

When Graduate Students Resist

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Anyone who subscribes to *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, reads the WPA-L listserv, or attends the WPA conferences knows that preparing graduate students for their future careers is an important issue. Indeed, the past decade has seen a plethora of books and essays on the subject.¹ For the most part, these works can be divided into two genres: “how to prepare” and “why to prepare.” What we don’t have are (m)any books or articles on “what to do when graduate students resist” our attempts to prepare them.

Over the past decade, as I introduced the strategies advocated in the “how to” manuals, I discovered that approximately 25 percent of my graduate students resisted these attempts. As a result, I began conducting action research, studying my graduate students in the pedagogy seminars they took with me in an attempt to discern why they resisted, how resistance might be manifested, how these feelings might be overcome, and why, despite my best efforts, some students could not cease resisting. After five years of collecting data, I generated a range of theories, two of which are presented here.

1. Graduate students resist pedagogical innovations when such changes contradict their personal construct and sense of self-efficacy.
2. Graduate students who initially resist nontraditional pedagogy because it threatens their sense of self-efficacy can overcome their resistance if they have developed a strong personal construct.

In this essay, I explain each theory and illustrate its generalizability to the graduate students I have taught over the past ten years. I follow by discussing how my growing awareness of these theories helped me to change my own pedagogy, and I conclude by suggesting how these theo-

ries might help other WPAs and graduate faculty to anticipate, address, and understand similar behaviors among their own students. I begin with the story of my research.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In the summer of 1990, I began what I thought would be a one-semester study of the effects of collaborative learning on my graduate students' teaching, learning, and writing.² My goals were modest: I wanted to illustrate how small group work benefitted female graduate students. So during an eight-week Reading-Writing seminar, I collected all of the students' writing and observed their interactions during group work. I also intended to tape-record the groups' discussions, but one student protested so vehemently that I limited myself to observations and analysis. This young woman's resistance so confounded my hypothesis that I felt I had to continue the project, for social constructivism was one of the theoretical bases of our writing program. If female graduate students were resisting it, what were the males doing? If all the TAs were resisting, how did these feelings affect their teaching? As WPA, I needed to know more.

Five years later, I was still collecting data. During this period, my focus evolved from an examination of the effects of collaborative learning to a larger view. Collaboration, I realized, was not the only teaching strategy differentiating my graduate seminars from others in the English department. In addition to working in small groups, I was also asking my students to reflect on their teaching, the readings, their research, and their writing processes; to write and revise multiple drafts of personal and researched essays; and to design and teach lessons based on the class readings. In return, I responded to the students' weekly journals; designed in-class activities to help them teach and develop their own essays; set aside class time for peer response to their drafts; provided feedback on their writing and their teaching; and encouraged further revision by requiring students to submit all of their work in final portfolios.

My reasons for teaching this way were threefold. Despite the findings of my first study, I believed such pedagogy was empowering for students of both genders. The assignments calling for reflective writing offered new TAs opportunities to develop their ideas and explore their feelings about writing pedagogy, while participating in small groups revealed both the value of peer response and the challenge of making collaboration a positive learning experience. These perennial overachievers had reached graduate school regardless and most likely unaware of their teachers' efforts. For the most part, they had learned individually and

independently; because this had worked for them, I feared they would assume this model applied to everyone, for I had felt the same way. Even though I specialized in composition, I remained skeptical of collaborative learning until I experienced this pedagogy as a participant-observer during my dissertation research. This led me to believe that graduate students unfamiliar with composition pedagogy might be even more likely to resist. Unless they participated in peer response, reflected in their journals, and consciously wrote and revised multiple drafts of their papers, I assumed they would neither appreciate these strategies nor understand how to use them. Without this engagement, most of them would leave my seminar and teach as they had been taught.

Since I was responsible for their teaching, I wanted to make sure they were prepared; since I believed strongly in this pedagogy, I wanted to trace its effects. And so my research questions evolved: How did participants in peer response groups develop an understanding of collaborative learning? What effects did peer response have upon graduate students' composing processes and final products? What role did reflection play in enhancing graduate students' understanding of composition pedagogy? How did engaging in action research contribute to their teaching skills?³ What type of students were likely to resist these activities and how could I address their concerns? In sum, this methodology reflected Peter Elbow's argument that "our success in pursuing and increasing theoretical knowledge usually depends on respecting and trusting practice for a while and afterward interrogating it as a rich source for new theory" (*What Is English?* 87).

To answer these questions, I continued to collect all of the students' writing during the semester they took Teaching College Writing, the required course for new TAs, and in any subsequent seminars they took with me. I triangulated these data by observing the students' interactions during in-class small group work, recording my thoughts and observations after each class meeting, and (with the students' permission) tape-recording the discussions during peer response. At the end of each semester, I asked the students to submit their work in portfolios; at the end of each school year, I organized, analyzed, and reflected on the new data. After drafting the case studies, I followed Patti Lather's guidelines regarding feminist empirical research: whenever possible, I practiced reciprocity by sharing the drafts with my student-participants so as to ensure "dialectical theory-building" and avoid "theoretical imposition." This process not only helped establish validity for this type of research, but also enabled those involved "to change by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular situations" (56).

Through ongoing analysis and reflection, I discovered fairly quickly that the resistance I observed in the first round of research was neither anomalous nor gender-specific. Nevertheless, my methodology remained situated within a feminist perspective. “From this perspective,” Ruth Ray argues, “the writing of teachers is just as important to knowledge making in composition as the model building of formalists, the controlled studies of experimentalists, and the abstract conceptualizing of philosophers and critics” (41). The theory emerging from this approach—what Elbow terms *active theory*—“is both an intellectual and a practical engagement done for the sake of self-understanding and promoting change in schools and classrooms” (Ray 18). In the next sections, I illustrate the theories regarding resistance.

RESISTING CHANGE

In his study of *Theory and Resistance in Education*, Henry Giroux argues that students’ responses to learning fall into one of three categories: accommodation, resistance, or opposition. Students who *accommodate* accept what they are taught. Students who *resist* refuse to learn because they believe the classroom ideology infringes upon their personal beliefs. In contrast, students who are *oppositional* fail to learn because they “refuse to engage in behavior that would enable them to learn” (Chase 15). Giroux views these concepts as political; consequently, he seems to dismiss those students who accommodate as submitting to the “dominant ideology,” whereas those who resist have a “revealing function, one that contains a critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection and for struggle in the interest of self-emancipation and social emancipation” (108-9).

Giroux defines the dominant ideology as traditional pedagogy, one-way teaching which does not take into account the students’ ideas, interests, or beliefs. However, as Ira Shor has demonstrated, students may express resistance in both authoritarian and democratic classrooms. A decentered classroom might incite resistance if students perceive it as imposing what Shor terms an “alien culture” (139). And to many graduate students, a dominant ideology which respects and encourages reflective practice, writing as a process, and collaborative learning may indeed seem alien. The students’ ability to overcome this resistance depends on their personal constructs and their perceptions of self-efficacy.

Personal construct is comprised of an individual’s prejudices, beliefs and practices developed from the confluence of home environment, parental influence, interactions with peers, and educational history. This system of beliefs is a result of experience, which is in turn colored by perceptions of those experiences, which may or may not be accurate.

By the time students reach their college years, their personal construct is pretty well established. This system of beliefs can affect what and how students learn; in fact, it is so internalized that college students may ignore or disregard certain theories or pedagogies if they are inconsistent with their personal construct. When this happens, it can disrupt classroom interaction and affect the students' subsequent learning (Ormrod 285). Instructors can sometimes facilitate conceptual change by identifying and discussing misconceptions, convincing students that their conceptions are erroneous, and motivating them to understand new ways of thinking (295). Research suggests that this is best accomplished by moving from traditional ways of teaching which impact individual construction of knowledge toward social constructivist pedagogy.⁴ Yet these efforts may fail if the students' beliefs are exceptionally strong, impervious to reason, or if change represents too great a challenge to their belief systems—in other words, if these students lack the requisite feelings of self-efficacy.

Feelings of self-efficacy are influenced by three factors: how individuals behaved or performed in the past, how others behave toward them, and what others expect of them. In other words, both internal and external factors influence one's sense of effectiveness positively or negatively (Ormrod 101-2). Unlike personal constructs, which are internal and fairly stable, feelings of self-efficacy are context-specific. Student ability, class size, teachers' feelings of expertise, and definitions of their role all affect how they feel about their teaching (McLeod 378). By the time they enter graduate school, students' sense of self-efficacy is fairly stable and therefore "increasingly resistant to change" (Ormrod 103). Because of this stability, these students' performances will be consistent with what they believe they can achieve. Students with strong feelings of self-efficacy will look for positive feedback, whereas those with weaker feelings tend to look for affirmation of those negative beliefs. To achieve change, students need "modeling, guided performance, and self-directed mastery experiences"—in other words, the pedagogy they might experience in a graduate teaching seminar (Bandura qtd. in Ashton 164). However, if students lack a strong sense of self-efficacy, these approaches will have little effect, for such students will most likely refuse to engage in behaviors that would help them learn. The following examples, drawn from case studies I developed through action research, characterize those students who may be unable or unwilling to overcome their resistance.⁵

Barbara was a forty-something former housewife who delayed college until her children were grown. Her personal construct is illustrated by the following traits: she was

a politically conservative, outspoken anti-feminist, authoritarian teacher. With regard to writing, her feelings of self-efficacy were based upon a tortuous composing process. She believed herself a good writer because she labored over every page, perfecting it, then printing it before writing the next page. Her resistance to change was obvious, manifested by refusing to participate in peer response by deflecting discussion, refusing to revise (because her work was already “perfect”), and continually disrupting classroom discussion by “playing dumb,” i.e., asking the same questions over and over, asking for instructions to be repeated, subverting the focus of the class, or undermining the teacher’s authority (Shor 138).

Bob, a forty-something high school English teacher, also held fairly traditional views. A former pastor, he referred to female professors as “Mrs.” and males as “Dr.” He once burned a spider in front of his high school students to illustrate “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Bob’s feelings of self-efficacy were low: he felt powerless to change his teaching because his students were “stupid and irresponsible”; he hated theory because it was “useless and obtuse”; and he felt belittled and targeted during discussions of feminist criticism. Bob’s resistance was manifested by refusal to participate in peer response and class discussion or to reflect in his journals.

Melva, a black female administrator in her mid-thirties, viewed herself as a successful professional woman and liberal activist. Her feelings of self-efficacy were mixed. Proud of mastering the conventions of academic language necessary for her job, she was also harried from juggling graduate school, work, family, and political activism. Her resistance was evident in her domination of peer response and failure to heed advice or to complete assignments on time; acceptance of the paradigm shift in theory but rejection of its practice; anger at the instructor and ultimately, refusal to accept responsibility for adequately completing course requirements.

These thumbnail sketches were distilled from individual case studies averaging twenty pages apiece. Although the total number of students who could not overcome their resistance was small (four out of 40 or 10 percent), their characteristics were amazingly consistent. Indeed, Phyl-

lis Kahaney, who has conducted numerous teacher training workshops over the years, maintains that although an average of 20 percent of the participants make significant changes in their teaching and 60 percent make moderate changes, 20 percent will resist change altogether (192). Kahaney attributes the ability to change to three factors: “a) the ability to articulate a problem [. . .] b) access to a benevolent authority (a text, a teacher) that reflects the shape of the resistance back to the change maker; and c) a community in which change can take place and in which the new behavior can be practiced and reinforced” (192). These case studies suggest that even when the above factors are present, they will not facilitate change unless they in some way correlate with the individuals’ personal constructs and sense of self-efficacy. In his analysis of elements contributing to teacher change, C.T.P. Diamond concludes that when personal construct is taken into account, we need to realize that learning to teach, especially to teach in different ways, “is often hard and sometimes costly” even with sufficient modeling, support, and engagement. Each teacher must compare new ideas and approaches with his or her own beliefs and determine what to accept or reject. In other words, changing teaching is “not the easy reproduction of any ready-made package of knowledge but, rather, the continued recreation of personal meaning” (64). For some graduate students, the effort simply isn’t worth the risk. But others may overcome their resistance if they are willing and able to take those risks.

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

Overall, resistance typified the initial behavior of one-quarter of the graduate students I encountered in Teaching College Writing. Within this cohort, twice as many males as females exhibited initial resistance; moreover, the men’s resistance differed in duration and degree. As a rule, the women’s resistance, evidenced by questions or refusal to participate, began to subside after the first peer response session and disappeared by midsemester. In almost every case the men’s resistance was more extreme—characterized by anger, sarcasm, or inappropriate language—and persistent, usually lasting much of the semester. However, by following their reactions, I found that these behaviors were only starting points on a learning curve that eventually led to a degree of understanding. By analyzing their resistance, I discovered that quite often its source could be correlated with the students’ age and writing experience, which in turn related to their feelings of self-efficacy.

Ray’s classification of resistance into rhetorical, pedagogical, and epistemological reasons is particularly applicable here. Ray uses these terms to summarize the resistance Carol Berkenkotter, Thomas Huckin,

and John Ackerman describe in the case study of “Nate.” In Nate’s case, *rhetorical* resistance was exemplified by his hesitance about joining the academic discourse community, and *pedagogical* resistance emerged as a result of his former teaching experiences, while *epistemological* resistance may have resulted from his markedly different writing experiences prior to his admission to Carnegie Mellon (Ray 154-55). As I followed my graduate students’ learning, I found that resistance for rhetorical reasons was a common trait among young, inexperienced writers new to the graduate program. These students appeared to question the new theories and pedagogical approaches to writing largely because of their uncertain status and relatively conservative approaches to writing. Insecure about succeeding in graduate school, they were afraid to take risks, to tamper with what worked before. These approaches challenged their feelings of self-efficacy. In class, their resistance was obvious—they disliked freewriting, agonized over drafts, resented working in groups, and openly expressed their anger and frustration. These graduate students felt that by requiring multiple drafts and asking them to participate in peer response groups, I was trying to change their writing style. Because they believed their students should not be subjected to something with which they felt personally uncomfortable, they tended to avoid these methods in their teaching.

Gail’s and Paul’s cases illustrate these feelings as well as their gender differences. Both students were literature majors in their mid-twenties, unfamiliar with writing theory and pedagogy but possessing well-established approaches to writing. Gail’s composing strategy as an undergraduate had been to “find out what the teacher wants and give it to him” in a single-draft process. Little wonder, then, that Gail believed “basing class discussions on my own freewrites is hell [. . .] and introducing a new cure-all theory of education is like sending an earthquake through a place that was always home.” However, her feelings of self-efficacy were restored after the first peer response session when she saw that both she and her partner benefitted from their exchanges. Paul took a little longer and expressed his feelings more directly. He dismissed freewriting as “artsy fartsy” and claimed collaborative learning would lead to “anarchy” in the classroom. He chose a German nun for a peer response partner so he wouldn’t have to talk or listen to her comments. In his drafts, he vented his frustration asking, “What am I supposed to do about this class, huh? I’m really fed up. [. . .] I have to write about a subject I can’t look up in a book, can’t fake my way around, and have no experience of. [. . .] OH WHAT THE HELL! DAMN THIS ASSIGNMENT TO HELL. BEGONE WITH IT. BURN IT!” Needless to say,

Paul's resistance was stronger than Gail's. It finally subsided during peer response for the final paper, when he worked with a group of males he considered his intellectual peers.

Students who resisted for *pedagogical* reasons were experienced but superstitious writers generally in their late twenties. They believed that good writers were born, not made; that good writing was the result of inspiration; and that to question or disturb the "muse" was blasphemous if not disastrous. Resistance of this type was sometimes difficult to reconcile because it was illogical yet deeply rooted in the writer's process and personality. In group work, these students seemed to ignore their peers' suggestions and appeared to do little or no revision between drafts; however, upon closer examination, I found that for this type of writer, revision connoted expansion because they had already labored over each word in the previous draft. These students were perfectionists in both their writing and their teaching. Afraid of losing control in the classroom, they maintained a teacher-centered class, often avoiding group work because they believed their students could not write well enough to profit from collaboration. Correlating good writing with good thinking, they assumed that those students who did not measure up were either lazy or dumb.

Susan and Jeff fell into this category. Both were somewhat experienced writers—she was a former real estate appraiser and he was a creative writer—and inexperienced teachers. Like the TAs Christine Farris studied, they taught writing "as a limited function of who they are; what they value; what they have read, taught, and been taught, and whom they teach" (152). In other words, their personal construct strongly influenced their teaching and their writing. Because Susan's composing process could be described as "procrastinating perfectionist," she believed writing was a hard, solo process. Consequently, she initially dismissed her basic writing students as "Neanderthals" and similarly regarded group work as too advanced. Day after day, her teaching logs began "I spent most of today lecturing." Jeff too was a perfectionist, uneasy allowing students a voice in their discussions or in editing their peers' papers. As Wendy Bishop found, these feelings and experiences are not atypical (*Teaching* 201), yet they seemed contradictory in light of Jeff's training as a creative writer. Even though his primary experiences as a writer had been in workshop settings, Jeff had difficulty believing the same approach would work with expository writing, in part because he did not view composition students to be the same caliber as creative writers, but also because he did not believe himself competent to teach composition. Susan McLeod maintains that "a teacher's sense of efficacy will determine the amount of effort she puts into her teaching, her task

choices, her degree of persistence when confronted with difficulties, her motivation to continue” (377). Because Jeff perceived himself an inadequate teacher, he resisted anything requiring him to move beyond the podium.

Both Susan and Jeff required tangible evidence to overcome their resistance to collaborative learning as a pedagogical strategy. Susan began to accept it when she had to rely on her co-workers to learn a new job; she ultimately embraced it after taking a course in feminist pedagogy in which the class of five functioned as a permanent small group. Jeff was shocked into acceptance the day he called his students to his desk to discuss revisions and discovered they already knew what to do because their peer editors had pointed out the same problems he had observed. “In the space of fifty minutes,” he wrote, “I had turned from a peer editing naysayer into a peer editing supporter.”

The writers who resisted composition theory for *epistemological* reasons fell into another category: pragmatic and experienced professionals in their mid- to late-thirties secure in their own process. Because of their prior successes, these graduate students were skeptical of theories of writing and learning at odds with how they wrote and reluctant to engage in activities such as peer response, dismissing them as intrusive and unnecessary. They displayed their resistance by playing what Elbow describes as the “doubting game,” arguing, questioning theories, trying to poke holes in them, raising objections, and quibbling over minor points (*Writing* 177). Nevertheless, because they were mature and confident writers, these graduate students were somewhat more willing to try freewriting, drafting, and collaborative learning in their classrooms. Again, such behavior knew no gender.

Former journalists in their mid-thirties, Pattie and Ken were skeptics and cynics. Pattie had been publishing since she was ten, and Ken had won both academic and professional awards for his writing. Always polite in class, they expressed their doubts about process-writing and collaborative learning in their journals. “To be involved in a group of my peers does not give me a feeling of comfort,” Pattie wrote. “How can I possibly consider them to be credible judges of my work when they are in the same situation as I am and I don’t know what I am doing?” But after Pattie’s group members helped her break through a writing block, her resistance quickly receded. Ken’s resistance followed gender-specific patterns, expressed in scathing criticism lasting most of the semester. “Look!” he wrote in one entry. “I want to give collaborative learning my best effort. But the very heart of me is built out of ideals of individualism I can’t abandon. I can’t.” Like many of his peers, Ken conflated collaborative learning with collaborative writing. He believed that working in small groups would result in people other than the author writing

the paper or coercing the author to change his content or point of view. Despite his years of working with editors, Ken did not equate that process with peer response. Not until he actually participated in the process did he begin to grasp the epistemological tenets, yet his resistance did not wholly subside until near semester's end. As he described it:

[T]he feedback from [his group member] Melanie was the most useful thing. Actually, she kept hammering away at the conclusion, saying it was weak, until I broke down and rethought it. Until that point, I'm not sure that I exactly knew what the conclusion was supposed to be. This, to me, is ideal collaboration, in that the conclusion is mine—she never really said how to change it—but just her stubborn insistence that it was insufficient pushed some, I don't know, competitive buttons and caused me to work harder on it.

Ken and Pattie represent one of the biggest problems experienced writers bring to teaching: they write well, but they have seldom considered how they learned or what they know, so they tend to believe that writing cannot be taught. For too many TAs, this ignorance causes amnesia, if not cynicism. Their personal construct leads them to doubt the ability of younger, less-experienced writers and to question the validity of any theories positing change. Such feelings are reinforced by a well-established sense of self-efficacy regarding their writing that leads them to reject composition theory and pedagogy because these were not conscious elements of their learning processes. Thus they approach teaching believing they have always known how to write or that their writing abilities must have come naturally. Because graduate students are experienced readers, this latter statement contains an element of truth.⁶ However, without a conscious awareness of their writing process—of its sources, strengths, and weaknesses—it is very difficult to empathize with, let alone analyze the processes of inexperienced writers to help them develop their own strengths. For these reasons, participatory classrooms are essential in overcoming these graduate students' resistance. As Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff point out, "writers learn the most by becoming students of their own writing processes" (446).

APPLYING THEORY

For WPAs, Elbow and Belanoff's statement might be rephrased to read: "WPAs learn the most by becoming students of their own teaching processes." I realized the truth of this statement two years ago when the TAs' required course—Teaching College Writing, my favorite, longest-

running, and most-successful seminar—turned into a war zone. Cosmo, a returning student in his forties, was rarely prepared. Although he was an experienced grant writer, he seldom brought drafts for peer response, his journals were usually half the required length, his essays always late. Jack, also in his forties, was always prepared and his papers excellent, for he had supported himself through his writing, yet he rarely participated in discussion. He just sat there, a virtual storm cloud hovering over his head. Three of the most vocally resistant students were young women in their early twenties. Two of the three were often unprepared, having failed to complete the readings, misunderstood the assignment, or forgotten to bring a draft. They complained incessantly: “This theory doesn’t help me teach.” “You assign too much writing.” “My group doesn’t help me revise.” “Why do we have to revise our work for portfolios?” “This is the hardest class I’ve ever taken in my life.”

The most chronic complainer was Eddie, a poet in his late twenties. He deemed the first essay assignment, a collage of personal narratives about learning experiences, “useless.” The second essay, analyzing his composing processes, taught him nothing. The final paper, a semester-long action research project focusing on his teaching, had been “the most frustrating experience” of his life. The complaints climaxed the night we discussed elements of the final portfolios. As I explained the process, Eddie’s face reddened and he began muttering; he slammed out of the classroom, then returned to protest, “It doesn’t really matter what we think, does it? You’re the one who assigns the grade. We have to do whatever you tell us!”

What was going on? Why couldn’t these students “get it” when all my former students had? Throughout the following semester, I continued to seethe, but gradually my anger subsided and I began to reflect. I thought about the students’ comments and wondered if they were true. Then one day, I remembered this research project I had been working on for ten years. Suddenly, the proverbial light bulb clicked on and people started falling into categories. Cosmo, my perennially late, nontraditional student, fit the patterns established by Barbara, Bob, and Melva: conservative, overworked, trying to write in a new context about an unfamiliar subject, he simply could not handle it. Jack, his unhappy fellow TA, reminded me of Ken. Both were cynical, skeptical, highly successful writers who’d internalized a process they had never closely examined. Their sense of self-efficacy damaged, they needed time to see how this process might work in the classroom. Two of the three young women could have been Gail’s sisters, for all felt overwhelmed by the workload, the unfamiliar theories, and the type and frequency of writing. But once the semester was over and they realized they had survived, their animus receded and their self-efficacy revived. Then there was Eddie, the poet.

Like Jeff, he was a creative writer who labored over his craft and initially perceived no connection between that process and the expository writing required in our graduate seminar. These beliefs helped to explain Eddie's frustration throughout the semester over the writing assignments and his anger when he learned he'd have to revise these maddening essays AGAIN.

Mired in the frustrations of my own classroom, I had forgotten everything I learned from my research. But theory is useless unless it's applied. So my first step was to reexamine the syllabus and decide how to make the seminar useful for graduate students of all ages. I added Douglas Hesse's "Teachers as Students, Reflecting Resistance" to the first week's readings about current composition theory and pedagogy to help my students see that their feelings were natural. In their journals, I asked them to compare these readings to their undergraduate experiences. In class we discussed their common feelings, then I explained how the readings, journals, and essay assignments were designed to alleviate these fears, engage them in learning, and thus develop two skills requisite for success in the academy: their teaching and their writing. Then we applied these issues to their teaching so they might similarly meet the needs of their own students.

Next, I replaced a highly theoretical research text with Bishop's *Ethnographic Writing Research*. Used throughout the semester, this text provided the rationale, guidelines, and caveats for every aspect of action research. I linked these chapters with the students' response journals and research logs. For example, after reading about selecting topics, observing classrooms, collecting data, and writing field notes, the students described their research interests and the types of data they'd collect; this focused the project. After the chapter on interviewing, they developed questions for their student-participants and wrote up the results; this resulted in the "background" section of the final paper. Throughout the process, I read and responded to their weekly logs, raised questions, and suggested supplemental readings.

To complement Bishop, I added chapters from Jan Zlotnik Schmidt's *Women/Writing/Teaching*. This edited collection simultaneously addresses TAs' fears, offers teaching tips, and provides models for their action research projects. Depending on the focus of their research, I asked my students to choose models from either Schmidt or Bishop best reflecting their style or subject and to organize their papers accordingly. When the first drafts of their research project were due, I asked everyone to bring copies for the entire class; these became the text for the next class meeting, during which we all offered feedback on every paper. If they had not already understood, this process underscored the value of peer response for these fledgling TAs.

By this point, I had long ceased formally researching my graduate students' learning, so I am unable to offer more than anecdotal accounts of that semester. I can report, however, that this was a happy class, a group who appreciated and benefitted from the pedagogy, so much so that they relayed their feelings to the angry group of the previous year. "I'm so jealous," said one formerly discontented TA. "Why wasn't our class like that?"

EPILOGUE

In undergraduate classrooms, we engage students in freewriting, explaining that they must learn to write reflectively, to explore ideas without fear of censure, to discover what they want to say. In undergraduate classrooms, we ask students to write drafts and share them with their peers. Writing is a social process, we tell them; language development is a matter of social construction, we say. In undergraduate classrooms, we ask students to take their drafts and their peers' responses and rethink, revise, redraft. Writing is a process, we remind them. The more you write, the better you get. In undergraduate classrooms, we assign response journals to ensure that our students will better comprehend their reading and assimilate the conventions of texts. We do so because writing about reading gives students a voice; it promotes interaction with the text; it helps them take new and difficult material and make it their own. In undergraduate classrooms where these strategies are practiced, we maintain that students emerge better thinkers, readers, and writers. Yet in graduate seminars, we assume these strategies are unnecessary.

Perhaps because of ingrained beliefs about postsecondary teaching, because graduate students are more mature than undergraduates, because many of us do not consciously freewrite, draft, journal, or reflect (or have the time to do so), we have overlooked a few things. Graduate students aim for perfection. They rarely freewrite, believing they must labor over every sentence. Because of this process, they often lack the time to reflect and revise. In competition with their peers, they are unlikely to indulge in any form of peer response. Overburdened with teaching and preparing and grading and reading and writing and attending classes, they don't have time to reflect on their reading, even though the texts they encounter in their pedagogy seminars may be unlike anything they've ever read before. The end result? Too many TAs exit their pedagogy seminars without fully developing an understanding of their writing or their teaching. Composition studies remains a boring, blurry subdiscipline while their own literacy skills stutter or stagnate.

Despite its ubiquity, the role of writing is rarely discussed in relation to graduate students' professional development. This focus is important, however, if we are to adequately prepare these students for a profession which demands the ability both to teach, and to produce, writing. Too many graduate students are like those described above, fearful, rigid, superstitious, or cynical. We can help them overcome these crippling apprehensions by engaging them in those strategies our research has found effective—collaborative learning, reflective practice, and writing as a process. By adopting these strategies in the graduate classroom, we foster our students' abilities as future scholars. These same strategies are not only a service to this next generation of professors, but also to their future students, for our pedagogical theory and practice answer the calls for change in higher education.⁷

If graduate students are to understand and implement these strategies, they must experience them. When they do, research suggests that many will resist. We need to anticipate such resistance, recognize its causes, and realize that the majority will eventually understand and accept the paradigm shift in composition. Writing may be the catalyst for TAs' resistance, but it also holds the key to change.

NOTES

¹ See for example, Bishop, *Teaching Lives*; Bleich; Fulkerson; Gebhardt; North; and Pytlik and Liggett.

² See Sally Barr Reagan (Ebest).

³ These questions are explored in Ebest, *Changing the Way We Teach*, forthcoming 2003.

⁴ See for example Bleich; Bruffee; or Hillocks.

⁵ All of the quotations attributed to these students were taken from their writing completed during their graduate seminars with me. The students were informed of the research, signed a consent form, and indicated whether they wished to be referred to by their given name or by a pseudonym.

⁶ For a thorough explanation of these correlations, see Smith.

⁷ Useful critiques and analyses include Gardiner; Haworth and Conrad; and Kolodny.

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