a limitation in my own thinking. I know too, though, that there were moments when I felt pulled in one direction or the other, and not just on the page, and that these moments helped shape the feeling that I needed to pick a side while simultaneously feeling incapable of doing so. What kind of moments, you ask?

Moment #1

I am passing through the vestibule of Hamilton Smith Hall early in my second year in the doctoral program when I bump into an instructor from my undergraduate days. We haven't seen one another in years; our paths, remarkably, haven't crossed since I returned to UNH for graduate study. We embrace and make small talk about life, family, the old days. I have that odd experience of running into someone to whom I was once subordinate but am no longer. In fact, now I am a doctoral student in composition and my colleague is still working as an instructor, still teaching the courses he taught when I was a student. When he asks what I am teaching, I tell him and then try to explain the changes in my thinking, the new approaches with which I've been experimenting. I watch his face sour as I talk. It's like he doesn't quite understand what I am telling him but has enough of a sense of it to know that it doesn't sound so good. Since he has always been someone who speaks his mind, he tells me to be wary of too much "theory." "What the students need is the chance to write," he says. "Just make sure you give them that too." I say that I will and thank him and tell him how great it was to see him again. We go our

separate ways.

Moment #2

I am sitting at the seminar table on the day of my comprehensive examinations, fielding questions from my committee members. It's unavoidably stressful, but made more so by the fact that they have seated themselves at the table in a way that reinforces the sense of division that I feel about myself and my status as a UNH tribesman. On one side of the table are two UNH tribal elders with whom I have long association and allegiance. On the other side are two young untenured professors, recent arrivals in the department who bring new and different perspectives to the tribe. I know all of these people too well, know their beliefs and commitments, know what I think they want to hear. Each time one of them poses a question, I find myself weighing my answer, searching for a response that will please one side of the table without alienating the other. Each time I do this I know I am failing. I'm not answering directly. I'm qualifying my answers to the point of absurdity, hedging so much so as to say nothing at all. Ultimately, I pass the exam, but end up feeling mostly deflated, as though I've not put my best foot forward because of my desire to avoid saying anything that will offend anyone. I can only imagine that the impression I have made is that I don't quite know what I believe.

Moment #3

I am standing in a restaurant at the annual alumni dinner at an annual conference, catching up with my UNH writing tribesmen and -women. A friend and colleague is arguing about how we should teach writing. To make his point, he is constructing an imagined conversation with the parent of one of his students. In this conversation he is attempting to articulate the rationale for the pedagogical choices he has made in his writing course, and in the process of doing so he references a different teaching approach, one that has recently garnered much attention in the field and one with which I have been experimenting. "I mean, can you imagine trying to explain that

way of teaching to a parent?" my colleague asks, incredulously, as he disparages my approach. "'To teach your kid how to write, I'm going to have him read a bunch of peer-reviewed articles from academic journals and have him write about them.' If you were a parent, how would you respond to that? Is that what you want your kid to experience in freshman comp?" My answer is yes, but I don't say so. I point out, instead, that the approach he finds objectionable attempts to help students think differently about writing in the spirit of our tribe and even asks them to read work that has been published by UNH tribesmen and -women. He's beyond convincing, though, and because he is a man who I have admired for many years, who I still admire, I can't help thinking that if he thinks my approach is crazy, perhaps I should reconsider it.

And so it went, this process of feeling divided. And yet, in the day-to-day work of my teaching, I was not so torn. I went ahead with changing my practice, experimenting with new teaching methods, assignments, and textbooks, and, most significantly and painfully, setting aside my trusty bible, Murray's *The Craft of Revision*. And if and when I found myself in a situation where I was forced out into the open by a tribal mentor or colleague, I ducked and dodged and tried to keep my mouth shut, deciding that if I didn't let on about the ways my thinking and teaching were changing, about the ways *I* was changing, my tribal membership would be preserved.

Sadly, this is how graduate school ended. There was no real synthesis, no pulling-things-together, no vista with a clear view, no solid outcropping upon which to stand. As I wrote my dissertation; started looking for and then, miraculously, secured a job; defended my dissertation; graduated; and began work as an assistant professor, I still hadn't worked things through in my mind—still hadn't found a way to reconcile my changed beliefs, practices, and self with my desire for ongoing UNH writing tribe affiliation. Worst of all, I still hadn't found a suitable answer to that question about how to teach writing that honored both the old and the new of what I knew and who I was.³⁰

It was a terrible way to begin a career.

CHAPTER XX

CAN'T GO HOME

A few years into my new life as a professor, I was offered an opportunity to teach an advanced expository writing at the college where I was working. With regard to the teaching of first-year composition, a staple in my teaching rotation wherever it seemed I went, I had moved on to new and different pedagogical approaches and methods—ones that focused more on rhetoric, argument, and research, and less, if at all, on personal voice, surprise, and the essay.³¹ In freshman comp, I no longer taught a *UNH writing course*. And yet, I had yet to find resolution as regards the dilemma of my tribal affiliation. Was I still a *UNH writing teacher* if I no longer taught a *UNH writing course*? And if not first-year composition, was there some other context in which I could reaffirm my tribal identity by teaching a version of the class that had impacted me so greatly and that, if I were to be honest, I still longed to teach?

Expository writing seemed like it might serve my purposes. First, it was an elective and so did not bring the baggage of preparing students for college-level writing that first-year composition courses by necessity bring. Second, the title of the course suggested a broad range of possible approaches and opened up the possibility of teaching many different kinds of writing in many different ways. Third, the last person to teach the course had recently retired, and my chair was telling me to do with the class as I saw fit.

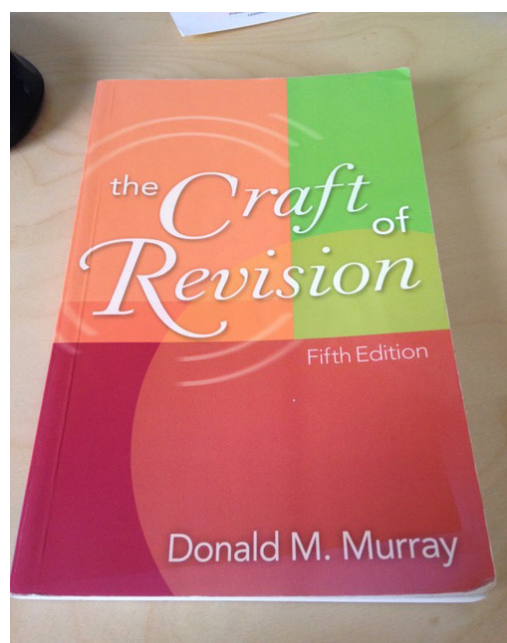


Figure 37: *The Craft of Revision* (2003)

In light of all this, as I immersed myself in planning for the new term that winter break, I began to allow myself to imagine Expository Writing as a *UNH writing course* and myself, once again, as a *UNH writing teacher*. One morning I found myself logging into the website of the campus bookstore and stumbling upon *The Craft of Revision* in the catalogue of titles. I selected it and a few other books as “Course Requirements,” and suddenly the decision was made. I would teach Expository Writing as a *UNH writing course*. You can go home again, I told myself.

As the first day of the new term approached,

I felt both excitement and trepidation. I had decided that I knew *The Craft of Revision* well enough that there was no need to reread the entire book before the term began. I would review the table of contents, skim the most important chapters, and then organize my reading schedule. It will be a useful, I told myself, to reread the book for the first time in a while with the students—to experience it, as much as possible, as they experience it, with fresh eyes.

And then the semester began and we got down to work. At first, slipping back into *Craft*, a book that at one point had embodied all that I had come to learn and know about writing and its teaching, felt like putting on a pair of old blue jeans. As my students and I waded in, I allowed myself to slip under Murray's spell, to be seduced by that old black magic . . .

I am still an apprentice to the writer's craft...

I admit surprise that while moving toward 80 years of age, I feel the same seductive fascination with the writing process that I felt when I was a boy...

I am still young at the writing desk, amazed at the joy—yes, that's the right word—of taking out, putting in, and moving words around...

Surprise. Fascination. Joy.

How I had longed for these words!

And yet . . .

And yet.

Before I was off the first page of the Preface, the spell was broken:

The chapters in the fifth edition move through the writing process as the student finds a focus, chooses a genre, erects a structure, documents each point, develops the draft, tunes its voice, and clarifies the final draft.

With this passage, all the old familiar questions that I had learned to ask during graduate school, and especially those informed by rhetorical genre theory, came flooding back: Is there really such a thing as *the writing process* (singular)? Do writers choose genres or do genres choose writers (or both, depending on the situation)? Are structures something writers erect or something inherent in genres that writers must navigate within? Is voice something one tunes or something one adopts or creates for the occasion?

And at the highest level, there was this: is composing really as writer-directed as Murray makes it out to be?

No, I realized as I crashed back down to earth that term in expository writing. You can't go home again.

A half-dozen years earlier, while teaching Freshman English at UNH as a new teaching assistant with this very same book, when confronted with a teaching dilemma I couldn't quite resolve, I had doubled down on a *UNH writing course* and pointed the finger at myself for lacking patience.

Now, on the other side of a doctorate, I was no longer willing to locate the problem within me.

I knew too much.

Murray hadn't changed.

But I had.

CHAPTER XXI

A WAY OUT, PART I: THE DISCOVERY OF OPTIONS

That term in Expository Writing, I was dogged by the feeling that I was teaching something that I no longer believed in—or, to be more precise, didn't believe in in quite the same way. "An individual's pedagogical choices often link up with her scholarly path," write Amy Rupiper Taggart, Kurt Schick, and H. Brooke Hessler in the introduction to their book *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* (6). My experience teaching with *The Craft of Revision* again that term in Expository Writing revealed to me just how far my scholarly path had taken me from where I had begun.

But Rupiper Taggart, Schick, and Hessler provide another means for understanding my experience—a more hopeful one: "Rare is the teacher who does not blend the practices of many pedagogical philosophies" (6), they write, and when I discovered this passage, it felt like a revelation. I'm almost embarrassed to admit this because, on the one hand, their assertion is so obvious: none of us is a pedagogical puritan. What we do in the classroom on any given day is a gumbo of all that we have experienced, learned, read about, and observed as students and as teachers. On the other hand, when you're locked within the tyranny of a binary, somehow cornered into an inevitable either/or that you can't seem to think your way out of, it's easy to miss even the obvious. The point is this: *I didn't have to choose*. I could blend the practices of several pedagogical philosophies, and in so doing, could give voice to the many different facets of my experience, including both my earliest, most innocent, and happiest moments in the UNH writing tribe and my more recent, more critical, but no less significant experiences. Rupiper Taggart, Schick, and Hessler helped me to acknowledge the richness of my stew.

Anne Beaufort helped too. Like Rupiper Taggart, Schick, and Hessler, Beaufort has catalogued pedagogical approaches to teaching college composition and articulated the goals of each approach. Here's her list, circa 2012:

1. The *expressivist* goal, facilitating self-expression, finding one's voice, one's personal truths;
2. The *critical theory/cultural studies* goal, facilitating critique of social hierarchies and cultural hegemonies;
3. The *democratic, rhetorical* goal, facilitating informed participation in civic issues;

Notes of a Native Son

4. The *pragmatic* goal, facilitating successful written expression in school and work contexts;
5. The *aesthetic* goal, facilitating an appreciation of the craft of writing and a love of language;
6. The *process* goal, facilitating growth in managing writing tasks. (n.p.)

Like Jim Berlin before her, Beaufort argues “teachers and program directors ... will develop the best possible curricula for their particular goals if they are clear with themselves, with colleagues, and with students about what those overarching goals are.” Also like Berlin, Beaufort names her preferred approach:

Although I value self-expression as a humanizing act, become almost ecstatic when encountering creative, artistic written expression, and take seriously the need for informed citizenry equipped with the critical thinking and rhetorical skills to evaluate social needs, hegemonies, and policies, my highest priority in academic courses is the pragmatic goal. (n.p.)

Unlike Berlin, Beaufort chooses not to attach scholars’ names to the various pedagogical approaches she identifies, implicitly acknowledging that while it may be possible to group composition theorists into different camps or categories, it’s never quite possible to say, definitively, that scholar X is a Y. Perhaps more importantly, she doesn’t, after attaching scholars’ names to individual approaches, point out each approach’s shortcomings and inadequacies. Beaufort’s is a more generous, more *inclusive* reading of our field’s major approaches to teaching composition. It argues for pluralism. If it were up to Beaufort, writing teachers would work to incorporate *many* (perhaps even *all*) of the approaches she has identified into their teaching. While her vote may be for the *pragmatic* approach, this vote does not preclude the value of other methods. Her framework is decidedly not winner-take-all.

In Beaufort, then, we find a scholar rising above the din of two decades of discord in the scholarly community of composition and rhetoric to offer up her own map of pedagogical approaches and stake her ground, but in a way that both acknowledges the value of multiple approaches and validates each one. What she and Ruper Taggart, Schick, and Hessler gave me at a time when I desperately needed it was a way to finally see my way out of the pedagogical

corner I had painted myself into. *Here*, Beaufort was saying, *all of these approaches have their merits*. For their part, Rupiper Taggart, Schick, and Hessler were saying, quite literally, “rare is the teacher who does not blend the practices of many pedagogical philosophies” (6).

Amen.

And when I looked around at my professional life during the time at which I encountered the work of these scholars, there was evidence that I was already blending pedagogical philosophies, both within the courses I was teaching and across them. My teaching options had expanded as a result of all that I had learned during my grad school days at UNH. And I was coming to see how different courses allowed for—necessitated, even—different pedagogical emphases. In first-year composition, I could concoct a pedagogical brew that combined *pragmatic* and *process* goals, while in a course called Writing for the Public Sphere, I could emphasize *expressivist* and *democratic/rhetorical* goals and *pragmatic* and *process* goals. In a professional writing course I could foreground *pragmatic* and *process* goals again, and in a course like Expository Writing, I might, if I so chose, foreground *expressivist* and *aesthetic* goals or take things in a different direction entirely, emphasizing *democratic/rhetorical* goals, *critical theory/cultural studies* goals, and *process* goals.

With the help of Rupiper Taggart, Schick, and Hessler, I could go even further, could acknowledge the ways in which my teaching was influenced by *collaborative pedagogies*, *genre pedagogies*, *new media pedagogies*, and *online and hybrid pedagogies*. And I could account for the ways in which my emergent work as a cross-disciplinary writing specialist was allowing me to incorporate *writing in the disciplines* and *writing across the curriculum pedagogies* into my teaching repertoire.

With all these possibilities on the table, the false choice of staying in the safe harbor of Murray’s *expressivist/aesthetic/process* approach or setting sail with Jim Berlin on a journey into *critical theory/cultural studies* and *democratic/rhetorical* waters seemed like just that: a false choice. I didn’t have to choose. Or, I did, but the choices were more expansive than I had allowed myself to imagine, and they weren’t once and for all, but hybrid and attuned to contextual factors. The question wasn’t whether to go with Murray or to go with Berlin, and the

question wasn't how should we teach writing (and why). It was, and is:

What is the best combination of pedagogical approaches for this course and this group of students?

And this, it turns out, is a far better question to ask than the one I had asked earlier and blamed myself for failing to answer. It's better because it acknowledges the possibility—the *necessity*—of *pedagogies*, plural.

CHAPTER XXII

A WAY OUT, PART II: THE USES OF HISTORY

In the same History of Composition graduate course at UNH in which I first encountered the work of Jim Berlin, I embarked on a research project to learn more about the history of writing conferences at the University of New Hampshire. At the time, I myself was conducting weekly conferences with my students and had, of course, years earlier met with my instructors in conferences to discuss my own writing. Now I wanted to try to understand where this teaching practice came from, how it had evolved, and whether it was unique or even original to our UNH writing tribe.

Fortunately, Donald Murray was still alive at this time, so I reached out to him for help. I spoke to other UNH English Department faculty members as well—Thomas Carnicelli, a medievalist, and Lester Fisher, an Americanist, both of whom joined the department shortly after Murray and both of whom were key Murray collaborators during the period in the late 1960s and early 1970s that Carnicelli jokingly referred to during our interview as “the years of the great writing revolution.”

My conversations with Murray, Carnicelli, and Fisher opened the door to a new way of thinking about the tribe and its founders. Whereas previously my sense of the tribe’s history had developed mostly by lore (i.e., through water-cooler conversations with instructors who had been around longer than I), my interviews with these three key players helped me begin to see the tribe’s history through the eyes of those who had lived it. From Murray, I learned that conference teaching at UNH had not originated with him, but dated at least to one of his own writing teachers at UNH during the post-war years: Dr. Carroll Towle, who taught in the UNH English Department from 1931 until his death in 1962.³² From Carnicelli and Fisher, I learned more about the history of conferencing, but also learned other interesting and surprising things. Carnicelli explained how, around 1971, he, Fisher, and Murray staged a coup to wrest control of the Freshman English program from its current director and install Murray in her place (Carnicelli claimed that, as a journalist, Murray didn’t have the clout to be elected Freshman English chair without the help of others in the department). Fisher described a series of interesting collaborations in the late 1960s and early 1970s between UNH faculty members and a dynamic English professor from nearby Westbrook College named Roger Garrison.³³ During the course

of my interviews, a complex picture of an exciting moment in the history of the UNH English Department began to emerge from my simple question about conference teaching. Sadly, no one helped me to recognize the potential of what I'd stumbled upon (and as a new doctoral student, I failed to recognize the potential myself). I wrote my paper on conferencing at UNH for the class, shelved my research, and moved on.

Flash-forward a half-dozen or so years and I've written and defended a dissertation that had nothing at all to do with the UNH English Department, Donald Murray, or my UNH writing tribe; landed a tenure-track job teaching English at a small public college in a nearby state; and am working diligently to jump through the next hoop in the seemingly never-ending parade of academic challenges: tenure and promotion. Back in New Hampshire, Donald Murray has died (but Graves lives on until 2010). Reconsiderations and appreciations are appearing in the field's major journals, and I want to say something too—want to offer my two cents as someone who, while he never worked with Murray directly, had spent most of his adult life working within his enormous shadow. Growing tired of the process of turning my dissertation into publishable articles and feeling a desperate need to start something new, I allowed myself a light task: to read Murray's two autobiographies, *My Twice-Lived Life* (2001) and *The Lively Shadow* (2003) to see what more I could learn about Murray and my UNH writing tribe.

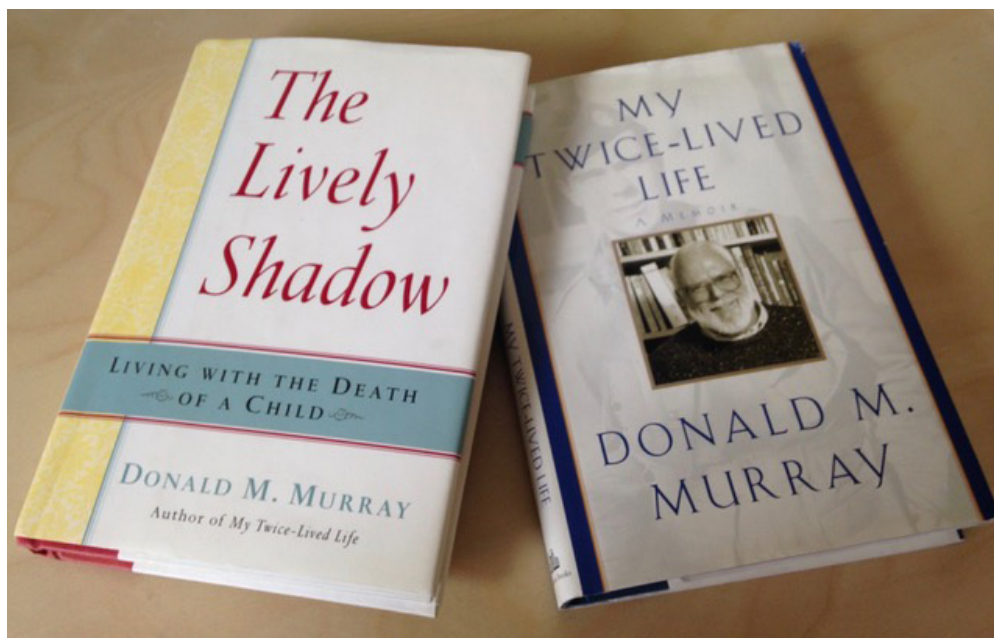


Figure 38: *The Lively Shadow* (2003) and *My Twice-Lived Life* (2001)

From these books I gleaned, among other things, a sense of Murray's troubled childhood, the challenges he faced in school, his conflicted military service during World War II, and his undergraduate years at UNH, where he was, like me, an English major. I also learned about his early career in journalism, his first failed marriage and his second successful one, his unlikely return to UNH in the early 1960s to teach journalism, and the tragic death of his daughter Lee in the late 1970s. As I read Murray's memoirs, the man who had become a myth began to come to life for me in a way he had not before. He became more than a wise elder by whose injunctions about how to teach writing I needed (and wanted) to abide. He became a human being. He was, I discovered, a man who came from modest beginnings and who struggled valiantly to carve out a life for himself in the American middle class. "I will always be the boy hired at Miller's Market," Murray reflects in *My Twice-Lived Life*, "the butcher apron, man-sized, triple-folded around my waist, seeing my mother's name on the bad-debt, give-no-credit list by the wall phone where housewives called in their delivery orders" (21). He may have always seen himself in this way, but for me, seeing Murray as he saw himself was something entirely new.

Inspired by my reading of Murray's memoirs, I decided to reach out to the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida, where his papers were collected. I learned that the collection was closed to the public but that a librarian, David Shedden, was willing to help me access materials of interest. What was I looking for, Shedden wanted to know. I wasn't sure, so he just started sending me things. Every few weeks, a thick manila envelope arrived in my campus mailbox containing Murray's correspondence, his article drafts, his personnel files, his notes, memos, letters, and reports. Out of these documents I began to build an archive, excited by the possibility of soon devoting my full scholarly energy to a project that felt so deeply personal: writing family history.

Next, I learned of the Milne Special Collections and Archives in the basement of Dimond Library at UNH. I contacted a librarian there and learned that while they didn't have much related to Murray, they did have his teaching evaluations and a few other items related to the UNH English Department. With the road to tenure and promotion finally cleared, I planned a

visit on a cold snowy day in late December 2011 and found myself in the basement of the same library where I had spent countless hours studying as an undergraduate student and later, as a graduate student, spent hours tracking down journal articles in hard-bound volumes. All morning I sat and read through Murray's teaching evaluations, seeing the man, again, through new eyes. Here are some excerpts from what I found:

English 817: Seminar in Teaching Writing (Fall 1975):

- Lousy discussion leader; most of the discussions were not productive or that helpful to a writer/teacher.
- This course never really seemed to get organized—it seemed to drift from one week to the next.
- This was not a good course, but he's a good teacher.

English 817: Seminar in Teaching Writing (Spring 1983):

- I have learned to be more observant and respecting of my students, to be less controlling—to let the students show me what they know and can do.
- This is the eighth time (counting undergraduate and graduate level courses) I have filled out this form for Don Murray's classes. I think that says more about his teaching than any "evaluation" I can give.
- The instructor's teaching style was non-authoritarian and non-directive.

English 401: Freshmen English (Fall 1986)

- This wasn't just a writing class, it was a thinking class.
- Use of his own writing demonstrated that writing is not something reserved for professionals, but is a process everyone can participate in.
- He rambles on about himself.

What did I see in these comments?

Murray.

I saw Murray, the teacher. The sometimes wonderful, sometimes rambling, sometimes successful, sometimes stumbling teacher that he inevitably was. Because at this point I was

long accustomed to reading my own teaching evaluations at the end of each term, I felt a kind of kinship with Murray as I read his. Here we were, no longer the wise old sage and the young acolyte, but, instead, two writing teachers doing our best under inevitably challenging circumstances to share our craft and knowledge and love of both with our students.

From Murray's teaching evaluations, I began to reconstruct his teaching schedule, to piece together a vision of the courses he taught over twenty-five or so years in the classroom at UNH. From there, I moved on to the yearly UNH catalogues to try to understand changes in the English major that took place while Murray was in the department. And all this time my project was expanding in interesting ways without me even noticing it. The librarian with whom I had worked on that first trip to the archives continued to offer new documents I had not yet seen: annual reports written by long-time Dean of the College of Liberal Arts Edward Blewett that touched on matters related to the English Department around the time of the Second World War; two thick files containing materials related to an incident in 1962 involving the student newspaper, *The New Hampshire*, that ultimately led to Murray being hired at the university; several boxes of folders, the "Freshman English Files," that told the story of a major transition in the Freshman English program in the mid- to late 1960s. Soon there were more documents than I had time to read that day. I gathered up my things and told the librarian that I would be back.

And I did go back, countless times in the next several years, and when it seemed that I had exhausted my search in the archives in the library, I looked elsewhere. One warm August afternoon in the summer of 2012, I found myself back in Hamilton Smith Hall, gazing down at several dozen boxes of haphazardly organized department files in the dimly lit storeroom across the hall from the English Department office. The secretary helped me carry the boxes into a classroom across the hall, the very classroom where I took my first course as an English major with Bob Connors in the spring of 1994 and where I occasionally taught Freshman English and advanced composition while a graduate student at UNH in the early 2000s. All afternoon I rummaged through the dusty boxes, stumbling upon old Freshman English syllabi, memos on the creation of the doctoral program in composition, and fliers from the semiannual UNH writers' conference. I even stumbled upon one of my own syllabi from the fall of 2000, when I

was teaching at UNH as an adjunct instructor, blissfully implementing a *UNH writing course* and working to be the best *UNH writing teacher* I could be. There I was, in the archives, part of our tribal history.

Over the years that followed, my inquiries took me to additional archives at Westbrook College, the University of Illinois, and Bowdoin College. I visited the offices and homes of some two dozen UNH writing tribesmen and -women where I listened and recorded stories of the tribe, its founding, its evolution. The shape and contour of the book I would write about the tribe began to take shape in my mind and then take shape again, and when I felt that I was ready, I sat down and began to write it—to impose chronology and theme and argument on the disparate scraps of history I’d collected over almost a half-dozen years. And as I attempted this task, I simultaneously struggled to understand the role of my own story within this larger story—to imagine a way to tell my own UNH writing tribe story, apart from but also a part of the story of the tribe. And that’s where this project, the one you’re reading now, began.

If Beaufort and Rupiper Taggart, Schick, and Hessler gave me the first way out of the bind I found myself in following my graduation from the doctoral program at UNH, helping me to see that teaching writing was never a matter of choosing between my tribe and something else but, rather, one of finding ways to integrate the different pedagogical approaches to which I had been exposed by my tribe, my investigations into the UNH writing tribe’s history have given me a second way to come to terms with my struggles. Archival research has provided a sense of perspective for understanding how tribal elders like Murray and Graves were themselves, per Henze, Selzer, and Sharer, “shaped by the available means of persuasion” (3). Learning about Murray’s and Graves’ lives and work (and about the work of myriad other tribesmen and -women) has helped me to historicize what I have been calling a *UNH writing course*, to see it and the men and women who created it *not* as something I must enact or replicate but as a historical artifact, a creation of a particular moment in history, some elements of which I may choose to preserve and others of which I may choose to discard. In short, researching my tribe and its founders has helped me see it and them through a more rhetorical lens—has shown me that, at root, there is nothing inevitable about a *UNH writing course*. It was built, if it ever existed in the

first place, by human hands and should be understood as such.

Of course, a sense of resolution is not all that my archival research has given me. It would be impossible to have spent as many years as I have with the words of my tribesmen and -women without also developing a deep and renewed sense of gratitude for having stumbled into a community of teachers, writers, and scholars who take *a contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person's background and talents as their raison d'être*. I am awed at my great good fortune at having found the UNH writing tribe and honored, finally, for the chance to carry forward its good work.

Nulla dies sine linea.

EPILOGUE

I walk into the computer lab on a cold January afternoon, the room warm with students sitting at long tables behind large flat black screens. I set my bag down on the table at the front of the room, log into the desktop computer, click on the overhead projector, pull my laptop out of my bag, and open my browser to the course learning management system. I am fresh from the writing desk, where I spent the morning with butt in chair, as Murray would say, turning over sentences, moving around words, puzzling through small, seemingly insurmountable complications of evidence, organization, and accidents of meaning.

Writing teachers must also be writers.

Yes. Now, though, I'm a writing teacher and it's time to begin.

I've taught first-year composition for almost twenty years now, and I find that I still discover new ways to teach the course each term. Since dropping my wholesale allegiance to a *UNH writing course*, I've not been able to hitch my wagon to another approach with quite the same constancy. This particular semester, I've arranged students into groups to investigate and write about various elements of college life: *Who are professors and what do they do when they're not teaching? What is general education, where did it come from, and why does it persist in higher education? What are academic disciplines and why do they exist? What is academic writing and how does it work?* These are the questions my students and I are looking into. Past experience has taught me that freshmen, and maybe college students in general, have little understanding about what we in composition might refer to as the *discourse community* of college. I want my students to know more about this place so they can navigate better within it.

Last night I read through and commented upon the students' informal writing. I had posted a prompt on the discussion board that asked them to reflect on the challenges and successes they faced the previous term—for most, their first semester at college. Today we will follow up on this work. "I'd like to begin by asking you to return to the small groups we worked in during the last class," I announce once the class has quieted down. "Please take a few minutes to read over your groupmates' informal writing, the homework that was due today. When you've done so, I'd like you and your groupmates to read five other students' posts to see if any trends emerge. Many of you had good and interesting things to say about the challenges

you faced last semester. I want to see if any larger themes emerge from this anecdotal data.”

The students get started, reading and taking notes and talking, and I get down to work too, copying and pasting passages from their homework that I find interesting or surprising into a document that I will share with them via the learning management system. As it’s still early in the term, I want to establish the norms for our community. In this class, we will do school differently. The content of our course will be students and their experiences of college. I will be the kind of professor who listens to and learns from his students. Everyone will have something valuable to contribute. Diversity will be our strength. Writing will be a tool we use for thinking. We will all be writers.

After ten or so minutes, I stand up and begin to move around the room. The room is abuzz with activity. Students talk animatedly with one another, not always about what I have asked them to discuss, but that’s okay. Talk, I’ve learned from my tribe, builds community. When I have the sense that most of the groups have at least something written down, a place to begin, I return to the front of the room and face the class. “Okay,” I say, “let’s talk about what you’re learning.”

ENDNOTES

1. Throughout this essay, I will use terms like *tribe*, *tribesmen and -women*, and/or *natives* as I speak about the UNH writing community and its members. I am aware of the political and cultural weight of these terms, particularly in relation to Native American culture and Native American studies scholarship. Were this a more traditional academic article, I would likely use other terms. "Tribe" seems more suited to my purposes here where, working in the spirit of my UNH tradition, I seek a register and syntax that is broadly accessible and which blends elements of formal and informal style.
2. *1977* is just one of many books of archival history that have appeared in the field of composition in recent years with the intention of adding layers of complexity and nuance to the field's already well-told disciplinary history (for that story, the foundational one, see Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality*; Connors; Crowley). Monographs like David Gold's *Rhetoric at the Margins* and David Fleming's *From Form to Meaning*, and edited collections like those by Bruce McComiskey (*Microhistories*) and Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon (*Local Histories*), have shone new light on the myriad and diverse local institutional contexts in which composition has been taught and practiced. These works and their methodologies have informed my own project here to a considerable extent, and this project contributes to the work of second-wave composition histories by focusing on a mostly unexamined local site of the teaching and research of writing, UNH, and going further, or in a different direction, by examining the site as part of an effort to better understanding its influence on a single writing teacher's professional and scholarly development.
3. Why map one's academic heritage? Why name where one came from and how one fits (or fails to fit) within a given academic community? It's hard to say exactly, but I'm certainly not alone in the field of writing studies or even among my UNH tribesmen and -women in feeling the impulse to do so. (For an example of the former, see my mentor Tom Newkirk's chapter on his experience working with Jim Kinneavy at the University of Texas, "Lunch at the Nighthawk: Or Kinneavy Moves his Office"; for an example of the latter, see my other mentor Bonnie Sunstein's lovely memoir about her experience as a doctoral student at UNH in the late 1980s, "A Stand in Time and Space: New Hampshire and the Teaching of Writing." Both appear in Patricia Lambert Stock's 2012 collection *Composition's Roots in English Education*). My sense is that we academics, and not just those of us in writing studies, map our professional trajectories because, like children, our earliest families form us so profoundly that we spend a good deal of the rest of our careers trying to make sense of both how we were shaped at the beginning and how we are being reshaped as we are drawn further away from the homeland.

4. Here I'm going with Sharon Crowley, who, in her book *Composition In The University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, pinpoints "around 1971" as the start of the writing process movement.
5. For more on Murray's personal story, see my article "Victims, Rebels, and Outsiders: Reconceiving Donald Murray" in the journal *Writing on the Edge*.
6. Just to name a few, at UNH we might point to Thomas Newkirk, Thomas Carnicelli, Gary Lindberg, Andrew Merton, Lester Fisher, Bob Connors, Pat Sullivan, Cindy Gannett, and Jane Hanson. Beyond UNH, we might name Linda Rief, Nancie Atwell, Lad Tobin, Bonnie Sunstein, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, Lori Neilson, Donna Qualley, Tom Romano, Mary Ellen Giacobbe, Bronwyn Williams, and on and on and on and on.
7. As part of his research, Melzer also looked into the kinds of audiences college students write for when they compose and, not surprisingly, found that the majority of writing assignments he analyzed, 64%, asked students to address an audience of what he calls the *teacher-as-examiner*. Students rarely wrote to an audience of what Melzer calls the *student-to-instructor*, in which a teacher and student carry on a dialogue or conversation, and even more rarely wrote to peers, the self, or a wider audience (beyond the classroom). In sum, Melzer found that the audiences students write for in college are limited and limiting. Most of the time, students write to an audience that is functioning as judge, examiner, or assessor.
8. I don't know if Pam graded my one-pager before she wrote her response, while she wrote it, or after, but she gave me the highest grade I could have earned, a check-plus, and looking back through the pile of one-pagers I wrote that term, I see now that she was not in the habit of just handing out check-plusses each week.
9. Please note: I was not a person who published editorials in newspapers or submitted articles to magazines before I came to college.
10. Specifically, Sunstein spent the first decade or so of her career working on portfolio assessment, a project she had begun with Graves while at UNH.
11. I could not then have appreciated the magnitude of this accomplishment in the mind of my host. In his memoir *The Lively Shadow: Living with the Death of a Child*, Murray writes elegantly about the pleasure and pride he took in owning his own home: "I go downstairs into my shadowed house. Mine. I allow myself a serving satisfaction. My father, and as far as I know my grandfather and their fathers, never owned a house. I take possession of this house in the morning. It is the single-family house I dreamed of when I was told to be quiet because of the

people who lived upstairs or down. I had come home from the war and gone to college not for scholarship but to earn a place in the middle class, a single-family house with a car in the garage" (188).

12. I was not alone in this experience. "It is my custom, whenever possible," writes Murray in *The Lively Shadow*, "to share materials on writing with those young and not-so-young who hope to write" (189).
13. "Research reports," Murray writes in "Write Research to Be Read," "are too often written in a private language and an academic form which obscures their conclusions and excludes those people who might implement the research results" (760). In particular, Murray (and Graves) wanted educational research to be made accessible to those who might actually use and benefit from it: classroom teachers.
14. Did I really believe in such a thing, "a UNH writing course"? Yes, at this point in my career, I did believe in such a thing. Do I still? No, today I know that there was no such thing as "a UNH writing course," singular, but rather many different "UNH writing courses," plural, each of which emerged out of the unique personality of the instructor teaching the course and a particular moment in the tribe's history. My tribeswoman Donna Qualley helped me understand the way in which Freshman English, the prototypical UNH writing course, changed over the thirty or so years between the time when Donald Murray briefly directed the course in the early 1970s and the time when I enrolled in it in the early 1990s. In a paper titled "Tradition and Change in Freshman English at UNH: Finding, Maintaining, and Directing the Dynamic Tension" that she wrote for a seminar while a grad student in the doctoral program at UNH, Qualley both affirms the basic core description of the course that I have provided in these pages, a *UNH writing course*, and details the changes to the course that were instigated under the leadership of several program directors from the mid-1970s through the time when she was writing in 1991. Her history documents the ways in which the Freshman English guidelines were revised during this period, granting, for example, reading a greater or lesser place in the curriculum or the personal essay a greater or lesser role in the course. Her essay illustrates the way in which the Freshman English course at UNH, what I have come to call a *UNH writing course*, was never just one thing but many things, influenced both by those who directed the program and the teachers who, day in and day out, taught the course.
15. It's worth asking what evidence, if any, what I am calling my tribe's foundational myth rests upon. Graves, Murray, and many others would argue that what I'm referring to here as a *myth* is, in fact, not a myth at all, and they would offer three kinds of evidence in support of their claim. First, they, and Murray in particular, would cite their experience in the classroom. Murray frequently wrote with disdain of students who were capable of "ejaculating correct little essays without thought" ("Write Before Writing" 375). In his teaching and in his writing about writing, Murray worked to reverse the unfortunate writing habits he frequently found in too many of his students. To his mind, prior education had taught too many of his charges the *wrong* things about writing. Second, they, and Graves in particular, would point to the findings of writing research. Graves

spent many years observing young children write. His contention was that kids arrive at school wanting to write. Older children, he found, no longer viewed writing in the same way. What other explanation was there for the older children's disillusionment if not their schooling? Additionally, during Graves' Ford Foundation research, he spoke to forty professional writers, asking them how they learned to write. "Not one of them learned to write in school," Graves reports. "They were usually on the 'outs' with the system" (*Writing* 205). Third, they, and Murray in particular, would cite their own school days as evidence for their claim. As I have documented elsewhere (see my essay "Victims, Rebels, and Outsiders: Reconstructing Donald Murray's Literacy Narrative, Reconceiving Donald Murray") and as he himself discussed on many occasions, Murray dropped out or failed out of school several times, struggling for years with the limiting curriculum he found in the classrooms of his Depression-era childhood (for more on this, see Murray's two memoirs, *My Twice-Lived Life* and *The Lively Shadow*, and also his interview with Jeanne Jacoby Smith, "Anatomy of a High School Dropout"). It's hard to believe that Murray's own experiences with schooling didn't influence his thinking once he himself became an educator (Graves had similarly negative experiences with school and writing instruction when he was a student, but wrote about these experiences less extensively than Murray).

16. Elsewhere, Graves identifies reading instruction as the enemy of writing. In his 1978 Ford Foundation report, "Balancing the Basics: Let Them Write," he writes,

Five-year-old Paul writes. Children want to write before they want to read. They are more fascinated by their own marks than by the marks of others. Young children leave their messages on refrigerators, wallpaper, moist windowpanes, sidewalks, and even on paper.

Six-year-old Paul doesn't want to write. He has gone to school to learn to read. Now that he is in school, the message is, 'Read and listen; writing and expression can wait.' Paul may wait a lifetime." (10)

17. In *High Fidelity*, the main character Rob Gordon frequently breaks the "fourth wall" to deliver a "Top 5" list directly to the viewers. His lists cover topics as diverse as "Rob's Desert Island, All Time, Top Five Most Memorable Breakups" and "Rob's Top Five Angry Songs About Women." It's a hugely entertaining and effective device.
18. For those with long-term tribal affiliation, the items on my list may seem obvious. For others without exposure to the tribe, my list may seem new, strange, or, perhaps, familiar. Regardless, my list is my own best effort to externalize and organize into something coherent, concise, and clear what I understand to be the tribe's highest-level beliefs and assumptions about writing and its teaching.
19. During his career, Murray quietly wove the thread of his autobiography throughout his published professional writing. For a more direct treatment of this story, see his autobiography *My Twice-Lived Life* or his interview with Jeanne Jacoby Smith, "Anatomy of a High School Dropout."
20. This student's instructor apparently didn't think that the theme was much better than Ken

Macrorie would have thought it, awarding the paper a D+ and including that grade on the essay at the top of BOTH page 1 and page 2. His substantial line-editing seems to signal his prioritizing correctness over content.

21. In making the student's writing the content of the writing course, Murray was sometimes accused of encouraging in his students a kind of solipsism. While it may be true that his belief that students should write about the things that they know sometimes led to a too-great emphasis on writing personal essays, Murray tried to encourage diversity in topic choice throughout his career. In his essay "Finding Your Own Voice," for example, he writes, "The search for information should not merely be autobiographical in a limited sense. The student does learn from the street corner, but he also learns from books. The coed who has worked as a waitress may be handed Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, or sent to an article on restaurant management. The intellectual process does not mean just reading; it certainly does not mean just feeling" (119).
22. In "The Listening Eye," Murray writes, "It doesn't seem possible to be an English teacher without the anxiety that I will be exposed by my colleagues. They will find out how little I do; my students will expose me to them; the English Department will line up in military formation in front of Hamilton Smith Hall and, after the buttons are cut off my Pendleton shirt, my university library card will be torn once across each way and let flutter to the ground" (149).
23. Throughout his career, Murray defined himself as an antiauthoritarian, and this too affected the teacherly persona he adopted in the classroom. To learn more about the various personas Murray enacted in his writing and career, see my essay "Victims, Rebels, and Outsiders."
24. From an early age, life taught Murray a learning mindset. His standardized test scores placed him at the top of his class, but he repeatedly failed out of school—what lesson could he have drawn from such an experience other than that tests purporting to measure intelligence as if it were an inherent capability were in some way flawed? Reflecting on his adolescent (and current) self in his memoir *My Twice-Lived Life*, Murray writes: "I lived by this belief: I was a person of limited talent and intelligence who would, by hard work and discipline, overcome my limitations and compete with those who were brighter and more talented than I. I still hold to that truth" (149).

The learning mindset that Murray developed as a young man may have been reinforced at midlife as a result of his career change. Surrounded by colleagues whose pedagogical philosophies sometimes veered toward a kind of fixed-worldview mindset, he adopted or constructed a different kind of teacherly persona, deconstructing his authority and reversing the typical roles of teacher and student. In "The Listening Eye," he writes, "Now that I've been a teacher this long I'm beginning to learn how to be a student. My students are teaching me their subjects. Sometimes I feel as if they are paying for an education and I'm the one getting the education" (155). In his teaching, Murray was able to create an alternate persona that allowed him to embrace what he didn't know and to challenge others to reconsider what they, perhaps, had taken for granted.

Finally, Murray's learning mindset worldview may have come from his subject itself. Writing, he felt, was too often wrapped up in a package of mysticism, mythology, and a mistaken belief that some people are just born knowing how to write well. Murray expended great energy trying to persuade just about everyone he came into contact with that this way of thinking about writing was just wrong—that, with a bit of hard work, *anyone* could write. He famously defined writing as “primarily not a matter of talent, of dedication, of vision, of vocabulary, of style, but simply a matter of sitting” (“Getting Under the Lightening” 74). Perhaps because of the surprise he felt at his own success as a writer, Murray wanted to teach others that even a Pulitzer Prize winner still had much to learn about his craft. “Few, if any, writers get it right the first time,” he wrote in his essay “Teach the Motivating Force of Revision” (6). And this included, most notably, Donald Murray himself.

25. It's worth pointing out that Graves' research method of choice, the case study, is uniquely well-suited to storytelling.

26. I believe that Murray's and Graves' reform agendas were rooted in their own experiences with schooling. I've written elsewhere about the challenges that Murray faced in school as a young man (see my article “Victims, Rebels, and Outsiders”). It was interesting to learn that Graves too faced frustrations with learning to write in school. In his essay “It's Never Too Late,” he relates a story about the mixed messages he received about his writerly potential as a young person. In high school, Graves was given the impression that he was a decent writer, perhaps even a good one. He came to believe that he might pursue a career as a writer like his hero, Jack London, and even pressed his English teachers to tell him what he needed to do to become a professional writer (“Write and rewrite,” one thoughtful and wise teacher told him).

In college, Graves declared an English major, but his writing dream was quickly shattered. “I was carefully taught that I couldn't write at all” Graves reports as he recounts a story of writing a paper on a character from *War and Peace* during his senior year in college while simultaneously grieving the death of a close friend and struggling with his decision to declare conscientious objector status for the Korean War (“It's Never Too Late” in *A Researcher Learns to Write* 1). “I figured that literature was intended to wrestle with life's big issues,” Graves recalls of his mistaken attempt to tie together his discussion of the character Bolkonsky from *War and Peace* and his own life experiences. “The paper came back with a D+ and the statement, ‘Please change your typewriter ribbon’” (1). Graves was crushed. Experiences like this helped to create in him, as they had in Murray, a deep suspicion of schools and the kinds of writing instruction that they often advance.

27. Murray pays tribute to Towle in several of his essays, articles, and books. In his short piece for *UNH Magazine*, “A Landscape of Words,” of the self he was when he arrived at UNH to pursue an undergraduate degree in English in the winter of 1946, he writes, “I carried little with me but the dream of becoming a writer—a dream that seemed so wonderful, so removed from the ordinary person I was, that I imagined it to be impossible. Yet in Durham, I found professor Carroll Towle, who seemed to think my dream possible.”

28. It occurs to me now that Towle should, perhaps, be mentioned as a kind of penultimate

UNH writing tribe founding father. It's possible to trace lineage from Towle (grandfather) to Murray (father) to me (grandson). At the same time, I am confident from my archival research that Towle really is a member of an entirely different generation of UNH writing teachers and a different writing tradition, one rooted less in the process vibe of the 1970s and more in the humanistic vibe of the pre- and post-war years. In light of this, I will leave him out of my tribal history for now, but perhaps continue to think of him as a kind of *homo erectus* to our *homo sapiens*.

29. The irony that I couldn't see at the time, of course, is that the tribe was doing precisely what any professional community worth its salt is supposed to do when socializing its newcomers: exposing them to a diverse range of ideas, arguments, and viewpoints, some of which conflict with its own beliefs and teachings. What I can see now that I didn't see then is that the tribe's strength derived in its ability to expose its members to new and opposing ideas and yet still hold together as a community of like-minded folks.
30. Had I paid closer to Richard Fulkerson's second and seventh conclusions at the end of his article "Composition at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," which I read as my time in the doctoral program at UNH was winding down, I may have found some consolation and perhaps even a resolution for my confused situation. In his second conclusion he writes, "At the turn of the twentieth century there is a genuine controversy—*within* the field, not in the eyes of the public, the administration, or the legislature—over the goal of teaching writing in college" (679). Amen. If Fulkerson, an established scholar in the field, was having a hard time determining the goal of teaching writing in college, surely I, a newcomer, could be forgiven for having a similar experience. In his seventh conclusion Fulkerson writes:

Preparing our graduate students in composition for the discourse community they must enter to succeed as composition professors is becoming increasingly difficult. It is natural to imitate our literary colleagues and produce PhD-holders created in our own image(s). "If you got your degree at South Florida, then you are post-everything. University of Pittsburgh grads are into cultural studies. Purdue and Arizona State products know rhetorical traditions." But limiting students to understanding one dominant perspective disadvantages them. Programs will have to make serious choices and perhaps prepare students as utility players able to fit into several positions, rather than teach them the field's "best practices." A new tenure-track PhD may have been well prepared in teaching composition for her alma mater using Approach A, yet be required to shift smoothly to Approach X in her new home. (680)

Here, Fulkerson helps me both to imagine the challenge I was experiencing as a newcomer to the field through the eyes of those who were trying to help me acclimate to that field *and* to reimagine my confusion and frustration at my inability to answer the question about how to teach writing as a potential source of strength: my feelings of division may have been the very thing that would provide me with the flexibility and dexterity to adapt to a new writing program and its traditions and beliefs once I left UNH and obtained my first faculty position.

31. In this way my approach had shifted largely towards the mainstream among composition instructors, at least according to Andrea A. Lunsford and Karen Lunsford, who, in their 2008 article "'Mistakes are a Fact of Life': A National Comparative Study," discovered that students were writing fewer personal narratives in first-year composition and focusing more on argument and research (793).
32. Here's Murray from our interview: "The conferences that I had prior to my own were mini-lectures. Carroll Towle would have a conference and cover you with smoke and what, essentially, he would do is he had gone through line-by-line and criticized your stuff and so you sat in line a long time and he would let the conferences run over—I don't know if I have mentioned this to you. John Lofty would say how wonderful a teacher Towle was... But you would be sitting there on the floor and you would be missing your other classes and I was a laundry-truck driver at the time and I said if I ever did this I would, you know, not do it this way."
33. For more on Garrison, see Neal Lerner's chapter in *Microhistories of Composition*, "Remembering Roger Garrison: Composition Studies and the Star-Making Machine."

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