Teacher Training in the Contact Zone

Wendy Swyt

In his College English essay "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone," Richard E. Miller uses a student paper describing the harassment of a gay man and vicious beating of a homeless person in order to address an important question: "what exactly are we to say or do when the kind of racist, sexist, and homophobic sentiments now signified by the term 'hate speech' surface in our classrooms?" (391). As part of his answer, Miller calls on Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone," a social space "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (34). In his essay, the contents of the student's paper and the circumstances surrounding it emerge in successive fragments because Miller deliberately withholds "vital contextual information" in order to replicate what he calls "the partial, hesitant, contradictory motion [that] defines how business gets transacted in the contact zones of our classrooms and our conferences" (391).

At each stage of the essay as we learn a bit more about the details of the student and his paper, we are confronted with the question, "what would you do?" First we learn about the student's essay, "Queers, Bums, and Magic." In response to an assignment on group behavior, a student described his trip to San Francisco to study "the lowest class . . . the queers and the bums" where he and a group of friends harassed a gay man and ended up in an alley kicking a homeless man (Miller 392). Then we learn that the instructor who received the essay is gay, making the paper a challenge to the authority of an openly gay instructor and possibly an act of gay bashing itself. Finally, we learn that the student writer grew up in Kuwait, English was his second language, and he wrote the paper during the Gulf War.

The student paper and its circumstances provide a powerful portrait of the challenges of diversity in our college writing classrooms. As Miller notes, after this student paper was mentioned in a 1991 MLA workshop on "Composition, Multiculturalism, and Political Correctness," two other panels addressing the paper followed at the 1992 and 1993 CCCC. In effect, this student essay became an occasion of teacher training for the instructors who discussed it in heated debates at national conferences and for those of us who read Miller's article.

The question that I pose is this: does the strategy by which Miller presents the student's essay offer the best way of training teachers, specifically new composition TAs, about issues of diversity and conflict in the classroom? Should we be replicating the fragmented, decontextualized presentation that Miller describes as patterned after "the contact zone of national conferences" (391)?

Test scenarios like the one that Miller describes are often used in training workshops to allow teachers to rehearse questions of practice and to put peda-

Teacher Training in the Contact Zone

Wendy Swyt

In his *College English* essay "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone," Richard E. Miller uses a student paper describing the harassment of a gay man and vicious beating of a homeless person in order to address an important question: "what exactly are we to say or do when the kind of racist, sexist, and homophobic sentiments now signified by the term 'hate speech' surface in our classrooms?" (391). As part of his answer, Miller calls on Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone," a social space "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (34). In his essay, the contents of the student's paper and the circumstances surrounding it emerge in successive fragments because Miller deliberately withholds "vital contextual information" in order to replicate what he calls "the partial, hesitant, contradictory motion [that] defines how business gets transacted in the contact zones of our classrooms and our conferences" (391).

At each stage of the essay as we learn a bit more about the details of the student and his paper, we are confronted with the question, "what would you do?" First we learn about the student's essay, "Queers, Bums, and Magic." In response to an assignment on group behavior, a student described his trip to San Francisco to study "the lowest class . . . the queers and the bums" where he and a group of friends harassed a gay man and ended up in an alley kicking a homeless man (Miller 392). Then we learn that the instructor who received the essay is gay, making the paper a challenge to the authority of an openly gay instructor and possibly an act of gay bashing itself. Finally, we learn that the student writer grew up in Kuwait, English was his second language, and he wrote the paper during the Gulf War.

The student paper and its circumstances provide a powerful portrait of the challenges of diversity in our college writing classrooms. As Miller notes, after this student paper was mentioned in a 1991 MLA workshop on "Composition, Multiculturalism, and Political Correctness," two other panels addressing the paper followed at the 1992 and 1993 CCCC. In effect, this student essay became an occasion of teacher training for the instructors who discussed it in heated debates at national conferences and for those of us who read Miller's article.

The question that I pose is this: does the strategy by which Miller presents the student's essay offer the best way of training teachers, specifically new composition TAs, about issues of diversity and conflict in the classroom? Should we be replicating the fragmented, decontextualized presentation that Miller describes as patterned after "the contact zone of national conferences" (391)?

Test scenarios like the one that Miller describes are often used in training workshops to allow teachers to rehearse questions of practice and to put peda-

gogical lore to critical use. In a recent WPA article, Anson, Jolliffe and Shapiro promote the use of narrative accounts as case studies in order to address "the growing importance of weaving together both theory and practice" (24). These accounts, they claim, transform "some thorny general issue" into pedagogical questions that are "real and tangible" for teacher training discussions (24).

I agree with Anson, Jolliffe and Shapiro, but I think we need to be careful about how such "real life" stories are used in our TA training sessions. Although this method can provide a valuable opportunity for new TAs to rehearse their responses, I want to argue that the "contact zones" that Miller describes, places where a pedagogical account emerges in a fragmented, decontextualized manner, might not be the most productive sites for discussing diversity and authority. In order to illustrate some of the risks in the "real life scenario" approach, I will examine an incident in which the use of scenarios was not effective. In the second half of the essay I suggest a training strategy, informed by Patricia Bizzell's proposal for a multicultural rhetoric, that might replace or complement a decontextualized scenario approach. Finally, I explore how the unsuccessful training session and my alternative provide insights about TA training and about diversity and authority in the writing classroom.

"Diversity Day"

At the university where I teach, a tactic similar to Miller's presentation of the homophobic student paper has been used during training for new teaching assistants in the expository writing program. During a two week orientation held before classes begin, TAs discuss the assignments they will use for English 101 and the pedagogical issues that might emerge in a writing classroom. This training is conducted by the director of the expository writing program, a faculty assistant, and three graduate students who serve as both trainers and mentors for new TAs.

Part of this orientation has included a workshop that TAs have come to call "Diversity Day." In this workshop, new teaching assistants discuss issues of diversity in the classroom using sample scenarios. When they receive a scenario, TAs divide into small groups, discuss the situation and possible solutions, and then report back to a larger group discussion. The motivations for this exercise are varied. For the director of the expository writing program, the reasons are primarily legal. He wants to make sure that teaching assistants are aware of the importance of diversity in their classrooms, especially conflicts that might result in harassment complaints. Other considerations are practical: to get TAs thinking about how conflicts might affect their classrooms in concrete situations and allow them to "practice" their responses. And, finally, there is also somewhat of a consciousness raising agenda.

During one Diversity Day session, TAs encountered several situations. For example, they were asked to respond to a scene where a male student approaches the teacher and asks if she discriminates against the Greeks because he belongs to a fraternity and will drop the course if she does. How will the

teacher respond? In another, the teacher is faced with a quiet Asian female student. How will the instructor encourage this student to participate? In the situation that produced the most heated debate, a student walks into the classroom wearing a T-shirt that reads "Homophobic and proud of it."

Although there was conflict around all of the situations, the last one provoked intense debate. Several suggestions emerged in the large group discussion: 1) Take the student aside privately and ask him not to wear it again; 2) In front of the class, require him to leave; 3) Take the student aside and tell him: "I find that offensive. . . . Don't wear it in my class;" 4) Ignore it, and wait for an opportunity to call the student on behavior related to his written performance. The discussion quickly polarized. Several instructors felt strongly that making an example of the student would create an unsafe environment in the class and even risk violating the student's freedom of speech. Some instructors felt that to take the student aside would be to privatize an issue that, as an act of discursive violence, should instead be publicly recognized. Two TAs explained that as gay instructors, they could not and would not tolerate it. Other instructors thought that these positions were unreasonable. It was a charged debate that ended pretty much in a standoff.

Many of the people involved in this "Diversity Day" incident—both TAs and trainers—left the training session upset by the conflict that had occurred. After the session, the people who participated described feelings that ranged from "silenced" and "angry" to "threatened," "exposed" and "frightened." Although like bell hooks, I think a discussion about differences should not be a conversation in which everyone comes away in agreement, feeling happy and united, I think the discomfort surrounding this training was not necessarily productive.

Though it might have served as a creative way to rehearse pedagogical decisions, the "Diversity Day" approach did not move the TAs to a constructive interrogation of conflict, authority and accountability in their assignments and classrooms. The approach risks creating a "talk show" discussion of teaching, centered primarily around the immediate emotionally charged question: "what would you do?" The rhetorical stance that this method invites is suggestive of the questions that begin the more popular talk shows: "What if you found out that your husband had been married to two other women? What if you found out that he was still married to two other women? Well, on our show today are two women...." Promoting controversy for the sake of controversy, these situations often become forums for the presentation of personal opinion characterized by their lack of preparation or reflection. Rather than allowing participants to clarify their positions and observations, the use of such scenarios can privilege a decontextualized emotive performance that forecloses critical analysis and shared discourse. Although the "Diversity Day" conflict didn't move to the extremes that we might see on an episode of the Ricki Lake show, the problems that emerged with this training strategy strongly resemble the limitations of the talk show forum.

The training session that I have described erased important contextual information and produced what one TA described as "highly essentialized situations." Difference was articulated as deviance so that all interpretations and explanations were read through the foregrounded difference. With all contextual factors reduced to "quiet Asian female," the identity of the student in the scenario became highly one dimensional and stigmatized. Such scenarios that encode unchallenged stereotypes like "silent Asian female" also implied on some level that the teacher was white and facing a problem with the recalcitrant Other. A TA that I spoke to argued, I think correctly, that what really needed to be questioned was the scenarios that were presented. As one of the graduate trainers reflected after the training incident, "this kind of training treated students as problems that we must fix with the right technique."

The approach also leaves the teacher's position unquestioned so that, as with the talk show, responses are framed in ways that erase the speaker's position. While the scenarios reductively describe who the student is, the implied teacher becomes a cipher, a blank in the pedagogical story. As one TA said, "Rather than questioning, 'What are my goals, how does my presence as a white woman from an upper middle class background, a lesbian and a Jew produce a specific teaching environment?,' I was supposed to solve the problem." Yet at the same time, the TA responses to the scenarios become highly personalized. The same TA explained to me, "I felt like I was asked to simultaneously ignore where my response was coming from and at same time validate my response by coming out." In the ritual space of the sample scenario, some subjectivities are highly politicized and personalized while others remain passive. As with a segment of the Oprah show, some of us may ultimately shut off the T.V. and breath a sigh of relief that it hasn't happened to us.

Beyond creating static roles for both student and teacher, the way that these scenarios are often used for training TAs suggests a problematic division between form and content in composition pedagogy. In other words, the content of diversity is separated from the strategies for teaching writing, a division indicated by the way that TAs sardonically nicknamed the training "Diversity Day" as though it was a Hallmark holiday. The diversity workshop existed separately from sessions on writing assignments, responding to student papers, conferencing, and grading. This separation and the scenarios that were used suggested that diversity was a matter of student behavior modification. In a writing course, incidents of homophobia and struggles over authority are more likely to involve interactions with student essays than our judgments of their clothing. The man with the T-shirt, the quiet student, and the fraternity member all suggest a struggle with student selves as problems to resolve rather than as the dissension inherent in classroom practice.

Rhetorical Contact Zones

In place of or perhaps in preface to a scenario approach, I'd like to suggest another way to bring the "contact zone" into TA training. My strategy is

much influenced by Patricia Bizzell's discussion of multicultural rhetoric in the composition classroom. Rather than teaching composition as the transmission of contextless tools or skills, Bizzell argues that in order to teach students to become "effective communicators in a multicultural democracy," the writing course should focus on rhetorical strategies developed around "experiences of negotiating differences at various moments in American History" ("Theories" 8, 9). Here she suggests that we organize course materials "around historical moments that present what Mary Louise Pratt calls 'contact zones' where cultures meet, struggle and mingle" ("Theories" 8). With personal and academic essays from different rhetorical locations, she proposes that students examine the variety of discourse situations that a multicultural democracy presents, an idea that she has also discussed in a recent issue of WPA. (See Shamoon, Schwegler, Trimbur, and Bizzell, "New Rhetoric.")

In her own course at Holy Cross, Bizzell assembled materials about the debate in antebellum America surrounding the assertion in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." Students in her course contrasted selections from European American defenders and African American attackers of slavery in order to examine the different rhetorical uses of the Declaration and how each writer engaged with other arguments.

Rather than replicating the fragmented, decontextualized "contact zone" that Miller describes and mimics in the structure of his essay, I propose that we bring Bizzell's notion of a rhetorical "contact zone" to our teacher training occasions. Instead of "a student walks into class wearing a T-shirt saying 'homophobic and proud of it'—what would you do?", we might offer clusters of essays that depict some of the complex negotiations of difference in the writing classroom. The first four are a group of that I've given to TAs who have expressed interest in the issue of sexuality in the classroom:

- "'So What Do We Do Now': Necessary Directionality as the Writing Teacher's Response to Racist, Sexist, Homophobic Papers." David Rothgery argues that with the antifoundational movement we lose sight of the "necessary directionality for the human condition and the condition of the planet we inhabit—that of alleviating human suffering." From this foundational truth, he argues, we can judge student responses that are homophobic, racist, and sexist.
- "Lesbian Instructor Comes Out: The Personal is Pedagogy." Janet Wright describes the act of coming out to her class as a strategy aligned with her feminist critical pedagogy—her self-disclosure, she claims, opens the possibility for "sane, connected, respectful, critical dialogue" with students.
- "Homophobia and Sexism as Popular Values." David Bleich describes the many violently homophobic responses that he received in response to an assignment about sexuality in a college expository writing class and demonstrates the manner in which sexism underscores the homophobia in his students' language.

"Breaking the Silence: Sexual Preference in the Composition Classroom."

An essay by the six teaching assistants (Berg, et al.) who worked with Bleich. As straight-identified teachers, they examine the heterosexual bias built into the assignment question that they used and how it actually provoked the homophobic responses that they received.

What I like about this group of essays is the different experiences and rhetorical stances that each presents. But they are similar in their arguments against the expression of homophobia in the classroom. In order to create a contact zone in Bizzell's terms, I complicate this collection with additional essays:

- "Diversity, Ideology and Teaching Writing." The controversial essay in which Maxine Hairston argues that in many first year writing programs, dogma often comes before diversity and politics before craft.
- "Johnny's Interview." An ethnographic essay written by a student who interviewed a friend about what it was like to grow up gay and combined this material with research on gay teenagers and homophobia.
- "Gays and the Military Just Don't Mix." An editorial written by a student who argues that "gays and perverts" should not be allowed in the armed forces.

And finally, I'd add Miller's "Fault Lines" piece. I recommend that we use these essays in a training session with an approach that is similar to Bizzell's proposal for undergraduate writing courses. To have TAs examine their positions in relation to such a collection would produce a more productive session than "Diversity Day" workshops. Part of this examination should include an opportunity for TAs to write themselves into a specific position on classroom conflicts. As a writing instructor, I've found that undergraduates often take extreme, dogmatic positions in papers because "they are the easiest to argue," as one student confided to me. A discussion of the rhetorical complexities of location and authority in writing and how to teach this in writing courses is, I think, especially important for TA training. From this exchange, new instructors might discuss how their theoretical investments play out in practical contexts, using a case study approach.

Instead of the talk show format of "Diversity Day," the strategy that I propose *begins* by examining how we create positions for ourselves in the classroom politically, personally, historically and rhetorically. In *Critical Teaching and The Idea of Literacy*, C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon explain that "Critical Teaching begins . . . not with a power struggle over preferable readings, but with the reading of those readings, contextualized by the life experiences of those who produced them" (62). Although Knoblauch and Brannon are referring to ways of encouraging undergraduates to reflect back on their own interpretations, I think their argument could and should be applied to a consideration of our positions as teachers around issues of diversity.

For example, new instructors might explore how David Rothgery's assertions of a foundational truth that "lies in that *groping* beyond the imprison-

ment of our situatedness" (246) are problematized by Janet Wright's feminist claims to empowerment and critical pedagogy through situated knowledge. Hairston's essay challenges the very subject of both works. Have we, as she charges, put "dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student" (180)? New TAs should consider the theoretical and political investments that shape their own responses to these issues. I am not advocating pedagogical pluralism as the goal of teacher training. Instead, I am suggesting that, for example, new instructors who agree with Hairston that politics don't belong in the classroom could see how a range of rhetorical positions politicizes the very stance that they adopt.

Another difference between my proposal and the "Diversity Day" approach is that it places the content of diversity directly in relation to teaching writing classes, classes about language and rhetoric. How do the ways that we assign and respond to student papers inherently shape our approaches to diversity and our claims to rhetorical authority as teachers? Pairing Bleich's essay with the one by his six teaching assistants generates insights about the ways that our authority interacts with student claims to authority in essay responses. Bleich reads student essays from his class as gay bashings influenced by sexism and dominant constructions of masculinity, but there is no indication that students were encouraged to read or reflect on their own readings. Although Bleich cites studies of religious history in order to contextualize his students' use of Christianity to support their homophobia, there is little sense that he allowed students to read these studies. His graduate students, on the other hand, begin their essay "Breaking the Silence" with a critical reading of their CCCC conference presentation on sexuality and writing pedagogy in order to foreground how their own investments affected their pedagogical approach to sexuality in the classroom: "By describing the patterns we saw in our students' writing—in effect viewing our students' virulent homophobia as a phenomenon to analyze—we were distancing ourselves from what was perhaps too painfully obvious; we had raised an issue that we as teachers were unprepared to deal with" (29). They explain how, as straight-identified instructors, they had replicated societal and institutional prejudices in their assignments and related pedagogical practices.

The two student essays that I've suggested prompt important questions about the split between form and content in our pedagogy. During a training session, TAs should have a hand at examining what Bleich's graduate teaching assistants did—how the very assignment structures student responses. In "Johnny's Interview" the student uses interview material and studies on sexuality to counter assumptions that school provides a comfortable nurturing environment for all teenagers. "'Passing' through high school," he argues, "is not a wonderful learning and growing experience." Especially when published "authorities" on sexuality might sustain homophobic assumptions, the student's use of interview material to make his argument suggests alternative forms of rhetorical authority. The other student paper, "Gays and the Military Just Don't Mix," was a response to an assignment in which students were to write an

editorial about "an issue within the community." This essay presents the type of argument-as-personalized-rant that we might hear on an ultraconservative talk show: "Should gays or perverts be allowed in the military? No they should not!" Using the tools of argumentation that he's learned, the student draws on analogy ("Gays in the military do not mix, much the same way alcohol and driving don't mix") and uses key quotes from authorities ("Major Daniel A. Pass of the United States army had this to say on homosexuals in the military, 'In a cohesive military unit which needs to function as one well oiled body the presence of homosexuals in a unit disrupts this operation to the point of disarray'.") Although the student attends to the strategies for argument that he's learned in class, the essay is rife with problematic assumptions and stereotypes about homosexuality. Clearly, we must consider not only how decontextualized rhetoric shapes conversations about diversity in our training, but how an isolated editorial approach to complex issues affects student responses in writing assignments.

The materials that might be included in an examination of this discursive contact zone are broad. Consider institutional documents on discrimination, harassment, and free speech, or excellent essays like "Religious Discourse in the Academy," in which Ronda Leathers Dively suggests strategies for productively challenging dogmatic, dualistic perspectives that appear in student essays. Because sincere religious convictions are often the basis for arguments that deny rights to gays and lesbians, Dively's essay provides important insights for a discussion of sexuality in the writing classroom. The list goes on. This proliferation of materials suggests, I think, that our discussion of diversity should be situated in complex, overlapping contexts rather than in decontextualized scenarios. And of course, the approach that I propose is not limited to sexuality in the classroom. We might use a similar group of essays addressing race, gender, religion or any related issue of diversity in the classroom.

Toward a Critical Genealogy

My argument and strategy indicate larger issues that should be addressed in training new TAs, issues implicit in recent debates about classroom authority. Critical pedagogy and the process paradigm have produced visions of a decentered pedagogy—visions that often invoke nervousness or guilt about being too directive or "appropriating" student texts. In response to these concerns, another strand of the authority and empowerment argument has emerged in recent scholarship. Critics like Bizzell argue that, to be honest, we have always had the power, so why not claim it and use it responsibly? In place of the "persuasive" power of decentered pedagogy or the "coercive" power of current traditional pedagogy, Bizzell offers us "authority":

Authority is exercised by A over B instrumentally in the sense that sometimes B must do what A requires without seeing how B's best interests will be served thereby, but A can exercise such authority over B only if B initially grants it to A. ("Power" 57)

Bizzell outlines a "two-stage process" in which students are persuaded through a dialogic interaction to grant the teacher the authority to "direct their course of action"—a course of action which will then serve a "liberatory educational project" ("Power" 58).

Although I find Bizzell useful in the ways that she complicates rhetorical situations by bringing historical contexts to argumentation, in this instance her proposal lacks an appropriately full context. As educational theorist Jennifer Gore points out in her book *The Struggle for Pedagogies*, discourses about authority do not function *in general* (139). Gore argues, I think correctly, that we need to go beyond an examination of our arguments about pedagogy to closely examine "the pedagogy of our arguments." In her words, we should scrutinize "what we are as particular kinds of educators . . . how we have come to be this way, and the ramifications and especially, dangers of our actions—not just reflecting on our reality but on how our reality has come to exist" (148). This kind of reflection should be part of our teacher training occasions.

When I gave a earlier version of this paper at a recent conference, one man at the presentation insisted that in the classroom he was a teacher first and all other matters came second. He told a story of a student who walked into his classroom wearing a T-shirt that said "Politically incorrect and proud of it." He explained that he responded to this by making a sarcastic comment that evoked laughter from the other students in his class and seemed to chasten the student. But in some sense his response and the pedagogy of his argument are embedded in whether he perceives "political correctness" as a matter of behavior modification, a glib joke, or a central site of the struggle about language and authority. His approach and its effectiveness emerge also, I think, from his very situated experiences as an older, white, male professor. At the same conference, I attended a panel about gender and authority in the writing classroom. Three women from Virginia Tech spoke of the effects that the ideals of decentered pedagogy had on TAs, specifically white women and women of color, who perceived their authority in the classroom as *already* decentered.

In these contexts how does what seems a simple matter of A persuading B to give A authority play out? To return to Gore's argument, we need to engage in a "critical genealogy" of the ways that we have constructed our authority as teachers in writing classrooms and the ways that institutional authority constructs us as WPAs, instructors, and TAs in order to test our assumptions and discourses and to understand our own involvement in them.

In her essay "Rend(er)ing Women's Authority in the Writing Classroom" Michelle Payne begins this work. Payne examines how her gender and education in composition theory have shaped "a rather interesting, sometimes frustrating, always conflicting inner dialogue about my own authority (and authority in the abstract)" (100). Payne explains that although her decision to decenter her authority in the classroom initially seemed to be the "ideal libertarian pedagogy," this approach was situated in powerful contexts:

From the perspective of a woman who was socialized to have what poststructuralists call a 'split subjectivity,' who already commands from

most students less authority and power than a man, yet who has embraced pedagogies and poststructuralist theories that decenter authority, and who also sees the value of 'apprenticing' students into the academy, asking students to question my authority was overwhelming at best, debilitating at worst. (100)

According to Gore, the kind of reflection that Payne demonstrates is more of a "historical tracing of what it means to be a teacher in specific contexts than [just] a personal or biographical account" (151).

Despite his claims that he is replicating a fragmented, decontextualized contact zone, Richard Miller also offers a critical reading of the kinds of authority that produced different instructional responses to the homophobic paper. Some of the responses, he argues, "dramatize how little professional training in English Studies prepares teachers to read and respond to the kinds of parodic, critical, oppositional, dismissive, resistant, transgressive, and regressive writing that gets produced by students writing in the contact zone of the classroom" (394). He advocates encouraging students to interrogate the conflicts that the homophobic student paper invokes, conflicts about "writing's performative aspect—how does it work, what its imagined project might have been, and who or what might be the possible subjects of its critique" (395).

As with Payne's and Miller's critical reflections, an analysis of my own pedagogy as a WPA shaped this essay. As the director of the university's Education Opportunity Writing Program, I had become concerned with issues of sexuality in the writing classroom. The conflict that had emerged with "Diversity Day" training indicated that we were overlooking an important aspect of writing instruction. And more recently, a TA had come to me with her concerns about a student paper. Her student had written an extremely homophobic editorial essay, and as a lesbian the instructor felt both threatened and hurt. She discussed with me her plans for coming out to her class. I expressed my support of her position and her decision to come out, but as a straight-identified woman I was unsure if I could have or should have done more to address her concerns.

I am only beginning to examine the ways that my position as a straight-identified instructor has remained an invisible, authorized element of my pedagogy and that rather than remaining a supportive observer, I need to interrogate the ways that heterosexuality shapes an imperceptible norm in writing classrooms. The issue, as I am realizing, is more complicated than announcing a position or "coming out" in the classroom. In a recent *College English* article Richard Miller describes a session in which new teachers aired a variety of responses to "coming out" in the classroom, a discussion further complicated when one graduate teacher "came out" as a Christian ("The Nervous System" 278-81).

As my colleague Kirk Branch says, teaching is messy. The response I propose to the "Diversity Day" approach only begins to address the problems of diversity in the writing classroom. Payne's genealogical exploration of her gendered authority does not provide her with any easy resolution. And despite

our best efforts to create assignments and classrooms that encourage productive, sensitive responses to issues of diversity, we still will receive disturbing homophobic papers. But to discuss with new TAs—TAs who often want the answer to such pedagogical dilemmas—the heterogeneity of approaches and positions surrounding classroom conflicts seems essential to me. Miller's strategy is similar, although not identical to Bizzell's notion of a rhetorical contact zone: "Once the student writer recognizes that all texts . . . are heterogeneous in their production as well as their reception, it becomes possible to talk about the range and kinds of choices available during the acts of reading and writing, and this, I would argue, is the most important work that can be done in a composition course" ("Fault" 403-4). I think that we can make a parallel statement about teacher training: when teaching assistants realize that pedagogies are heterogeneous in their production as well as their reception, it becomes possible to talk about the political, personal, rhetorical locations of our teaching strategies, and this, I argue, is the most important work that can be done in TA training.

Note

1. I want to distinguish between this scenario approach and the kind of work that has been done with case studies. As Anson, Jolliffe and Shapiro describe them, case studies are "rich retellings of real classroom events" that "encourage teachers to move beyond the 'idea' of a teaching issue by seeing it played out in a particular context enmeshed in various related circumstances" (26). In the scenario approach that I describe, the scenario remains more on the level of an idea.

Works Cited

- Anson, Chris M., David A. Jolliffe, and Nancy Shapiro. "Stories to Teach By: Using Narrative Cases in TA and Faculty Development." WPA: Writing Program Administration 19.1/2 (Fall/Winter 1995): 24-37.
- Berg, Alison et. al. "Breaking the Silence: Sexual Preference in the Composition Classroom." Feminist Teacher 4.2/3 (Fall 1989):29-32.
- Bizzell, Patricia. "Power, Authority and Critical Pedagogy." *Journal of Basic Writing* 10.2 (Fall 1991): 54-70.
- ... "Theories of Content." Conference on College Composition and Communication. Convention Center, Nashville, 19 March 1994.
- Bleich, David. "Homophobia and Sexism as Popular Values" Feminist Teacher 4.2/3 (Fall 1989): 21-28.
- Brannon, Lil and C. H. Knoblauch. *Critical Teaching and The Idea of Literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1993.

- Dively, Ronda Leathers. "Religious Discourse in the Academy: Creating a Space by Means of Poststructuralist Theories of Subjectivity." Composition Studies 32 (May 1994): 91-101.
- Gore, Jennifer. The Struggle for Pedagogies. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Hairson, Maxine. "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing." College Composition and Communication 43.2 (May 1992): 179-192.
- Miller, Richard E. "Fault Lines in the Contact Zones." *College English* 56.4 (April 1994): 389-408.
- ____. "The Nervous System." College English 58.3 (March 1996): 265-286.
- Payne, Michelle. "Rend(er)ing Women's Authority in the Writing Classroom." Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the '90s. Ed. Lad Tobin and Thomas Newkirk. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1994.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession 91.* New York: MLA, 1991.
- Rothgery, David. "'So what Do We Do Now?" Necessary Directionality as the Writing Teacher's Response to Racist, Sexist, Homophobic Papers." *College Composition and Communication* 44. (May 1993): 241-247.
- Shamoon, Linda K., Robert A. Schwegler, John Trimbur, and Patricia Bizzell. "New Rhetoric Courses in Writing Programs: A Report from a Conference for New England Writing Program Administrators." WPA 18.3 (Spring 1995): 7-25.
- Wright, Janet. "Lesbian Instructor Comes Out: The Personal is Pedagogy." *Feminist Teacher* 7.2 (Spring 1993): 26-33.

Regional Affiliate Meeting

The Southern California WPA Regional Affiliate will hold a conference on October 5, 1996, at California State University, Los Angeles. The theme is "Composition Southern California Style: Where Are We Now, Where Are We Going?" The meeting will feature well-known compositionists in the morning, will honor Ross Winterowd at lunch, and will offer a variety of workshops, roundtables, and interest group meetings in the afternoon. All welcome. For more information, contact Alice Roy at <arovelerated action of the content of the state of t