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"I'M THE AUTHOR OF THIS PAPER":

COLLABORATION AND THE CONSTRUCT OF AUTHORSHIP

IN A FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH COURSE

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Purpose

It is the scope of this article to present a theoretical framework for successful collaboration and our ideas on how it might be implemented in a first-year college composition classroom. We began by creating a collaborative assignment for our composition classes based on a very cursory understanding of successful collaboration. In light of this experience and our exploration of the theory, we argue that collaboration can be effective in the freshman writing course; however, conventions of successful collaboration must be taught and not just assigned. This article offers a means of doing just that.

What Is Collaboration?: A Theoretical Framework

In order to lay the groundwork for collaboration, we must first examine the notion of authorship. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford tell us that the notion of the individual author is a highly constructed cultural phenomenon. In spite of this, most teachers approach writing assignments from the assumption that writing is a highly individualized act (112). This could in no small part be due to the fact that as a society we are burdened by the idea that writing must somehow be an element of individual ownership. In order to demonstrate how this notion has been a function of historical and societal change, Ede and Lunsford describe how the Middle Ages' collective view of texts, in which "there was no distinction between the person who wrote a text and the person who copied it," was gradually transformed into our modern notion of writing as personal intellectual property through the emphasis on the individual that characterized both the Renaissance and the Romantic period (77-79, 85). In short, the "concepts of authorship and of intellectual property rights that we take for granted" were once "noncommonsensical and nonobvious" (84). What flows logically from this is the assumption that a teacher is not necessarily being true to the way the world works if he or she only assigns tasks that involve individual authorship. In fact, the work of some theorists suggest quite the opposite—that collaborative writing might have psychological grounding in addition to Ede and Lunsford's historical groundwork. Building on the notion that thinking is social—from Vygotsky and others—Kenneth Bruffee posits, "If thought is internalized public and social talk, then writing of all kinds is internalized social talk made public and social again. If thought is internalized conversation, then writing is internalized conversation re-externalized" (419-422). Thus, collaborative writing assignments create a forum that reflects the way knowledge is actually played out in human experience.

But aside from such historical and theoretical grounds for collaborative writing's importance, there are pragmatic concerns that inform the issue. As Bruffee tells us, colleges found that students were not prepared for the rigors of the collegiate classroom, yet these same students "refused help when it was offered" (417). Emphasizing collaboration, then, seems a logical way for students to develop practices that help them utilize the resources around them. Even Ede and Lunsford, who espouse collaboration almost exclusively from the standpoint that it is good because of its consistency with human reality, see collaboration as beneficial for its pragmatic benefits: "Writing teachers err if, in envisioning students' professional lives upon graduation they imagine them seated alone, writing in isolation... struggling in a professional garret to express themselves" (72). Put simply, teachers should teach collaborative writing in some way because students will likely need to write collaboratively someday; failing to teach collaborative writing is on some level willfully neglecting an often-necessary life and career skill.

To this point, we have examined the grounds for collaboration, but the question remains: what is collaboration? As it is not the scope of this project to define the term by summarizing and evaluating all possible theories and ideas, it may be more beneficial to discuss collaboration in terms of what it is not. A term thrown around in pedagogical circles seemingly synonymous with collaboration is "cooperation;" however, there are key differences in these two types of academic conversation. It is important that we do not confuse or combine these separate ideas. Cooperative learning is different from "collaborative learning in the Bruffee tradition" because it "posits an externally verifiable 'reality' which serves as stimulus for various responses" (Ede and Lunsford 117-118). Cooperative learning seems to be a distinct means to an end. The answer or truth is available only through this type of discussion. However, collaboration is not necessarily interested in the solid, defined end of absolute knowledge; it is interested in socially constructed knowledge. With more disputable ends, collaborative conversation focuses more on the process.

The operative word in both cooperation and collaboration is conversation. In an explicit social environment, the necessity to converse is paramount for successful invention and composition. Bruffee encapsulates this idea by stating, "What students do when working collaboratively on their writing is not write or edit or, least of all, read proof. What they do is converse" (425). To better understand possible parameters and guidelines for collaborative conversation, Mark

Condon and Jean Anne Clyde use the metaphor of relationships to discuss ideal (and not so ideal) collaborative processes. They divide these relationships into three types: No Conversation, Partial Conversation, and Full Conversation. In summary, the no conversation relationship relies on one participant to do all the composing while others are either completely absent or nominally involved. As all members may be committed to or involved in invention, only one person creates the text. With partial conversation, there still remains one primary composer; however, there is more interaction (questions, comments, division of labor, etc.) in the final textual composition. Also, although there may be more than one composer, it is still primarily an individual act. The Full Conversation relationship is the most ideal according to Condon and Clyde, and it seems Bruffee, Ede and Lunsford, and other social constructivists would agree. The text becomes a seamless and coherent product that will elude attempts to establish a single author. According to Bruffee, "To think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively—that is, we must learn to converse well" (421). So, the full conversation model, according to Condon and Clyde, is the textual evidence of "conversing well." This is the model that all teachers should ascribe to when creating collaborative assignments in the classroom.

Potential obstacles to conversing well surface when groups must come to some consensus about what they will complete in their assignments. The debate surrounding the definition and employment of consensus in collaboration is worth examining. John Trimbur suggests two lines of criticism that help shape the current discussion. On one end, conformity is the danger. The suppression of important differences hijacks a successful and rich conversation. On the other hand, social constructivists think that collaboration enforces the hierarchy of ideologies or "the authority of knowledge," which it seems to want to dethrone (602-603). Trimbur and Bruffee (with the latter's notion of "abnormal discourse") both accredit the need for "dissensus" within collaboration: teachers should be "less interested in students achieving consensus as in their using consensus as a critical instrument to open gaps in the conversation to which differences may emerge" (614). Here, using Trimbur's definition, consensus tries to evade any intellectual leeching or bulldozing in the writing process. It opens richness and depth within communication. The ideal use of abnormal discourse or dissensus is not to conform to or uphold any certain ideologies, but to reinforce the power of multiple perspectives and give groups grounds for conversation.

Why Not Collaboration?

As students, Jake and Matt both experienced collaborative writing. In general, our experiences have been mixed. As a college student, Matt would often be left with primary composing and editing responsibilities (he often felt like he was the "real" author of the text), while Jake would tend to back down from any collaborative conflict, leaving someone else with either the primary work or decision-making responsibilities if it meant a smoother process (all in all, he saw it pragmatically: What is the most efficient or even quickest way to finish this assignment?). As high school teachers, we had had some experience attempting to implement collaborative writing in our classrooms. Jake found collaborative methods to be especially useful in helping students with the invention process (brainstorming, topic discussions, thematic debates); Matt found collaboration a mixed bag in his use of literature circles: students seemed to enjoy the assignments more, but they also seemed to be much more off track than they needed to be. The dilemma here is obvious: there is so much theory that clearly suggests the benefits of collaboration, but in practice, these benefits are a bit more nebulous.

Interestingly, few ideas are more grounded in the social-constructivist bent of the modern university than collaborative writing, yet these ideas are implemented with less frequency. Perhaps this is because the idea that thinking is a social act, while clear to many composition teachers, is a totally foreign concept to most students, who see themselves as the solitary authors of their papers; as one of our students noted in a journal prompt, "Who is the author of this paper?": "Of course I'm the author." One student even felt the need to assert his own authority with stunning redundancy: "The paper that I completed was done by me, giving myself ownership, stating that I am the author." Only one out of 70 non-collaborative writers seemed to see himself as being a part of a conversation between some external intellectual objects; as he said, "How original can a paper really be if you are just adapting [a theory] that already exists to [a cultural phenomenon]?" Many teachers may be resistant to use collaboration on theoretical grounds, but it seems to us that in light of such responses, most teachers are opposed to it because they fear a mutiny in their classes. Students have a multitude of seemingly well-founded fears regarding collaborative writing assignments. One student feared collaboration would usurp his authorial voice: "I just think that an essay should be someone's own personal thoughts and that having to work with someone on an essay would skew the individuality of a certain piece of writing." Another student expressed concerns over time management: "I feel that it is hard to organize the time for both people to work on a project together." The final and perhaps strongest fear involves the unfair distribution of labor: "My experience in high school for collaboration would involve me writing the paper and getting the A for the less fortunate...who decided to work with me. Generally these people were the guys from the football team who were just about as lazy as my fish. Except my fish are probably more conscious of what is going on in their life. Enough sharing." A composition teacher faces the daunting task of creating collaborative assignments that effectively account for these student concerns as well as the theoretical and practical benefits of collaborative writing.

Why Collaboration?

While theory certainly addresses the issues of authorship, conformity, and writing as social construct, students also picked up on other various reasons why collaboration is important, if not crucial, to the writing process. In opposition to individual writers, the collaborative teams talked eloquently about the positive aspects of working with someone else. There were no issues concerning control of authorship and intellectual property. In fact, several students seemed to grasp that writing as a social act is an important aspect of assessing a collaborative paper. A collaborator responds, "The best way to assess collaboration would be to read the paper. It would be evident if two people wrote it because the essay would have several different views and ideas instead of just one." It should be noted that students only read a brief outline of various collaborative relationships from Condon and Clyde's article. Students seemed to enjoy sharing ideas and working through intellectual conflict. One student wrote, "I did not get bored as quickly or as often as I do when writing an individual paper. . . . Moreover, ideas seemed to flow better while collaborating." Another student added, "The best part was never really having writer's block." Interestingly, several students commented on the correlation between time spent and grade received. Both writers felt like assessment should be based on an equal amount of work done on the project: "The grade the paper deserves should be given to both of us. This only works in cases like ours, where each student contributed equal amounts of work." What interests us here is that students did not need the theoretical grounding in collaboration to understand some of its key benefits and tenets—they discovered these through their own collaboration. Ultimately, theories of collaboration surfaced in writing activities where the theory was not taught.

Methodology: How might a teacher incorporate collaboration into a first-year composition course?

We decided to implement a collaborative writing assignment in Marquette University's second-semester First Year

English course called Rhetoric and Composition 2: Public Sphere Literacy. There are four units in the semester covering a variety of different literacies: media literacy, narrative literacy, civic literacy, and workplace literacy. The purpose of the course, as stated in the Introduction to the textbook is to “help you learn not simply *how to read, write, speak, and listen* but also *how to think critically about these skills* so that you can teach *yourself to communicate effectively with your audiences* in different situations, both academic and public” (ix). Because one of the primary objectives of the course is to empower students to engage and explore culture, we assumed that an added option of collaboration would fit quite well.

Students were given the option to work individually or collaboratively with the following assignment: “Students will write a thesis-support essay using a theory presented in class to critique a cultural phenomenon selected by the student.” Those who chose to work collaboratively kept a journal on unit concepts and the collaborative process. The only secondary source that aided the planning and construction of our experiment was Bruffee’s article “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind.’” As you can see, both of us attacked this project blindly. For a detailed outline for our original unit, see Unit 3 assignment sheet ([Appendix A](#)). In light of what we learned from theory and student concerns (now that we are not blind), we have redesigned Unit 2 of Rhetoric and Composition 001 to reflect what we see as successful collaboration. For a complete outline of the Unit 2 collaborative structure, see [Appendix B](#).

What we learned immediately is that collaboration must be taught in the classroom as a concept in and of itself. Perhaps the problem is that teachers tend to see the mountains of theory supporting collaboration and think that collaboration is such a true phenomenon that they can implement it effortlessly in a way that will be successful. However, it is good to include an injection of realism here; as Kuralt and Haas tell us, one should be aware of potential pitfalls in order to create a good collaboration: “Collaboration is not a smooth and efficient tool that can be mastered predictably and applied without transformation to different environments” (17). We have taken Kuralt and Haas’s lead in creating our activities; what we plan for this unit is not a cure-all, but it helps ease students into the collaborative process. We hope that how we have designed this unit allows students space for conflicts that will arise, the forming of group cohesion, and what Bruffee might call “abnormal discourse.”

On many levels, this redesigned Unit 2 is a vast improvement on how we had originally implemented collaboration in Unit 3. Even though we may have initially created a collaborative assignment that was highly problematic, we were able to observe the collaboration and see how it could be improved. Inherent in our assumptions so far is the notion that writing is a social act; thus, all assignments will be collaborative on some level. However, it should be noted that some assignments may invite collaboration at the direct composition level better than others. In this, we have followed Ede and Lunsford’s exhortations that good collaborative writing assignments “call for or invite collaboration” (123) and Hillebrand’s notion that “the teacher should create a need which can best be served only through the group process” (74). Here, Unit 2 is ideal for collaboration because it focuses on competing perspectives (that may come out better in a group with divergent or even “abnormal” discourse tendencies) and research (a natural spot for division of labor). At the heart of these decisions regarding our creation of this collaborative assignment are notions of teacher control. Indeed the teacher is the one responsible for creating the conditions under which effective collaborative teams can develop; the teacher must offer plenty of “guidance” (Ede and Lunsford 123) without which students will “flounder” (Stewart 63). However, if good collaboration is really going to occur, the teacher must allow them to actually collaborate in the classroom; “lessons on strategy” should not “interrupt the business of discovery” (Hillebrand 74). This is why we have provided so many opportunities for hashing out group norms and performing group tasks in the lesson plan and activities we have provided.

While the teacher needs to offer students space to collaborate, perhaps the teacher’s most important task is to “ease student anxieties about collaborative conflict” (Kuralt and Haas 17). This is what guides our inclusion of the journal entries, online discussion board, the collaborative contract, and the things we have designed for assessment. We hope that the journal entries offer a chance for students to communicate independently with the professor about crucial information, frustrations, successes, etc. regarding the collaborative process in each group. The online discussion board gives students a place to conduct certain pieces of collaborative business without necessarily always having to meet at exactly the same time. In the future, we also intend to encourage meetings via some form of online messaging such as AOL or MSN Messenger (Please see [Appendix C](#) for an example of this). The collaborative contract offers students a chance to communicate their own expectations to their group; hopefully, this will stop many misperceptions about group roles early in the collaborative process.

Finally, in the area of assessment, we offer a caveat for students who fear a potentially uneven collaborative experience; as Hillebrand points out, teachers should not sabotage the collaborative experience through the use of an “escape clause” that lets students opt out of the project to go it alone (73). Instead, we have created something that gives students a portion of their grade that will be completely under their individual control—the journal. This crucial reflective exercise will be awarded 5 points (based on its relative merit—i.e., the amount of effort it seems the student has put forth in it) toward the 20 point paper. Receiving all the points on the journal makes it statistically possible to raise a student’s personal grade on the collaborative paper by as much as half a letter grade. We see this as a fair chance for improvement. It does not allow a student to check out of the collaborative process and still receive an excellent grade based on their individual work; however, it does reward a student who may have found themselves in a group that did not achieve a quality of work at a level to the student’s liking.

In light of what we have discussed and created for this project, we have made certain decisions regarding what we will do in future first-year English classes we teach. Below are a few suggestions as you begin thinking about including collaboration in your composition course:

Online Discussion

Students will be required to make daily, brief entries on an online discussion forum (available on Blackboard and other like programs) until they have agreed on a working research question and thesis. Students are also encouraged to do some invention brainstorming via internet instant message programs. Students may do this and submit a print-out to the instructor. Using this form of technology allows the group plenty of time to collaborate during all stages of invention. Furthermore, it offers them an alternative to classroom work and negotiating meeting times and places.

Collaborative Contract

In an effort to address possible conflicts and tension within the group, we recommend a meeting that allows students to discuss their goals and expectations freely before the project commences. In an out-of-class meeting, the group is to produce and sign a contract with the following: names, research question or thesis, plans for time and length of meetings, plans for dealing with members who miss meetings and consequences for members who contribute unequally to the project, and plans to ensure equal contribution in research, discussion, and all stages of writing process. It is also important that each member express the assignment’s priority and importance in their own academic

timeframe. It is our assumption that this process could manage any (un)foreseen problems within the group.

Reflection Journal

The purpose of the journal is to allow students to reflect upon their own collaborative experience. Our expectation is that each student will write in his or her journal on a weekly basis. Hopefully, these questions and comments will benefit group-work as well as show teachers how the process is coming along. These are private journals and will be given five points out of the possible twenty points on the paper. Also, this journal is a total free-write. In such cases, the instructor could offer prompts or guidance. Notice that a portion of the final paper grade is based on individual work—this is also important for each student to understand.

Optional Activities

- 1) Cancel class one day early in the unit. Have students meet informally over a meal. In this meeting, they must perform one or two small tasks (could involve collaborative contract or team building exercises). However, the main point is to get to know each other as a group.
- 2) Have students read Mark W.F. Condon's and Jean Anne Clyde's essay "Co-Authoring: Composing Through Conversation." After reading about possible collaborative relationships, have students write about their ideal situation and their idea of the worst-case scenario. Have students discuss in their groups and come to a consensus about which collaborative method they will use.
- 3) Students should free-write about past collaborative experiences and discuss fears, expectations, and concerns about this project. This could also be used as a team-building exercise.

Above all, we have learned that collaboration is not an exercise, it is a practice. Teachers cannot simply say, "Here, we are using collaboration" and "Here we are not using collaboration"—as social constructivists of sorts, we believe that all class processes are collaborative on some level and that teachers must keep this in mind at all stages of teaching the writing process, whether students are turning in a collaborative paper or not.

Appendices

Appendix A: Unit 3 Assignment Sheet

Academic Critique: Using Theory to Critique Pop Culture Phenomena

I. Assigned Writings

- 1 Critique Essay
- 4 Journals

II. Critique Essay Assignment

Writer's Task: "Critique" means "to evaluate." Because you cannot evaluate something unless you have *analyzed* it and *explained* it to yourself, Unit 3 builds on Units 1 and 2. For this critique assignment, select a theory from *Critical Literacies* and use it to evaluate a pop culture phenomenon of your choice.

Topic Focus: For example, you might employ Linda Seger's theory of screenwriting in "Creating the Myth" to critique *Fight Club*. Using a theory to critique a cultural phenomenon means more than simply applying the theory cookie-cutter style by saying, "Yes, Seger's theory explains my movie" or "No, her theory does not explain my movie." That move will earn you a "C." Using a theory to critique a cultural phenomenon means employing that theory to generate questions about your chosen phenomenon and then exploring those questions in depth so that your resulting paper explains, analyzes, and critiques (i.e., evaluates) your selected phenomenon. (For more details, see "Academic Critique" in *Critical Literacies*.)

Prewriting Activities: For example, if you are using Linda Seger's theory of screenwriting in "Creating the Myth" to critique *Fight Club*, use the theory to help generate questions. Ask yourself: What are the components of Seger's healing myth? Does the Edward Norton character enact all the components of this myth? Does he revise them? Does he overturn some but not others? After contemplating these questions, what can you conclude about the movie (there's your thesis). Or you might employ John Fiske's theory of TV to critique MTV or the Disney channel; or you might employ Katrina Stapleton's theory of hip-hop to critique your favorite hip-hop or rap artist.

Important: Don't let the word "theory" throw you. It is simply a set of ideas that *explains* what has happened or *predicts* what will happen *in general*. We all walk around every day with theories in our heads about how the world works—e.g., theories about how significant others should behave, theories about how to balance studying and fun at college, theories about the best way to play golf. We generate such theories to explain the world to ourselves. In turn, we use our observations and experiences in the world either to reaffirm our theories (e.g., in the midst of a successful relationship, we don't question our theory of significant others) or to revise our theories (e.g., after a bombed test, we reassess our theory of balancing study and fun). Well, every academic discipline has theories, too; e.g., Seger's film studies theory explains/predicts what happens in films; Fiske's media studies theory explains/predicts the function of TV; and Stapleton's cultural studies theory explains/predicts the function of hip-hop. The readings in Unit 3 provide theories of different popular culture phenomena (music, shopping, computer use, films, TV, etc.). These readings were selected because they are very accessible; thus, you can practice the skill of academic critique without having to wade through dense theoretical material (that can wait until you've chosen your major field of study!).

Purpose:

- To make visible our daily use of theory to evaluate our world.
- To introduce you to academic critique, i.e., using theory to generate questions about a cultural phenomenon so that you can evaluate it.

Collaborative Option:

You may write this unit's paper with a partner. If you choose to do the paper collaboratively, you must find a partner by Monday, October 25. Should you and another person agree to do this paper collaboratively, let me know ASAP. If you

would like to write the paper collaboratively, but do not have a partner, let me know ASAP so that I can try and set you up with someone else by October 25. Collaborators must do the journal assignments that are designated "Collaborators." You will receive a group grade for your paper, but you will also have an opportunity to evaluate your partner's contribution to the paper.

Rules for Collaboration:

1. All journals are individual projects. These journal entries will be kept anonymous (only I will read them while knowing your name) and will not be shared with any students in your class.
2. Meet with each other on a regular basis (in person, phone, email).
3. The final paper must be a collaborative effort.
4. All in all, only elect to participate in the collaborative option if you intend to be an *excellent* collaborator for your partner.

Audience:

Teacher and classmates who are *as informed* on the theory but *less informed* on your selected phenomenon.

Essay Grading Criteria:

1. Purpose/Audience Negotiation:

- How effectively is the topic defined and narrowed in the introduction—i.e, how well has the writer used a theory to generate questions about a selected cultural phenomenon?
- How well has the writer employed a thesis statement (as his/her stance on, or answer to, the theoretical questions generated)?
- How well does the writer address the class and the teacher as people who are *as informed* on the theory but *less informed* on the writer's selected cultural phenomenon?

2. Organization: Given the purpose and audience,

- How rhetorically effective is the organization (a) of ¶s in the paper and (b) of ideas in each ¶?
- How effective are the introduction and the conclusion?
- How well does the thesis statement organize the paper?

3. Development/Critique:

- How effective is the critique?
- How clearly are the writer's general points stated?
- How effectively employed is the evidence (e.g., details about the cultural phenomenon via summary, paraphrase, and/or quotation OR student's own reasoning)?

4. Writerly *ethos* :

- How well does the essay employ an *ethos* of student expert?

5. Readability

- How effective are the choices about sentence punctuation, subject position, parallelism, transitions, and action verbs?
- Are there any spots where sentence shape (length, punctuation, wording) interferes with meaning?
- How effective are academic citation practices: i.e., MLA parenthetical citation & Works Cited page?

Due Dates:

M 11.1 Zero-Draft

W 11.3 Peer Review Session: draft of Essay 3 due, along with author sheet and peer review sheet

F 11.4 Style Workshop: bring draft of Essay 3

M 11.8 Unit Three Portfolio due: Journals 1, 2, 3 and Essay 3 (NOTE: Include all your drafts this time; Collaborators: Include all written materials—notes, communication, drafts, etc.)

W 11.10 Journal #4 (Unit 3 Reflection) due

III. Journal Assignments:

Writer's Task and Due Dates:

These sequenced writings are intended to help you think about your essay topic so that you can revise your ideas as we proceed through the unit. If appropriate, your journals *may be incorporated into your final essay*. Each journal will be two paragraphs. Write one paragraph for each numbered prompt.

Journal #1: Prior knowledge and experience. Due: M 10.25

Everyone: What gap do you see in today's theory—i.e., what is not discussed?

*For collaborators: What experience do you have with collaborative projects in the past? Has the experience been positive or negative? What are you excited about in this collaborative assignment? What are you apprehensive about?

*For individuals: What do you find most difficult about beginning the writing process? What are you excited about regarding this unit's paper assignment? What are you apprehensive about?

Journal #2: Invention. Due: W 10.27

Everyone: List three cultural phenomena suggested by the theories we've read. Explain why one of them interests you as a topic.

*For collaborators: Have a conversation with your partner about what cultural phenomenon you will select and the theory you will use to critique the phenomenon. After discussing this, journal on how you are going about choosing your topic. Consider some of the following questions: Who is making suggestions? How do you suppose you will make decisions in your group? How is it helpful to think about your topic with another person? How is it more difficult?

* For individuals: Write about selecting your topic. What is the toughest part about deciding on a topic? What helps you decide what you will write about? Do you have any conversations with others about your topic before you write your paper? If so, do you find these to be helpful? Or do you feel the need to do all your thinking independently?

Journal #3: Process. Due F 10.29

Everyone: Generate one question from a theory that we've read (preferably the one you'll use in your final paper) and use it to discuss your topic—the pop culture phenomenon you've chosen to write about.

*For Collaborators: Describe the process you intend to use or have been using in writing this paper collaboratively (pre-writing, composition, revision, etc.). How often will you meet, where, and what will the meetings look like? What roles are each of you taking and how did you decide on these roles?

*For individuals: Describe how you will write this paper. What pre-writing strategies do you intend to use? How will you structure the time you will spend on this paper? Will you write it in pieces, or will you write it all at once? Do you write rapidly or slowly? Do you take any breaks?

Journal #4: Reflection. Due W 11.10

In order to allow adequate time and space for reflection, this one-page journal will be due the class period after the unit portfolio is due. Please choose any of these questions (you may choose a few) to write a one-page reflection. You must incorporate the bold-faced questions somewhere in your response.

For Collaborators:

-Who is the author of this paper? What does it mean to be an author?

-How did you communicate with each other? Was it effective?

-Do you and your partner deserve the same grade on the unit paper? Why or why not?

-What is the best way to assess collaboration?

-What was the most helpful/enlightening aspect of the project? Most difficult/frustrating?

-How did you resolve conflicts or differences of opinion?

-How did collaboration help/hinder your performance during brainstorming? Composing? Editing/Revising?

-How do you think this project models real life?

-Did you like sharing ownership of the project?

-Is collaboration conformity? Is this a positive or negative thing?

-What are the individual aspects of collaboration?

-Define collaboration using this experience (and comparing it to other experiences)?

-What advice would you give other collaborative groups?

For Individuals:

-Who is the author of this paper? What does it mean to be an author?

-How did your experience in class (discussions, short writings, readings, other students' opinions) inform your paper?

-What was the most helpful/enlightening aspect of the project? Most difficult/frustrating?

-Should assessment for individual work be different from assessment of collaborative work?

-How does this project model real life?

-What is your past experience with collaboration? Why did you choose to write the paper individually?

-What advice would you give other students about the writing process?

-Did you seek any additional input (besides peer review) as you thought about, wrote, and revised your paper? If so, how was it beneficial? If you did not, do you typically think that such input is helpful or unhelpful to you?

-Describe how and why you chose your topic. Did you choose what most interested you? Did you seek anyone's input on your topic?

-What kind of process did you use to write your paper? Are there any other strategies of writing your paper that you might like to try for the next unit paper? If you had the chance to completely rewrite this paper again, what might you do differently?

-How much time did you put into revision? Did you find your peer reviewer's suggestions helpful? Describe why you took certain suggestions, or why you did not take other suggestions.

Audience:

Yourself and your teacher.

Format:

Use same paper heading as for your essay.

Journal Grading Criteria:

Completed and brought to class on assigned dates for use on in-class work.

Evidence of having answered the prompts adequately.

UNIT 3 GRADE : (20 points) 20% of final course grade

The unit grade will be awarded to the final essay; *however*, journals must be completed on due dates AND turned in with Portfolio Three in order for you to receive full credit for the unit; otherwise, you may lose 1/4 (percentage) point for each journal not completed on time or included in your portfolio. (cf. Course Policy Statement for other grading policies). *Note: Journal 4 will be turned in separately from Portfolio Three, but it will have the same bearing as the other journals on your portfolio grade.*

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Appendix B: Redesigning Unit 2

Creating Groups:

Students will choose their own groups. Groups may be made up of 2-4 students.

(This offers students the chance to own the dynamics of their group somehow. We think it is important for students to have some choice here to manage the resistance they might have to collaborative assignments.)

Short Writings:

1) Bring a single document containing five topics you would be interested in researching; for each topic, write a sentence or two on why you are interested in it (1p.).

(Everyone might have some separate ideas on this, so it makes for some division of labor; however, they will need to create one document. This gets them collaborating early in the process and gives them an opportunity to get to know each other and their personal work styles. See Ede and Lunsford—division of labor; Haas and Kuralt—early time to get to know each other.)

2) Each person from your group must summarize a different source (1 p.)

(Our hope here is that their individual work will find a place in larger group goals. Furthermore, this fits Ede and Lunsford's idea that good collaborative assignments involve tasks that lend themselves to division of labor. This allows them to save some time in the source-finding process.)

3) After reporting summaries to the group, create a single document rhetorically analyzing each source.

(Our hope here is that the group starts to come to some consensus about their approach and possible research questions or thesis.)

4) The group will choose a fifth source to read, analyze, and offer a strong response to. Create a single document responding strongly as one "seamless" voice.

(Choosing a fifth source will not only create more research, but it will also force them to create a consensus, as students will have to negotiate differing opinions, find common ground, while still maintaining some sort of unified ethos. This activity most closely resembles the final paper.)

Collaborative Contract:

**Include the following:

-Names

-Research question (or working thesis)

-Plans for time and length of meetings

-Each student expresses the assignment's priority and importance in their own academic calendar and time frame

-Plans for dealing with members who miss meetings

-Plans to ensure equal contribution in research, discussions, and at all stages of the writing process

-Consequences for unequal contributions

**This must be signed by all group members and teacher by Day 3 or 4.

Reflection Journal:

Students will write in this journal on a weekly basis. Each week must amount to at least one page of text. The prompts for this journal are generally openended: students may free-write about questions about collaboration, frustrations, successes, group process, leadership, roles, consensus, dissensus, goals, etc. On occasion, the teacher will provide certain prompts. These are private journals, and will be given five points out of the possible twenty points on the paper.

(The purpose of the journal is to allow students to reflect upon their own collaborative experience. This is crucial to a

good collaboration. Hopefully, these questions and comments from students will benefit group work as well as show teachers how the process is coming along. It also gives them independent control over a portion of their work.)

Readings/In-class activities (a representative day in Unit 2): Unit 2 Lesson Plan

Objectives:

- Students will discuss and define issues of authorship as it pertains to "Lesson's Learned" by Malcolm X (with Alex Haley).
- Students will be introduced to the concept of authorship as it pertains to their paper.

Lesson:

Authorship

1. Freewrite: Who is the author of this essay? Justify your answer.
2. In the collaborative groups, discuss members' answers to the question. Come up with either a consensus or a way to express differing opinions or competing perspectives in your group.
3. Students write independently: Who will be the author of your paper? [This will allow the teacher to trouble-shoot misconceptions of authorship. What drives our project is the idea that writing is a social act.]
4. In the collaborative groups, discuss members' answers to the question. Come up with either a consensus or a way to express differing opinions of competing perspectives in your group.

Rhetorical situation—give each collaborative pair a magazine advertisement to analyze.

1. In groups, students must answer the following sets of questions: a. How does this ad appeal to authority (Writer/Ethos)? How does it appeal to emotion (Audience/Pathos)? How does it appeal to an external logic that it presents (Text/Logos/Word)? b. What does this ad and its appeal say about the culture in which it is created? c. What information is omitted?
2. Students must decide how to verbally present their findings about their ad(s) to the class.
3. After presentations, the teacher asks groups how they decided who would present to the class. [This allows teachers to troubleshoot potential role and power issues in groups early on.]

Brainstorming possible topics

1. Using SW #1, students will narrow their list of topics down to at least 2.
2. The teacher will spend time observing groups. [This gives the teacher a chance to see the collaborative groups in their decision-making process.]

Online Discussion:

Students will be required to make daily, brief entries on an online discussion forum (available through Blackboard or other program) until they have agreed on a working research question and thesis. Students are also encouraged to do some invention brainstorming via internet instant messenger programs. Students may do this and submit a print out.

(This allows them plenty of time to collaborate at the invention stage. Furthermore, it offers them another place to have interaction.)

Other readings/activities:

- A pre-collaborative exercise: Cancel class one day early in Unit 2. Have students meet informally over a meal, coffee, etc.—something involving food. In this meeting, they must perform one or two small tasks (selecting a topic, setting meeting times). However, the main point is to get to know each other as a group.
- A pre-collaborative exercise: In their collaborative groups, students must answer these questions: What worries you most or what concerns do you have about working with this group on this assignment? How would this team function if everything went just as you hoped? How would this team function if everything went wrong? What actions do you think must be taken to ensure positive outcomes? (Dyer 131). Students will write their own responses to these questions; each individual will share these with the group. As a group, they must discuss what they see as the most crucial concerns and the best forms of action.
- "Co-Authoring: Composing Through Conversation" by Mark W.F. Condon and Jean Anne Clyde (Summary of Article). After reading the possible relationships, have students write individually about what is the ideal situation and what is the worst-case situation. Have students discuss in their groups and come to a consensus about which collaborative method they will use.
- Have students respond to different theories of collaboration. Teachers place a quote overhead and allow students to free-write. ("Collaborative writing is like having another self" [Pennisi and Lawler 226] or "The pervasive common sense assumption [in Western Society is that] writing is inherently and necessarily a solitary, individual act" [Ede/Lundsford 5]). A discussion of the quote forces collaborative team to analyze their own process and goals for future meetings.
- Students should free-write past experiences with collaboration. This can allow the teacher to trouble shoot or address any concerns or anxieties

Unit Paper:

- Single Document
- 4-5 pages.
- Assessment: Single grade (20 pts); 5 of these points are awarded individually for the reflection journal.

[\[return to text\]](#)

This brief excerpt of a 14-page, hour-long online conversation explores possible online venues for group invention, process, and reflection. Also, this type of conversation allows for a more social and informal way to construct ideas and group norms. Instant messaging could also foster a more conducive environment for abnormal discourse. Most students are more willing to write conflicting ideas rather than speak them in person. The point here is that teachers should incorporate multiple discourses for collaborative conversation. Finally, our students are doing this anyway on a nightly basis, so why not use this new technology in the classroom.

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

because.....i think it went pretty well.....i'm wondering exactly what you think about it.....

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

and....

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

we could discuss how our similar backgrounds might have informed it

Jake says:

I think it went well, too

Jake says:

but I'm really anxious for the peer review

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

i know you've had a lot of thoughts on that

Jake says:

we need a lot of revision

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

yes....we definitely do

Jake says:

ok background

Jake says:

We see the world through the same Protestant lens

Jake says:

so

Jake says:

that helps with decreasing the importance of the individual

Jake says:

a little humility thank you

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

yeah.....especially the reformed branch of our protestant backgrounds

Jake says:

right

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

we've kind of been told from a young age that life isn't all about the individual

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

and so maybe we're a bit more ready to accept the idea that the individual author is a construct.....

Jake says:

but that each individual is vital for the whole

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

and that.....there's nothing new under the sun.....that it's all social knowledge

Jake says:

just like Paul talked about

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

yes

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

true

Jake says:

the leg does the leg thing

Jake says:

and the arm does the arm thing

Jake says:

but it's all for the body

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

different roles....creating a unified whole

Jake says:

we both bring certain things to collaboration to create a unified whole

Jake says:

I think I brought organization (like my many outlines)

matt_vanzee@hotmail.com says:

definitely

Jake says:

you certainly brought the ability to attack the computer with composition [\[return to text\]](#)

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Jacob Stratman is Assistant Professor of English at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas where he teaches American Literature and Composition. His research interests include pedagogy, American reform literature, and teaching writing/literature for social justice. During this collaborative process, Matt accused Jake of only eating bananas while Matt worked laboriously at the computer.

Matthew Van Zee teaches 7th and 8th grade English in Blaine, MN. Is that enough? I could say things like: "He enjoys wake-surfing, eating at White Castle, and tutoring Somalis in the Franklin Avenue neighborhood." I could throw in: "His wife makes delicious chocolate chip cookies. If you ever become a friend of his, you can have one." For another, more current thing: "He was recently fitted for a three-piece suit." Then there is always: "He is experiencing first-hand what a joy it is to sell a home in the current real estate market." For a more positive spin: "He is rediscovering the magic of the Olympics." Or: "He enjoys reading G.K. Chesterton."

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