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# An Intentionally Ecological Approach to Teacher Training

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Having served as an assistant director of the University of Oregon's Composition Program, and having taught writing for more than a decade, I have been an extremely interested observer of composition directors over the years. I have talked with them, eaten lunch with them, even shared offices with them. I know how hard they work. It seems like a generally thankless job, but one that I would enjoy facing. Out of respect for them, and because part of what I will do in this paper is to call for a re-evaluation of practices, I want to acknowledge that I cannot speak to all of the forces—the department heads, faculty senates, accountants, and deans—pressing on writing program administrators as they develop their teacher training. What I can speak to, and what this paper focuses on, is the process of becoming a teacher. In what follows I assume that writing program administrators start from a shared experience as teachers; even if they are not primarily teachers now, in most cases, composition directors became teachers before working as administrators. Though my specific aim here is to affect the way directors of college composition conceive of themselves in relationship with their student teachers, because I recognize the reciprocal forces at work in such complex systems as writing programs and teacher training curricula, this essay addresses anyone who has become a college writing teacher. As I do so, I ask questions that may seem basic, but I draw them from an ecological and phenomenological viewpoint, a perspective which I believe offers valuable insight into the systematic functions of perceiving parts within a greater whole such as a college composition program. Some of these questions are: What did the process of becoming a teacher involve? How long did it take? Who were the people who most influenced us as we became, and continue to become, teachers? What was the environment in which that process took place?

If we pause to reflect on these questions, we cannot help but remember that becoming a teacher is an intense and phenomenally rich experience. Recalling the persons, the buildings and grounds associated with our first time entering the classroom as a teacher should give us pause as well to recall our own anxieties, internal narratives of teacherly perfection, and the psychological trials that are practically inevitable in this process. One might think that such an important aspect of a college writing pedagogy would lead to the creation of a large and rich body of research and publication. Some studies do exist, of course—writing program administrators are thinking carefully about this process and developing curricula for teacher training all the time—but I have to agree with the authors of a recent bibliography on the subject when they say that finding materials on teacher training is not easy (Catalano 36).<sup>1</sup> Some might

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argue that the many fine anthologies on classroom practice and theory<sup>2</sup> obviously offer enormous assistance in devising a composition pedagogy. But can such research and theoretical scholarship, however practical it might be in preparing a teaching assistant for the setting of the classroom, assist the writing program administrator in preparing to meet a new group of prospective teachers? Beyond informing the foundation of a pedagogy, can these descriptions of classroom practice and the details of cognitive theory or subject research combine to offer an approach to teacher training itself? In short, can the teacher of teachers rely on writing pedagogy as a model for teacher training? Perhaps—much of the newer work on collaboration and audience takes into consideration how we approach our visions of the self in community, and some useful ideas might be extrapolated from recent work on writing groups. But not enough of the major focus in teaching pedagogy deals with how a writing program as an environment opens itself to the incoming teacher-to-be.<sup>3</sup> We too often focus on communities of college writing teachers as aspects of theory and programmatic development without considering the threshold experience of entering into a new community—and I mean our local communities of teachers. We align ourselves in discourse communities spanning thousands of miles, existing in journals, or at conferences, or in cyberspace, but too little consciousness seems to be expended on how we invite new members into what we do together at home.

As I pondered the reason for this, a few possible explanations came to mind: first, our culture tends to focus on the individual, which leads us ever away from community thinking, collaboration, and open discussion of our interrelationships. I won't go further into that dense, complex forest, but I think most of us will acknowledge that the heroic ideal still dominates academia. A second possibility for why the writing and research on teacher training so often turns to theory may be that many prominent theorists in the field move from directing composition programs into careers oriented more toward research—directing a composition program is a tough job and there's no reason to hide or mince words about the fact that the burnout rate is high. Perhaps admitting that from the start will help, which leads directly into my next possibility: maybe the people who would do such writing and thinking—the writing program administrators themselves—are simply too busy to take the time to write about this aspect of the curriculum.

The very fact that one of the standard references on the subject is more than ten years old should tell us something about the need for new research and writing on this topic. Indeed, reading through the volume, Charles W. Bridges' *Training the New Teacher of College Composition*, takes us to the heart of the problem as I see it. Though the essays are generally fine examples of the kind of thought that has focused on this question of becoming a teacher, only one of the dozen essays in the collection directly addresses the process of training—most return to theories of what should take place in the writing classroom rather than what should take place in the teaching classroom. In general, they argue for one or another approach to classroom practice but offer little if any direct advice or careful analysis of how to train teachers. Like *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*

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series, the text addresses the individual from the point of view that what he or she will do in the classroom can be learned from a book. And certainly, much of what we do in class does come from our theoretical base, and as insight into pedagogical theory, the essays work well enough. We have had more than ten years now to try these ideas out. But this still leaves the question of how we address the new arrival—how do we invite teachers-to-be into the conversation?

The one article which seems to speak directly to writing program administrators, William Imscher's "TA Training: a Period of Discovery," may help to explain why the others ignore this aspect and generally focus on the theoretical foundation or tips for classroom success. As Imscher addresses the question of "the role of the director in creating the proper climate for learning by students and teaching assistants alike" (27), he offers a view of the teacher in training as a type:

Teaching assistants . . . by their youthfulness and relative inexperience paradoxically have a built-in advantage unless they deliberately adopt mannerisms and strategies that sever the natural working relationship they have with students. Freshman students are more willing to write for someone who is likely to accept their ideas and values because no matter how bad their writing is, students characteristically attribute low grades to some fundamental disagreement between them and the teacher about content. (28)

This assumption, that teaching assistants in training will fall into a special category of person, leads to a further misconception. It is no stretch of the imagination to see how this concept of the model TA in training turns to the narrative of the inchoate teacher whom the writing program administrator will mold in his or her own image, as the following passage from Imscher's essay demonstrates:

A director's attitude about the importance of writing will become the attitude of the assistants. They will learn the value of teaching writing. They will learn respect for what they are doing and not simply anticipate the time when they will graduate to what are too often considered the more significant areas of English studies. (35)

Ideas come from above—they trickle down into the brains of the TAs. Knowledge and practice are revealed—given. Teachers-to-be are blank slates upon which a pedagogy gets written. It would be misleading for me to leave it at that, for Imscher's essay, as I stated earlier, was the only one in the collection to actually address the idea of community and creating relationships. He at least began from the point of view that the uncreated teacher is an entity worthy of our specific observation.

Now admittedly, these ideas are ten years old. But judging from a recent special issue of *Composition Studies* (Fall 1995) containing a large selection of syllabi for composition theory/teacher training courses, we have not advanced very far beyond the paradigm that claims theory as the primary component which we may pour into our teachers-in-training. Indeed, the very fact that

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courses in theory and teacher training are so often combined, as they are in many of the syllabi, may itself indicate uncertainty about what teacher training is. Apart from the fact that people are now more direct about claiming their theoretical preferences, and in spite of the many promises of, as one syllabus put it, "abiding commitment to more openness and tolerance and fairness in teaching and living" (Hurlbert 43), the narrative figure of "making" teachers out of people, of creating the people we want, remains, as the following passage from one of the recent syllabi demonstrates:

As we seek to understand and further sculpt the nature of composition as a profession, it is perhaps most crucial for me to keep in the foreground the really messy embarrassing questions. Questions like, to what degree has "writing" as we know it become obsolete in an age where visual literacy reigns supreme and information exchange relies less and less on ability to make sentences? What does it mean that, of all academic fields, composition is the one that depends perhaps most heavily on slave labor (the widespread subjugation of thousands of grossly underpaid, over-worked adjuncts with little or no benefits and professional rights)? How responsible is a *field* like composition, with its incessant preoccupation with production of written texts, when outside our classrooms the world is on the brink of ecological collapse? I want my students [teachers-in-training] to doggedly pursue such questions. I am not interested in simply churning out batch after batch of "good writing instructors" who do their jobs admirably but with little critical awareness of the profession they're electing to become a part of. (Owens 86)

Again, as with the 1986 volume and the ideas it carries, I want to point, not to the individual administrator—indeed, many of us will agree with at least part of what is said above—but to the intentions and systematic perception of the teacher who will *be made*. All of the syllabi highlighted the fact that the pedagogical houses (or plantations) which the teachers-in-training were being invited (or bound) into had foundations in theory. But judging from the statements of purpose, reading lists, and general designs of these courses, except for two or three out of the seventeen represented, little emphasis was placed on examining the values, desires, hopes and fears of the teachers-in-training themselves. Must we proceed from this empty vessel narrative of teacher training or is there another way to conceive of this complex interaction? I want to offer some suggestions and point out a few practical and philosophical concerns that might help us to begin the process of looking into our own houses once again.

I return your attention to the title of this essay—an *intentionally ecological approach*. The phrase works as a sort of tripod, with each separate term necessary to balance the whole toward its center. No part of this three-word phrase will stand alone. To explain why I've set it up this way, I refer to one of the most thoughtful contemporary interpreters of the idea of ecology, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who writes that "the complexity and flexibility" of an ecological structure make "the formulation of an ecosophy" or ecological philosophy "impossible, perhaps even meaningless" (31). I won't lead you on a cat-and-

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mouse chase after the idea of ecology. I think any educated person has a sense of what it means—the study of local environments, of the parts making up the whole, of energy transfer systems, of creation, dissolution, and relation—ecology at its most basic level means simply the “home way.” Not all homes are the same, of course. Ecosystems exist at varying levels of complexity, and we cannot by a single action choose to order them differently—by their very relational nature, one action can, and likely will, create reactions beyond our immediate ability to predict. What we can do is see ecosystems from different perspectives. We can learn to ask questions that look into the process and thereby come nearer to useful predictions.

To bring you closer to the idea and its problems as a “theory,” I offer the age-old epistemological conundrum that Thoreau expressed in the paradox of “be[ing] nature looking into nature” (quoted in Worster 78). How do we achieve that? How do we make any sense out of the thing of which we are so integrally a part? How can we speak in the subject/object dichotomy when we are so totally involved in the system? This is the problem of ecology, and this is why Naess and other careful thinkers have resisted labeling it as a monolithic philosophy or theory. And it is also the reason why I choose the other two legs of the tripod for my title.

To be *intentional* is to be purposeful, mindful, and directed.

Phenomenologists from Edmund Husserl through Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edward S. Casey use the concept of intentionality to remind us that we bring ourselves into all situations—we carry a self-concept and go toward what is not ourselves with a preconception. “To the things themselves!” was Husserl’s reveille, and maintaining a mindful awareness of the subjects around us in the world can help tremendously, especially in these times of intense self-absorption and personal reflection.

To clarify the difference between this approach and the usual sorts of reflection we read about most often, I point to this distinction made by Don Ihde in his book *Experimental Phenomenology*: “An introspective ego proclaims direct, immediate and full-blown self-awareness as an initial and given certainty. In phenomenology, the ‘I’ appears by means of/and through reflection upon the phenomena that in toto are the world. Put in practical terms, the phenomenological ‘I’ takes on its significance through its encounter with things, persons, and every type of otherness it may meet” (50-51). The renewed interest in phenomenology and the great rise in research and writing on collaboration directly result from decades of introspection and fascination with the individual self. We are looking outward more carefully again, and I want to ask that we go further still.

Setting up an “ecological” composition program based on such a phenomenological approach might seem like an impractical, even a silly idea. In fact, I would never argue that we should or could do so. But by focusing on how we see things, by *approaching*—and here is the third leg of the stool and of my title—by *drawing nearer* to the programs we administer and the teacher training we design, we can increase our understanding of what we do and what we have in place. An intentionally ecological approach would keep us mindful that we are

looking at a local system—this is the idea of the “home way” that sits at the center of the very term ecology. Staying mindful of our local system will bring the reciprocal, ecological nature of a writing program to the fore and keep us intentionally engaged with the collaboration that is always at work in such a social environment. Ecological-mindedness teaches us that parts must collaborate to make a whole—the many things, coming together to form a single thing, always affect one another in the process, whether we are conscious of this fact or not. We administrators, teachers of teachers, and teachers in community might try to see who it is we wish to affect. Such a delicate act of respectful and mindful approach is essential to good working relationships and to the health of culturally based ecosystems.

Knowing where our theory comes from, as difficult a task as that may be, is never enough. As the theory acts in process and practice, we can begin to contemplate its place in the center of our teaching community. But apart from naming it, what other, ecological sorts of questions might we ask about the ground of our program and how it affects teacher training and classroom activity? How often, for instance, do we stop to ask ourselves what is *unavailable* because of the choices we have made? Imagine new teachers-in-training as migratory birds for a moment (graduate student teachers reading this may thank me for making one of the most favorable animal comparisons they have heard for themselves): what birds will not be likely to land or thrive here? Why? What is it about this particular program and method of training that will keep certain kinds of people from finding a purchase here? We are less likely to ask such questions if we do not approach our programs with the relational, ecological, and collaborative points of view in mind. How will we ever really know anything about what’s happening where we are if we don’t know who the people we hope to train are? How will we know who they are unless we ask? So from the start, the simplest, most obvious way to approach a more intentional ecological view of our system is to become more mindful of those who participate in the program with us.

Now obviously some people are simply better judges of personality and character than others. You will know them by their abilities. But imagining the other must be a part of any composition director’s or manager’s job. Is there another way, though, aside from being constitutionally a careful observer of people? As a starting point, you might ask: Does the program we administer have built into it any means for determining who precisely it is we are training? All of us have preconceptions and imaginary views of what it means to be a teacher. Even so-called non-traditional students, like the 40-year-old returning to college after years of labor in the vineyards of the “real world,” will enter a teacher-training course with some internal concept of what teaching means. Phenomenology and the idea of intentionality remind us that there really are no clean slates when it comes to people. What predilections, what views, what interior narratives of teaching and learning do people carry with them? We spend plenty of time calibrating our composition classrooms by inviting our students to explore and explain their own beliefs—do we ask our teachers-in-

training to do the same? And if we do ask, what for? Is our intention merely to expose them to their own predispositions, or do we listen when they speak?

What I am advocating goes beyond heightened reflection. It may seem easy or obvious, but until we grasp the final and most important aspect of this perceptual engagement, it will be meaningless. The easiest part of the system to forget is that the self both perceives and projects at the same time. And from a spirit of collaboration, we begin to realize the self in direct reciprocal relationship with others. To heighten this sense of reciprocity and collaboration, we might pause to ask ourselves whether or not we care enough about the teachers entering our programs to imagine how they see the world, and take the next mindful step by considering how the self we project will affect their view. The design of a program, the reading list for a course, the welcoming letter, the tone of correspondence, all of these simple messages and signs we send out affect the way a new teacher will come into a community. How do we meet them? What is their frame of mind as they arrive? What kind of narratives have we written to describe them in our imagination in advance? How will this entering group's dynamics affect the larger dynamic of the community that is already in place? Who am I, as the writing program administrator and trainer of teachers, to them? How do I respectfully and most ethically approach them? What was my own experience as a first-time teacher? How did I myself become a teacher? What were my fears? What are their fears?

To put this in practical terms, I want to look in the final part of this essay at some possible ways that a person might be implaced in a new teaching community. I know these are possible because I own them—these are my memories.

My first experience was miserably bad, but probably not very rare. It happened at a large, western public university and consisted of roughly four two-and-a-half hour seminars over about a week's time. Just before the fall term, we were given a forty-page booklet, called a *Manual*, which drove us toward teaching a ten-week course on the "10 Principles of Writing" (including such generalities as "freewriting," "transitions," "development," and the like). The manual gave a few ideas and tips about how to teach these principles, and we met every other week for two hours during our first quarter of teaching. No one wanted to admit that they were inadequately prepared, so no one jumped up during those meetings to shout "This pedagogy sucks! We need something else!" Some drifted into madness and paranoia, while others adopted a stoicism and kept their eyes on the days ahead when they would no longer have to "do comp." A handful of us lucked into the fact that one of our friends had a Master's in Teaching Writing and had taught elsewhere. Watching us flounder during the first few weeks, he took pity and started dropping books and articles in our mailboxes, ideas which we devoured and talked about for hours on end in bars, at lunch, in our offices. Weekly rap sessions on teaching practices evolved into a small, stable, sane community of teachers. We tried things that seemed unthinkable during the crash course in composition, and plenty of them failed. Others

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worked and some just helped to keep us level and alive in the classroom. Maybe this introduction helped me in the long run. Being tossed overboard, so to speak, may have gotten me and my friends who engaged in our subversive teaching to realize the strength and value of teaching communities. But I hasten to add that I would not wish those first few weeks of classes on anyone—the terror of being twenty-five years old, standing jaw agape, realizing that the lesson plan out of your *Manual* took up only 15 minutes out of an 80-minute period can be paralyzing, and I hazard a guess that many of those instructors who obviously hate teaching learned to do so in just this way.

This method of teacher training is like dumping a mound of bagged generic Super Mulch in a circle in your backyard, sprinkling a few packages of seeds over it, turning the sprinkler on it for two hours every few days, and hoping a garden will emerge. Of course, without any thought to the soil content, climate, or seed types, you're likely to get just whatever local weeds will spring up in that base. The minds that constructed this first pedagogical system could not have cared much about what did spring up. Some of the people introduced to teaching via this trial-by-fire method gave it up forever. Those of us who formed our separate microsystem survived. Others became callous or cynical or hateful of teaching. Poor soil gave them no support at their roots. They withered and fell to the wayside. And who knows what happened in their classrooms. Not much good, I suspect.

The next ecosystem I wound up in came with a non-tenured, renewable full-time position. I was one of the slaves mentioned in the syllabus earlier, but I had autonomy to teach as I saw fit. Most of the discussions about composition at this school—another large, public western university—focused on the fact that the graduate student teaching assistants favored process over product, as the embattled composition director had taught them to. The members of the faculty who decided to take an interest in the underlings teaching writing did so only for the sake of registering disapproval and belittling the ideas of those who labored in the fields of composition. After a year or so of this discord, things came to a head, and in a paranoid process of meetings, memos, and repositioning of staff, the laborers were brought into line. As an adjunct member of the faculty, I could voice my concerns and pass along some of the things I'd learned, but again a sort of subversive or furtive teaching of process evolved. The top spoke and the people at the bottom—clipped trimmed and trained like so much topiary—contorted themselves to appear like the absurd model of composition teachers the department decided to imagine. I am sure that the faculty who interfered in the program and changed it so violently had images in mind of errorless themes on literature and perfect classrooms filled with well-groomed, youthful TAs passing along the knowledge of how to perform these papers. I know this because they confided in me as a colleague somewhat higher up the evolutionary ladder than the TAs and part-timers. When they poked fun at the nonsense of process-oriented writing courses, I told them that my Advanced Composition class operated as a workshop from beginning to end and asked them whether they'd read any of the more recent work on writing pedagogy. Once or twice, I

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offered to Xerox articles and introductions to books. I stayed for a couple of years at this school and along with a few other members of the faculty tried as best I could while teaching four classes in both literature and composition to help my fellow composition teachers figure out ways to make their classes productive, to engage the students in affective learning, in making composing a practice rather than a mystery or a formality.

As an ecosystem this program was a sort of Versailles of the mind—the aristocrats passed down decisions about how things ought to look, and as they strolled along the hallways or stopped for a moment in this or that part of the garden, the pruned hedges and geometrically ordered designs gave them comfort. Of course, massive amounts of chemicals had to be used to keep down any wretched weeds or unplanned wildflowers that might pop up to break the rhythm of perfect rows and elaborate color schemes. And the plants seemed somehow unlike themselves, the coloring a bit off, the shine of their leaves diminished somehow.

In the years since then I have been fortunate to experience carefully conceived, much more healthy composition programs. Teaching at San Francisco Bay Area community colleges, I found that the use of the term “community” in their title was more than just part of the name. At one of the schools where I taught, groups of writing teachers, tenured and non-, gathered at the end of the semester to read all of the entrance placement samples from our basic and remedial writing courses. In the spirit of community, we developed our ecosystem—a flourishing public garden where, during several highly sensitive and reflective days of examining students’ work, we struggled to understand what the words we wrote on people’s papers meant. Discussions of theory arose and questions of practice and intentions were asked and answered with a common purpose in mind. We made decisions together, and we checked together to see how these decisions matched up overall. Though the administration of the writing courses may not have been explicitly collaborative, our communal calibration meant that nearly all of the faculty entered the conversation during the most vital part of the curricular and instructional process. Thus, acting together as a group, we determined what we thought our students should learn, and together, in collaboration, we learned something of how each of us in our community saw his or her role.

My experience in community college teaching was a good stepping stone toward my even more favorable experience at the University of Oregon, where I was welcomed into the program in a way that impressed me with its carefulness and desire to draw me and my ideas into a community of teachers. My introduction to the program was to receive in the mail a schedule for something called the Fall Composition Conference. I was pleasantly surprised to see that I would begin the year by coming together with other teachers. Years of moving into new teaching situations had taught me to cherish any opportunity to discuss the work I would soon be engaged in. It had also made me acutely aware that gaining an accurate sense of any new work site depended on my own openness in the beginning of the process. Learning the new landscape required receptivity and

good guides; I immediately appreciated the fact that this conference would give me such a chance without my having to go through the sometimes perilous process of seeking information. In effect, orientation and renewal had been built into the system. It was as though special ground had been set aside to allow new growth—new outgrowths—in the existing place.

Having since designed and carried a Fall Composition Conference to realization, I can say that the four-day event full of panels made up of graduate student teachers, instructors, and faculty works to invite collaboration and to calibrate our program. With participants addressing everything from classroom practice to literacy, from theoretical foundations to curricular developments such as portfolio use, departmental requirements, new textbook offerings and new tools for the Computer Writing Center, the conference asks the newest teachers and the most senior to enter into—or come back to—a conversation that has been going on for some time. As the first event of the new year, the annual conference stands as a cornerstone event—the fact that it has happened in the past and will happen again in the future has a great effect on how the planners and participants conceive and collaborate on the project. The conference also sets an early example to new arrivals of the possibilities and realities of working together in the university's Composition Program.

Through a process of consultation with the Director and the departing Assistants from the past year, the new Assistant Directors are asked to make a current, relevant rendition of a thing that is already in existence, and that they themselves are familiar with from their own past. We were shown an open space within which to work, but with the knowledge that we needed to fulfill the broader goals of our larger community in doing so. Learning to work together, having the chance to see how collaboration had gone into making the program what it now was, we Assistant Directors were given a chance to realize the functions of the larger system into which we had already been adding our ideas and actions, but which we now were being asked to affect in even more direct, purposeful, and intentional ways. This kind of collaboration, stretching as it does beyond the simple notion of people working together, out to the more phenomenological sense of horizons and the collaboration of the past, with the present, looking toward the future, represents the deepest sort of ecological interaction over time in place. Tradition and imagination are key elements: remembering how things worked in the past, and holding that in comparison with our own vision for the future, can be enormously productive and a real learning experience.

Over the years, seeing the conference from a variety of perspectives, as an entering teacher and a returning teacher, as the conference designer and facilitator, and as a member of a community who will likely soon be moving on, I have had a chance to reflect on its wider meaning and central place in our pedagogy. By having the Graduate Teaching Fellow Assistant Directors plan and put on the conference, the University of Oregon Writing Program recognizes the value and, as I have argued here, the need, to draw the newest members of the community together with the rest in order to learn who we are as a whole.

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In comparison to earlier programs which I had come into, this was far and away the most informative, interesting, and thorough introduction to a pedagogy I'd yet experienced. Where in the past I had been expected to more or less come on board by either taking a one- or two-week crash course in the hopes and desires formed by someone else's imagination—a writing program administrator? a rhetoric? a departmental committee?—or by perusing the available textbooks and coming to my own decisions about my class, in my introduction to the University of Oregon's Composition Program I was asked from the start to participate and collaborate in the continuing process of creating a vision of teaching writing and reasoning. I felt as though I was truly a part of a larger relationship. I felt welcome, and I felt eager to get to work.

Our system is not perfect, but thinking ecologically about systems reminds me that perfection itself is a strange dream—maybe even a nightmare. Real ecosystems operate by a different set of motives than the single grand design, and as a system our program at the university has the advantage of being prepared to shift and open itself to new members.

The conference may be the most important way of showing the program's receptivity, but there are a host of others throughout the year. A textbook selection committee, the practice of Graduate Teaching Fellow mentoring and apprenticeship programs, the production of our program's extensive annual curricular guide and sourcebook, *Componere*, and a book-length collection of student essays, *Harvest*, founded, edited and produced by the teaching fellows—all of these aspects of collaboration, reflection, and openness to the teaching staff help to build a sense of community. Through all of this, we stay mindful of the local, and the program that is in place has more vitality and opportunity for teachers to affect it from within than any other I have known. The soil has been worked and cared for with great attention to its elements over the years. It is true that we have not got a wild ecosystem, but I'm equally certain that such wild systems ill serve the students and the teachers-in-training themselves. Here, on the forest's margins, we develop a continuously changing, evolving garden in which elements from outside enter into the ecosystem and adapt to it but at the same time change it by degrees. This process is at work in any system, but when that evolution is recognized and fostered—when the ground is left open to allow new growth—the system maintains a diversity and resilience which will allow it to thrive.

I admit to being partial to the ground I found upon my arrival at the university, for so many of the practices that I had come to from an effort of trial and error, of striking the flint and occasionally having the fuel burst up in my face, were already in place in the Oregon pedagogy. As I said, we could make improvements—one that I can think of straight off would be to set up some sort of *teacher-led* evaluation of the pedagogy by which graduate teaching fellows, who have spent years teaching in the program, can engage the newest teachers in the ongoing conversations begun at the Fall Conference. Such an open-ended questioning of what is absent could strengthen the value of what is present.

I end by pointing to an idea that comes from the Mckenzie River essayist and bio-geographer, Barry Lopez. In his short, insightful book, *The Rediscovery of North America*, Lopez identifies what he sees as the most serious problem with the European approach to North America:

Instead of an encounter with 'the other' in which we proposed certain ideas . . . our encounters were distinguished by a stern, relentless imposition of ideas. We never said to the people or the animals or the plants or the rivers or the mountains: What do you think of this? We said what we thought, and bent to our will whatever resisted. I do not suggest lightly, or as a kind of romance, that we might have addressed the animals, the trees, the land itself. The idea of this kind of courtesy is more ancient than 'primitive'. And the wisdom of it, the ineffable and subtle intertwining of living organisms on the Earth, is confirmed today by molecular biology and atmospheric chemistry. To acknowledge the interdependence is simply a good and wise habit of mind. (15-17)

Can we try, as administrators, teachers, teacher trainers, trainees, and students to develop such habits of mind? Can we strive to better see the roles we play in our own local systems? Can we help our writing community, our ecosystem, our home way in its constant state of becoming by approaching our work with a renewed intention to see the parts in reciprocal relationship? I think we can.

## Notes

1. See Works Cited for the complete reference. This bibliography and Beth Burmester's bibliographic essay, "Doctoral Pedagogy as a Field of Inquiry: A Bibliography" (*Composition Studies/FEN* 23:2, Fall 1995: 104-09), offer the most extensive resources on publications and unpublished papers on this topic.
2. Erika Lindemann and Gary Tate's *An Introduction to Composition Studies* and Gary Tate, Edward P. J. Corbett, and Nancy Myers' *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook* (3rd edition) are exemplary for the sort of collection I refer to here.
3. Along with the many narratives and memoirs relating individual histories of becoming teachers, Elizabeth Rankin's *Seeing Yourself as a Teacher: Conversations with Five New Teachers in a University Writing Program* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1994) offers a reflective insight into the issues that arise for a small group of graduate teaching assistants in one university's teacher training program.

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