ABSTRACT
        A college English professor explores her pedagogical
development as she recognizes her process-oriented teacher-centered pedagogy
and considers a new philosophy incorporating a more student-centered teaching
style introduced to her during graduate studies. Using teaching experience to
reflect on the construction of teaching practice, she studies how basic
writing teachers construct their pedagogy. Graduate research led her to
believe that in order for teachers to be successful they need to figure out
ways to adapt intellectually appealing writing theories and practices to
their own deeply felt beliefs about teaching, learning, and writing. Focusing
on the role she plays in the classroom, she set up a process of
investigation. Her entertaining style of teaching, she began to realize,
would prevent students from learning on their own. Finding the tools to
change is easier than changing her teaching style. By accepting her own
personality qualities, she was able to adapt the lessons learned from
experience to the theories and ideas she learned from training and
scholarship. Reflecting on her activity-obsessed personality, she realized
that not everyone needs what she needs to be happy and feel successful; this
might actually inhibit students' growth process and development. (SC)

Turning the Researcher Gaze Inward: Where Does
My Pedagogy Come From?

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"Turning the Researcher Gaze Inward: Where Does My Pedagogy Come From?"

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In May of 1997 I had what I thought was a rather bright idea: it would be good to

practice what I preach. I preach about a great numbers of things, but what I was thinking

about specifically is encouraging practicing teachers to engage in guided, even systematic,

reflection on their own teaching practices. So, I thought, I should do it myself. I ought to

go beyond that casual reflecting that we all do: in the few minutes between classes, when

we read a student or colleague evaluation, and even when we're planning and preparing

our courses. I thought this was such a splendid, if simple, idea—and something that isn't

done enough—that I talked my friends Anne Herrington and Phoebe Jackson into putting

together a panel for this conference. We had each had experiences which gave us vehicles

through which we might re-see what it is that we do. Naturally I pointed this out to

Anne and Phoebe. Anne, I said, you've been talking to me about your experiences at the

University of Cape Town, telling me how the ways these teachers were conceptualizing

and valuing writing and teaching writing made you realize how your values and

conceptions are rooted in your personal, historical and cultural context. Why not use that

experience to reflect on the construction of your teaching practice? Phoebe, I said, you've

got it easy: as a research participant in my study of how basic writing teachers construct

their pedagogy, you have the advantage of reading a whole chapter—my chapter—on

how another person—that would be me—sees you. What better tool is there than that?

And remember how all through the research project you said, this is wonderful; this is

really giving me a great opportunity to think about my teaching. Well, now you have a chance to put it all down on paper. Without too much persuading, Anne and Phoebe bought my argument and agreed.

As is probably the case for most of you who are giving papers this week, our ideas that were so exciting last May began to look peaked in February, pretty horrible by mid-March, and just plain old embarrassing by late March. As Phoebe and Anne and I have commiserated, long distance, this last month I think I have heard all of us say that what is particularly uncomfortable this year, in writing this paper, is that we are writing about ourselves. We don't have something to turn our gaze to—an external text, a public debate, or, in Anne's case and mine, another person's writing or teaching. We're comfortable analyzing phenomena that lies outside of ourselves because, I think, studying someone else or some other thing both seems more valid—and I might argue is seen to be more valid—and therefore feels more worthwhile. Finally, for me, anyway, studying myself as a teacher is a little depressing. It's hard not to see the flaws, the holes, the bad practice.

But I've procrastinated enough: here I go.

To start I should explain the theory of pedagogical development that I am working from, and I believe my co-presenters, Phoebe Jackson and Anne Herrington, are working from too. In my doctoral research, completed in 1996, I did a qualitative study examining how three teachers "constructed" their own pedagogies. I wanted to discover how each of these teacher's' practice was formed, and what relationship existed between what they had learned from the process-oriented training they had received, and similar milieu in

which they worked, and the lessons they had learned about teaching from their own

personal experiences; in other words, to use the authors of the feminist study, *Women's*

Ways of Knowing's terms, I wanted to see how these teachers integrated the knowledge

gained from external sources with that gained from internal sources. My research suggests

that when we are in the classroom we carry with us powerful histories that need to be

reckoned with, and accommodated for, within the theories that we actively choose to

about such gatherings as this, and which we then go back to our classrooms with the

intention of enacting. What I found was that for these teachers to be successful they

needed to figure out ways to adapt intellectually appealing writing theories and practices

to their own deeply felt beliefs about teaching, learning, and writing—beliefs that came

from knowledge they had received outside the professional environment.

So now it's time for me to explore where my teaching comes from, how the

process-oriented training I've received and endorse has gelled with the sometimes

contradictory, sometimes complementary, knowledge I gained long before I "learned how

to teach" formally, in 1989 when I became a TA and graduate student of composition at

the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

The process I went through t uncover some of the roots of my pedagogical

practice, and to investigate the ways in which these roots reflect contradictions and

compromises between experiential, personal knowledge and knowledge gained from

scholarship and training, I set up a process of investigation, a set of steps to follow.

First, to simplify things, I decided that I would just focus on the role I play in the

classroom. Then, without looking at other material, I spent some time writing about

myself, trying simply to describe the role I see myself playing as a writing teacher. Next, to gain some external perspective, I went back through other people's observations of my practice—observations of supervisors when I was a graduate student, colleagues at my current institution, and students' written comments on end-of-the year anonymous evaluations. Soon I had two long lists of descriptions about myself—descriptions generated by others, and also the descriptions I had generated myself. From these two sets of descriptions emerged several reoccurring teacher-role themes, and from them I was able to see a consistent pattern: I am a teacher of enormous energy who is very task-oriented, keeping students active and busy pretty much all the time. Now, before I went on to an analysis, I thought and thought about the non-theoretical origins of my practice. I thought and wrote about my most deeply held beliefs about teaching and looked for experiences and other internally-derived explanations for these beliefs. Second, I put on another hat, and thought about what I've learned from my training, reading, and general immersion in process-oriented teaching pedagogy, and identified which "lessons" from this external world had really impacted my practice. So now, armed with two sets of data about where my formation of a teacher role might have "come" from, I was ready to do an analysis of some of the ways that my pedagogy is "constructed" from an integration of knowledge I have gained from theory with my own beliefs and educational experiences, all set on the backdrop of a self with particular personal and structural identities.

Like many who go to graduate school straight from college, I was introduced to composition theory through my Writing Program's training sessions, faculty-led workshops, and my own reading as I was also teaching first-year English. When I started

to learn about what process-oriented teaching was all about, I realized that what I thought was my greatest asset—my ability to entertain—was not going to be an asset in this program. I had assumed teaching was sort of like stage-work-with supplementary texts and not quite choreographed questions from the audience, I mean, students. Of course this is what I had seen done by all of the most popular teachers at the small college I had gone to. As students, we all loved the entertaining ones. And I did want to be loved, and to be popular. All this is to say that before going to that first day of training in late August of 1989, I though I had it made: I was, I knew, pretty entertaining. But as I began my training in composition I came to believe what I believe I was being told, that all this entertaining would prevents students from learning on their own, from becoming active learners rather than passive learners, writers instead of listeners. Keeping quiet was a value I took on from my trainers and from what I read, but had much greater trouble implementing. What on earth, I thought, am I going to do instead of talk?

Process theory gave me some tools: and so I turned from the all-talk model I had anticipated into the part-talk, part-activity model. Activities, I thought, would make me into the student-centered teacher I wanted to be! And to some extent it did: I did lots of in-class writing—free writes, what Charlie Moran calls "quick-writes" on teacher or student chosen topics, Peter Elbow's "loop exercises," Elbow and Belanoff's peer responding exercises, Toby Fulwiler's journaling, and on and on. What I couldn't do, I found, was figure out how to shut up when I was one on one with students—either in person, or in that conversation that occurs when reading and responding to their essays. And this really troubled me. I read Donald Murray's *A Writer Teaches Writing* and his

well-known article, "The Listening Eye" and heard him saying, loud and clear: what you, the teacher, say and do, is usually to the detriment of students. Shut up and keep out of their way. More precisely, Murray says, "If we create a way for our students to write with a minimum of prior instruction (our instruction often causes bad writing no matter how well-intention it is) we may find ways to help our students to respond to and improve their own drafts...so they will become effective readers and writers of their own prose" (*A Writer Teaches Writing*, xiii). In the "Listening Eye" Murray writes of the ingredients of the most successful writing conferences: a self-directed, talking, reading student and a silent, smiling? teacher. The real work is done by students, working alone, or maybe with peers, on their writing. Murray's quintessential "de-centered" teaching is the result, he explains, of a slow progression away from the teacher-centered teaching he used to do when he stood behind a lectern: "Each year I teach less and less, and my students seem to learn more and more. I guess what I've learned to do is stay out of their way and not to interfere with their learning" (233). Oh, how this article has plagued me! He sounded so right, and I do buy what he has to say, but I just can't seem to make this happen. The only time I am silent in a conference is when my student is reading her essay, or when I'm waiting for her to answer one of my questions (I have learned to wait.)

Should we conclude then, that I am just a hopelessly teacher-centered teacher who doesn't allow for student-led learning, or expression? Let's look to the "data"—the descriptions others have offered—to answer this question.

Observers from all three groups consistently note my strong presence, and that I have a lot to say. A supervisor notes, "From everything I could see Emily has established herself as a strong force in the classroom, someone the students listen to and learn from." (Carey). And, also from a supervisor, "Emily's style is…fraught with energy and exhileration. She talks a bit fast for me, but obviously not for her students, and her staccato pace obviously keeps them alert and active" (Carey). Students frequently used the word "fun" to describe me, as in "She was fun and that made class that [much] more interesting" (Z). Another writes, "She adds spice to our class." (U)

But there's something else there, or at least students are seeing something else. This very same personality seems to get students to open up, to talk and write more, to push further. This is actually pretty consistently commented on. A sampling: "My instructor encouraged me to write… She made me feel better about msyelf and my writing" (Q). "Emily s down to earth and one of 'us.'…In other words, I was not a pion, but someone with good ideas." "Oftentimes there have been times throughout the course when I needed an extra little spark to keep my ideas flowing, and she always knew what to say." (A).

In some ways these comments don't surprise me (and yes, they do please me), as in my life before and outside the classroom I have had a similar effect on people. Although everyone who knows me sees me as a big talker, people also open up to me. Members of my family, friends, and colleagues turn to me with confidences. For years I've heard, "I haven't told anybody that." So I guess I've found a way to make my talkative ways work within a student-centered pedagogy. Rather, I think, in some ways

what I learned from my life pre-teaching really was not just about talking to entertain and get attention, but also that talking is a way to make others feel comfortable enough to open up and take risks.

So this is the happy story of how by coming to accept one of my own qualities, I was able to adapt the lessons learned from experience to the theories and ideas I learned from training and scholarship. I note that it's a slso a story of how perhaps a student-centered theory can get reified into an overly simplistic set of procedures, implicitly encouraging new teachers to take on specific practices and roles rather than invent ways to enact pedagogical ideals.

Briefly I want to draw attention to another feature that was repeatedly remarked upon by my observers, and this is a trait that I find more problematic. It seems I am activity-obsessed, and that these activities don't always strike observers as purposeful or useful. A colleague writes, "things are moving a little too fast... She seems to be going somewhere and in a hurry to get there. This lends to a certain intensity to the discussion" (Whitney). Several students request that I slow down, as in, "I believe my instructor needs to slownn down the rate at which assignments are given" (T) and, "more would probably be accomplished if we spent more time on each essay," and "I think she sould relax a little and slow down. She sometimes gets ahead of herself." And, finally, "Give up on the unexplained cheerfulness. Talks too much during class sometimes, and I cannot get my work done." Finally, consistently I read of requests for fewer non-essay assingments: letters, "guided" responses to reading, peer review checklists, self-assessments, etc.

I know why I'm in such a rush: I have so much I have to get through. So why do I do this? What is wrong with me? My students are on to something: I can just see myself running around like mad before class, or when planning a unit, thinking, they've got to be doing something during the second half of Tuesday's class. There must be some PROOF of revision, of successful peer talk, of thoughtful reading; they must have something due everyday or they're going to fall behind; they must have steps, rules, procedures. How embarrassing. This isn't what I've learned from process writing scholarship. Activities are suggested, but I'm a little nutty about this. Why?

I've never been able to cope with unstructured time. As a kid I didn't do homework, I wrote papers the night before, and all through this I hated myself. I hated myself for being such a procrastinator, and therefore, in my eyes, such an awful person. I carry these behaviors and attitudes around me to this day. Sure, I have developed some strategies to better cope with this problem, but it's still one of my most hated qualities. Last summer was my first summer without a job, without a dissertation director, and weeks upon weeks of that "research time" that we all crave. It was a nightmare. I lay in my bed, I played computer games, I watched a lot of TV, I read novels, and primarily I just hated myself. Okay, I'll admit, I did write a little, but oh, so very little! But by a long shot, this was not a productive summer, or just importantly for me, not a happy one.

What I've learned from my own experiences is that unstructured time is dangerous, unproductive and emotionally damaging. From these deeply painful experiences with unstructured time I've created for my students an environment where, I

think, there is no way they can be unproductive and so there is no way they can feel bad about themselves. Sounds good? No. The great error that I've committed is not an uncommon one: I've generalized to a broad range of learners and writers from the experience of one. I have to learn that they are not all younger Emily's; they have identities of their own, complete with work habits, ways of learning, ways of writing, and ways of organizing their lives. And, for those who are like me, creating a crutch to get them through my class won't do them much good in the long run. They need to develop strategies to cope with their problems with unstructured time; they need to be in control of their own education just as I need to be in control of my own.

I hope my conclusion is implicit, but I'll say this about the value I see in this process: in order to transform our pedagogies (or others'), we need to understand our existing pedagogy as practice that comes from experiences and beliefs as much as it comes from external sources of scholarship and training. In addition, I hope that by reading myself as a teacher from both theoretical and experiential perspectives, I have told another story of pedagogical "construction."

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