

6 REVOLUTION

THE "CENTRAL FACTOR IN THINKING"

Listening is an orientation to the world and a pedagogical practice that is most advantageously paired with reflective writing and reflective thinking. As we know, reflective thinking has a long and distinguished history. John Dewey is perhaps the most influential thinker and educator to discuss reflective thought, and reflection is vitally important to the way he understands and theorizes thinking. For Dewey, reflective thought is, as he famously put it in *How We Think*, the "central factor in thinking" (Dewey 1997, 6):

To turn the thing over in mind, to reflect, means to hunt for additional evidence, for new data, that will develop the suggestion, and will either, as we say, bear it out or else make obvious its absurdity and irrelevance. Given a genuine difficulty and a reasonable amount of analogous experience to draw upon, the difference, par excellence, between good and bad thinking is found at this point. The easiest way is to accept any suggestion that seems plausible and thereby bring to an end the condition of mental uneasiness. Reflective thinking is always more or less troublesome because it involves overcoming the inertia that includes one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves willingness to endure a condition or mental unrest and disturbance. . . . As we shall see later, the most important factor in the training of good mental habits consists in acquiring the attitude of suspended conclusion, and in mastering the various methods of searching for new materials to corroborate or to refute the first suggestions that occur. To maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry—these are the essentials of thinking. (Dewey 1997, 13)

Writing teachers should be in the business of designing assignments that require students to think in ways that are "more or less troublesome" in the sense that Dewey uses here. Moreover, learning theorists would be very supportive of the kind of "mental unrest and disturbance" that Dewey champions here because this kind of "unrest" has the potential to move students toward more sophisticated cognitive orientations

and a more complex understanding of the nature of knowledge and the construction of meaning and value.

Dewey also suggests in *How We Think* that reflective thought is only required for the most challenging kinds of problems, a class of problem that "perplexes and challenges the mind so that it makes belief at all uncertain" (Dewey 1997, 9). Uncertainty is a key variable here for Dewey, as it is for learning theorists. In his own way, Dewey is discussing ill-structured problems, problems for which there is no obvious or correct solution, as there might be for an algebraic equation or calculating a chemistry problem.

Dewey offers writing teachers a compelling rationale here for bringing reflective thinking (as opposed to simplistic argumentative thinking and its privileging of closure and certainty) to the center of our curriculum.

REFLECTIVE THINKING IS "OPEN TO SELF-CORRECTION"

Reflective thinking is one of the key focal points in King and Kitchener's developmental scheme, and it is essential for Perry's as well. King and Kitchener note that reflective judgment has become a neglected aspect of the critical thinking process (King and Kitchener 1994, 1-19). The most important and essential point they make about reflective thinking is that it actively resists certainty and closure: "Judgments derived from the reflective thinking process remain open to further scrutiny, evaluation, and reformulation; as such, reflective judgments are open to self-correction" (8). Openness of mind and resistance to certainty and closure are key hallmarks of the pedagogy we are theorizing here. King and Kitchener devote a whole chapter to identifying ways to nurture this kind of openness and reflection during the college years (222-57). At the center of these recommendations is the ill-structured problem. As King and Kitchener suggest (and as we have noted previously), "in the final analysis, the real challenge of college, for students and faculty members, is empowering individuals to know that the world is far more complex than it first appears" (1).

We also see reflective thinking at work in the most advanced stages of Perry's developmental scheme as he reports on what students say about their development in college. It is the essential wellspring that makes possible the kind of ethical and intellectual development that he chronicles in his famous book. Given this important work, why are we still teaching in a manner that actively subverts what we know about how mature thinking and writing is produced?

HILLOCKS AND YANCEY

Reflective thinking is important for scholars in the field of composition as well. In *Teaching Writing as a Reflective Practice*, George Hillocks situates reflective thinking at the center of teaching writing. At the heart of the pedagogy that Hillocks discusses is an epistemological stance much like the one we are theorizing here. It is focused on inquiry, "the exchange and thoughtful examination of ideas and opinions" (Hillocks 1995, 213), and "requires an epistemological stance quite different from that of current-traditional rhetoric and the textbooks that use it, one which suggests that truth is unambiguous, monolithic, and transportable by means of language" (212).

Hillocks recommends including a richer variety of writing tasks for students, including personal narrative and satire, along with argument (Hillocks 1995, 127-46). Significantly, Hillocks supports the use of personal narrative because it helps build empathy:

One major concern in schools is with developing potential, providing the bases from which students may grow. A second has been with providing the tools for understanding the culture. If our writing program is to fulfill either of these broad goals, it must include writing for empathic response, both to develop potential and to better understand how such writing operates in the culture.

Beyond that, empathic writing has auxiliary purposes as well. Because students engage with their own stories and like to hear the stories of others, personal narrative can be used in a variety of ways to involve students in high-level discussion of complex ideas and emotions. (Hillocks 1995, 128)

Hillocks values this kind of intellectual work very highly: "Writing that achieves empathic response is arguably the most important kind of writing in our culture" (128). There is much in Hillocks's book that supports the pedagogy we are developing here. Of special note is Hillocks's summary assessment: "If thoughtful inquiry does not lie at the heart of writing, then our students become little more than amanuenses" (214)—that is to say, "manual laborers" who go largely unengaged and unchallenged by the ideas they are writing about. As Hillocks suggests, however, the kind of "thoughtful inquiry" that he advocates must be very carefully theorized and implemented for it to be realized effectively in the classroom. Ultimately, for Hillocks, the teaching of writing involves foundational questions, including "what we hope our students will become through our teaching of writing, both as people and as writers, how our means and methods of teaching influence that, and what must (or may) be taught (the matter of curricula, plural) to reach those goals" (3). A pedagogy focused on

listening, empathy, and reflection would certainly be worthy of such noble goals.

Kathleen Blake Yancey has also done important work on reflection and writing. In *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Yancey acknowledges that "reflection has played but a small role in the history of composing" (Yancey 1998, 4). This is something we are both interested in changing. Yancey theorizes reflection, building on the important work of Donald Schon (1983, 1987) (*The Reflective Practitioner* and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*), as both a process of inquiry and a type of writing students do:

Reflection is both process and product. The process of reflection can be fostered in several ways. Inviting students to reflect in multiple ways is inviting them to triangulate their own truths, to understand and articulate the pluralism of truth. Given what William Perry explains about maturation for the typical college student—that she/he moves from a dualistic stance to a relativistic stance to a reflective stance—such invitations seem particularly appropriate. (Yancey 1998, 19)

Yancey discusses and develops a pedagogy here for three different kinds of reflection:

- **reflection-in-action:** the process of reviewing and projecting and revising, which takes place with a composing event, and the associated texts
- **constructive reflection:** the process of developing a cumulative, multi-sensed, multi-voiced identity, which takes place between and among composing events, and the associated texts
- **reflection-in-presentation:** the process of articulating the relationships between and among the multiple variable of writing and the writer in a specific context for a specific audience, and the associated text (Yancey 1998, 13-14)

The kind of reflection Yancey champions here is interrogative, dialogic, and collaborative. It is "about learning to ask questions, about the power that asking good questions confers, about the value of doing this collaboratively so that we learn with and from each other. Reflection is, as I've learned, both individual and social" (Yancey 1998, 17). There is also a tentative, cautious quality to this kind of intellectual work for Yancey and this orientation links her ideas about reflection to the learning theory we reviewed earlier. As Yancey suggests, given the central role that reflection plays in the development of thinking, we have much to gain from moving reflective writing beyond the marginal places it now occupies in our curriculum (i.e., for the reflective portfolio letter, the final reflective portfolio essay, the reflection that sometimes accompanies a more traditional kind of writing task, and the final, cumulative

reflective essay at the end of the semester) (see Jung 2011; Yancey 1998, 15). Yancey's most recent book, *Writing across Contexts: Transfers, Composition, and Sites of Writing* (2014), which she co-authored with Liane Robertson and Kara Taczak, positions reflective writing at the center of a writing pedagogy focused on transfer of knowledge. At the moment, however, reflective writing is very much undervalued and underappreciated in the writing classroom. It has been in large measure eclipsed in the writing classroom by simplistic thesis and support argumentative writing.

THE EXPLORATORY ESSAY

There has been considerable and sustained resistance to argumentative thesis and support writing in the academy now for many years. In fact, a significant oppositional tradition has developed within our scholarship (which, alas, has been generally undervalued, and with which I humbly and respectfully position myself) that seeks to have students focus on more exploratory, open, and dialogic kinds of writing activities. The model for some of these scholars is Montaigne and his example of a writing practice that is fueled primarily by curiosity, openness, and the spirit of intellectual exploration. Generally, these scholars all suggest that a more open-ended, exploratory essay model is better for student learning, offering a more productive and worthwhile kind of writing experience because it privileges a more tentative, cautious, and exploratory orientation toward the world than conventional argumentative writing. I see my own pedagogy here supporting, extending, and attempting to operationalize this important work.

As early as 1971, Keith Fort critiqued the "tyranny" of the thesis/support essay. Fort suggested, in "Form, Authority, and the Critical Essay," that the thesis/support essay perpetuates, among other things, hierarchical power structures in society: "the form we have unconsciously assumed to be the best one (if not the only one) for expressing written ideas on literature both reflects and perpetuates attitudes that generate the structures of our society" (Fort 1971, 629). Furthermore, he suggested that this type of writing activity "*conditions* thought patterns and, particularly, attitude towards authority" (630). It does so because it requires students to think in terms of hierarchy, "mastery," and the belief "in the reality of a transcendent authority" (633): "As will always happen when the mind is patterned to think in terms of hierarchy, it will also have to be competitive. Most basically the critic is competing against his subject to establish his claim of mastery over it. And the form that

has internal competition as its motive force will also generate extrinsic competition" (635).

As we have seen from our discussion of learning theory, this kind of thinking produces a number of serious problems for student writers, serving to entrench them in lower order cognitive orientations. This kind of argumentative writing, which privileges the strong thesis statement above almost all else, also reduces writers to "thesis hunters" (633), rather than careful readers and reflective thinkers: "If the only form in which a writer can express himself on literature is one that requires a thesis, then he has to look at literature as a source of theses" (633). This pedagogy requires student writers to think in certain ways—but not others:

Formal tyranny in essay writing, as in any other expression, is based on the need of those who are in control to make the appearance of the expression confirm a desired idea of which there is doubt. To reach some understanding of what causes the creation of this tyranny, the best approach is to consider the common element in the form that is most generally taken as a rule, for this common element is the one that binds the group together.

In the essay it would seem that this key rule is that there must be a thesis which the essay proves. The first question always asked about a prospective paper is whether the idea is "workable" or can be "handled." As I understand these terms, they mean "do you have a thesis that can be proved?" This formal requirement is a *sine qua non* for a paper. Meeting it does not necessarily mean that a paper will be successful (an A in the classroom or publication), but its absence guarantees failure.

This formal requirement permits an infinite number of individualized expressions, but like any formal limit, it obviously permits freedom only of a kind. And, furthermore, since a relation always exists between form and content, it also imposes broad restrictions on the kind of topics that may be chosen. Only those ideas are acceptable that can be proved. If a writer tries to force the "wrong" kind of idea into the right form failure will result. Teachers and editors look with dismay on "big" or very personal topics. Their abhorrence is reasonable so long as the form is fixed because these topics are not provable. (Fort 1971, 631)

Fort approvingly mentions "conversational, exploratory essays" (632) as a viable alternative to thesis/support essays.

William Zeiger's (1985) essay, "The Exploratory Essay: Enfranchising the Spirit of Inquiry in College Composition" is another important landmark in this oppositional tradition. The title itself suggests a great deal about Zeiger's curricular ideas, and I am especially appreciative of his interest in enfranchising students, something I enthusiastically support as well. Zeiger suggests that our almost exclusive focus on

argumentation in the classroom serves to subvert intellectual and emotional exploration and mature meaning-making:

The ability to construct a logical argument, as in exposition, is of course a critical skill for any educated person. Equally important, however, is the ability to explore—to recognize and weigh alternatives. By concentrating almost exclusively on thesis-support exposition in college composition classes, we are implicitly teaching that the ability to support an assertion is more important than the ability to examine an issue. In doing so, we fall in with the results-oriented popular prejudice and fall in our duties as liberal educators. No doubt we composition teachers extol to our students the need to research a topic carefully and to scrutinize a question from all sides; we even sit in conference over preliminary drafts. But as long as the goal and product of writing is to demonstrate the validity of a thesis, the implicit message is that proving is more important than finding out. (Zeiger 1985, 458)

A powerful and important critique, indeed. Zeiger sees our disciplinary mono-culture of argumentation as dangerous and problematic for a number of reasons:

It would appear, in sum, that concentration on the expository essay has reached a point of severely diminished returns. It continually demands that the writer prove a thesis, even while slighting the exploration that would provide the substance of the proof; it asks the writer to make bricks without straw. It augments this impediment to free creation by confronting the writer with a critical audience, dispelling the congenial atmosphere in which exploration would thrive. I do not challenge the importance of sound exposition to a college career and a liberal education; but as long as the "bottom line" of an essay is a well-defended thesis, the art of exploration will continue to languish as the poor step-sister of exposition. If we genuinely wish to promote freedom of thought, to balance demonstration with the inquiry which sustains it, then we must establish the art of exploration as an equally acceptable and worthy pursuit. (Zeiger 1985, 459)

In place of argument, Zeiger proposes that we teach "the personal or familiar essay in the manner of Montaigne—an essay in an informal, friendly tone, whose aim is to unfold the intellectual potential of an idea" (460). Zeiger suggests that we adopt an "open form" of essay writing that has as its primary defining characteristic a "quality of accommodating several viewpoints, even contradictory viewpoints, simultaneously. If the expository essay is essentially an argument, the familiar essay is essentially a conversation" (460). The language here of "conversation" brings us back to Bruffee, Salvatari, and Morrow. This kind of writing privileges caution and the value of staying flexible and open to self-correction.

Shere Meyer has also done important work on this subject. In "Refusing to Play the Confidence Game: The Illusion of Mastery in the Reading/Writing of Texts," Meyer submits to withering critique the standard intellectual orientation of argumentative writing as it typically plays out in our classrooms, which relentlessly requires writers to assume a position of "authority" and mastery. Meyer suggests that this is a very risky "game" to play:

Some students can play the part; they can assume "authority" in imitation of the models they know. But they may still have a great deal of difficulty overcoming their feelings that they (and therefore their essays) are frauds. Sometimes those feelings are sufficient to create writer's block or dissatisfaction. If we insist that they pose as "acknowledged authorities," then we have contributed not to their learning but to their impostor complex.

Too often, these students are not really confident of their power to write; instead, they are playing a confidence game. One synonym for confident is "cocksure" and indeed, that is my point—to have confidence, the students must participate in an illusion of mastery: an illusion of "being cocksure" of themselves, their control of the language, their mastery of the literary text, and their superiority over their audience. Being "in control," however, exacts a heavy price and, strangely enough, exacerbates rather than relieves anxieties about inadequacy. (Meyer 1993, 47)

Furthermore, the focus of a writer constructing an argument, then, becomes not to listen to or embrace or welcome the other/s, but to annihilate them:

The act of persuasion is then a verbal assault on that opposition; we have won the argument if the reader moves from his or her opposition to our position—if we annihilate the "other" view" (Meyer 1993, 48).

Deep engagement with the chaos of mature meaning-making also becomes difficult under these conditions (48–9). Like Zeiger, Meyer laments the current state of curriculum in our discipline and seeks to theorize an alternate pedagogy:

Although challenged from a number of directions, formal argumentation is and will probably continue to be, at least for some time, the dominant mode of academic discourse. As such, it can be seen as empowering—empowering those students who by successfully imitating it convince their readers that they really "know" what they are presumed to know. Whenever students (or we, for that matter) sit down to write, we are all confronting the power of the red pen or the blue pencil. Rather than risk losing their place in academe, students try to play by the rules of the confidence game I have already described. Conformity may appear safer than the alternatives.

What then are the alternatives? What other stances and voices are there? Can we establish an "authority" that is not based on an illusion

of mastery? Can we locate an academic discourse that is not aggressively combative and competitive but that promotes a community that engages in dialogue, not debate? Can we argue differently about literature? These are the questions I ask of myself, my colleagues, and my students. And I am not alone. (Meyer 1993, 52)

Drawing on feminist scholars like Torgovnick, Lamb, and Frey, as well as the work of Jane Gallop, Meyer theorizes an oppositional pedagogy and a writing practice for the classroom that is less monolithic and more fluid than traditional argumentative writing, one that focuses on helping students "attain a degree of flexibility in negotiating the subject/object relations of the reading process and in articulating a multiplicity of 'selves'" (Meyer 1993, 54).

Paul Heilker and Donna Qualley have also contributed significant work to this oppositional tradition. Both of these scholars champion a pedagogy that is less reliant on argumentation and more focused on dialog, openness, and exploratory types of writing assignments. Heilker and Qualley's work warrants careful attention from anyone interested in having students produce mature, intellectually sophisticated work.

Heilker suggests in his notable book, *The Essay: Theory and Pedagogy for an Active Form*, that the thesis/support format, "once learned, works to actually thwart student development" (Heilker 1996, 2) because it embodies an "overly simplistic positivistic epistemology" (4)—one that suggests that truth can be rather easily found and that uncertainty is typically only a temporary condition. Heilker cites James Berlin here to discuss epistemology, but he might have also cited the learning theorists we discussed earlier, all of whom make roughly the same point about this kind of cognitive orientation. Furthermore, Heilker suggests that

besides being the uncritically and automatically invoked template for producing text, the scaffolding of the thesis/support form that allows students to simply and mechanically organize information reveals a second way this form limits students' development: by closing rather than opening their minds. This closing process begins by requiring students to repeatedly narrow and focus their topics (often to the point of incoherency) in order to find a "workable" thesis, one that is straightforward (often to the point of being obvious, incontestable, or clichéd) and has clear supporting reasons. (Heilker 1996, 3)

Heilker goes on to suggest that this form of writing is inadequate in all sorts of ways—developmentally, epistemologically, and ideologically. In its place, and drawing on the work of Lukacs, Adorno, Huxley, Holdheim, Good, and Bakhtin, Heilker champions a different kind of essay, which he theorizes and defines, following the example of

Montaigne, as a form of writing and intellectual inquiry that "must be an uncertain exploration of received opinion that searches for truth rather than trying to establish it" (38). Such writing should be characterized by three hallmarks:

- A profound epistemological skepticism. Against the absolute sureness and "airtight closure" (Heilker 1996, 4) of the thesis/support essay, Heilker suggests we embrace and model writing practices in our classrooms that acknowledge (and here he is quoting J. C. Guy Chertea) the "insufficiency" of our own knowledge "and its uncertainty" (17).
- Antischolasticism. Heilker is interested in destabilizing the idea that the academy is the only place one can find answers to life's most challenging and important questions and suggests that "truth" can be elusive, context-specific, and various.
- Chrono-logic organization, a form of organization that is much more fluid and organic than argument typically is. This is an organizational strategy that celebrates the mind at work, however associational, asymmetrical, tentative, and nonlinear the results of that thinking and inquiry may be. Again, Montaigne is the model here.

Of course, as Heilker suggests, putting this kind of writing at the center of our curriculum would require "both teachers and students to rethink almost everything they know about writing in academia" (87). This seems to be very much the case, indeed.

Qualley makes similar recommendations in *Turns of Thought: Teaching Composition as Reflective Inquiry*. As the title of her book suggests, Qualley's pedagogy seeks to promote "reflective inquiry," a complex intellectual and rhetorical activity that is built around a number of essential components, beginning with an "encounter with the other": "The encounter with the other initiates the reflexive turn to the self and the continual interplay between self and other is what prevents self-consciousness from slipping into narcissism or solipsism" (Qualley 1997, 139). Additional elements of her pedagogy include:

- Developing an "open stance" that is "receptive, deferent, exploratory, tentative" (Qualley 1997, 141).
- Privileging dialog: "Genuine dialog also presupposes that participants are not isolated in their own subjectivism and are open to considerations of other positions" (146).
- Embracing recursiveness: "Such a process helps students to experience revision as a creative and intellectual process. It also nurtures an important, intellectual, and ethical habit of mind in both students and teachers" (151).

Qualley also has important things to say about agency and confidence, that bring us again to problematic elements at the heart of "the discourse of mastery":

A good example of a person with a strong sense of ethical agency—way beyond most of us—is the nun in the film *Dead Man Walking*, who is able to open herself to the other, the convicted killer, without losing herself in the process.

All too frequently, though, our methods in the teaching of composition seem to encourage false or premature agency or an illusion of power. As Sherre Meyer (1993) notes, learning to write in the university can often mean learning to play the "confidence game." When students assume an authority in their written texts before they have had an opportunity to earn it through inquiry, they "participate in an illusion of mastery" that belies an inadequacy they often still feel about themselves as writers. (145)

Qualley's comments here about earned authority through inquiry are vitally important to keep in mind as we consider the simplistic argumentative essay. How much of the authority in these essays is "earned"? How would a student "earn" such authority? Would it be possible for someone who has read only a few short essays about a subject to earn any kind of authority? And what are we teaching students about writing, thinking, and meaning-making with these kinds of argumentative assignments? All important questions, for sure.

Paul Heilker's (2001) more recent essay, "Official Feasts and Carnivals: Student Writing and Public Ritual," extends Fort's discussion about the thesis/support argument and posits an alternative type of writing activity for students, theorized using Bakhtin's ideas about "carnival":

In teaching writing, we limit students' development by training them to practice only one kind of public ritual: the official feast of thesis-and-support writing. This kind of ritual, Mikhail Bakhtin notes, serves only to reinforce extant discursive, epistemological, and ideological boundaries, to buttress and sanction the existing ideas, hierarchies, prohibitions, and truths that proscribes the possible limits of students' thought, actions, and identities (Rabelais 9). Students also need to learn to practice the opposing and complementary public ritual of the carnival and thus come to transgress and transcend these forces which would place such hard limits on their senses of who they are, what they can do, and who they might become. By training students to also write in carnivalesque genres like the exploratory essay or Winston Weathers's Grammar B, for example, we train them to engage in a ritual which, according to Bakhtin, exists to offer temporary liberation from the established, enforced, and accepted conventions of the world and, thus, to consecrate inventive freedom. By teaching students to engage in the public ritual of carnivalesque writing, we can provide them with powerful practices with which to think, act, and

write differently—and, thus, to reinvent both who they are and the worlds in which they live. (Heilker 2001, 77–78)

Heilker suggests here that "the thesis/support form celebrates a postivistic epistemology and corresponding rhetoric in which truth is eternal and indisputable" (Heilker 2001, 79). As James Berlin has noted, in this epistemological orientation, "all truths are regarded as certain, readily available to the correct method of investigation" (Berlin 1987, 9). As we know from our review of learning theory, this is deeply problematic for student development. In its place, Heilker proposes that we embrace the models provided by Montaigne and Bakhtin:

In contemporary terms, the Montaignean essay, in stark contrast to the official feast of academic discourse, serves as one form of carnivalesque writing. The Montaignean essay counters official ideology, ritual, and dogmatism by embodying a spirit of discovery at work in an uncertain universe that leaves old, inadequate orders behind in its quest for new ideas, new insights, and new visions of the truth. It operates in opposition to the scholastic delineation of experience into discrete disciplines and their respective discourses, offering instead a transgressive and more inclusive discourse that temporarily brings together contrasting and incongruous points of view in an attempt to more fully and deeply address whole problems of human existence. In this, it enacts a conscious and conscientious act of resistance, one characterized by the free and familiar contact and discourse among people usually divided by a variety of cultural barriers. It encourages students to endlessly open and complicate their topics, to examine how and why they came to think and feel as they do, to follow an idea wherever it may lead, to entertain multiple (even contradictory) simultaneous theses, to enact the perpetual mobility that characterizes a freed mind. (Heilker 2001, 80)

There is much to be said for this kind of "resistance." This is the kind of intellectual work that should be at the center of our writing instruction, grade 6–13.

FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP AND THE "ADVERSARIAL METHOD"

Feminist scholars have also urged compositionists to rethink our reliance on argumentation and thesis and support so that our assignments require more dialogic and collaborative intellectual work. Feminist theory has long been interested in moving our discipline away from what Catherine Lamb has called "monologic argument" (Lamb 1991, 13). Lamb suggests, in fact, that "we have uncritically assumed that there is no other way to write" (13). This seems to be clearly and certainly the case. Argumentative academic writing is devoted almost exclusively to

what Olivia Frey has characterized as the "adversarial method" (Frey 1990, 512). Deborah Tannen has written a whole book on this question (*The Argument Culture*), and she has suggested that, in the final analysis, "our spirits are corroded by living in an atmosphere of unrelenting contention" (Tannen 1999, 3). We have had many calls over the years from feminist scholars and others for classroom writing activities that, following Lamb, move us away from the almost gladiatorial writing practices of argument and thesis/support toward writing activities that promote "cooperation, collaboration, shared leadership, and integration of the cognitive and the affective" (Lamb 1991, 11; Clinchy 2000; Gannett 1992; Kirsch et al. 2003). I would like to add my name to that list.

ROGERIAN ARGUMENTATION

We should pause here briefly to consider rhetorical tradition itself and the appealing example of Rogerian argumentation, a style of argumentation and negotiation founded perhaps most essentially on listening. Rogers identified and framed the key issues facing us in terms of rhetoric and argument much the way I am framing them here. As he notes in *On Becoming a Person*, "I would like to propose, as an hypothesis for consideration, that the major barrier of mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of the other person, of the other group" (Rogers 1961, 330).

This is a disposition enabled and encouraged, in some unfortunate ways, by simplistic argumentative writing. The solution to this problem, for Rogers, is increased priority given to listening and empathy:

But is there a way of solving this problem, of avoiding this barrier? I feel we are making exciting progress toward this goal and I would like to present it as simply as I can. Real communication occurs, and this evaluative tendency [to judge others] is avoided, when we listen with understanding. . . . We know from our research that such empathic understanding—understanding *with* a person, not *about* him—is such an effective approach that it can bring about major changes in personality. (331–32)

Rogerian argumentation is also built around furthering legitimate dialog and finding common ground. In response to the kind of culture of contentiousness that alarmed Deborah Tannen many years later, Rogers laid the foundation here for a more humanistic, dialogic, and less adversarial argumentative rhetoric. As Doug Brent has noted in *Theorizing Composition: A Critical Sourcebook of Theory and Scholarship in Contemporary Composition Studies*, "Rogerian rhetoric has had difficulty

achieving unqualified acceptance. Yet it has had an uncanny persistence. For many scholars, the turn toward dialogism, collaborative learning and social construction of knowledge makes Rogerian rhetoric more rather than less interesting, despite problems with its earliest formulations" (Brent 1998, 264).

There is much that Rogers says about human communication here and elsewhere in his work that can provide important guidance to us as we develop pedagogy and curriculum for our students.

PETER ELBOW AND THE BELIEVING GAME

Peter Elbow's work also supports a pedagogical focus on listening, empathy, and reflection. Elbow has spent his career resisting many of the accepted and dominant traditions and pedagogical practices in our discipline in an effort to create a space where students could write freely and enthusiastically, liberated from "the gateway power that teachers have in institutional classrooms to determine a student's experience of writing and to judge whether writing is good or bad" (Elbow 2008, 520). In his comments on receiving the Exemplar Award from CCC (in 2007), Elbow returns again to one of his primary concerns as a teacher and scholar—championing the value of "the believing game" and listening:

I knew that it would seem anti-intellectual to suggest a class where no one has any training or authority or sanction to judge writing. This was exactly the charge that Joe Harris later came to make: "the students in [my teacherless] workshops . . . do not seem to be held answerable to each other as intellectuals" (31). That's why I wrote the appendix essay and started off this way:

To academics especially, the idea of listening to everyone else's reading no matter what it is, refraining from arguing, and in fact trying to *believe* it, seems heretical and self-indulgent. Many people would dismiss the charge: "Intellectual schminintellectual! Who cares?" The trouble is I care. I think of myself as an intellectual! (Elbow 2008, 147)

In that appendix on the believing game, I was trying to show how deeply intellectual it is to harness both intellect and will in the job of believing multiple and conflicting views. I was arguing (as I still am) that the notion of "intellectual" work is far too permeated by a hunger for better answers and therefore toward premature judging and arguing. I tried to show that conventional assumptions about "good thinking" tend to preclude a kind of smartness and perceptivity that depend on maximum responsiveness and the willful withholding of judgment. (Elbow 2008, 521)

That's beautifully put, as we might expect from a scholar who has made it his life's work to find new ways to make us listen, to "voice," to

the music of vernacular language (Elbow 2012), to others as a matter of principle, and to students. "Listening and silence are hallmarks of the believing game. All input, no output" (Elbow 1973, 189). One listens most effectively and productively, Elbow suggests, while also "fighting the itch for closure" and certainty (Elbow 1973, 176-81). There is much in Elbow's work that supports the pedagogy we are theorizing here.

WHITHER COMPOSITION?

Given this long and distinguished tradition within our scholarship, we can now consider a simple question: What's not to love about the kind of writing described here by this rather long list of distinguished scholars and teachers? And why aren't we asking students to do more of it?

And two last questions if I may: Doesn't the research and scholarship we have carefully reviewed overwhelmingly indicate that it is time to make a change? And doesn't this scholarship and research give us a clear sense of what direction that change should take? I think it does.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF THIS PEDAGOGY

While I draw on a large body of scholarship from both within and outside our discipline, there are some unique features to the pedagogy I am proposing here that I would like to briefly highlight. First of all, this approach to teaching writing has been carefully theorized to incorporate learning theory into our teaching practice. While scholars in our discipline have long been interested in learning theory, none has developed a theory and practice of teaching writing linked so closely to learning theory or developed such a full range of pragmatic applications that seeks to incorporate what we know about learning theory into our daily classroom activities. This is an important, unique, and foundational element of the pedagogy we are discussing here. In addition, this approach to teaching writing has been designed to be responsive to scholarship from a variety of important subject areas for our discipline, including scholarship related to critical thinking, transfer of learning, and the nature of writing expertise. I am unaware of any pedagogy whose foundational practices can be tied so transparently and intentionally to such a broad range of important scholarship and research. This linkage to such a wide range of foundational scholarship should provide teachers of writing at all levels of instruction with confidence that this pedagogy has been carefully theorized and that it can offer students at all ranges of instruction important opportunities for growth and development as

writers. This pedagogy also offers teachers of writing strong philosophical validation for moving away from a focus on argument and toward a curriculum that embraces listening, empathy, and reflection as its most valued classroom practices. I know of no other pedagogy that does this.

Furthermore, this curriculum moves the ill-structured problem to the center of the intellectual work students do in our classrooms, an approach that provides instructors at all levels of instruction with a very pragmatic focal point for a whole range of classroom activities that can serve to center the work we do in the classroom on a common, simply stated, and theory-supported purpose. I know of no other writing pedagogy that makes this link to ill-structured problems so overtly and centrally. I am also suggesting here that assignment design, long an undervalued and undervalued component of our teaching practice, must be regarded as a complex and vitally important art form and linked in overt ways to learning theory and scholarship related to critical thinking, transfer of learning, and the nature of writing expertise. Readings must be very carefully selected, sequenced, and scaffolded. I know of no other writing pedagogy that makes assignment design so centrally important. So although there are some common features here informed by other research and scholarship, the pedagogy we are discussing updates and contemporizes that work in substantial, productive, and positive ways.

ALIGNMENT

This approach to teaching composition also aligns well with a number of important recent statements about writing and "college readiness." For example, this pedagogy supports many of the objectives articulated in the "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing," a document developed collaboratively by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project. Of particular note for our purposes here are the "habits of mind" that are the foundational elements of this approach to college readiness:

The concept of "college readiness" is increasingly important in discussions about students' preparation for postsecondary education.

This Framework describes the rhetorical and twenty-first-century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success. Based in current research in writing and writing pedagogy, the Framework was written and reviewed by two- and four-year college and high school writing faculty nationwide and is endorsed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project.

Habits of mind refers to ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students' success in a variety of fields and disciplines. The Framework identifies eight habits of mind essential for success in college writing:

- Curiosity—the desire to know more about the world.
- Openness—the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.
- Engagement—a sense of investment and involvement in learning.
- Creativity—the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas.
- Persistence—the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects.
- Responsibility—the ability to take ownership of one's actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.
- Flexibility—the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.
- Metacognition—the ability to reflect on one's own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge. (Council 2011)

The pedagogy we are theorizing here seeks to nurture and privilege each of these habits of mind. We will discuss this document and these dispositional characteristics in more detail in the final section of this book. This new pedagogy is built around the belief that these habits of mind are essential to helping students develop more sophisticated cognitive orientations about the world and essential to helping them become stronger, more mature readers, writers, and thinkers.

The kind of reflective writing practice that I am advocating here also aligns well with a number of the Common Core State Standards (2010, 35–47 [reading and writing]; 48–50 [speaking and listening]), especially those related to reading. A focus on listening, empathy, and reflection in the writing classroom would, for example, help students meet the ambitious reading goals set forth in these standards:

Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
 9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- Range of reading and Level of text Complexity
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. (CCSS, 35)

The focus on listening in the Core Standards is also another obvious area of alignment, although I am advocating here for a broader and more philosophically-informed understanding of listening. The Common Core Standards puts argumentative writing at the center of our national curriculum, however, and this is a priority I do not support and would like to see modified.

This approach also aligns very well with the outcomes articulated in AACU's important report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*, especially the focus on developing skills in "inquiry and analysis" (Association of American Colleges and Universities 2007, 3) and assessing "students' ability to apply learning to complex problems" (26). As we noted previously, this report echoes Robert Kegan's claim about the cognitive challenges adults face in modern life, calling for a curriculum that invites students to engage "challenging questions": "In a world of daunting complexity, all students need practice in integrating and applying their learning to challenging questions and real-world problems" (Kegan 1994, 13).

This report also calls on educators to become more "intentional" about the kinds of learning students need:

The council further calls on educators to help students become "intentional learners" who focus, across ascending levels of study and diverse academic programs, on achieving the essential learning outcomes. But to help students do this, educational communities will also have to become far more intentional themselves—both about the kinds of learning students need, and about effective educational practices that help students learn to integrate and apply their learning. (Association 1007, 4)

Our focus here on learning theory, critical thinking scholarship, and work done on transfer of knowledge and the nature of writing expertise seeks to do precisely this, anchoring the work we do in writing classes firmly and intentionally in foundational research and scholarship.

DISCERNMENT, JUDGMENT, AND CAUTION

Finally, the approach to thinking and writing that we are theorizing here is similar in many important ways to the one advanced by Sam Wineburg for thinking and writing about history in his book, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*. Wineburg suggests that the teaching of history should be used "as a tool for changing how we think, for promoting a literacy not of names and dates of discernment, judgment, and caution" (Wineburg 2001, ix). A pedagogy for the writing classroom focusing on listening, empathy, and reflection could be said to be built around the same principles—discernment, judgment, and caution. Wineburg asks, "What is it, exactly, that historians do when they 'read historically'? What concrete acts of cognition lead to sophisticated historical interpretations?" (xii). One of his answers is that history can "teach us what we *cannot* see," can "acquaint us with the congenial blurriness of our vision" (11). Mature historical cognition, he suggests, "is an act that engages the heart" and begins to embrace "a humility before the narrowness of our contemporary experience and an openness before the expanse of the history of the species" (22). He explains:

Coming to know others, whether they live on the other side of the tracks or the other side of the millennium, requires the education of our sensibilities. This is what history, when taught well, gives us practice in doing. Paradoxically, what allows us to come to know others is our distrust in our capacity to know them, a skepticism about the extraordinary sense-making abilities that allows us to construct the world around us.

A skepticism toward the products of the mind can sometimes slide into cynicism and solipsism. But this need not be the case. The awareness that the contradictions we see in others may tell us more about ourselves is the seed of intellectual clarity. It is an understanding that counters narcissism. For the narcissist sees the world—both the past and the present—in his

own image. Mature historical knowing teaches us to do the opposite: to go beyond our own image, to go beyond our lived life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we have been born. History educates ("leads outward" in the Latin) in the deepest sense. Of the subjects in the secular curriculum, it is the best at teaching those virtues once reserved for theology—humility in the face of our limited ability to know, and awe in the face of the expanse of human history. (Wineburg 2001, 23–24)

Note here Wineburg's emphasis on openness and humility. (This is not typically something that argumentative writing does much to nurture.) The model of historical thinking that Wineburg advances, foregrounds caution and respect for uncertainty and indeterminacy as being among its primary values. Advanced historical thinking as it is theorized here understands history as "context-bound and context-sensitive" (Wineburg 2001, 42).

Furthermore, Wineburg suggests that effective learning activities in the history classroom must be very carefully constructed with these goals in mind. He demonstrates one such activity with a case study assignment, "Reading Abraham Lincoln," a fascinating project focused on exploring Lincoln's ideas about slavery and African Americans (Wineburg 2001, 89–112). Texts for this project were carefully chosen not from textbooks, but from primary documents (a speech by Stephen Douglas, a letter to Mary Speed, etc.), and they provide a very rich and complex picture of Lincoln. Assignments for writing classes must be as carefully designed and crafted, with cognitive outcomes clearly in mind. In many important ways, the curriculum we are discussing for writing classrooms closely parallels the curriculum Wineburg outlines in his book for history teachers.

YES WE CAN

Why do smart, perceptive, well-read writing teachers sometimes feel compelled to teach reading and writing in ways that are sometimes reductive, not always conducive to real learning, and not always congruent with scholarship and research? How might we move beyond simplistic argumentation to develop a deeper, richer, more effective teaching practice that is built around current research and scholarship and that will work in a variety of classrooms, grades 6–13? As a discipline, we know a lot about writing and reading and their importance for thinking and learning. So why are we teaching writing in a manner that often subverts so much of what we know is good for students and good for their development as writers and thinkers?

For those of us who teach FYC and prepare others to do so, our sense of purpose and direction continues to evolve as we listen to the various voices participating in our scholarly and disciplinary conversation. Even when we work out in our own minds what our purpose and pedagogy will be (at least for the moment, as this process is often one that is ongoing and responsive to new ideas and scholarship, as it should be), we are confronted with many factors that can complicate or even prevent our ever fully implementing this purpose: high-stakes testing and accountability to others outside of our discipline; common core curricula; standardized textbooks; teaching staffs comprised of over-worked teachers who are responsible for too many students; graduate students (in some cases with little training) and part-time teachers with little job security; too many papers to grade and too little time or energy to think creatively or purposefully about curriculum and pedagogy; and the often invisible power of routine, entropy, and old patterns and beliefs.

I am calling for a new writing curriculum built around listening, empathy, and reflection. This is a pedagogy that would support all forms of serious intellectual work and would help nurture essential cognitive and dispositional orientations that are the wellsprings of mature meaning-making. Such a pedagogy would also offer us the chance to teach knowledge that transfers to other disciplines and to contexts outside the classroom. This is something that a curriculum focused on argument and thesis/support simply cannot claim.

Given what we have surveyed in terms of scholarship and research from a variety of fields including composition, learning theory, critical thinking, neuroscience, transfer of knowledge, and work related to teaching thinking in the classroom, it is clearly time to develop curriculum nationwide that is more responsive to this important work. It is time to liberate our classrooms from the stranglehold of simplistic argumentation. The time for revolution is now.

There may well be important civic benefits for our democracy that issue from this pedagogy as well: citizens in potentially great numbers who understand and appreciate the transformative power of listening, who are willing and interested in engaging others with empathy, and whose first response to a complex problem is to read, research, and reflect. The benefits to the nation and for our democracy could be substantial.

PART II

Motivation