
Enculturation, Not Alchemy: Professionalizing Novice Writing Program Administrators

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I. Into the Abyss

Carlos Castaneda writes of a final meeting with his mentor, Don Juan, a Yaqui man of knowledge, a sorcerer. The meeting occurs with other apprentices in the Sierra Madre of central Mexico. Castaneda says:

... our apprenticeships had come to their concluding moment. . . . I jumped . . . from the top of the mountain into an abyss. . . . Don Juan . . . [is] no longer available and [his] absence has created in me a most pressing need . . . to make headway into the midst of apparently insoluble contradictions. (7-8)

Castaneda's tale allegorizes the experience of many novice writing program administrators, as they leap from graduate school into their first full-time jobs. Struggling with a profound sense of isolation and vertigo, novice WPAs may only come to recognize the need for collaborative administration as circumstances dictate it. For them, I hope to provide a cautionary tale. But I hope my tale also proves useful in helping seasoned WPAs to see their work afresh.

I began my full-time employment as a "visiting instructor" in a medium-sized, private, PhD-granting university noted for its program in composition and rhetoric. I was assigned four sections of composition per semester, with twenty-eight students per section. When I wasn't holding conferences or responding to freshman prose, I was conducting independent studies with graduate students, serving on committees, maintaining a regimen of scholarly activities, and continuing my search for a tenure-track position. After a year of this schedule, the department chair invited me to direct the undergraduate writing program. I was to organize workshops, observe classes, order books, staff courses, handle grade appeals and complaints, advise TAs, write letters of recommendation, and attend to a myriad of other unspecified duties. I would teach three sections of composition per semester instead of four. "Don't worry" the chair assured me. "It's do-able. And we'll extend your yearly contract from three years to five."

The notion of becoming an untenured, "visiting" writing program administrator was very problematic, politically and ethically—and later, this point would be driven home to me in dramatic fashion. But to be frank, I felt too overwhelmed to assert William Irmischer's dictum that "a major portion of a director's time must be concentrated on the TA training program. . . . No one can

teach full-time and direct the program as an overload" (35). Accordingly, I sought advice from a professor who had been my chief mentor during grad school days. She urged me to accept the offer. "At least you'll have a say," she predicted. So I decided to earn my academic citizenship by demonstrating a sterling work ethic. Surely, if I did the job as it should be done and provided reports that specifically detailed all my duties, I could persuade the chair to ameliorate my working conditions. Maybe my efforts would eventually affect my temporary status, too.

I now realize that my initial plan was naive. I lived at the border of a culture I didn't understand.

Even though new PhDs in rhetoric and composition emerge firmly grounded in classroom theory and practice, the custom of turning them into WPAs catapults them into political realities that their graduate courses and teacher training never revealed (Hult, "Politics Redux" 50). Seduced by the hope of advancement and distracted by their overload, these unwary WPAs land pell-mell among the shifting tensions of power in English departments and university administrations, often becoming "a filter through whom all that is 'low,' *ad hoc*, and transient moves, even as this filter represents the . . . regulating gaze of the truly powerful" (Miller 172).

Institutions will typically pressure novice WPAs "to participate in the exploitation of others [and] . . . identify with the existing order of the academy," so they might earn the possibility of a better future, if not tenure (Gere 126). Many of us already know the sad twist of justice with which, after five or six years' service, these institutions release WPAs, only to replace them with others who are employed under the same protocol (125).

Action research has attempted to address this scenario. We're familiar with how the CCCC initiatives on the Wyoming Conference Resolution strongly encourage English departments to appoint tenure-line, not temporary faculty, who are "professionally committed to rhetoric and composition . . . [to] coordinate and supervise composition programs"; they "should be given appropriate release time and should be eligible for professional advancement for this work" (62). The Council of Writing Program Administrators' Portland Resolution provides English departments with clear-cut guidelines for WPA job descriptions, underscoring a *genuinely* do-able workload, fair evaluation procedures, employment security, access to people who influence their programs, and the power to request adequate resources and budget (Hult et al 89-90). Action scholarship has also suggested a leadership model for WPAs, where "the intellectual agenda and authority . . . come from a synthesis of informed instructors . . . in need of a spokesperson or liaison . . . but not a single position assigned total curricular responsibility or autocratic power" (Gunner, "Decentering" 13). Indeed, such collaborative administration is a necessity, if writing programs are to approach anything that resembles the goals of the Wyoming and Portland documents.

Notwithstanding, writing programs will continue to be perceived as "merely administrative units," until they are transformed into *local* sites of

action research (Gere 128). Only so can WPAs become change agents whose “unfamiliarity with and respect for the local culture combined with a willingness to listen and learn . . . makes their knowledge about teaching writing not something to be imposed but something to be discussed, perhaps broadened through dialogue” (McLeod 112).

Yet again, no alchemical formula exists to transform fledgling WPAs into these action researchers or change agents. Instead, they must undergo a process of enculturation.

I believe the process can be defined in terms of three stages. In the first stage, new WPAs critically read a writing program, to locate the program’s key allies, potential advocates, and proven adversaries. They need to learn why these people have taken such stances. In the second stage, WPAs implement changes on an infrastructural level, to convert positive relations among their colleagues into collaborative leadership. They need to create a coherent community identity. In the third stage, WPAs seek dialogue with the superstructural level, to sustain the writing program’s mission or to implement a better vision of what it must become. They need to see what lies beyond the program’s immediate boundaries. Experienced WPAs might also verify that these three stages outline an ongoing process that must be sustained.

At the same time, Paulo Freire warns that when enculturation in any social context occurs, people’s “subsequent acts *must* become the object of [their] knowledge so that they can perceive [a culture’s] conditioning power” (Freire 53-54, emphasis added). WPAs cannot perceive the conditioning power of academic culture by themselves. Others must help them do it, so that WPAs can effectively resist inertia, resist entrenchment in any one doctrine, and resist the very concept of professionalization itself—if such professionalization reifies them as “boss compositionists.” That is to say, enculturation is mutual, and I specifically equate it with collaborative administration. It involves the concurrent education of a full cast of players who are influenced by, or participate in, the writing program. Without mutual enculturation, not just the WPA, but TAs, adjuncts, full-time faculty, administrators, and students remain vulnerable “to the fate that may be imposed upon [them] by those who have the power of decisions” and who, in turn, want them to yield to other interests (112).

Accordingly, the enculturation of WPAs means that everyone assumes a degree of responsibility, and no one remains unchanged. This essay will explore how such a symbiosis of professional relationships might be choreographed.

II. Post-secondary Writing Programs and their Constituents: A Reading

How do WPAs initiate mutual enculturation? They begin by critically reading the rhetorical constructs of the program, to see where the program metonymically represents “other more general questions facing American culture” (Connors 3). One such construct is that a writing program must remediate illiteracy among entering college students. Another persisting construct is that a writing program should ensure correct grammatical expression.

Or: a program must promote “life skills” which improve inter-communication and critical reflection; it must establish uniform academic standards; it must prepare students for their vocation; it must enhance pluralism and encourage minorities to contribute to democracy; it must initiate social reform; it must introduce students to the discursive practices of different academic disciplines and communities.

To be fair, the rhetorical construction of a writing program usually indicates how a concerned faculty wants composition courses to function in their department, for the general well-being of students and the institution. However, as Sharon Crowley warns, no matter how promising the rhetoric—and the pedagogical practices the rhetoric gives rise to—it may represent no more than an attitude toward the program’s identity, rather than any real shift in the theoretical paradigm upon which the program needs to be founded.

To read a writing program, I would propose WPAs keep four major categories in mind. These categories correspond with Richard Lloyd-Jones’s schema in “Doctoral Programs: Composition”: 1) those that are an extension of the English department’s interests, offering practice in exegesis and the genres of critical/literary research; 2) those that are a service of remediation or standards-setting for the rest of the institution, but are not directed by “experts” in the discipline; 3) those that are shaped by one faculty member who has developed interest, or has already been trained, in rhetoric and composition and can acquaint TAs or adjuncts with reasonably timely practices; 4) those that are nourished by the collaborative participation of several faculty committed to rhetoric and composition, whose various specializations contribute to a masters or doctoral degree in the discipline.

Clearly, it’s perilous even to hope that all writing programs could be commensurate. The program I first directed eluded the very categories I’ve enumerated. The English department included many senior members who taught rhetorical theory and history, or even undergraduate composition. But as I collected information from various conversations, I saw how years of teaching graduates had separated them from administering the undergraduate program itself. Moreover, the department chair had addressed budgetary concerns by replacing a tenured director of composition, when that person left, with a succession of visiting appointments. The most recent successors to the appointment had prepared themselves for careers teaching literature, not composition.

In joint discussions with TAs and interviews with prospective adjuncts, I often heard the chair recite a familiar “text”: the program’s mission was to provide undergraduates the benefits of “the most modern, up-to-date methods of teaching composition.” But I discerned a conflicting text: without any systematic structure in place to help them reflect on their practicum, TAs and adjuncts rarely felt confident enough to experiment with those methods. Instead, many of their syllabi navigated the uncertain shallows of neo-Aristotelian rhetoric, impeded by the usual barnacles: narration, description, exposition, and argument (see Berlin 11-13). Other syllabi focused on writing about literature, or on style and grammar. Some had no center at all. I was reminded of Louise

Wetherbee Phelps's finding that "In such cases structures and common requirements are few, or essentially empty of content: autonomy resides with ideological factions, individual faculty members, or even students, to fill in the blanks. This anarchy [is] called the 'apprenticeship model'" ("Reproducing Composition" 118-19).

Notwithstanding, I sensed that no major ideological dragons were holding this particular version of the apprentice model hostage. As my "reading" became more intensive, I saw many hopeful signs challenging the presiding anarchy. For instance, a colleague in literature initiated the argument that I be appointed director. Then a senior colleague who regularly taught theories of rhetoric and composition met with me to discuss his own perception of the program's priorities. Following that, graduate students and adjuncts responded to a memo I sent out, telling me how they felt the program could be improved, mentioning specific faculty in the writing center who gave the best, most pragmatic classroom advice.

As I looked beyond the department, my reading led me to see other key allies and potential advocates of the writing program who might come to the fore if I sought to implement reforms. The college dean and one assistant dean strongly supported a more rigorous and organized approach to training instructors. People from the intensive English program keenly desired dialogue with TAs and adjuncts. So did the coordinator for students with learning disabilities, the academic advisor for student athletes, the Dean of Student Life and her staff, and professors from the departments of nursing, religion, economics, and engineering, who all taught writing intensive courses. Perhaps the best revelation of all, though, was that undergraduates—freshmen and sophomores, especially—provided some of the most thoughtful critiques of the program as they responded to questions I posed to them in the sections of composition that I taught.

This host of composition-friendly colleagues and their supportive responses helped to offset the department chair's surprisingly obstructive, laissez-faire attitude toward the program. In fact, when some people found that I actively sought their advice, they encouraged others to initiate contacts with me—and their individually expressed concerns helped more and more to piece together the fragments of the "whole text" I was trying to excavate and interpret.

My example represents the act of going beneath the "surface" of a writing program's rhetorical construction and attempts, in Freirean terms, to problematize its deeper structure as a codified situation that preserves the culture's status quo. I find that true enculturation begins for WPAs when they proceed to deconstruct such a surface, gaining distance from the program as "a knowable object," as Freire puts it, in order to

perceive relationships between the codification's elements and other facts presented by the real context, relationships that were formerly unperceived . . . [transforming] what was a way of life in the real context into 'objectum' in the theoretical context [so that t]he learners, rather than receive information about this or that fact, analyze aspects of their own existential experience represented in the codification. (52)

Deconstructing the rhetorical surface thus helps novice WPAs to estimate not only where they fit in, but also where an activist "spirit of communion" might be engendered (84). People who constitute, or are influenced by, a writing program will not necessarily recognize the interests they share. But when WPAs begin to intuit how the relationships among the program's constituents and allies have evolved—or have failed to evolve—they can also begin to see how those relationships condition everyone's performance. From that point, WPAs can help everyone to imagine instead what their shared interests are, and in what ways they can pursue those interests (see 87-88). To interpolate Freire's perspective further, as I did, WPAs must adopt a subject position that is qualitatively different from those who have been conditioned to opt for passive silence—writing instructors and students, especially—because on the local level, action research depends upon setting a dialectical exchange in motion *and sustaining it* (95).

III. Revising the Infrastructure

In many instances, people see WPAs as merely emblematic of the localized status of composition. A department's or an institution's unacknowledged expectations of a writing program will thus confer an "affective domain" upon the WPA herself (Miller 165). Jeanne Gunner notes that "This construction of the WPA subsumes and subverts the political. It separates administration from the social, a managerial model that highlights tasks and functions" ("Politicizing" 27). Just so, when the affective domain surrounding the WPA is negative, upper-level administrators may act ambivalent, faculty members aloof, graduate students apprehensive, and adjuncts frustrated—not because they dislike a WPA's personal leadership traits, but because they perceive (or misperceive) composition's "social usefulness" (Miller 164-65). This negative affective domain can turn a writing program into a token club where docility and acquiescence are the by-words, and only those who pose no questions or probe no problems earn membership (Welch 96-97). The infrastructure of the program will reflect as much.

Susan Jarratt's work implies that the infrastructure of any learning community evolves from its function as a site which represents multiple forms of power. Her work suggests that a collaborative theory of administration will not only help WPAs deconstruct a negative affective domain, but reconstruct the infrastructure as well.

However, WPAs who want to make infrastructural changes based upon the collaborative model must realize that "collaboration becomes more difficult when one collaborator has significantly more power," putting less powerful collaborators—especially TAs and adjuncts—in a position of uneasy compromise, just to survive (Wingate 101-02). A psychologically healthy collaborative model will stimulate leadership and interaction within the program by cultivating discussions of difference that do not stifle—or give too much sway to—the discourses of conflict (see Jarratt). It does so in two ways: 1) it helps WPAs to learn and retain what is most valuable in the program's existing infrastructure; 2)

it helps WPAs to revise the infrastructure so that undergraduate and graduate students, teaching assistants, adjuncts, English and cross-disciplinary faculty, lower and upper-level administrators can engage each other in mutual education.

I entered this second stage of enculturation when I recognized that several necessary practices for a collaborative model were already in place in the program. The tricky part was to critique how well those practices actually functioned. To illustrate: every year, experienced TAs and upper-level administrators as well as English and Writing Center faculty enthusiastically contributed to a three-day, pre-semester workshop which engaged first-year TAs in pedagogical issues and syllabus development. Many faculty and administrators felt that this workshop sufficiently addressed the program's teacher-training needs. But classroom visits and discussion with TAs and adjuncts taught me otherwise.

In fact, a number of TAs and adjuncts wanted something that would extend the pre-semester workshop considerably. One TA told me that in a nearby university, "the graduate students are required to take a one-hour [per week] seminar per semester in support of their classroom teaching." Why, she wondered, didn't our program have such a seminar? I started by organizing triweekly colloquia. Recruiting senior faculty to help lead the colloquia was crucial, because it would curry the department's general recognition of what the TAs and adjuncts really needed. Inclusion of undergraduate composition students complemented this strategy, because their frank responses at the colloquia enabled all of us to ponder where instruction succeeded, where it could be improved, where it failed.

The program's infrastructure also included appointing a graduate-student as associate director of composition. This position—a catch-all for duties to which the director could not attend—became, in the absence of an official director, an *ad hoc* directorship. Just so, the year before I started as WPA, when no one occupied the position, a graduate student appointee ended up seriously compromising progress in her degree. I saw how her situation also barred others from sharing important leadership opportunities.

Following that year, I made it clear that the associate director's responsibilities would be relegated more evenly to others. In response, two TAs volunteered to edit the program's freshman manual for comp courses. Another took on the task of organizing the graduate students' annual spring conference. Still another accepted duties as the graduate student representative to the department. Each position called for leaders to train their next-year's replacements. The collaboration of leadership paid high dividends indeed when consequent associate directors were freed to pursue specialties in areas such as computer-assisted instruction and writing across the curriculum. They not only supplemented what I could offer by way of training to TAs and adjuncts: *they helped to train me.*

TA teaching teams accounted for still another component of the existing infrastructure. Formed to compensate for the lack (or elimination) of a director of

composition, these teams had been assigned the task of visiting each other's classes and evaluating them. One TA saw the teams as "a policing agency" and asked, "Why aren't they conceived as a resource for me?" Another said her team was "a non-functional group . . . too busy to swap ideas, come into my classroom, etc." This system utterly excluded adjuncts, as well.

Yet when I followed the TAs' and adjuncts' requests to let them choose their own teams, and I required them to visit one another's classes in preparation for small-group conferences with me, the teams became sources for building solidarity, discussing individual teaching styles, and complementing my own classroom visits. Adjuncts, above all, felt more a part of the program. Our conferences provided explicit points for everyone to gauge professional growth and a way to address the sharp, sometimes wild, disparities that existed among different instructors.

A fourth asset of the program's existing infrastructure was the graduate students' regional spring conference. This gathering of scholars, faculty, and graduate students from a variety of nearby colleges and universities annually invigorated the entire department and provided us with exposure to some of the finest current thought in the discipline. How ironic, then, that so much of it went unapplied in the classroom.

In my third year of directorship, the grad student organizer of the conference asked me to be one of the speakers. Although I first declined, she urged me to talk about inequities in writing programs. She suggested that I collaborate with an untenured faculty member from the writing center. She'd already got him to agree. I was hoist on my own petard. But when our turn came to present at the conference, my writing-center colleague and I ended up generating a very lively discussion about the potential power that WPAS, TAs, and faculty have to institute reform in teacher training programs. An even livelier discussion about reforming our own program occurred afterward among our own faculty, graduate students, and adjuncts—many of whom had already participated in, and wanted to accelerate changes, starting with an established seminar for first-year TAs.

The four infrastructural revisions I cite culminated in a turn-about for the writing program. I compiled a proposal that outlined a year-long pilot program for upgrading the department's teacher training. The graduate committee accepted it and pressured the department chair to petition a year's extension of my temporary appointment. A seminar was established for the following year, requiring two semesters of weekly meetings for newly appointed TAs. We also planned for more frequent and participatory methods of assessing classroom performance for all instructors. I would have adequate release time to implement the changes.

It seemed that my work ethic had born fruit indeed. But shortly after this burst of collective enthusiasm, unhappy news arrived. The department chair advised me that the administration would not extend my yearly contract beyond

the three years originally agreed upon. I was stunned into silence. Not knowing what else to do, I sent out a rush of application letters to other schools. It was March—just before that year's Conference on College Composition and Communication. The letters yielded some interviews, and I eventually got invited to three campuses. With these results, I told a few colleagues on the faculty what was happening. They seemed startled. Within a few days, I got a letter from the Provost, telling me that the university would extend my contract for another year. I asked my colleagues what they thought I should do. "Sign the contract, but go for your on-site visits," they advised me. Getting a tenure-track position took priority over my staying another year to implement the teacher-training proposal. I heeded them.

At the beginning of my third and last on-site visit, the head of the search committee told me she'd phoned my department chair for more information about my work. By way of reply, the chair had asked her if she'd hire someone who broke contract with another school. She wondered what was going on. I asked her to contact one of my other colleagues on the faculty instead. She did. Later, she called to tell me that the search committee had invited another candidate to accept the position, but that they would have offered it to me, had that candidate refused. It provided small consolation. I wondered if the other two search committees had phoned my chair as well.

In any case, I knew I'd be staying on for another year, to carry through with the teacher-training seminar.

I have to reflect on how Freire frankly describes the ambiguous character of a change agent in this sort of situation: "it is manipulative, yet at the same time a factor in democratic mobilization" (79). Were the reforms I implemented manipulative? On many levels, yes, and those reforms cost me dearly. But I'd still argue that the collaborative model of the writing program helps to prevent the manipulation from becoming undemocratic because it particularly involves those whose cultural alienation is "reinforced by their university 'formation'"—TAs and adjuncts (see Freire 79). When WPAs actively seek to provide opportunities for everyone to change ineffective, even oppressive and dehumanizing structures—"taking advantage of . . . the most efficient and viable means of helping [themselves] to move from the levels of semi-intransitive or naive transitive consciousness to the level of critical consciousness," as Freire advocates—it thus helps many, and not just WPAs alone, to re-see the political realities of the conditions surrounding the writing program (83). Sometimes those political realities are deeply disconcerting.

From this perspective, novice WPAs come to appreciate the writing program's infrastructure as a permutation of historical conditions and themselves as engaged in transforming that history. They can accordingly join the ones who have already played a role in putting the program's infrastructure in place, sometimes to intervene against reactionary maneuvers, but more often to remind their more experienced and privileged colleagues that a program's infrastructure is never a stable historical artifact. Freire's work probably confirms

my own observation that ever-changing exigencies render the program's infrastructure an unfixed dynamic of reflection and action. A successful writing program provides its own, self-evident testimony to praxis.

No assurances exist as to how higher-ups will apprehend or support such a project, however, since the important and very risky task in revising the infrastructure of a program collaboratively "is not to take power but to reinvent power" (Freire 179). That is why WPAs must also consider how power impinges upon the program from superstructural levels. As Freire would observe, the reinvention of power moves WPAs increasingly toward "an infrastructural process that renders the system a dialectic between the infrastructure and the superstructure" (31).

IV. The Dialectic with the Superstructure

As WPAs transform the writing program into a site for action research, they must acknowledge—as I discovered—that "the superstructure cannot be automatically transformed by making changes in the infrastructure" (Freire 31). The reason that changes in the one do not always challenge the stability of the other is that the academy's "class life [is] almost feudal in its stipulation of working class and ruling class" (Schuster 89). Thus, denizens of the superstructural realm may apprehend the writing program as foreign terrain, what goes on there as foreign affairs, and WPAs as "other." This is the flip side of WPAs assuming the stance of an "appealing visitor" who is willing to listen and learn from the local culture, even as they work to effect change (see McLeod 112).

A dialectic between the infrastructure and superstructure depends upon human interaction and what Kristine Hansen calls "the ethical motivation that comes through face-to-face relation with the other" (37). This dialectic is imperative, if WPAs want to safeguard the movement of change that they must bring to a writing program. Otherwise, the program may amount to little more than a "cult of personality" that disintegrates whenever individual WPAs move on or are replaced (Hult 51).

Perhaps the most essential and formative face-to-face relation WPAs can have is with their English department chairs. Gary Olson and Joseph Moxley suggest that ideally: "The department chair directs all non-composition aspects of the department; the writing program administrator directs all aspects related to the writing program. Both administrators enjoy autonomy over their respective components" (56-57). Such an arrangement begins to deconstruct the "otherness" of novice WPAs, if duties are democratically shared, rather than divided and compartmentalized. The latter can silence novice WPAs, even shutting them off from the very community of colleagues they seek to recruit. But in a democratic mode, the chair can function as liaison between the infrastructure and the superstructure, making the novice WPA aware of upper administrative attitudes toward the writing program. The chair can voice to those in power the novice WPA's concern for program reforms, explaining why the reforms are needed. The chair can mentor the WPA in relating effectively to the faculty, so that neither the WPA nor the writing program is ever seen as a

poor relative of the department. The chair can stay alert to semesterly and daily administrative problems as they occur in the writing program, remaining available to the WPA when the support of a concurring authority is needed—but not intervening when intervention would be counter-productive. Just so, sound relations with the department chair keep in check the impulse that novice WPAs may feel to adopt a siege mentality, whereby—as Jan Swearingen warns—they could create a caricature of Freirean teachings by seeking to empower TAs, adjuncts, and themselves “to participate as a group in various guerilla strategies aimed at the English department, the university, and the larger political institutions that the university is seen as representing” (12).

The same year I piloted the teacher-training seminar, a new department chair assumed office. He immediately petitioned the Dean and Provost to approve the appointment of a tenure-line director of composition—which I’d strongly recommended in my proposal to the graduate committee. He invited me to apply. I knew the upper-level administration would not seriously consider or approve my candidacy, but when I declined applying in favor of continuing my job search for positions elsewhere, the chair invited me instead to share my vision with him of what the writing program should become. He made it clear he valued my ideas and wanted to know where he could help me to strengthen the program’s mission of training teachers. At the same time, he wanted to let me know where the administration’s contending values might necessitate negotiation or prevent reform. We spent a great deal of time that year considering ways to set up and activate an infrastructural/superstructural dialectic. I shall briefly describe a few of the outcomes:

- The chair and I discussed the need to establish university-accredited courses for preparing TAs and adjuncts. This goal became part of the new director’s job description, which the chair submitted to the department and the higher administration.
- The chair gave me autonomy over course scheduling and staffing. He provided substantial support in getting the dean to enforce a slightly lower enrollment cap. At the same time, he started a conversation about restructuring teaching assignments, to accommodate a much smaller enrollment cap.
- The chair also made it a part of the new director’s job description that s/he should play a major role in deciding who received teaching assistantships.

However, the most significant outcome concerned the abuses of the adjunct system. The university had had a visit that year from regional accreditation officials, who noted that four departments in the College of Humanities relied very heavily on adjuncts—and the English department was the worst offender. The chair used this evaluation to get the faculty and the administration to agree upon my suggestion that a core of full-time instructors be hired to teach composition. The chair conceived of this suggestion as opening the possibility for *de facto* tenure for the successful candidates, who would continue their employ-

ment through rolling contracts. Due to his efforts, monies were released for three appointments.

Productive relations with the new chair accompanied other promising developments. During the second semester of the TA seminar, a senior colleague joined us for weekly, lunch-time meetings. One afternoon, he proposed conducting a comprehensive appraisal of what composition meant to the university. Plans fell together very quickly. For the first tier of the project, he recruited a graduate student to help him interview English faculty, to find out what they expected composition courses to accomplish. For the second tier, he planned to do the same with faculty from other disciplines and departments. For the third tier, he wanted to interview composition instructors themselves, to learn what they believed their students were gaining. For the fourth tier, he would compile a summary and analysis of the data to share with the college dean, the provost, and the chancellor.

My colleague predicted the project would show that composition courses were the most influential in the curriculum, when it came to introducing students to academic life and affecting students' long-term enrollment. To the department and the administration, he announced that this project would provide a useful public-relations tool for stabilizing reform in hiring practices, reform in teacher training, reform in the university-wide focus on writing, and—the highest priority of all—reform in instruction for undergraduates.

Wisdom dictates that I fix a skeptical eye on the relatively encouraging turn of this account. Yet I have to agree with Freire's assertion that changes in the infrastructure can cause cracks and fissures to appear in the "culture of silence" that an oppressive superstructure imposes upon it (38). While the result may not produce precisely the dialectic that WPAs expect, the exigencies for its emergence "can be verified by the witness of the leadership," when department chairs and senior faculty rally to the writing program's cause (84). Such colleagues become a deciding factor in enculturating WPAs, because, in Freirean language, they can help WPAs to remind higher administrators that even in the superstructure, "there is no permanence of permanence, or change of change" (38). Such colleagues can also teach WPAs that even in this current era of budget-crunching and downsizing, campus administrators may still regard a writing program favorably—if only they are apprised of the program's needs through the right channels and actions.

What more can novice WPAs learn from such colleagues? They can learn not to accept facile solutions to complex problems. They can learn not to act freehandedly, but to appreciate the interests of the superstructure, and why those interests exist. Most of all, WPAs can learn from their more savvy colleagues not to over-reach their grasp, since in the academy as elsewhere, "we do what we can and not what we would like to do" (Freire 41). I suspect this last is an addendum to Louise Wetherbee Phelps' advice that WPAs must enact a form of *kairos*, which "enables [them] to become a positive force for change by . . . operating experimentally and hypothetically; nurturing a fragile sense of

community in talk, text, and collaborative work; and seeking interdependencies where they can find them" ("Institutional Logic" 168).

It is this *kairos* that will enculture the most powerful allies of the WPA, even while the WPA is becoming encultured.

V. Directions and Misdirections

As novice WPAs adapt to, come to know, and participate in the academy, they begin actively to influence the young teachers, the colleagues, and most important, the undergraduates whom the writing program draws to it. But I cannot reiterate enough that the academy and the people surrounding the WPA exert a powerful influence in return. The slowly evolving status of rhetoric and composition demonstrates all too clearly how an educational system reproduces the values and legitimates the ideologies of the society that allows it to exist (see Giroux xiv). So, perhaps more than others, WPAs need to decipher Freire's disconcerting assertion that education "is not a tool for transformation" (179).

This latter point serves as a warning about the professionalization of WPAs. James Slevin indicates that a trend toward tenuring directors of composition puts them nearly on par with tenuring the "professoriate" in other disciplines—(69% versus 82%) from 1985 to 1990—but that its objective is more to stabilize writing programs by placing at the helm "fairly secure colleagues whose professional complexion matches that of the staff" (4). John Trimbur suggests that this trend can translate into "a monopoly of the services [WPAs] provide, to keep authorized practice independent of other practitioners and other markets," leading to "acts of surveillance that constitute both staff and students as 'docile bodies'" (138, 142). Kristine Hansen warns, "If WPAs seek only for [themselves] the privileges of professionalism that are purchased with the services of underpaid, overworked part-time faculty [and TAs, they] contribute to . . . the ideology that ghettoized composition and its teachers in the first place" (42). And James Sledd insists that in too many instances, the dreadful has already happened: WPAs have become "boss compositionists, overseers" whose speech of empowerment and transformation belies their selling out to a brutal hierarchy (6).

I am personally disquieted by these voices of prophecy in the discipline. I have moved on to a tenure-line directorship at a university with a very large and complicated writing program. Due to my current terms of employment, I could possibly stop worrying about securing—or even redefining—my position. Instead, I could focus my energies upon maintaining the program structures that are already quite strong in many ways. But the program depends predominantly upon adjuncts. It also has a teacher-training program that prepares and encourages its own graduates to join their part-time colleagues' freeway-flying ranks. Therefore, even if I grant that the adjuncts are unionized and that they are assured at least of some basic benefits, I cannot deny what I see and what I am part of. How can mutual enculturation among the adjuncts, the TAs, the full-time faculty, the administrators, and me help to prevent the program's stability from becoming an excuse for protecting this deeply entrenched system of inequity?

How can we turn around the undercurrent of demoralization that grows as teachers who have served for years remain vulnerable to fluxes in state support for writing courses, upper-level administrative pressures to downsize, and an inexorably unpredictable pattern of supply and demand from semester to semester? How can my work with them keep me mindful that my role as change agent, or my efforts at local action research, must never become shallow and ineffectual guises for the privilege I now enjoy?

I am also aware of the professional loneliness that is part and parcel of the WPA's institutional function. On the one hand, WPAs must bring together all kinds of groups and factions, to mediate, negotiate, and facilitate the discussion among them, with an attitude that approaches universal empathy. On the other hand, WPAs must avoid relations that create imbalances, or identify themselves too radically with the interests of anyone—even students—because of the limits such identifications will impose upon their necessary openness to change. *If WPAs can never afford to work independently, they can afford even less to become all things to all people.*

So what do WPAs do to assume accountability? Do they foster professional development among instructors—university-sponsored seminars, travel support for scholarly activities, academic freedom in course design, inclusion in administrative duties/decisions—"that can begin to compensate for the lack of job security and traditional markers of professional achievement" (Strenski 84)? Do they campaign to establish permanent writing across the curriculum programs, to popularize their expertise "for broader social services," so that in some utopian eventuality, tenured writing specialists will become ensconced in every discipline (Trimbur 145)? Do they seek alliances with entities outside the academy—e.g., the private business sector—to devise programs financed and specially tailored to meet job market demands? Do they examine the implications of technology and long-distance learning, to envision what many of us would still condemn as unthinkable—writing programs that actually exist, charge fees, and function beyond the aegis of the academy?

Freire provides a compelling, civil-rights oriented challenge to WPAs in the presence of such questions. He says:

Educators must ask themselves for whom and on whose behalf they are working. The more conscious and committed they are, the more they understand that their role as educators requires them to take risks, including a willingness to risk their own jobs. Educators who do their work uncritically, just to preserve their jobs, have not yet grasped the political nature of education. (180)

Herein lies the hope and the scourge of our profession.

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