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Since the 1980s, the field of rhetoric and composition has embraced the idea of collaborative writing as a means of generating new knowledge, troubling traditional conceptions of the author, and repositioning power within the student-teacher hierarchy. Authors such as David Bleich, Kenneth Bruffee, and Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede have written about, and advocated for, teachers' engagement with collaboration in the composition classroom. Yet in discussions of collaborative writing, scholars have tended to ignore an important element: the limitations placed upon student agency by the institutional context in which students write. We can ask students to work together in the classroom, but limitations on their choice of collaborators, their time together, and their ability to determine the outcome of their work result in an unproductive simulacrum of collaboration in which students write together but do not engage deeply with each other in the ways scholars describe. Ignoring the fact that classroom collaborative writing is embedded in different fields of power than writing done by scholars working outside institutional limitations results in a conception of collaborative writing as little more than an element of pedagogy, one that can be added to a syllabus without significantly changing the structure, goals, or ideology of the course. Rather than approaching collaborative writing as a means of pushing against the limits of institutional writing, the context in which collaboration takes place is naturalized. As a result, the assessment and disciplinary structures of the academy, the physical division of the student body into class

sections, and the tools available to support (or undercut) collaborative work vanish in the scholarship.

To counter this trend, I explore how the denial of context and the resulting disconnection between theory (the claims for collaborative writing) and practice (the twenty-first-century composition classroom) promote not collaboration, but a simulacrum of collaboration: academic work that mimics the appearance of true collaboration while failing to enact the liberatory possibility of working with other writers. This project explores collaborative theory on three levels: the personal, in which collaborative writing is illustrated via specific business, public, and academic contexts; the pedagogical, in which current collaborative theory and practice is deployed and analyzed to understand its limitations; and the disciplinary, in which current collaborative theory and practice is questioned, critiqued, and remediated to propose an alternative collaborative classroom praxis. The structure of the dissertation, which uses interchapters to draw connections between larger theoretical issues and my ethnographic research, interviews, and analysis, reflects these three strands as a means of illustrating the interdependence of the personal, pedagogical, and disciplinary conceptions of and engagements with collaborative writing.

COLLABORATIVE AUTHORIZING AND THE VIRTUAL  
PROBLEM OF CONTEXT IN WRITING COURSES

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

To my students, past, present, and future.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of  
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT, COMMUNITY, AND COLLABORATIVE AUTHORING IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

I came to academia from the software industry and, before that, the newspaper and magazine publishing industry. Both of these arenas have long promoted the kind of collaborative work that is valorized in rhetoric and composition scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Throughout these organizations, one would find people working closely together on tasks, sharing ideas, cooperatively engaging with research, and detailing their processes in texts that both documented the work at hand and laid the groundwork for future projects. At the software companies I worked at, collaboration usually took the form of engineers who regularly met to work through knotty coding problems and documentation issues; in the newsroom, groups of reporters and editors relied upon daily meetings to generate questions for sources and ideas for investigations, as well as one-on-one editing sessions in which individual reporters and editors collaborated on the final version of stories. As many advocates of collaborative learning, including Kenneth Bruffee and Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede, have claimed, these moments of working together are uniquely powerful. When writers collaborate on a piece of text, audiovisual content, web construct, or even a chunk of software code, strong feelings of connection and knowledge rooted

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<sup>1</sup> As far back as 1982, Faigley and Miller found that 73.5% of professionals engaged in some form of collaborative writing in the workplace (561), and the number of organizations requiring collaborative work remains high (Hinds and Kiesler xv).

not in the individual minds of the participants but in the collective “mind” of the collaborating partnership are generated.

In my teaching, I have attempted to give students the opportunity to understand and experience these types of collaboration. But every time I try, I meet immediate resistance—resistance familiar to any teacher who has asked students to work together. Their complaints ran the gamut from worries that they would be the only ones who did any work, to accusations that other students were not “good enough writers” to work with them, to blatant dismissals of collaborative writing as “busy work.” This resistance was not limited to undergraduates; my graduate student peers were just as reluctant to work together, and Joan P. Isenberg, Mary Renck Jalongo, and Karen D’Angelo Bromley’s research shows a similar reluctance among educators.

A look through the tables of contents of major journals shows that single authoring remains the primary means of authoring in English Studies.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, there is a powerful resistance to working together, even by those who acknowledge the pedagogical and productive value of collaboration. Yet in the scholarship of collaboration, there is a tendency to position working together as an act that remains the same no matter the context in which it takes place. As my experiences in the corporate and academic world illustrate, this is not the case. Collaboration is context-sensitive, and the shapes of

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<sup>2</sup> This is in contrast to research into publishing practices in other fields, which shows that “most universities undertake a substantial amount of collaboration and, in general, the amount of collaboration has jumped substantially in recent years” (Phelan, Anderson, and Bourke 635). Yet, as Haviland and Mullin note, the fiction of the solo academic “is maintained in some humanities fields where single-authored texts or projects are the norm; even though feedback and editorial comments from colleagues clearly affect the creation of a text, these are not always acknowledged” (17).

collaborative relationships are determined not only by the participants, but also by the institutional contexts in which the work takes place. Collaboration scholarship's failure to engage with context has important implications for the classroom, since the scholarship does not reflect the reality to which it is applied.

When I have asked students about their experiences working together, it soon becomes clear that many actually prefer to work together on larger projects. However, they resist the act of writing together, preferring to control their own texts. Given that writing collaboratively is common both in the corporate world and in online realms (including wikis, remixing communities, and the joint storytelling taking place in role-playing games), why is it difficult for students to write together? The key element is the academic context, a context that privileges individual achievement over communal work. Collaboration in its ideal form—the form generally appearing in the scholarship—takes place between two or more highly motivated agents who define the scope of their project, goals, criteria for success, the tools being used, the final product (a paper, video, or other text), the participants they work with, and their schedule for completion.

Rhetoric and composition scholarship commonly refers to this way of working as collaborative writing; however, this is quite different from the collaborative writing assignments in composition classrooms, which take place in a disciplinary space that limits student agency and ability to collaborate. In the classroom, the instructor determines the scope of the project, goals, criteria for success (in terms of grades), tools, and outcome. The institution controls the schedule and the possible participants—collaboration is only permitted between members of a single class.

Rather than considering collaborative writing as a task that troubles what Les Perelman calls “institution-based discourse”—writing that prioritizes the values of the academy, not the student (474)—collaborative writing is too often positioned as an unproblematic element of pedagogy that can be added to a syllabus without significantly changing the structure, goals, or ideology of one’s course. And, in ignoring context, scholars and collaboration-minded instructors create a situation in which the best possible outcome is a simulacrum of collaboration—a working relationship in which the appearance of collaboration hides the reality that students are not engaging with one another, and are instead simply divvying up the tasks required to complete a project, writing their parts alone, and cobbling them together. There is no give and take, no exploring together, no disturbing the assumption of single authorship. This is not collaborative writing—not even the hierarchical collaboration that Ede and Lunsford describe. This is a series of parts appended together into a longer piece, not the rich collaboratively authored texts described in the scholarship.

In “Collaborative Authorship and the Teaching of Writing,” Ede and Lunsford note that “scholars in English studies...are often more comfortable theorizing about subjectivity, agency, and authorship than we are attempting to enact alternatives to conventional assumptions and practices” (356). I have taken their words to heart. The path out of the conundrum of missing classroom context is not a retheorization of the act of collaboration, but a productive manipulation of the terms with which we discuss the act of writing together. As a field, English Studies uses the words “collaboration,” “collaborative writing,” and “collaborative learning” to refer to a wide variety of

activities. Given the frequency of these references, one might assume that scholars were working with set definitions. Yet there are nearly as many definitions of these terms as there are scholars working with these topics.<sup>3</sup> Some definitions are broad (collaborative learning), while others focus more directly on the task being performed (collaborative writing). Rather than attempting to draw a line between the physical act of writing and the larger acts of composing (brainstorming, invention, and freewriting, for example) I have chosen to adopt the term “collaborative authoring.”

This term, which has been used by other scholars, but not in this form, describes a way of writing together synchronously and together in space—even if that space is mediated by computers.<sup>4</sup> In other words, collaborative authoring is the act of writing in the moment with someone else, either in the same physical space or, through the use of technology, the same virtual space. The elements crucial to successful collaborative authorship are presence and synchronicity—working in the moment to generate texts together. Collaborative authoring is built upon James Reither’s conception of collaboration as both coauthorship *and* a philosophy centered on community (5). It is generally a long-term process in which two or more writers commit to a working relationship that supports the generation, shaping, and delivery of one or more rhetorical objects. While collaborative authoring relationships often form as a means of producing

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<sup>3</sup> The large number of definitions for collaborative work is a longstanding problem, one that Allen, Atkinson, Morgan, Moore, and Snow noted as far back as 1987 (73). In *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications*, Gere identifies 18 different terms describing writing groups, including “collaborative writing.”

<sup>4</sup> “Collaborative authoring” is often used in corporate environments to describe tools allowing for the creation of complex multimedia texts, as well as for tools supporting synchronous multiuser composition.

texts or other products, there is not a one-to-one correlation. Collaborative authors may generate a single product, a series of products, or no product at all. The resulting work may be marked with all participants' names or only one participant's name; the important aspect is the *process* of writing together, not the product.

This division between process (collaborative authoring) and product (the outcome) is vital to my analysis because collaborative authoring is relationship-based; it takes place in the generative interaction between participants. Two or more people commit to a way of being in the world in which they operate in relationship with each other. They agree—explicitly or implicitly—to a partnership with one another. While there is a goal for the collaboration, it is a goal that the partners agree is only achievable through their work with the other person(s). Importantly, the partners also agree that the goal is only achievable by working with particular partners; the goal cannot be achieved equally well by any random assortment of writers.

The difficulty with collaborative authoring in the classroom is, as I noted earlier, the fact that the classroom exists in a context that promotes individual engagement with the world. Disrupting this situation requires that students view their classmates as something other than isolated agents brought together by the whims of the institution and their individual schedules—that they consider themselves, in some way, as part of a community. Many collaboration scholars discuss the need for community for collaboration to succeed, but too often the scholars assume that simply placing students in proximity to each other is enough to produce feelings of community. Few address the topic of how community feelings form and how instructors can support the formation of

communities in their classrooms. A writing classroom's context reinforces individuality and products while the collaborative assignment requires community and process.

One way to address this disparity is through David McMillan's Sense of Community Theory, because it prioritizes the processes by which communities form while understanding that these communities come into being with the goal of producing outcomes—even if that outcome is the continued existence of the community itself. As McMillan notes, the success of a community depends not upon the individual genius of its members, but upon their skill at working together and upon their ability to strengthen the community. McMillan's theory is also useful because it is a means of theorizing the *sense* of community—the development of individuals' belief that they are members of a community—rather than a means of defining that a community exists.<sup>5</sup> This removes the instructor from the role of determining the shape of communities, and encourages individual groups to negotiate their own metaphors describing their groupings.

As I explore in more detail in chapter 3, McMillan identifies four key elements that foster the production of a sense of community: Spirit, Trust, Trade, and Art. Groups that exhibit these elements are effective; groups that do not exhibit these elements—or that have their development of these elements blocked—do not develop a sense of community and, thus, do not develop the ability to promote collaborative authoring. An intriguing element of McMillan's formulation is that the four elements are linked

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<sup>5</sup> Reynolds briefly outlines the problem with using metaphors of community to describe the work of composition ("Composition's" 31-32). By focusing on the sense of community, rather than attempting to link composition work to spatial metaphors like city or borderlands, my goal is to focus attention on the individual negotiations collaborative authors engage in as they define the shapes of their working relationships. See also Grimm, *Good Intentions*, 87.

linearly. While it is possible to develop each in isolation, effective communities develop a loop in which each of the four elements drives the production of the next.

While McMillan does not explicitly rule out the possibility of entering the loop at a different stage, much of his argument centers on Spirit as entry point. In this, he aligns with Kenneth Burke's discussion of identification and its primacy in the formation of community (*Rhetoric* 21). In both McMillan's and Burke's formulations, individuals must first identify commonalities with others before risking deeper connections. In the classroom, though, something entirely else happens. The need to assess student progress means students must perform the work of a community without having the support afforded by a community.

In most collaboration scholarship, theorists assume that students have in-built Spirit by virtue of their shared status as students, a view that is wholly unsupportable given the variety of student identities in the modern academy. Failing to recognize this variety strips all agency from students and positions them as little more than interchangeable cogs that can be swapped in and out without influencing the work of the group. Similarly, many scholars position Trust as a given, apparently believing that declaring "we'll all be working together" assuages student fears about their peers' performance in group environments.

When engaging with collaborative work in the classroom, it is incumbent upon instructors to actively help students develop a sense of community, a belief that they are working with people they can trust and want to continue working with. Instructors must construct a classroom in which Spirit has time to develop, in which students can build



Trust before they have to begin the higher-stakes act of Trade. This means maximizing the time groups spend interacting among themselves. Instructors can start this task by simply encouraging groups to sit together, which both increases their ability to talk with each other and helps define them as a coherent whole with an inside and outside—a key element of both McMillan’s and Burke’s theories of community. Instructors should also make space for collaborative group discussions in which students are invited to connect class topics with their lived experiences. By bringing their daily existences into conversation, collaborators develop a better sense of their partners’ beliefs, values, and approaches to the world. This uncovers commonalities between the collaborators, but more important, it uncovers disjunctions and disconnections, differences in their worldviews that lead to “dissensus,” which John Trimbur describes as “a powerful instrument for students to generate differences, to identify the systems of authority that organize these differences, and to transform the relations of power” (“Consensus” 603).

Instructors can also promote the development of Spirit and Trust by delaying the assignment of a final assessable task to the groups. This allows students to focus on the development of a working collaborative group as an end in itself, to explore its operation within the classroom through low-stakes work, discussion leading, and Spirit- and Trust-building collaborative writing activities. The group is not simply a tool for producing a final paper; it is a different way of working together in which the negotiations—textual and interpersonal—that students engage in are valuable in and of themselves. The final outcome thus grows out of the students’ work together. This requires that the instructor scaffold assignments—establishing a series of smaller writing tasks that support the final

project—but refrain from informing students that the work they have been doing is in support of a final project until the groups are comfortable with low-stakes trade and are ready to engage with a larger task.

McMillan’s work with Spirit of Community Theory and the formation of productive working communities illustrates how the success of collaborative writing tasks is dependent upon relationships. Collaborative writing—especially collaborative authoring—requires ongoing engagement with other people. Writers who do not feel connected to their partners—who feel no Spirit, no “spark of friendship” (McMillan 316)—will have difficulty progressing through the Trade and Art stages of relationships. In broader terms, working together productively requires that writers be invested not only in the task of writing, but also in the development and continued existence of their engagement with their writing partners.<sup>6</sup>

Students working together in a composition classroom provide a valuable, but fairly limited, means of investigating the role relationships play in the success of collaborative writing. Because of the strictures placed on their work by the institution—they are together for only a few weeks, and their choice of partners is limited to students enrolled in the course—students working together in the classroom have great difficulty developing the deep relationships required for collaborative work. This results in the type of “collaboration” often found in classrooms: papers consisting of individually written sections held together by little more than a few transition words. While this form of

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<sup>6</sup> While I have observed that students often form friendships via collaborative work, that does not mean that only friendly relationships are productive. As Trimbur argues, dissensus is a valuable element of collaborative work.

collaborative writing is common, it is not the only type of collaborative writing taking place within the academy. Professional scholars—faculty members and researchers working outside the limited context of the classroom—can, and do, establish working relationships that differ greatly from those available to students working in the classroom. By examining how academics who both study collaborative writing as well as engage in scholarly collaboration talk about their work, it is possible to gain insight into how their relationships enable collaborative working styles that productively question institutional assumptions about solo authorship.

The fact that students are limited in their ability to work together does not mean that more complex forms of collaborative writing—including collaborative authoring—are impossible to achieve in the classroom. It is possible to foster community formation and collaborative authoring through the tools used for course work—specifically, through technology like wikis, blogs, and synchronous online editors like *Google Docs*, *SubEthaEdit*, and *ZohoWriter*. While a number of scholars have argued for the inclusion of these tools in the classroom, they have tended to gloss over how students engage with the tools. Software may have features that support collaboration, but it does not mean that users will use these features collaboratively. In fact, these tools—wikis and blogs especially—can actually support radically individualistic authoring, and it is up to the instructor to promote their use in collaborative ways.

Claims about the collaborative nature of wikis and blogs are problematic for two major reasons. First, both blogs and wikis center on individual authors—they mark each revision with the identity of the specific author who made the change, reinforcing the

idea that the whole is nothing more than a series of incremental edits by individual authors. Second, blogs and wikis are product-centered—they present each revision (in the case of wikis) or post (blogs) as a draft, a completed whole that is the latest word on the subject. A draft may be tentative—in fact, that’s fairly common—but it is a completed whole, one that must be *edited*, not *authored*. “Collaborators” working with a wiki document are positioned as individual actors altering a series of incremental drafts of a text rather than a collaborative mind cooperatively authoring a single text together. The work of the collaborators, in this system, is the production of drafts (a product mindset), not the interpersonal negotiations through which authors make new meaning (a process mindset). The invitation to change the draft is an invitation to contribute to an existing text, not to author with another person who is present in time and space and with whom one has developed Spirit and Trust.

These issues can be addressed if instructors foster an approach to the technology that focuses not on “correct” use of the technology but on emergent “misuse”—uses that may not be ones that the authors of the technology envisioned. This approach foregrounds the task being performed instead of the software’s features that must be learned. This requires that the parties working together agree that they will interact with the software in ways that promote collaborative authoring. For example, while wikis assume that each contribution is from a single actor, they do not enforce a particular way of working. This means that there is a space for intervention and disruption of these individualistic (and individualizing) assumptions. Collaborative authors could write an

entry together, negotiate the final version of their contribution, and submit it as a single identity—thus locating their negotiations in their relationship, not in the software.

While wikis and blogs have attracted the most attention from scholars, the tools with the most potential for supporting collaborative authoring are synchronous online editors like *Google Docs*. While there have been some articles and books about their use in the classroom, the focus has been on “how-to” narratives rather than explorations of how they can be used to support collaborative authoring. Unlike wikis and blogs, which can be written collaboratively, but which do not support live editing, collaborative text editor documents are live, changing in real time as writers work through the text. This requires that students negotiate changes to the document as they happen; conversation about the writing takes place parallel to the development of the text. That conversation can take place either orally, with students physically sharing a keyboard and discussing changes, or textually, with students working on individual keyboards and cooperatively negotiating the development of their text.<sup>7</sup>

These editors include many tools to encourage collaboration, but as I noted earlier, that does not mean students will automatically use them collaboratively. Instructors must foreground the need to write live with one or more partners, and students must agree to work together live. The pedagogical intervention, as with so many technological developments in the classroom, must not be at the level of the software, but at the level of the users—they must understand that these tools are just that: tools. It is in

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<sup>7</sup> Because synchronous online editors allow for more than one person to type into a document at a time, they are particularly well-suited for distance learners and students with limited time on campus.

using them strategically, in ways that promote collaborative authoring in which authors work synchronously and are present to each other, that they have the potential to change student (and faculty) engagement with collaboration.

These technological tools can be a valuable means of helping students begin to explore collaborative authoring within the confines of the classroom, but they clearly do not represent a solution for all of the challenges facing students and instructors engaging with collaborative pedagogies. As noted earlier, collaborative work centers on relationships and writers' ongoing engagement with the people with whom they are writing. Facilitating these relationships requires that instructors help students learn to interact with one another productively, in ways that break with the strict hierarchies of the classroom and that promote peer-to-peer learning. While there are numerous avenues for achieving this type of interaction, the writing center, a liminal space that invites reconsiderations of the teacher-learner binary, offers a particularly useful model.<sup>8</sup>

The writing center is an academic space that is both a part of, and apart from, academic hierarchies and institutional structures. Unlike the classroom, which centers on the instructor's power and the disciplinary function of grading, writing centers are spaces in which power relations are in flux. The consultant (who is often a peer of the student writer) has authority by virtue of her or his employment at the writing center, but that authority is mediated by his or her status as fellow student. The consultant's authority is also largely limited by the fact that the writer has ultimate authority over the text and its

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<sup>8</sup> My discussion of the writing center assumes a center drawing upon best practices of writing center pedagogy, as outlined by the International Writing Centers Association and influential scholarship on tutoring practices.

final shape. The consultant can suggest, but not grade; the writer's work is under discussion, but he or she does not relinquish authorial control of the text. This alteration to the teacher-student binary promotes a different working relationship, one that can serve as a model for students writing together in the classroom. While it is not possible—nor desirable—to simply transplant writing center pedagogy into the classroom context, instructors interested in promoting collaborative authoring can draw upon the model of the writing center's peer-to-peer interactions as a means of helping students work together in the classroom.

This project explores collaborative theory on three levels: the personal, in which collaborative theory is illustrated via specific business, public, and academic contexts; the pedagogical, in which current collaborative theory and practice is deployed and analyzed to understand its limitations; and the disciplinary, in which current collaborative theory and practice is questioned, critiqued, and remediated to propose an alternative collaborative classroom praxis. The structure of the dissertation reflects these three strands as a means of illustrating the interdependence of the personal, pedagogical, and disciplinary conceptions of and engagements with collaborative authoring.

Chapter 2, "The Production of Real and Virtual Collaboration," establishes the terms shaping my discussion: collaborative authoring, real collaboration, virtual collaboration, and classroom context. This chapter argues that students engage in virtual collaboration; real collaboration is not possible due to the structures in which instructors and students operate. Promoting classroom collaboration in the university as it is currently structured is destined to fail, resulting in frustrated students and teachers.

Because of the way the university is structured—the organization of students into classes, the grade regimen, and the semester/trimester arrangement of time—students do not learn to collaborate; they learn to perform the surface signs of collaboration. By ignoring the fields of power in which the collaborative composition classroom is located, rhetoric and composition has promoted virtual collaboration and positioned collaborative writing as little more than an activity done to support certain papers.

Interchapter 1, “Institutions as Limiting Contexts,” draws upon Bill Readings’ *The University in Ruins* to explore how collaboration can serve as a means of breaking with dominant institutional narratives of the role of students. Rather than promoting the idea that the goal of academia is the production of autonomous subjects or “good soldiers,” collaborative work—especially collaborative authoring—can promote Readings’ “rational community” where “*the question of being-together is raised*” (20, italics in original).

Chapter 3, “The Year of Working Together: Enacting Theories of Collaboration in the Classroom,” illustrates how the institutional context in which classroom instruction takes place serves as a constant reminder to collaborating students that their individual success trumps their work with peers. I begin with a general overview of the project, the IRB-approved research method, and the ways in which that method reduced my control as mediator/matchmaker in the three sections of ENG 102 I studied. I also describe, in general terms, the three sections and the demographic differences between the two semesters. I then explore the structural differences between the classes, focusing largely on how the decoupling of students’ final grades from their collaboration resulted in far



more healthy collaboration in the second semester. To support my claims, I examine several students' interactions with me as part of the project. My data includes emails about their work—generally, emails in the fall focused on management issues (this person isn't doing his/her work) while those in the spring focused on students' own work—and the fact that students in the spring, who had no grade pressure on their collaboration, chose to develop the relationships most useful to their work: to truly collaborate, in other words.

Interchapter 2, “Competing Contexts of Collaborative Authoring: Institutions vs. Disciplines,” examines English Studies' troubled relationship with collaborative writing. Pedagogically, the field holds collaborative writing in high esteem; collaborative writing techniques—especially fairly accessible activities like peer-review—are frequently deployed in college classrooms. Professionally, the field's engagement with collaborative work is far less positive. The number of multiple-author articles published in leading journals continues to lag far behind other fields, and collaborators report often encountering resistance during promotion and tenure considerations.

Chapter 4, “Profiles of Academic Collaboration Outside the Classroom,” draws upon interviews with writing scholars to illustrate how professional academics come to write together, how they define the work they do, and how they communicate with their academic peers and students the value of their chosen working style. Using examples drawn from the corporate world, my classroom research, and a series of interviews with experienced academic collaborators, I examine three possible working styles—styles that fall under the umbrella of collaborative writing, but that differ greatly in their

engagement with questions of authorship and textual ownership. I conclude by arguing that collaborative authoring, so valuable as a means of disrupting the individualization of the classroom, is only one of several possible working styles. One of the most important skills for collaborators to develop is an ability to alter the type of collaboration to meet present needs.

Interchapter 3, “Audience as Context: Technologies of Collaboration,” examines academia’s tendency to view new technology—especially networked computer technology—as a goal, rather than as a tool. Institutional pressures to remain “cutting edge” and engage students via technology result in a rush to engage with technology unreflectively. Systemic issues with pedagogy and institutional structure are naturalized by the rush of new technology, resulting in problematic and sometimes counterproductive implementations in the classroom.

Chapter 5, “‘Collaborative’ Technology and the Simulacrum of Collaborative Authoring,” argues that, despite the hype about wikis and groupware, computer and network technology do not automatically lead to real collaboration. There is a potential for change embedded in distance learning’s reduction of face-to-face interaction and collaboration tools’ downplaying of individual authorship, but this potential comes with a cost: this technology marks each bit of data with a source—an author. Instructors can use technology to foster new authoring relationships, but only while foregrounding student interactions to build community and by disrupting the built-in accountability tools. The key point is that technology is not the grand answer; integrating blogs and wikis is simply providing new tools for old work styles. The goal should be to move away from a product

mindset (such as blog posts that are then commented on or wiki entries that can be “finished”) to a process mindset (in which works are developed by and in a community).

Interchapter 4, “Place as Context,” draws upon Nedra Reynolds’ *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference* to explore how the contexts of the writing classroom and the writing center reflect very different engagements with writing and teaching. As a result, people working within these places interact with each other and with texts differently. While it is possible—and, I argue, beneficial—to consider how collaborative classrooms can draw upon the peer-to-peer learning model of the writing center, one cannot simply transplant writing center pedagogy into the classroom. The writing center, by virtue of its differing practices, can serve as a model for engagement, but not as a model of authorship.

Chapter 6, “The Writing Center as a Model of Collaborative Authoring Encounters,” explores how the writing center’s focus on peer-to-peer interactions outside a formal assessment schema makes it a useful model for instructors interested in engaging with collaborative authoring in their composition classrooms. The writing center, in its ideal form, promotes interactions between writers and writing consultants in ways that break with traditional teacher-student/knower-learner binaries. While the work generally focuses on school topics, the conversation about the task takes place in the informal interactions between writer and audience. The result is a liminal space where writers and readers operate simultaneously within and without the academy, resulting in boundaries between writer and reader that are particularly porous. By drawing upon the

practices of the writing center, instructors can help students learn how to engage with other writers in a way that promotes the openness required for collaborative authoring.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PRODUCTION OF REAL AND VIRTUAL COLLABORATION

#### **Two scenes in the life of a collaborator**

1. Sara, Jennifer, and I bend over the laptop, watching as Sara combines a problematic paragraph with sentences written—and abandoned—earlier in the life of this article. We are gathered around a coffeehouse table, working on an article that began life as a series of discussions about visitors to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) Writing Center. Our initial talks turned into three conference presentations, the text of which formed the kernel of this article. At this point, there are a few snatches of our individual phrasing remaining, but much has changed. It is no longer possible to point to a section and say, “that’s mine,” nor is it possible to imagine presenting the argument in three parts; it has become a coherent whole. As we work, I idly wonder who is the author of the piece: Sara, Jennifer, and Alan (three individuals), or SaraJenniferAlan (an author living in three bodies)? Ultimately it doesn’t matter, because the authorship is only one facet of this relationship. Each of us could have written an academic article about this topic, although it would have been quite different than the one we are writing. What is more important is how we have come to rely on each other for motivation (our regular meetings serve as a powerful spark to writing), for writing help (some of our best sentences have been crafted when we’re gathered around a single computer), and for support (our conversations shift from the article to school events to personal issues and

back again). Unlike our other projects—projects we are tackling individually—the focus is as much on the experience of writing together as on the resulting product. Indeed, as the article has taken shape, we’ve all mentioned our discomfort with the prospect of losing our regular writing-together time. The resulting worry is generative; as we complete this article we have already started talking about our next one.

2. Students sit quietly around a large table in a seminar room on the third floor of UNCG’s humanities building. The professor announces that it is time to get into pairs to begin working on a co-writing project, and the tension rises immediately. There is a pause in which the students glance at one another, and then the professor says, “OK, let’s go.” The pairs who are not sitting next to each other engage in a bit of negotiations about who will move, and then slowly get into position. Conversation starts quietly, with cautious statements like, “so, um, where should we start,” or apologies for not doing sufficient prep work. The energy, which had been running high during the earlier lecture and discussion, has dropped. As the students discuss the assignment, they are careful not to assume the “boss” position; each one is careful not to step on the other’s toes or to take on too much work. (Earlier, almost all hands had gone up when the professor asked if they had ever been the only one to do work in group settings.) A fairly typical English 101 class? Not quite; this took place in a graduate course focusing on collaborative pedagogy.

So what’s going on? Both situations involve students who received or are in the process of receiving terminal degrees in English at the same institution. While not all of the people are rhetoric and composition scholars, all of them have worked in the same

department, a department that encourages the use of groups and collaborative activities in undergraduate writing classrooms. And yet collaborative writing (other than basic peer review) remains a rarity both in classrooms and in the work styles of graduate students. There are exceptions—including Sara, Jennifer, and I, as well as John Pell and William Duffy, who I discuss in chapter 4—but informal conversations with MA and PhD students in the English department shows a fairly strong aversion to collaborative writing. The aversion is not rooted in philosophy—most of the graduate students I have spoken to fully believe the arguments for collaborative writing and its power as a tool for learning—but in pedagogy: it is too hard to get undergraduate students to collaborate, and it is too hard to collaborate with graduate peers. This phenomenon begs investigation. Why does collaboration come naturally to some and not to others? While it may be tempting to write off this dichotomy as outside the bounds of human intervention—“some people are just born to collaborate”—such a move is intellectually unsatisfying. As a field, rhetoric and composition has questioned the narrative of the solitary author and committed to a consideration of the social aspects of writing. Theorists such as Bruffee, Ede and Lunsford, and Trimbur have demonstrated that collaborative writing is pedagogically valuable. And, as Muriel Harris argues, academia is home to an “informal network of assistance and support that goes on in residence halls, study rooms, coffee shops, libraries, and faculty offices—where peers help each other by reading each other's drafts when asked” (“Collaboration” 370). Why, then, is the prospect of implementing collaborative writing and working with other writers in a classroom so difficult?

It is only possible to address this question if one first identifies the structural differences between the two scenes described above. First is the personal connection: strong and longstanding in the first, tenuous and newly formed (if it is formed at all) in the second. Sara, Jennifer, and I first interacted as fellow students and peers, and then chose to write with one another. The article grew out of a personal and professional relationship, one that extends beyond the time spent writing together. The students in the classroom may have preexisting relationships, but they may be only nodding acquaintances. A second, but closely related, difference is the professional stakes: high in the first, low in the second. An academic publication has professional implications far beyond that of a class assignment (promotion and tenure, status in the field, even monetary benefits). A class assignment, unless it transforms into a personal project extending beyond the boundaries of the class, only “matters” until the day grades are filed. A third, also related, difference is the issue of choice: open in the first, closed in the second. Sara, Jennifer, and I chose to spend time together, and we chose to transform a personal relationship into a working relationship. The students chose to take the course—if only to meet an institutional requirement—but they did not choose to engage with the assignment collaboratively (it was assigned by the professor), nor did they have the option of collaborating with writers outside the class—even if they had already been working with this other person on other projects.

These three differences point to a major issue that has largely been ignored by scholars working with the topic of collaborative writing: context. Specifically, how the context in which writing takes place dramatically alters the agency and engagement of



the writers and their ability to collaborate. Sara, Jennifer, and I are working on our own, with no pressure from the institution nor prescribed ways of working. We are largely autonomous of the structures of power limiting the students in scene two, since we have the power to begin and end the project as we need, we chose our working partners, and we define success for ourselves. Our work together proves that collaboration works; the students' work together proves that the context in which collaboration takes place must be considered.

And yet for the most part, the role played by context in collaborative writing relationships has not been subjected to a prolonged investigation. Anne Ruggles Gere, in *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications*, notes that “institutional origins of authority” limit classroom groups' ability to operate autonomously (4), but does not follow up on this thread of her argument. Donna Qualley explores the importance of time and trust (the personal) in *Turns of Thought* and Lee Ann Carroll examines questions about high- and low-stakes collaboration in *Rehearsing New Roles*. Ede and Lunsford, in *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*, make hints at contextual analysis, but largely treat the classroom context as a local condition easily overcome. (For example, classroom structure is reduced to classroom design—a local condition solved by moving chairs—instead of considering the classroom's position in larger fields of power [*Singular*, 120].) Ede and Lunsford's engagement with assessment thus becomes a discussion of new assignments and different systems of credit-giving (121). Similarly, Zane L. Berge's “Differences in Teamwork Between Post-Secondary Classrooms and the Workplace” presents collaboration as something students can to learn

to do via the right type of assignment (195). Candace Spigelman builds upon these earlier works in *Across Property Lines*, acknowledging classroom strictures, but repositioning the issue as a matter of students' conception of textual ownership rather than one of institutional limitations upon student agency (113). David Bleich, in "Collaboration and the Pedagogy of Disclosure," makes a similar move. He acknowledges that there is something different about classroom collaboration, but positions the issue as a matter of student resistance to collaborative writing based on concerns about sharing and trust (43-44).

Aside from these brief discussions of context, there has not been a sustained examination of the structural, institutional, and philosophical strictures in place that limit the ability of instructors and students—specifically, those in the writing classroom—to work collaboratively with texts. Because the field of collaborative scholarship has tended to ignore context, the result is a conception of collaborative writing as little more than writing-plus: writing plus another voice, writing plus negotiation with another person. By ignoring that collaborative writing in the classroom is embedded in different fields of power than those affecting collaborative writing scholars working on their own, collaboration scholars do a disservice to their topic. Collaborative writing becomes little more than an unproblematic element of pedagogy that can be added to a syllabus without significantly changing the structure, goals, or ideology of one's course. Rather than considering collaborative writing as a task that pushes against "institution-based discourse" and the limits of classroom writing, the context in which collaboration takes place is naturalized, and the assessment/disciplinary structures of the academy, the

physical division of the student body into class sections, and the tools available to support (or undercut) collaborative work vanish in the scholarship (Perelman 474).

This chapter examines this large-scale denial of context and how the denial of context and the resulting disconnection between theory (the claims for collaborative writing) and practice (the twenty-first-century composition classroom) promotes not collaboration, but a simulacrum of collaboration: academic work that mimics the appearance of true collaboration while failing to enact the liberatory possibility of working with other writers. I argue that one means of breaking through the simulacrum is collaborative authoring—writing together in real time while present to one’s partner(s). Because of its focus on immediate interaction and privileging the students’ work with each other, collaborative authoring represents a means of disrupting assumptions about what collaborative writing can achieve within the first-year composition classroom.

### **Collaborative Theory: Terminology**

When students engage in collaborative writing in the classroom, they appear to be doing the same thing that writers operating outside the classroom are doing. They look at the same text, they contribute ideas, they discuss changes, and they choose what to cut and what to keep. Only when examined with an eye toward context does it become clear that the students are proscribed in a way that writers with more institutional power are not. In fact, as Mary Lea argues, “most university teaching and learning practices are not about inclusion but tend to position undergraduate students as permanent novices, never

attaining full membership of an academic community of practice” (193).<sup>9</sup> This is particularly true for collaborative writing assignments. Collaborative writing in the classroom is a simulacrum, a copy that, by virtue of its seeming fidelity to the original, comes to replace the original. This notion of the simulacrum is drawn from Jean Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality and the precession of the copy in postmodern culture. In his conception of the simulacrum, the real and the copy are not in a simple causal relationship; the copy not only can represent the real, but it is increasingly taken as the real (27-28). The collaboration students engage in the classroom becomes, for them, what collaborative writing is. When—or if—they later engage with collaborative writing outside the context of the classroom, these same students may understand collaboration can be more than simply a way of grouping individualistic writers; it can be an effective way of producing texts in concert.

When considering collaborative writing in the classroom, the real/virtual split marks two very different ways of working. The real is the rich, productive working relationships described by, and engaged in by, writers such as Ede and Lunsford, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater and Bonnie Sunstein, and Kami Day and Michele Eodice. This is the type of engagement described in scene one, a working relationship in which the process of writing together is just as important as the outcome (if, indeed, there *is* any outcome other than the relationship itself). The virtual is the enactment of collaborative activities and assignments in the classroom without considering how the context in which the collaboration takes place differs wildly from the context in which rhetoric and

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<sup>9</sup> Crowley makes a similar argument in *Composition in the University* (8).

composition scholars collaborate. The virtual draws upon the same set of tools as real collaboration—peer review, coauthoring, and collaborative editing, for example—but does not acknowledge the institutional limits placed upon members of a collaborative group.

In using the term “real,” I am not intending to mark a particular way of working as true or authentic. Indeed, students can, and do, make real connections with their writing partners in classroom contexts. Instead, the real/virtual split serves as a means of illustrating the disconnection between theory and classroom practice. Similarly, my use of the word “real” does not mark a privileging of physical/offline relationships. While real/virtual often operates as an analogue for the offline/online binary, our interaction with technological spaces has become far more complex. It is just as possible to collaborate via networks as via face-to-face interaction. The shape of the collaboration is different, but there is no structural obstruction to collaborative writing inherent in computer-mediated communication.

As noted in the Introduction, the field of rhetoric and composition uses a multitude of terms to refer to the act of writing together, including “collaboration,” “collaborative writing,” and “collaborative learning.” In this dissertation, I build upon Ede and Lunsford’s definition of collaborative writing, which acknowledges that the act of writing together includes quite a bit of work that takes place outside the text:

any of the activities that led to a completed written document. These activities include written and spoken brainstorming, outlining, note taking, organizational

planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Written products include any piece of writing, from notes, directions, and forms to reports and published materials. (*Singular* 14)

Unlike traditional conceptions of writing as a solo activity, this form of collaborative writing makes explicit the social nature of composing.

Ede and Lunsford's term leads to a second, and much more important, definition: "collaborative authoring."<sup>10</sup> This term, which is not as commonly used as "collaborative writing," "collaborative learning," or "collaboration," describes a way of writing together synchronously and together in space—even if that space is mediated by code. In other words, collaborative authoring is the act of writing in the moment with someone else, either in the same physical space or, through the use of technology, the same virtual space. Unlike broader terms like "collaborative writing," collaborative authoring is a "fully collaborative enterprise involving coauthors who plan, draft, and revise a document in a face-to-face context" (Rogers and Horton 122).<sup>11</sup> The vital element to successful collaborative authorship is presence and synchronicity—working in the moment to generate texts together. Collaborative authoring is built upon James Reither's conception of collaboration as both coauthorship and a philosophy centered on community (5). It is generally a long-term process in which two or more writers commit to a working relationship that supports the generation, shaping, and delivery of one or

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<sup>10</sup> I have chosen to use the term "collaborative authoring" rather than the shorter "coauthoring" to foreground the idea that collaborative authoring is an act that is constantly under negotiation by writers determining working styles, hierarchies, as well as texts. Because "coauthoring" is commonly applied to more hierarchical relationships in the sciences, its use to my project is limited.

<sup>11</sup> Rogers and Horton do not name this act collaborative authoring, instead positioning it as a variety of collaborative writing.

more rhetorical objects. While collaborative authoring relationships often form as a means of producing texts or other products, there is not a one-to-one correlation.

Collaborative authors may generate a single product, a series of products, or no product at all. The resulting work may be marked with all participants' names or only one participant's name; the important aspect is the process of writing together, not the product.

This division between process (collaborative authoring) and product (the outcome) is vital to my analysis. As I explore in chapter 3, collaborative authoring is relationship-based; it takes place in the generative interaction between participants. Two or more people commit to a way of being in the world in which they operate in relationship with each other. They agree—explicitly or implicitly—to a partnership with one another. While there is a goal for the collaboration, it is a goal that the partners agree is only achievable through their work with the other person(s). Importantly, the partners also agree that the goal is only achievable by working with particular partners; the goal cannot be achieved equally well by any random assortment of writers. Kami Day and Michele Eodice describe this act as “choos[ing] to locate themselves in a place where respect, trust, and care make possible not only publishable products but also rich and rewarding personal relationships” (“Coauthoring” 114).

Collaborative authoring stands in stark contrast to what I term “group work.” Group work projects are the short-lived, usually in-class work sessions engaged in by students with little to no connection with one another. Collaborative authoring is participant-driven; group work is assignment-driven. When collaboratively authoring, the

participants find one another (possibly from a group of people beyond the immediate context of a particular class or school), determine working roles, and determine criteria for success and failure. They must also, as Harvey S. Wiener argues, negotiate consensus, an act that he claims is “the major factor that distinguishes collaborative learning from mere work in groups” (54). In group work, the instructor determines when grouping is allowed, chooses the size of the groups, organizes the groups him- or herself, and provides a task for the group. Students engaging in group work are thus objects to be manipulated. Students engaging in collaborative authoring are still objects to be manipulated, but they have more agency based on their greater autonomy.

Outside academia, there is less confusion of terminology in the scholarship; the terms “collaborative learning” and “group work” are fairly rare. In business journals and texts describing corporate work, the terms “team” and “collaboration” dominate. The former tends to be used to refer to work within an organization, while the latter tends to be used for organization-to-organization relations or software. Texts focusing on teams, in the corporate context, often focus on many of the same issues as works directed toward classroom collaboration: problem-solving, dealing with diversity, conflict resolution, and other interpersonal skills.<sup>12</sup> While these works can be useful to classroom instructors as a means of learning how to teach these skills to students, their focus on long-term collaborative relationships of the type found in the corporate environment makes them less useful for use by students. In contrast to texts focusing on teams, texts using the term

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<sup>12</sup> Examples of these types of texts include Belbin’s *Beyond the Team*, Maginn’s *Making Teams Work: 24 Lessons for Working Together Successfully*, Fisher’s *Leading Self-Directed Work Teams*, and Hackman’s *Groups That Work (and Those That Don’t): Creating Conditions for Effective Teamwork*.



“collaboration” in the business context often focus on relations between corporations and non-profits and community groups or the use of groupware/collaborative software.<sup>13</sup>

### **Collaboration Scholarship: The Tenets**

While some advocates of collaborative work may quibble with the lines between collaboration, collaborative writing, collaborative learning, collaborative authoring, and group work, there is a general consensus that writing together is something more than simply asking two people to generate a single text. While there are numerous definitions of the work taking place, there are four tenets that appear with regularity in the scholarship: in the classroom, writing together 1) has inherent value, 2) is both different and more difficult than solo authorship, 3) is teacher-directed, and 4) has a material outcome.

Of the four, the first tenet is the most common: the act of collaborating with another person is valuable *in and of itself*. A typical claim can be found in Beth M. Henschen and Edward I. Sidlow’s “Collaborative Writing”: “In collaborative learning, students focus on what each other has to say. They begin to see the world as other people see it and to get to know each other as writers” (33). The major pedagogical work of writing together takes place in the process of collaboration; the resulting text is less

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<sup>13</sup> Examples of the former include Samu and Wymer Jr.’s *Nonprofit and Business Sector Collaboration: Social Enterprises, Cause-Related Marketing, Sponsorships, and Other Corporate-Nonprofit Dealings* and de Man, Duysters, and Vasudevan’s *The Allied Enterprise: Global Strategies for Corporate Collaboration*. Examples of the latter include Coleman’s *Groupware: Collaborative Strategies for Corporate LANs and Intranets* and Chaffey’s *GroupWare, Workflow and Intranets: Reengineering the Enterprise with Collaborative Software*.

important. This stance is in line with composition studies' privileging of process over product, a fact that likely explains why it is so prevalent. This focus on process may also explain why collaborative work is more visible within the field of Rhetoric and Composition than traditional literary studies, which tends to focus more closely on the completed text (Hafernik, Messerschmitt, and Vandrick 31).

Yet consensus on this first tenet begins to fragment when scholars attempt to justify their belief in the importance of collaboration. While the reasons for promoting collaboration vary across the board, they can generally be divided into two camps: the idealistic and the practical. The first presents collaboration as a means of personal growth, the second as a reflection of how things are done in the "real world." This split corresponds to Richard Louth, Carole McAllister, and Hunter McAllister's divide between Philosophical/Theoretical and Pedagogical/Anecdotal (216). The idealists tend to focus on collaboration as a means of expanding the mind, improving the self, liberating the student, and creating new knowledge. Ede and Lunsford's description of collaboration as promoting "a deeply enriching and multiplicitous sense of self" (*Singular* 142) is fairly typical. John Trimbur's conception of collaboration as a means of questioning structures of power and ideologies is located in this camp, as is Hephzibah Roskelly and Kate Ronald's claim that "inquiry is both a communal and a contingent process, operating in local contexts and among groups as well as individuals, and its method is therefore necessarily collaborative" (84). John Schilb values collaboration as a means of challenging "the teacher's authority and the misleading image of the isolated writer" (107), while Johanna W. Atwood argues that working together is "a way to

correct the philosophy of composition and to show the falsity of individualism in writing” (20). The common theme is that collaboration is a means of altering participants’ worldview (even though the resultant worldviews may be very different).

On the practical side of the first tenet’s idealistic/practical binary, theorists focus less on the philosophical benefits of collaboration and more on its use as a means of helping students operate in an academic-corporate environment. Typical publications include Sylvie Noël and Jean-Marc Robert’s “Empirical Study on Collaborative Writing: What Do Co-Authors Do, Use, and Like?,” Janet K. Winter and Joan C. Neal’s “Group Writing: Student Perceptions of the Dynamics and Efficiency of Groups,” Brenda S. Gardner and Sharon J. Korth’s “Classroom Strategies That Facilitate Transfer of Learning to the Workplace,” and Beth L. Hewett and Charlotte Robidoux’s *Virtual Collaborative Writing in the Workplace: Computer-Mediated Communication Technologies and Processes*. These publications position collaborative writing as a job skill valuable as a means of achieving corporate goals. More theoretically grounded examples include David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrovsky’s basic writing classes at the University of Pittsburgh, which stress collaboration as a means of building writerly confidence, and Janis Forman’s research into the growth of team-centered workforces and the concomitant increase in the numbers of businesses requiring collaborative work.

Like the first tenet, the second tenet—collaborative writing is both different and more difficult than “normal” writing—appears in nearly every article and book. Regardless of a theorist’s position in this idealism/practicality binary, he or she can be counted on to engage with this topic, usually in relationship to error. As far back as

Bruffee's seminal "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" advocates for learning together acknowledge that collaboration in the composition classroom is difficult and often fails. In fact, as a number of researchers note, the product may actually be less competent than work produced by single authors. In my experience, collaboratively authored texts tended to take much longer to compose, even though they were typically much shorter than single-authored pieces. These findings duplicate Neomy Storch's work with second-language collaborators (160). While students tended to compose slightly less competently when working with other students, research by Helen Dale; Winter and Neal; and Louth, McAllister, and McAllister shows little negative pressure on the quality of student writing. While their findings are reassuring for collaboration-minded instructors, this type of research is largely beside the point since most collaboration scholars tend to talk little about the actual quality of final products.

While collaborative composition is acknowledged to be more difficult than single authorship, this difficulty is usually positioned as a strength, one that supports the concept that collaboration's value lies in the act of collaboration. Trimbur, in "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," makes a virtue out of the inevitable struggles groups of writers face, positioning the struggle for consensus as "a powerful instrument for students to generate differences, to identify the systems of authority that organize these differences, and to transform the relations of power that determine who may speak and what counts as a meaningful statement" (603). While acknowledging the difficulties, Trimbur and other theorists maintain that collaboration is an important, even necessary tool for students to develop, either for their growth as students (Gere 3) or as humans

(Roskelly and Ronald 84). In a twist on Stephen North's famous description of the writing center, collaborative writing makes both better writing *and* better writers.

While the first two tenets have been rooted largely in Louth, McAllister, and McAllister's "philosophical/theoretical" realm, the last two are firmly embedded in practice. Both are clearly stated in Bruffee's 1984 definition of collaborative learning: "a form of indirect teaching in which the teacher sets the problem and organizes students to work it out collaboratively" (637). His Freirean definition represents the third tenet of collaborative theory: the "work" of collaboration is indirect instruction. By placing students in conversation with one another, instructors break from the banking model where teachers talk and students listen. By engaging in problem-posing, the instructor models the critical engagement with the world required for liberatory pedagogy. Unlike the previous two tenets, which are true for collaborative writing both in and out of the classroom context, this tenet clearly connects itself to the classroom context. Like the final tenet, it assumes that there can be a single overarching "reason" for collaboration, rather than treating the act of writing together as a way of being.

The final major tenet of collaboration scholarship is perhaps the most practical of all: Collaboration results in an outcome. Collaborative projects are *projects*; they are designed to produce something material, whether it be writing, an oral presentation, or multimodal content. The goal may be the working-out of the problem, but it must be a working-out that results in a product that mediates among multiple voices, which signifies that "[t]his collaborative mind has a collaborative voice" (Alm 134). Because of the requirements of the academic essay form (a single text with a single argument), the

multivocality of the process must be hammered out before the final product is handed in. As a result, the rich back-and-forth that marks the development of a collaborative text fades into invisibility as the work is polished into a single-voiced text.

These tenets underpin not only collaborative pedagogy, but also the real/virtual collaboration binary. They do so because their referents are two very different ways of working with texts and other people. The first two tenets refer both to classroom collaborative writing and to the self-directed collaborative writing engaged in outside the academy. In contrast, the second two tenets clearly refer solely to collaborative writing taking place within a classroom. This phenomenon of dual referents invites a blurring of the differences between classroom and non-classroom collaborative writing. Students seem to be doing the same type of writing as non-students (some of whom are writing the works on collaboration in which this blurring takes place), so the limitations placed upon student agency by the classroom context fade from consideration. This move contributes to the virtuality of student collaboration by erasing the real context and substituting one based not on the students' situation, but their instructors' and other academics'.

### **Collaboration Scholarship: The Assumptions**

The tenets' contributions to the collaboration simulacrum are problematic, but it is clear that such a move is not done maliciously. These tenets reflect a commitment to student-centered classrooms dedicated to fostering dialogue, deepening relationships, reducing students' alienation from their academic labors, and inviting reconsiderations of authorship and the composition of texts. Unfortunately, while these goals are admirable,

they are built upon extremely problematic assumptions—assumptions that in many cases undercut the instructor’s goals for the collaborative work and unproductively represent the context in which the students’ work takes place. As with the tenets, the assumptions can be roughly divided along a practical/theoretical split. Unlike the tenets, the assumptions can be more easily examined when one begins with the practical spectrum, since the first three assumptions are embedded in the definition of collaborative learning Bruffee proposed: “a form of indirect teaching in which the teacher sets the problem and organizes students to work it out collaboratively” (637). The other two assumptions—motivation and instructors’ ability to create community by fiat—are rooted in the theoretical side of the spectrum.

As Bruffee’s definition makes clear, academic collaboration is 1) teacher-driven, 2) product-based, and 3) single-classroom-based. Because of the in-built hierarchy of the classroom, collaboration is assigned, not assumed. Students are told they will collaborate on a project, piece of writing, or editing task. Any organic collaboration driven by members of the class interested in working together must be approved by the instructor. Any collaboration done “unofficially” (without notifying the instructor) or with non-class is gray-area collaboration; some might consider this plagiarism or academic fraud. (UNCG’s academic integrity policy specifically identifies “giving or receiving information or assistance on work when it is expected that a student will do his/her own work” to be cheating [“Academic Integrity” n.p.].) The word “expected” is an important one. By positioning the single author as the default one expects, this policy illustrates that

the institution clearly views the normal state of writing to be single authorship. Any alteration of this situation, any upsetting of expectations, is a potential violation.<sup>14</sup>

Just as the teacher defines the boundaries of “acceptable” collaboration, he or she defines the boundaries of the “problem” being addressed and the organization of the students. Collaboration thus becomes little more than an activity, a thing to do for 50 or 75 minutes two or three times a week.<sup>15</sup> Collaboration also becomes marked as a means of producing something rather than a stance in the world; it’s something you do in this classroom setting, not a way of being. This assumption, that collaboration necessarily generates a product, is vital to the first tenet’s claim that the value of collaboration lies in its enactment. (If nothing else, the act of collaboration produces a “changed student.”) Collaboration is not facilitated as a way of existing in the world; it is promoted as a productive activity that better generates x, y, or z. This assumption also underpins the pragmatic belief that “the corporate world” is collaborative. Learning to work together is a valuable job skill, so its product is a more-adaptable worker.

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<sup>14</sup> In her work on plagiarism, including *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, Collaborators* and “Sexuality, Textuality: The Cultural Work of Plagiarism,” Howard explores how conceptions of the autonomous author are inextricably tied to western conceptions of gender. Drawing upon Ede and Lunsford’s division of collaboration into hierarchical vs. dialogic forms (*Singular* 133), she writes that “[c]ollaboration involves one writer being influenced by another, whereas in the male-dominated authorship of the modern West, authors are supposed to be autonomous. If they *must* collaborate, they must do so hierarchically, not dialogically—thus preserving their autonomy and individuality” (“Sexuality” 477-478, italics in original). Students who collaborate with writers outside the boundaries of the classroom (or in ways not approved by the instructor) disrupt these assumptions, resulting in work that is deemed a violation.<sup>15</sup> As Howard notes, positioning the writer as able to choose whether he or she writes collaboratively reinforces the idea of the autonomous author rather than troubling it (*Standing* 46).



The third assumption embedded in Bruffee's definition illustrates a profound tendency to objectify students as little more than resources to be paired up as needed for the subject-teacher's work. Engaging in collaborative writing in the classroom assumes one of two equally problematic situations: either the registrar's office, in a supernatural act of wisdom, paired each student with his or her ideal collaborative partners; or the actual identity of one's collaborator doesn't really matter and everyone can write equally well with everyone else. The former is highly unlikely, while the latter tends to dehumanize students. As any instructor working with collaboration can attest, some students struggle when they are asked to work with others. This does this mean that these students cannot collaborate or cannot collaborate well with *anyone*. It could be that they cannot collaborate well *with the particular members of that course section*. The division of students into sections, an act that is largely invisible to academics so familiar with the structures of our work environments, contributes to a conception of students as largely interchangeable. Also embedded within this assumption is a far more disturbing assumption for those of us committed to collaborative writing: the only reason students collaborate, the only reason they do the work at all, is because the pressure exerted by the grade. The idea that part of a collaborative group could exist outside the teacher's purview, or that a collaboration could generate writing not assessable by the instructor, is never addressed. Interestingly, the assumption that each class contains an ideal collaborator even appears in Susan Miller's alternative urban/city-studies-influenced model of collaboration. While it discounts the notion of community (a point I return to in

chapter 3), it maintains a conception that the division of students into class sections has no effect on collaboration.

Critiquing the structure of the classroom may seem unfair, since workers in corporate environments are often asked to collaborate, sometimes in groups consisting of coworkers with whom they may not work well. An argument could be made that, since this type of collaborative work is in students' futures, educational institutions should mandate collaborative work in the classroom as a means of preparation.<sup>16</sup> This argument may appear seductive, but it unravels when one considers how the classroom and the cubicle differ in terms of time, individual relationships, and motivation. In corporate contexts, employees work together for long periods of time (typically 40 hours a week) with no set end date. In the classroom, students generally have a single semester or trimester together. If they work with their collaborators for five hours a week outside of their classwork (which at UNCG is three hours per week), they will be together for only 120 hours—three weeks' worth of 8-5 corporate work. Students are also likely to regularly interact with a far larger number of "coworkers"—other students—than corporate workers. This makes the development of collaborative relationships more complex, since students must renegotiate working relationships every semester.

Employees asked to work together thus can be said to operate in a context closer to the one in which Sara, Jennifer, and I work. There is high motivation—failing to cooperate could result in unemployment—and (with some exceptions) workplace collaborations can exist for a much longer time. Motivation is an important issue, and the

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<sup>16</sup> This assumes that the purpose of college is the production of white-collar workers, a highly problematic understanding of the role of education.

fourth major assumption of collaboration theorists is that students' motivation for working with one another is either the same as their instructors or is not important at all. According to scholars, the academic goal is either self-growth or employability. But it's worth considering what the student's goal may be. In many cases, it's little more than doing what he or she needs to do to please the instructor (and thus get a good grade). An analysis using stasis theory would quickly point to a major flaw in discussions of collaboration: the two sides (instructor/academia and student) are talking about different things. Some students will be highly motivated by working with other students (these are the success stories featured in collaborative pedagogy articles). Others will be motivated by a desire to please the instructor. But all will be motivated, in some way, by grades. Even if the students pick their own topics and groups—a system I tend to use—they may not be motivated to do the work with the students in their group; limiting collaborator choices to a single class radically reduces students' ability to find good partners.

Like motivation, the fifth major assumption falls into the theoretical camp. While the other assumptions pose difficulties, this last is both the most difficult to overcome and the least visible. Yet when it is put into print, the problem becomes clear: Rhetoric and composition scholars seem convinced that a community and a feeling of *communitas*—an approach to peers so vital to collaborative work—can be something instructors develop by fiat. Because we see the classroom as a community, we believe that this somehow makes the group of people in it a community. The assumption is that communities form when we want them to—when the teacher assigns a problem to solve, in Bruffee's formulation. While many theorists depend upon Kenneth Burke's concepts of community

formation when envisioning classroom interactions, they largely ignore his analysis of the importance of communal feeling in the formation of communities. To collaborate, one must feel a connection to the people with whom one is working—an identification with the community. Just as importantly, communities depend upon a scapegoat—the member who is the non-member of a community, the person or persons who are the not-us (*Grammar* 406). Students working together must feel a connection to their partners, a connection that is stronger than the potential connections they could have with other members of the class. Any pre-existing relationships (such as when roommates are in the class together) are subordinated to the new structure imposed by the instructor. I return to the topic of community formation and the need for the instructor not to intervene, but to step back, in chapter 3.

### **The Missing Consideration: Context**

These problematic assumptions can be fairly easily traced to a single flaw in collaboration scholarship. Advocates for collaborative writing—both the idealistic or practical—tend to ignore the fact that the composition classroom is situated in a larger institutional context, one that is largely hostile to any work that troubles traditional notions of single authorship. This failure (possibly refusal) to consider context reflects a tendency in academic scholarship to consider the classroom as “my space,” a realm where the teacher has the ability to fully control student interactions and assessment. This belief seems particularly endemic to the composition classroom for a number of reasons, including the fact that the course is often required (thus attracting a more heterogeneous

student population), it usually has smaller class sizes (thus allowing for more individualized interactions), it is largely taught by young/inexperienced/academically powerless instructors (thus encouraging more experimentation), and it has “no content,” but simply subject matter (a claim famously explored by Frank D’Angelo [86]). This belief in the autonomy of the classroom is false and counterproductive, since any collaborative project takes place not only inside the limits of one’s classroom; it also takes place in a larger field of power.

Applying Pierre Bourdieu’s axes of audience size and cultural consecration, the composition classroom aligns with vaudeville: it has a mass audience, but little prestige (329). It is a class everyone has to take simply because everyone has to take it, so it is a perfect space in which to experiment. Yet just as vaudeville is itself embedded in larger fields of cultural production, power, and capitalism, the composition classroom is enmeshed in fields of academic power: grading systems, composition’s anxiety about its validity as a field, cultural expectations for college, and monetary pressures on both the institution (retention) and the student (“will getting this degree help me get me a job?”). While most rhetoric and composition scholars struggle with issues raised by negotiating these fields of power as professionals, these external pressures fade from view when discussing collaboration. The issues raised tend to focus inwardly on the concerns authors have about control of their work (Alm 135; Bruffee 640) or on the individual benefits accrued by the participants (Elbow; Gere). The result is a classroom that denies the reality of both instructors’ and students’ lives as participants in the academic system.

Context is the missing key term in the academic collaboration equation. As Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Joseph Harris, and many others have argued, the work of composition differs in many ways from the work taking place elsewhere in the academy. This often results in classrooms—and classroom relations between instructors and students—that differ greatly from other spaces in the academy. Yet, as many of these same scholars have noted, while the composition classroom “feels” different, it is still part of the larger academic system; closing the classroom door and putting chairs in a circle cannot free the instructor and students from their engagement with academia’s systems of assessment, discipline, and power. Yet context is also the term that radically alters the project. It is not ethical to position collaborative writing as simply an activity done within a classroom space without acknowledging that that space exists inside larger disciplinary/grading structures. As Evan Watkins argues in *Work Time*, transcripts of final grades are the most important product of higher education. This is a problem because transcripts are largely unnuanced: “you don’t report to the registrar that...John has a remarkable grasp of English history for a sophomore. You report that 60239 got a 3.8 in Engl 322, which in turn, in a couple of years, is then circulated to the personnel office at Boeing as 60239’s prospective employer” (18). No matter the grading schema used to assess collaborative projects—individual assessment by instructor, group grading, single group grade—students leave class with a single final grade. What does this grade reflect? The students’ ability to collaborate? The quality of the final presentation? Some combination of both? The negotiation between assessing collaboration skill and writing skill is a valuable one. However, since this negotiation takes place at the classroom level,

it is invisible at the institutional level. The final grade is a single data point on the transcript with no accompanying narrative as to how it was achieved. Institutionally, the work the students do to problem solve, negotiate stakeholders, forge consensus (and Trimburian dissensus), and other acts of collaboration are invisible. The only thing that matters is if they can write better. (Of course, defining that “better” is a thorny subject, and one that rhetoric and composition scholars have been more than willing to engage with.)

Obviously, the issue of invisible work—intellectual activities that students engage in that foster development not reflected in the final grade—is an issue for many instructors, including composition instructors engaging with critical literacy topics. In fact, many of the questions facing instructors teaching critical literacy and critical thinking are the same as those facing instructors teaching collaborative writing: what exactly is being assessed, and how can it be assessed. But the act of assessing individuals’ contribution is particularly problematic for collaboration-minded instructors, since individual grades work against the ideals of collaborative pedagogy. No matter how the instructor sets up his or her grading system—for example, if he or she grades students individually or gives all members of the group the same grade—the institution interprets each student as an isolated writer. This undercuts collaboration, because it constantly reminds students that their collaborative work has no institutional importance outside the classroom in which it takes place. According to the institution—and, as Watkins notes, the transcript—it makes no difference if students work together or if they work separately. Regardless of the instructor’s goals for the class, the larger cultural narrative

of the individual/isolated author permeates the students' existence in the academy and shapes the way they are tracked and assessed. Ignoring this situation, or believing that giving all group members the same grade somehow mediates the influence of the grading system, is highly problematic.

### **Collaborative Writing and Authorship**

Given the divergence of terminology, pedagogical goals, and classroom approaches, it may seem quixotic to propose another term for the act of writing together. However, my use of “collaborative authoring” marks a very different approach to this act, one that centers on the importance of synchronous invention and arrangement by authors present to one another—even if their presence is mediated by technology. Rather than writing in isolation and negotiating the integration of finished products, collaborative authors are present to each other, either side-by-side, face-to-face, or in the same virtual “space.” Collaborative authors write the entire text together, engaging as a group with questions of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Stephen M. Ritchie and Donna Rigano describe this approach as the “piano duet” model, in which writers sit side-by-side at the keyboard, composing the text together from beginning to end (123). By privileging the act of writing together in real time, the term “collaborative authoring” strategically leverages cultural assumptions about authorship as a means of foregrounding how writing together challenges the individualistic assumptions of the academy.

More than two decades ago, James A. Reither and Douglas Vipond, writing about the then-recent move toward considerations of writing as a social activity, noted that



even though radical changes in practice seem called for if we believe even some of what has been claimed about the social dimensions of writing, little substantive change in either course design or classroom practice has come about that can be said to result directly from this reconsideration of the nature of writing. (855)

A similar charge can be laid at the feet of collaboration scholars, who have largely focused attention upon the individual classroom and ignored the structures of power in which the classroom is located. So how could instructors interested in collaborative writing engage with questions of institutional power and classroom context? One possible intervention lies in the problematic, yet powerful, role of the author. The university's assumption that writing is done by isolated individuals is, as James S. Leonard and Christine E. Wharton argue, rooted in the Romantic era and its privileging of the individual (27). Collaborative writing theorists—including Leonard and Wharton—who have engaged with the topic of authorship have argued that collaborative writing can trouble this conception and open new possibilities of authorship. Yet the question of student authorship has not been a major focus of these discussions. When the topic arises in the scholarship, in works like M. Thomas Inge's "The Art of Collaboration" and Jeanette Harris's "Toward a Working Definition of Collaborative Writing," it is often a means of revisiting Roland Barthes "The Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?" and applying these earlier claims to "literary"/"high art" examples. (Maxwell Perkins' work with F. Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe is a popular example.)

While most scholars focus on generalized "writers"—individuals operating outside any context—Spigelman's *Across Property Lines: Textual Ownership in Writing*

*Groups* and Tracy Hamler Carrick and Rebecca Moore Howard's edited collection *Authorship in Composition Studies* explicitly engage with student authorship. Yet even their discussions of student collaborators tend to focus on writers operating in non-classroom spaces—writing centers, predominately—or on actions the instructor can take to facilitate student engagement with questions of authorship. As a result, the limits placed upon students by institutions, writing programs, instructors, and other authorities are largely invisible. This is a puzzling move, since, as Howard notes, the category of “student,” like the category “author,” implies a solitary mind engaging with the world alone. Of course, “author” and “student” are terms located near the poles of an axis of prestige. Authors are esteemed for their “originality, autonomy, morality, and proprietorship,” while students are required not to be original, to depend upon sources, and to repeat the ideas of others. And, as the obsession with catching plagiarists indicates, students are assumed to be if not immoral, then at least amoral (Howard, “Binaries” 1-2). The result is a writer with no control over his or her writing, whose power has been relocated in the instructor (Crowley, “writing” 95-96).

Regardless of whether a rhetoric and composition scholar engages with questions of student authorship, one notable element of the scholarship is the fact that, in most works, collaborative writing is depicted as a means of disrupting the exalted place of “author” in western society (Howard, *Standing* 46-47). Yet it is worth considering how the category of “author” could not simply be disrupted, but also repositioned. Spigelman describes how “authorial ownership underscores a writer’s commitment to his or her work; it suggests an investment of time and effort, sometimes at great emotional cost”

(5). Authors are committed to their work in a way that “writers” (and certainly “students”) are not. This divide between identities, which Bruce Horner terms “the author/student writer binary” (505), is highly visible in students’ understanding of their place in the institution. Kelly Ritter’s survey of first-year composition students, published in “The Economics of Authorship: Online Paper Mills, Student Writers, and First-Year Composition,” found that only 35 percent considered the work they did in the classroom to be authorship (609). While a simple terminology change is not enough to alter students’ engagement with their work, it can become a public marking of a new approach to the author/student binary.

Bruce Horner’s “Students, Authorship, and the Work of Composition” offers a possible model to follow. While he explicitly focuses upon the individual student in his discussion of the author/student binary, his suggestion that composition instructors “[join] with our students to investigate writing as social and material practice, confronting and revising those practices that have served to reify the activity of writing into texts and authorship” points to a more productive classroom engagement with student authorship (526). Yet I would question his dismissal of “promoting students’ accession to an authorial status we know to be problematic.” The category of author is problematic, but it is also a category associated with a great deal of cultural capital. As Ritter’s work makes clear, students recognize the identity of “author” as a privileged one, but largely feel that this identity is inaccessible to them (613). Is there a way to decouple the author/student binary as a means of promoting the agency of student writers while, at the same time, making space for collaborative authoring?

Late in “Agency and the Death of the Author: A Partial Defense of Modernism,” John Trimbur points to Walter Benjamin’s idea of a socialized author-producer, one who “is able first to induce other producers to produce, and second to put an improved apparatus at their disposal” (qtd. in “Agency” 296). In Trimbur’s formulation, it is this idea of a socialized author that should be the goal of compositionists, not the wholesale rejection of the author or a doctrinaire “all writing is social” stance (296). This more nuanced conception of authorship points the way to a new approach to collaborative classroom work. In this formulation, students come together not simply to *write* (a low-status task explicitly tied to a physical act) but to *author* (a high-status task engaging with multiple modalities and increased agency). Such a move breaks the author/student binary and supplements the existing category of “student author” (commonly used for authors who are still enrolled in formal education) with “authoring student,” a category that acknowledges the limited authority of the student while enabling what Sharon Crowley terms “Author-ity” (“writing,” 96). Such a move enables the investigation Horner calls for, as authoring students use their texts to examine, with authority, the context in which they operate. Instructors can facilitate these examinations by inviting students to consider issues such as the institutional definitions of plagiarism and autonomous authorship discussed earlier, and by working with students on writing tasks that position “the student as academic author, and...the assignment as real writing, integral to the student’s understanding of his or her own authorship” (Ritter 614).

My work with collaborative authoring is in its early stages, but it is possible to report some preliminary results. One of the most evident findings is that it is quite

difficult to enact, meaning that instructors interested in this type of work must approach assignments strategically. As I argue in chapter 3, collaborative authoring depends greatly upon community feelings and students' ability to trust their collaborator(s). This is difficult to achieve within the context of the classroom and the brief duration of most classes. Yet when I have had students work together in ways that promote collaborative authoring, either by sharing a computer or through the use of online collaborative text editors, they have reported that they both enjoyed the experience and felt that they produced quality work. This correlates with Ritchie and Rigano's findings in "Writing Together Metaphorically and Bodily Side-by-Side: An Inquiry into Collaborative Academic Writing." While they found some difficulties with synchronous composing—including writers' struggles with different composing styles (125)—they report that, in their case, the resulting writing was "substantially more reflexive than otherwise possible" (130).

### **Moving Forward: Collaborative Authoring as Resistance**

In *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University*, David Damrosch argues that, for good or ill, "a highly individualistic scholarly self" is vital to academic success (86). This means that engaging with collaborative authorship is a means of troubling the academy's conception of what Damrosch terms "the scholarly personality" and the conception of texts as being single-authored artifacts. Likewise, foregrounding context is a means of resisting the invisibility of collaborative writing. Rather than ignoring context, collaboration scholars must reconsider collaborative authoring not only as an act of

resistance to the dominant means of knowledge production within a single classroom and a single time span, but also as a means of performing Horner's task of critiquing (and possibly altering) the larger assessment/disciplinary structures of the academy. Doing so requires breaking with traditional scholarship and the bifurcated theoretical/practical tracks Bruffee identified nearly three decades ago. Instead of more articles, books, and dissertations proving that collaboration works or describing how an individual instructor implemented scholarship, the field should engage with larger questions of how collaborative authoring can drive reimaginings of the academy, its understanding of collaborative action, and its means of assessing students.

To begin this work, instructors must reconceive collaboration within their classrooms. Rather than positioning collaborative authoring as "our next activity" or "something fun we can try," instructors must foreground the contested area of collaboration in the academy and the larger culture. Instructors must engage as collaborators *and* disciplinarians, members of the community and liminal agents capitalizing on their institutional authority to enable experimentation with collaborative authoring. The idea of working together becomes the topic of the class in many ways, as the instructor helps students understand their position within the academy and the means by which the academy leverages capitalist competition to position them as not only isolated from their peers but actively antagonistic to them. Such a move invites students to consider their understandings of authorship and the societal assumption of a solitary,

autonomous author.<sup>17</sup> The instructor must implicate him- or herself as an agent of a system actively hostile to the expressed goals of the collaboration, while asking the students to imagine alternate relationships between student, instructor, institution, and culture.

To pursue such a change, the instructor's goal should be an "all for one, one for all" relationship: the class commits to working together (as a whole or in groups) toward a project while supporting one another in their intellectual work. At the same time, the instructor commits to working with his or her students to clarify both their relationship to him/her and their varied positions within the academy. Thus instructors should maximize the agency of their students within the classroom. This requires abandoning the strict hierarchy of the classroom and facilitating not only collaboration, but also the *rejection* of collaboration. Rather than decreeing that students must work together, instructors can make a case for working together and help students understand that collaborative authoring is a powerful—but not the only—means of pursuing a writing task. Students may learn important lessons about the power of collaboration by observing the progress of individual- and group-authored projects within the same class.

Ira Shor's work with the liberatory classroom is vital to this project, since a decentered classroom requires renegotiation of agency over schedules, projects, and

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<sup>17</sup> This consideration must be explicitly introduced by the instructor, since, as Howard notes, much of the scholarship of collaboration, dating back to Bruffee's work in the mid-1980s, still assumes solitary authorship (*Standing* 34). Spotlighting this assumption and asking students to reconsider societal conceptions of authorship is a means of moving away from a conception of collaborative work as multiple autonomous writers working independently to a more productive conception of collaborative authorship.

grading.<sup>18</sup> Along with the “all for one, one for all” relationship and experimentation with class structures, the critical collaborative classroom must support exploration of subjects driven by internal interests, not instructor demands. As a group, the class must consider problems to address and consider how collaboration can be used to support them. They must consider work styles and texts outside the purview of traditional academic work. They must also consider how to assess their work, not in the interest of grading *qua* grading, but in the interest of reflective consideration of collaboration as a means of working. Exploration along these lines draws upon collaborative, semester-long projects such as those described by Cynthia Selfe. Finally, collaboration scholars must also investigate with students the role played by technology and the means by which wikis, group authoring programs, and other collaboration tools both support and undercut classroom collaboration.

As noted earlier, this project examines collaborative theory on three levels: the personal, the pedagogical, and the disciplinary. The structure of the dissertation mirrors this approach. The chapters explicate and connect pedagogical and disciplinary elements while the interchapters describe and analyze how collaborative theories are applied in academic and non-academic contexts. This chapter has established the terms shaping my discussion: real collaboration, virtual collaboration, the tenets and assumptions of collaboration, and the possibility of intervention through (re)examinations of authorship and context. Because real collaboration is not possible due to the structures in which we,

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<sup>18</sup> While most of Shor’s work engages with critical pedagogy, *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* and *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* offer the clearest visions of decentered, critical classrooms.



as a field, operate, students are only able to engage in virtual collaboration. Promoting classroom collaboration without acknowledging how the academy influences students' ability to work together is a project that is destined to fail, resulting in frustrated students and teachers. Because of the way the university is structured—the organization of students into classes, the grade regimen, and the semester/trimester arrangement of time—students do not learn to collaborate, they learn to perform the signs of collaboration. They sit together, read each others' work, and submit a group-credited paper, but they are largely not able to engage in the type of inventive collaborative work that collaborators working outside this context can. By ignoring the fields of power in which the collaborative composition classroom is located, rhetoric and composition has promoted virtual collaboration and positioned collaborative writing as little more than an activity done to support certain papers. My goal is not to undercut the work of Ede and Lunsford, Bruffee, Bleich, Marilyn Cooper, Michele Eodice, Rebecca Moore Howard, Thomas Newkirk, Patricia Sullivan, Victor Villanueva, Kathleen Blake Yancey and the other prominent rhetoric and composition scholars who have explored the topic of collaborative writing. Instead, I build upon their central claims to argue for real collaboration—context-sensitive, student-driven, critical pedagogy that both acknowledges the context of student collaboration and brings that context into consideration by student writers.

In the next interchapter, "Institutions as Limiting Contexts," I explore how two powerful, and competing, institutional ideologies position the students as autonomous writers operating in a realm of individualized assessment. To support my argument, I

explore how Bill Readings' proposal for decentering teaching as a means of rejecting the conception of the isolated learner is particularly valuable for collaborative writing. I also examine how the policies of UNCG's Institutional Research Board (IRB) enforce the problematic ideologies Readings describes. I build upon this claim in chapter 3, "The Year of Working Together: Enacting Theories of Collaboration in the Classroom," which uses David McMillan's Sense of Community Theory as a lens to examine a yearlong classroom research project. This interchapter and chapter illustrate how the institutional context in which classroom instruction takes place serves as a constant reminder to collaborating students that their individual success trumps their work with peers.

### **Interchapter I: Institutions as Limiting Contexts**

During the 2009-2010 school year, I engaged in a class-based research project, approved by UNCG's Institutional Research Board (IRB). This project brought into stark relief the competing ideologies, often framed as mission statements, at play within most American universities. As Bill Readings explains in *The University in Ruins*, mission statements promote the grand narrative that evolved from the German model for American universities, which “centered on the production of a liberal, reasoning subject” (9). This narrative is in direct conflict with the assessment-driven ideology of administration that learning is information transmission, which positions the student as both product and capital—including economic, political, and cultural (19). In both ideologies, university graduates embody the institution they passed through—one as a model of individual agency in society and the other as a productive worker-citizen. The common element of these competing ideologies, beyond the privileging of the autonomous subject that Readings explores, is that both concern themselves with time other than the present. Mission statements are forward looking, focusing on the reasoning subject resulting from the students' time in the academy. Assessment regimes, though established (ideally) before the work being assessed, are backwards looking, focusing on how well the subjects handled the task of developing autonomy. The Now—the time spent working with a particular group of students and an instructor in a particular

classroom—serves only as an anchor point of timeline leading to the “real work” of pedagogy.

The outcomes of both of these narratives are problematic, though for different reasons. The first narrative—the student as autonomous subject—promotes a pedagogy based on mimicry. In this conception, students are “finished” when they are recognizable by their professors as “professionals” (see David Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University”). Even if the instructor believes she or he is teaching students to think critically (a common claim in English departments), a problem remains: what does “thinking critically” look like? If the student’s thinking is not recognizable to the instructor, it essentially does not exist. Contrast this approach to the student with the approach embedded in the second narrative: student as product. This mindset promotes a pedagogy based on adherence to a list of criteria, transforming students into the “products” of composition courses. In this conception, students are “finished” when they have proven they can do a series of tasks mandated by the bureaucracy of the academy. Other skills fade to invisibility by virtue of their omission from official standards.<sup>19</sup> The conceptions of the resulting students are different—at its extreme, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Man Thinking” versus the good soldier—but both posit the student as an autonomous subject individually submitting to a program of learning.

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<sup>19</sup> This conception of the student as the product of a composition course also contributes to the invisibility of context discussed in chapter one. As Horner notes in *Terms of Work for Composition: A Materialist Critique*, emphasizing outcomes hides the contributions of institutions and the material circumstances—including context—in which the work takes place (18).

Yet, as Readings notes, “pedagogy also can be understood otherwise: other than as the inculcation or revelation of an inherent human autonomy, other than as the production of sovereign subjects” (154). There is also the possibility of Readings’ university as a “model of the rational community” *and* as “one site among others where *the question of being-together is raised*” (20, italics in original). Such a university focuses not on individual results—such as the value-laden term “Excellence”—but on the act of coming together to interact, work, and think with other students and instructors—an act that privileges both the individual and the communal. In this formulation, teaching is not a search for truth, but a move toward justice. The instructor is no longer a *magister* handing down Truth; she or he becomes a *rhetor* participating in and facilitating discussion (158). In Readings’ formulation, “Teaching should cease to be about merely the transmission of information and the emancipation of the autonomous subject, and instead should become a site of obligation that exceeds an individual’s consciousness of justice” (154). Such a move foregrounds not the achievements of the individual in a search for Truth, but her or his engagement with another in an act of thinking together.

Readings does not explicitly address the role played by collaboration and collaborative writing in the development of this pedagogy, but his description of pedagogy as a “network of obligations” to students within a rational community invites an engagement with collaboration theory (158; 180). In his discussion of his revised conception of pedagogy-as-relation, he positions the teacher not as an authority handing down knowledge, but a *rhetor* engaging with an audience. Yet it is also more than the substitution of persuasion for dominance. In the network of obligations there is neither

dominance nor the fusion of mutual understanding, but a constant interaction: “teaching, like psychoanalysis, is an interminable process” (159). Readings’ definition of the rational academic community—a grouping “which incarnates a pure bond of sociality around the disinterested pursuit of the idea”—is equally amenable to collaboration theory (180). Sociality, which assumes engagement with other writers and thinkers, serves as a new centering point for academic work, displacing the lone writer as the key referent. Asking students to collaborate in their writing thus becomes a means of allowing room to explore both their own relationship and the way(s) in which this different way of working can serve as a model for revised student-teacher and student-institution relations.

Asking students to think and write together can be a means of foregrounding the network of obligations already existing in classroom. However, engaging in collaboration does not automatically bring the dominant ideologies into question, nor do community relations necessarily model the rational community. If not engaged with thoughtfully, working and writing together can actually reinforce dominant ideologies of learning and reinforce the lone writer’s position at the center of academic life. As noted in chapter 2, theories of collaborative writing can be roughly divided into an idealist/practical binary. The first conceives of the act of working together as a means of discovery, both of new knowledge and of the self; the second as a means of preparing students for the team-centric modern workplace. These positions closely mirror Readings’ description of battling ideologies. The idealists focus on the autonomous student-as-nascent-thinker while the practical theorists focus on the autonomous student-as-future-worker.

Readings' proposal for decentering teaching—moving away from considering it as the act of a sovereign subject (student, teacher, or administrator) to reflection that “refuses both the isolation of education in relation to wider social practices and the subjugation of education to predetermined or externally derived social imperatives”—is an important consideration here, one with value to instructors interested in collaboration (153). Most importantly, it refigures the learner *and* the instructor as members of a community operating within an institutional context. The limitations placed upon student and instructor agency can thus become objects of study, as do the institutional structures that cloak or downplay the effects the institutional context has upon learners' and instructors' ability to engage with one another.

Because my argument that instructors interested in promoting collaborative writing must acknowledge and disrupt the classroom context itself hinges on context, it is not possible or productive to make a sweeping statement on how institutional structures limit student and instructor agency. By privileging a particular ideology, each institution establishes different limitations upon student and instructor agency and promotes different conceptions of the goal of education. Rather than attempt a master narrative, I have chosen in the next chapter to use an ethnographic approach to illustrate the ways in which collaborative writing was limited by the institutional context during my yearlong research project. This invites reflection upon how local context(s) result in a particular (dis)engagement with collaborative writing.

My research took place in three sections of ENG 102: Composition II, a speaking-intensive (SI) composition course that is one of several that students can take to fulfill

their low-level SI class requirement as well as to fulfill their general education requirement in reasoning and discourse. Since the course is a composition course with the SI marker, ENG 102 instructors tend to focus on the writing of speeches and conference-style paper/presentation projects. I opted for the latter in these sections. The three sections of ENG 102 that I studied met in UNCG's Science Building, in a classroom with individual writing desks in rows facing the teacher's desk and teaching station, rather than the larger, shared tables in the Humanities building. Thus, from the start students were isolated by the structure and furniture of the room. I attempted to alleviate this by asking students to shift their desks into a circle, but the sheer number of desks in the room made this difficult. The fact that many of my visual aids were on the computer meant that I was often not a part of the circle, instead standing next to the computer or writing on the board. This added to the distance between student and teacher and marked a break between the work we did together in the circle and the work we did as traditional instruction. It also reinscribed me as *magister*, the knower who delivers knowledge to the students rather than engaging with them in ethical practices of interaction (Readings 154).

At the beginning of the semester, Nancy Myers, my dissertation director and the principle investigator of my research project, solicited student participation in the project.<sup>20</sup> This was required by the IRB, which mandated that students must have the

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<sup>20</sup> In the terminology of the IRB, I was a student researcher. This point is problematic for more than the faulty parallelism. As a teaching assistant, I am the instructor of record for my courses—I create the syllabus, I teach the classes, and I do the grading—yet I was not able to manage my own research project. This is a minor point, true, but one that indicates how the institution invisibly reduces student agency, even at the graduate level.



ability to opt out of the project and that that decision must be made at the beginning of the semester before they knew anything about me, about the course, and about our work together. This was problematic because it both disrupted the development of relationships necessary for ethical interactions and returned the institution to the center of teaching. In granting permission, students submitted to the institution, a move that reinscribed me as representative of the institution first, and member of the community second. This reinforcement of the institution as the center of teaching was also due to the fact that the students did not hear about the research from me (a person with whom they had begun to form a relationship), but from Myers (a person they did not know). She spoke with the students at the beginning of the semester, distributed the participant permission forms and collected them. She then had to assign the groups based on who chose to participate and who did not. All group members had to participate or I could not use any of the individual student's data. It wasn't until after grades were submitted that I learned who had and had not participated.

As the semester progressed, I realized the permission structure, which had seemed so liberating, actually limited student agency in highly unproductive ways. Because I did not know who was participating, I could not restructure the groups for fear of mixing participant and non-participant data. Students were thus unable to pick their group members or reorganize to maximize their ability to collaborate. This limited the scope of

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By tying the research project to a faculty member instead of to the actual researcher, the IRB policies make material the idea that student research is secondary, a lesser type of work that must be funneled through a "real" scholar before it can be trusted. I can research, but I need faculty status to investigate. While both words have equally high status, the fact that they aren't the same indicates a belief that what I do and what faculty do is qualitatively different.

ethical obligations students could place on me as authority figure. Once again, the institution was the center of teaching, a move Readings identifies as vital to the posthistorical, bureaucratic-privileging university (152). While this limitation is specific to my project, it is valuable as an example of the strictures placed upon student collaborators by the university course system. Students choose or are placed into particular sections for reasons not tied to the content and focus of the course; boundaries are then drawn around these groupings, boundaries enforced by academic integrity rules. For instance, collaborating with other writers in the class without instructor agreement is likely to be considered a violation of student codes of academic conduct. Even with instructor permission, collaborating with writers outside the class officially falls under UNCG's plagiarism policy: "Submitting, as one's own, work done by or copied from another...Includes work done by a fellow student, work done by a previous student, or work done by anyone other than the student responsible for the assignment" (n.p.). Depending upon how an instructor defines "work done by"—whether she or he maintains a belief that collaborative work can be broken down into a series of individual contributions—a collaboratively written essay could be a violation resulting in expulsion (see chapter 2). The university course system thus limits student agency in the same way as the IRB limited student movement and ability to work with their preferred collaborator.

The limitations associated with my IRB also serve as a means of considering student and instructor agency in the design and progress of a particular course. As part of the approval process, I had to stick to the course design I had chosen, even when it

became clear that my initial plans for the course were not working. Worse, because the overall theme of the class was registered with the IRB, I couldn't allow for student input into the progress of the class. Changing the progress of the class or its central focus—an option I often keep open in the later weeks of a class not part of a research project—would have invalidated my IRB acceptance. Because students had no say in the progress of the class, it appeared that the work I asked them to do was equally unimportant; no matter what knowledge they created together, they would still be working on the same set of assignments as the next class. Again, this is an issue specific to the approval of my IRB, but it illustrates how the discipline system, required courses, and instructor power limit students' ability to write collaboratively. If what they do has no impact upon their world, if the supposed outcome of collaboration—individual growth or developing skills—has no impact upon their lives, it is understandable for them to ask why they are being asked to collaborate. If the only response is “because I said so,” collaboration becomes just another activity rather than a way of being.

As a testament to the students' openness to the “network of obligations” that had begun to form in the sections of ENG 102 I studied, more than half of students in all three sections chose to participate in my research. Unfortunately, the opt-out process also had serious negative impact upon my research, a fact I discovered two semesters after completing my classroom data collection. A student from the 10 a.m. Fall semester section spotted me on campus and asked about my research. She told me that she had been interested in participating, but the IRB-mandated participation warning was “super spooky” and made her unwilling to join the project. She suggested that if she'd known

that it was just me gathering research or if she had better understood who was involved in this research, she might have participated. Moreover, had the permission request come at the end of the class, after she had learned to trust me, she would have participated.<sup>21</sup>

Because the IRB foregrounds the institution in its dealing with students—the warning was written in the language of the academy and delivered by a faculty member who was a stranger to the students—it reinforces distance and isolation. Each student was individually signing on, without knowledge of their peers’ decisions; the relationship was not between them and me, or among peers, but with the academy as institution.

At first glance, this privileging of the individual may appear to be a means of enabling student autonomy, since each student has the choice (or at least the appearance of a choice) to participate. Yet is autonomy—which Readings notes is rooted in the “ruined” conception of the University of Culture or the more recent University of Excellence (11)—a valid, or even possible, goal? Upon closer inspection, the liberatory appearance of this power-grant collapses. As in the larger world, where the abstract idea of the state mediates all relationships between individual citizens, the students’ autonomy relies upon the mediating and universalizing power of the institution (Readings 182). As with the real/virtual collaboration discussed in the previous chapter, this autonomy is a simulacrum. The students’ “autonomy” depends upon a belief that their choice to participate actually makes a difference. Yet they remain non-autonomous in this case, since their choice to participate has no actual effects upon the progress of the class. To avoid problems with bias, I taught the entire class as though they *were* participating; there

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<sup>21</sup> All of the IRB materials describe permissions as occurring before the research, so this would not have been a possibility.

was no differentiation of assignments or alterations of content. As far as they could tell in the class, their decision had no material outcome—it had less immediate effect upon their education than the attendance policy.<sup>22</sup> Thus while it may appear to be an act granting autonomy, asking students to grant me permission to study them did nothing to break the students out of their heteronomous position.

The act of soliciting student permission promoted the appearance of autonomy, but it did not promote community. Each student signed on, or refused to sign on, individually. While the students may have discussed their participation among themselves, I forbade them to talk about it publicly so that it would not taint my data. Similarly, the fact that students worked closely together in groups promoted the appearance of community, but it did not promote collaboration. Students worked together, but the context in which they worked did not facilitate the interactions needed to build both consensus and dissensus. The result was the appearance of collaboration (the simulacrum discussed in chapter 2) rooted in the ideologies of mission statements and assessment. It was also a community centered not on ethical practices and the search for justice, but upon the transmission of knowledge, which Readings identifies as one of the key tasks of the ruined modernist university (154).

The question facing collaboration scholars, and one that is still open after my yearlong study, is whether writing together could be a means of enacting the rational community promised (but not achieved) by the academy. Obviously, such a move toward

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<sup>22</sup> It apparently had little immaterial effect as well. During the Spring semester, I spoke with a Fall-semester student—one of the members of the groups I profile in the next chapter—and she had forgotten about the research project. It had become just another hoop to jump through on the way to finishing her degree.

a rational, equitable community is limited in a space where one person—the instructor—grades the other members. Yet it is possible, on a small scale and in certain moments, for students working together to break out of the grand narratives of individual growth/individual excellence. Collaborative writing is rooted in the notions of communication and mutual transparency, which are the same notions underpinning the larger University project (Readings 181). In working and writing together, students engage with one another in a series of exchanges—simultaneously monetary (in terms of work) and non-monetary (in terms of the development of their relationships) exchanges that trouble the social privileging of the speaker over the listener. By asking students to write together and to work in small groups, we ask them to engage in the “community of loose ends” Readings adapts from the Miami Theory Collective (185). Just as importantly, when we surrender our position as class leader, when we step aside and let students work together in a self-directed way—even when the task is as simple as taking control of Facebook security settings as I discuss in chapter 3—students may model a new approach to education, one that breaks with the radically individual narratives animating the modern academy.

CHAPTER III  
THE YEAR OF WORKING TOGETHER: ENACTING THEORIES  
OF COLLABORATION IN THE CLASSROOM

In December 2009, for the first time in four years of teaching, I had first-year composition classes whose members actively did not get along, members who openly sneered at their peers in conferences with me, members who regularly emailed me to complain about the work their fellow students were (not) doing. This massive resistance in these classes—two sections of ENG 102, the second semester of first-year composition at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG)—coincided with an Institutional Research Board (IRB)-approved classroom-research project I pursued during the 2009-2010 school year. I was expecting a certain level of student resistance to working with others, but I was surprised by the viciousness of their complaints and the regularity with which complaints were appearing in my inbox (at least once a week, one of my nearly 40 students emailed me about group problems). These complaints went far beyond the casual emails I had come to expect: “hey, just letting you know, one of my group members is being a problem” or “I want to do something different than the rest of the group does—help!” Instead, many were panicked pleas for grading mercy due to an underachiever or furious demands that I “do something” to fix their work relationships. Along with the negativity of these complaints, I was also taken aback by the students’ approach to me in the classroom. I try to foster an open classroom environment in which current events, campus news, and individual students’ stories serve as jumping-off points

for the day's in-class discussions. For the first time, students didn't want to talk about anything other than how I would grade them; every discussion returned to this topic.

As noted in the interchapter, limitations in my project organization meant that I broke with my typical system of group management and had students begin working together very early in the semester. For the first time, I tied a final grade to the groups' performances; every group member would get the same grade on their final project, an oral presentation and paper collaboratively researched, written, designed, and presented by their group. The students were able to determine the shape of their working relationships, the tools they used to compose, and the methods they used to write. I promoted the idea of collaborative authoring—writing together in real time while present to each other—and devoted a small amount of classroom time to it, but did not require this working method. While I was uncertain about the effect that assigned groups and shared grades would have on the students' performances, I certainly did not expect the ferocity of their resistance.

For the first time, student collaboration was negatively impacting my classroom. I had to drop readings and devote the bulk of two class meetings to discussing conflict negotiations. I also had to meet with two groups to talk about strategies for working together. I had to intervene via email to help three groups come to a decision about their approach to an in-class presentation. Every new email was evidence that *something* was not working with this project; the structure I had established in my classes was unable to support the work I had asked my students to do, and many were unable to rethink their relationships on their own. In other classes I had taught, students were able to work with



me to overcome and learn from their conflicts. Not this time. The semester's problems came to a head with visits to my office by two tearful students. The first student, who claimed to have never received anything below an A, blamed his peers for "ruining" his GPA with a B. The second came to my office baffled at his low grade; according to him, his D was also due to working with others. Because of federal privacy laws and IRB regulations, I could not tell these students that they were the outliers, respectively the highest- and lowest-scoring members of their groups. Yet had they known this, I don't know that they would have cared. It was clear that they believed their grades were low not because of anything that they'd done individually, but because I was "forcing" them to work together (to use a verb borrowed from the second student).

What happened? Why were these two sections having so much trouble working together? Facing another semester of intragroup conflict and upset, I opted to alter my grading system and grade the students' final projects individually instead of as a group. I also devoted more time, early in the semester, to get-to-know-you activities—in-class work that promoted students' interaction with one another. Altering my approach to students' collaborative work contributed to a class that was far less contentious, with some groups moving toward the real collaboration described in chapter 2—one group even engaged, to a small degree, in the beginnings of collaborative authoring. So while the fall semester was a crisis, it was a uniquely generative, since it forced me to consider how students' feelings of community and their relations with each other can either promote or inhibit the act of working together. Given that collaborative authoring

requires strong connections between the parties, the promotion of community is vital to any instructor's attempt to promote collaborative authoring in the classroom.

My research indicates that promoting collaborative writing, particularly collaborative authoring, in the classroom means instructors should approach writing together not as an activity, but as a way of being. Rather than focusing their attention on the development of specific assignments, instructors should reconceive their role as facilitators, people who help students understand the institutional structures that shape the classroom and the ways these structures can both block and enable collaborative action. Instructors wanting to promote collaborative authoring should also abandon the idea of positioning it as a required task or working style; instead they should provide invitations to students to work together on projects that lend themselves to collaboration (large publications, research-intensive initiatives, and other projects too large for a single writer) and devote time in class to collaborative authoring. Because community and connections to other writers are so important to collaborative authoring, instructors should also be sensitive to moments when community is forming and be willing to step aside and allow students the room to develop that community. Perhaps most importantly, instructors must remember the importance of community feeling among group members and learn how to foster the growth of effective communities.

### **Understanding Sense of Community Theory**

For collaboration-minded (and thus community-minded) instructors, David W. McMillan's Sense of Community Theory is a particularly useful tool for understanding

how communities form and operate. As McMillan notes in his 1996 *Journal of Community Psychology* essay “Sense of Community” (an update and reworking of his original 1986 article, coauthored with David M. Chavis), one of the most important products of an effective community is its own continued existence as a functioning group. The success of a community depends not upon the individual genius of its members, but upon their skill at working together and upon their ability to strengthen the community. McMillan defines the sense of community as “a spirit of belonging together, a feeling that there is an authority structure that can be trusted, an awareness that *trade*, and mutual benefit come from being together, and a spirit that comes from shared experiences that are preserved as *art*” (315 italics in original).

He identifies four key elements that foster the production of both a sense of community and content that reflects the group’s engagement with one another:

Spirit, Trust, Trade, and Art. Groups that exhibit these elements are effective; groups that do not exhibit these elements—or that have their development of these elements blocked—do not develop a sense of

community and, thus, are unlikely to be able to engage deeply with other writers, a requirement for collaborative authoring.

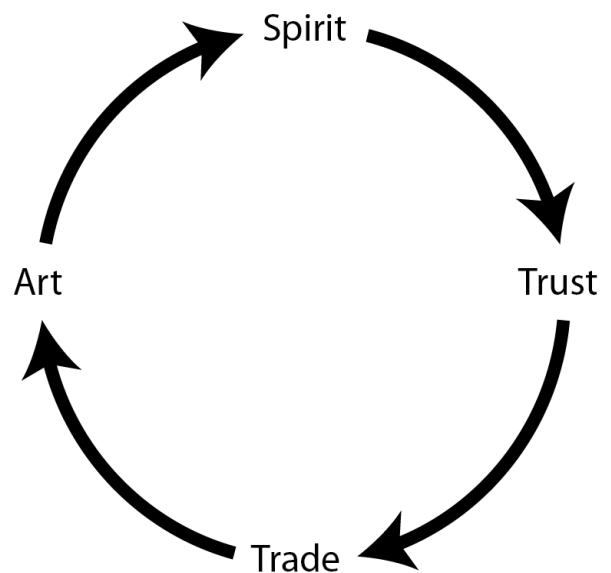


Figure 1: The Sense of Community Loop

An intriguing element of McMillan's formulation is that the four elements are linked linearly. While it is possible to develop each in isolation, effective communities develop a feedback loop in which each of the four elements drives the production of the next element. The first element, Spirit, refers largely to the bodily makeup of the community. McMillan roots this element in the "spark of friendship" fostered by sharing a space where one can be oneself (316-317).<sup>23</sup> McMillan further divides the elements of Spirit into Emotional Safety, Boundaries, and Sense of Belonging. Emotional Safety is rooted in the self and the concept of "The Truth" as honest testimony about one's internal experience (316). In effect, Emotional Safety depends upon the community playing Peter Elbow's "believing game" and accepting each member's emotions, feelings, and thoughts as true expressions of their "experience of meaning" (150). The operation of Emotional Safety is fairly easy to understand: group members who feel more comfortable sharing are more likely to do so, generating additional discourse. Group members whose relationship with their group is distant or fragmented—such as the two students who came to my office to complain—do not feel comfortable sharing with group members, resulting in more distance and fragmentation.

The Boundaries element of Spirit is intimately connected to classical rhetorical conceptions of categories and Kenneth Burke's notion of the scapegoat. For a collection of people to become first a group, then a community, they must be able to easily identify who is, and who is not, a "real" member. Insiders are trusted, are on "our side" of the

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<sup>23</sup> The idea of "being oneself" and being one's "true" self are, of course, contentious issues in modern critical thought. McMillan is not advocating a return to a theory based on Platonic essence; he is acknowledging the psychological feeling of being "at home" and "safe" reported by people discussing their membership in groups (317).

border, and have paid their dues; outsiders (who may on the surface appear indistinguishable from the insiders) are scapegoated—marked as different and outside the border (*Grammar* 406). Boundaries are also vital to the final element of Spirit: Sense of Belonging. McMillan defines this element as a dialogic process, one in which the member's faith that he or she belongs and the community's acceptance of that faith are interdependent (317). While these elements are in dialogue, they do not necessarily develop simultaneously. A person can consider him or herself a group member, even when the community has yet to accept him or her. In the 9 a.m. section, three groups rarely sat together and often did not gather together during in-class work sessions without prodding from me. In a conference, a student in one of the groups could not remember his group name or the names of the members of his group. Clearly, this group did not have the firm borders that reinforce insider/outsider status. While it is not possible to link this behavior to final grades or writing quality, these three groups' final oral presentations were the least coherent and polished.

Boundaries, and the ability to mark the inside/outside spaces of a community are intimately tied to what McMillan calls "paying dues," which can be either actions taken or simply time spent in the community (318). Paying dues operates in much the same way as boundaries: it marks publically who has earned the right to call him- or herself a member. This element is particularly difficult to engage with in classroom community building, since students earn entry simply by enrolling in the course and being assigned to a group. Students who do not contribute actively to their groups may not be paying

dues, but they can depend upon other forces—the instructor, primarily—to guarantee their memberships.

Spirit fosters togetherness and discourse, which generates the second characteristic: Trust. Trust (which McMillan and Chavis termed “Influence” in the original 1986 article on Sense of Community theory) is intimately tied to questions of power and influence. As McMillan notes, “[f]or the spirit of community to survive beyond its first initial spark, the community must solve the problems arising from the allocation of power” (320). By “allocation of power,” McMillan is referring not to the allocation of tasks or the ranking of members, but to the negotiations resulting in group norms, order, and shared authority based upon principles external to the group (319-320). McMillan connects the last element to “transcendent” issues such as human rights (320). While human rights may be a consideration in some classroom communities, transcendent principles are more likely to take the form of assignments, institutional rules on academic honesty, and other disciplinary functions. The student who complained about his B was particularly untrusting and isolated from his group; he apparently prepared his work on his own and would not allow them to change his sections of the text. His mistrust of his peers isolated him from the community, making it difficult to engage in these allocations of power. This had material effects since his section of their presentation duplicated some of the points made in other parts of the group project; it was clear that he had not trusted group members to make the points to his satisfaction. His distrust evokes Spigelman’s accounts of students resisting working with others due to fears that their peers might “steal” ideas; like the students Spigelman describes, he

approached his group members not as fellow authors, but as people with whom to compete.

As these examples show, if members of a community cannot trust one another, it is extremely difficult to engage with the third element of McMillan's theory: Trade. Via economic exchange of services—even if those services are little more than the respect given to a speaker—group members develop a trade that reinforces the group's self-definition and its intra-group relationships. As a result, he claims, "a community is as strong as the bargains its members make with one another" (320). He bases this element of his theory upon Albert J. and Bernice E. Lott's influential 1965 study, "Group Cohesiveness as Interpersonal Attraction: A Review of Relationships With Antecedent and Consequent Variables," in which the Lotts illustrated that the strength of a community is proportional to the satisfaction group members derive from their participation. He breaks with the Lotts on the importance of making each member's contributions visible. Instead, he argues that a strong community exists in a "state of Grace" in which individual contributions and trades are downplayed (322). When communities reach this point, their individual trades are less important than the group's continued existence and progress toward shared goals. When communities fail to reach this point, or when a member refuses to engage in fair trade with his or her group members—as the student who earned a B did—trade exists as a spiritless economic exchange.

The final state of the Trade stage that McMillan describes enables the fourth principle of Spirit of Community theory: Art. Art, in this formulation, is both product and

process, the evidence of the group's working together *and* the promotion of continued collaboration. The spirit of a community, when respected and valued, becomes trust. Trust enables trade, and the end result of the group's spirit, trust, and trade is its art: the work that transcends the group while reinforcing the boundaries of the group, the work that simultaneously is emblematic of its spirit and supports the process by which the community continues to develop (325). This phenomenon has also been reported by Randall Collins, who found that collaborators whose work together is productive "develop a taste for more ... solidarity of the same sort, and are motivated to repeat" their partnerships (149). In their engagement with each other, writers working together develop not only a text, but also the relationship that enables their continued interactions.

### **Justifying the Use of Sense of Community Theory**

An argument could be made that McMillan's Sense of Community theory, while useful, falls too far afield of rhetoric and composition to be useful. Yet it is clear that McMillan's work reflects similar claims made by rhetoricians. His depiction of community spirit as a system that progresses through set stages is similar to Stephen P. Witte's discussion of how the collaborative writing that he studied, which took place in very different contexts, "became increasingly more collaborative and collaborative in different ways" (qtd. in Ede and Lunsford, *Singular* 119). Through continued contact with each other, the community develops. McMillan's model also shares many of the characteristics of Ede and Lunsford's "substantial collaborative writing assignments":



1. They allow time for group cohesion (but not necessarily consensus) to occur and for leadership to emerge.
2. They call for or invite collaboration; students need to work together in order to complete the assignment effectively...
3. They allow for the evolution of group norms and the negotiation of authority and responsibility...
4. They allow for and encourage creative conflict and protect minority views...
5. They allow for peer and self-evaluation during and after the assignment.
6. They call on students to monitor and evaluate individual and group performance and to reflect on the processes that made for effective—or ineffective—collaboration. (*Singular* 123-124)

These six categories correspond roughly to McMillan's four stages. One and two address elements of Spirit, two and three align with Trust, four and five reflect elements of Trade, and six represents the looping back between Art and Spirit.

An objection could also be raised about the use of a theory of community to interrogate collaborative authoring. While McMillan's model includes the production of texts (in the Art stage), he places far more stress on Art's role as a means of generating Spirit. His theory is useful not as a means of explaining how texts are written collaboratively (product), but as a way of explaining how the writers produce the text together (process). Community and the importance of writers feeling that they belong to a community are commonplaces in collaborative scholarship. In fact, one of the most famous pieces of collaboration scholarship, John Trimbur's "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," is rooted in Jürgen Habermas' community theory and assumes that a working community is required for collaboration.<sup>24</sup> More recently, Nels P. Highberg, Beverly Moss, and Melissa Nicolas position writing groups as "key sites where

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<sup>24</sup> The term "working community" should not be read as "peaceful community" or "homogenous community." As Trimbur argues, dissensus is a powerful, and inescapable, element of community relations.

local communities evolve” (5) and M. Jimmie Killingsworth describes writing groups—a form of collaboration—as “local communities:…the place where writers ordinarily work” (111). The interrelationship of community and collaboration is so strong that David Bleich does not even address the point when he connects the concepts in his “Collaboration and the Pedagogy of Disclosure.” Given the widespread acceptance of the role played by feelings of community in collaborative writing scholarship, McMillan’s theory offers a particularly useful new lens through which to examine collaboration.

### **Classroom Assignments and Sense of Community Theory**

As McMillan’s descriptions make clear, he conceives of the process as a loop, albeit one with a particular beginning. In both the 1986 original and the 1996 revision, he describes the process as beginning with Spirit. While he does not explicitly rule out the possibility of entering the loop at a different stage, much of his argument centers on Spirit as entry point. In this, he aligns with Burke’s discussion of identification and its primacy in the formation of community (*Rhetoric* 21). As in Burke’s formulation, individuals must first identify commonalities with others before risking deeper connections. Upon reflection, it is fairly easy to see the difficulty with the system I established in my classroom. I established the groups and (because of the requirements of my IRB-approved project) students could not change their group makeup. Each group came into being with the requirement to work together—Trade—in support of a final project—Art—*before* establishing community (Spirit) or building Trust.

Surprisingly, other collaboration theorists have not flagged this strange act as a problem. As noted in chapter 2, part of the “work” of collaborative learning that these writers describe is the task of learning to operate as a group. This assumes that students have in-built Spirit by virtue of their shared status as students, a view that is wholly unsupportable. While this may have been the case in the early days of the American higher education system (though even then it would be a troubling act of violence upon student individuality), it is certainly not the case now. Yet the assumption that there is such a thing as a “typical undergraduate student” persists. The claim that “student” operates as the ultimate generic identity category erases all other identifications and is only possible if one is willing to strip all agency from students and position them as little more than interchangeable cogs that can be swapped out without influencing the work of the group. The idea that Oliver, a white father of two teenagers, had an inherent commonality with his white, Latina, and black, 18- and 19-year-old group members in the 10 a.m. Fall semester section, is unsupportable.<sup>25</sup> He had far more in common with me (similar age, similar background) than with them. It was only the institutional categories of teacher and student that kept us from being collaborators.

While I did not find McMillan’s articles until after teaching the course, it is possible to correlate my class activities and assignments to his Sense of Community structure. This is not surprising, since the need to engage with the elements he identifies—community spirit, trust between group members, exchange of ideas and content, and writing papers together—are fairly typical elements of any class. My means

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<sup>25</sup> All students’ names have been changed.

of encouraging the development of community centered on providing many opportunities for what Shirley Brice Heath calls literacy events: “occasions in which the talk revolves around a piece of writing” (386). My goal was to get students writing multiple texts while at the same time forwarding their writing as a topic of discourse and source of additional writing.

In all three classes, students wrote together in class, on their own, and in support of a larger final project. In-class writing fell into three categories: round-robin writing, writing with immediate feedback, and final paper/final presentation planning, writing, and editing. To ensure that all of the members were working with their group topic, I also had them turn in low-stakes, but significant (two- to three-page) updates on their work. They largely worked on these papers on their own, but I dedicated a class period to in-class peer editing the week the essays were due. The final project was a 12-page paper and 20-minute in-class oral presentation, both of which were written together during the second half of the semester. (See appendices 1 and 3.) In the fall, I required students to collaboratively author the final paper and oral presentation, meaning they wrote approximately 10 to 12 pages and up to 20 PowerPoint slides together. All members of the group received the same grade on their paper and presentation, so (I thought) the stakes would be the same for everyone. In the Spring semester, students no longer shared a final major grade. Rather than forcibly link collaboration to formal assessment, I asked them to work together on interdependent projects that were graded separately. (See appendices 2 and 4.) The result was a highly productive semester in which students

cooperated with one another via extensive peer editing, collaborative researching and article sharing, and, in one case, collaborative authoring.

As with the in-class writing, my goal for the group-authored paper and presentation was to position the project as a literacy event. Working together on a single project required that the students engage in extensive negotiation among themselves on their topic, their approach, their writing, and their final oral presentation. I assumed (correctly, for the most part) that finding a topic they were all interested in would be difficult and require numerous conversations and redefinitions of their topic. (One group changed its topic three times.) That said, not every group engaged at the level I wanted; members of three of the groups in the 9 a.m. section—including one of the groups I discuss below—and one group in the Spring section said they simply acquiesced to what one or two groups members wanted. In another arrangement of students, or another class structure, my system may have been more effective; I have since observed other groups of students, in both my own and others' classes, engage more deeply with topic selection.

In this section, I examine how the writing and activities I assigned intersect with McMillan's Sense of Community loop. This analysis illustrates the importance of Spirit and Trust in community formation and how classroom activities and writing that focus solely upon promoting Trade and Art at the expense of the first two factors limit students' ability to collaborate. While it is possible that a class could start with Trade and develop a strong community, the difficulty level in doing so within the confines of a 15-week semester is great.

*Spirit*

To some extent, when interacting with my students in the early days of the class, I fell into the trap that so many instructors do when encouraging the development of a community. I assumed that students, by virtue of their status as “student,” shared some commonality that easily translated into the “spark of friendship” so important to the development of Spirit (McMillan 315). I also assumed that the boundaries established by their membership in the class would serve as the borders element (315-316). Were this formulation true, then the smaller groups would have likely gelled far more quickly, since they would already share some connection to their group members via the whole-class group. This connection would have encouraged the development of empathy, caring, and acceptance so vital to community formation. Yet it quickly became clear that my assumption of the existence of Spirit was not only untrue, but it actively worked against community formation. By assuming in-built spirit based on perceived commonalities and registrar-determined membership, I fostered an environment in which only a simulacrum of collaboration was possible.

While my assumptions were problematic, a more problematic issue is that these assumptions are common to many instructors of composition. As Marguerite H. Helmers’ work with teaching testimonials in *Writing Students: Composition Testimonials and Representations of Students* makes clear, instructors generally assume what Helmers calls the “essential, transhistorical student” (2). This student is “a passive entity upon whom pedagogy operates,” a faceless and voiceless object upon which the teacher subject operates (19). Part of the issue, as Helmers notes, is an effect of the literary form, which

privileges recognizable, infinitely portable narratives (3). Yet, as Horner argues in *Terms of Work for Composition: A Materialist Critique*, these testimonials are of a piece with the narratives of student lack Mike Rose examines in “Narrowing the Page.” Focusing on an idealized (ideally flawed) category of “student” thus conceals both the context in which the students write and the internal variability within the class (33).

In my study, two students, Oliver and Owen, serve as examples of the problem with assuming a default “student-ness.” Oliver, who was enrolled in the 10 a.m. section, had returned to school more than 20 years after dropping out of college. He had mortgage payments, a full-time job, and two sons—one of whom was older than some of the other students in his class. He and I had far more in common than the other students, and we quickly forged a subversive friendship centered on wry smiles at the certitude of undergraduate pronouncements about the world. Even though he shared little with the other students in the class, both the institution and I treated him as though they were his peers; the identity category “student” trumped every other category. Owen, who was enrolled in the Spring section of the course, was also an outlier. He was closer in age to his classmates (24), but he entered the class with a history that included two combat deployments to Iraq. Like Oliver, he was categorized as just another student, but his lived experience meant that he maintained a very different, mature, and occasionally harsh tone when interacting with the other students. One of his group members told me in a conference that he was “very mean,” an assessment that seemed odd in light of his glowing feedback about her writing. When I observed the group, it was clear that he was

still adjusting to the more polite civilian register and would occasionally lapse into rougher, more aggressive language and argumentation.

I forward these two examples not to advocate a position that non-traditional students are somehow unlike “normal” students and need to be treated differently, but to illustrate the problem with approaching all students in a class as interchangeable objects that can be repositioned at will. By assuming default “student-ness” and failing to acknowledge the arbitrariness of students’ placement in a particular classroom, instructors are dealing with simulacra: students are little more than infinitely interchangeable objects that work like we tell them to, regardless of their backgrounds, interests, and abilities. Because I assumed commonality, I did not include many activities aimed at building it. Rather than creating assignments, early in the semester, that promoted Spirit, I immediately engaged with issues of Trust, Trade, and Art development. The only activities explicitly focused on generating emotional safety and a sense of belonging occurred during the first two class sessions. I ask students to participate in several get-to-know-you activities, both in whole-class and small-group settings. Rather than going around the room and asking each person to “tell us about yourself” (an activity too clearly rooted in Foucault’s *scientia sexualis* confession regime for my comfort [58]), I ask students to participate in a round-robin name-memorization activity, a writing-from-artifacts activity, and finally, a full-class name derby, in which they have to try and name everyone. One of the most important signs I’ve identified for determining how the whole class is coalescing is if they challenge me to participate in the name-memorization activity. The classes that have begun to connect almost always do,



since they have begun to establish an in-class community that is both positioned against the outlier member of the room (the instructor) and willing to engage with that outlier in a playful way.

Once the small groups were established, I very quickly moved into activities aimed at helping them build Trust. The only exception was an assignment, given during the latter part of the semester, in which I asked students to write a paragraph response to the day's reading that they thought would be appropriate to submit for a grade. They would then share that with another member of their group. The second person would read and comment. The goal was to make them more comfortable with one another and to experience another person's take on a shared experience (the text). This was not very successful in any of the sections, largely because I had difficulty timing the activity. The reason I wanted them to write and edit at the same time was largely because I wanted them together bodily as they wrote and edited, thus creating and beginning to revise texts as a group. The students took longer to write than I had planned, leaving far less time for the editing every time. They were writing together, but they were not actually interacting. Had I had time to try the activity again, and had I been able to give them the time needed to succeed at the collaborative writing, the outcome could have been more pedagogically valuable and done more for classroom Spirit.

The fact that I did not include more focused Spirit-development activities meant that students had to build their familiarity and comfort on their own. I encouraged this (largely unconsciously) through my engagement with them as authority figure. I made a point of foregrounding my research and how the work they were doing together was part

of the larger project. In doing so, I was careful to say “our research,” not “my research.” My goal with this rhetorical move was to emphasize the importance of their role. I also tried to help the group view itself as a community by stressing that the work the students were doing in this section of ENG 102 was very different from the work taking place in other sections. This was sparked by a group discussion in the 10 a.m. Fall section in which one student asked why her roommate “[was not] being forced to do group work.” Rather than take offense, I returned the discussion to *our* research and how *we* were engaging in research. Finally, I asked each group to choose a name for itself that we would use to refer to them. They had been grouped (an act that removed agency), but I returned a bit of agency in allowing them to choose their names. I then made a point of referring to each group by name, even when the group name was as complex as “The Roof, the Roof, the Roof Is on Fire” and “The Amazing Title Group Three Finally Came Up With” or when it contained profanity (as one of the names in the Spring class did).<sup>26</sup> My goal in doing so was to reinforce group boundaries and encourage the groups to consider themselves coherent communities with the ability to name themselves.

### *Trust*

By shortchanging Spirit development, the students in my classes had to begin working before they fully identified with one another. This meant that intra-group Trust was slow to develop. I recognized this fact and attempted to create opportunities for more

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<sup>26</sup> When I have asked groups to name themselves in other classes, they have never picked such long or problematic names. Future research into group naming in high- and low-agency situations may be informative.

trust-developing literacy events using in-class writing. The first collaborative writing they did was part of the get-to-know-you activities during the first week. Upon telling the students they would be working together, I was met with many groans and disgruntled looks. (In the 9 a.m. class, three people dropped the class after the first session in which I discussed the group project.) In our first conversations, it became clear that while other instructors—in high school and, in some cases, in college—had told the students about the benefits of writing together, this group did not accept the narratives of collaborative writing they had heard. They offered the typical complaints: other people didn't do their part, it was too hard to get together with other people, and the most poisonous one of all (in my mind at least)—the resulting writing was worse than what they could do on their own. Because of this profound distrust of both their classmates and the process itself, I decided to get them writing together in a very low-stakes way. I began by measuring how well they worked together. After Nancy Myers set up the groups, I told them to sit together and make conversation. While the Fall 10 a.m. and the Spring students did fairly well with this task, conversation quickly fell apart in the 9 a.m. section. Within five minutes, the groups in this class were either sitting quietly and looking at me, texting, or reading. (This will be a common refrain in this chapter; the students in this section never gelled as much as those in the other two sections.)

At this point, I decided to deploy a first-day exercise I remembered from Computer Science 101. Each person wrote the first part of an “if/then” statement (such as “If I can get an A in this class”) at the top of a piece of paper, then folded it over to cover the statement and passed it to another person in his or her group. This person wrote the

“then” below the fold (such as “then I will be made of mayonnaise” [an actual line from the Spring semester]). The student then passes the paper on to another person in the group, and the process continued. After four rounds, I asked them to unfold the paper and read the resulting statements to the class. I wrote some of them on the board, including:

If I was president, then I am going to ask Tisha to marry me.  
 If Mr. Allen<sup>27</sup> gives me a good grade in this class, then the dogs won't pee on the floor.  
 If they take me off third shift, then they can party all weekend.  
 If I can swing a B, then mom will let me live off campus.

While there were numerous subject/verb and other grammar issues in the sentences, examples like the fourth one showed that it is possible to write a grammatically correct sentence with another person without knowing exactly what that person will say. Even in the most nonsensical example (number two), it is possible to find some sense. We talked about how dogs can supposedly sense human emotions, so they may be less nervous. This non-composition conversation quickly shaded into a discussion about the work needed to bring contributions into accord; the discussion about number three included consideration of pronoun use (who was “they” and were both “they”s the same “they”?). Throughout the discussion, I stressed that these single-line examples could serve as a model for thinking about their work together. While it was not possible to predict what their peers would come up with during the writing process, it was possible to trust that they would be able to fit together even highly divergent contributions. (I also

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<sup>27</sup> This student's first language wasn't English and he struggled with remembering the given name/family name order.

stressed that the process of shared research would help ensure that the contributions would not be unworkably divergent.)

The discussion of number three, which was written in the 10 a.m. Fall section, sparked a fairly long digression into partying and the places where students went to socialize on and near campus. While this was not germane to the teaching of spoken and written rhetoric, it was an important moment of Trust building. This line, as well as lines like number four (from the Spring section) made clear the norms of their community, a key element of Trust development (McMillan 319). Without prompting, very different people wrote about the same set of topics, resulting in sentences that sounded quite familiar to all. By bringing the shared circumstances of their lives, their shared interests, and their very similar concerns about jobs, social interactions, grades, living arrangements, and transportation (several ifs and thens concerned minimum-wage jobs and parents helping them buy cars or bring them to campus) into conversation, the commonalities between them came into clear view.

Finally, and (to my mind) just as importantly, the sentences resulted in lots of laughter, a move that simultaneously built both Spirit and Trust. The laughter sparked by absurdist phrases, the nods sparked by all-too-familiar sentences, and other shared reactions helped students begin to judge what to expect from other students. Students in both the 10 a.m. Fall section and the Spring section were more talkative; their boisterous responses showed that they were likely to make jokes and tease each other. Students in the 9 a.m. section were far more reserved. They responded, but their responses were measured, their laughter little more than chuckles. The fact that this early moment of

shared laughter did so little to generate Spirit and Trust continues to puzzle me; perhaps another approach, one that relied less upon humor and more upon other elements of *pathos* would be more effective. Another, less satisfying, possibility is that this is one of those elements that can never be controlled, that varies based on course makeup, time of day, and other factors.

As the semester progressed, I continued to promote Trust by asking students to write together in their groups several times. Typically, I would ask them to write a response to the day's reading. (I chose the class texts—John Palfrey and Urs Gasser's *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* and Mark Bauerlein's *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)*—specifically because I knew they would spark debate.) They would then get into their groups and compare what they wrote. They would then synthesize the various points into a spoken response by one of the group members.<sup>28</sup> My goal was to allow them time to build the social structures required for a group to develop Trust. Regardless of how they viewed their group members—even if their opinion of the group member was low—working together meant that they had more time together to both reinforce and disrupt their understanding of one another's roles. During their conferences with me, I asked their opinions about this activity and how they felt about their group members. Students in the 10 a.m. class said it was a useful means of getting to know their group, but students in the other two sections were fairly blasé about it. I am still struggling to understand the differences between the

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<sup>28</sup> It was a speaking-intensive class, so I had them address their classmates. This activity would work just as well as a group-writing task.

reactions of the 10 a.m. Fall and the Spring sections, since in other ways they were very similar classes. Again, this could be a variation based on the makeup of the class, but I do not want to simply write it off as an uncontrollable variable.

### *Trade*

As noted earlier, most of the in-class writing was aimed at helping the students generate ideas for their final project. Early in the semester, after they had been placed in groups, I asked the students to begin brainstorming topics. I generally allotted five to ten minutes at the end of the class for this activity. By five weeks into the class, all of the groups had chosen a topic for their group and begun researching. This was a means of beginning the translation of Trust into Trade. By mid-semester, all of the groups had begun work on elements of their final presentations and papers. I devoted several class sessions to in-class preparation, writing, and editing of their projects. At this point, I had largely dropped any Trust-building exercises, counting on the students to be comfortable with the talent exchange of the Trade phase. Unfortunately, there was no consistent level of Trade in the groups, a fact that may reflect the limited in-group trust. Some groups did a little work together, others talked over their presentations but did not write together, and one group worked on their presentation video together while writing separately. In general, little actual writing took place during these work sessions. The exception, interestingly enough, was the one group that wrote large amounts of their final paper in *Google Docs*. During the in-class group writing sessions, they discussed changes and made them live using their laptops. As far as I could tell from the document, this was

their primary method of making changes to the text; very few edits were made outside class time.

Once the groups had chosen a topic, I asked them to keep me updated on their progress through email reports, brief in- and out-of-class reflections, and one-on-one meetings. I also periodically grabbed a student on the way out of the door and asked about their progress.<sup>29</sup> It soon became clear that most of the groups were working individually on texts that they planned to integrate at the end. This is the hierarchical model Ede and Lunsford contrast with the more generative dialogic collaboration in *Singular Texts* (133-134). As Ede and Lunsford found, the resulting texts still exhibited strong evidence of the individual authors' voices and writing styles. Early drafts of the papers often displayed physical evidence of their origin as individual texts, including different writing voices, citation styles, and even fonts. This caused a major problem for the collaborative relationship of some of the groups, since it was very evident which text came from which person. I observed one of the less-coherent groups using the fact that one person had written fewer pages (a fact they could check based on the different font) as a tool for chastising a low-performing member. While this was a valuable means of assessing the different contributions of each member, it reinforced the identification of the students as individual authors.

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<sup>29</sup> I only had these one-on-one leaving-class discussions with the students in the 10 a.m. section and the Spring section. I have often wondered if my inability to engage in this kind of casual face-to-face talk with the 9 a.m. students contributed to their lack of interest in the class. They left the class, but I stayed to teach the 10 a.m. class, which meant I was not able to speak with them.



Because it was essentially an enforced action, the students in the classes I studied engaged in quite a bit of Trade during the semester. Yet it was clear that it was a type of Trade in which the actors are largely isolated from one another. Rather than the “shared intimacy” that leads to fair interactions between group members, the groups exhibited purely economic exchanges (McMillan 321-322). They traded with the other group members not because they identified with them or particularly trusted them, but because they had to get their work done. This relationship is closer to the Spirit-less experience of shopping than to interactions with members of a community. Once again, students become interchangeable. As a result, their interactions can only be virtual; true Trade cannot occur without Spirit and Trust, and true collaboration cannot occur without Trade.

### *Art*

Because Art encompasses both physical creations and the less-visible relational elements that support the continued existence and development of communities, it is easy to misjudge it. The texts the students generated are Art, but so are the relationships that, had we had more time together, could have driven the development of Spirit. In terms of physical Art, students in these three sections wrote three low-stakes out-of-class papers, 11 longer out-of-class pieces, more than 20 shorter in-class pieces, and contributed to a two-part final project: a final paper and a final 20-minute group presentation that summarized and extended the paper (see appendix 5). Each group’s shared experiences, the time spent together, the knowledge they created, the jargon and in-jokes they coined,

and the rivalries and tensions they developed also contributed to their Art. Since the latter is difficult for an outsider both to detect and to assess, I focus on the groups' material Art.

In the classes I studied, the only thematic requirement for their final project was that it had to engage with technology in some way. Topics ran the gamut from a survey of recent changes in medical technology and arguing against the criminalization of texting while driving to questioning the idea of Facebook addiction and surveying aspects of sexual identity enabled by a networked society (see appendix 6). They were allowed to summarize and expand upon this work in any way that made sense to the group; oral presentations included everything from a short video to a panel debate to a conference-style PowerPoint presentation. The latter was the most popular choice in the classes I studied. Another instructor may find that requiring a more complex presentation format—a video, for example—can encourage student collaboration more effectively.

This version of the assignment worked fairly well, but the connection of the final project grade to their group work caused a lot of problems, both for the students' writing and for their connections to each other. Due to this fact, I altered the Spring requirements for the final paper element. Instead of doing the entire project together, students chose a topic and prepared a final presentation together, but wrote their final papers individually. The advantage of this was that students were more willing to critique each other's work in more substantial ways (it is easier to be "objective" when looking at work that is not tied to one's own grade). The disadvantage was that, with one exception, the links among the members of the small groups were less developed than in the Fall classes. The final

presentations also suffered; all of the groups did academic conference-style PowerPoint presentations.

The major paper was only one of several pieces of out-of-class formal writing. In all three sections, I asked students to write at least one three- to five-page paper out of class. In the Fall classes, this paper was a summary and critique of an article on their topic. Each student wrote an individual paper, but they worked together on drafting and peer editing in the weeks before it was due. While they were not writing together, the groups were engaged in the larger writing process. Since the articles all centered on the group's topic, I asked them to discuss not only the article's argument, but also to compare it to other writing in the field. This required the students to carefully read each other's papers to be able to characterize the typical argumentation about that topic. This project was fairly successful; it got students talking about argumentation, it encouraged them to begin researching their topic earlier in the semester, and it required that students working on a topic read each other's work. That said, there were several groups who had great difficulty with the assignment, largely because one member had chosen an inappropriate article (a newspaper article, in one case) or because they were attempting to contrast argumentation styles rooted in very different fields (media studies and psychology in one group). This is less of a collaboration issue and more of a teaching issue; in subsequent classes, I was able to help students handle this assignment more effectively.

Because of the troubles the students had with the article critique, during the Spring semester, I replaced it with a paper in which students would use Facebook, MySpace, and Google searches to craft a profile of one of their group members. I asked

them not to verify any of their findings with their subject or to ask for any information not available online. My goal with this assignment was twofold. First, I wanted to start a conversation about persistent information and the connections that can be made between various sources of data. Second, I wanted to subtly raise the value of interacting with their group members. I knew that they would find the information fairly easily, but that making judgments about what they'd found would be more difficult. I hoped that having to write from a place of ignorance, but with the subject immediately available, would help the students connect the idea of expertise to their peers.

In general, the students' assessment of this assignment was surprisingly positive. I expected this academic incursion into their non-academic lives to be problematic for the students. While several students said they were made uncomfortable by the idea of "being a creeper" and crossing the barrier between school-related and non-school-related computer use, most said the activity was interesting. Sadly, while it definitely met the first goal, it didn't seem to address the second. Part of the issue was that, by the time they wrote this paper, they had already formed the interpersonal relationships that drive a classroom's underlife: "behaviors that undercut the roles expected of participants in a situation" (Brooke 141). In their reflections, 12 of 17 students admitted to speaking to one another about their findings before submitting the paper. While this did reflect a turning to their peers as experts, it did not seem to translate to greater identification of their group members as experts based on research in their chosen topic. This is not an issue of Trust, it is an issue of Art, since the writer's trust was rooted not in shared time with the subject, but in the assumed expertise of the subject about his or her own life. In

retrospect, this approach was clearly not the best way to achieve my goal, but it did encourage the group members to learn more about each other.

### **The Elements of Sense of Community Theory in My Classes**

All of the writing described above was done in support of the larger goal of fostering community formation and generating collaboratively authored texts. The results of these two semesters of work were, to be generous, mixed. Rather than the moments of collaborative authoring I expected, I found instead that students simply restructured their existing individualistic work styles and worked beside, not with, the members of their groups. In the Fall, according to the two class's final self-assessments, the majority (nearly 72 percent) said that working with their classmates made "little to no difference" in the paper they submitted. This was dishearteningly evident in the class periods before their final presentations. During in-class prep time, three groups did not actually sit together. Instead, they wrote on their own laptops and did not speak to each other. Each time this happened, I waited at least 10 minutes to see if they would move together on their own before telling them to sit together. The Spring class was slightly better, if only because one group identified "peer editing and proofreading" as a "very important" element of their collaborative work and because one group chose to co-author their paper, even though it was not required for that group of students. To understand how feelings of community affected the work taking place, I trace three groups, one per course section, through the Sense of Community loop. By following the groups' movement through the

loop, it is possible to see how different students' feelings of community correlate to the type of work they produce.

The first group, from the 9 a.m. Fall class, was the least successful. They never established an effective working relationship, resulting in a final paper that never moved beyond a collection of three unfocused mini-essays dropped into a single document, a final presentation that was disjointed, and a lot of intra-group stress and complaints. I call this group the Wrens.<sup>30</sup> The second group, from the 10 a.m. Fall class, did slightly better. Two members made a strong connection with each other, and the other two were becoming more integrated with the group's operations. Their final paper was more of a joint effort, with a more integrated voice (due largely to one group member editing the other members' text to match her writing style) and their relations were largely productive and supportive. I call this group the Martens. The third group (Spring semester) made a strong, and nearly immediate, connection with each other. As soon as they were put in groups, they started sitting together and spending time outside class together. Shortly after the semester started, they asked me if they could write their final paper collaboratively, because they said they liked working together and thought they would do well at it. I call this group the Sparrows.

Rather than follow McMillan's structure and begin with Spirit, I will trace the groups' performance through the faulty, Trade-first structure required by the classroom context. Like Burke, A. Alfred P. Rovai, and other collaboration scholars, McMillan

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<sup>30</sup> I asked students to name their groups during their first co-working session. I have replaced their names with generic names for this dissertation. In honor of Hephzibah Roskelly's group-naming system, I have chosen to use bird names.

assumes that a community forms before it begins its work, that it transcends a particular product, and that its members are the agents driving its creation. In the typical classroom, none of this is the case. The work predates the communities; courses build toward a final project, a culmination and exhibition of the work done in the weeks spent in the class. Classroom groups are explicitly tied to a series of projects; their reason for existing is to generate discourse, texts, and “learning” (however one defines that). Classroom groups are part of a class; once the class work is done, the community has no reason to exist, nor any support to continue existing. And classroom groups are imposed upon the participants; the instructor, course topic, institutional standards, and limited time reduce the ability of students to shape their groups. In essence, the groups predate the students, who are little more than bodies to be fitted into an existing structure.

As a result of these factors, which are rooted in the contexts discussed in chapter 2 (time, course topic, classroom structure), classroom communities enter McMillan’s Sense of Community loop at the Trade stage. Instructors group students together and give them tasks (acts in which students have no say). They must begin trading with each other before they develop a feeling of community (Spirit) or basic Trust. This could be changed, but the brevity of a semester/trimester-long class severely limits students’ ability to build Spirit and Trust before assignments are due.

### *Trade*

Not surprisingly, beginning with Trade—the mutually beneficial interactions rooted in feelings of Spirit and Trust— was difficult for the Wrens. It became clear very

early on that they were not invested in one another, nor did they trust each other to do very good work. In one of her first reflections, Wendy, the sophomore member of the Wrens, wrote about how “nobody ever does work” when working with other students. After the groups submitted their first group-authored piece, Wanda, the freshman female, came to my office hours to apologize for what she saw as poor writing. When I asked her why she thought the writing was poor, she told me she hadn’t seen the final version (Warren had submitted it) and that she assumed he had done a bad job. Both she and Wendy identified themselves as strong writers during conferences with me, but had low opinions of their peers’ writing. (Warren rated himself as a “fair” writer in a self-assessment.)

I found this assumption of weakness strange, especially since their group was one of the most balanced in terms of writing skill. Not only did all three write academic prose at approximately the same level of skill, they also shared very similar backgrounds and wrote about very similar topics in freewrites. Yet the two women thought I had saddled them with two losers. This disconnection between reality and student assessment was particularly odd when contrasted with the group that *did* exhibit the most diversity in skill level. This group was far more even-handed in their assessments of both their own writing and their peers’. It wasn’t until I observed the group’s working style that the problem became clear. While other groups gathered around a single computer to write their final script for the oral presentation, the Wrens did not even sit together to work. Instead, each person wrote an individual section, then emailed it to Wendy, who



assembled it. (In her final reflection, Wendy said she took charge on assembling the final paper and oral project “because they wouldn’t do it or they’d do it wrong.”)

Clearly, the problem wasn’t that the group was having difficulty with their economic relationship; the problem was that there was no relationship. Each member of the group acted as an individual contractor, delivering her or his part as a self-contained unit. Their “collaboration” was, in essence, the same relationship that different speakers at a conference have. The theme was the same, but each person’s part operated individually. They had read one another’s writing, but did not engage very deeply in the activity (all three told me that the editing help they’d gotten from their peers was “not useful” or “poor”). The project started with Trade, but removing the first two stages meant that no actual trade took place for this group.

Starting with Trade was problematic for the Martens as well, though they managed to move to a better relationship by the end of the semester. In her first reflection, Martha told me she was a “bad writer” and worried that she would not be able to help anyone in peer editing. Mark also identified himself as a weak writer early on; he wrote in his first reflection after the groups chose topics that “I don’t really know anything about world of warcraft [sic], but it looks fun. I used to play mario brothers [sic] a lot, but its [sic] different. The idea seems good though.” This statement is more important than it may appear, since it not only identifies his anxiety about his ability to trade, but also marks a source of potential useful knowledge. He exhibits the shame that McMillan identifies as a major stumbling block to trade, but he also announces his

similarity to the gamers and that he is willing to move through the shame and trade with them (321-322).

In their earliest writings together, the Martens clearly struggled with questions of how to divide tasks and how to work with others' texts. Martha, in particular, posed a challenge for the other members. Lacking any gaming background, she often had difficulty contributing to the group's project (which focused on *World of Warcraft* avatars and identity play). In early November, as the groups were preparing for their final projects, the other three members met with me to discuss her role in the group. The conversation was unusual, since I expected to hear them complain that she wasn't doing work. Instead, they wanted to ask me if it was OK for her to primarily work on one element of the project (the visuals for their final presentation) and write less. I asked if they'd talked to her about it, and they said she'd suggested it. She wanted to contribute—to trade—but the group worried that the trade they'd identified as most logical would fall afoul of institutional pressure. My role, as avatar of the institution, was to enable this trade. Once I freed them from this set of contextual pressures, they were able to forge a working relationship that was (in their minds) more effective.

Like the other groups, the Sparrows struggled with the task of beginning work at the Trade stage. Their troubles were more a matter of surface issues and workflow planning. They were one of the first groups to pick a research area (social networking), a topic (identity play in social networking environments), and a rough hypothesis (the move toward stronger connections between on- and offline identities limits social media's usefulness as a means of exploring identity issues). It wasn't until they submitted

a single hypothesis that I realized they wanted to write together. And yet they didn't—they planned on writing three papers with the same thesis. I met with them as a group during class and talked about the other possibilities for working together, including co-authoring their final paper. In my notebook entry for that day, I wrote about how surprised I was to find that they'd never considered that writing together was a possibility. "Did I say they couldn't do this? Why not assume they could do it?" Perhaps because they've been trained *not* to think this way, to consider the final paper to be a single-author art form.

Once I made it clear that they could work together, their next concern was ensuring that I knew they were all contributing equally. Their first co-authored piece, a research proposal, looked like a rainbow because they highlighted each line to mark its source. While this type of sentence-level (actually, character-level) authorship identification is similar to the accountability systems built into wikis and other computer-aided composition tools (a point I return to in chapter 5), it actively works against collaboration by marking individual elements of text with a single author. In my feedback, I asked them not to mark their future pieces in this way. Sam wrote back and said they'd done that because he and Steven wanted me to notice that all three of the members had contributed equally. Along with the concrete trade of text in support of their larger paper (intra-group trade), they worked together to ensure the extra-group trade with me was equitable. They were equally careful to ensure that I knew they were trading well when editing and peer reviewing; Steven was particularly careful to outline exactly how each member contributed to their project. This willingness to work closely

together with one another set them up well when preparing their final project and their continuing friendship (both of which constitute Art).

### *Art*

As noted earlier, McMillan offers a capacious definition of Art, one that includes both the material work of a community and the continuation of the community. Art is a problematic stage for communities based in classrooms, since the material product is tied to grading structures and the continuation of a community (which requires continued contact, as McMillan notes) is limited by the relatively brief length of the class (325). While it is significant that some of the group members maintained relationships after the class ended, characterizing these communities as “more successful” is questionable. A classroom community (in Rovai’s formulation) can exist for a brief time, yet still have salutary effects upon student learning (34). In addition, as other collaboration scholars make clear, the act of writing together often generates less-than-effective texts. Thus assessing the success or failure of the student group’s Art, given the disruptive influences of grading and limited time, is far more complex than in McMillan’s non-time-limited theory.

### *Spirit*

From the outset, I had concerns about the Wrens, which consisted of two first-semester freshmen men, one freshman woman, and a sophomore woman. (One of the men dropped the class early in the semester.) In Warren’s first reflection on the group

interactions, he wrote “I guess it will be OK...To be honest, I really don’t like working with partner [sic].” Other members of his group apparently shared this resistance. While none of his partners wrote about their dislike of group work, it was evident in their interactions with one another. The group was always the last to get talking, and three of the students complained about other group members’ commitment to the project and willingness to work. My entries about his group from the first few weeks of class are telling: “last to sit down together,” “only group not sitting with each other,” “didn’t complete writing in time.”

Having a group not gel in this way is not an unusual occurrence, sadly. The unpredictability of human relations and the difficulty in creating effective groups are common topics in scholarship about collaboration. (This may be why authors such as Gere [3] and Coleman and Levine [187] use terms like “magical” when referring to successful collaboration.) In other classes, I have stepped in and remade groups, redistributed members, or simply allowed students to restructure the classroom based on their own working styles. My usual solution in this situation is to allow students to form their own groups and to shift between groups freely until they find a group that works better for them. Because of the IRB approval, I was not able to restructure the groups, which limited my ability to help Warren and his group members.

As the semester went on, the group’s lack of engagement was a constant theme. Wendy wrote me four times complaining about Warren missing out-of-class meetings, failing to submit the agreed-upon work, and possibly plagiarizing his text from *Wikipedia*. Wanda told me in her conference that she had to email both of her group

members repeatedly to get them to submit text. For his part, Warren complained in our conference that he was not given a voice and was not allowed to contribute to the group's larger plan. At the end of the semester, the three group members graded each other fairly poorly on factors such as cooperation, clarity, and organization.

Compared to their compatriots in the 9 a.m. class, the Martens engaged far more deeply with one another. During the first group session, they were laughing and talking exuberantly about their backgrounds. Like the Wrens, they did not complete the first-day group writing assignment. However, this was not due to the fact that they were sitting silently with one another, it was because they were socializing. By the next class session, three of the four were sitting together and cross-talking with each other during whole-group activities. Even more telling, they had begun to tease one another. Two of the members were active *World of Warcraft* players, and they built upon jokes rooted in that community as a means of play.<sup>31</sup> They leveraged this play, and the competition inherent to, and slang stemming from, their shared game background, to announce a playful rivalry with the rest of the groups. While claims like “we rule you” (something they would sometimes announce before and after their group reported on their in-class work) were clearly meant to be read as joking, they both reinforced the Spirit of their group and encouraged the other groups, by marking them as othered, to close ranks against the outside “threat.”

While the Martens' Spirit was highly visible, it masked a larger issue of group power I discuss further in the Trust section. Much of the group's visible Spirit was due to

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<sup>31</sup> The role of humor/play as a tool for relationship building in the classroom is a topic that needs more study.

the efforts of Mark and Mary, both of whom told me they had become fairly good friends and spent time together outside the class. As noted above, one member (Matt) tended not to sit with the group, and in his reflections and his interactions with me, often positioned himself as an individual dealing with a two-person group. For example, in his midterm reflection on the group's progress, Matt wrote, "The project is on track. [Mark] and [Mary] really like our topic, and they keep us busy." In the same reflection, the group's fourth member, Martha, wrote, "I don't know really what *Warcraft* is all about...I just do what they tell me to do." Clearly, these two members did not feel the same Spirit as Mark and Mary, both of whom were very positive about both their work relationship and their topic. (Mary described it as "the best English paper I've done in college.")

The bifurcated Martens group indicates a weakness in McMillan's formulation of group community. Mark and Mary felt strong ties to each other and exhibited strong Sense of Community. The other two members were not as integrated into the community, though they worked well with the more integrated members. McMillan assumes a fairly homogenous set of actors and a web of relationships that is largely one-to-one. A situation like the Martens', in which a central core of members operates as a two-person peer to the other members, is a more complex relationship that calls for further study.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Sparrows entered the project with fairly strong Spirit connections. Sam and Steven knew each other from outside the class, and the two of them sat next to Scott before the groups were set up. While they were more subdued than the Martens students, they were also far more involved in each other's lives. This involvement was very evident in their assessment of each other—they consistently

ranked each other's performances on group tasks as "excellent." While the Spring semester students tended to rank each other fairly highly (see figure 2), it is significant that three of the four "excellent" ratings on the final assessment came from this group.

The success of this group, as well as the moderate success of the Martens, indicates an issue that might alter instructors' approach to classroom group formation. In both cases, students with strong commonalities, if not preexisting relationships, formed far more productive working relationships. They also tended to be more positive about their work than students in other groups, and several formed strong relationships that transcended the class. While the production of friendship is not a goal of a typical academic class, the experiences of writers in chapter 4 indicate how these extra-class friendships can develop into productive writing relationships. And, as McMillan makes clear, strong feelings of Spirit are required for students to begin to trust one another.

### *Trust*

Based on the initial feedback from students on their experiences with classroom collaboration, it was clear that even if students felt like they belonged in a group and

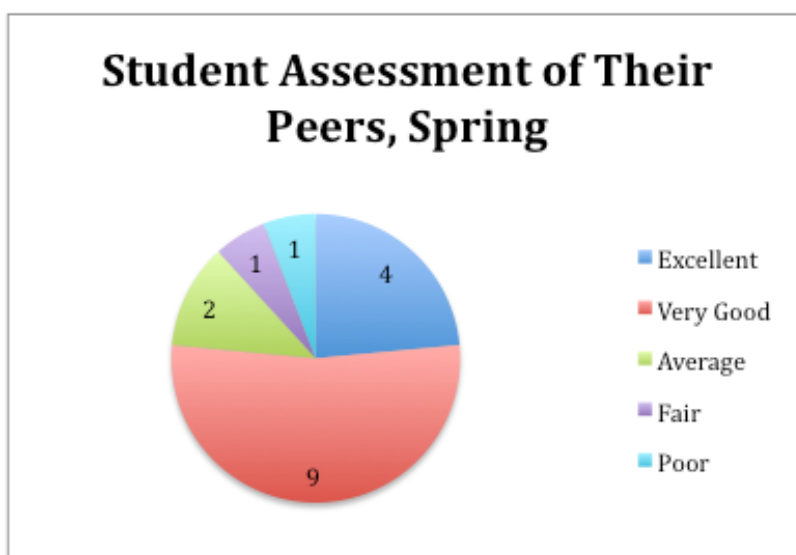


Figure 2: Student Assessment of Their Peers, Spring



identified with its members (Spirit), they did not trust the other members to perform. As noted earlier, the Wrens never established strong feelings of trust for one another.

McMillan identifies “order,” the knowledge of what to expect from one another, as the first requirement for trust (319). Without order, he says, it is not possible to reach one’s desired level of performance. Since the members of this group did not trust one another, they were not able to produce texts of the same quality as they might on their own. (As noted earlier, their final paper was remarkably less polished and rhetorically effective than their solo writing.)

The Martens again illustrated a possible hole in McMillan’s claims. While they did achieve a fairly high level of Trust, it was a strongly hierarchical collaboration. Since all of the text went through Mary before it was submitted, she had final say in the appearance and production of the paper and oral project. She and Mark also maintained control over the distribution of labor in the group’s work; Martha’s desire to refocus her efforts to her strengths (visual rhetoric) first had to be approved by Mary and Mark, then by me. According to Edward J. Lawler, whose work underpins McMillan’s work on Trust, unequal power distribution leads to more individualized actions by group members (33). Obviously, this was not the case. Perhaps the classroom environment, in which the students have little power outside the group, allows them to overlook hierarchical power differences?

The Sparrows group also troubles McMillan’s theory, but in an unusual way. Their final paper read fairly smoothly and did not exhibit the stylistic unevenness so typical of group-written texts. However, it was very easy to identify the authorship of the

various parts of the final text because once again the three members had highlighted the sections they were primarily responsible for. I asked Sam why they did this, even after I asked them not to. He told me that they decided to mark the text to ensure that each person got credit. They trusted one another to do a good job, but they did not trust me to assess them as a partnership of three. The teacher-student relationship is the most unequal power relationship in the classroom. At first glance it would appear that the text coloring was an example of the individualization Lawler describes. Yet upon investigation, it became clear that the individualization was not due to competition among members, but was instead an attempt to support one another. There was individualization, but its goal was equality of assessment, not differentiation of labor.

### **Sense of Community at the End of the Semester**

At the end of my year-long project, I had a lot of data, one group of active collaborators (the Sparrows), three failed groups, and 12 groups who had learned to work well enough together to produce a final project. But were the members of the Sparrows really engaging in collaborative authoring? And what exactly were the groups who worked fairly well together doing? It looked like collaboration but was little more than a simulacrum. One of the major elements that transformed this relationship into virtual collaboration is the lack of agency afforded the members. With the exception of the Sparrows and one group from the 9 a.m. Fall section, all of the groups consisted of strangers who were grouped together not by choice, but by the institution. While there were three pairs of students who knew each other outside of the class and had chosen to

take the class together, most of the students were in their sections because it fit their schedule. It wasn't possible to collaborate with students in other sections of the class (or, indeed, with students not taking the class that semester), so they were limited to a maximum of 21 other writers. As noted earlier, because of the limitations of my research project, I was not able to let students choose new groups or move from group to group. Unlike the collaborators I profile in the next chapter, who choose to work with a person or persons they choose themselves, the students in the classes I studied were placed into groups with no choice as to whether they would participate. Instead of fitting the working style to the students, I fitted the students to the working style.

While the inability to change the group makeup is particular to my research project, the other institutional limitations upon student agency affect all writing classrooms. Also affecting all classrooms—including mine—are limits upon time and writing genre. Students in my sections were together for a total of 45 hours (three hours a week for 15 weeks). Asking students who may or may not know one another to move from forming feelings of Spirit to producing sophisticated Art in such a short time is not supportable pedagogy. While it is possible for some groups to succeed in this task—and, based on accounts like Donna Qualley's *Turns of Thought* and Hephzibah Roskelly's *Breaking (into) the Circle*, some groups do—most of the groups I observed failed to form working communities, resulting in frustration for them and me. Likewise, the idea that the assignments I chose (short essays and oral presentations, all of which are mandated by departmental policy) would somehow be the perfect match for my students is problematic. Individual students already struggle with academic idioms and genres;

asking groups to compose in the essay form, a form strongly tied to Western ideas of individual expression, is a difficult task even for advanced writers.<sup>32</sup>

### **Serendipity, Spontaneity, and Collaborative Authoring**

Late in the Spring semester, as we were discussing the rhetoric of security and a recent news story about malicious users scraping data from Facebook profiles, I mentioned that it is possible to increase security by adjusting the default security settings. Lana raised her hand and asked how to do this. I asked her to let us look at her Facebook security settings and work together on setting them correctly. After a brief hesitation, she agreed and logged in on the overhead. We were able to see her home address, phone number, and family photos, a fact that shocked her. I asked her if she wanted help fixing the security settings, and she said yes, then asked me where to go. I had intended to work with her one-on-one after class, but I realized that this could be a teachable moment that would allow me to connect this topic to earlier readings about users' engagement with demands made by Web sites.

As she navigated to the settings area (Owen, who was very computer-savvy, directed her while I took notes), she repeatedly apologized about the "stupid stuff" on her page. What was notable about these apologies is that they appeared to be more ritualistic than sincere. She was not apologizing for the content, but for the insertion of "silly" content into the academic context. As McMillan notes, one of the elements of an effective community is that it protects its members from shame (322). Her apologies were not to

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<sup>32</sup> I return to this discussion of how the conditions of the first-year composition course affects students' ability to write together in interchapter 4.

the class for the content or for her interests, but to me as authority figure and “keeper” of the class. Once she found the page, Owen and three other students suggested changes to make while I attempted to spark a conversation about how the intersection of solitary Web surfing and form-based interfaces promote a culture of disclosure. Some of the students chimed in on this fairly abstract topic, but most of the class was far more interested in checking their own security settings. I dropped my point, and the students immediately broke into small groups gathered around laptops and began several conversations about adjusting security settings. While some of the groups aligned with the official groups, most consisted of people who happened to be sitting near someone with a laptop. As the students worked, I kept taking notes on the snippets of conversation I heard. Students talked about places they’d been, told anecdotes about family pets, discussed cars and computer hardware, and, in one case, continued talking about how Facebook encouraged a culture of disclosure.<sup>33</sup>

My best pedagogical move, at that moment, was to step aside, to trade my obligation to the institution for an obligation to the student—an obligation based simply on my existence with them in a classroom community (Readings 186). As Bill Readings argues, I abandoned the idea of teacher as *magister* and acknowledged that no position of authority can be authoritatively occupied (187). Instead, I recognized that something

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<sup>33</sup> This issue of perpetual disclosure in social media spaces raises intriguing questions. Do elements of online culture, including near-constant visibility in social media spaces and the remix culture (in which texts can be reworked by people other than the writer), actually reinforce solo authorship? Could the academic essay, with its privileging of the individual Platonic writer expressing him or herself, be a means of seeking control over one’s utterances? These questions, while outside the realm of this dissertation, could be a valuable means of integrating online discourse research and collaboration studies.

unusual was occurring and stepped back to allow space for it to continue.<sup>34</sup> Moments like this one, like the bursts of laughter caused by the students' group-written sentences, were moments vital to the formation of Spirit. Students were turning to their peers to ask for help, to share knowledge, and to swap stories about a site they spend so much time using. Unexpectedly, a non-academic Web site had become a means for building community in the classroom. Because all 17 of the students used the site, and because the site was so important to student life, meant that it was an emotionally safe topic through which they could engage peers. I was pleased (and a little surprised) to see the high level of trust this elicited; the students with laptops let their peers use the computer to make changes, an impressive invitation into one's home space. This computer exchange facilitated the ongoing trade of expertise, knowledge, and shared experiences. The resulting locked-down Facebook pages—along with the trust and respect exchanged during student interactions—were the Art of these communities.

Was this composition? No. Was this moment important? Definitely. At the end of class, two students thanked me for giving them the chance to work together on the settings. Just as importantly, the activity sensitized the group to the topic of security; students often tied our group conversations back to the events of that class period. (I even got a traditional assignment out of it; I asked the students to write about their concerns about security.) As an instructor it was risky, largely because it was an activity in the academic space that wasn't controlled by the instructor. Even now I'm uncomfortable writing about it because it does not fit into the traditional idea of classroom work. Yet,

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<sup>34</sup> In retrospect, I recognize that this was a moment when a Sense of Community loop had begun.

given its importance as a means of building community, I can only be happy with the way it turned out.

Instructors must be open to surprising moments like these, because they represent a way of making real connections within a virtually collaborative environment.<sup>35</sup> As noted in chapter 2, engaging in real collaboration largely requires shifting the context entirely outside academic grading and organization structures. What this year of working with students illustrates is that institutional pressures, classroom structures, and student resistance/disinterest make in-class real collaboration impossible. Instead of striving for real collaboration (as I did), it is more pedagogically sound to accept the virtual nature of student collaboration and to focus instead on the vital first steps of collaborative relationships: community building. This is where McMillan's work becomes particularly valuable. Communities are not something one forms by fiat. Groups formed by the instructor's command are not born as communities, and communities do not burst into life with no work. It is possible for an instructor to form groups, to organize bodies in space. It is not possible to form the communities required for collaborative work unilaterally. To enable collaboration in a classroom, the instructor must allow space and

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<sup>35</sup> Drawing upon Schön's concept of "reflection-in-action," this approach can be termed collaboration-in-action. As in his formulation,

the practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. (68, pronouns in original)

By stepping out of the way, being open to being surprised by students' collaborative work, and allowing students to shape their working styles, instructors can both promote collaborative work and help students learn to reflect on their work and the spaces in which they work together.

time for community loops to begin operating. This means an instructor must recognize the need to foster Spirit and Trust *before* requiring students to begin Trade, and understand that the limits of the classroom—in both time and potential action—make it a hostile space in which to collaborate. Rather than treating collaboration as something that works equally well with every student, instructors must give students more agency to form groups based on existing feelings of Spirit. Instructors must recognize that our models of collaboration are based on writers, such as the ones I profile in the next chapter, who work together because they already have the Spirit and Trust.

Classroom collaboration is virtual, but this does not mean that it is without value. Reflecting upon the classroom context in which they work together can be a valuable tool for helping students understand fields of power. Rather than assuming students can collaborate, given the right class structure, instructors must engage students in considerations of how their classroom existence works for, and against, their ability to collaborate. Since completing my classroom research, I have discussed the experience with students in my composition classes. I found the students to be fully aware of the contextual limitations that composition theorists tend to ignore and to be acutely sensitive to the fact that collaboration is often something assigned to them, not something they choose. This is not to say that students are hostile to collaboration; many of them actively collaborate with other members of their community and school groups. It is not collaboration that is difficult, or even collaborative authoring—it is collaborative authoring within the context of the classroom and assessment regimes that is difficult.



Along with bringing the classroom context into conversation, instructors interested in promoting collaboration should be sensitive to moments when Sense of Community loops begin to operate. At moments like the one described above, when the students are engaging with a topic that facilitates collaboration but may not be directly writing-related, getting out of their way may be the best pedagogy. Instructors must reconceive collaboration not as an assignment, nor as a required working style, but as a phenomenon that, given the right environment, can occur. Rather than a series of small assignments that could be completed individually, but had to be done by a group, it would have been far more effective to challenge the students to complete a large project that could only be completed by several people. While this essentially “tricks” students into working together, it also more accurately models the challenges that inspire non-classroom collaboration. Rather than declaring that students must write together, it is more philosophically sound to present collaboration as a possibility, an invitation from the instructor. The instructor makes it clear that collaboration—particularly collaborative authoring—is an option, that he or she will work with students to ensure grading is fair, and that they are supported as they learn to negotiate. Only when students choose to collaborate, when they are free to build their communities and working styles, can virtual collaboration—the only collaboration possible in the classroom—become pedagogically valuable as a means of helping students begin to investigate both their own writing and the context in which they write.

## **Interchapter II: Competing Contexts of Collaborative Authoring: Institutions vs. Disciplines**

In 1963, Derek J. De Solla Prince, surveying the growth of collaboratively written articles in scientific fields, cheekily predicted that, “by 1980, the single-author paper will be extinct” (89). While this situation has obviously not come to pass, the move from solo authorship to collaboratively written texts has continued to alter understandings of scholarship as an isolated project. Almost thirty years after Prince’s tongue-in-cheek pronouncement, Anne E. Austin and Roger Baldwin argued that “collaboration in the academic professions is a growing and controversial phenomenon” (1). More than 20 years later, both elements of this claim about collaborative work—its growth and its controversy—remain true for scholars in the humanities, particularly English Studies.

It is now common, if not expected, for scholars in both the “hard” and “soft” sciences to write with other researchers. Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, Dorothy S. Messerschmitt, and Stephanie Vandrick reported, in 1997, that 97% of articles in six volumes of the journal *Science* were authored by more than one person.<sup>36</sup> Collaborative writing has even been positioned as a means of outreach in some fields; Richard L. Hart, in an essay for *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, advocates that untenured librarians should work with other authors “if there is any doubt as to their ability to

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<sup>36</sup> It is important not to take the frequency of collaborative work in the sciences as a sign that collaborative work is unproblematic in fields other than English. In a 2003 editorial, *Science* editor-in-chief Kennedy describes how questions about “whether a much-cited paper was really the candidate’s work or a coauthor’s” come up during committee meetings outside the English department (733).

produce a solo-authored high quality manuscript and get it accepted for publication” (195). In contrast, writers working in the humanities still tend to work alone, preserving elements of the “writer in the garret” working style even as scholars of collaboration have brought the concept of individual authorship into question. Charlotte Thralls’ “Bakhtin, Collaborative Partners, and Published Discourse” exemplifies this position, arguing that all writing is collaborative by virtue of the interaction between writer and audience (67-68).<sup>37</sup> English scholars interested not only in promoting collaborative writing, but also engaging in it themselves, should be sensitive to the fact that this disciplinary reluctance has implications for them as both scholars and faculty.

English Studies’ resistance to collaborative work is clearly reflected in the tables of contents of its journals. According to a “quick survey” by Kami Day and Michele Eodice, only five percent of *College English* and 24 percent of *College Composition and Communication* articles were credited to more than one author between 1990 and 1996 (*First* 16). An equally quick survey of recent tables of contents shows both growth and reduction in collaboratively written texts. Between March 2002 and March 2012, 16 percent of *College English* articles were credited to multiple authors, and two issues—May 2010 and March 2011—were entirely co-authored. The same percentage of bylined CCC articles published between February 2002 and February 2012 were credited to more than one author.

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<sup>37</sup> The assertion that all writing is collaborative has been critiqued by other scholars—Yancey and Spooner argue that, in claiming that all writing is collaborative, “‘collaboration’ becomes moot and useless as a theoretical construct” (56)—but the claim continues to arise in discussions of collaborative pedagogy.

There has been growth in the number of multiple-author scholarly articles (at least, in the pages of *College English*), but English Studies continues to be a field in which the single author dominates. It is difficult to identify a single reason for this situation, but James S. Leonard and Christine E. Wharton's suggestion that English Studies' resistance to collaboration reflects the continuing influence of a Romantic understanding of textual production as a private (and thus solo) act is compelling (27-29).<sup>38</sup> More germane to this interchapter is how the understanding of authoring as the work of an individual has material effects upon scholars engaging in academic collaboration. While the number of collaboratively written texts has increased, Austin and Baldwin's assessment of working together as "controversial" is still often the case.

During the spring 2012 semester, I interviewed five scholars who have both studied and published with other authors: Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, William Duffy, John Pell, Hephzibah Roskelly, and Bonnie Sunstein. These interviews form the basis of the next chapter, but their observations about some experiences with fellow scholars and administrators illustrate how working within the context of academic institutions can make collaborative relationships difficult. All of the scholars agreed that collaborative work is received far more positively than it has been in the past, but understanding the professional resistance experienced by academic collaborators can shed light on how the dominance of single authorship affects scholars who choose to work together.

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<sup>38</sup> Other authors who have explored the negative effects of the conception of the isolated scholar include Entes in "The Right to Write a Co-Authored Manuscript" and Sullivan in "Revising the Myth of the Independent Scholar."

Academic institutions' problematic treatment of scholars engaged with collaborative work is a trope that appears many times in the scholarship. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford describe how Lunsford's coauthored and coedited work was not considered as part of a review for promotion (*Singular* ix-x). Hafernik, Messerschmitt, and Vandrick report that faculty who have primarily published collaboratively have been told by deans that their tenure and promotion depended upon the publication of single-authored papers (32). In "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," Lunsford points to an (unnamed) "prominent and very distinguished feminist scholar [who was] refused an endowed chair because most of her work had been written collaboratively" (4). More chillingly, Judith Entes describes a dean actively warning her against investigating collaborative writing because her work "[did] not appear to yield scholarly articles directly related to developmental reading" (57). This resistance to collaboration extends beyond questions of promotion and tenure; Day and Eodice's proposal for a collaboratively authored dissertation was rejected because the chair of their department and the dean of the graduate school "did not feel [their] dissertation, although a worthy and necessary undertaking, fit the definition of a dissertation" (4).

As these examples make clear, the resistance to collaborative work largely focuses on its institutional, not scholarly, value. Mary Ann Latimer and Pamela Spoto report that objections to collaboratively written works often concentrate on how they will be accounted for in tenure decisions: "Administrators and others want to know who really wrote the paper" (280). Joseph Harris describes how "the routine forms of marking an academic career—CVs, annual faculty activity reports, tenure and promotion reviews—

militate against [collaborative work] by singling out for merit only those moments of individual ‘productivity,’ the next article or grant or graduate course” (51-52). While these objections could be addressed via changes to the “routine forms,” the reception of collaborative work can have deleterious effects upon the perception of a scholar’s work. Richard Chait reports that “some universities assign numerical values to the scholarly publications of promotion and tenure candidates and then divide the ‘points’ by the number of co-authors” (23), a move that positions collaboratively written texts as less scholarly, simply by virtue of the way they were authored.

The scholars I interviewed did not report the same level of resistance to their work, but they acknowledged that they have heard faculty and administrators voice concerns about their collaborative work. One of the most promising observations—for collaboration-minded scholars—came from John Pell and William Duffy, who recently received their PhDs from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). The pair have presented together at a number of conferences and workshops, and they reported that their claim that “collaboration...is central to intellectual work but often ignored, which often limits the ideas that circulate in our profession” has been well-received by fellow scholars. In their answers, they obliquely addressed institutional resistance to collaborative work by arguing that collaborative work “helps illuminate a central skill-set in a globalized academy: the ability to engage the other intellectually.” They claim that

[c]ollaboration signals, amongst other things, that a person who works with others (crucial to navigating department politics), is interested in creating intellectual relationships (important given the emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration,

especially in writing programs), and if a person had solid publications we need to remember that collaboration does not somehow short circuit the peer-review process.

In other words, their argument for collaboration addresses concerns about the working style's institutional value by asserting its value to both the local and scholarly community.

While they firmly believe in the value of collaborative work, Duffy and Pell clearly understand that they may still face questions about their work together in promotion and tenure reviews, predicting that “we will most likely face the same kind of scrutiny our colleagues have faced before us.” Bonnie Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater provide a clear example of the type of scrutiny younger scholars like Pell and Duffy may experience. When Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein were going through the tenure process, each was asked to write letters for the other asserting that both partners contributed equally to their joint projects. Both laughed about it, but acknowledged that it reflected broader assumptions about how “real” scholarship is pursued individually. Chiseri-Strater observed that collaborative work “is more accepted now than it has been in the past. I mean the University has collaboration as one of its big themes, although I don't think that they do much to really support that. You have to make a case for it.” Sunstein added, “I don't think they know that they're not doing it, but until they change their ways of thinking they aren't doing it [supporting collaborative work].” One of the clearest illustrations of the resistance to collaborative work, according to Sunstein, is the fact that some promotion and tenure committees still consider whether an author is first-

credited or not: “The traditions are outdated, they were invented at a different time, but they are still there.”

Hepzibah Roskelly, who has written collaboratively with a number of different authors, described institutional resistance in many of the same terms. During her tenure review Roskelly was asked to provide letters from the writers with whom she worked outlining how the work was divided:

When Kate [Ronald, Roskelly’s frequent collaborator] wrote her letter, she said, ‘I was responsible for every word and Hepsie was responsible for every word.’ That view of collaboration was difficult for people to understand 20 years ago or 15 or when I came up for tenure. That was a radical thing to say.

Roskelly noted that, thanks in part to collaborative writing becoming more common, it had become less common for collaborative scholars to have their work questioned. Some of the change is due to a growing awareness of the fact that “it’s so much harder to write with somebody. So I know that [people who write together] had to have a good reason to be writing with somebody. It’s an incredible misapprehension to believe that you write with somebody else because it makes your job easier.” However, she was very clear that this misapprehension continues to exist and that some institutions, administrators, and even other scholars still view collaborative scholarship with suspicion.

Roskelly’s observation that collaborative work may still be misunderstood is an important one for academics interested in collaborative scholarly work. English Studies’ understanding of collaborative work has changed from the days when Lunsford’s department excluded her coauthored and coedited work from her tenure portfolio, but, as Harris makes clear, many of the tools used to represent and assess that work—CVs, for



example—still tend to assume single authorship. This situation illustrates how the work of collaboration scholars may extend beyond their research and into the realm of advocacy and institutional reform. It could be argued that instructors interested in both promoting and engaging in collaborative writing themselves have an obligation to not only approach the topic from pedagogical or scholarly directions, but also consider how the act of working with another writer is assessed. If, as Roskelly noted, writing together is a more difficult task than writing alone—a claim made by many other scholars (see chapter 2)—is there any logic in treating collaboratively written texts differently than solo-authored texts? Perhaps it is time to begin to answer the question Ede and Lunsford asked more than a decade ago in “Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship”: “why has the ideological function of the single-author book—a virtual necessity for promotion and tenure in most research universities—not received the same attention from scholars that the author construct has received?” (358). As a field, English Studies seems to be comfortable with the death of the author, the application of the Foucauldian concept of the “author-function,” and the idea, as Kurt Spellmeyer puts it, that “[e]ven our most sublimely ‘original’ moments cannot escape the grid of constructed meanings and uses” (qtd. in Howard, *Sexuality* 84). Yet there is a line drawn, institutionally and disciplinarily, between inevitable influence and explicit engagement with other writers. Examining this line, and the scholars who have chosen to transgress expectations for solo authorship within the academy, can be a means of understanding how institutional and disciplinary structures influence the kind of scholarly work it is possible to do in the humanities. In

the next chapter, I profile five academics who, in their work, contribute to troubling the definitions of what it means to be a scholarly author.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROFILES OF ACADEMIC COLLABORATION OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

The yearlong research project described in chapter 3 illustrates how the context of the classroom has a powerful influence over the types of work and working relationships available to students. Because of the restrictions upon student agency, the lack of time for community development, and the limitations placed upon their ability to define writing relationships and products within this context, students are limited in their ability to break away from individualistic authoring behaviors. As my study shows, students recognized the problematic nature of collaborative work in the classroom, resulting in overt resistance to my grading system as well as less-visible resistance enacted through their writing and their engagement with their partners or group members.

Instructors interested in promoting collaborative authoring—the act of writing together with a writer who is present both in time and in space—or other, less-intensive forms of collaborative writing—composing texts with others—cannot afford to ignore the role that the classroom context plays in shaping the work that takes place within it. However, neither can they ignore that the classroom context is only one of the possible contexts shaping writerly relations within academia. Students write, individually and together, as members of community groups, fraternities and sororities, and religious organizations. Outside the context of school, they write, again individually and together, as part of their jobs and personal lives. It is not possible to address the multiplicities of

contexts in which writing takes place, nor is it possible to describe the multiplicities of working styles—including collaboration—used to produce writing within these contexts. However, it is possible to examine in more detail the characteristics of academic collaborators, writers who operate within the larger academic system, but outside the strict boundaries of the classroom. These writers, who have far more control over their relationships, interactions, distribution of tasks, goals, and the shape of their final product (if any), illustrate how a less constrictive context can facilitate forms of collaborative writing—including collaborative authoring—that are difficult to achieve within the classroom.

In this chapter, I explore how academic writers come to write together, how they define the work they do, and how they communicate to their academic peers and students the value of their chosen working style. Using examples drawn from the corporate world, my classroom research, and a series of interviews with experienced academic collaborators, I examine three possible working styles that fall under the broad umbrella of collaborative writing, but that differ greatly in their engagement with questions of authorship and textual ownership: compiled writing, serial writing, and collaborative authoring. I conclude by arguing that collaborative authoring, so valuable as a means of disrupting the individualization of the classroom, is only one of several possible working styles. One of the most important skills for collaborators to develop is an ability to alter the type of collaboration to meet present needs.

This chapter draws on a series of interviews conducted during the Spring 2012 semester. All of the interviewees have ties to the English department at The University of

North Carolina at Greensboro, either as faculty or former graduate students. Additionally, all have composed at least one academic work together and promote collaborative work to their students. My goal in limiting the data set is to illustrate the variety of working styles evident even within a fairly small number of writers. I base my methodology—interviews rather than observations of the writing partners at work—on the work of Kami Day and Michele Eodice. As they argue in *(First Person)<sup>2</sup>: A Study of Co-Authoring in the Academy*, interviews reflect a phenomenological approach to the topic, one which allows the interviewees to “describe their lived experience of writing together and the meaning they make from that experience” (6). Because my interest in their work centers largely on their interpretations of the work they do together, a phenomenological approach is more appropriate than a case study or ethnographic approach.

In *Writing Together: Collaborative Learning in the Writing Classroom*, Tori Haring-Smith outlines a useful, though rough, heuristic for classifying varieties of collaborative writing. She divides writing into three categories, based largely upon the type of input each writer has and how the writers allocate responsibility and credit. The first category, serial writing, represents writing that passes through a series of isolated writers who contribute to a final text while having little to no control over the final shape of the document. Haring-Smith describes serial writers as “relatively isolated individuals whose combined work produces a single-authored text” (362). Haring-Smith’s second category, compiled writing, represents a stronger sense of group authorship. In compiled writing, each person shares a common goal, but contributions from each one are individually marked and identified with a single author (363). The third category, co-

authored texts, downplays individual authors' contributions and credits all of the writers with the composition of the text as a whole (363).

While Haring-Smith's heuristic is useful for general categorization, there are a number of issues with using it as a means of understanding the types of writing found in the academic context. Much of her discussion of the types of writing represented by these categories assumes a corporate environment, one in which issues of individual assessment and voice are less important than organizational hierarchies and corporate voice. This is particularly true of her description of serial writing, which she summarizes as "writing *for* someone rather than *with* them" (362). A larger problem is that, in all three categories, she assumes individual authorship, making the key differential between her categories the question of credit and individual voice. When she addresses working styles closer to collaborative authoring, much of her discussion centers on the difficulty of negotiating between individual authors. Especially problematic is her tendency to position authoring in real-time with another person as exceptionally difficult; she actually warns against drafting as a group, describing it as "very frustrating" and time-consuming (370). This represents a product-centered approach to the task of writing, one that prioritizes the production of texts rather than the work needed to compose the text. Writing together can indeed be difficult, but, in my experience, writers comfortable working together—such as the experienced collaborators profiled in this chapter—can collaboratively draft a text with little frustration or added time, since they have developed the relationship needed to foster their work. Less-experienced collaborative authors—including students working closely together for the first time—can actually benefit from

the difficulty of the task. Thus the pedagogical benefit of collaborative authoring is that it foregrounds the rhetorical negotiations taking place during the composition of a text, which can help sensitize students to the rhetorical moves they often make without reflection.

The issue of crediting contributors, the issue that Haring-Smith's heuristic largely centers on, is an important one to address when considering acts of collaborative work within academic contexts. As described in chapter 2, students operate within an assessment system that reinforces the conception of the writer as an isolated mind. Because of the "publish or perish" paradigm, in which career advancement is tied to active publication, professional academics—instructors, faculty, and independent scholars—operate within a similar system. While professional academics have more flexibility in their ability to work with others, they need, for reasons of promotion and tenure, to receive credit for contributions to publications. The work styles of students and professional academics differ greatly, but both groups engage with a system that prioritizes individual writing.

Since students and academic professionals engage with similar individualizing pressures, it is not particularly effective to categorize works based upon how contributors are credited. Instead, Haring-Smith's heuristic can be refocused to place more emphasis upon how collaborative writers interact in time and space. Such a move shifts attention from the resulting product and how its authors are credited, instead focusing on the process of composition and the authors' engagement with each other. A revision to Haring-Smith's original system also allows for finer consideration of the varieties of

working styles she places under “co-authoring,” a broad category that includes everything from individual-authored drafts that are circulated among a group to collaborative authoring (363-364). By shifting focus to writers’ interactions, it is possible to draw attention to how the chosen working style affects the types of writing that can be produced.

Like the original heuristic, the revision categorizes collaborative writing into three general types. I use the same terms, but shift the definitions and order of the first two categories to clarify how the working style described within reflects different engagements with other writers in time and space. The first category of the revised heuristic is compiled writing, writing that is composed individually and assembled into a single document. This writing allows for each writer to maximize his or her solo writing time. Because the education system focuses on individual writing, this means that contributors are able to engage with a comfortable form of writing until the time comes to compile the final text. (This is likely why this is the type of collaborative writing most often produced by students new to the work of collaboration.) As in Haring-Smith’s heuristic, “each of the individuals retains some control over part of the final text and the reader can distinguish one person’s contribution from another’s” (362). In student writing, this ability to distinguish ownership of the text often manifests as shifts in diction and style.

The revised heuristic’s second category, serial writing, describes writing that is drafted individually, then edited collectively. This category includes writing styles Haring-Smith includes in both her compiled and co-authored sections. While she



describes this form of writing as a “train of individuals working on a text” in which there is no feedback loop through which the writers interact (361-362), such a relationship is not the only working style available to serial writers. While it is possible for there to be little to no interaction, in the form of feedback loops between writers, such a relationship would be difficult to maintain. Instead, writers working serially—either by sharing incremental drafts or by composing different sections of a larger document—must interact regularly to craft a document that reads as the work of a single author (even if the authors are in more than one body). Like compiled writing, serial writing may involve writers working at different times and while not present to each other. However, compiled writing assumes a far stronger connection between the contributors, since the writing “belongs” to the collaborators as a group, not as individuals.

The third category of the revised heuristic, collaborative authoring, is much narrower than Haring-Smith’s co-authored texts. Rather than focusing on whether it is possible to distinguish the work of the individual writers (her criteria for co-authorship), this category centers on the act of writing together when present to the other. In this working style, writers move through the writing process as a single unit, crafting the text together while negotiating the each member’s engagement with the topic. Because of the difficulty of this working style, it is, as Haring-Smith notes, rarely attempted by large groups (364). However, as the interviews in this chapter make clear, it is a very accessible working style for pairs of writers.

My revision of Haring-Smith’s work represents a means of differentiating between very different relationships that are often lumped together under the term

“collaborative writing.” The next sections draw upon this heuristic to examine three different types of collaborative writing taking place within the university. While the writers described in my three examples, taken from classroom observations and interviews, engage in all three types of collaborative writing at different times, it is possible to identify their primary working style. I conclude with an example of a skilled collaborator who is able to strategically choose the working style that best supports her relationship with one or more writing partners.

### **Compiled Writing**

In compiled writing, each contributor composes his or her section individually, crafting stand alone elements that are later compiled into a single document and submitted as a final draft. Rather than approaching the writing task as a shared responsibility, the writers approach it as a series of tasks performed by individuals. This means that each writer writes her or his section in isolation, with little to no feedback from other writers. As the text develops, each writer retains ownership of, and responsibility for, his or her section of the final document. The partners or group may edit sections of the text to integrate disparate elements of style and argumentation, but this editing largely focuses on transitions and consistency of terminology. The final draft of the writing retains these features; even if it reads smoothly, it is still possible for each contributor to identify her or his contributions.

Instructors who assign collaborative writing tasks are likely very familiar with compiled writing; in my experience, most novice collaborators gravitate to this style of

working. In the classes I studied during my yearlong classroom research project—as well as in other courses I have taught—students tend to engage in compiled writing unless I intervene. During my conferences with student collaborators, it is common for them to refer to “my part” or “my section” when discussing elements of the paper. The popularity of compiled writing is likely due to the fact that, of the three types of working styles described in the heuristic, compiled writing is most like individual authoring. Unlike the other forms, which require that writers engage with others during the drafting process, compiled writing allows writers to work largely alone, only coming together at the end. Compiled writing thus maintains the fiction of the isolated writer, reifying conceptions of individual authorship even within the framework of collaboration. Compiled writing also does not require strong relationships between writers, so it is an easily accessible working style for collaborators who are unwilling (or unable) to engage more deeply with their fellow writers.

In chapter 3, I describe a group I named the Wrens, a group that failed to work productively with each other.<sup>39</sup> Their work not only provides both a very clear example of compiled writing, but also illustrates the interrelationship between working styles and the strength of a collaborative writing group’s relationship. As I note in that chapter, the Wrens did not engage with each other very deeply. They did not sit together unless prompted, did not share work during the drafting stages, and did not trust each other to do quality work. The collaborative pieces they submitted during the class were clearly written individually, and then compiled into a single document. This was evident both

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<sup>39</sup> As noted earlier, all student and group names have been changed.

mechanically—each section of the first paper was in a different font—and rhetorically—there was no single thread of argument joining the various sections. During our final group conference, I asked the Wrens to describe how they drafted and wrote their final presentation. Without exception, each person spoke about her or his section of the paper and about the ways she or he developed it in isolation. In our meeting, the members were unable to identify a single thesis that encompassed their various sections of the project. Only Wendy, who compiled the final script, discussed working with the draft as a whole, and she expressed frustration about the difficulty of compiling four very different arguments. As she said in an email after our meeting, “I don’t really know what all of us are saying as a group, but I know what I’m saying.”

This disconnection between the group members was evident in the final product they submitted at the end of the course. Their introduction made it clear that there would be little integration of the members’ contributions:

People use the internet for many reasons, including shopping, news, gaming, and social media. Many people use the internet to talk and interact with other people. In this paper, we look at four ways people use the internet for relationships: keeping in touch with friends through social media, having cybersex, and the problem of pornography.

Grammatical and rhetorical issues aside, this introduction is notable for the way it reflects how the writers developed and wrote their sections individually. This was one of only three paragraphs that referred to the paper’s argument as a whole (the other being the conclusion, which simply recapped the three sections, and a short paragraph about internet use statistics). Yet, as is clearly evident in the introduction, there is no single

argument other than the fairly obvious point that people use the internet as a means of pursuing relationships. This lack of integration marked the rest of the paper as well; Warren and Wanda, who wrote about cybersex and pornography, had a polished and fairly smooth transition between their sections, but Wendy's section on social media did not integrate with the others at all.

According to my notes about our last group meeting, I noted this lack of integration, suggested they rework their introduction and conclusion, and asked them to read each other's sections to draw connections between their arguments. My goal was to move them, in some small way, toward a form of serial writing (described below) in which the contributors worked through the project as a whole, contributing to the various sections as well as integrating the other writers' suggestions. Doing so could have helped them develop a more streamlined and consistent paper, one that was not simply three papers compiled into a single document. While it is not possible to identify a single reason for their resistance to this type of work, it is likely connected to their failure to develop a strong sense of community, a point I explore in chapter 3.

At this point, I should clarify that the student example above represents a fairly primitive form of writing, one in which the individual writing style and voice of the contributor takes priority over the evocation of a single author's voice. However, as Haring-Smith notes in her discussion of the form, compiled writing can produce far more polished work than that typically found in the classroom. In the corporate world, this may take the form of a group-authored report, in which each person produces a different section. As a technical writer, I engaged in this type of writing quite often. However,

since most corporate reports are templated, the expectations for the text enforce a single voice for the writers. Haring-Smith also points to anthologies as another example of a form in which each contributor's work is intentionally not integrated. This conception of writing invites questioning of how one defines a work—is a work the argument, or the form in which it is published? I fall on the side of Michele Eodice, who describes this form of writing as “parallel writing toward a shared audience” (116). While contributors are working toward a goal, they pursue this goal individually, a much different working style than the deeper forms of collaboration described below.

### **Serial Writing**

Serial writing, in which the participants in a collaborative writing partnership or group produce a single-voiced work by alternating between individual drafting and collaborative editing of each member's draft work, represents a far deeper relationship than that required to support compiled writing. As the text moves through the drafting process, and as each contributor modifies the argument (or suggests modifications), the writers can engage in extensive discourse about the writing. These interactions represent feedback loops in which the writers not only modify produced texts, but also, as they read the others' writing while composing and revising their own drafts, develop different rhetorical strategies that they can deploy in their own writing.

Unlike compiled writing, in which the bulk of the final text will be drafted and polished individually, serial writing assumes that the writers come together to polish the final text. Because serial writing supports individual drafting, it is more accessible to

writers separated by distance or limited in opportunities to work with one another in real time. As a result, academic collaborators who work at, or attend, widely separated schools may find this form of collaborative writing more accessible than collaborative authoring, which requires real-time presence. Yet, since serial writing assumes collaborative editing, it is easy for authors to begin a project as a serial writing endeavor, and then shift to collaborative authoring as the text moves to a more polished form. Alternatively, a project could begin as a collaboratively authored piece, shift to serial writing of drafts, then return to collaborative authoring. Serial writing is thus the most flexible of the three types of collaborative writing described in the heuristic.

An example of serial writing—as well as collaborative writing—can be found in the relationship of William Duffy and John Pell, two graduates of UNCG’s English PhD program. Pell and Duffy began writing collaboratively five years ago during graduate school at UNCG, producing several seminar papers, conference papers, and an essay for the department’s student rhetoric text.<sup>40</sup> Duffy’s dissertation, which deploys interactionism theory as a means of understanding collaborative writing in and out of the classroom, reflects his experiences working with Pell and the writing they engaged in during their time at UNCG. Their collaboration began with a prospectus for the editors of a proposed collection:

They liked the idea but had a few questions, so they requested that [Will] send them the first half of the essay. I (Will) didn’t “have” an essay, all I had were

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<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, the scholars profiled in this chapter, as well as Lunsford and Ede and Day and Eodice, trace their collaborative work to graduate school. An investigation of how collaboration-minded instructors could draw upon elements of the graduate school experience may be informative.

those three paragraphs about an idea for the essay. I was intimidated because this was now “for real” writing, so I asked John if he wanted to collaborate with me. I knew he was interested in the subject matter, and we were already friends, so it seemed like a smart move. It was a smart move insofar as it sparked in us a passion for collaborating with each other, but the process of writing that essay was terribly difficult because neither of us had ever written for publication before.

In the initial stages of their relationship, Duffy and Pell, who lived across the street from each other, worked together in real time “pretty frequently.” They note that “we would both agree that working together in the same room is the most productive in terms of ideas.” However, they also did quite a lot of work on their own, noting that “there is also a time and place for simply putting yourself in front of the keyboard and composing and then allowing your partner to read that work.” They described their writing process in terms of continual negotiations, first determining the scope of the project, then, once they are on the same page, moving into the writing:

[We] begin working together (one person talking and taking notes, the other typing at the keyboard) and begin drafting sections, paragraphs, and pieces of the essay. We continue this process on multiple occasions, coming back together to review writing we have done on our own and then spending time composing and revising together. Finally, when we feel that the draft is near completion we read the whole draft out loud—taking turns, of course.

When partners begin work by defining their goals, they can more easily work on their own and then come together to revise and compose more. Yet it is important to note that they do not conceive of themselves as independent authors working on isolated texts that are then compiled:

Often we find ourselves saying something to the effect of “no, we shouldn’t say it that way,” or “we are being too wordy there.” What is interesting about this



language is that it does not signal out a single author's efforts. Instead, we have come to see the text as inherently collaborative, even those portions that we author individually.

This illustrates how Pell and Duffy's form of writing, which has the characteristics of serial writing, differs from the compiled writing described above. While it may be possible to tease out a particular phrase as characteristic of one person's writing, the final text exists as a joint construction, one with a single, joint author. Because the pair prioritize the conception of themselves as collaborative writers, they recognize that their work together results in a single voice, one which they both own.

Since graduation, the partners have moved far from each other—Duffy to South Carolina, Pell to California—so working in real time has become more difficult. The move has necessitated writing more on their own, but “[w]hen we are working on something with a due date, we usually meet in a ‘face-to-face’ capacity more frequently, if you count Skype and screen sharing as methods for doing face-to-face meetings.”<sup>41</sup> At those moments, they shift into what I call collaborative authoring, illustrating that the borders between the categories proposed by Haring-Smith, while useful as a heuristic, are permeable.

This negotiation of working styles is important, since it points to the need—explored later in this chapter—to be flexible in terms of working styles; writers can (and often do) move between serial writing and collaborative authoring. Pell and Duffy, in fact, question the use of working styles as a heuristic for understanding collaborative

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<sup>41</sup> In the next chapter, I argue that network technology that allows for collaborators to present to each other in real time does indeed represent a similar experience as face-to-face meetings.

work, since such a move prioritizes the act of actively producing text over less-visible relational acts: “[I]t suggests that we can actually pinpoint those times when we are collaborating, as opposed to those moments when we are not. It’s sort of like asking someone to describe the writing process; how do you decide what does and does not count as part of the process?” This is an important point, since it is counterproductive to focus solely on working styles while ignoring how the writers’ relationships and interactions with each other inform the work they do together. Such a move can obscure the need to promote collaborative work as what Duffy and Pell describe as “an inventive process and reflexive relationship.” As I argue in chapter 3, the ability of writers to work together productively is relational, depending in large part on the feelings of Spirit and Trust shared by members of the collaboration.

### **Collaborative Authoring**

Collaborative authoring, which Haring-Smith terms “co-authoring,” involves authors writing together in real time while present to each other. It is the most intense form of collaborative writing, since it requires the writers to work together while writing nearly every word. When writers collaboratively author a text, they must constantly negotiate different rhetorical styles, different worldviews, and different understandings of the task at hand as a means of crafting a single voice that reflects both or all writers. Due to the complexity of the task, collaborative authoring is the most difficult type of collaborative writing, a fact made evident by numerous writers. Eodice describes this form of writing as “the one that involves suffering, that painful powerful dynamic of

exchange between individual and group, group and individual” (116). Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clincy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule describe their work together as “the product of our joint efforts and interchange of ideas” achieved via arguments, objections, and impasses of understanding (xxv). As noted earlier, Haring-Smith actually warns against engaging in what she calls collaborative drafting, due to the fact that it is both time-consuming and frustrating (370).

Given the difficulty of the act of collaborative authoring, it may be worth asking why writers would want to engage in this type of work. If it is possible to write a text serially and have it reflect the thoughts of both writers, why engage in the more intense form of collaborative authoring? The reasons vary from group to group, but scholars such as Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, Hephzibah Roskelly, and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater and Bonnie Sunstein consistently point to the role that friendship plays in their choice of working style.<sup>42</sup> Rather than establishing a relationship as a means of creating a text, the text is an outgrowth of an existing relationship, one that both precedes the text and enables its creation. While both Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein have published single-authored texts and works with other scholars, they made it clear during a recent group interview that they preferred working with each other.

Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, who began collaborating in the late 1980s during graduate school, illustrate how the ability to collaboratively author is dependent upon the writers’ relationship. During the interview, the pair alternated between discussing interview questions and personal talk about their lives, their history together, their

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<sup>42</sup> I alternate the order of their names to reflect how Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater systematically reorder their names in their publications.

families, and their individual scholarly work. When one person would begin to answer a question, the other would often chime in with clarifications. Some questions began to be answered by one person, before being taken over by the other. During the interview, their interaction was not competitive, but complementary, both a conversation between partners and a voicing of their partnership.

Like Pell and Duffy, Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein's relationship predated their decision to write together. As graduate students at the University of New Hampshire, they became close friends. Chiseri-Strater was a year ahead of Sunstein, but stressed that the difference in their class year did not result in a hierarchical relationship: "I would never call it like a mentoring thing but it was an inspirational thing and it was a sharing thing." It was only after establishing their friendship that they began working together professionally: "[W]e were in a program that really, really expected us to collaborate. I mean they didn't expect Elizabeth and me in particular, but I do remember once Tom Newkirk saying to me... 'Go talk to Elizabeth, she knows how to take notes, just do what she does.'" Rather than forming a relationship as a means of writing a paper—a situation students in the classroom often find themselves in—the pair drew upon individual expertise to expand a friendship into a scholarly collaboration.

Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater began collaboratively authoring while developing the first edition of *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*. In 1996 they rented a cabin in Maine as a means of establishing a joint space to work (they were at different institutions at this time). According to Chiseri-Strater, they "originally envisioned two computers side by side and we thought that's how we were going to write but that only

took about a week for us to realize that that was not going to work, that we really needed to work on one computer.” Their relationship promoted a form of work in which they write together, alternating typing and observing, each with the ability to contribute ideas, tweak wording, and suggest new approaches to the problem. They continue to create new editions of *Fieldworking* using this form of collaborative authoring, and both said that pursuing another project together would require that they collaboratively author it.

An important element of Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein’s work together is the maintenance of a number of rules and rituals designed to maximize writing time while both reflecting and reinforcing their friendship. Chiseri-Strater described how the pair prepares by assembling a library of research materials they expect to use. When writing, they begin the day with coffee and outlining what they plan to do that day. During the work time, the partners keep themselves, and each other, on track. Generally, Sunstein types (“she’s good at that,” Chiseri-Strater noted), but they also switch roles when needed. Lunch is brief, and work continues throughout the eight-hour day. They also allot time for personal interactions, including time to vent about families, but not during the work period. Sunstein explained that the compressed working time is necessary, given that the writers have to produce a lot of content during a fairly short period. (The first *Fieldworking* writing session was only three weeks.)

This working style presents problems for writers who cannot be in the same space at the same time, a fact that Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater faced after their first summer of writing. As Sunstein noted,

[w]hen we realized it was going to take us two summers to write the first *Fieldworking* we were both terrified. We had spent the whole year collecting materials and we knew what we were going to write about, but we were scared to death that we weren't going to get our voice back. Together on one computer we had a very different voice and I think it took about 20 minutes [to get it back] and it really surprised us.

Chiseri-Strater amplified this point, describing their writing as “this voice which we always say is not mine and not yours, it's like this new writing voice that comes together.” While they acknowledge it is initially a struggle to rediscover their collaborative authoring voice, both noted that they are always able to begin writing in their distinct joint style fairly quickly. Chiseri-Strater said “we've developed a sense of how we write together, and we know if we aren't sounding like us.”

This felt sense of voice, like the other elements of Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein's relationship, has developed over decades of work. Because of the limitations on classroom time, it may appear impossible for instructors to promote collaborative authoring in the classroom. While they acknowledge that encouraging students to work together can be difficult, both Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater see value in the attempt. Like Duffy and Pell, who make a point of asking the students they teach to collaborate on texts, both Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein do not position collaborative authoring as a working style only available to scholars or those outside the classroom context. While they acknowledge that getting students to collaboratively author is difficult, both say that the work required of students is worth the difficulty. According to Sunstein,

[W]e're both people who really believe in learning by collaboration. And one of the things I'm deeply committed to in my teaching is creating partnerships, even though it's a pain in the neck...when I teach the teaching of writing I always

make sure that I set up some sort of partnership. Sometimes it's junior high kids, sometimes it's college freshman, sometimes it's student athletes, whoever I can get my hands on because I think that there's no better way to learn to teach writing than to go head to head with another person.

In voicing this belief in the power of collaborative authoring, a belief echoed by Chiseri-Strater later in the interview, Sunstein acknowledges that writing together does not come naturally to students. At several points during the interview she stressed that instructors must help students learn to negotiate differences in expertise and hierarchies of age and experience: “[T]he thing that is the most important to me is the equality of the relationship, that one person is not tutoring the other person, that no matter how different the students are, they are each other's readers. To me that's the most important thing.” To promote this type of working relationship, instructors need to help students break down hierarchies by promoting engagement between partners—engagement that allows each partner to exhibit his or her knowledge.

One of the primary tools that Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater use to help students understand their working relationships is, ironically, individually written reflections. These texts are a means for students to make sense of their collaborative work and to understand the roles played by their writing partners. According to Chiseri-Strater,

[O]ne way to make the students conscious is to continually have them write reflectively about what they did in the writing group. I always find those little pieces of writing very insightful. What did you learn from this group today about your own writing? What did you learn about reading somebody else's writing? Even to the point of asking them “when you're reading something what are you bringing to their reading, what do you know, why did choose this reading over another reading?”

Giving students a break from the negotiations required to produce collaboratively authored texts is an important step, since it allows students to reflect on their work within a familiar writing environment (the single-authored text). The integration of single-authored and collaboratively authored texts can also help sensitize students to the differences between these types of work. As Sunstein explains, “it’s counterintuitive and yet, that’s where they recognize the collaboration. And if you don’t create a place for it, it disappears.”

Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein’s discussion of promoting collaborative authoring in the classroom illustrates how the work done outside the classroom context can provide a model for instructors interested in helping students begin to engage with questions of authorship, textual authority, and the development of, as well as the disrupting of, consensus. Compiled writing may be the most common form of collaborative writing, but as the Wrens make clear, it is not the most productive method for collaboratively crafting a text. Duffy and Pell’s work together, which integrates elements of both serial writing and collaborative authoring, and Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater’s collaborative authoring show how stronger relationships and deeper engagement between writers allow for new types of work. While it may not be possible for students who are together only briefly to forge the types of relationships that undergird these scholars’ work, promoting stronger relations by stressing the development of Spirit and Trust (see chapter 3) can be a means of facilitating students’ moves toward more developed forms of collaborative writing.



### **Moving Beyond the Heuristic**

The modified version of Haring-Smith's heuristic is a useful tool for roughly organizing collaborative writers by working style, but as Duffy and Pell point out, such a move requires that one prioritize the production of text over the relationships that enable that production. The heuristic also runs the risk of positioning the various forms of collaborative writing as mutually exclusive. As Duffy and Pell show, the borders between serial writing and collaborative authoring are permeable. Similarly, Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein's use of individual writing as a means of promoting reflection about collaborative authoring shows how moments of isolated authoring can help students better understand the work they are doing together. These examples of border-crossing illustrate the need for scholars investigating collaborative writing to conceive of the task not as a one-size-fits-all solution, but as a rhetorical move. The means of composition can be strategically deployed based upon the writing situation, the availability of possible collaborators, and the requirements of the task. While the ability to choose among the three general forms of collaborative writing may be difficult to achieve within the classroom, it is possible to draw upon examples from outside the classroom context.

When considering the choice of collaborative working style as a rhetorical act, it can be useful to consider how a writer who has worked in all three of the heuristic's styles negotiates different approaches to composition. In this, the work of Hephzibah Roskelly, an experienced collaborator, is particularly useful. Like Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, Roskelly has published works composed via different strategies: solo authoring (which can share characteristics of compiled writing), serial writing, and collaborative

authoring. Examining her working styles, and the means by which she varies her style to reflect her goals for the task at hand, can help illustrate how experienced collaborators draw upon skills that students can begin to develop within a collaborative classroom. The purpose of such analysis is not to position Roskelly outside the heuristic, but to illustrate how skillful collaborative writers choose working styles that best suit their situation and relationships.

As with Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein, Roskelly's primary collaborative work began via a friendship forged in graduate school. She and her frequent collaborator, Kate Ronald, were fellow students and assistant directors of composition. As part of their work, "we gave workshops together and before long we were finishing each other's sentences and people were calling us 'KateandHepsie' as though we're one name." This relationship transitioned into the classroom as the two began team-teaching, a move that helped them begin working together as writers. Yet this move into a scholarly relationship did not take priority over their friendship:

[W]hen we graduated, we realized that we were going to far different places and that writing together was one way to keep our friendship. Writing together was one way that we would have this professional, real connection that would make us need to be in touch all the time. And, it did, in fact, work out that way.

Roskelly and Ronald's friendship enabled their working together, but also enabled them to engage in "constant testing and feedback"—the means by which writing relationships develop, according to Roskelly. Because the pair trusted and liked each other, they were able to engage with the difficult work of collaborative authoring.

During her interview, Roskelly stressed at several points the importance of friendship to collaborative writing: “If collaboration is going to work at all, it can’t just be ‘Let me look at your draft,’ or ‘Let’s write this paragraph.’ It can’t be that. You’ve got to build a human connection.” While acknowledging her relationship with Ronald may not be replicable by all writing partners, she asserted that successful collaborative work must build upon existing friendships. “You wouldn’t be collaborating with them if you thought they were a jerk. But that’s what happens with students. We make them collaborate even with people they think are jerks.” She also noted that while she met Ronald in graduate school, and Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein met in graduate school, graduate students—perhaps the most enculturated members of the student population—often have trouble engaging in collaborative work.

With graduate students who know each other from other courses, who’ve been thrown together, who are in the same situation, you would think that it could emerge at least a little bit more easily for them. But in my experiences, the graduate students fight it because...there’s this parallel move against collaboration, which is “what’s going to happen to my unique voice?”

Given this resistance, Roskelly noted that she often has to work harder to help more experienced students understand the value of collaboration—a point Chiseri-Strater also made during her interview. Both scholars rely upon reflective writing as a means of overcoming resistance, but both also acknowledge that overcoming resistance is often less about the work being performed, and more about promoting relationships between students—relationships that can translate into scholarly work.

Ronald and Roskelly's relationship is a particularly productive one, resulting in a large number of monographs and articles. However, it is not the only collaborative writing relationship in which they engage. As is the case with Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, both parties have partnered with other scholars to produce work. In every case, Roskelly noted, the writing was an outgrowth of a relationship, not the means by which a relationship was forged:

I don't think, "Who can I write this with?" ... I think it's more a certain sense of personality. And I will tell you that I think for me then, my personality is kind of – one might call it dilettante or wishy-washy, I don't know what word you prefer. But I love writing with people, but I like writing by myself too. And, to me, those things don't fight each other but help each other.

Just as the writing is an outgrowth of a friendship, the working style is an outgrowth of both the friendship and the task at hand. This flexibility clearly illustrates how Roskelly—and the other scholarly collaborators profiled above—enjoy access to working styles not normally available to students in the classroom. Other than her work with Ronald, two of Roskelly's most visible collaborations are with Eleanor Kutz, on *An Unquiet Pedagogy: Transforming Practice in the English Classroom*, and with David A. Jolliffe on *Everyday Use: Rhetoric at Work in Reading and Writing*. While she described both of these writing relationships as "wonderful partnerships," she noted that their relationships "really centered much more on the project, I think, rather than on just us." This contrasts with her relationship with Ronald, which she describes as

the way for us to keep talking even though we're a thousand miles apart. I don't mean this to sound flip, but in some ways, it was almost like it didn't matter what

we were writing. What mattered was that we were engaged in this conversation about stuff we loved but we were going to be able to do it together.

Roskelly's work with Jolliffe on *Everyday Use* serves as a very clear example of how experienced collaborative writers strategically alter their working styles. The text, which is widely used in secondary and college classrooms, grew out of a shared interest in high school pedagogy. While the Roskelly-Jolliffe partnership's working style is very different than Roskelly's work with Ronald, it again began as a friendship, one which Roskelly describes as "collegial friends rather than real personal friends." Both partners had a strong interest in working with high school teachers and in the ways language arts classes in high school should prepare students rhetorically. Their discussions about these interests at an AP grading session inspired them to begin working together.

While her work with Jolliffe shares some characteristics of her work with Ronald, there are a number of key differences that illustrate how successful collaborators can productively vary their working styles to better reflect the needs of the partnership. During the Spring 2012 semester, Roskelly was actively working with Jolliffe on a writing project. The pair uses a cloud-based filesharing service to exchange articles and drafts. While each partner is working on different chapters, the other partner has the ability to add text, add questions, and point out areas for expansion.

I'm revising a chapter right now that David has been working on primarily and I'm revising it by writing on the text with a different color so that he could see what I've done. And then the first chapter that I did that with and he went back and looked at it, and now he says to me, 'Let's take it all out and let's just put this as a whole text.'

This working style falls into the serial writing of the Haring-Smith heuristic. While the fact that the different parties “own” a section of the text may appear to be compiled writing, Roskelly stressed that the other writer is free to modify, expand upon, or remove text as needed.

More importantly, the way the pair handles questions of style and voice places their work in the realm of serial writing. Roskelly pointed out that, while she and Ronald have very similar writing styles, Jolliffe tends to write more formally than she does. This necessitates that the partners find a balance between their voices, since “he and I are both very clear that what we want is consistency of the voice.” When she writes with Jolliffe, she generally does the final revision and adjustment of style, largely because Jolliffe “believes I’m the person who can get that consistency the easiest....But that’s really just to get that voice to approximate that third voice” of their partnership—“my voice in conversation with another voice.” Notably, much of this arrangement is due not to internal factors, but to the project’s schedule:

Either one of us can get to the final voice...I think, as much as anything, my being the person to do this is a function of the fact that we’re trying to work very hard to deadline, so he thinks I can do that faster. If we had more time, we would probably go back and forth more and he might be the last one.

This point about time is important, since it illustrates that the scholarly collaborators profiled in this chapter also work within some of the same constraints as classroom collaborators: limited time, (sometimes) limited access to partners, and limited genre. The difference between student collaborators—who may be working with another writer for the first time—and experienced collaborators is the latter’s more developed ability to

alter how they work to address both the limitations on their work and their relationships with their partners.

Roskelly's scholarly work, which includes solo-authored essays (which share many qualities with compiled writing), serially written texts, and collaborative authoring, can serve as a model for young academics interested in engaging with collaborative scholarly writing. Her work also calls into question the idea of a strict heuristic of collaborative work. While it is possible to roughly divide writers based on generalities of their working style, the boundaries between working styles are fluid; any one writer or writing group may, at different points, exhibit characteristics of all three categories. The flexibility of categories is important to this dissertation, since I have advocated for the promotion of collaborative authoring in the classroom as a means of encouraging students to better understand the rhetorical negotiations they engage in as both collaborative and solo authors. Since students tend to adopt the compiled writing method, instructors interested in promoting collaborative writing should be sensitive to the characteristics of this form of writing and craft assignments that promote other ways of working. Instructors can also, through the promotion of stronger relationships among writing partners (see chapter 3), help students build the types of deeper relationships—even friendships—that facilitate serial writing and collaborative authoring. Instructors should also understand that, while collaborative authoring is a useful means of helping students understand writing, it is also only one possible working style. Neither teacher nor students should become so dogmatic that they ignore the possibilities inherent to other

forms of collaborative writing—forms that may fall between the boundaries of the modified Haring-Smith heuristic.



### **Interchapter III: Audience as Context: Technologies of Collaboration**

In a piquant section of his essay for *The Nation*, “Faulty Towers: The Crisis in Higher Education,” William Deresiewicz writes:

Among the class of academic managers responsible for the trouble in the first place, an industry of reform has sprung up, along with a literature of reform to go with it. Books like Taylor’s *Crisis on Campus*, James Garland’s *Saving Alma Mater* (2009) and the most measured and well-informed of the ones I’ve come across, Robert Zemsky’s *Making Reform Work* (2009), propose their variously visionary schemes....Nearly all involve technology to drive efficiency. (para. 32-33)

As Deresiewicz argues, efficiency is the buzzword of the moment, a goal that higher education administrators pursue through such avenues as the free market and technology.<sup>43</sup> The latter is of particular interest, since it most directly impacts classroom instructors. Institutions around the country are investing heavily in such classroom computer technology as distance-learning software and learning management systems. By enabling nearly synchronous interaction over the Internet, technology supposedly erases physical distances between collaborators. By mimicking the network-mediated interactions so many students engage with daily, technology supposedly makes academic work more familiar and approachable. And, because most of our students are “Digital

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<sup>43</sup> In *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*, Donoghue questions the popular perception that efficiency is a new development in academic management, instead tracing this obsession with efficiency to the earliest days of the modern university, which arose shortly before Frederick W. Taylor’s introduction of scientific management principles.

Natives” (one of academia’s least-supportable claims), anything involving technology is inherently “meeting them where they are” (to borrow another knotty academic phrase).<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, this technology is often also marketed as promoting collaboration, a problematic claim I explore in the next chapter.<sup>45</sup>

As Deresiewicz makes clear, academic technology is not necessarily viewed as a tool, but a goal in itself. Simply by adding technology to the mix, schools believe that they have “fixed” whatever problems they may be facing. Fetishizing technology—such as classroom teaching stations, distance learning software, or learning management systems—in this way creates an environment in which there is institutional pressure on instructors to engage with technology, any technology. The results can be seen on mailing lists like wcenter and WPA-L, in posts from administrators saying they have been given iPads (at the time of this writing, the “cool” technology *du jour*) and told they need to use them in the writing center or first-year composition program. These administrators must then turn to their peers to figure out how to use the technology. This is not necessarily a negative situation—instructors may find that a new piece of hardware

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<sup>44</sup> In “The ‘Digital Natives’ Debate: A Critical Review of the Evidence,” Bennett, Maton and Kervin argue that many claims about “Digital Natives” (also called the “Net Generation”) and their different learning styles are highly problematic, resulting in what they term “an academic form of a ‘moral panic’” (775). Other works that have critiqued both the reality of, and usefulness of, Prensky’s concepts of “Digital Natives” and “Digital Immigrants” include Bayne and Ross’s “The ‘Digital Native’ and ‘Digital Immigrant’: A Dangerous Opposition,” McKenzie’s “Digital Nativism, Digital Delusions, and Digital Deprivation,” and Jenkins’ “Reconsidering Digital Immigrants....”

<sup>45</sup> Software marketed as collaborative, or as a means of promoting collaboration, includes wikis, blogs, course management systems like Blackboard, and online text editors like *Google Docs*.

or software revolutionizes and reinvigorates their teaching—but it is a situation in which a problem (need for an iPad) must be manufactured in response to a solution (free iPads).

The iPad example is important not just for what it says about the cart-before-the-horse approach to technology as a means of maximizing efficiency, but also for how it illustrates academia's troubled relationship with technology. In many classrooms, students are explicitly forbidden to use iPads, mp3 players, phones, and even laptops. University of Oklahoma physics professor Kieran Mullen became a web sensation in February 2010 when a video of him illustrating his no-laptops rule went viral. In the original video, which has since been removed from *YouTube*, he dips a defunct laptop into liquid nitrogen, and then smashes it. And yet he is surrounded by technology as he destroys the laptop. The message is clear: the only technology welcome in the classroom is technology that is a) provided by (or explicitly approved by) the educational institution and b) controlled by the instructor. Technology brought into the classroom by students—including smartphones and laptops that can be used to support educational work—is forbidden. This stance is justified as a means of ensuring students are not “wasting time,” but it also ensures that they are not able to do classroom work using their own tools.

To be fair, many instructors take a more progressive approach to the technology students use in non-academic contexts. Many digital humanities scholars center their work on the use of student laptops, cameras, and audio recorders. Susan J. Brooks-Young's *Teaching With the Tools Kids Really Use: Learning With Web and Mobile Technologies* actually does attempt to meet students where they are, exploring pedagogical uses for such often-banned technology as mp3 players and smartphones. Yet,

as Daniel de Vise notes in his *Washington Post* story “Wide Web of Diversions Gets Laptops Evicted from Lecture Halls,” many institutions—including those who rely heavily upon technology for distance-learning and face-to-face instruction—continue to block the use of student technology in class.

This divide between acceptable and forbidden technology has very real implications for instructors. Students currently enrolled in colleges and universities are, in Donna Haraway’s construction, cyborgs. Their use of always-on, always connected technologies—smartphones and WiFi-enabled laptops—as well as their engagement with social media intimately linked with their movement through the world—*Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Foursquare*—makes them truly “creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted” (149). Students have “friends” they have never met, yet these people have more access to the students’ movement through space than face-to-face friends do. Like the Harawayian cyborg, students are “no longer structured by the polarity of public and private” (151), bringing the private (their familiar technologies) into the semi-public space of the classroom. Yet they are met with a wall of non-cyborg resistance, an institution that encourages some technology while banning others, simultaneously asserting that technology is not something connected to the student (and his or her identity) but little more than a tool usable for “real work.”

This failure to recognize students’ preexisting engagement with technology and the privileging of unfamiliar technology brings into sharp focus three issues concerning audience as context that make classroom engagement with technology (particularly when

the focus is on promoting collaborative authoring) extremely difficult: 1) a failure to interrogate technological tools' anti-collaborative assumptions, 2) a related failure to recognize software engineers' "writer-based" approach to their work, and 3) a widespread conception of the user as a person who must adapt to the technology (instead of the other way around). All three of these issues are rooted in a failure, at both the institutional level and at the deeper programmatic level, to understand audience as context. This failure positions the audience (the users) as an undifferentiated mass whose knowledge of, and ability to manipulate, technology is equal either to that of the creators or of an imagined ideal user. This approach to audience has real implications for classroom collaborative authoring, since the tools often used to promote collaboration can actually work against the project and silently promote non-collaborative use. Unless users have the technological skill to work against this pressure, collaborative technology can be little more than a new means of promoting Western ideas of individual authorship. Instructors thus have an obligation, when deploying technology in the classroom, to consider not only how they can use the tool(s), but how the tools shape the relationships resulting from their use.

To illustrate how these assumptions play out in the academy, I draw upon my experience in the corporate world. During an earlier period of my life, I worked for several software companies that developed software for both the consumer and enterprise markets. At one of the companies, a security and anti-virus firm, I worked closely with a usability engineer who often railed against what he called "NFWFI." NFWFI (which he pronounced "enfewfy") stood for "New Features Will Fix It," which referred to an all-

too-common reaction, by engineers, administrators, and even skilled computer users, to usability problems. If a new revision of a product has enough new features, users may be willing to forget their irritation with longstanding problems: poorly written help files, counter-intuitive controls, and other user interface flaws. The rush toward the new meant that systemic flaws lived on, even if the new features shifted users away from older features affected by these flaws.

The connection to academia lies in the approach to systemic problems and the forwarding of new versions of technology as a cure-all. This is the first issue with institutions' failure to consider audience as context: the uncritical embracing of new software simply because it is new and (allegedly) improved. As Deresiewicz makes clear, academic institutions' approach to technology neatly mirrors what my friend termed "NFWFI." Larger issues of access to underserved communities, of the commodification of higher education, and of the precarious situation that the liberal arts finds itself in are difficult problems. But we can seem to be fixing these systematic woes by offering more distance-learning classes or engaging in "gamification" to make courses more fun. Institutions invest in new versions of technology that promise to promote teacher-student interactions, collaborative writing, and new ways of learning, without considering how the technology already works (or does not work) to achieve these tasks. Long-standing problems are cloaked by the appearance of new and improved technology, and the belief that NFWFI shifts attention away from the need to address these problems and consider how they work against collaborative authoring or other educational goals. Plato's anecdote about cookery's relationship to medicine can apply here. Just as cookery is "a

flattery which takes the form of medicine,” new technology too often is a flattery which diverts attention from the rotten meat on the table in front of one (521e).

Like the engineers I worked alongside, some instructors introduce technology to their class as a means of addressing problems that cannot be solved by that software. If students do not feel a connection with one another (perhaps because the instructor has omitted the vital community-building work described in chapter 3), assigning wiki writing will not automatically provide that connection. Just as engineers can’t simply ask “can I add a feature?” without considering if it is needed, instructors can’t simply ask “can I add tech to my classroom?” without considering how technology will not only enhance, but also change, their pedagogy. Instructors who implement new technology simply because other people are doing it—or because the institution requires it—appear to be innovative, but unless they do so thoughtfully, their engagement with technology is virtual at best.

Learning management systems are particularly good examples of how new technology serves to divert attention from systemic problems. My institution uses the Blackboard system, which was recently (as I write this) upgraded to Blackboard Learn, the latest iteration of the software. During the rollout period, the information technology department sent numerous emails touting the new features of the software. We learned that it had a new, more powerful chat tool and a new wiki system, two tools vital to technology-mediated collaborative authoring. This appeared to be good news, but it is important to remember that the new features operated within the larger system, one riddled with the poor usability and reliability of older versions. Students in my classes

struggled with these new tools, running into some of the same problems that had stumped students using the earlier version. In most cases, this was not due to the operation of the wiki or chat, but because of Blackboard's user interface text and organizational metaphors—the problems that the new features were supposed to fix.

My students' difficulty with Blackboard illustrates the second issue with audience as context, one that again can be illustrated by my experience in the corporate world. In my discussions with my usability colleague about software, I added the "Oh It's Easy" theorem to his NFWFI rule. When I asked the software engineers about new features in upcoming software, I could count on them telling me how straightforward and easy-to-use they were. At one point, the project manager told me that one new feature was so easy it would not need any explanation. (Needless to say, writing the explanatory text required three meetings with engineers and a complete interface overhaul before it saw the light of day.) These engineers were not being disingenuous; because of their own biases, they truly thought these fairly complex functions were self-explanatory. In rhetoric and composition terms, this product is a "writer-based" construct, one that "reflects the associative, narrative path of the writer's own confrontation with her subject" (Flower 19-20) rather than a "reader-based" construct that reflects an audience-aware engagement with writer's thought (21).

As with reader-based prose, the key element is the context in which the various parties interact with a text—either a written one or the "text" of a tool's user interface. Powerful insiders live close to the technology, understand how it is built, and know how to use it to achieve their goals. This is because the technology developed out of the



context of these power users, so it shares their assumptions and worldview. When it is ported to a new context—the end users, who largely do not share the software developer context—suddenly things that were “obvious” become baffling, assumptions that were logical become quixotic.

In academia, the “Oh It’s Easy” theorem plays out in institutions’ approach to students using school-mandated software. As noted earlier, there is a great divide between the technology that students use and the technology that institutions promote as learning tools. Yet, except for a few workshops at the beginning of the semester, there is little to no work done to close the gap. Instead, there is often an assumption that since students are “Digital Natives,” they can transfer their background knowledge to school technology with ease.<sup>46</sup> This approach to students assumes that there is no difference in motivation, understanding, or background knowledge—students are collapsed into a single tech-savvy identity within a context that immerses them in all forms of technology. Because students are perceived as an undifferentiated mass, there is no institutional drive to address these differences. And because students are viewed as equally skilled at educational technology as they are at cell phones, there appears to be no need to reduce the gap between students’ technology and institution-approved technology.

Lack of thought in engaging with technology results in the third issue of audience as context: a highly problematic relationship with the user (the student, in this case)

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<sup>46</sup> Frost’s recent *Computers and Composition* essay, “Why Teachers Must Learn: Student Innovation as a Driving Factor in the Future of the Web,” is an example of this approach. Her description of the students she studied—“All traditional students in terms of age, every one of them had an active Facebook account...eager to embrace technological approaches to composition” (270)—illustrates how the term “Digital Natives” erases questions of access, as well as any consideration of other identity categories.

rooted in the fact that technology is not necessarily as easy to use as its creators may think. Logical leaps so apparent to an engineer (who understands the structure of the underlying code) or to an advanced user (who has been enculturated to expect certain behavior from software and hardware) may be impenetrable to users. An analogy can be drawn to Linda Flower's concept of Writer-Based prose: "verbal expression written by a writer to himself and for himself...the record and the working of his own verbal thought" (19). It is writing that is so thoroughly predicated (in the Vygotskyian sense) that its logic is not apparent to the reader. Terminology that makes perfect sense to an engineer who has worked with software most of his or her life may mean nothing to a student using his or her first laptop.

This phenomenon is especially problematic because of its interaction with the popular conception of "Digital Natives" promulgated by Mark Prensky and expanded upon by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser. The idea that students—particularly those of the millennial generation—are more familiar with technology than older generations means that there is no need to explain technology to them. Instead of engaging with the audience, determining what their skills are, and introducing technological tasks that fall within their zone of proximal development, instructors too often assume a (very high) baseline level of tech knowledge. The simulacrum of "Digital Native"—a popular image of students that replaces the reality of student difference—and the mistaken notion that software brought into the classroom is "self-explanatory" result in a situation in which students who need help are positioned as lacking.

The fact that technology is implemented with little investigation of the realities of student knowledge, access, and ability is particularly problematic when the technology is deployed as a means of promoting or supporting collaboration. Because technology is positioned as a solution, there is pressure to use it as a means of collaboration even when the instructor is not himself or herself interested in using it. Integrating technology in a challenging class may blur the source of the problem; collaboration may not work because of the technology or because of the students, but the source may be due to the fact that the technology was unreflectively integrated. Because students supposedly already know how to use the technology, the instructor may not recognize the need to facilitate or teach collaboration in a technologically mediated space.

Because technology is assumed to be self-explanatory and accessible to students with no training, it only poses a problem when students are not able to use this “easy” tool. Yet, with few exceptions, the tool is rarely at fault. In fact, when students or instructors have difficulty with technology, developers may deploy another acronym (common in software development slang) I often heard in the corporate world: PEBKAC (“Problem Exists Between Keyboard and Chair”). This acronym is rooted in a perception of the user as “luser,” as an unskilled, uneducated person. The thinking often goes something like this: “this software is easy for me (a software developer) to use; this person who’s confused is dumb.” In other words, the software is fine; it is the user that is the problem.

The connection to academia lies in this approach to the user. Engineers view the world from their position as engineers, not users. They are expert users who, by virtue of

long exposure to a tool, have become so familiar with the tool it has become invisible to them. Similarly, teachers engage with students as educators, advanced “users” of the academic space who have become so used to operating within the classroom context it has become invisible to them. It takes a mental leap, one that is not performed often enough, to place one’s self in a new relation to a tool.<sup>47</sup> Yet when one ignores the context in which work takes place, everyone appears to enter into the process of working together with the same ability to act. By failing to be mindful of factors like students’ differing technological knowledge, interest in learning new software and hardware, and motivations to succeed in a class where technology use is required, instructors promote a classroom unfriendly to less-skilled students. Instructors recognize that students come to our classes with different writing abilities, but we assume collaboration—even collaborative authoring—is equally approachable for all of them.

Engaging with technology in the classroom is demanding in many of the same ways that engaging with collaborative authoring in the classroom is, and for much the same reason. The classroom is positioned by the institution as a space into which technology must be introduced; this implies it is an inherently atechnological space, one in which any computer is an addition. Yet a look around even the most traditional classroom shows how wrong this image is. The classroom is filled with technology we no

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<sup>47</sup> In Heideggerian terms, this act represents a shift from approaching a tool as *zuhanden* (ready-at-hand), in which the tool is known to the user only in terms of how it can be used, to *vorhanden* (present-at-hand), in which the user is aware of the tool itself (98).

longer view as technology, such as white boards, pencils, and pens.<sup>48</sup> It is also full of technology owned by students, such as cell phones, laptops, and MP3 players.

Technology is already in the classroom; it is just below our radar because it is not institutionally invited or controlled. The idea of the technology-free classroom is just that: an image, a simulacrum—and a particularly misleading one at that. As with collaboration—in which a simulacrum of working together hides the institutional pressures blocking collaborative authoring—classroom technology represents a simulacrum in which institutional pressure hides the fact that every piece of technology includes assumptions about its use and its users.

So what is an instructor to do? As I explore in the next chapter, the answer is not to simply accept technology on its own terms. True, our students are cyborgs, but they are not uniformly cyborg, nor are their abilities uniform. Ignoring the context of collaborative technology's audience is an unsupportable act because it is a failure to accept responsibility for strategically constructing borders between organism and machine—a responsibility Haraway identifies as fundamental to cyborg existence (150; 180). When introducing technology—especially technology that claims to promote collaboration—to the classroom, instructors must act thoughtfully and strategically, yielding to institutional pressure while resisting unreflective adoption of technology. This requires that instructors be more than simply aware of the software and hardware and how it is “correctly” used, but also how it can be “misused” to achieve goals not anticipated by its makers (a point I

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<sup>48</sup> In “From Pencils to Pixels: The Stages of Literacy Technology” and *A Better Pencil: Readers, Writers, and the Digital Revolution*, Baron explores how writing technology becomes so familiar to its users that it ceases to be considered technology.

also return to in the next chapter). In other words, they need to approach the introduction of the technology and its use by students from an “audience as context” perspective, as situated in a specific technological realm. In doing this, instructors must also consider how they will use the software and hardware in their classrooms and how this context alters users’ (students’) engagement. Finally, instructors must interrogate their goals for the technology in their classroom—the pedagogical role of the technology. These tasks are difficult, especially since even advanced users of technology often approach it unreflectively. Yet for instructors hoping to promote collaborative authoring, these tasks are vital.

## CHAPTER V

“COLLABORATIVE” TECHNOLOGY AND THE SIMULACRUM OF  
COLLABORATIVE AUTHORIZING

In “Writing to Collaborate: Collaborating to Write,” Michael Schrage draws upon Marshall McLuhan to state that “the medium of collaboration is shaped by the media of collaboration” (17). The technology through which students connect simultaneously enables new ways of working together and closes off others. What is missing in Schrage’s formulation is a consideration of how using a medium not only changes the user, but also the medium itself. The popular perception, certainly since the era of Newton Minow’s “vast wasteland” speech, is that television is a pacifying force, a tool for stupefying minds and dulling creativity. But is it really such a simple relationship?<sup>49</sup> How does one account for remix culture and mashups, in which older audiovisual content is manipulated to create something new? How does one understand the Situationist-derived *detournements* created by Adbusters and other provocateurs? How does one make sense of fan fiction, an art form that existed before television, but which has exploded with the growth of the Internet? And how does one explain parody versions of popular sitcoms, made by fans and distributed via YouTube? While visual media certainly shapes our society, it is also clear that not all viewings—nor all viewers—are

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<sup>49</sup> In *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action in the Composition Classroom*, Fleckenstein complicates this simplistic approach to visual media, arguing that rhetors’ ability to enact change depends upon their ability to interpret and create not only alphabetic, but also visual content.

the same. Just as it is possible to write back to a text in the margins, it is possible to respond to a television show, film, poster, or other visual media (in the form of remixes, edits, and graffiti). The difference is that, thanks to more accessible publication platforms, margins are far more public than in the past.

Two sets of questions might be asked at this point, the first about online media's relationship to collaborative authoring and the second about the pedagogical shifts instructors must make to integrate software into the classroom in ways that support collaborative authoring. In general, collaboration scholars have focused on how instructors can use technology that is marketed as promoting collaboration. While it is true that recent developments in authoring software and publishing platforms make it possible to collaborate online, this software cannot be dropped unthinkingly into the classroom, since there is no inherent way to use software. As several authors in a recent anthology on the topic, *Wiki Writing: Collaborative Learning in the College Classroom*, note, it is very possible to use software that has been designed to promote systems of working together in ways inimical to collaboration. For example, rather than assuming that collaboration just happens, we must explore how collaborators can use software both with and against the grain. Along with "correct" uses—activities the software's creators designed the software to support—we must consider how collaborators can draw upon the concept of emergent gameplay and use the software in ways *not* anticipated by the software's creators. Rather than focusing on using technology correctly, which privileges the technology, approaching the technology as a tool that the user can use as he or she sees fit privileges the user. This approach to software may allow student writers to craft



working styles and relationships that challenge the individualistic context of the classroom.

As in the scholarship about collaborative writing in general, a simulacrum of “collaboration” replaces the reality of collaborative authoring. In other words, collaborative software may result in the perception that technology is a panacea for collaborators separated by time and space. For example, Dan Gilbert, Helen L. Chen, and Jeremy Sabol position technology and collaboration in a causal relationship, stating that “[a]s more and more students have access to technology and wireless networks, opportunities to collaborate, participate, and define how knowledge is organized are opening up at a dramatic pace” (71). Karen Weingarten and Corey Frost also argue that wikis inherently destabilize the Western concept of authorship, describing wikis as “an ideal tool for teaching alternative constructions of authorship that emphasize collective acts of composition” (48). The engagement with technology—driven both by instructors’ interests in experimentation and by universities’ interests in increasing efficiency and reaching new markets<sup>50</sup>—adds another layer of virtuality to the act of writing collaboratively. The technology that supposedly facilitates collaboration promotes a certain form of working on a single task while simultaneously isolating collaborators and discouraging productive engagement in collaborative authoring.

While some of these engagements with technology have fostered a simulacrum of collaborative work, this does not mean that instructors interested in exploring

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<sup>50</sup> In *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*, Donoghue explores the role “efficiency” and other scientific management concepts play in modern academic administration.

collaborative work in the classroom should (or can) simply turn their backs on collaborative technologies. There are already tools that can dramatically alter writers' engagement with other writers, promote new working styles that support multiple authors writing together, and facilitate collaborative authoring in both face-to-face and distance-learning environments. The task for instructors is to recognize that while software *can* facilitate collaborative work, it does not automatically do so. It is not possible for instructors to simply adopt a software package and assume that students will use it collaboratively. It is not possible to simply add technology to a syllabus without altering one's syllabus; integrating collaborative technology requires pedagogical shifts to help students learn to use it to work together effectively. They must re-envision assignments in ways that help students use the software in support of collaborative work rather than assuming that collaboration will just happen.

In this chapter, I survey some of the arguments made about collaborative technological tools, examining three prominent tools for networked/online collaborative writing (wikis, blogs, and distributed text editors) and the problems with assuming their collaborative nature when utilizing them in the classroom. As Christopher E. Manion and Richard "Dickie" Selfe argue, it is only through reflective and strategic use of the software that instructors can promote collaboration (26). While all of these tools promote some sort of collaboration, their ability to promote collaborative authoring is less clear. As described in chapter 2, the term "collaborative authoring" refers to a particular form of collaborative writing, a relational, intensive, and largely synchronous act involving two or more writers. Many collaborative technology tools support less-intensive, largely

asynchronous means of working together where distance and time are less pivotal to the writing process. These are ideal for the draft-response-revise-response-revise model common to writing groups and described in chapter 4 by Hephzibah Roskelly. While this type of working can generate collaborative writing (Roskelly and David Jolliffe's work is an excellent example), it also generates texts that are not commonly considered collaborative. Many, if not most, academic texts, for example, arise in conversations with other scholars, are read by peers, and revised based on this feedback. Yet they appear in print as single-author works, with any evidence of the formative collaborative writing relegated to authors' notes as acknowledgements. The tools I explore in this chapter—especially blogs—prove to be less well-suited for the type of synchronous collaborative authoring described by Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater and Bonnie Sunstein in chapter 4, where both time and author proximity are instrumental in the composing process. Only collaborative real-time editors have the ability to support the immediacy of collaborative authoring.

In discussions of educational technology, three tools are frequently identified as particularly valuable to collaboration: wikis, blogs, and collaborative real-time editors. Wikis (like *Wikipedia*) and blogs (like *Engadget*) are web technologies that allow users to create and edit web pages and sections of web pages via web browsers. They differ in that wikis support ongoing editing by visitors, while blogs support visitors to comment on, but not edit, the original post. Collaborative real-time editors (like *Google Docs*) allow multiple people to simultaneously compose and edit a single document. As Dana J. Wilber notes in *iWrite: Using Blogs, Wikis, and Digital Stories in the English Classroom*,

these tools have the advantage of being easy to use, free (in many cases), and versatile (xi). This has contributed to their popularity not only with college-level instructors, but with secondary and even elementary teachers as well (ix).<sup>51</sup>

These three technologies represent an altered understanding of authoring and the author-reader relation, since wikis allow the reader to edit the original text, blogs allow the reader to write back to the original text, and collaborative real-time editors allow the reader to intervene *as the text is being written*, disrupting the author function. In the following sections, I briefly explain each technology, explore how it is used in composition classes and the claims for its power as collaborative tools, examine some issues with its support for collaborative authoring, and propose alternative classroom uses that address these issues. My goal is not to dismiss the work of theorists studying these tools or instructors using them with students, but to illustrate the pedagogical potential of altering one's engagement with the tools.

### **Wikis: Sequential Change Without Engagement**

A wiki is a web site that allows users to create and edit web pages via a web browser. The pages are hosted on a wiki server that manages the contributions and displays the pages to visitors (who can in turn edit the pages themselves). Wikis (from “wiki wiki,” Hawai‘ian slang for “quick”) were invented by software engineer Ward Cunningham in 1994. The first wiki, WikiWikiWeb, which is still available at

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<sup>51</sup> Their popularity with students outside the classroom is arguably lower, but as Wilber notes, there is little value in attempting to pull in many of the isolating and disruptive technologies students use on a daily basis (xii).

<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki>, went online the next year (“Wiki History” n.p.). Following a short incubation period, several companies and open-source groups began developing their own software, including MediaWiki (which powers *Wikipedia* and its offshoot *Wikia*), PBWorks, Wetpaint, Wikispaces, and PHPWiki. While each implementation varies quite dramatically from the others, all allow for editing from within a web browser, all log changes (allowing for the identification of the author of each contribution), and include some way of commenting on the wiki text via comment pages or other means.

Of the three technologies I am addressing here, wikis have attracted the most attention as educational tools for collaboration. *Wiki Writing* reflects the popular academic engagement with wikis. Essays in the volume, which includes a section specifically focusing on wikis’ use in the composition classroom, center on a single shared assumption about wiki software: it is inherently collaborative.<sup>52</sup> This assumption is rooted in wikis’ openness to change and, as John W. Maxwell and Michael Felczak note, the technology’s focus on group interactions rather than single-person use of the technology (90).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, essays in *Wiki Writing* are largely positive about the effects of wikis on classroom communities and writing. In fact, most critique of wikis’ deployment focus on questions of whether students are using the technology “correctly.” In their survey of current online collaboration scholarship, in “What Type of Collaboration Helps? Psychological Ownership, Perceived Learning and Outcome

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<sup>52</sup> A number of essays critique the idea that wikis automatically promote collaboration, including Mackey’s “The Social Informatics of Blog and Wiki Communities: Authoring Communities of Practice (CoPs)” and Raman, Ryan, and Olfman’s “Designing Knowledge Management Systems for Teaching and Learning with Wiki Technology.”

Quality of Collaboration Using Google Docs,” Ina Blau and Avner Caspi note that issues of textual ownership often bedevil instructors and students working with wikis.

Numerous studies they cite illustrate a major problem with wiki collaboration: users were hesitant to change other people’s work, and did not want their own work changed (48).<sup>53</sup>

While the question of perceived ownership is important, the issues it raises are not dramatically different from ownership discussions involving any collaborative work.

Similarly, another common critique of public wikis—that they allow for the easy insertion of false or misleading information into a text—is reminiscent of student concerns about their partners’ research, a concern rooted in the failure to develop the Trust stage of David McMillan’s Sense of Community Theory (see chapter 3).<sup>54</sup>

What is far less commonly considered is the assumption that wikis are inherently collaborative, an assumption that undergirds much of the scholarship about the tools.<sup>55</sup>

Because of this, scholars have tended to gloss over several highly problematic elements that undercut students’ ability to write collaboratively using wikis, problems I explore below. While some of the issues I discuss can (and have) been addressed through alterations (by users and administrators) to wiki interfaces and back-end programming, the larger issue is that wikis’ basic structure reflects a mindset that is fundamentally

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<sup>53</sup> This reluctance to alter “finished” writing is not limited to wikis; Carroll’s *Rehearsing New Roles: How College Students Develop as Writers* illustrates that students in traditional first-year composition courses also struggle with questions about the control of a piece of writing.

<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the most famous example of false information intentionally added to a wiki text is the John Seigenthaler controversy, in which libelous material was added to a biography on *Wikipedia* (“Seigenthaler” np).

<sup>55</sup> This assumption is not dissimilar to the assumption that classrooms are inherently communal spaces, a point I explore in chapter 2.

product-focused, assessment-driven, and individualistic—the same mindset, in many ways, of academia. While wikis can be a site of collaboration (in much the same way that classrooms can be a site of collaboration), it is not possible to say that they are inherently collaborative or that they promote collaborative authoring because of wikis' engagement with authorship, form, and a product-centered mindset.

What is largely overlooked, by proponents and critics alike, is that a wiki is an authoring system where the goal is not the act of authoring but the production of authored documents—in other words, the point of wiki is generation of text (product), not the work needed to get to there (process). Wikis, as noted earlier, grew out of a software engineer's desire to create a tool for programmers to share information. Like the source-control software most large developers use, which marks each change to the code with an author, wikis recognize users as individual agents making a series of changes to a larger project. Source-control software is a means of storing software code in a form that can be easily changed, and just as easily changed back. When a developer wants to make a change to the software, whether it is to improve an existing feature, add a new one, or squash a bug, she checks out the code from the source-control system's server. This tells the system that she may be making changes to the code and prevents (in many systems) other people from checking out the code.<sup>56</sup> When she is done making changes—even if the change is as simple as removing an extraneous space in a text file—the source-control software automatically compares the new version with the old version, notes the differences between the two versions, and overwrites the version on the server. The change is marked

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<sup>56</sup> This process is more complicated in large source repositories like *GitHub*.

with a date, time, and author. The next time someone checks out the code, the first developer's changes will be there. Because each change is identified as an individual action, it can be "backed out" or "reverted," returning the code to its state before the change was made. This is handy if a mistake is inadvertently added to the code, breaking the resulting software.

This system works exceptionally well for software engineers working together on a project. However, it is worth considering whether this type of work is collaborative authoring or simply a group of people working together on a larger goal. Because each change is an individual element, marked with the person contributing it, this system maintains the individuality of each contributor. Each check-in of code is thus an isolated act, one that is linked to a single author in the database. This is valuable in terms of workflow, since it ensures that a less-competent or rogue coder cannot disrupt the software code. Yet it is problematic if one tries to make the claim that software development is collaborative.

In my time at software companies, I often observed programmers working together around a single computer, testing ideas and tweaking code to solve problems. They collaborated on the code in real time and space, which looked like collaborative authoring. Yet the context in which this work took place is important. In every case I observed, one programmer would ask another over to his or her space. The visitor, who usually was the one bringing expertise, came into the asker's workspace, sat next to the asker, and contributed suggestions and ideas. At no point did the asker relinquish ownership over the workspace, and he or she almost always maintained control of the



keyboard. Each party was thus operating from a position of power, either knowledge—the visitor—or the control of tools—the asker. Yet the code did not belong to both people; it was checked in under the asker's name and he or she “owned” the change. Once again, an institutional system erased the reality of collaborative authoring (the two programmers working together) with a simulacrum of collaboration (the collection of individual check-ins by multiple people working individually).

Most wikis—in particular those based on the popular MediaWiki software—draw upon source-control metaphors to manage contributions. Each change to the page is logged in the page history, marking each contribution with a name (or IP address if the user does not have an account). Each contribution is not only linked to an actor, it is also undoable; without administrator changes, nothing added to a MediaWiki-based wiki is permanent. The default assumption in this system is a group of singular writers contributing individual entries that the server collates into a single document. In contrast to Weingarten and Frost's argument that wikis undercut the author function (51), the structure of the tool—and its ability to link every change to a contributor—actually reifies the individual author. In fact, their discussion of assessment centers on the continuing existence of an author function, since they focus on page histories as a means of monitoring individual contributions to a wiki (55).

Because wikis treat contributions to a text as individual changes linked to isolated agents, it is vital that instructors who adopt these tools as a means of supporting collaborative work shift their pedagogy and work against wikis' individualizing pressures. This entails the creation of assignments that center on helping students alter

their understanding of the goals and outcomes of wiki work. Rather than presenting wikis as a publishing tool, one that collates multiple inputs and generates a final product (albeit a product that constantly changes), instructors should stress that wikis are spaces wherein writers experiment together. Rather than focusing on the production of a single text, wikis become a site of multivocality, a place where contributors share ideas, texts, links, and other content without focusing on a single voice. In this formulation, the function of the talk pages—the site of meta-commentary about the content—moves to the foreground, as writers write about writing. The production of a single-voiced, formal text can be the final outcome of wiki work, but, pedagogically, the messy process of generating that text is far more important.

A primary means of addressing the issue of wikis' individualized approach to authoring is to ask wiki contributors to collaboratively author and submit their work to the tool. Wikis assume that each contribution is from a single actor, but they do not enforce a particular way of working. This means that there is a space for intervention and disruption of these individualistic (and individualizing) assumptions. Co-authors could collaboratively write an entry, negotiate the final version of their contribution, and submit it as a single identity that they share. This would require that both/all parties who are working together agree that they would interact with the software in ways that promote collaborative authoring. One person may be in charge of checking in changes, but he or she would be working on behalf of the collaboration and would act only in concert with his or her partner(s). For example, in a classroom setting, contributors to a class wiki could be writing partners or groups instead of individual students, and the assignment

would require that they negotiate a final version of each of their contributions—even if the negotiation is as simple as agreeing to a spelling change. This adds an additional layer of collaborative interaction to wiki projects. Not only would the writers be “collaborating” with writers around the world on the final version of a piece of writing, they would be truly collaborating with one or more partners on their engagement with these distributed collaborators. The pedagogical value of such a system is that it foregrounds the differences between real and simulacrum, as students engage with their partners in a deep collaboration and the other writers in a wiki-collaboration.

A second issue complicating the use of wikis for collaborative authoring is the fact that wikis privilege a particular conception of form that reinforces traditional individualistic composing. By design, each page of a wiki represents the latest version of its text. The most recent version of the text, whether it is the first revision or the thousandth, is privileged. All of the negotiations to get to the text are available via the page history, but there is an implication that all of these previous versions were but flawed versions of the current best version.<sup>57</sup> This not only devalues the earlier drafts, but it also devalues the negotiation process that led to the final version. In other words, wikis privilege drafts chronologically, enforcing a hierarchy of drafts that, while they can be undone, maintain the current draft as the most important. Unlike collaborative authoring, which foregrounds the negotiation between writers in the moment of collaborative

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<sup>57</sup> This is not dissimilar to students’ approaches to drafting in the classroom. When I have suggested that they return to an earlier draft to rescue a point removed from a more recent draft, they often tell me that they have no digital copy of the draft. Older versions of the document are destroyed, leaving no evidence of earlier (incomplete) drafts.

authoring, a series of changes to a wiki entry often reflects little more than unexplained (and unexamined) alterations.

This is not to say that the process of developing a wiki is invisible. In fact, it is far more evident than in most writing projects. As noted above, each change in a wiki is marked in the page history. In most wiki configurations, it is possible for users to view the history of the page. MediaWiki-based wikis, for example, usually have a “History” tab at the top of the page that gives access to past revisions. Using this tool, it is possible to move through the revisions and see which changes were made. Usually this is done in the form of a “diff”—an identification solely of the text that changed, sometimes with a small amount of contextual information that allows the reader to locate the change within the document. Most wikis also include a field for a change description, which allows the author to explain what he or she changed and why.<sup>58</sup> (In most implementations of wikis, the change description is optional and often ignored by users.)

In light of their connection to source-control software, wikis understand changes in atomistic terms. Source-control software monitors changes at the bit level; even the tiniest alteration in a document registers as a change to the software. Wikis operate similarly, only on the character level. If any word or spacing is changed, it registers as a change to the page. When coupled with the general disuse of the change description, this character-level change monitoring can be problematic for instructors interested in promoting collaborative authoring. Because there is no clear differentiation of the type of

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<sup>58</sup> Of the three technologies discussed in this chapter, wikis are the only one that includes this feature. Other source-management tools not described here also include change fields.

change that has taken place, all alterations appear to have the same amount of weight. In fact, some larger changes may actually appear to be less important because they represent a smaller change to the document. For example, a transition from “wikis are easy” to “wikis are problematic”—a change that marks a rhetorical change in how the software is discussed—appears in a history page to be a less substantial alteration than a multiple-word change like “wikis are easy” to “wikis are easy to use.”<sup>59</sup>

Of course, if an alteration happens over a long period of changes (say, from “wikis are easy” to “wikis are easy for many” to “wikis are not easy” to “wikis are problematic”) it is possible to view the negotiation within the page history. Yet even in this case, a great deal of information is lost to view, replaced with the appearance of negotiation.<sup>60</sup> This replacement is due to the fact that each change is, in itself, a potential final version. “Collaborators” working with a wiki document are essentially individual actors altering a series of incremental drafts of a text rather than a collaborative mind cooperatively authoring a single text together. The work of the collaborators, in this system, is the production of drafts (a product mindset), not the interpersonal negotiations through which they make new meaning.

As with authoring, there is room for troubling this problematic engagement with texts within a wiki. Since wikis are designed to produce “final” versions of texts, even

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<sup>59</sup> Several essays in *From A to <A>: Keywords of Markup*, particularly Burgess’ “<?php>: ‘Invisible’ Code and the Mystique of Web Writing,” explore how software can have difficulty differentiating between important and non-important changes in a file.

<sup>60</sup> Garza and Hern point to this type of negotiation as evidence of how wikis preserve (and potentially make visible) the “messiness” of writing, an act that foregrounds process over product. Yet they do not address how each step of the development of the text remains linked to the person contributing it.

though that final version can always be changed, alterations may need to take place at a programming level, as there is little authors can do within the current systems. One possible avenue for exploration would be to invert the page and its history. Instead of first seeing a “final” (even if it is still unpolished) version of the document, visitors to a page set up this way would see a history of changes to the document. This would foreground the path taken to the final draft, but is less than usable for the end user. It also does not address the problem with a wiki being a series of incremental drafts, however.

A more extensive solution would be to establish a system that allows for visitors to see a draft, but promotes the type of discussion between and among authors that so many collaboration scholars identify as vital to their project. In such a system, the discussion of changes would be privileged over the actual changes being made. In this version of a wiki, authors would not only exchange drafts of the final product, but would put into text their reasoning for making the change. The other writers would discuss the change, adjust the possible final version, and then implement the change only when all parties had bought in to the change. The benefit to this approach is that it allows far-distant collaborators to recapture some of the extensive negotiations that take place face-to-face between longtime collaborators. It also promotes conversation *about* the topic rather than simply the production of more of the product; in other words, it promotes process over product. A version of this alteration of the wiki process is actually already taking place on a number of large wikis. On *Wikipedia*, for instance, some articles’ talk pages host discussions of potential changes, in which regular contributors discuss recent changes or proposed new additions. While the contributors on a site as large as *Wikipedia*

do not have the type of deep collaborative relationships described by the collaborators in chapter 4, this type of discussion does allow for a small troubling of the product-centered mindset of a wiki system.<sup>61</sup>

The problem with this system is that talk pages offer a space for discussion, but exist as an addendum to the wiki text, a fact that is due to the third structural problem with wiki support of collaborative authoring: the tools' product-focused mindset. The page history, change descriptions, and comment/talk pages are satellites of the wiki text; to get a comment page, one must first create a page upon which to comment. The center of the wiki project is the articles/entries/essays, not the work that generates them. This is counter to the understanding of most collaboration scholars, who foreground the process of collaboration over the result. Privileging the wiki text is a similar move to the pedagogical approach that privileges Trade—the production of group-written texts—over Spirit—the production of relationships (see chapter 3). As a result, the deep interactions required for collaborative authoring have little time to develop and product takes precedence over process.

Addressing this stumbling block to collaborative authoring is more difficult than the other problems, since wikis' product-centric approach limits the ability to create comment pages isolated from article pages. Even if comment pages could predate an

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<sup>61</sup> Viégas, Wattenberg, Kriss, and van Ham's "Talk Before You Type: Coordination in Wikipedia" makes a strong case for the use of the talk page as a means of coordinating contributions from multiple users. However, Kittur, Suh, Pendleton, and Chi's "He Says, She Says: Conflict and Coordination in Wikipedia" notes that, while anonymous changes to articles correlate with less conflict, anonymous edits to talk pages often result in more conflict (458). More research is needed to determine whether the smaller, and less anonymous, space of the classroom would result in cooperation or conflict on talk pages.

article, the product-centered issue would remain, since the current system connects each comment page to a wiki text. Even though conversation would come first, it would still be within a system with a single possible outcome: a wiki page. One possible solution would be to break the link between conversation and product. A dedicated wiki page could serve as a brainstorming space in which writers come together to offer ideas for new pages. Alternatively, a message board or other discussion forum could be the initial work space, with writers generating discussion threads in which different topics are discussed. This differs from the use of comment pages because the threads are not tied to a particular outcome. Some of the threads would die on the vine, while others would flower into a wiki text (or, in a truly free system, to other final products). Such an approach privileges the discussion that takes place during the authoring process without locking writers into product-centered draft-trading. This approach is also fairly simple to implement, since it requires no back-end or user interface changes.

### **Blogs: Monologue and Reaction Presented as Dialogue**

A blog, which is a portmanteau of “web log,” is a type of website designed to be easily (and often frequently) updated by a user or group of users. In general, each entry is time-stamped, appears in chronological order, and includes space following the entry for comments from readers. According to Nielsen’s *Social Media Intelligence*, there were 178,637,835 blogs on 3 Dec. 2011 (“Blogpulse Stats” n.p.), running the gamut from small, single-user journals (often found on blog hosts like *LiveJournal* and *Blogspot*) to large, multi-author sites like *DailyKos* and *Little Green Footballs*.



As noted earlier, the advantage of blogs, especially for instructors, is that the learning curve is generally quite low and setup is quick. This has resulted in a large number of academic users in both college and pre-college institutions. While they are popular tools for journaling and reflection, blogs have attracted less attention as tools for collaborative authoring, largely because they more clearly connect to the highly individualistic activity of solo writing. As noted earlier, the original blog software was conceived as a means of keeping an online diary and thus tied to personal expression (and Western concepts of authoring).<sup>62</sup> Yet a number of scholars are exploring blogs as a means of promoting collaborative authoring in their classrooms. Robert Godwin-Jones argues that blogs' commenting and cross-linking promotes collaborative engagements (13), an argument pursued by Richard West, Geoff Wright, and Charles Graham. In separate essays Catherine Poling, Shelbie Witte, and Sara Kajder, Glen Bull, and Emily Van Noy argue that blogs' promotion of exchange (via comments) results in collaborative learning communities—a problematic claim I return to below.

Proponents of blog-driven collaboration focus largely on the ease of use afforded by blogging tools, since many of the “collaborative” features are integral parts of HTML (cross links, easy integration of outside data, collaboratively written texts). The other element that is often stressed is the comment function, which allows visitors to comment on posts, ask questions, and work together with the author on content. By promoting conversation about texts, blogs invite writers to engage with audiences in a more active

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<sup>62</sup> Lefevre's *Invention as a Social Act* outlines how individualistic approaches to invention, particularly the dominance of what she terms the Platonic view, reinforce the conception of authoring as the act of isolated minds at work.

way than static texts allow. Because each entry has a means of commenting, there is (usually) a space for additional voices.<sup>63</sup> Finally, most blog systems allow for multiple authors, so writing partners can work together on the blog itself as a large document made up of a series of entries.

While these scholars make blogs look promising as a potential space for collaborative authoring, once again the context should be addressed. The most obviously problematic issue, but also the most easily addressed, is the fact that blogs are rooted in the act of journaling. There is a cultural assumption that diaries and other personal journals are individual works reflecting the Platonic single mind at work. This assumption means that writers likely approach blog writing from the same mindset as they bring to other expressivist writing projects (the personal narrative, for example). Even in collaboratively written blogs, in which multiple authors contribute to a larger text project, each entry is usually marked by an author's name, thus identifying a single mind at work.

Disrupting this easy identification of blogging with individualism is a matter of changing both authors' and visitors' engagement with blog writing. One tactic would be to move to a collaboratively written blog while either removing all author names or using a series of pseudonyms for collaborative groupings. This would have the effect of altering both the production and the reception of the text. For the authors, it would require that they negotiate a voice for their blogger character (either the supposed author of all the

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<sup>63</sup> Most blog software packages allow the author to turn off comments for individual posts or the blog as a whole. Almost all blog software includes functions for deleting individual comments because of inappropriate content or other reasons.

posts in the case of an anonymous blog or their pseudonymous author). Doing so would require quite a bit of negotiation, first to establish the character, then to ensure that each post was written in the appropriate style. This requirement fosters the need for the collaborators to engage in the type of extensive conversation about writing that fosters the generation of new knowledge. It also promotes considerations of audience, voice, tone, and characterization. These are not collaboration-specific factors, but they are valuable pedagogically.

A larger, and more intractable, issue is the fact that blogs are an inherently product-centric tool. More than wikis, which can be viewed as an incremental series of drafts, each blog entry appears as a final draft, with all the authority implied by that term. Unlike wikis, most of which display an edit link on each page, each blog entry appears as a final take on the subject. It is possible—and fairly common—to present the blog entry as tentative or soliciting input from readers, but this request is locked into position as a draft of a larger argument. This system promotes a type of collaboration in which drafts are swapped, with the authority on the initial author to either accept or reject the suggested changes. All of the power remains with the author rather than being shared—a type of collaborative authoring, but one that does not reflect the equitable back-and-forth relationships described in chapter 4.

The issue of control is far more important for blogs than wikis, which intentionally level the ability of users to control content. Yet like wikis, this control takes the form of drafts leading to conversation leading to revised drafts rather than conversation leading to drafts leading to more conversation. As with wikis, the work

comes first followed by development of community Spirit and Trust (see chapter 3). In the case of blogs, developing a community depends upon frequent and substantive interactions between author and readers in comments and posts. Positioning blogs as inherently collaborative is a problem because the relationships needed for collaborative authoring are not developed, but assumed. This assumption hides the need for instructors to promote the development of collaborators' relationships and to help students move away from conceptions of the author of an entry as the author and commenters as ancillary participants.

As noted earlier, some scholars argue that blog comments reflect a means of collaboration between author and audience. These claims are problematic, since in blog systems—in fact, in most Web 2.0 systems like Facebook status updates and YouTube uploads, comments are reactive; they come after the article/status/video. The community is thus a largely passive audience, not productive collaborators. Addressing this issue requires a similar move to the one suggested for wikis: reversing the standard conception of conversation following a post. Wilber's suggestion for using a collaborative blog as an invention tool could be a means of altering students' approach to comments as reactive rather than formative (67-68). Blog posts could also be tools for generating content in the form of comments; rather than posting a draft that a collaborator responds to, a writer could post an entry containing nothing more than a call for discussion about new topics. This allows space for discussion to generate new blog posts, rather than simply reacting

to blog posts, a move that promotes the type of rich conversation about writing called for in collaborative writing scholarship.<sup>64</sup>

Repositioning blogs from a tool for capturing reader reaction to a tool for invention strategies shifts student engagement with online texts in a productive direction. While commenting produces text, the original post defines the terms of discussion and the scope of possible reactions. When blogs are used as tools for invention, the resulting text (in the form of both linked and unrelated comments, false starts at introductions, rough outlines of an argument, and other fragmentary writing) represents the negotiations inherent to collaborative authoring. This foregrounds textual creation, which Janice M. Lauer describes as “one of the most visible parts of published rhetorical performance...and one of the most often invisible” (2). The act of creating together, the act that initiates the move into Art from Spirit, Trust, and Trade, thus comes into focus, illustrating to students the work—both individual and collaborative—that goes into the creation of texts.<sup>65</sup>

### **Collaborative Real-Time Editors: Moving Toward Collaborative Authoring**

A collaborative real-time editor, also called a distributed text editor, is a software tool that allows multiple users to work on a single document at the same time. This

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<sup>64</sup> Recent experiments with crowdsourcing journal work, such as *Shakespeare Quarterly*'s open peer review of articles for its “Shakespeare and New Media” (conducted between 10 March and 5 May 2010), illustrate that blog-based tools can also serve as a means of altering scholars' approach to text development.

<sup>65</sup> Many of the invention strategies described by Lauer, especially those outlined in *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition*'s “Issues over Invention Strategies” section, can be productively applied to blog-based collaborative invention.

document is generally text-based (a narrative text or a section of software code) and editable either through a dedicated software tool (such as SubEthaEdit) or a web tool (such as *Etherpad* or the popular *Google Docs* and the now-discontinued *Google Wave*). The advantage of dedicated software is its ability to support instantaneous changes—when one user makes a change, the change immediately appears in the other users’ workspaces. The advantage of web-based tools is their flexibility and accessibility to collaborators separated by great distances.

Surprisingly, collaborative editing tools have received the least attention in scholarship. Troy Hicks, in *The Digital Writing Workshop*, positions what he calls “collaborative word processors” as a revision tool (46). While these editors are particularly well-adapted to support revision, using them solely in this way is not recognizing their potential as authoring tools. In their recent “Cooperative and Collaborative Writing with Google Docs,” Donna J. Evans and Ben S. Bunting, Jr., engage more deeply, outlining their classroom engagement with the software. While their experience was not particularly positive, their survey of *Google Docs*’ strengths points to how an altered deployment could result in more effective uses. While a few academics have engaged with *Google Docs*—for example, Blau and Caspi, Godwin-Jones in “Web-Writing 2.0: Enabling, Documenting, and Assessing Writing Online,” Stijn Dekeyser and Richard Watson in “Extending Google Docs to Collaborate on Research Papers,” and Lindsay Oishi in “Working Together: Google Apps Goes to School”—few rhetoric and composition scholars have spent much time investigating the topic. Yet these tools may represent a rich resource for instructors interested in collaborative authoring.

Because they allow for nearly real-time editing, writers separated by distance can recreate elements of the experience of working together in time and space on a single computer, yet with the advantage of each writer having his or her own keyboard (and thus, more ability to contribute immediately to the text). Unlike wikis and blogs, which can be written collaboratively, but which do not support live editing, collaborative text editor documents are live, changing in real time as writers work through the text. This requires that students negotiate changes to the document as they happen; conversation about the writing takes place parallel to the development of the text.

Of course, this type of dynamic development of content can only take place if students use the tool to work together in time and (digitally mediated) space. In my experience, this often is not the case. One group I studied during my classroom research project wrote together using *Google Docs*, but did not do so synchronously. The document resembled the type of conversational piece described above in the wiki and blog sections: a place where students posted suggestions that would be read and accepted or rejected by group members later on. The primary affordance of the collaborative text editor software (live collaborative editing) did not come into play, since the students never worked together live. This will be an ongoing problem for distance-learning instructors, since many distance-learning programs advertise their programs as “work when you like” systems. A typical claim comes from DeVry Institute: “as an online student, you can study 24/7 from home, the office, or an Internet café—anywhere you can find a connection” (“Online University Programs” n.p.). If students are not working together live, then a collaborative text editor is little more than a centralized draft marked

up in sequence—a collaboration, but not one that takes full advantage of the tool. Solving this issue is up to the instructor and the student, not the programmers. Instructors must foreground the need to work together, while student writers must buy into the process and agree to work together live.

A second issue is that, like wikis, most collaborative editors track individual changes, allowing for an atomistic view of the document as it developed. This can cause a problem for instructors interested in collaborative authoring, since it again promotes the idea of a document as a series of final drafts. This is mediated programmatically by the fact that there is no “publish” button in the user interface that automatically makes the document public; all drafts can remain private to collaborating authors. Without making the document public—in other words, by maintaining the document among collaborators—the idea that it is an official draft is less powerful. Hicks outlines another means of approaching the issue. Rather than using the history of a document as a means of tracking the changes made by each partner, instructors could approach it as a series of drafts compiled into a single document (47-48). The key element is not who made which change, but the state of the document at a particular moment in time. This approach is valuable because an instructor can use it as a means of illustrating how the development between two drafts in which all partners worked together can be more significant than between two drafts written by the same person.

Addressing these limitations again requires the instructor to shift her or his pedagogical approach to collaborative software. As with wikis and blogs, collaborative editors privilege the creation of final products, presenting the process of creation as little



more than a trail of changes leading to an polished final incarnation. Instructors who want to promote collaborative engagements using collaborative editors must shift their approach to assignments using the tools. Instead of prioritizing the creation of a final group text, as Evans and Bunting do, instructors should present the editors as a space where students can begin the process of generating ideas together. Such an approach prioritizes the work that goes into a text, its production, over the resulting text. In so doing, instructors can help students become sensitive to their authoring processes and their rhetorical choices, as well as to the negotiations needed to write with another person. This shift in pedagogy thus supports the development of a consciousness about authoring, a consciousness that can inform not only collaborative work, but also individual writing.

### **Technology and Collaborative Authoring: Gaming the Systems**

If collaborative writing technology cannot be counted on to provide an automatic, unproblematic means of helping students learn to write together, what can an instructor interested in technology do to support collaborative authoring? The answer is to reconsider one's approach to technology. Just as collaborative writing tools can actually support non-collaborative writing when used in a certain way, they can also support new ways of authoring collaboratively. This is because there is no "right" way to use software. There are intended uses and best practices, but innovative uses cannot be predicted. Through (mis)use of software it is possible to complete tasks not expected by the

software's creators. While this is sometimes questionably referred to as "hacking," it is more productive to consider it in terms of the metaphor of emergent gaming.<sup>66</sup>

Emergent gaming is the use of features in a game to achieve goals or create content not designed into the game by its creators. Emergent gaming is a particularly powerful metaphor to use when engaging with collaborative technology because collaborative authoring can itself be viewed as an emergent engagement with the academy. The rules of the game are clear: an author is a single person working on a single-voiced text, and a classroom text is written by a single person enrolled in a single class section. The act of writing together pushes against the boundaries of these hard-and-fast rules, troubling the easy connections between writer and text. This pedagogical experimentation lends itself to exploring emergent means of engaging with technology.

During a 2007 University of Texas masterclass (preserved for posterity by game blogger Alan Jack), longtime game designer Warren Spector described the best game design as "systems that allow [users] to set in motion events that [designers] don't control, can't anticipate, and didn't plan for" ("Game Design, part 1"). This is the thinking behind emergent gameplay, an approach to game design that gives the end user tools to create his or her individual stories while moving through the game. This design

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<sup>66</sup> The use of the word "hacking" to refer to innovative/unusual uses of software and hardware rather than to making more substantial changes to software code or hardware is widespread in academia. The *Chronicle of Higher Education's* "ProfHacker" blog and the recent edited collection *Hacking the Academy* are typical examples. While this definition of "hacking" is not wrong *per se*, it elides the difference between using software in new ways and structurally changing that way the software works.

philosophy grew out of designers' observations about how people use existing, non-emergently designed software.<sup>67</sup>

For example, in the first version of the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft*, there was a piece of scenery—the Ironforge Airport—meant to be unavailable to users. Yet some users learned, through much experimentation, that it was possible to reach the space by manipulating character abilities and adapting in-game tools that allow for extra-high jumps or speed boosts. It soon became a badge of honor to have been up to the airport (a risky act, since Blizzard, the game's publisher, frowned upon this type of trespass). The users doing this act were breaking the rules, but they were also, in another way, playing precisely by the rules. Like many video games—especially MMORPGs—*World of Warcraft* centers on quests, tasks assigned to the player by non-player characters (NPCs). The player accepts a quest, performs the task, and returns to an NPC for his or her reward. In effect, the users recreated this game mechanic in their dealings with the Ironforge Airport: they accepted a quest—get to the airport—performed the task, and returned for their reward—acclaim from other players. This acclaim took the form not of in-game gold or experience, but identification of themselves as crafty, rebellious players who were skilled at bending the rules.

In getting to Ironforge Airport, the users were playing the game and following the rules of questing that defined the game world. Yet they were doing exactly what Spector

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<sup>67</sup> Juul's *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* and Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* also address how pedagogies of emergence can benefit students.

described: making something new (a unique quest) that the game designers never imagined would exist. This is emergent gaming: playing the game but also playing the game's rules, misusing the software to do things the software "officially" cannot do. It has increasingly become part of mainstream games—indie hit *Minecraft* is wholly emergent—but it can also be useful outside the gaming arena. Most importantly for this project, it can be a means of rethinking how instructors engage with the collaborative technology discussed earlier in this chapter.

The task for classroom teachers interested in technology and collaborative authoring, then, is not "what tools are out there, and how do I use them correctly?" but "what tools are out there, and how can we do things with them?"<sup>68</sup> The difference between these approaches is slight, but the nuance is important. Using a tool correctly privileges the tool, while doing things with a tool privileges the users performing these tasks. For instructors, it means the difference between direct instruction in software features and the introduction of tools, with direct instruction largely left to student investigation and group conversation. Discussions surrounding the first focus on assessing how well one is meeting the ideal of "correct use;" discussions surrounding the second focus on the negotiations Jonah Bossewitch, John Frankfurt, and Alexander Sherman describe: "The purpose that the software serves—the essence of the engagement—is determined by the way its participants agree to use it" (47). Once again it is a matter of a simulacrum, a false impression of software mastery that hides students'

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<sup>68</sup> My use of the term "do things" is indebted not only to Austin's *How to Do Things With Words*, which explores performative utterances, but also to Bogost's recent *How to Do Things With Videogames*, which reconceives of video games as learning spaces.

unfamiliarity with how to (mis)use the software productively. Instructors and student writers can focus on the idealized “correct use,” or acknowledge the messy reality that it is not possible to use a piece of software perfectly and that one can use a tool to pursue one’s aims even without a perfect knowledge of the tool.<sup>69</sup>

Previously in this chapter, I suggested possible avenues for disrupting the anti-collaborative elements of wikis, blogs, and collaborative real-time editors (the three most-often discussed collaborative technologies). Each of these techniques requires an emergent mindset, but more detailed considerations can illustrate the value of approaching these technologies using the emergent gaming metaphor. As noted earlier, wikis are structured to prioritize the text over the discussion leading to the text. Yet there are ways to work around this privileging of product over process, and the place to begin is at the assignment level. Rather than crafting assignments that require students to collaborate on a single wiki document (or even a whole wiki site), the instructor asks writers to create a wiki with the goal of privileging metadiscourse. In the creation of the polished subject page, student writers use the talk page to plan strategy, discuss argument design, and organize sources. The change logs for these pages then become the focus of a second narrative, one in which the writers collaboratively make sense of their decision-making. This can be a means of promoting the student discussion, collaboration, and a sense of community Cooke, O’Hare, and Quartermaine describe (59). In this second

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<sup>69</sup> A related question is “how do we assess emergent work?” Manion and Selfe’s “Sharing an Assessment Ecology: Digital Media, Wikis, and the Social Work of Knowledge,” which argues for flexible and adaptable assessment systems that focus on students’ ability to enact the instructor’s values about knowledge, serves as a workable model.

document, students write about the changes they made, outline to an outside reader what their work process was, explain why changes were made (or not made), and justify why the final version of their page (or site) is the way it is. This move returns focus to the work—the process—as the center of inquiry, reinforcing the value of the work taken to achieve a product and downplaying the over-prioritization of the final document.

In David McMillan's terms, refocusing on the work needed to reach a final project promotes student engagement with Spirit—the relationships developed through negotiations about the text—and Trade—the acts of experimentation and exploratory textual moves. This shift away from Art (the final wiki text) toward these earlier stages in the development of Sense of Community promotes the communal relationships required for collaborative authoring. By highlighting process, evoking we-ness in trade, and by fostering spirit of experimentation, students start to see the power of collaborative community and collaborative authoring. This encourages them to question how they can use these work styles in other contexts.

A similar move toward recursive metadiscourse can take place via an emergent engagement with blogs. The blog section earlier proposed that a group-written single-author blog, in which students collaborate on a single author character, is a means of breaking with the assumption that a blog entry represents a single author's voice. This teaching strategy requires that students do more than simply write in their individual voices, since the resulting character would be unbelievable. The work students must do to create a living collaborative author requires that they work together on a backstory, forge a common writing voice, and agree upon topics to post. A less intensive, yet still

powerful, approach would be to reconceive of the tool not as a means of communicating with outside readers, but as a means of sharing snippets of text, paragraphs of interest, sources, even interesting words. This approach (which is similar to so-called tumbleblogs like those on *Tumblr*) disrupts the conception of a blog post as a completed draft of a thought. The blog, in this system, becomes a cooperative commonplace book, a spot where collaborators trade bits of information rather than a series of finished thoughts.

Collaborative real-time editors, by virtue of the fact that they already trouble the easy association of one-author, one-text, are particularly powerful tools for emergent gaming-inspired pedagogy. Yet their support for collaborative authoring is strongly linked to the means by which they are used. As noted earlier, it is possible (and fairly common) for users to work on a document asynchronously. This working style is little different from simply exchanging a Microsoft Word document and does not represent the type of collaborative authoring relationship in which writers co-author together in real time. Instructors can disrupt this tendency toward asynchronicity by dedicating in-class work time to writing collaboratively within the tool. This allows the students to develop the types of working relationships and rituals described in chapter 4. Such a move is not exactly emergent, since it is one of the features of the tool, but it does work against many students' tendency to avoid collaborative authoring.

Yet even in these systems, there continues to be moments when authorship is linked to a single person. This is where another emergent approach can be useful. Until this point, I have presented these three technologies largely in isolation from each other. An approach that draws upon the strengths of all three—that uses them to achieve a task

rather than uses them “correctly” and “fully” as isolated tools—is ultimately far more valuable. Students can author together in a collaborative real-time editor, track their working relationship in a wiki, and publish it as a character on a single-authored blog. Across this project assignment, an instructor can focus class discussion on the possibilities for disrupting the “correct” way of using tools and recentering discussion on how students can strategically, emergently (mis)use technology to achieve their goals.

Ultimately, it is these interactions, in which students collectively—if not collaboratively—reconsider collaborative technologies, that illustrate the value of the emergent gaming metaphor. By approaching collaborative technology strategically and refusing to assume that any use of the technology is inherently collaborative, instructors foster a classroom environment in which the tools students use are not invisible and are available for interrogation. Emergent gaming can thus serve as a metaphor for productively recentering discussions/engagement with technology. This encourages the development of a classroom in which students both use technology to collaboratively author texts, as well as collaboratively question their own use and the structures put in place by software designers. The result is a pedagogy that questions uncritical use of technology and promotes the development of students’ ability to not only engage with, but also collaboratively write about, technology and its assumptions.



### Interchapter IV: Place as Context

Early in *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*,

Nedra Reynolds observes that:

Places evoke powerful human emotions because they become layered, like sediment or a palimpsest, with histories and stories and memories. When places are inhabited in the fullest sense, they become embodied with the kinds of stories, myths, and legends that the spot beside the Illissus [in Plato's *Phaedrus*] holds; they can stimulate and refresh—or disturb and unnerve—their visitors. (2)

The modern university is home to many of these evocative places, places sedimented with decades of student and faculty engagement with both the subjects and structures of academia. One of the most powerfully marked places is the first-year composition classroom, a space about which debate continues apace.<sup>70</sup> Is it a service course, a means of introducing students to critical pedagogy, “The Best Course in the University to Teach” (Fulwiler 104), or “a black hole ever since its inception, swallowing up students, teachers, and money without giving much in return” (Crowley, “Perilous” 11). Because the course takes place within classrooms, first-year composition intersects with the layers of meaning attached to the broader notion of the classroom: a space of inquiry and discipline, a room of strict hierarchies enforced by the grading system, a site (still) of traditional lectures and passive students.

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<sup>70</sup> Some scholars, especially those writing before the past decade, use the terms “freshman English” or “freshman composition.” I have chosen to use “first-year composition” to reflect the more recent understanding that many students taking the course are not actually freshmen or male.

Like the first-year composition classroom, the writing center is an evocative place, one with wildly different definitions at play. Begun (in most cases) as writing laboratories in which students were remediated, writing centers have, in recent decades, been reconceived as spaces of liberatory pedagogy. Yet the remedial nature lives on in the external perceptions of the center as a space where writing is “fixed.” The result, as Elizabeth Boquet argues, is “a discourse...perfectly at odds with itself” (465). Unlike the composition course, which has always been located within the classroom, the writing center began life not as a place, but as a method (Boquet 466). It is only in the 1940s, as Boquet notes, that the writing center shifted from being a method to a site, a move that marked it as a separate place, one with its own “stories, myths, and legends.” The remedial image remains linked with the place (evident in writers’ hesitation at the door and their often passive engagement with the work of the consultation), yet the autonomous writing center place can be, through the work of peer consultants and directors, a place where hierarchies are troubled, new forms of relationships can develop, and discussions about writing that transcend simple grade issues can take place.<sup>71</sup>

In the next chapter, I explore how writing center pedagogy can contribute to a classroom centered around acts of collaborative authoring—composing together in real time while the parties are present to each other (whether physically or through network

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<sup>71</sup> The terms used to refer to the parties engaged in writing center work vary greatly through the scholarship. I have chosen to adopt the terms used at UNCG’s University Writing Center: consultant and writer. The writing center employee is the consultant, and the person who brings in a paper or other text is the writer. I use these terms rather than tutor/tutee because they deemphasize the primacy of the tutor and substitute a linguistic relationship that stresses dialogue: the center is consulted, but the writer remains the authority deciding when and how the consultation takes place.

technology). The task of integrating these two writing places is a difficult one, especially since, as Reynolds argues, “the academy suffers from acute hardening-of-the-boundaries, and this makes it difficult for its members to think outside of the box” (6). In this interchapter, I set out the context in which both places—the classroom and the writing center—operate and briefly consider how place affects how people interact with each other and with texts. These two places reflect very different engagements with writing and teaching, as Reynolds notes (“Imagined” 13-14). For example, one of the most cherished elements of writing center pedagogy, enshrined in many mission statements, is the idea that the writing belongs to the writer and the consultant should never take over its composition. Collaborative authoring, which involves active writing by two or more people, is at odds with this working style. Thus the writing center, by virtue of its differing practices, can serve as a model for engagement, but not as a model of authorship. Understanding the difference between these spaces is vital to a project that attempts to draw upon one place to inform the work within another place.

The composition classroom is a curious space, one that exists at the convergence of two strands of resistance. As Crowley demonstrates in *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, composition has long held a secondary position within English departments. Literature faculty assigned to teach composition have historically viewed it as “a professional disaster,” while those who chose to teach composition have long been “underpaid, overworked, and treated with disdain” (121, 120). This stands in contrast with the fact that, in many schools, first-year composition is one of the few required courses. The graduate students, temporary, and part-time instructors who teach

composition interact with far more students, but do not reap the professional benefits. More senior faculty, responding to academic institutions' prioritization of research over teaching, have prestige, partially because they are not marked as composition instructors (119).

Crowley notes that many students display a similar resistance to the course, viewing it as little more than an extension of high school (242). I have seen this resistance in my courses, often in the form of students questioning why they are taking the class. When I teach first-year composition, I ask students to reflect upon the experience and to answer a fairly simple question: "why are you taking this class?" When I assign the question as a writing prompt, the responses generally repeat platitudes that could apply to any class: it builds their skills, makes them better students, helps prepare them for future classes. When I ask students in class to discuss the question, however, their responses are far less politic (perhaps because students recognize that the ephemeral nature of in-class discussion means it usually is not graded, while written work is). In class, students tend to say things like "it was required" and, even more damning, "I don't know." I have pushed them to elaborate, only to find that even though many describe themselves as poor or below-average writers, they still see the course as a diversion or obstacle in their pursuit of a degree. While some change their opinion by the end of the course (based on in-class discussions and their end-of-course assessments), a large portion still describe the course in less-than-flattering terms.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> My students' opinions of the course, while disappointing personally, is very much in line with other accounts of student resistance to first-year writing, including Hesse's "Teachers as Students, Reflecting Resistance," Brooke's "Underlife and Writing

Some of this might be explained away as my failure to communicate the importance of the class and as extraordinary student resistance. Yet, as Crowley has argued, students around the country enter the composition classroom reluctantly, chafing against its required nature and their insecurities about writing instruction dating back to high school and elementary school courses. This situation results in a student population that enters the place of composition instruction with a desire to do as little as possible to succeed and more interest in a final grade than in the development of their skills. While this makes any teaching difficult, it makes teaching collaborative authoring especially difficult because, as Kami Day and Michele Eodice note, collaborative authoring breaks with mainstream academic culture (117). Students in a course that asks students to explore elements of collaborative authoring face a double disruption: a course in which they must not only write often and copiously (a task many students resist), but also work in a way inimical to their training within the individualizing educational system.

A means of addressing this situation exists in the university, though it, too, is a space of resistance. Like first-year composition courses, writing centers are often staffed by largely powerless members of the academic community. Many writing center consultants are undergraduate students, with little authority other than that granted them by their identity as consultant. Like some other writing centers, the University Writing Center at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) employs graduate

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Instruction,” Durst’s *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*, and Kill’s “Acknowledging the Rough Edges of Resistance: Negotiation of Identities for First-Year Composition.” Bean’s “Feminine Discourse in the University: The Writing Center Conference as a Site of Linguistic Resistance” illustrates that student resistance to writing instruction also affects writing center work.

teaching assistants (who serve as instructors in the English department) as well as non-teaching graduate research assistants from a number of disciplines. These students, by virtue of seniority and/or their identity as instructors, have slightly more institutional clout, but still are not powerful members of the department.

The writing center mirrors first-year composition not only as a place of low faculty status, but also as a place where students resist. Boquet describes an incident in which a faculty member scrawled “Go to the Writing Center!” across the bottom of a student’s revised paper (469). I have seen similar declarations on papers writers have brought to UNCG’s writing center. Usually these papers are accompanied by a discouraged, often distressed, writer who believes that she is, in some way, faulty. This act by faculty graders must be interpreted in two ways. On the positive side, it displays faith in the writing center and a belief that the work done there can benefit students. On the negative side, it reflects an understanding of the writing center as a “fix-it shop,” a place where broken writing gets repaired. This move reduces the writing center to little more than an editing service or a place of remediation, a place that that can only “disturb and unnerve” visitors.

As noted earlier, the similarities between the two places are remarkable, but they differ greatly in their engagement with physical space. While both are limited by institutional resources and campus/building space, the writing center, by virtue of its existence as a non-classroom space, is more able to break with expectations of what a classroom space looks like. Often, this takes the form of room layouts designed to evoke “homey” residential or leisure spaces, a move that Leslie Hadfield, Joyce Kinhead, Tom

Peterson, Stephanie Ray, and Sarah Preston declare is “important, if intangible” (170).<sup>73</sup> The goal in this arrangement of space is “a non-threatening, comfortable environment that generates—rather than inhibits—conversation” (Hadfield *et al.* 171). This ability to alter place by restructuring physical space also depends upon the relative permanence of the writing center’s office space. It is possible to rearrange desks and tables to disrupt the traditional “sage on the stage” setup of a classroom, but the fact that classrooms are shared spaces means that no permanent alterations to the space can take place. Rather than disrupting the classroom as place, an instructor altering the desk arrangement is simply altering students’ physical distribution within an unchanged place.

At UNCG, this attempt to create a space that is both decentralized and comfortable has affected the way the writing center (as a place) is inhabited. It is not uncommon to find students who have completed sessions retiring to the waiting area couch to continue work. Consultants off the clock will come in to visit with working consultants, discuss coursework and their own writing, and forge friendships that extend outside the center walls. These moments of connection indicate that writers and consultants are responding to the writing center’s attempts to position itself as simultaneously a place of social interaction as well as a place of work.

The effect of the writing center’s ability to disrupt student expectations via the alteration of space is an important one, but one that can be overstated. A shift to a

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<sup>73</sup> This integration of leisure and working spaces, which invites students to congregate and converse while pursuing academic tasks, is not unique to the writing center. Universities have long integrated social spaces in the form of student lounges, and many academic libraries—including UNCG’s—offer social study spaces that allow for blended work and socializing interactions.

different arrangement of furniture does not create a wholly new idea of place as much as point to a different metaphor of place. For example, instead of the hierarchical place of the classroom, with its center on the instructor, writing centers may evoke medical offices. At UNCG, the University Writing Center greets students with a front desk person who takes their information and directs them to a waiting area. The next consultant in the queue meets the writer, takes their file of paperwork, and escorts them back to a workspace. This appears analogous with a physician's office, yet it does not follow that interactions between writer and consultant parallel patient-physician relations.<sup>74</sup> Instead, as Reynolds argues, “[p]laces, whether textual, material, or imaginary, are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices, structures of feeling, and sedimented features of habitus” (*Geographies* 2). The altered physical space results in altered interactions—student-to-student working on academic tasks in small face-to-face sessions—creating the writing center as a place outside the work/home binary. In its fostering of these altered relationships between people, the writing center can serve as a model for approaches to the classroom that promote collaborative authoring.

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<sup>74</sup> Writing centers have long been linked to medicine via the metaphor that they are places where writers are “cured” of bad writing habits. In his histories of writing center development, including “Rejecting the Remedial Brand: The Rise and Fall of the Dartmouth Writing Clinic” and *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory*, Lerner notes that many early centers approached writers as patients, positioning consultants as diagnosticians/healers. In “Tutoring as (Hard) Labor: The Writing Clinic, The Writing Laboratory, The Writing Center,” Boquet explores how the names given to centers supported a medicalized approach to writers. While recent scholarship has tended to avoid medical metaphors, scholarship from outside the field, such as Thompson’s “Scaffolding in the Writing Center: A Microanalysis of an Experienced Tutor’s Verbal and Nonverbal Tutoring Strategies,” continues to use medical terminology like “diagnose” to describe the work done in the writing center.



A more important element of the ability to shift furniture and walls in ways not available to the classroom is that it enables the possibility for altered interactions within the space. Furniture within the writing center is organized not hierarchically (in the form of the classroom's rows of desks) but relationally (in the form of small tables and chairs). This arrangement of space promotes bodily interactions that are decentralized, prioritizing face-to-face interactions that break from traditional faculty-student relations. Because there is no "center" to the writing center, no single space from which authority flows, the space is ideal for understandings of writing that break from individual authoring.<sup>75</sup>

As I explored in Chapter 3, David McMillan's Sense of Community Theory is a useful tool for understanding how groups of people come to understand themselves as members of a community (and are thus able to engage with collaborative authoring). While all four are in play, the first two—Spirit and Trust—are particularly important to writing center work. Spirit refers to the "spark of friendship" promoted by the members' existence in a space where they feel they can be themselves (316-317). Hadfield *et al.*'s work with writing center design illustrates a means of engaging this belief through the creation of a setting "where people enjoy spending time and where they are happy, productive, creative, and social" (170). McMillan further divides Spirit into Emotional Safety, Boundaries, and Sense of Belonging. Writing center sessions, with their focus on

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<sup>75</sup> Depending on the organization of the writing center, the director/administrator's authority may be visible to writers (because he or she identifies as an administrator) or it may be hidden by the administrator's physical absence from the center (in larger centers, the administrator may not consult at all) or by her/his adoption of a "just another consultant" role.

individual interactions and welcoming behavior by consultants, promote all three of these elements by reducing hierarchies between the parties, setting the consultation in its own space, and positioning the writer as the focus of the interaction.

The second element of McMillan's theory, Trust, is promoted via the ethos of the center itself. While, as noted earlier, some students come to the center reluctantly, those who come to the center willingly already, in some way, trust the center to provide a valuable service. Writers who share their work with a consultant are also evincing trust; by placing their work before an audience, they are risking judgment. Only by virtue of the writer's trust that the consultant is honestly helping him or her to improve the writing does this act become doable. Yet this risky act is mediated by the personal nature of the interaction. To use Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's terminology, the writer faces an addressed audience, one that is before the writer and responding to the text in real time ("Audience" 156). This addressed audience differs not only from the invoked audience, but also from the addressed audience of the instructor. Addressing a non-grading peer, who may have written a similar paper him- or herself is far less stressful than an instructor with the power of grading. In return, the consultant trusts that the writer is listening, that his or her suggestions to the piece will be heard, and that the work they do together is valuable. (This does not mean that the consultant has an expectation that their vision of the paper will prevail, but instead that he or she expects that the writer will benefit from the work done during the session.)

Given the importance of Spirit and Trust to the development of a group of people's sense of community (and thus to the possibility for collaborative authoring),

instructors interested in promoting collaborative authoring may find value in exploring how the writing center's engagement with space contributes to its existence as a place of both comfort and work, a place where students work together and define their own criteria for success rather than a place where students interact individually with the instructor and, through him or her, the individualizing assessment system of the institution. It is not possible (or desirable) to transform one place to another, but through strategic integration of elements of writing center pedagogy into the classroom, consultants and writers can offer a model for engaging with collaborative authoring in the composition classroom. As I explore in the following chapter, this model draws upon theories of engagement with the other to reconceive writing center work as a means of understanding the individual interactions that make up collaborative authoring relationships. Ultimately, altering the way students exist in the space of the classroom can begin the work of altering the palimpsest, promoting a classroom place that, in some small way, stimulates and refreshes its visitors.

CHAPTER VI  
THE WRITING CENTER AS A MODEL OF COLLABORATIVE AUTHORIZING  
ENCOUNTERS

When I have presented on the topic of collaborative authoring, whether to tenured faculty or graduate students, I have learned to expect an all-too-common series of responses: “But if you value collaboration, don’t you have to explicitly teach it? And if you teach it, don’t you have to grade it? And if you grade it, just what are you grading—the collaboration or the content?” It is difficult for those embedded in the field of higher education—a field in which participants are frequently assessed—to break from the idea that everything we introduce in the classroom must be assessed for it to “count.” Yet there is already a space where members of the academic community meet while explicitly deferring the assessment drive: the writing center. In this space, students meet together one-on-one in conversation with each other and with assignments, while operating outside the formal boundaries of the academy. The task centers on school topics and assignments, but the conversation breaks with formal academic discourse; students talk and write about formal texts using informal language. The result is a space where writers and consultants operate simultaneously within and without the academy, a liminal space where boundaries between writer and reader are particularly porous.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> As noted in the interchapter, the terms used to refer to the parties engaged in writing center work vary greatly through the scholarship. I have chosen to adopt the terms used at UNCG’s University Writing Center: consultant and writer. The writing center employee

The writing center is thus a space uniquely suited for supporting collaborative writing—writing done by multiple people, either together or serially—and promoting collaborative authoring—writing done by people who are present to each other and working in real time on a single text. Because the writing center promotes troubled boundaries, disturbed hierarchies, and connections between peers, and because it operates in a different context than the classroom, writers operating in the space have access to working relationships that are difficult to enact in the classroom. That said, the peer-centered space of the writing center, a place “where students and consultants engage in one-on-one conversations about writing—conversations that center on shared knowledge and expertise” (“Our Mission”), can serve as a model for instructors interested in engaging with collaborative authoring in their composition classrooms.<sup>77</sup>

Writing center theory cannot easily be separated from collaborative learning theory, since both center on the act of multiple writers working together on a single text. Yet, as Muriel Harris noted in 1992, “Collaboration Is Not Collaboration Is Not Collaboration.” The work that takes place in writing centers and in collaborative classrooms is rooted in similar conceptions of writing, but because the aims, context, and institutional relationship to the writer differs in the two cases, the shapes of the collaborative relationships are dramatically different. In this chapter I explore how the

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is the consultant, and the person who brings in a paper, other text, or questions about writing is the writer.

<sup>77</sup> In making these claims, I acknowledge that the ideal of the writing center is not always the reality. As Boquet notes in “‘Our Little Secret’: A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions,” writing centers can be “one of the most powerful mechanisms whereby institutions can mark the bodies of students as foreign, alien to themselves” (465). I continue to maintain, however, that the ideal of peer-to-peer learning remains a powerful model for collaborative authoring.

writing center's context differs from the classroom's, how the two sites' differing aims intersect with collaborative theory and practice, and how the ideal writing center consultation can provide a useful model for writers engaging with each other in collaborative authoring relationships. I argue that the writing center, by virtue of its position outside traditional institutional definitions of place—neither classroom nor student space—and pedagogy—neither direct instruction nor unfettered writing—serves as a model of the peer-to-peer engagement vital to promoting collaborative authoring in the classroom.

The idea of extending writing center pedagogy to the classroom is not new. As far back as 1984, in his oft-reprinted “The Idea of a Writing Center,” Stephen North had raised the idea that classroom pedagogies could benefit from writing center methodologies (79). Such authors as Louise Z. Smith, in “Independence and Collaboration: Why We Should Decentralize Writing Centers,” Lea Masiello and Malcolm Hayward, in “The Faculty Survey: Identifying Bridges between the Classroom and the Writing Center,” Suzanne Powers, in “What Composition Teachers Need to Know about Writing Centers,” and Dave Healy, in “A Defense of Dualism: The Writing Center and the Classroom,” continued this line of inquiry through the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, authors such as Steven J. Corbett, in “The Give and Take of Tutoring on Location: Peer Power and Authority in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring,” and Elizabeth Boquet and Neal Lerner, in “Reconsiderations: After ‘The Idea of a Writing Center’,” have considered how elements of writing center consulting can serve as possible models for classroom pedagogy.

In the past decade, a related thread of scholarly discussion has arisen, centering on the integration of writing center consultants and writing fellows into the classroom.<sup>78</sup> In his recent “Using Case Study Multi-Methods to Investigate Close(r) Collaboration: Course-Based Tutoring and the Directive/Nondirective Instructional Continuum,” Corbett proposes “course-based tutoring (CBT)” as a collective term for these initiatives. While the models differ greatly between each other, a commonality is that consultants essentially bring the writing center into the classroom, conducting sessions within the confines of the classroom. This differs from the approach I promote below, in which the writing center consultation serves as a model for student-to-student encounters rather than as a means of integrating tutoring work into the classroom. While I see value in the CBT approach, its tendency to retain the consultant-writer binary (instead of the writer-writer binary required for collaborative authoring) means it maintains a divide that works against collaborative authoring.

### **The Writing Center Context: Productive Liminality**

As noted earlier, writing centers operate in a very different context than classrooms. They also operate based on a large number of possible models. Some are staffed by undergraduate consultants, others by professional consultants and faculty.

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<sup>78</sup> A number of recent works have argued for the integration of writing center consultations into the classroom context, including *On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring*, Spigelman and Grobman, eds.; *Writing Groups Inside and Outside the Classroom*, Moss, Highberg, and Nichols, eds.; Zawacki’s “Writing Fellows as WAC Change Agents: Changing What? Changing Whom? Changing How?;” and Bruland’s “‘Accomplishing Intellectual Work’: An Investigation of the Re-Locations Enacted through On-Location Tutoring.”

Some prioritize non-directive consultations, others are more directive. Some are arms of the English department, while others are institutionally located elsewhere within the university.<sup>79</sup> These different models make it difficult to propose a one-size-fits-all pedagogy that can be ported from one institution to another. Instead, I have opted to work with a model writing center based upon the International Writing Center Association's "Writing Center Concept" document, which outlines baseline practices for all writing centers. According to this document, writing centers prioritize one-on-one work in which "coaches and collaborators" focus on the writers' individual needs within a space of experimentation (Harris, "Writing Center"). While some scholars have questioned this model of instruction—in "Retheorizing Writing Center Work to Transform a System of Advantage Based on Race," Nancy M. Grimm argues that the primacy of the individual in writing center work is problematic because of its tendency to naturalize racism and other systemic privileging mechanisms—the IWCA guidelines continue to influence dominant conceptions of writing center work.<sup>80</sup> While I acknowledge the importance of Grimm's assertions, my approach to this issue in this chapter is to present the writing

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<sup>79</sup> The writing center is not the only academic space engaging in peer-to-peer instruction. Many academic skills centers, learning centers, and some English as an Additional Language programs draw upon writing center theory. However, these centers are generally positioned as spaces of remediation, "fix-it shops" where student writing is repaired by an expert writer. While, as Grimm notes in "Rearticulating the Work of the Writing Center," a "sticky history of remediation haunts the scene of writing center work" (530), writing center scholars have worked to establish the center as a space of writerly development, not remediation. Because these spaces do not disrupt academic hierarchies between teacher and learner or promote of equality in writer-consultant agency, they do little to promote explorations of collaborative writing and collaborative authoring.

<sup>80</sup> While few centers can hope to live up to the ideals of this statement, the University Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (the center with which I am most familiar) includes these points in its own mission statement ("Our Mission").



center not as a space for generating independent writers, but as a space where collaborative authoring can be modeled.

While remembering that all writing centers differ, it is possible to speak to certain characteristics of writing center work shared by many centers (and evident in the ideal center described in “Writing Center Concept”). First, writing centers work with texts at all levels of composition. While most writers bring drafts at various stages of completion with them, it is not uncommon to work with students who have little more than an assignment sheet and a vague idea about a possible topic.<sup>81</sup> Through guided conversation, questioning, invention activities, and even collaborative researching using the center’s computers, writing center consultants can help students engage with invention. Karen Burke Lefevre terms this “interactive” collaboration (68), contrasting it with joint invention, in which multiple authors invent together (72). While the two types of invention share some characteristics, interactive collaboration—“in which one party aids what is primarily another’s invention” (73)—better represents the type of work taking place in the writing center, as joint invention assumes partners working together as equals throughout the entire invention process (73-74).

A second characteristic is that writing centers exist outside the traditional work/home binary. Writers come to the center to do work (the production of texts), but the center breaks with dominant ideas of what a learning space looks like and how it works. Rather than the one-to-many model of the classroom, writers work with

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<sup>81</sup> This claim must be tempered by Boquet’s observation that, writing center discourse aside, there is a “fetishization of the finished product” in conversations about writing center work (“Our” 479).

consultants in one-to-one configurations. Rather than a model that centers on the instructor (even “non-hierarchical” classes retain the instructor as the center of power, because the instructor is the only person with the ability to declare the space “non-hierarchical” and because he or she retains the responsibility for reporting final grades), writing centers operate on a diffused-authority model, one in which the student writer controls whether a session takes place, what its text is, how it progresses, and how it ends (Gillespie and Lerner 8). The consultant is an authority, but one with far less institutional power than the instructor; consultant authority is mediated by her or his status as a peer writer. In Harris’ terms, the consultant is “a middle person...who inhabits a world somewhere between the student and the teacher” (“Talking” 27). This “middle” status, like the liminality of the center itself, allows for more interactions closer to the peer-to-peer ideal. The result of this change is that student writers can have far more agency within the center than without it. Rather than a passive object moving in reaction to an authority’s actions, student writers are subjects with the ability to control both their participation in a working partnership as well as the progress of the conversation about the text. In fact, students in the writing center have the ability not to enter a collaborative relationship at all. Because participation in the writing center is initiated by the writer—unlike participation by students operating in the classroom context, who cannot choose not to participate without grade damage—writers retain ultimate authority over the relationship. This positions the consultant in a stance of dependence; he or she only performs a function at the invitation of the writer.

Because the writer has more authority—including control over the base existence of the session—he or she enters the relationship with the consultant from a position of power. While the consultant, who is marked with institutional power by virtue of his or her identity as “writing center consultant,” may appear to be the dominant player in the consultant-writer relationship, this power is mediated by his or her dependence upon the writer. The two parts of the consultant-writer relationship thus enter from positions of power, each with her or his own authority. This is important to the act of collaborative authoring, since it is difficult for authors to meet as true peers while maintaining a hierarchical engagement with each other. That said, as experienced consultants find again and again, writers tend to enter the relationship in a subservient stance, abandoning their power to the consultant. This issue can be addressed by stressing that “collaboration requires that both participants in a one-to-one relationship have authority” (85), a point Susan Blalock makes in “Negotiating Authority through One-to-One Collaboration in the Multicultural Writing Center.” As her case studies make clear, consultants can facilitate writers’ agency by explicitly reinforcing the idea that the writers’ knowledge and experiences represent a form of authority that “give[s] students the power to take chances and make choices among cultural alternatives that require managing conflicting claims to authority” (80).<sup>82</sup>

As noted earlier, I am working with an ideal of writing center work. The reality is far more complex, especially in terms of the interplay between instructor, consultant, and

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<sup>82</sup> See also Mackiewicz’s “Power in Discourse Frames: The Use of Politeness Strategies to Balance Hierarchy and Equality in Writing Center Tutoring,” which explores specific discourse strategies writing center consultants use to promote the writers’ authority over their papers.

writer authority. The writing center's ability to promote student authority and agency is influenced by the instructors for whom students work; existing outside the classroom does not mean the writing center is isolated from instructor authority. While students are free to bring in any piece of writing, the vast majority of students visiting UNCG's Writing Center are working on writing for class. Thus, even though the instructor is not part of the consultation, his or her grading criteria shape the consultation and the writers' goals for their work. Perhaps the clearest example of instructor control is the way they can mandate writers' engagement with consultants through required visits. Requiring students to visit the writing center erodes student agency, since the decision to engage with a consultant is made for them. The writer thus enters the writing center space as a subject of the instructor's power rather than as an active agent. Required visits can also alter the agency of consultants, who may have to rush through consultations due to the sheer number of writers waiting to work with them.

While required visits and other elements of instructor authority inescapably influence the progress of writing center consultations, it is possible to mediate their effects. One of the most powerful means of reaffirming writers' agency is by stressing how writing centers break with the traditional faculty-student relationship by positioning the parties working on the text as peers. The instructor's power to assess exists, but it exists outside the work taking place in the writing center session. Rather than a situation in which an authority assesses student progress based on an assessment crafted by the authority, peer-to-peer relations operate in a space where the assessment and assigning authority exist outside the peers' dyadic relationship. Assessment takes place, but it is a

multifaceted assessment isolated from the formal, institutional assessment of the grade. As the consultant reads the student text, he or she assumes two distinct (yet overlapping) relations to the text. First, she or he is a peer audience, reading the text as a fellow student who may have written such a text in the past. Second, the consultant reads the text as an imagined instructor, a construct rooted in the consultant's interactions with past professors and any knowledge he or she may have about the assigning professor's engagement with students.<sup>83</sup> In Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede's formulation, the audience addressed (the writing center consultant) is not an audience that is explicitly invoked in the text (it would be unusual to find a paper assignment in which the writing center consultant was even considered as part of the audience). Yet the consultant is able to read him- or herself into the text, responding to the cues embedded in the text to imagine the paper's audience ("Audience" 87).

The interaction between these subject positions is uniquely generative. As a peer audience, the consultant is sensitive to the rhetorical moves available to students based on his or her own engagement with past assignments. Yet he or she is also free to imagine approaches that the writer, as a (generally) less-experienced member of the academic community, may not have mastered. The consultant thus enables experimentation by the writer; his or her authority as "consultant" (which is often read as "writing expert" by student writers) validates the suggestions she or he makes. The consultant's authority and ability to make suggestions exists in dialogue with the writer's authority over the final

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<sup>83</sup> In addition to these subject positions, consultants who are teachers bring in another approach to a text: how they would like their students to pursue this question. This stance invites feedback from a third perspective, that of the imagined assessor—the person who reviews the student's response to the assignment.

version of the text. While the consultant can suggest changes, she or he cannot mandate changes. The writer, as the actor who is most informed about the assignment, has ultimate authority about whether the suggestion(s) are valid strategies. He or she manages the writing's engagement with its audience, maintaining control over the cues used to invoke its audience. The partners' authority thus works in conversation, yet privileges the agency of the writer.

Of course, students in in-class writing groups also approach their fellow students' texts from both the peer and imagined professor subject positions. Yet because they are within the assessment structure of the classroom, in-class readers also bring in a third subject position: fellow writer addressing a shared writing task. The reader brings in her or his own approach to the assignment. Rather than imagining how he or she would approach the text, the in-class peer reader reflects upon the actual rhetorical moves she or he made. In other words, rather than approaching the text from a position of openness and possibility—"what would I do in this situation?"—he or she engages with the text from a closed position—"what did I do?" The difference between these two positions is fairly narrow, but it is important. The fellow writer has made a rhetorical choice to engage with a question from a particular stance, a stance conceivably rooted in class discussions, past assignments for the class, and his or her own false starts using other stances. It is thus more difficult for the fellow writer to approach her or his peer from the same stance of openness available to the writing center consultant. This lack of openness is not necessarily a negative; I have had student writers tell me that the approach they chose during our writing center sessions were not ultimately productive. However, it does

reduce the rhetorical options open to a writer and may cut off avenues the peer could pursue that the fellow writer could not.

I return to the topic of facilitating a writing center-influenced pedagogy later in this chapter. First, however, I must address the question of positionality. Claiming that writer and consultant are peers is a rhetorical act that cannot fully alter the realities of individuals' relations to each other. Yet scholars often ignore that writers entering the writing center bring their positionality with them.<sup>84</sup> Many students have been interpellated into the identity of “bad writer” by their insecurities about writing and negative experiences with harsh or blunt teacher feedback. As a result, they enter the center in a subservient stance, desiring nothing more than intervention by an all-knowing authority. Because the consultant operates with the imprimatur of the writing center, he or she brings authority as “writing expert” to the interaction. As noted earlier, while student writers have authority—they control the progress of the session and bring knowledge of the assignment, their intention with the piece of writing, and the expectations of the professor—they often cede all remaining and more substantial authority to the consultant. Michael A. Pemberton positions this move as evidence of a dependency that works against the writing center goal of creating independent writers (64). By reinforcing hierarchies, it also works against collaborative authoring, which requires that all parties have the ability to contribute equally to the final text.

A popular means of addressing this issue is via what Jeff Brooks terms “minimalist tutoring.” The approach, which he describes in an essay of the same name,

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<sup>84</sup> See Mary Broglie’s “From Teacher to Tutor: Making the Change” for an example of this move.

has been exceptionally influential in writing center work and remains one of the most-reprinted articles to appear in *The Writing Lab Newsletter* (“Whatever” 4). It centers on non-directive tutoring, asking students questions about their rhetorical choices and argument framing rather than explicit instruction in the subject matter (Brooks 2). Such an approach positions the consultant as reader, reacting in the moment to a piece of rhetoric rather than a teacher assessing a text. The difference is again a small one, but vitally important. By removing the consultant from the realm of assessing content, minimalist tutoring reinforces the writer’s authority over her or his writing. At the same time, the practice gives voice to the reader, foregrounding the reception of the text and the reaction of its reader.

At first glance, minimalist tutoring would seem to reinforce a divide between the parties engaging in a writing center consultation, and thus work against collaborative authoring, but this interpretation fails to consider how the practice reinforces both parties’ authority. Rather than a faculty/student, powerful/less-powerful engagement, an approach rooted in minimalist tutoring positions the parties as experts in different fields meeting in a space of overlapping authority. Because the consultant does not engage primarily with content, he or she cedes control of that element of the paper to the student. The analogue is thus not the teacher-student relationship in which the teacher is the ultimate knower about the topic, nor the teacher-mediated relationship described in chapter 3. Instead, minimalist tutoring promotes interactions closer to the peer-to-peer relationship existing between the writing partners profiled in chapter 4.



Along with positionality, a second issue that must be addressed before pursuing a writing center-influenced pedagogy of collaborative authoring is the question of ownership. As Rebecca Moore Howard argues, the model of peer tutoring that underlies writing center pedagogy centers on a text that is brought into conversation with the intent that it be improved upon through discourse (*Standing* 37). The text, which pre-exists the relationship with the consultant, is owned by the writer, who controls its final shape. Howard points to Lefevre's discussion of "interactive" collaboration, in which she claims that the peer review model assumes "something valuable and original and unspoiled in the writer, and that the reader can help to cut through stereotyped or irrelevant language and ideas so that the real writer can be heard" (68). This conception of the text segments much of the task of invention from the rest of the composing process, reinforcing the idea of the single autonomous author.

Howard's critique illustrates that, in the context of the writing center, one party in the writer-consultant relationship has ultimate ownership of the text. As a result, relationships within the writing center can approximate collaborative authoring, but cannot reach the ideal of equal partners working together on a single task. While this critique is important for writing center theorists interested in integrating collaborative authoring into their pedagogies, it is less important for classroom instructors integrating writing center-derived methods into composition classrooms. In the classroom, collaborative authors work together from the beginning of a text and in a relationship that locates ownership in that relationship. Other forms of collaborative writing relationships—such as the serial writing and compiled writing discussed in chapter 4—

maintain the idea of “my part” and “your part,” but in an ideal collaborative authoring relationship, it is not possible to identify individual “owned” elements.<sup>85</sup>

A third element that must be addressed when exploring the integration of writing center pedagogy is duration. Writing center engagement, in most cases, is ephemeral, lasting usually less than an hour per encounter.<sup>86</sup> While it is possible (and not uncommon) for writers to work closely with the same consultant over a long period of time, either by choice or because a small staff necessitates that writers work with the same consultant, each encounter generally begins the relationship anew. This is a larger issue than positionality, since the ephemeral engagements of a writing center generally do not support the type of long-term interactions required to promote Spirit and Trust (and thus collaborative authoring). As noted in chapter 3, communal feelings are vital to students’ ability to work together productively, so the brevity of writing center sessions would seem to work against the possibility of collaborative authoring.

The limited length of writing center sessions is a thorny issue, but one that can be addressed by shifting one’s conception of what the writing center session represents.

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<sup>85</sup> Questions about how writing centers negotiate questions of authorship and plagiarism have been addressed by a number of scholars, including Behm (“Ethical Issues in Peer Tutoring: A Defense of Collaborative Learning”), Clark (“Collaboration and Ethics in Writing Center Pedagogy” and “Maintaining Chaos in the Writing Center: A Critical Perspective on Writing Center Dogma”), and Clark and Healy (“Are Writing Centers Ethical?”).

<sup>86</sup> An informal survey of 35 writing center websites in May 2012 showed that all limited consultations to an hour or less, with some schools offering sessions as short as 20 minutes. While the schools that offered both face-to-face and online consultations did not differentiate between the types of consultation, Breuch and Racine’s “Developing Sound Tutor Training for Online Writing Centers: Creating Productive Peer Reviewers” illustrates that online sessions often take longer than face-to-face sessions.

Rather than viewing a writing center session as an analogue for an entire class, the brief duration of a writing center consultation can represent one of the many engagements with another person that are required to produce a collaboratively authored text. The writing center is thus not the model for an entire interaction, but a means of understanding how collaborative authors can productively work with each other. The writing center consultation invites analysis using Martin Buber's concept of the "encounter" between two people. Like the writing center, Buber's philosophy, outlined in *I and Thou*, centers on the act of dialogue. In his formulation, humans may adopt one of two stances toward the world: the I-It (subject to object) and I-Thou (subject to subject). The I-It relationship, which Buber terms "experience," results in the I perceiving the other person as a collection of isolated qualities existing in a world of things. The I-Thou relationship, which he calls the "encounter," represents an engagement with another person as a whole being that cannot be reduced to specific qualities (26). I-It relations promote detachment, while I-Thou relations promote mutuality, reciprocity, and cooperation.<sup>87</sup>

Because of the intensity of I-Thou relations, Buber acknowledges that they often cannot last long. Thus, perhaps paradoxically, the brief nature of writing center sessions are the ideal venue for modeling the Buberian encounter, in which the Other is Thou to the I. As Buber notes, "This, however, is the sublime melancholy of our lot that every You must become an It in our world" (68). The encounter—the I-Thou relation—requires a deep focus on the person with whom one is engaged in dialogue. When the I shifts

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<sup>87</sup> While they do not address writing center pedagogy, Lunsford and Ede, in "Collaborative Authorship and the Teaching of Writing," and Peterson, in "Valuing Teaching: Assumptions, Problems, and Possibilities," draw upon Buber's conception of I-Thou relations in discussions of collaborative writing and classroom community.

attention, the dialogue breaks and the Thou recedes to an It that is experienced. It is possible to engage with another person as a Thou multiple times, but these encounters are necessarily broken up by periods where the I experiences the other person as an It. In the classroom, as students work on a shared text without engaging with their fellow author, they operate in the realm of experience—the space where they are, in Buberian terms, an It to each other. The other person is a means of completing a task, useful for her or his ability to help the I but not experienced as a full person. Yet when the students come together in time and space, there is the potential for encounter and collaborative authoring.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, to use the writing center as a model, collaborative authoring assignments in the classroom must be reconceived as something other than a single task performed by two or more people. Instead, collaborative authoring assignments must be considered as a process in which two or more people write together via a series of encounters that take place within a community. This means that the instructor's pedagogy should center on strategies that promote Buberian encounters while ensuring that the classroom engages with the type of community-building described in chapter 3. This has been pursued in the past (most notably by Donald Murray in the 1970s and 1980s) via pedagogies centering on regular teacher-student conferences. While conferencing pedagogies offer a rough

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<sup>88</sup> While he does not explicitly cite Buber's work, Canagarajah's "The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued," pursues a similar line of argument. He argues that, "speakers don't have to be experts in another variety of English in order to speak to other communities. They simply need the metalinguistic, sociolinguistic, and attitudinal preparedness to negotiate differences even as they use their own dialects" (593). Thus acceptance of otherness hinges not on mastery of another person's dialect, but on one's own willingness to be open to difference.

model for a writing center-inspired pedagogy, their maintenance of a student-teacher relationship rather than a peer-peer working relationship means they must be altered to support collaborative authoring.

Like writing center pedagogy, conferencing pedagogy is connected to anxieties about student performance and populations of “unready” students. In “The Teacher-Student Writing Conference and the Desire for Intimacy,” Neal Lerner links the history of conferencing-based pedagogy to periodic jumps in college enrollment and concerns about the efficacy of whole-class instruction. He roots the continuing popularity of conferencing—which he traces back to the early years of the modern composition classroom—in a desire for intimacy with student writers (187). In his history, Lerner focuses primarily on intimacy between faculty and student, only delving into peer-peer conferencing briefly in his discussion of the growth of peer tutor-staffed writing centers in the 1960s and 1970s. So while most conferencing pedagogy centers on student-teacher relationships, Murray’s work on nondirective conferencing, in which the instructor operates not as authority but as audience, has some value to the project of collaborative authoring.

Murray’s model of conferencing, which he describes most famously in “The Listening Eye: Reflections on the Writing Conference,” centers on nondirective interactions with student writers.<sup>89</sup> Rather than entering the conference with an agenda,

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<sup>89</sup> While Murray’s work is now quite old in terms of scholarship, it continues to influence the academic conversation about conferencing. More recent works exploring the use of conferences and student authority in the composition classroom, including Patthey-Chavez and Ferris’ “Writing Conferences and the Weaving of Multi-Voiced Texts in

he advocates that instructors relinquish much of the control over the conference to the students. He includes a list of questions to start conversation—“What did you learn from this piece of writing” and “Where is this piece of writing taking you” (274)—but advocates approaching the writer as an audience member, not an instructor. Murray’s approach to the student is one of support and belief: “It is a matter of faith, faith that my students have something to say and a language in which to say it. Sometimes I lose that faith but if I regain it and do not interfere, my students do write and I begin to hear things that need saying said well” (275). Yet as his words in this passage show, he never fully abandons the role of teacher—they are *his* students, and he has the power of determining whether the writing that needs to happen is happening.

The maintenance of the instructor’s role in the conference is a key difference between Murray’s conferences and the encounters that are part of collaborative authoring. Murray’s model downplays the coercive power of the instructor, but he or she is physically before the student. This is not the case in peer-to-peer encounters. And while it is never possible to fully eliminate the influence of the instructor in conferences—her or his grading authority is ever-present—conferences between students provide space for the productive classroom underlife described by Robert Brooke. As he describes the term, “[u]nderlife allows individuals to take stances toward the roles they are expected to play, and to show others the stances they take” (144). In other words, it is the peer-to-peer discussion and activities that take place alongside, and in conversation with, the teacher-

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College Composition” and Black’s *Between Talk and Teaching: Reconsidering the Writing Conference* draw upon his research and methods.

led class content. While students are always taking stances towards the roles they are expected to play while interacting with the instructor, the lack of a traditional authority figure in the encounter allows for more agency in adopting stances and exploring alternatives.

Removing the instructor's eye from the individual encounters between students working together in the classroom is important not only for facilitating underlife, but also for promoting the type of student writer authority required for a writing center-influenced pedagogy. As Laurel Johnson Black noted in her study of conferencing, "[e]ven in liberal classrooms, where difference may not be ignored or repressed but is 'celebrated' in thematic units on diversity, conferences still function to find ways to subordinate the personal experience and language of students to a dominant world view—the teacher's" (150). While some subordination of personal experience and language does take place in student-student encounters, the understanding of the dominant worldview is not centered in either student partner. Thus, it is not naturalized and can provide the possibility for a space of rhetorical negotiation, a space where collaborative authors work together to define their joint worldview (and construct a worldview for their instructor) as they generate texts.

While writing center-derived pedagogy differs from conferencing pedagogy, the best practices of the latter can inform the former. Murray describes the role of the instructor in a conference as one of "waiting, trying to shut up—it isn't easy—trying not to interfere with their learning, waiting until they've learned something so you can show them what they've learned" (275). This willingness to cede control of the proceedings, so

difficult for instructors, is vital when attempting to bring writing center pedagogy into the classroom. As explored earlier, there is an in-built power differential between the consultant and writer in a writing center session, if for no other reason than the consultant has been marked with the role of writing authority. In the classroom, less visible, but still significant, hierarchies arise based on students' impressions of each other as writers and scholars. Through explicit instruction and via readings like "The Listening Eye," instructors can help students develop their own strategies for learning to wait for their collaborative author, to share power, and to build strategies for weaving together their individual learning styles.

A second important takeaway from Murray's conferencing model is his use of regular conferences. In *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Murray provides six schedules illustrating how instructors working with different size classes and different course loads can arrange for weekly conferences with each student (176-180). While there are some issues with his claims as to the achievability of such a system (Lerner points to the difficulty facing instructors teaching 5-5 loads at multiple institutions [205]), the larger issue—the need for including frequent one-on-one contact—is less problematic. To foster the type of productive composing encounters required for collaborative authoring, students must be allowed to meet together frequently (Hawkins 67). To integrate writing center-influenced pedagogy into the composition classroom, the instructor must schedule time away from whole-class activities to support peer-peer learning.

Yet while a writing center-inspired pedagogy can draw upon some of the best practices of conferencing pedagogy, the former's status as a peer-to-peer engagement



requires that instructors break with the traditional conception of the conference as a means of indirect teaching. Unlike Murray's conferences, in which the student reports what he or she has learned and the instructor validates that learning, writing center-inspired work does not center on a coherent pole of authority.<sup>90</sup> Students working on a collaboratively authored project constantly renegotiate authority each time they meet, refiguring their relationship based on the task at hand. This requires a conception of the conference as a space in which students can—and must—have ownership over their working methods, the tools they use, and the shape their final product takes. This requires that instructors interested in drawing upon writing center methods to promote collaborative authoring adopt a pedagogy that maximizes student agency and control—both as individuals and as a partnership (or group).

One of the first requirements for a writing center-inspired pedagogy of collaborative authoring is that it must maximize student agency by making working together an act students choose to engage with (Hawkins 66). In the collaborative classrooms I have observed, as well as in many described in the scholarship, instructors tend to maintain control of student bodies when setting up the classroom. Students are told that they will collaborate, who to partner with, what they will write, and how they will work. I explored the problems with the third and fourth directives in chapter 3. However, the first two instructions are highly problematic as well, since they reflect an unwillingness to allow for student agency in the classroom.

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<sup>90</sup> Even scholars who point to the problems with teacher-directed conferences, such as Walker in "Teacher Dominance in the Writing Conference" and Nickel in "When Writing Conferences Don't Work: Students' Retreat from Teacher Agenda" still tend to present the conference as teacher-led, if not teacher-dominated.

By telling students that they must work together on a project, collaboration-minded instructors are enforcing a way of working that they believe benefits the students. This is not unusual; instructors do this when requiring drafts. Yet requiring collaboration (working together) or collaborative authoring (writing together in real time while present to the other) is a larger mandate than simply assigning a topic or a required length. It is requiring a way of working, a particular engagement with the task of writing. Collaboration is a way of working, a process that operates in conjunction (and in conversation with) the writing process. Requiring students to collaborate is an act similar to requiring that students produce drafts that are then revised. It is a means of controlling how students work with an eye toward encouraging behaviors known to be beneficial to them as writers. In the case of the writing process, decades of research into writing has proven that drafting-revising-rewriting results in more polished and rhetorically effective texts. Similarly, works like *Singular Texts/Plural Authors* and research into collaborative writing in other disciplines have shown that students writing together learn to develop powerful strategies for problem-solving and idea generation.<sup>91</sup>

While the arguments for asking students to write together are persuasive, it is important not to approach collaborative work as the only acceptable working style. Just as process can go from being a series of steps students *should* follow to “a model of the composing process, thereby constructing a Theory of Writing, a series of generalizations

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<sup>91</sup> See Noël and Robert, “Empirical Study on Collaborative Writing: What Do Co-authors Do, Use, and Like?,” Lay, “Interpersonal Conflict in Collaborative Writing: What We Can Learn from Gender Studies,” and Ritchie and Rigano’s “Writing Together Metaphorically and Bodily Side-by-Side: An Inquiry into Collaborative Academic Writing.”

about writing that supposedly hold true all or most of the time” (Olson 8), instructors may err on the side of positioning classroom collaboration not as a productive way of working but as the only way of pursuing a writing task. Following all the steps/working in pairs becomes the goal of the work rather than a means of generating knowledge. This removes agency from students, returning them to passive objects to be shifted around by the teacher-subject. The liberatory claims of collaborative writing collapse in such a situation, since there is little disturbance of the strict teacher-student hierarchy when agency has been removed from the latter. By allowing students agency to choose whether they will work with other students, instructors position collaboration as a possible means of working, not *the* means of working. (As illustrated by interchapter 2, solo authorship is still the preferred way of working in the humanities.)

This requirement may seem quixotic in a dissertation about collaborative authoring, since, as noted in chapters 2 and 3, students do not tend to collaborate without external pressure from the instructor. Students have been enculturated through their experiences in the educational system to understand academic authorship as a solo endeavor, one in which a student composes and is assessed individually. Yet this resistance can be addressed via other avenues rather than an authoritarian requirement to collaborate. Mandating collaboration will get students to work together, but it removes their agency. Unlike the experienced collaborators profiled in chapter 4, students required to work together do not choose to collaborate. The only motivation to succeed is the grade (an external motivator) rather than their desire to work with a partner (an internal motivator).

To activate this inner motivator, to get students working not to please the instructor, but because they are exploring the possibilities of working with another person, instructors must craft assignments that promote collaboration without mandating it. Such assignments might be large projects that can only be completed by partners or small groups, projects that require a lot of data collection (ethnographies are particularly well-suited for this), or projects that center on a multivocal final product. Rather than mandating a particular arrangement of bodies, the instructor can set some guidelines for possible working groups—partners, trios, small groups—and outline how working together will make the task more achievable. At the same time, instructors must recognize that students’ resistance to collaborative work may be so strong that they opt out of working together. Allowing students to opt out of collaborating on a project is not the same thing as allowing students to opt out of the project itself. When presenting the assignment the instructor must position it as a problem to be solved, and one of the possible solutions is solo authorship.<sup>92</sup>

This approach to assignments fosters relationships that more closely resemble those forged outside the classroom—see chapter 4—as well as those found in the writing center. Unlike students who are working together because they are told to, students who have the ability to make the choice to work with others come together from stances of power. They chose their partner, meaning they recognized value in working with this

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<sup>92</sup> This also requires that instructors create assessment tools that do not assume collaborative relationships. One possible strategy would be to divorce grading from the final product, instead grading student reflective writing performed alongside the larger collaborative work. This would allow the instructor to grade individual writing regardless of the form of the student’s collaborative work.

other person. Their partner may be a stranger—as is the case in many writing center consultations—but in choosing to work with him or her, the student positions the partner as valuable, as knowing (or being able to do) something that will help achieve a goal. While this move does not solve all motivation problems, it does shift motivation from a wholly extrinsic factor to one that is at least partly intrinsic; the student has chosen to form a working relationship, thus taking on the responsibility of that choice. As J.D. Williams and Scott Alden's work illustrates, intrinsic motivation positively correlates with more substantial engagement with the writing and revising processes (107-108)

Once groups are established, the instructor must reinforce the idea that each member of a collaborative authoring relationship is an authority. This can be pursued through two avenues: a) Spirit- and Trust-building activities that promote knowledge about, and respect for, students' partners (see chapter 3); and b) assignments that encourage students to bring in existing expertise (not just expertise with writing, but with other modes of composition). The former can be pursued through familiar trust-building exercises, but the latter is more complicated, since it requires engaging with the possibility of final projects that break with the traditional form of the academic essay. This means that instructors interested in collaborative authoring should be open to the possibility of multimodal composing.

The move toward multimodal composing in the classroom, which is informed by the New London Group's work on multiliteracies—as well as the recent work of such rhetoric and composition scholars as Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher, Stuart Selber, Jody Shipka, Kathleen R. Tyner, Anne Frances Wysocki, and Kathleen Blake Yancey—

is a topic too large to do justice to here. However, just as writing center pedagogy can—and, I argue, should—inform the work taking place in collaborative classrooms, multimodal-focused pedagogies provide valuable insights into both the composing process and the negotiations required for successful collaborations. As the New London Group argues, multimodal composition promotes an approach to composing in which “literacy educators and students...see themselves as active participants in social change, as learners and students who can be active designers—makers—of social futures” (65).<sup>93</sup> Their conception of literacy as inherently social invites a reconsideration of the types of collaboration—including collaborative authoring—promoted in the classroom. In this dissertation, I have largely conceived of the work of collaborative authoring in terms of textual final projects (the PowerPoint and video presentations mentioned in chapter 3 were adjuncts to a final paper, not projects in their own right). However, such an approach reduces student agency by limiting students to “facsimiles of the authentic work of the institution” (Grimm 97), thus reinforcing the simulacrum of collaboration in the classroom. Multimodal composition cannot break through the simulacrum, but it may serve as a means of promoting work that is closer to the real collaboration described in chapter 4.

These moves toward a writing center-influenced pedagogy are valuable not only because they support collaborative authoring, but also because they allow for instructors to reposition their classrooms, to a small degree, within the institution. While it is impossible for instructors to adopt the writing center model and remove institutional

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<sup>93</sup> The New London Group was a collaboration between 10 literacy and new media scholars from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

pressures regarding assessment, individualistic accountability, and the role of the instructor, it is possible to use the writing center as a means to allow students to think outside the current classroom system. By integrating elements of writing center pedagogy as a means of promoting collaborative authoring, instructors can help students become cognizant of both their position in the academy and the classroom's position in the institution. This awareness can help students and instructors become more sensitive to how the context in which we work together—as subjects, authorities, and learners— influences what it means to be a writer, author, and knower.

### **Conclusion**

As a student, I wrote innumerable essays, always operating alone. It was not until college, with an instructor who had apparently read Peter Elbow or other scholars writing about the use of peer review in the composition classroom, that I experienced anything resembling collaborative writing. This lone class was my only preparation for my jobs in the corporate realm, environments that engaged with texts in very different ways than academia. Instead of solo authorship, I wrote with others, collaborating on texts, web sites, software, and other projects. Upon returning to academia, I delved into the scholarship about collaboration, scholarship that brims with the promise of rethinking ideas of authorship, ownership, and work. Yet, in trying to apply this scholarship in the classroom, I discovered another element of the scholarship: its tendency to speak about collaborative writing in the ideal without considering that students—myself included—are not engaging in the type of fully self-directed collaborative work described in the

scholarship. By downplaying the effects of the classroom context, the scholarship has created a simulacrum of collaborative classrooms, one that masks the reality in which students operate. Rather than ignoring context, I believe that instructors interested in promoting collaborative writing must address the institutional strictures on student agency.

This dissertation draws together these three threads of discussion—the personal, the pedagogical, and the disciplinary—as a means of exploring a more productive engagement with collaboration and collaborative writing. My avenue for pursuing this goal is collaborative authoring, the act of writing a single text in real time when present to the other. Collaborative authoring foregrounds the process of collaborative writing, encouraging students to negotiate the elements of the text while composing it. Collaborative authoring prioritizes process over product, drawing student attention to the work required to compose. By discouraging the creation of solo-authored texts that are then integrated (the most common way students write in groups), collaborative authoring promotes deep student engagement with their partner(s). This prioritizes connection over isolation, making good on some of the claims of collaborative scholarship.

This dissertation takes as its starting point the research into collaborative writing published by such rhetoric and composition scholars as Lunsford and Ede, Kenneth Bruffee, John Trimbur, Hephzibah Roskelly and Kate Ronald, and David Bleich. Their work clearly outlines the benefits of asking students to work together and the liberatory possibilities of collaborative writing (including the work I term collaborative authoring). Their work also outlines the drawbacks to collaborative work; as many have noted, it is



often quite difficult to get students to work together; when they do, they often struggle with the content. Yet what is missing is an investigation into the reasons *why* collaborative work—especially collaborative authoring—is particularly difficult when pursued within the classroom. Collaboration, as any number of theorists note, is very common outside academia—many corporations center on team-based work. This indicates a missing element of collaborative theory, one that has dramatic implications for research into group work and other manifestations of collaboration. This missing element is context, and the scholars’ tendency not to engage deeply with the question of context and the limits placed upon student agency and authority by the university classroom and the larger institution.

Along with this tendency to downplay, if not ignore, the role the classroom context plays in the success and failure of student collaborative work, there tends to be a lack of deep engagement with questions of community formation. Rather than considering how students might come to view and work with their partner(s) as members of a working community—the process—instructors’ tendency to foreground the physical product of collaborative relationships—the product—means that students are forced to do the work of a community without benefitting from the support that a community provides. David McMillan’s Sense of Community Theory, which describes how feelings of community spirit and trust undergird communities’ ability to engage in trade and produce art (including the “art” of the communities’ continued existence), illustrates the problems with the product-centered approach to collaborative work. Because of the brevity of courses, the desire to move into the “real work” of a class, and the need to

assess student work, instructors shortchange community development and ask students to act as though they were members of a community, even though they do not share feelings of community.

Because students who are asked to work together lack deep connections to their partners, they tend to gravitate toward the type of writing so familiar to collaboration-focused instructors: each writer produces a different section of a paper, then the group or partners (sometimes clumsily) mash the parts into a single text. This type of writing, which reflects elements of what Tori Haring-Smith terms “serial writing,” is a means of maintaining each individual’s authority over his or her section of text. While this mode of writing is problematic for inexperienced writers, it can be a productive means of working outside the confines of the classroom, as chapter 4 illustrates. The profiles of experienced academic writers show that collaborators working outside the context of the composition classroom have the ability to strategically select their working partner as well as engage more deeply with each other over time, thus enabling different forms of collaboration—Haring-Smith’s compiled and coauthored writing. These more complex forms of collaboration, while possible in the classroom, reflect relationships that are difficult to form within the confines of a classroom.

The noun “confines” was chosen intentionally, since one of the most active areas of collaborative writing research during the past decades has been collaborative technology, especially wikis and blogs. These tools have been promoted not only as a means of engaging tech-savvy students but also as a means of disrupting traditional notions of authorship and textual ownership. Because wikis make editing and publishing

easy and open to multiple users, they have been championed by scholars who believe that these tools allow writers to share authority over a single text. Similarly, blogs' commenting features have been described as a means of forming writerly communities centering on texts that can be annotated by readers. However, as I explore in chapter 5, structural and programmatic structures of the tools reflect traditional conceptions of authorship, maintaining the original author's primacy and positioning other writers as reactive, not generative. These anti-collaborative structures can be disrupted, but only through an approach that encourages writers to approach the tools emergently and work against the individualistic (and individualizing) elements of the software.

The emergent approach is important, because, as I noted earlier, I strongly believe in the value of collaborative work in the classroom. So while it is important to be cognizant of issues with the scholarship, such an approach provides little value to classroom instructors interested in collaborative writing. Rather than simply pointing to gaps in the scholarship, I advocate instead for what can be considered an emergent approach to collaborative writing: collaborative authoring. Collaborative authoring is a means of composing in which multiple writers work together on a single text in real time and in ways that make them present to each other—either physically or via network technology. Rather than working on a text in isolation, which promotes what Karen Burke Lefevre terms a “Platonic” approach to composition, collaborative authoring is dialectical, requiring writers to negotiate the text in the moment of composing it. Asking students to write together in the moment while present to each other foregrounds the

process of composing, the individual rhetorical acts that are required to create a single text through the work of multiple minds.

Collaborative authoring can be pedagogically useful, but promoting collaborative authoring is not a simple task. To allow for the types of deep relationships described in chapter 4, students would need the ability to strategically choose their writing partners, a difficult task given such limitations upon their agency as the brief time of an average course and the restrictions upon partners, all of whom must be in the same class. Barring institutional reconceptions of acceptable behavior (courses are limited by the institution, and working with students outside the class can be considered academic misconduct), this is a difficult issue to address. More likely is an approach that helps students see how they the classroom context limits in their ability to work together productively. This requires that courses include space for discussions about institutional control of student bodies and limitations upon their agency. By defamiliarizing the act of isolated authorship, instructors may be able to help students productively reconsider their positions within the academy and to begin to understand how institutions influence their engagements with the world.

To promote this type of productive reconsideration, instructors can create classrooms that encourage students to engage in ways that promote collaborative relationships and can lead to collaborative authoring. A first step is promoting the growth of communal feelings that can promote deeper engagement with writing partners. This entails restructuring course schedules to allow students the opportunity to engage in extensive one-on-one and small-group work. Such a move allows students to experiment

with working relationships and better prepare themselves for sustained engagement with another writer. The writing center—especially in its ideal, peer-to-peer form—can serve as a powerful tool for helping students engage with each other in productive ways. Rather than dealing with their collaborative authoring partner as a tool to perform work, students can draw upon the ideal of writing center consultations and learn how to engage with the other as a person from whom he or she can learn.

Promoting collaborative authoring necessitates that instructors allow for students' authority over the forms that their working relationships take. Rather than announcing that everyone will work as individuals, partners, groups of three, or other formations, instructors should craft assignments that encourage students to decide for themselves how they will pursue a task. Instructors can pursue this goal by creating assignments that, due to their complexity, require the type of collaborative work called for in contexts outside the classroom. At the same time, instructors must rethink their assessment tools, crafting evaluation tools that do not unduly punish students whose experiments with collaborative authoring do not result in best-quality work. In other words, the assessment should measure the process, not the product. Given that outcomes assessment largely focuses on the end result, instructors must explore other means of assessing the work taking place. This could entail the decoupling of the final grade from the resulting product, replacing this outcomes-based assessment with a review of individual reflective essays or journals detailing the group's goals for its work, the project's evolution, each student's contribution, and the students' own assessment of the project.

Promoting collaborative authoring calls for instructors to engage strategically with technology, not assuming that collaborative technology actually promotes the type of work required for collaborative authoring. Instructors should be open to technology and encourage its use as a means of authoring in their classrooms. At the same time, instructors interested in promoting collaborative authoring should approach technology with a critical eye and encourage students to do the same. Rather than requiring students to use a particular tool, provide students with a task to perform and allow them to choose the means of achieving this task. Such an approach encourages the development of critical technological awareness as well as promotes student ownership over their work.

Finally, engaging in collaborative authoring requires that instructors carefully manage their expectations for the outcomes of collaboration. Students in a 15-week course cannot hope to reach the level of interpersonal engagement and community feeling illustrated by the experienced collaborators profiled in chapter 4. Yet it is possible, by foregrounding contextual limits upon their ability to collaborate, allowing students the experience of collaborative relationships, modeling means of developing community spirit and trust, using technology wisely, and drawing upon the ideals of writing center pedagogy, to allow for students to begin engaging—briefly—in real collaboration. It is highly unlikely that students will be able to reach the ideal of collaborative authoring within the confines of the classroom, but by allowing them to move in such a direction, instructors can begin to make good on the promises of collaborative scholarship.

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## APPENDIX A

## RESEARCH PROJECT MATERIALS

## 1. Group assignment for ENG 102: Composition II, Fall semester

Syllabus version:

**Research Project and Presentation**

At the beginning of the semester, you will be placed in a 3- to 4-person group. Each group will conduct a semester-long project in which you investigate an aspect of Internet culture or technology. Using your assigned text as a guide, you will research, write, and design a 15- to 20-minute presentation containing multimedia (video or audio) content, a 5000- to 6000-word research paper, and an online (wiki, blog, other tool) component. The presentations will take place during the last weeks of class and your papers will be due on the last day of class. You will be graded as a group, but you will also have the opportunity to grade both your own work and your group members’.

Longer version:

**Final project: Researching (on) the Internet**

This semester, we consider what it means to be a generation, a “digital native,” and a student researching and writing in a wired world. The two major texts, as well as the shorter readings, videos, and multimedia content, have raised many more questions than anyone could hope to address in a 15-week class. That’s where you come in. This semester, your group will investigate an aspect of Internet culture, technology, or language use. Using your assigned text as a guide, you will research, write, and design a 15- to 20-minute presentation containing a multimedia (video or audio) and/or an online (wiki, blog, or other tool) component, as well as a 5000- to 6000-word research paper.

The project includes:

**Research proposal.** Due the Friday before Fall Break (October 9). Briefly outline your group’s topic and the question you plan to address.

**Research question.** Due two weeks after the proposal (October 21). This is your (hypo)thesis—the question you want to answer. It can change, but it should already be fleshed out enough to spark interest and to point toward a research path.

**Literature review.** Due two weeks after the research question (November 4). Each group will research an issue raised in the texts we read in class. You will find **academic** discourse on the topic (in other words, you’ll use the library), briefly contextualize the issue in light of this research, and explain how the text we read as a group fits into

the larger discussion about the topic. You will offer, at the conclusion of your presentation, an issue for the class to debate. In addition, each individual group member will submit a 700- to 800-word critical analysis of one of the scholarly articles.

**Working draft.** Due two weeks after the literature review (November 18). This is a polished draft containing your complete argument and all sources. Your argument may need a bit of cleaning up, but it should be largely complete.

**Presentation.** Polished and professional presentation of your work, including audio/video components and class participation. Takes place during last week of class.

**Final paper.** Due the last day of class.

You will receive a group grade for the paper and all components. In addition, each member will periodically submit progress reports for all other members. These progress reports will contribute to the individual final grades.

## 2. Group assignment for ENG 102: Composition II, Spring semester

Syllabus version

### **Research Project**

At the beginning of the semester, you will be placed in a 3- to 4-person group. Each group will choose a topic on which to conduct semester-long research projects in which you investigate an aspect of Internet culture or technology. Using your assigned text as a guide, you will research and write a 2500- to 3000-word research paper. This paper must have a strong thesis/argument, show signs of extensive research, use evidence well, and be formatted properly. The paper will be due on the last day of class.

### **Research Presentation**

You will collaborate with your group members on a 15- to 20-minute presentation containing multimedia (video, audio, and/or interactive) content that illustrates your theme and integrates elements from your individual papers. The presentations will take place during the last weeks of class. You will be graded as a group, but you will also have the opportunity to grade both your own work and your group members' contributions.

Full version

### **Final project: Researching (on) the Internet**

This semester, we consider what it means to be a generation, a “digital native,” and a student researching and writing in a wired world. The two major texts, as well as the shorter readings, videos, and multimedia content, have raised many more questions than anyone could hope to address in a 15-week class. That’s where you come in.

This semester, you will investigate an aspect of Internet culture, technology, or language use. Using your assigned text as a guide, you will research and write a 2500- to 3000-word research paper. You will also work with other students researching similar topics to write and design a 15- to 20-minute presentation containing a multimedia (video or audio) or online (blog or wiki) component.

The project includes:

**Research proposal.** Due the last Friday of February. Briefly outline your group's topic and the question you plan to address.

**Research question.** Due two weeks after the proposal. This is your (hypo)thesis—the question you want to answer. It can change, but it should already be fleshed out enough to spark interest and to point toward a research path.

**Literature review.** Due two weeks after the research question. Each group will research an issue raised in the texts we read in class. You will find **academic** discourse on the topic (in other words, you'll use the library), briefly contextualize the issue in light of this research, and explain how the text we read as a group fits into the larger discussion about the topic. You will offer, at the conclusion of your presentation, an issue for the class to debate. In addition, each individual group member will submit a 700- to 800-word critical analysis of one of the scholarly articles.

**Working draft.** Due two weeks after the literature review. This is a polished draft containing your complete argument and all sources. Your argument may need a bit of cleaning up, but it should be largely complete.

**Presentation.** Polished and professional presentation of your work, including audio/video components and class participation. Takes place during last week of class.

**Final paper.** Due the last day of class.

You will receive an individual grade for the paper and a group grade for the presentation.

### 3. Assignment weights for ENG 102, Fall semester

- Research Project and Presentation 25%
- Blackboard Posts and Leading Discussion 20%
- Reflective Writing 15%
- Literature Review and Issue Debate 20%
- Discussion Participation and Extemporaneous Speaking 20%

### 4. Assignment weights for ENG 102, Spring semester

- Research Project 25%
- Research Presentation 15%

- Blackboard Posts 20%
- Leading Discussion 10%
- Reflective Writing 10%
- Literature Review and Issue Debate 20%

## 5. Low-stakes assignments

### Out of class

- Longer
  1. Technology autobiography
  2. Rhetorical analysis of visual or artifact related to group topic
  3. Summary and assessment of academic article related to group topic
- Shorter
  1. Eleven posts on Blackboard reflecting upon specific points made in the readings.
  2. Self-assessment of their oral presentations

### In class

- Sample prompts:
  - “How does your engagement with technology correspond (or not) with Palfrey and Gasser’s depiction of your generation?”
  - “Write about a time something you or someone else said was misinterpreted” (this prompt was tied to a discussion, in the text, of misinterpretation)
  - “Where do you feel like you are the most *you*—the most true to your ideal self? Why? What about that space allows for you to be *you*?”
  - “If you could ban one piece of technology, what would it be? Why?”

## 6. Topics chosen

### Fall, section 1:

The Internet’s effects upon users’ long-term psychological health.  
 Texting-while-driving bans.  
 Remixing and copyright law.  
 The elements, present in Facebook and absent in MySpace, that drove the former’s success.  
 If and how texting affects student writing.  
 Rhetorical analysis of Apple’s depictions of its users.

### Fall, section 2:

Case study of users’ negotiation of *World of Warcraft* avatar-creation tools, to support an argument about identity play.  
 Depictions of sexuality in online culture.

Depictions of sexuality in hip-hop videos.  
 Case study of a heavy technology user and a light user swapping use patterns.  
 Correlating internet use to obesity rates.

Spring:

Group topics:

Technology and health care.  
 The “Digital Participation Gap.”  
 Relationships in online worlds.  
 Identity play in social networking spaces.  
 Video gaming and relationships.

Individual paper topics:

Networked relationships and the changing nature of friendship.  
*Amazon.com*'s use of gender stereotypes in organizing its data.  
 Identity play in social networking spaces (group paper).  
 Informative document for new parents of a child with ROP.  
 The possibility of replacing animal testing with computer modeling.  
 Digital divide issues.  
 The negative effects of classifying students as “Digital Natives.”  
 Argument for the inclusion of newer, more expensive, but less painful cancer treatment regimens in health insurance offerings.  
 The positive effects of video games on children.  
 Changing definitions of “intimacy” in online spaces.  
 How gamers are socialized in an MMORPG.  
 Stereotypes of African-Americans in mass media.