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Call and Response: Toward an Ecological View of Response

Jamey Thomas Gallagher
Lehigh University

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Call and Response: Toward an Ecological View of Teacher Response

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Jamey Gallagher

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Jamey Gallagher
Call and Response: Toward an Ecological View of Response

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Dissertation Advisor: Barry Kroll

Committee Members:

         _____

Edward Lotto

         _____

Elizabeth Fifer

         _____

Iveta Silova McGurty

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Dissertation Abstract

In *Call and Response: Toward an Ecological View of Teacher Response*, I argue
that the changing demographics of students in higher education and the shifting rhetorical
landscape push writing teachers to rethink how they respond to student writing. An
increasing numbers of nontraditional students in higher education and an increase in
digital communication change how writing happens in college classrooms. A new
emphasis on the situated nature of writing necessitates a shift in how we view teacher
response. I explore three conflicts—one in an online environment, another with a student
whose prose was inflected with elements of African American Vernacular English, and
the last with an adult student with whom I had to rethink the purpose of writing—and
suggest that thinking of writing in an ecological sense helps writing teachers approach
response differently, making response theory consonant with contemporary situated
theoretical paradigms.

Chapter One

Toward an Ecological View of Response

Like many who begin their teaching careers in community colleges, I came to the

teaching of writing waywardly, after years of working, writing, and being a

nontraditional student myself. During my first year of teaching as an adjunct instructor at

three separate community college campuses, I came to recognize how much I enjoyed

working with a diverse population of adult and nontraditional students, and how

unprepared I was to do so. In writing groups and master's classes, I had learned to

comment on and respond to texts written by fellow writers, but I had no training in

responding to student writing. One of my goals, in entering a PhD program after

spending a year as an adjunct instructor, was to become a more effective responder.

Since the field of composition and rhetoric is so clearly concerned with teaching, I hoped

to find practical approaches to responding to student writing—solid answers, if possible,

and guiding principles, if not. I found a good deal of theorizing about response in the

field of composition and rhetoric, much of it enlightening and helpful, but, after reading

extensively, something remained missing. The kinds of writers I had dealt with in

community college seemed largely neglected in the literature, and the situations described

by response theorists did not match my classroom experiences. Significantly, response

theory did not appear to have kept pace with changing pedagogical conditions.

An approach to response, either implicit or explicit, has always been a part of any

pedagogical approach to the teaching of writing. In "Composition at the Turn of the

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Twenty-first Century," an important overview of the field, Richard Fulkerson claims:

"All composition perspectives assume some view of the writing process" (658).

Likewise, because response is something that all writing teachers must do, all

perspectives also assume some view of how teachers should respond to student writing.

Response orientations common in the field can be separated into the transactional, the

dialogic, and the contextual. Mapping the field according to these three orientations

reinforces the claim that response practices have not kept pace with changes in pedagogy.

The following chart illustrates the three orientations, pedagogies associated with these

approaches, and response practices each orientation implicitly calls for:

Orientation	Pedagogies	Typical Response Practices
Transactional	Current Traditional Academic Discourse Cultural Studies	"Correction" Directive commenting. Teacher comments.
Dialogical	Critical Process Rhetorical	Facilitative commenting. Writer comments.
Contextual	Social-Epistemic Enlarged Literacy Ecocomposition	Writer comments. Contextual commenting.

While these three orientations are each at play within the field at this time, they

can also be traced in a roughly chronological way, suggesting a progression from the

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transactional to the contextual.

Prior to the process revolution of the 1970s, teachers typically took a transactional approach to the teaching of writing—commonly called "current traditional." As *Key Works in Teacher Response,* a collection put together by Richard Straub, makes clear, much pre-process response took the form of commenting on student papers. Two examples of pre-process essays are "The Effect Upon Student Composition of Particular Correction Techniques," and "Some Semantic Implications of Theme Correction." The shared term "correction" is significant. Basically, response had been simple: either students provided the specific element the teacher was looking for in their writing, or they did not. Comments were generally teacherly and directive. Examples of transactional comments, taken from "The Effect Upon Student Composition…" include "develop more clearly—you have an excellent point here!" and "tr. abrupt." Although the first comment makes an attempt to praise the writer, by and large the approach is transactional, with the teacher looking for something in particular—whether it's development or a stronger transition. A transactional teacher commenting on a student work might concentrate on either form or content, but in either case, there will be a "correction" to be made. This approach has been labeled current-traditional, and has been widely discredited in the field.

Also implying a transactional approach to response are some cultural studies and academic discourse pedagogies, both of which entered composition studies during the "social turn" of the 1980's[1]. A critical cultural studies (CCS) approach that works on uncovering false consciousness or bringing students to conscientization, in Paulo Freire's

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[1] See John Trimbur

terms, would rely heavily upon interpretation and analysis. As Fulkerson writes, in CCS

classrooms "papers are judged in the same way they would be in any department with a

'content' to teach… Thus the standard for evaluation used is… actually a mimetic one—

how close has the student come to giving a 'defensible' (read 'correct') analysis of the

materials" (662). This claim may seem exaggerated, but it is difficult to counter since so

few CCS theorists take on practical pedagogical issues in their writing. Significantly, no

CCS practitioners are featured in Straub's collection of *Key Works in Teacher Response*.

Related to CCS is the approach taken by some proponents of academic discourse. David

Bartholomae's "Inventing the University," which serves as a foundational text for many

writing teachers, also suggests a transactional model of response—with the student being

guided toward an understanding of the "commonplaces" used in an academic field,

essentially mimicking those who belong to certain discourse communities. Although

Bartholomae has problematized this approach in more recent work, such as "The Tidy

House," many teachers continue to follow the academic discourse model laid out in

"Inventing the University." I suspect that little has been written about response from

practitioners of academic discourse and CCS pedagogies because their response practices

are transactional and more similar to current traditional teaching practices than many

would like to admit. Transactional approaches ask for a single correct reading or posit a

correct form.

      Dialogical approaches cede more control to the student. With the advent of more

complex notions of writing-as-thinking in the 1970's, response became a site for analysis,

and response orientations shifted to the dialogical. The majority of essays in *Key Works

on Teacher Response* are dialogical in nature. A dialogical orientation led theorists to

think more deeply about the roles and attitudes implied by pedagogical approaches. Of the writers concentrating on the attitude of responders, the most prominent have been Cy Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, particularly in *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing*. For Knoblauch and Brannon, attitude and outlook can be summed up in two words: "facilitative" and "directive." Facilitative comments help a writer see what he or she can do next, driving him or her toward revision, while directive comments *tell* a student what to do. Facilitative comments are driven by negotiation. "Negotiation assumes that the writer knows better than the reader the purposes involved, while the reader knows better than the writer the actual effects of authorial choice. The dialogue initiated by the comments… enables the writer to reflect on the connection between what was meant and what a reader has understood" (128). This is clearly a dialogical approach.

In "The Concept of Control in Teacher Response," Richard Straub suggests that there are many different varieties of directive and facilitative commentary, and that the two terms do not have sufficient explanatory power. The real issue, he claims, is control. The thrust of Straub's work remains dialogical, a break from transactional, current traditional practices. In "Teacher Response as Conversation: More than Casual Talk, an Exploration," Straub calls on teachers to be more literally dialogical, delineating six traits of conversational response. This shows that, while Straub does not necessarily endorse Knoblauch and Brannon's terms, the end result is ultimately the same: a dialogical approach to response. All dialogical approaches attempt to get students to rethink their ideas and to revise significantly. Comments become less "teacherly" and more "writerly." Straub highlights examples from Peter Elbow and Christopher Anson, among

others, to exemplify conversational response. An example in this vein includes the following, which is Anson's response to an essay about fishing: "Ok, if somebody's interested in perhaps going to Orlando to fish… knowing that you know where all the hidden structures are isn't going to be useful information, if you see what I mean. Useful in a narrative about your childhood, maybe, but not, um, you know, for an article on these great fishing spots" (348). Anson is clearly dialoguing with this student, as well as informing him about how his piece might be viewed by other readers. Leading students to see their writing from a reader's point of view is essential work for dialogical response. The interaction between writer and reader becomes central, with the teacher acting as both fellow writer and paradigmatic audience. Some critical teachers, it can be assumed, also respond dialogically, especially those who, like Ira Shor, attempt to share power in the classroom with their students, but there is little writing specifically about response from these writers.

Contextual approaches to response, where they currently exist, build on the dialogical. Contextual commenting practices are being used in classrooms, but they are not yet part of an overarching pedagogy. Some glimmers toward a contextual approach to response exist in the social-epistemic work of James Berlin, in the work of scholars who think about response in terms of contact zones and different student populations, and in the response theory articulated by Nancy Welch.

In *Rhetoric and Reality*, Berlin writes: "Epistemic rhetoric posits a transaction that involves all elements of the rhetorical situation: interlocutor, audience, material reality, and language" (16). This is clearly a contextual approach to the teaching of writing, calling for contextual response practices, though I have not seen any indication

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that Berlin thought through these ramifications for practice. Other compositionists have been more particular. For instance, Richard E. Miller has pointed to the difficulty of response in the "contact zone," Mary Louise Pratt's well-worn term for the borderland of identity in which different groups conflict with each other—a clear move toward the contextual. Miller's essay "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone" focuses on a student paper, written for a homosexual professor, which seems to advocate gay bashing, and on the various reactions the paper elicited from compositionists at national conferences. Like Miller, many other theorists have written about the difficulty of response in an era of difference. These theorists, who include Arnetha Ball, Geneva Smitherman, Mike Rose, and A. Suresh Canagarajah, have examined the cultural conflicts experienced by African Americans, the working class, and various kinds of learners of English as a Second Language, including residential bilinguals, immigrants, and international students.

One of the few practical approaches to contextual response that I have come across is the technique Nancy Welch calls "sideshadowing," in opposition to foreshadowing, which attempts to open up rather than to foreclose options for student writers. Welch uses Bakhtinian theory to think about how any draft contains multiple possibilities. Of her responses, she writes, "with each word, each sentence, I work toward defining a reality for [my student's] draft" (376). To change the generic situation in writing classes, in which a student writes and teacher comments, Welch suggests that students should comment on their own work, and that we should not think of response as dialogical, but trialogical—"a multi-stranded trialogue between him, this text, and me" (388). Welch elaborates: "This work of locating the draft within a field of possibilities is no longer up to me alone" (389). This "field of possibilities" is clearly contextual. By

opening up possibilities for student writers, sideshadowing problematizes the idea of standards and correct form, a move that literature in the field has been doing for some time.

Much of what could be done in terms of contextual response—thinking with and beyond Welch—remains conjectural. By examining situations in which my beliefs about writing did not match up with my commenting practices, this dissertation points toward some answers, answers that will be helpful for me as a teacher, and should also be helpful for instructors in the situation I described in the beginning of this chapter: teachers confronting their own limitations in response to student papers. In order to do that, I will investigate current pedagogies and how they call for a more contextual approach to response. Not enough work has been done to align commenting practices with our evolving view of writing. The shift toward a more contextual, situated view of writing and response is necessary because context has been undervalued in recent movements in composition—particularly in process pedagogy, as well as critical studies and constructivist orientations.

A process-expressivist orientation, because of its positivist inclinations (see Susan Miller, among others), tends to obscure the situatedness of students, focusing too narrowly on the individual. Critical studies and social constructionism also obscure situatedness, by focusing too heavily on the power of discourse. As David Russell has pointed out, "In social constructionist theories, some theoretical construct (e.g., 'discourse or interpretive community,' 'social context,' 'paradigm,' 'communicative competence,' 'social norms,' 'social forces,' 'ideology,' etc.) is bracketed off, posited as a deep explanatory structure, and treated as an underlying 'conceptual scheme' (Kent

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1994) or 'tertium quid' (Rorty 1979) or 'underlying domain or form' (Nystrand et al.) or 'neostructuralist trope' (Prior, in press) to explain behavior, including writing."

As we move toward more contextual models of writing, scholars in rhetoric and composition are coming to better understand how writing functions in the various settings in which students actually find themselves, *within* various discursive environments. One of the main reasons we have begun to rethink our theoretical underpinnings is that the communication has changed significantly since the process movement and the "social turn" in composition, which gave rise to cultural studies and constructivist approaches. Our students are "experiencing a quite different textual world in which knowledge and belief are shaped less by specific isolated rhetorical acts than by countless encounters with any manner of texts" (Hesse 48). Interactions are becoming increasingly more important, and a pedagogy that remains focused on isolated texts will be outmoded. Although I suspect that the difference between the world our students live in and those our forebears lived in may not be as radically different as many claim, there is, nonetheless, much to be said for the fact that our students *are* encountering countless texts, and are being asked to, or, more importantly, are choosing to produce different kinds of texts (wikis, blogs, texts, mp3 files, videos). The rhetorical environment is more complex, less bounded than a textual world in which Martin Luther King Jr's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" circulated. The main argument for a situated view of writing is that the ecology in which our students and information exist is different, and that it will continue to change and evolve in increasingly more complex ways. Neither a process-expressivist orientation, nor a social constructivist approach, seems capable of managing change, of showing how material and discourse are intertwined. In order to help students

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function, to navigate and create in this new environment, writing teachers are developing theoretical approaches complex enough to grasp that environment.

To that end, many in the field of composition and rhetoric are currently working to broaden the focus of writing by bringing together the discursive and the material, or to understand the ways in which the discursive and the material are always already intertwined. Context is being reconsidered, reevaluated, and theorized in ways that widen our view of the writing situation, taking in institutional elements, ideological underpinnings, and the lived experiences of students and teachers. Theoretical perspectives consonant with this orientation include: embodied writing, what I call "expanded literacies," activity systems theory, and ecocomposition. Many of these perspectives complement each other and are being considered in conjunction: for instance, Kristie Fleckenstein has written about embodied writing and ecocomposition; and Shannon Carter has written about enlarged literacy and activity systems theory. Because doing so helps to lay the groundwork for this dissertation, I will, at least initially, treat each of these perspectives as relatively distinct.

The questions I would like to explore in this chapter specifically, and in this dissertation more generally, include: What might teacher response to student writing look like, and how might it change, within these different theoretical perspectives? How context is understood may be different within each perspective, but, essentially, context is always seen as complex, and situational elements are always understood as interrelated. The moving parts of a writing situation are extratextual as well as textual, including relationships and locations, writers and teachers, ideological and institutional restrictions. One difficulty inherent to a contextual approach is understanding how to conceptualize

that complexity and find ways to work with it as writing teachers in actual writing classes. This dissertation hopes to further that goal by considering actual teaching situations and inquiring into different approaches that might have been more efficacious than the relatively traditional methods employed. In the following section, I briefly describe three contextual theoretical perspectives and begin to suggest ways in which response is changed within each one. While making use of ideas from each perspective in the chapters to follow, I will concentrate on ecological conceptions of writing. The purpose of the following section is not to advocate one perspective over another, because I believe they work together: when we expand our view of literacy, we begin to see writing as more situated, which requires a more complex approach to writing, such as activity systems theory or ecocomposition. I hope to draw parallels, point to differences, and suggest how each perspective can shed new light on response. Following this section, I suggest how we may work toward an ecological view of response.

Expanded Literacies

Literacy has traditionally been defined narrowly and textually, as the ability to read and write. Until recently, the privileged value of text has remained relatively unquestioned, but currently the autonomous model of literacy, which views writing as a bundle of skills rather than as a situated activity, is being questioned by theorists, such as Deborah Brandt and the New London Group, both inside and outside of composition studies. The New London Group, including Paul Gee and Thomas V. Street, have coined the term "multiliteracies" to counter the idea of an autonomous model of literacy. As

traditional literacy appears to lose influence[2], many in composition studies have called for an expanded understanding of literacy, one that takes into account the contexts in which our students find themselves. I will look at only two examples of this current movement, but there are many others, including Anne Ruggles Gere's call to look at the "extracurriculum" of composition, Bizzell and Bishop's push toward alternative styles, and Charles Bazerman's interest in workplace genres. Shannon Carter has also written about expanded literacies, including gaming and computer literacies, in relation to basic writing in *The Way Literacy Lives*. The two examples of expanded literacies below show how composition teachers' thoughts about writing are changing—which, in turn, should change how teachers think about responding to that writing.

With Beth McGregor and Mark Otutye, two undergraduates at Stanford University as co-authors, Jenn Fishman and Andrea Lunsford write about "performing literacies." The two undergraduates used techniques carried over from their experience or "literacy" in performance—drama and spoken word in particular—to better understand their academic literacy. The authors explore "how the act of embodying writing through voice, gestures, and movement can help early college students learn vital lessons about literacy" (226). They claim that the literacy students need to learn today "is both highly inflected by oral forms, structures, and rhythms and highly aware of itself as writing, understood as variously organized and mediated systems of signification" (245). The authors make a compelling argument that helping students to think about performance will also help them to understand academic writing. Because our students are situated in

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[2] Richard Miller, for instance, has written about "the possibility that the vast majority of the reading and writing that teachers and their students do about literature and culture more generally might not be all that important" (6)

a new literacy landscape, one that benefits from literacy in performance, writing can be rethought as a performance in its own right. The implications for response are obvious; we would benefit from attending to more than formal issues and ideas. We can also focus on delivery, not only on "voice" and style but on how students can present their work to audiences. As our idea of literacy expands to encompass performance as part of the work of a composition class, how we respond to students could become more holistic, more grounded in the actual situations in which students write and seek to be heard.

In another attempt to expand our understanding of literacy, Cynthia Selfe has written about the new literacies that are introduced by the production and consumption of new media—an important move in the field at large and no longer a mere specialty. Selfe showcases a student, David, who was highly literate in his self-sponsored activities online ("using several word-processing packages; several email and page layout programs; spreadsheet and database packages; rendering and animation software; the departmental and university networks and the World Wide Web; photomanipulation packages; Java, Shockwave and Flash; and telnet" (50)) but was unable to engage with his work or develop as a writer in a composition course. His teachers, Selfe claims, "failed to take advantage of, build on, and even to recognize, in some cases, the literacy strengths he did bring to the classroom and, therefore, missed important opportunities to link their instruction goals to his developing strengths" (51). An overriding focus on traditional literacy limits a teacher's effectiveness with students who already possess various different literacies. In this respect, it is also important to recognize that we are not dealing with separate skills. Since learning to write and having to produce or to navigate new media are both activities mediated by language, they are related in

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important ways. An expanded view of literacy would not make traditional literacy obsolete—it would help find connections between different literacies, connections that already exist.

Apparent in both new media and performance literacy is the fact that, since the view of literacy is expanded, the writing situations in which we place students will also necessarily change. Fleckenstein, et al, write: "The complexities of life outside of the classroom are inextricable from the complexities of life within the classroom" (400). As our students' literacies become more complex, as the demands put upon them change, response should also change. Expanded literacies change response by placing more responsibility on the teacher. Teachers will be driven to learn more about their students' subject positions, their interests, and the various literacies that they bring into the classroom with them. If there is an extracurriculum, it would be to our advantage to become versed in that extracurriculum, thinking about both the different literacies our students have acquired in the past, and the literacies that will be required of them in the future. Not only are our students bringing different experiences to their writing, they are also bringing a different conception of what writing can do, and while I don't think it's possible for us to become experts in every one of those literacies (video game literacies, dance culture literacies, musical subculture literacies, anime literacies, religious literacies, to name only a few), we should make an effort to bridge the gap, allowing students to become our teachers. An expansion of literacy seems to beg for an ecological or a network metaphor, a complex and flexible metaphor appropriate for a complex situation.

Activity Systems Theory

In a number of articles, including "Rethinking Genre in School and Society: An Activity Theory Analysis," David Russell has brought activity systems theory to composition studies. Activity systems theory "develops the metaphor of interlocking, dynamic systems or networks, embracing both human agents and their material tools, including writing and speaking" and "posits the activity system as the basic unit of analysis of behavior" (4). An activity system could include anything from a course of study to a religious organization. Importantly, activity systems theory does not attend only to the discrete elements of a system, but to the system as a whole, and to the various relationships within that system.

In "Rethinking Genre in School and Society," Russell addresses the problems he sees with social constructionism and dialogism as theories of writing, noting that social constructionists have looked at writing by bracketing off text and context, while dialogism focuses on texts and dyads rather than on full and complex contexts. By focusing on what happens between these elements, between text and context and within and through text and dyad, activity systems theory may be able to understand writing in more contextual and more useful ways. The system itself becomes the unit of analysis. This is an important perspective for understanding writing as situated because it posits different ways to analyze these systems.

Other composition theorists have made use of or expanded Russell's ideas, including Shannon Carter in *The Way Literacy Lives* and, in the realm of response itself, Richard Haswell in "The Complexity of Teacher Response to Student Writing." Carter uses activity theory to suggest ways to bridge different literacies, while Haswell uses a

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specific model of activity theory developed by Paul Du Gay, based on what he calls a

"circuit of culture," to think about response in new ways. The different parts of Gay's

circuit of culture are: representation; identity; regulation; production; and consumption.

None of these aspects takes precedence over the others. Haswell explains the ways in

which response theory has addressed each of these modes. For instance, he shows how

identity is tied to the identity of the respondent, listing different roles that respondents

assume. Haswell claims that consumption is the most problematic of these elements

because we can't know exactly how our students will respond to our responses.

Haswell's article is significant because it argues for complexity, but it spends little time

thinking about how activity systems theory may be used to rethink the practice of

response itself. Instead, Haswell focuses on how response theory can be expanded by

thinking about activity systems theory. For this reason, his approach differs significantly

from mine, which focuses on response theory and the writing-response situation and

attempts to point toward an implied pedagogy.

The strength of an activity systems approach is that it focuses on interactions—

social, ideological, discursive and material interactions—rather than on dyads or texts,

but the drawback is that the language seems less than transparent, and it can become

overly complex. Although this approach seems less clear and promising than ecological

metaphors, which I will examine next, there are many aspects shared by both

orientations. Both focus on the situated nature of knowledge (and, by extension, writing),

and both seek to understand writing within a wider context, in terms of interactions. I

argue that activity systems theory does so with a language that may be more valorized by

the university but which is ultimately less clear and useful than ecological metaphors.[3] It

may be more productive to think about the ways in which writers function as organisms,

rather than to think about how writers are producers in a circuit of culture. Both

expanded literacies and activity systems theory will be tangentially important to the work

of this dissertation, while the next orientation will be central.

Writing as/in an Ecosystem

Rather than thinking of academic writing as an activity system, we can think of

writing more generally as functioning within an ecosystem, using an ecological metaphor

to understand writing. Marilyn Cooper is often cited as the first voice in composition to

call for an ecological approach to writing. In her 1986 essay "The Ecology of Writing,"

she stated: "the ecological model postulates dynamic interlocking systems which

structure the social activity of writing" (20). Cooper was also the first to recognize how

difficult it was to conceive of or analyze *relationships* rather than human actors, a

conceptual difficulty worth thinking through. Dobrin and Weisser followed Cooper with

their 2001 collection *Ecocomposition*, which included two strands of ecocomposition:

one that developed literally ecologically-conscious approaches, and the other that looked

at ecology as a metaphor or model for writing. This second strand is most important for

my purposes. Fleckenstein, et al., have argued more recently for using an ecological

metaphor for research in composition and rhetoric, as well as for writing. And in *Lingua

Fracta: Toward a Rhetoric of New Media*, Collin Gifford Brooke details how several

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[3] At the same time, it was the importation of systems theory into ecological science that allowed scientists
to conceive of "ecosystems."

theorists in other fields, specifically media studies, are also using ecology as a framing metaphor. The term is not merely a buzzword, though. The metaphor of "ecology" or, even more specifically, "ecosystem," does important conceptual work.

The advantage of this orientation is that the ecological metaphor is both complex and comprehensible. We can isolate the elements of any given rhetorical ecosystem, detailing environmental factors on our students' writing, even if we cannot always determine precisely how each element influences the others. The metaphor provides a meaningful way to understand the basic idea of context. As Fleckenstein, et al, explain: "Material artifacts and activities integral to the constitution of an ambient environment and the writers and texts within it are all germane to a writing ecosystem," and, "An ecological orientation provides a means for studying conventional and new media writing holistically, privileging the organism-in-its-environment" (393). The more we can "see" of a context, the more we may be able to understand it. This is true of writing-response situations, for the topics that our students write about, and for our response to that writing. The organism-in-its-environment is what interests me most. The three case study chapters that follow look at the organism-in-its-environment, viewing both the student writer and myself as organisms while trying to determine how aspects of the environment, including students' past histories and experiences, institutional requirements, and cultural issues, impact each other, the writing student, the writing students do, and both response in general and my own specific responses. I will focus my analysis of these ecosystems with research questions that invite inquiry.

Writing itself is conceived in a new way within an ecological orientation. If "[t]o write ecologically is to be immersed in a multileveled, multifaceted environment" (395),

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then it won't be enough to consider individual assignments or de-contextualized

responses to those assignments. An ecologically-oriented teacher would want to consider

the multifaceted environments in which writing and response are enacted and performed.

Both elements are important—though in this dissertation I will attempt to focus on

response. Further, "[w]riting and writer are created through the feedback—the

communication—among the various loops/levels of a system" (396).   The metaphor is

dynamic, but, just as the actual study of ecosystems illuminates how elements of an

ecosystem are interrelated, thinking through the metaphor can reveal how writers actually

function in this complex rhetorical system.

Any act of writing takes place within an elaborate social ecosystem. One aspect

of that ecosystem is teachers' response to student writing. Although feedback can occur

on many different levels and come from many different sources, including ideological

and institutional feedback, teachers' response to their students is clearly a crucial element

of feedback. The ecological view of writing changes how we think about response. For

one thing, writing teachers become responsible for investigating, or co-investigating, the

boundaries of the ecosystems in which students write. How can we make an essay on,

say, violence in the media matter? Because of the multiple layers of context that

constitute a writing ecosystem, we are not *creating* those ecosystems wholesale, no

matter how focused our assignments might seem. Teacher/student identities, institutional

requirements, the life histories of our students, expected and unexpected audiences, and

our students' writing processes and products all interact to create that ecosystem—but we

can point to some contingent borders around any writing act. We could draw those

borders *with* students—borders that reach beyond the classroom and encompass more of

students' material realities. The response a teacher makes to student writing influences where those boundaries are and whether or not they are pushed in different directions. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will suggest ways in which teaching practices may be changed through this approach, including a list of potential ecological questions to elicit response. Writing teachers would also want to be attuned to the different elements interacting with each other within an environment—clearly a more demanding task than simply "correcting" student texts, "remediating" them, or providing formal or structural feedback. The responses that our comments elicit from our students will also feed back into that system. A successful writing class will feed into multiple discursive ecosystems and interact with them in various ways. I hope to make this complexity clear in my case study chapters.

There are at least two other advantages to thinking about writing and response through an ecological metaphor. The ecological metaphor is capable of accounting for change. The ecology our students find themselves in—the proliferation of new media, social networks, the paroxysms of the publishing industry, the changing demographics of the students themselves—is presenting us with new demands, and our conception of students' needs is also changing. The notion of an ecosystem carries with it a built-in flexibility. Because we are studying and promoting interactions and not stable "standards," we can re-imagine our students and our expectations. Viewing writers as organisms also helps us to account for their sense of agency in different ways. Many theorists, including Anis Bawarshi, have used Giddens's notion of "structuration" to show how writers are both formed by and resist genres at the same time, but an organism clearly has at least some power within an ecosystem. An ecological view of agency is

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naturally limited but not determined. An organism's actions influence his or her environment. This is important for me as a teacher, and is also, I believe, important to students, who resist seeing themselves as entirely socially constructed.

Assuming an ecological orientation, writing teachers would focus more on feedback, on their own implication within an ecosystem, and on students' interactions within an ecosystem. I believe the writing-as-ecosystem orientation helps move us away from unproductive teacher/student relationships, and places us in different, more useful subject positions. We still play the role of teachers and student writers, charged with certain responsibilities, but we also become organisms in a common environment, sometimes but not always working toward common goals. Although much response literature seems to treat students' lives as generic, our students' lives are complex and multiple. Students in traditional universities may include working class and international students, all of whom are living in a world flooded with messages from various sources—the internet, wireless devices, traditional media, television, etc. Nontraditional students, particularly in community colleges, include people of all ages, ethnicities, experiences, and skill levels. Some students are full time and can devote the hours necessary to improve their writing; others struggle to find fifteen minutes to work on writing. While earlier response literature ignored these differences, I want to make those differences the focus of my dissertation.

Some actions that might follow from considering response in an ecological way include:

1. Rethinking the style of the respondent.

2. Understanding response as situated within complex contexts.

3. Developing a new conception of the analytical site.

The concepts of "directive" and "facilitative" responding styles, or even Straub's more complex view of response as dialogue, provide too limited a view of context. Though promising, Straub's push toward a more engaged style of response still does not attend to matters beyond the text or the classroom. The idea of conversation and the two key terms from Knoblauch and Brannon overplay the importance of the discrete response instance and downplay the importance of response and feedback in general. We may benefit from considering whether we assume a facilitative or directive stance in terms of our overall teaching style, within the context of our actual classrooms, but to think about the style we use when we respond to individual papers may not be as helpful as earlier theorists have believed. As only one limited aspect of the ecology of writing done within the classroom, discrete examples of response may assume less importance, but because response is a permanent part of what we do it is important to theorize in new ways.

While directive and facilitative commenting styles are not as useful to think about as we once believed, new orientations toward response will be useful in a situated paradigm. The changing demographics of students encourages us to rethink response. Since higher education, including the university and the community college, should be more attuned to the lived realities of students' lives, a more responsive, real-life, and contingent responding style will be relevant. Moving toward a more ecological model of response would mean attending to student work differently—as investigators and co-investigators. We would be asking different questions of students, questions that urge them to see the rhetorical environment as a whole. This would push their thinking deeper and give them a way to transfer literacy skills to new contexts.

Response is interlinked with contexts. Purposes, material realities, institutional requirements, students' lives, teachers' lives, and institutional realities all affect the specific response situation. We may want to move response beyond or outside the classroom, finding ways to think about students' material realities. An older student who has not been in the classroom for twenty years but is eager to share his life experience, and a young African American woman who has recently experienced difficulty in high school cannot be responded to in the same way. Perhaps situating students within real rhetorical situations—including academic situations—and responding to the situations in ways that are dynamic and amount to more than role-playing will be more useful than attending to only academic ways of writing, in the traditional of Bartholomae or Joseph Harris. What will be meaningful for the older adult student will not necessarily be meaningful for the younger woman, yet we have to find ways to situate both within some conception of writing. Praxis becomes increasingly important as we find ways to rethink our students' situations.

Because students live in complex environments, writing teachers would benefit from finding ways to respond not only to isolated student texts but also to systems, relationships and interfaces. More holistic responding methods, such as portfolios, would make sense in this situation. We could be responding to our students' processes of writing, including aspects of process not usually considered—how much time the student has to devote to writing between childcare and a full time job, for instance—as well as the products of their writing. The site of analysis could become the process and the situation, not the essay or the major paper. In this way, an ecological approach calls on us to attend to the learning and development of our students in different ways.

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The most significant challenge to the efficacy of an ecological conception of writing is that often "ecology" becomes too capacious, a backdrop term that takes in *everything*. Currently there are few examples of ecological analyses that go beyond the general or conceptual, that do more than call for a new metaphorical understanding of writing. Anis Bawarshi has analyzed rhetorical systems in Florida by reading billboards, as well as the genre ecosystem of the first year classroom, but he does not look at how individual writers negotiate that environment. The field of rhetoric and composition is in need of studies done on writers as organisms within an environment—this dissertation will offer three examples. In order to find boundaries for my analysis, I consider my response to three students' writing as my focal point.

Fleckenstein et al. write that "ecology is predicated on the belief that biological and social worlds are jointly composed of a network of organisms and environments that are interdependent, diverse, and responsive to feedback" (394). While attending to the conception of an ecology of writing as interdependent and diverse, in this dissertation I will be most interested in the notion of feedback—or, possibly more ecologically, interaction. How does a teacher's interactions with students influence both the students' writing and the writing situation? How do changes in our response change the environment? Since writing is situated and my chapters deal with particular situations, my analyses will inevitably be incomplete. My own subject position will influence the analysis, and in each chapter I address this element of the ecosystem. My analysis goes beyond a discrete event—student hands in paper, teacher evaluates the paper, student files the paper away. What comes before and what comes after an assignment is essential to the situation, and the knot of relationships and configurations that make up the full

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writing-response situation is what I am interested in. In each chapter, my analysis will be defined differently. The larger hypothesis I will be exploring is that thinking of writing as situated and response as contextual, or ecological, will lead to substantially different ideas about response. Within each chapter, a narrower research question, described below, will also orient these analyses. I will act as observer and theorist more than qualitative researcher.

The case study chapters that follow give rise to issues that I feel are important to composition studies—issues of identity and difference in particular. The changing demographics in higher education, with the existence of an increasing number of nontraditional students, changes the ecosystem, and this dissertation is in part a response to that change. I am interested in students as organisms because, along with Richard Miller, "I conceive of the work in the classroom as an ongoing project in which I am learning how to hear what my students are saying. Learning to do this helps me, in turn, to find a way to speak that they can hear. It also makes is possible for my students to learn how to hear what I, as a representative of the academy, am saying and how to speak, read, and write in ways that I can hear" (48).

Chapter one focuses on my interactions with an online student named Mary[4] whom I believed to be an ESL student. By looking at how traditional response failed in this online setting, I hope to suggest ways that an ecological approach would better serve students like Mary. Rather than examining my response to a single paper, I consider the entire online term and how my interactions with Mary failed to take advantage of our various situations. I also address online education as an environment and point to ways

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[4] Pseudonyms are used for all students.

response is changing as a result of this new educational setting. I begin with this example because it is indicative of a situation in which a teacher does not have enough contextual information to respond effectively. The chapters that follow offer increasingly more context.

Chapter two centers around my interactions with a young African American man named TJ. His paper showed certain features of African American Vernacular English and diverged greatly from the kind of academic discourse I had been expecting as an inexperienced composition teacher. By taking a more ecological view, I hope to suggest how differences among organisms in a writing ecology, the differences between my expectations and TJ's writing in particular, can be productive.

Chapter three, the last case study chapter, details my interactions with an older adult student. Cheryl, an African American woman, experienced multiple challenges in the four classes she took with me. In this chapter, I look specifically at how widening our understanding of the ecology in which student writing circulates, attending to exigence, may help adult students in particular. It also provides the most contextual case study.

Just as there can be healthy and unhealthy ecosystems in nature, there can be healthy and unhealthy rhetorical ecosystems. Anis Bawarshi, in *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, claims that the first year writing classroom itself is an ecosystem, as real and vital as any other, but I believe that that vitality depends on the kinds of writing welcomed and the kinds of response writing teachers enact within that ecosystem. A natural ecosystem relies on biodiversity for its health, and I carry that notion over here by thinking about the cultural diversity of students in college classes, a move that could, naturally, lead to further thoughts about multiculturalism and globalism. In any situated

perspective, a writer-teacher will function more effectively than someone who is simply a "writing teacher," a distinction that will be important. As one more aspect of the ecosystem in which students exist, writer-teachers who also participate in the context in which the writing is active will be able to make different pedagogical moves than writing teachers who are merely there to teach students "how to write." For instance, writer-teachers can collaborate with students within certain settings and provide writerly feedback. They can help co-create contexts with students. They remain teachers, and so are marked with certain kinds of authority, but they can exist at least somewhat outside the realm of gatekeeper and voice of unquestioned authority. A healthy natural ecosystem relies on the ability of the organism to attain what it needs to develop and grow—this should be our primary goal as writing teachers.

Chapter Two

Response in an Online Environment

Since my focus is on context, it makes sense to examine a situation in which

context becomes problematic for the teaching of writing. For that reason, in this chapter I

will consider what happens in a relatively new education environment—online

education—and I will analyze and explore my interactions with a single student within

this environment during an eight-week term. I will ask questions about how the online

environment changes the nature of teacher response. How can we forge relationships

with online students in any way that is similar to the relationships we form in face to face

(f2f) classes? How does the ecosystem of writing in which our students operate change

when our students may be located anywhere in the world?   In previous online classes, for

instance, I have taught students not only from but actually living *in* the Czech Republic

and Kenya. I have taught soldiers actively serving in Afghanistan in a warzone. The

opportunity to work with such a diverse student body is exciting, but it also fractures the

idea of a stable rhetorical ecosystem and forces us to rethink the kinds of relationships we

can build with students.

As of this writing, I have taught seven online composition courses for a relatively

small state university. In recent years, online education has been growing rapidly. In

2006, 65 percent of higher education institutions offered online, credit-bearing classes,

and that number has surely increased in the intervening years. For that reason, it is

important to ask questions about how the teaching of writing changes. How does the

rhetorical ecosystem change, how do relationships change, how can we think about response in light of these changing situations of online higher education: These are some of the questions I will explore in this chapter. I will focus on my interactions with one student named Mary Pauver, interactions that point to the particular difficulties inherent in an online environment. I begin by examining the writing-response situation in four ways—by looking at the student's position, the institutional situation, the teacher's position, and the writing task—analyzing these specific aspects before considering ways that the generic response situation changes online.

Because of basic personal information divulged in an "icebreaker" discussion forum at the beginning of the term, I knew this about Mary Pauver: she was living in Maine and attempting to earn her Bachelors degree in communication because of her interest in computer animation. Although I was not positive, because of a photograph attached to the icebreaker forum, featuring a young, smiling Chinese-American woman, and because of her sentence structure, I suspected that Mary was an ESL student. I was unsure what kind of ESL student—most likely a residential bilingual. As Joy Reid has noted, international student writers and U.S. residential ESL writers have different needs in a writing classroom. For example, international students typically need more help with idioms and other conventions than do residential bilinguals. Because of my limited sense of her identity I had difficulty pinpointing Mary's needs. Except for a single picture, I never saw Mary, never heard her speak, and never interacted with her in conferences. Building a relationship with Mary or any other online student was difficult, and it was also difficult to form a sense of community within the class as a whole.

At the beginning of each term, a sense of community has to be built through discussion boards on an online education site—the university used the very popular program Blackboard. I've had some success building community online by asking students to share pictures and fill out "interest inventories," but these offer a limited substitute for face to face interaction. One other way relationships can be developed is through the writing that students produce, and the response that I give to them. I received five papers from Mary, and she posted on eight weeks' worth of, or about fifteen, discussion board forums, in which she answered discussion questions in a satisfactory but not particularly personal or revealing way. She was there in the online class, and then she was gone. If it were not for writing this chapter, the memory of this student would have evaporated. I believe that this is, unfortunately, the most common face of online students—a quickly dissolving one, one that it difficult to hold on to even when classes are in session. In this environment, relationships are difficult to create, difficult to maintain.

On the other hand, I have taught several online students who have made an effort to establish a relationship with me, and I am always eager for, welcome, and try to elicit that kind of interaction. A few of my former online students email me regularly, share personal stories, and suggest my classes to other students. I am even Facebook "friends" with a former student. In short, some of the students in my online classes have become real people to me. Through my response and my constructed identity as a teacher, I try to reach out to students and make that interaction possible with each of them, but, partially because of traditional methods of response, the vast majority have been like Mary. They are there, then gone. They make little effort—they see no educational or career-oriented

benefit in making an effort—to form a personal or pedagogical relationship with me. Many of them complain, in their papers or discussion board posts, about how they have been forced to pursue an education as a meaningless credential, as a step forward in their careers. They don't particularly care about writing. Resistance to writing is familiar ground for us in composition, as Russel Durst and others have attested, but resistance takes a different form in the online world. That resistance comes not merely from the fact that these students don't want to take first year writing, but because many of them feel that they are just jumping through hoops to get their credential and don't value an education in particular. In fact, I have had students in online classes protest when I try to engage with them as students and human beings. One student informed me that he had not signed up for online classes to be in a "classroom setting" but so he could get the work done and move on. Conversely, I have also had some excellent students who are eager to earn a valid online education that they desperately want to be equal to a f2f education, students who, for whatever reason, are stuck in situations that won't allow them to take traditional classes but desire a rigorous education. Some of the most resistant to education have also proven, ironically, to be excellent students—impatient with education for the same reasons that I am impatient with education: because it fails to be meaningful in their personal and professional lives. As I hope to show in more detail later, the online environment works to erase the student's situated position, which, especially for students like Mary, can have negative consequences.

The class that Mary took with me was Composition II, which, at this university, was focused exclusively on argumentative writing. This is the last required writing course for most students—a great relief to many of them, including Mary. Some students

have tested out of or transferred credits for Composition I, while others have fairly recently taken Composition I online. The institution has a strong presence in online classes via a standard syllabus required for all courses. Rules that teachers are required to follow include: requiring a certain percentage of the grade to consist of discussion board participation; assigning a set number of essays; using a required textbook and required rubrics, including a discussion board rubric, for each class; grading three discussion board posts a week; and posting a required "lecture" once a week. In this way, the institution guarantees uniformity in the instruction delivered to all students but severely limits the pedagogical freedom of teachers.

Many online classes are "intensive"—i.e. shortened to allow for quicker progress toward a degree. The courses I have taught have each been eight weeks long, half the length of a traditional college semester. How can students be expected to produce multiple essays—fully developed, revised, and edited—in eight weeks? How can teachers be expected to respond to them all in that time? This shortened term supports the implicit worldview that sees education instrumental, a means to an end—more money, a better position at work—and clearly affects response as teachers are required to push against the common belief that all students have to do is get through the term, and that good writing is even possible in such a short window of time. In addition to this, according to the students I've taught in Composition II, there is very little uniformity in how Composition I is taught at the university—despite the standard syllabus and textbook—so a progression of development through a program can't be anticipated. Many students have not taken Composition I at the university but at various other colleges, often several years, as many as twenty, earlier. The "program" or "writing

sequence" gives way to an individual eight-week class. Concerns about whether skills or mindsets are transferring from writing classes to other classes are exacerbated here because students pass so quickly through these terms.

Along with the often unknown environment in which the student lives is the discursive and material environment that the part time, adjunct, online instructor inhabits—a strange world to be sure. Although I have taught at only one online institution, I believe my experiences are at least relatively representative of the experiences of other part time instructors. The university at which I have taught maintains a faculty web page which is meant to add some professionalism to the process (and it does that, to some extent), but adjuncts are kept significantly away from the inner workings of the department for which they, ostensibly, teach. For instance, I was instructed explicitly *not* to contact the English department in order to discuss anything about my classes or my pedagogy. Everything the department wanted to communicate to me was covered through standard syllabi and required textbooks. In fact, I have never had any interaction with anyone in the English department of the university. This disconnection has an obvious impact on how teachers view their responsibilities to students and how they run their classes. Although administrators are always lurking (for instance, I have received email "evaluations" without any warning at all), teachers have the option to do whatever they want, or, what is probably more common, they can follow the syllabus and textbook to the letter, entering the endless mill, churning out class after class. The situation encourages teachers to set up classes, write their lectures and discussion board posts, and then by and large allow the classes to run themselves.

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Teachers and students interact through various means, but much of the class is structured around online asynchronous discussion boards. Students are meant to respond to at least three significant questions each week, and a rubric, which asks students to integrate material and move the discussion forward, is meant to measure each response. Active involvement on the teacher's part is essential to keep any sense of discussion going, but even then discussion can be hit or miss. Students are capable of answering a prompt without getting involved. They can choose to answer a teacher's inquiries for further thought or information, or they can ignore those queries. One problem with discussion boards is that once they're done, they are done. Students do not go back to them unless explicitly prompted to. This can give the class a jerky rhythm, with each week functioning as a discrete unit, a tendency I believe teachers have to fight against, especially in a writing class in which writing assignments should build on each other in some way.

As online programs go, however, I believe that the program in which I have taught is one of the better ones. It requires extensive training of its instructors, offers opportunities to grow and develop, and pays fairly well—no small consideration. The program has established a strong working relationship with the military and welcomes military students, which adds a certain flavor to classes. In each of my classes, I have had at least two students who were active members of the military. One of these students was even actively serving in a warzone. (This had obvious consequences when he disappeared from class for a week. He was able to pass my class but decided not to take any more classes until returning from Afghanistan.) International students are also welcomed, and the existence of such a diverse student population pushes this

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environment in different directions, giving students real cross-cultural interactions in a meaningful educational setting, a situation that would not be possible in a f2f class. In short, the influence of the institution is both positive and negative, and in either case the institution affects how response is enacted in the "classroom"

Response is clearly central to a teacher's position in an online writing class. I am constructed as a teacher online by syllabi, by the required weekly written "lectures" I post on various subjects, by discussion board posts and responses, and, most importantly, by my response to student writing. Response is how they get to know me as a teacher. If response is part of what writing teachers do in a f2f class, it becomes a greater percentage of what teachers do in an online class. It is how our pedagogical position gets communicated to students. In that sense, previous response theory can be helpful. Am I responding in a facilitative or directive way? Do I take on the role of the editor or the coach in this situation? These matters all continue to be relevant in an online environment.

Beyond that, there is my own situated experience as an online instructor. I have taught these online classes while also pursuing my doctorate in rhetoric and composition—a fact that means that sometimes I don't have as much time to spend on these classes as I might like. For the most part, though, I believe my education is beneficial, as I bring new ideas to each of my classes and refuse to give in to the temptation to set the class up and simply let it run. Since many/most instructors are teaching online only part time, my status as a student and a teacher is probably not uncommon. I am interested in practicing the ideas that I encounter through my education. As a teacher, I continue to try to respond to students in meaningful ways, try

to engage with them on the level of content. What I try to communicate in my teaching is that writing is difficult but valuable work.

According to my students, the quality of online instructors is variable—a fact I can attest to from my own undergraduate education, during which I took one full year of online classes. Students often communicate their disappointment with the lack of response from former online instructors—including instructors who grade but fail to comment on or provide guidance for student writing, and instructors who don't answer student emails or post on discussion boards. On the other hand, many students praise their former instructors, and I have interacted with fellow online instructors who are as rigorous and intellectual as any f2f professor. I would argue that, while there is as much variability among instructors online as elsewhere, there is more uniformity in delivery among online teachers. The environment itself asks teachers to do certain things—one of which is to erase themselves from the equation. With the increased use of video, videoconferences, and other means of communication, this erasure may change, but at this point it is easy to teach online as a disembodied voice of authority.

Obviously, this online world is a significantly different environment in which to teach writing than the environment one would find at a four year residential college or a community college and requires us to be different kinds of teachers. Exclusively online classes are significantly different than hybrid online and f2f classes, in which students would have an opportunity to interact with their professor and forge relationships in a more traditional manner. An environmental approach to writing and response can help us attend to the differences in environments in a more productive way, thinking more deeply about our positions as teachers.

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The last element of the writing-response situation I will consider is the writing task. Since I am thinking about and inquiring into an entire term's worth of work, most of this analytical work will take place below, when I go into more detail with my interactions with my student, but, at this point, I should explain the expectations of the class itself. Composition II in this university is focused exclusively on "argumentative writing," and makes use of White and Billings's *The Well-Crafted Argument*. In the first section of the book, White and Billings explain three different "models" of argumentative writing: the Classical, the Toulmin, and the Rogerian Models familiar to the field, giving examples of each model. I am constantly working against the idea that these "models" are outlines that students have to fill in in order to have a good paper, but, at the time that I taught Mary's class, I was still structuring the class so that we looked at each of the three models, capping the term with a research paper utilizing one of them. The rubric for the course was entirely focused on this last "proposal" paper, asking for such standard fare as a "captivating introduction" and a "rebuttal." Much of the work and response in this class was focused on working toward the capstone paper, which accounted for a large percentage of the final grade. The course, as constructed through the required syllabus and textbook, takes what I would consider a non-ecological approach to argument by laying out the models and illustrating them with example that, in many cases, fail to have relevance for students. For instance, one example of the "Classical model" is an article about the role of faith in the 2004 elections—hardly captivating ecological fare for most students in 2010. It also limits the purview of argument to three models without considering cultural differences.

In addition to the proposal assignment, students in Composition II were required to write four other papers. For the first assignment of the term, I asked students to write an editorial, which I described in the following way:

"Your first assignment will be to write an editorial on a subject *of interest to you*. This should be something you're already fairly familiar with. Letters to the editor and editorials don't generally cite their sources, but when reading a good editorial you know that the writer is knowledgeable. At this point I'm not particularly concerned with what you pick to write about. Your topic could be a relatively small, local issue, or something larger, like health care or the war in Afghanistan."

My goal with this assignment was to encourage students to write about something personally meaningful to them and something that they did not have to research—a move toward a more ecological approach. It was meant simply to be a fairly painless start toward the kind of argumentative writing we would be doing in the class. Since developing this assignment in Mary's class, I have rethought this approach and moved away from editorials and toward blog entries, which seems to be a more familiar genre for most students. I tried to keep the stakes of this assignment fairly low. Unfortunately, I did not have time to look at rough drafts for this assignment because of the need to assign five "major" papers in eight weeks. Instead, I decided to accept revisions for each paper throughout the term, but I did not inform students of this until after I had received their editorials.

Here is Mary's paper, along with my comments. Although I used the commenting feature on Microsoft Word, for simplicity of formatting here I bracket off what I highlighted and offer my comments as footnotes:

Banning smoking on the entire UMO campus

Starting next year of 2011, the University of Maine in Orono will be officially smoke free on the entire premises. [The school did ban smoking to the outside of the buildings and into vehicles on site, but because the school felt like smoking can eventually lead to lung cancer and death, the school decided to take action and ban smoking, not just outside the buildings and in vehicles that it was before, but on the entire campus, and not just the students are banned from smoking, the faculty are as well.][5]

So what does that mean for those who are going to continue to smoke, but to take it elsewhere[.][6] UMO will be "one of more than 350 such schools in the country" to be taking action and help prevent secondhand smoking that can also [be just as deadliest][7] to be smoking it yourself and prevent accidental fires in dorm rooms, if there was any or in other buildings as well as destruction of wild life when disposing the cigarette butts on the ground as if it was [a garbage can and later have one of the faculty or students who volunteer to pick up after the people who litter.][8]

Going to college is like starting a new life of leaving home for these just out of High school students, but to some of them going to college, it means a lot of partying and drinking. [There will always be different classes in school, such as rebels, the geek group etc, which will continue on throughout college so there will always be some students trying to bend the rules, pulling an all nighter to get a paper done before class, sneaking in 6-pack of beer and it will eventually lead to sneaking cigarettes in as well]][9].

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[5] This is a very long sentence, Mary. It would be better to break it down into shorter sentences.
[6] ?
[7] ?
[8] This entire paragraph is one sentence.
[9] There's something off about the reasoning here. Are you saying that smoking is going to happen anyway?

[I actually went to UMO after almost finishing my 2-year degree at a community college, but decided to leave and come back to the community college after a semester because the size of the school and the class size was quite overwhelming. While attending classes at UMO, the campus was so big, which is around 660 acres, I hardly even noticed that there was a problem in smoking on campus, even though when I attended the college about 3 years ago, things could've changed back then][10]. I do not smoke myself and while working and attending school, [I would often get customers who you could tell that they smoke just by the smell that is presented around them, but after smoking for however long they started, they become immune or don't notice it anymore][11].

Even though the college thinks they are doing a good deed and I'd like to be in a non-smoke environment as well, smoking is [their][12] choice. If the students or faculty wants to go out and have a smoke, they should be allowed to do so, but they should also be considerate of those who don't want to smell it around them so students and faculty should have a smoke only area on campus, outside where it isn't in a closed area of a classroom or take it in their car. They should also be considerate of nature and wild life when emptying their cars of cigarette butts. Nobody wants to clean up after them. [As for dormitories, if the students don't want to head outside to the designated smoke area because it is in the middle of winter or something, then by all means, smoke in their dormitories, but the campus should be set up such as, smokers should have an entire floor to themselves every so couple floors in dormitory buildings and each dorm should have a

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[10] Long sentence.

[11] Okay. How does this tie into your argument?
[12] Who's they?

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smoke detector][13]. The schools may have them already, but having not stayed in a dormitory yet until hopefully this coming fall.

I think the college is trying to do something good by helping prevent secondhand smoking and protecting the wild life outside, but they should've thought it more through so everyone would be comfortable. [It is their choice for those who decided to pick up the smoking habit and we can only do anything about it if they decided they want to quite someday or could be a potential problem to others like if they were living in an apartment and fell asleep and left the cigarette burning which could be a fire hazard and for others, but by banning smoking on the entire campus, eventually the students and faculty will protest][14].

Mary,

Why did you choose to write on the same subject as the editorial you looked at? I hope you didn't feel that you had to. What I liked most about your editorial was that you proposed a good, reasonable solution. That was absolutely the strength of the piece.

The personal connection section was good, but I'm not entirely sure how relevant it was. In all, I think you could support your claim more clearly.

I also think you could work on your sentences. As a writing teacher, I definitely try to focus on content first, but sometimes I was distracted by your sentences. Many of them are long. A simple solution is to make all your sentences short and simple. I don't think that's the right way to go. Keep thinking about ways to connect sentences, but consider the fact that there are different ways to do it. When you come to a new idea, you should

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[13] Sentence is odd. But the idea is great. You're coming up with a viable solution. It also seems like a good middle ground.
[14] Again, long sentence.

definitely start a new sentence. I can work on this with you, if you're interested. My suggestion would be to take your second paragraph and rewrite it. Turn it into two or three sentences. Play around with subordinate clauses (see the Penguin book if you don't know what those are.) Your ideas are so strong that we need to get your sentences to match them.

I'm not sure that you could turn this into a longer argumentative paper or your proposal. The situation just seems too small to expand on. You might be able to address smoking as a wider, social issue, but you've done enough with UMO.

You have the opportunity to revise this at any time during the term. Right now I'm going to give it a B-. If you work on your sentences, you could bring it up to a B+, and if you address the other issues (explaining your proposal in more depth, making sure everything supports your main point), then it could go higher.

Jamey

The first thing that I notice about my response to this paper—and the first thing that Mary probably noticed—is the fact that the first four marginal comments deal exclusively with grammar. They are not the kind of red-pen editing symbols that will have no meaning to students, but they still attend to form rather than to content. Only in the endnote do I address content, and even then my level of engagement is fairly minimal. Nothing positive or engaged is communicated. Maybe this lack of engagement stems from my own distance from the topic—I don't particularly care about smoking bans—but I should have been reflective enough to concentrate on content first, in a real and honest way. By addressing her experiences with work, on the campus, and as a young college-age student, Mary was trying to make a personal connection with her

topic, but instead of engaging with those aspects of the paper—which are, according to my assignment instructions, what I was looking for—I glossed over them. I suspect that I would have urged her to develop those aspects of the paper if this were a rough rather than a "final" draft—an example of how I failed to treat writing as ecological. Although I welcomed revisions throughout the term, I still responded to the draft as if it were final—or, at best, as if sentence structure were the main concern. I tried to focus on everything instead of on one or two things.

The length of the endnote, nearly as long as the editorial itself, may also be a problem—there is no guarantee that Mary read to the end. She could have skimmed my comments until she found the grade, felt perfectly satisfied with a low B and carried on, no reflection necessary. In classifying the tone I use as a respondent, I have to admit that it is somewhat teacherly. It is not conversational in the tradition of a Peter Elbow or a Christopher Anson. At the same time, the diction is not beyond the student's reach, not so specialized that she wouldn't understand it. The biggest failing here is not tone but a lack of engagement. I write, "You proposed a good, reasonable solution," but that is not exactly high praise, or presented in a personal way. There is very little sense of connection here.

It's easy to be overly critical of one's own comments (though I believe these are fairly poor comments), and there are elements of this written response that are more positive. There are shades of a personal, caring teacher: "Your ideas are so good…" Most importantly, if Mary were to take my comments seriously as grounds for development, she could easily improve the paper in the ways in which I wanted to see improvement. Some simple work with complex sentences, and with understanding how

to find the ends of sentences, would have helped her writing. In a f2f class I would have sat down and talked to Mary one on one. I might have urged her to use the writing center of a f2f institution. I would have had her read her paper aloud, then talked about subordinate phrases and where and how to separate sentences. I don't believe that this work has to happen before content can be developed—in fact, I think that where my response fails most noticeably is in its inability to see beyond form to content—but it does have to happen. In Hartwell's terms, we could consider what I'm calling for an example of "Grammar 5," which is stylistic. Here is how Hartwell describes a teacher who believes in a "romantic" conception of Grammar 5: "Writers need to develop skills at two levels. One, broadly rhetorical, involves communication in meaningful contexts… The other… involves active manipulation of language with conscious attention to surface form. This second level may be developed tacitly, as a natural adjunct to developing rhetorical competencies" (326). The "tacit" element of the equation changes with ESL students, a salient point here. In an online environment, all I can do to attend to grammar is point to handbooks, websites, and urge email correspondence. Handbooks and websites provide lessons in out-of-context grammar (Grammar 4, or school grammar), and have limited applicability, while email correspondence about writing in progress is often too slow and clunky to accomplish much. Online writing labs and tutoring services connected to the university may be useful here. On an individual level, videoconferences seem to hold promise, but the university at which I've taught encourages asynchronous instruction, and scheduling online conferences might prove even more difficult than scheduling f2f conferences.

There is a very real possibility that I estranged Mary with my comments on this, her first paper of the term. I *do* think that sentences should have been a priority for Mary to work on, but the formal comments clearly overwhelmed the relatively skimpy content comments. I did not engage as a co-inquirer with this student—possibly because I did not see her purpose in writing the paper and failed to share her enthusiasm about the topic. During the week leading up to the assignment, I had asked students to share an editorial from a local paper on a discussion board, and Mary had shared an editorial on the same topic of smoking bans. In fact, I viewed this essay as a poorly worded paraphrase of that editorial. I assumed that Mary had misunderstood the assignment and felt compelled to choose the same subject. That assumption blinded me to the ways in which this piece was significantly different from the editorial: for instance, with the inclusion of personal experience. There is much to praise here—which is why it received such a high grade. Mary is making a fairly clear, concise argument, one that is well suited to the editorial genre. Simply from the process of picking a suitable topic and developing a concise claim, she may have gained some insight about how to write argumentation.

Directly following this assignment, I paired students and had them summarize and analyze each other's arguments. This ensured that they didn't see all of the assignments in the class as discrete. Mary could not simply throw the essay away and forget all about it. She was forced to think about it at least one more time. This was one small step toward making the online environment more ecological, attempting to push students' understanding of writing beyond a work that circulates only between them and me. I realize now that my own understanding of the paper could have been more generous and

"ecological"—I could have tried harder to understand why Mary was interested in this topic.

I also realize now that I had to construct my own version of Mary as a student more than I have to construct a version of the students whom I interact with face to face, and I had to do so in a different way. The online education environment is more constructed, in every way. We never see our students and know little about their everyday lives. A good student becomes a student who writes interesting discussion board posts, raises provocative questions, and is clearly intellectually engaged. The simple task of asking what someone did over the weekend is impossible. Online students are leading radically different lives—from each other and from me. In one way, this puts the constructed nature of all writing in the foreground. Our students are always rhetorically constructing versions of themselves through writing—and in an online environment these constructions *become* our students. Likewise, we are constructed by our response.

Throughout the term, I never felt like I, as a teacher, connected with Mary. I believed that she was not an eager student but was doing what she had to do to pass the class, irrespective of her learning. She accepted the grades I assigned her, never complained or asked questions, and never revised anything, although I gave students the option to revise throughout the term. I have no way of knowing whether or not she even read the comments I provided to her. The advice given by the university is to let students come to you when they have a problem, to force them to take ownership of their educations, and Mary did enough to receive an adequate grade. I considered Mary to be an ESL student, even though she didn't identify herself in that way, and for that reason I

almost immediately thought about formal matters. I tried to attend to her writing in the way an ESL student would be most comfortable with—as something to be worked on formally, as well as for content. In retrospect, this was not the best approach I could have taken. I am still interested in finding ways to approach form (perhaps through error analysis, as discussed in the next chapter), but content has to be paramount. My construction of Mary was simply not generous enough. I suspect that this may be true of the constructions many online teachers create of their students.

The problems I had with responding to Mary, then, began with the first assignment and continued throughout the term. The capstone paper of the class was a "proposal" assignment that asked students to use the Classical, Toulmin, or Rogerian model of argumentation. For this paper, students could choose whether or not they wanted to focus on one of the "clusters" presented in the second half of White and Billings' textbook. Each of these "clusters" featured five or six essays on a certain issue, ranging from "multicultural learning" to "media regulations." The benefit (and drawback) of this controlled-source approach is that students and teachers don't have to search frantically for appropriate material. The main problem with "clusters" is that they limit the kind of inquiry students can pursue. By providing a mere handful of essays on any given topic, no matter how interesting and diverse, clusters give the illusion of completeness. I always urge students to look beyond those clusters and tell them that students who find their own topics produce better papers, but many of them are not motivated to look beyond what is already provided. I have since moved to a more exigence-based method of teaching argumentation, one that, theoretically, ensures that students are engaged with the material with which they're working. In a cluster

approach, students have to find ways to interest themselves in arguments that are presented as static, whereas in exigence based writing (explored more in chapter four), students are asked to identify exigences, to determine where the boundaries of the rhetorical situation are, and to think about how they can encourage change via discourse. In this way, my approach to argument is also becoming more ecological.

For her proposal, Mary did not pick a cluster, but she did pick what could easily have been a cluster topic—the impact of media violence on children. This is almost a stock topic (in fact, I would not be surprised if Mary had written about this topic for another class—Intro to Sociology, for instance). The problem with this topic, as well as many others that our students gravitate to or that are presented in clusters, is that it invites yes-or-no reasoning and is divorced from any sense of a genuine rhetorical situation. It is not ecologically sound to have students write about media violence unless they have some pressing desire or purpose in doing so. The idea that a student paper on media violence will influence the larger rhetorical situation in which the question is active is highly questionable. I was never able to determine *why* Mary chose this topic (something I probably would have learned in a face-to-face class, during conferences), but I still believe that it would have been to her benefit as a student to change topics. My non-confrontational teaching style may have prevented me from urging change more forcefully.

As I worked with Mary over the course of the term, I sensed that the traditional methods of response and the traditional view of writing, in conjunction with the relatively new online educational environment, were not helping me as a teacher, or Mary as a student. I now want to work through my response in hopes of finding a new approach.

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For the proposal assignment, I required students to submit a rough draft—a significant improvement over how I had handled the editorial assignment. In online Composition I classes, I had consistently required drafts and, partly for that reason, found my time with those classes much more rewarding than my time with Composition II classes. I believe students got more out of those classes because they were not focused specifically on argumentation and I could bring more of my own ideas about writing to the class, but also because the ecology of writing was structured in a more dynamic way that provided more room for feedback. As Fleckenstein, et al, make plain, the importance of feedback in an ecology is essential. Even in an eight-week class, more time for feedback and response that is not evaluative or directive has to be made.

Here is Mary's rough draft, along with my comments:

<div align="center">Is Media Violence Too Much Violence?</div>

Television, music, and video games have been around for years and are changing everyday. About twelve years ago, children had their Game boys, Sega, and Nintendo 64, and now the children have the Wii where it is based on your [movements instead][15] of just sitting there with the controllers, [you're actually physically doing something][16]. However, what if a child stumbles upon a television show that is too violent, video games that are too gory or music that has swears throughout the entire lyrics, what will that do to the children's behavior and personality? Act out in school, play too rough with their peers or friends, or become rebellious against their parents? All of these are troubling factors

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[15] This might be a good place to break up this sentence.
[16] I'm wondering why this is important.

that must be addressed by the children's parents and teachers [and monitor what they are surfing on the Internet as well as other type of media devices][17].

["Viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children."][18](Arvidson) Children often mimic their parents or older siblings behavior or attitude, that is how children learn at a young age, but as [parents, you have to teach the children, what is right and what is wrong][19]. Stores that also sell media devices such as Best Buy or Game Stop also has to be strict of the rules of the store and card those who may appear under the age of 18 or what the game the child is purchasing is rated. Most children if purchasing a game, movie, or whatnot will most likely not have ID on them, but [there should be some type of regulation to prevent children from purchasing media products that they are not of age][20]. Most often also are parents too busy with their careers or having to pick up an extra shift just to make ends meet, so they become unaware what their child is observing while they are not under their care such as being in school or at a friends house. "Moral responsibility to point out that there is that link, and parents have to be extremely aware of this link." (Arvidson) There are also a lot of celebrities out there that children would like to either dress like or get the same hairstyle, not just because it looks good, but it is their favorite actor or actress.

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[17] This idea should probably go into its own sentence. You seem to be introducing the idea that there are more and more media-related things for parents to worry about. That makes sense to me. I wonder if you could even bump it up a little more?

[18] The reader should know where this quote comes from—and whether it's reliable or not. I'm putting up a file called "They Say" in Course Documents. It might help you incorporate quotes more effectively.

[19] Okay, so is this your claim? That parents need to be more responsible?

[20] Is this your main claim?

There are many children shows that are out there that they enjoy watching. Teletubbies, Seasame Street, the Muppets, Mickey Mouse, and many more, but have you ever thought what children must be thinking when watching another episode of Road Runner and Coyote where the Coyote is always trying to catch the Road Runner, but the Coyote is always either falling off a cliff or blowing up explosives, and end up blowing himself up instead? However, the Coyote always comes back! [The show of course is fictional and should be for entertainment purposes and that is where children should know that the show is fictional, it is on television to be a form of entertainment and should not be tried at home!][21]

[Another form of media that can be pretty dangerous to young teenagers is the Internet.][22] You can search pretty much anything on the Internet nowadays and get a result through one of the search engines such as Yahoo or Google. [The Internet can also be used to chat with friends, create networks to stay in contact with old friends or make new ones and many more!][23] Some teenagers will even go on chat rooms to make new friends and that is where some dangers will lie. A complete stranger can easily create an anonymous account and pretend to be anybody they want. Now there are some people that actually regulate how the chat rooms are being used whether someone is being aggressive toward another user or they're not acting appropriate. If children using the Internet are not careful, they can easily become too involved with a user and give them their address and phone number or go out and meet them and they will never be heard

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[21] I'm confused. Should someone teach them this? Is this really a significant problem? Do you have any data to back up this claim? (And, I'm wondering if Spongebob might be more relevant than the Road Runner?)

[22] This could be an entirely new paper on the dangers of the internet.

[23] Doesn't this get away from your point about violence?

from again. I admit that when I was young, I too was involved in chat rooms with friends and now that I am older, I can see the dangers and risk of chatting with someone that you do not know.

Arvidson, Cheryl. Statement Linking Media Violence to Violence in Kids Draws

Criticism. The Freedom Forum Online. July 2000.

Mary's note: Still adding some more different types of media to the paper such as banning books at schools and might use the J.K. Rowling series as an example cause most people have heard of her as well as some Internet type media and television.

My Endnote: I think the main thing you have to do, Mary, is determine exactly what your claim is. What are you arguing? I'm thinking about the tobacco essay we read in our textbook. That was not a perfect essay, but it did have a main claim: that people need to be responsible for their own actions. What is your claim here? Should parents be more responsible? Should video game makers be more responsible? Do ratings work? Do you want to talk about violence or the internet? Before you get too far into a draft, I would suggest you try to narrow down your claim. I don't think simply listing different types of media will help you much. We know that there are dangers involved, but what can we do about them, and who is responsible for addressing the dangers?
Jamey

I feel more comfortable with my response to this paper than with my response to the editorial. Although my first marginal comment again addresses sentence structure, a

majority of the comments consider the content of the paper and ask questions, clearly in a more facilitative than directive mode, in Knoblauch and Brannon's terms. Seven of the nine comments are aimed at pushing Mary's thinking deeper, asking her to clarify her claim and informing her when I was confused. The other two directive comments—one on sentence structure, the other dealing with incorporating sources—seem reasonable. They will not overwhelm Mary but will remind her to attend to sentences and focus her attention on another important skill that she needs to learn. Another positive aspect of my comments is that I am clearly searching for a claim—trying to determine exactly where the claim is and asking Mary, in turn, to be more clear about her claim. The lack of a focused claim is the paper's most significant weakness—at least it is if we are adhering to the tenets of Classical argumentation—and making Mary aware of that fact should help her produce a "better" paper, or, at the very least, one that hews more closely to the conventions of the Classical "model." My endnote is focused on ideas, trying to find the claim that will allow the paper to take shape, and does not consider sentence structure at all.

One change I would like to make in my response is to present comments differently. A simple change could be to position my longer written response *before* the marginal response, so that Mary sees her teacher immediately responding to her ideas rather than to form. It might have been to her benefit as a student to see the "narrowing your claim" comment before being confronted with requests to change and rewrite sentences. In fact, if she were to follow my advice in the endnote, my marginal comment about sentence structure may have become moot. Although I told Mary in my response to her editorial that form was less important than content, in fact a more holistic approach

to response, one that allows a student to see how form and content interact, would be preferable. In the case of a rough draft, facilitative, content questions are far more important than anything else. Ideally, I would be able to respond at least twice to each paper—once to a rough draft and once to a penultimate draft in which form and sentence structure and their impact on content would become a larger focus. This would be particularly important for writers, like Mary, who genuinely need to work on their form. This formal work should come in the context of real, authentic learning tasks— ecologically.

Time is a significant constraint here. Although Mary clearly would have benefited from seeing multiple comments at multiple stages of the drafting process, eight weeks is simply not enough time to provide comments to multiple students on multiple drafts. In an eight week course which requires students to write five major papers, a paper will be due sooner than every two weeks. Different approaches to assignments that take advantage of this environment have to be developed. One option could be to rethink the assignments that lead up to this assignment, to make all assignments do work toward the final, something that I have attempted to do more recently. Portfolio grading rather than discrete grading would help as well—if it's possible within the institution (in this case it was not).

A more ecological response to this paper would have addressed Mary's purpose in writing this paper—what and to whom she hoped to communicate by choosing this topic. At this point, I provide what is a traditionally facilitative response. This will assist Mary's development as a writer, but I wonder if more could be done to tie the paper to the student's environment. This would not be difficult to do in this situation. As is clear

from the paper, Mary had grown up as a digital native. By treating this assignment as a standard research paper, asking Mary to deepen and focus her claim, I missed to opportunity to connect this writing to real, meaningful leaning. What does Mary *really* believe about media violence? Why does it matter? Could her section about chatrooms and her experience on the internet open up more opportunities? Nancy Welch's technique of sideshadowing could have been beneficial here. Instead of funneling Mary's thoughts into one claim-driven direction, what would have happened had I opened up her opportunities? For one thing, the process would become messier for Mary. She would have had to write her way out of chaos. But if she could find some way to make the paper more meaningful to her life, she would learn more from writing it. An ecological approach would find ways to engage connections between her experiences and her ideas, making use of other literacies that Mary might have. How has media violence affected her? Why should people care? Instead of trying to develop a simple claim out of a complex issue—and Mary obviously senses the complexity because she resists a clear, tidy claim—what might happen if we try to connect argument to belief? These issues can be difficult to address in an online class, but they are essential to ecological response.

I suspect ecological response would have elicited a different kind of revision than my traditional facilitative response did. Here is what Mary did with my comments:

Is Media Violence Too Much Violence?

Television, music, and video games have been around for years and are changing everyday[24]. About twelve years ago, my siblings and I had our Game boys, Sega, and Nintendo 64, and now children and adolescents have the Wii where it is based on your movements instead of just sitting there with the controllers. However, what if a child stumbles upon a television show that is too violent, video games that are too gory or music that has swears throughout the entire lyrics, what will that do to the children's behavior and personality? [Act out in school, play too rough with their peers or friends, or become rebellious against their parents][25]? [All of these are troubling factors that must be addressed by the children's parents and be monitored what they are surfing on the Internet as well as other type of media devices][26].

As Cheryl Arvidson explains, "viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in [children."][27] Children often mimic what their parents or older siblings behavior [or attitude appears in a situation, that is how children learn at a young age, but as parents, you have to teach the children, what is right and what is wrong][28]. Some parents are also too busy with their careers or having to pick up an extra shift just to make ends meet, so they become unaware what their child is observing while they are not under their care such as being in school or at a friends house. Cheryl Arvidson explains[[29],] "moral responsibility to point out that there is that link, and parents have to be extremely aware of this link." [There are

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[24] This would be two words.
[25] Maybe starting with "Will they…" would help.
[26] This sentence is not clear to me. Do you mean parents must address these issues and monitor their children?
[27] Page number?
[28] I like how you use this quote now. It drives your own thinking.
[29] That there is a?

also a lot of celebrities out there that children would like to either dress like or get the same hairstyle, not just because it looks good][30], [but it] [31]is their favorite actor or actress.

One form of media violence that can be hazardous to children's behavior and personality are children shows such as: Teletubbies, Seasame Street, the Muppets, Mickey Mouse are just a few examples. But have you ever thought what children must be thinking when watching another episode of Road Runner and Coyote where the Coyote is always trying to catch the Road Runner, but the Coyote is always either falling off a cliff or blowing up explosives, and end up blowing himself up instead? However, the Coyote always comes back or other shows that might be giving the wrong message to children. [The show of course is fictional and should be for entertainment purposes and that is where children might get confused and should know that the show is fictional],[32] it is on television to be a form of entertainment and should not be tried at home! Fanti explains that "exposure to TV, video game and film violence may lead to several problematic outcomes, including increased aggressive and violent behavior, increased aggression-related thoughts or the accessibility of violent constructs in memory and desensitization to real-life aggression and to the suffering of victims." [Fanti also explains that desensitization "has been defined as the diminished emotional responsiveness to a negative or an aversive stimulus after repeated exposure to it."][33]

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[30] I'm wondering why this sentence is here. The paragraph seems focused on parents and what they should do. Why bring celebrities into it here?
[31] "But because it is"?
[32] This seems like a good time to bring up the idea that parents should teach their kids the difference between fictional shows and real life. Parents seem to be your main focus.
[33] After this something about parents would help.

Another form of media violence is video games. There are many different types of genres of video games as well as ratings that the game developer suggested a certain age group could play. It is quite similar to movies and television with different ratings, except [you are more involved in video games][34] with completing certain tasks or quests for an example. Video games are more geared toward young boys or adolescents, however some girls play as well. When boys are addicted to video games and are most often [35]games that they wouldn't do in real life such as Mortal Combat or James Bond that are a few examples given as well as many other similar types of video games. Most often, the graphics of the game, [the visuals as well as the audio can draw the viewer and eventually become addicted to the game][36]. It is about the same with television, movies and video games back in the 1980's, 1990's. The graphics are not that great 20 years ago, but as technology was further developed over the years, the graphics improved, Moller and Krahe explains "almost 20 years ago, Braun and Giroux (1989) found a violence rate of 71% for a sample of 21 arcade games. Since then, hard and software of game technology have improved dramatically, graphics and sound effects have become highly realistic, and modern games often show a technical quality similar to films." Even though this article is based in Germany, the results in video game addiction and violence in children and adolescents can be quite similar in circumstances to the United States.

Over the past couple of years, I, myself have enjoyed video games, not as violent as some of the young adolescents boys would often play, but would play World of Warcraft on my downtime when I am either out of work, and have majority of my

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[34] Okay. So it has a stronger impact?

[35] ? I'm confused here.

[36] Again, coming back to parents here and what they can do about it would make your claim more focused.

homework finished. The World of Warcraft consists of creating a character from one out of (depending on the expansion pack) nine races to choose from. After completing several quests, you gain experience and level. [What makes the game may appear violent is majority of the quests having to fight with an in-game character that isn't controlled by other players like yourself or world wide, but is built in the game and will have some violent outcomes such as some blood and gore.][37] There is also some talk of alcoholic beverages as well as some others that wouldn't make the game suitable for children and I especially believe the game shouldn't even be possibly be suitable for adolescents either. Looking at the box of the game now, the game is rated, T for Teen and that it is rated for that age group because blood, gore, suggestive themes, alcohol, and violence is depicted, but as explained above, I think the game is rated too lightly for that age group in my opinion.

Another game that I also enjoy playing every once in a while, but haven't picked it up is the Sims. The Sims is a virtual game that you create and control and I imagine not a lot of young adolescents boys would often be found playing this because I feel it more [geared toward girls][38]. In the game, you would create a family, move the family into a virtual world with their own house and you basically control how they run their daily life such as going to work or not, but if you chose not to send your "sim" to work, most likely that virtual character will get fired. It is very much like real life and it is so much fun creating yourself and your family in that game and see how they turn out. After looking

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[37] This sentence seems unclear to me.
[38] This idea of genders could be an entirely different topic. I'm curious about why you're bringing this game up, though. How does it support your claim?

at this game and it's rating, it is rated T for Teen and it is rated for that age group because there is crude humor, sexual themes and violence depicted in the game.

[Depending on how old the child is and my siblings was in their teens when they've enjoyed watching horror movies for entertainment, some will not][39]. I often remember being tricked into watching horror movies such as *Jurassic Park* and was told by one of my sisters that the only scary part in the movie was at the beginning. I was about in my pre-teens at the time. I, of course knew that wasn't true as I continued watching it and wasn't interested in watching a movie with a lot of action, adventure, and with some grisly scenes, but as I grew into my late teens, early twenties, those are one of my favorite genres to watch because you learn that those scenes, which are often explained and talked about in the Special Features of the DVDs how the directors, special effects etc have worked to make those scenes look real! [It is one of my favorite parts of the DVD to view, especially if you are going to college to learn how to animate][40].

[Nowadays media companies and shopping stores are coming out with more devices such as, parental controls to either block certain channels on the television as well as certain websites or terms used on the Internet. The parental controls are often handy if parents want to block channels or websites, but it is also the kind of thing that companies sometimes don't make it easy to take it off when you changed your mind or your children has grown up and is mature to watch the content that is displayed on the television][41]. The stores such as Best Buy or Game Stop should also be aware that

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[39] ?

[40] It seems like you're interested in this topic, rather than on violence, per se. Maybe changing your topic would have led to a better paper. I'm just not entirely sure whether this personal experience material is helping you make your argument.

[41] Now you're back to your main claim about parents.

children who do not meet the ratings of video games should have some type of regulation to prevent children from purchasing video games that is not suitable for their age group. In grocery stores or movie theaters we card those who look or appear under age to purchase tobacco, alcohol or seeing a rated R movie. The first time I have ever been carded to view a movie in theaters was *Wall-e* and that movie wasn't even rated R! The ticket person had thought I asked to see the movie *Wanted*, which was out at the same time, and when my boyfriend came up, he asked, is *Wall-e* rated R, and she replied, "yes, it is." I will also always be carded for purchasing alcohol because I look younger than I appear, but the point is, the media stores should also have something similar so they are not selling video games that is not appropriate for the children's age group and selling products that might not be suitable or mature isn't helping to prevent violence on children's television sets.

Media has been around for decades and a huge amount of us cannot live without it when there is either a snowstorm or thunder shower that is predicted by the weathermen and eventually you lose power for a certain number of days. But because media has impacted much of our lives, [we need to protect children of the violence that is depicted] [42]whether it is on the television through one of the children shows or online through the Internet. [I'm not sure of those who have been involved in crime, robbery, or theft watched or have been exposed to violence when they were children, but at least parents can do now for their children is to help prevent it where it could possibly begin][43].

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[42] Good.

[43] This is a little odd to me. Wouldn't it be better to concentrate on the dangers you know exist.

Mary,

This is a much better draft than the first draft. A lot of the added material is good.

During sections of the paper, you seem to be arguing effectively. But I still don't know

whether you've focused your claim enough. It seems like parents are the main concern in

the beginning of the paper, but that fades out as you write on. It really seems that another

topic might have suited you better. Your personal experience material was all interesting,

but it didn't seem focused on the claim. You incorporate quotes much more effectively

here, but you don't include page numbers in in-text citations. In general, I think this

piece has great potential. B-

Jamey

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        3d9a74-c748-4671-b590-
        b451aaadecc1%40sessionmgr10&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d
        #db=a9h&AN=36519821

Again, I would like to analyze and think about this piece and my response to it,

using my thinking as a springboard for inquiry. The piece itself is pretty standard

research paper fare, with the addition of some personal experience. It's difficult for me

to get excited about a paper like this because it seems disembodied from any rhetorical situation—a failing of mine in setting up the assignment, not hers in completing it. How many times have writing teachers seen papers similar to this? Too many, I would argue. And writing teachers see papers like this because the default ecology of an argumentative class welcomes, maybe even calls for, papers like this. If the claim takes precedence over all else, real argumentation is not being enacted. As James Crosswhite makes clear, a claim is a "call" to someone else. It is social. Research papers like this one fail to call out to anyone. No matter how focused their claims may be, they shout into the void because there are no real stakes involved. An ecological approach to response would discourage this kind of paper.

At the same time, it's important to value what is working in this draft of the paper. This draft makes a significantly better claim than the previous draft. It is a manageable and fairly clear argument now. This is also a significant piece of work—seven pages of writing by a student who probably does not enjoy writing (and, unfortunately, won't like it any more after writing this piece). The first few pages have not been significantly revised, but some attempt has been made to use my comments for development.

For my part, in my comments I focus on meaning much more than on grammar, telling Mary when she is "back to her main claim." The marginal comments provide her with a kind of "movie of the mind," to use Peter Elbow's phrase, as it is playing out. Giving further options for revision suggests that I did not consider this final piece "final," but as a work still in process which would benefit from further revision. This idea that nothing is ever final is essential to me, but it may seem strange to students, especially ones I don't interact with f2f. For those students, these comments probably simply seem

too little too late. My comment about the paper having "potential" may also have seemed strange. In any case, my response focuses on both content and form.

In this draft, Mary is still committing the same kind of sentence structure errors that she was making in the first paper seven weeks earlier. The errors might occur slightly less frequently now—it's difficult to determine. In fact, it may be *impossible* to determine, given the short duration of the course. I had tried to get her to focus on sentences throughout the term, and there is some evidence here to suggest that she did. I can only hope that the issue was raised for her, but that it doesn't become yet another example of an English teacher nitpicking and making writing a chore.

I would argue that the subject of the paper is still not the right one for Mary. She is writing a disembodied essay. Some interesting moments in the essay come when the writer attempts to incorporate personal experience. The personal experience is not integrated well, and it may point more to Mary's perceptions about my beliefs as a writing teacher than any desire to use personal experience as support. I probably made it clear that I believe all writing is personally invested in certain ways, even when that investment is not readily apparent. In a f2f class with a more complex and full understanding of context, we could have discussed these issues further. Conferences would have helped us bridge our different ideas about the paper. I may not have been able, or willing, to convince Mary to change her topic, but I would have been able to push her further into thinking about *why* she was writing about this topic. What are the stakes? What is the rhetorical situation? How can you make a real contribution to the discussion? As it is, I can only sense these problems now, months after the class itself has been over. With ecological response, I would have been asking not only for personal writing, but

also for thoughts about how belief and experiences interacted. How did Mary's position as a student, a Maine resident, and a digital native influence her claim about media violence?

Significantly, the basic artificiality of the online environment contributed to the decontextualized writing task. My decisions and actions were a large part of how response was enacted, but those decisions and actions were guided by my position in a constrained rhetorical ecosystem. I would argue that the easiest thing to do in an online class is to teach writing in a disembodied way, with assigned topics, clusters, models of writing, and dead rhetorical situations, a method that does not do anyone—particularly struggling students—much good.

Ecological Analysis

At this point I'd like to step back and do an ecological analysis of this writing-response situation. Fleckenstein, et al. claim that we should think of a rhetorical ecosystem as a "network of organisms and environments that are interdependent, diverse, and responsive to feedback" (394). How, then, are the interactions between Mary and myself situated within a network of organisms and environments? The organisms include Mary and myself, primarily, along with other members of the online class, who offered feedback through peer workshops. How did we interact with each other, how were we dependent upon each other, how did one of us influence the other? The most cohesive environment here is the environment of the online education site Blackboard, but other environments include Mary's life-world and my life-world, which were considerably different. Much is hidden from analysis because of the nature of the online environment.

I know that Mary is not a traditional college student—she is not living on a campus, nor is she fulltime—but I don't even know what Mary's job is or how much time she has available to devote to class work. Her life-world impinges on and interacts with the rhetorical ecosystem, but the interactions are largely hidden from me, almost by necessity. Even if I were to know more details about Mary's job, I would not really know what that job entailed or how she worked around it to produce work in the class. In fact, I chose to examine Mary's paper in this chapter because her life-world so clearly influenced her writing, but it was impossible for me, working within the traditional means at my disposal, to delineate those influences. Her ESL status is only one aspect of what I would need to know about her to work with her effectively as a writing teacher. We know that not all writers are alike, that not all writers require the same kind of instruction. Knowing something as basic as whether a student is a residential bilingual or an international student can make a significant difference in how we teach and how we approach response. Without knowing the life-worlds of out students we miss pedagogical opportunities.

My life-world also influences the ecology of the classroom. Where I come from and what I'm doing at the time both influence how I teach. My situated position as someone who returned to school, a middle class father and creative writer, influences all of my interactions with students, in ways that will become clear in the next chapter. In addition, the life I was living at the time had an impact on this situation. The fact that, while I taught this online class as an adjunct instructor, I was also teaching one class at Lehigh University, in addition to working on my dissertation, influenced how much time I could devote to this student and to this class. My own writing history and educational

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history, and what kind of writing I'm expecting from students, all impinge on the environment. I have some degree of power in how to shape the environment and assign writing, but I am also an organism caught within certain conditions. I have been trained to function in this environment in a certain way by the university. I have a script to read from—a standard syllabus—and I have to figure out how to navigate through what is still a fairly new environment, online education. Maybe because of the novelty of the situation, and certainly because of the constraints, I fell back on a more traditional approach than I would normally take with argumentation. While trying to work against the "models" approach to writing, student expectations, course requirements, and the textbook all reinforced the models approach. My response, while facilitative in Knoblauch and Brannon's terms, was also traditional.

Blackboard is, again, the most cohesive and, perhaps, the most constraining environment in this ecosystem. Elements of this aspect of the context may be specific to the university at which I taught, but the approach of the university seems fairly common (there are, after all, only so many approaches one can take). The Blackboard site is where all of the work of the classroom is meant to take place. What is this environment supposed to look like, how is it supposed to function? The name itself is instructive. A physical blackboard is a rare sight in a classroom today, but the name makes a nod to traditional educational settings, conjuring images of a classroom with neat, ordered rows of desks, all pointing in the direction of a blackboard on which a teacher, as unquestioned authority, makes lecture notes. Instead of rows of desks, Blackboard provides teachers with neatly arranged discussion boards. While being trained to teach an online class, teachers at the university at which I've taught are told to set up three discussion boards a

week and to solicit a certain kind of writing—mostly formal responses to content. Rubrics that call on students to integrate material and push discussions forward are used. Students post on these boards, and then they are done with them. The passage of time is marked by the passage of discussion board forums. Teachers are also required to post "lectures" each week—another nod to traditional education. These lectures give the teacher's take on the textbook material, expanding and elaborating on material that is meant to be common to all sections of the course. The lecture can be a Word document, but many teachers have started producing video lectures—a positive trend toward a more "embodied" approach. Along with discussion boards, in composition classes students are required to write traditional essays—four in Composition I and five in Composition II. As stated earlier, this puts students under very real time constraints. Every online student I have communicated with has anecdotally commented on how much *work* is required in online classes—as if work and stress equals education. This environment can be described as fast-paced, segmented, ephemeral, and evaluation-based.

There is also what might be termed the ideological environment in which Mary and I coexist as organisms—higher education itself. Students and teachers both come to this environment with ideas about what is going to happen here. Students are going to write, while teachers are going to respond and grade. The institutional ideology is conveyed through rubrics, which serve as essential mediating tools to objectify teacher's comments. The work is supposed to be demanding and "academic." When students are asked to talk about the differences between the writing they did in high school and the writing they are doing in college, they invariably talk about writing for "information" in high school vs. writing for "interpretation" in college. Students generally want to push

toward intellectual work. The ideological environment colors what we do and can do, in writing and in response.

Now I'd like to return to Fleckenstein et al's definition. Organisms and environments are "interdependent, diverse, and responsive to feedback." I have already suggested ways in which they are interdependent and diverse, and I have begun to suggest ways in which students are responsive to feedback. I would like to spend more time with this idea of feedback, especially considering the nature of this dissertation. There are different levels of feedback, including the ideological, the institutional, and the personal. Ideological feedback involves what is expected of students generally in higher education, institutional feedback involves what is expected more specifically of students and how they progress through their education, and personal feedback includes teacher response. Teacher response is only one, fairly minor part of the overall feedback mechanism in a class, but it is the most visible and, perhaps, the one most amenable to change.

We cannot change response effectively without changing our view of writing. To take an ecological approach to response means to look at the entire system of writing instruction, including writing itself. Teacher expectations have clear and distinct impacts on how we respond. We need to open writing to new environments as our students seek access to new environments or are placed within new rhetorical environments, and we need to welcome different kinds of writing, including mixed and alternative discourses (see Bizzell, Fox and Schroeder). We also need to make more attempts to enrich how writing is conceived in the online educational environment. One way to do that is to broaden our understanding of students' life-worlds, possibly by pursuing more exigence-

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based writing. Another idea, beyond the scope of this dissertation, is to significantly alter the online educational environment. In Jonathan Alexander's "Gaming, Student Literacies, and the Composition Classroom," online gaming is described as a multilayered, collaborative environment in which the users (or organisms) are deeply invested in developing their literacies. This kind of environment could and should be fostered in an online education in general and writing classes in particular.

Several actions can be taken with response specifically to make the environment richer for students, online and f2f. Some of these actions follow from what we do traditionally, while others will be relatively new. As others have written, we should make an effort to be facilitative rather than directive, and we should try to *engage* on a meaningful level with students and their writing (Straub). In addition, we should continue to work with multiple drafts and find a way to comment on both formal and content matters. These are all good pedagogical tactics. We should give students who struggle with form a way to manageably work with certain important aspects of grammar (like sentence structure), while ensuring that grammar instruction is not our primary focus. We should guide students to higher level skills, the ability to revise in particular, and to see how different strategies are required in different rhetorical situations.

In a more ecological vein, we could also reconceptualize the classroom ecology and ask students to view their environments differently with us. We could make note of the ways in which their situated positions influence what they write about and how they can deliver their writing to various audiences. Delivery becomes important in ecologically-minded classrooms. This adds another layer of response on top of traditional facilitative, engaged response—metadiscursive response that drives students to

think deeply about how they can be heard within various environments. We could ask online students to think about the online educational environment itself and the impact that it has on their writing and their writing education. We could and should ask students to engage in various rhetorical ecosystems rather than only in the rhetorical ecosystem of the online class. Mary's research paper is not unusual in its limited embrace of audience. Teachers often ask students to write research papers that have no ultimate goal other than (and only possibility) the writer's development. I would argue that the writer's development is not going to be maximized unless she sees a real reason to engage in discourse with others on a topic that has meaning for her. If Mary is truly concerned with the issue of media violence, there are ways that she can be encouraged to consider the matter in a different light. There are sociological blogs, studies being done, and parents and advocacy groups that are concerned about the issue. Even if Mary was to find a rhetorical audience of a single person whom she genuinely wanted to convince, her writing instruction would benefit and become more authentically ecological. Teacher response is essential in helping students reconceptualize writing in this way. Too many students have accepted the idea that writing is a discrete act, to be done in fifty minutes, in response to a decontextualized prompt, and then forgotten. Ecological response can move students away from that notion.

Diverse modes of response, beyond written comments, might also be helpful in an ecological approach to teaching writing, especially online. I have started to use video responses in my classes, which gives students a more embodied view of their teacher and has generally been well received. I find that I focus more on content in videos. Many have written about how recorded voice comments seem to allow students to get more

from response (Anson, Cryer and Kaikumba, Sommers), and video may be another extension of that, an extension that should be as conceptually helpful as voice comments while adding the socio-emotional element that comes from a more embodied approach. I would also like to use two-way video, or have students videotape themselves. Encouraging students to respond to my responses is part of a more ecological view of response. I would like to find a way to make conferences, via email or video, as "real" as possible, and to find different ways to understand what students are experiencing, throughout my writing classes and beyond those classes.

The limitations and constraints to an ecological view of writing and response are particularly noticeable with online education. These constraints are partially institutional—the institution holding the reins too tightly. During one semester, the university at which I've taught experimented with a syllabus template that could not be changed in any but the most mundane ways. In addition, there are limits to the software itself. Teachers have to be allowed to be teachers and not messengers of a static curriculum. Restrictive online programs have to become more elastic (and Blackboard *has* started to loosen up by adding many tools beyond the discussion board). My basic belief is that online writing classes may never be as useful as face to face writing classes, and definitely are not as useful as currently propagated, yet by attempting to make online writing classes as ecological and embodied as possible, and by tapping into the new ways of thinking that digital media encourages, the process of online education may become as educational as it is expedient. While we try to change the system, possibly to something more closely resembling the kind of engaged role playing games many of our students

now engage in, we have to work within the system to change response in small, more

ecologically astute ways.

Chapter Three

Where Is Now Looking Back

Chapter two focused on a situation in which context was inevitably limited—

without face to face interaction, online writing teachers are always functioning with

limited context. Yet even in f2f classes elements of context can be missing or misread.

In this chapter, I will explore my response to one paper and explain how thinking about

this response spurred the desire for a more ecological approach to response. After

assigning a five-paragraph essay to a basic writing class in Atlantic City in 2007, I

received the following paper, and I sat in an empty classroom reading and rereading it,

wondering what I had gotten myself into:

A Big Decision in Life

A very Big Decision, in my life who. I would like to introduce myself, How are

you doing? Name TJ[44]. It had all starter in High School. Seventeen years old taking

place. I was trying to figure out, what changes were going to happen me. Figuring the

path also risks were coming me. I guess that i am going talk you about beginning.

Starter with me making a hard typically chance going into the NJROTC. Taking where

in ACHS i knew the change had to made of.

"The year now two thousandth and five." I went into the program finally change

my mind. In the first week struggle. I knew it was not going to be easy for me. Long

journey road. My family were happy toward me. People teachers glad looking steering

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[44] Pseudonym.

seeing what type of moves i was going to make. Chief saying son your going to be

alright son, I see something in you speaken me.

"I myself saw a change me." Because the way how actually how start talking.

style change completing different. Staying out of trouble. Hanging around positive

people nor not negative effecting on a young man. Thinking about where can also what

and who I were going to be at. Can TJ take a chance now on a straight long path.

Making a career move standing in the school. Seeing if I could get me some scholarships

in colleges far away on campus.

"Big decision in the NJROTC." Now thinking about the reserves Miltary, Navy,

Airforce. What can I see myself in what type of a big huge branch. Thinking always

about the wars were going on. Standing strong in program. I wanting to expand and

grow. Learn things know a lot love history, don't look treadys going on.   Staying in

there going through a lot things.

"What change's i made." Made a big difference in the environment around.

Joined a couple people in. Only first year in there. My Literuantent and Chief said

youuure a strong man. Now getting questionan. How what your going to do for career.

Both them responding back to me can you see yourself in one of the branch's. I don't

know asking myself that question! The only way to find out is pray asked God also Jesus

his son.

"Summertime here now about be a senior." Going on the next year. All the

months being in there. Each month learned something, many times saying i can do it. I

lived by myself with a younger brother. Did not live with my parents almost couple

years seeing both them. The two hardest years that had been distructable in ACHS.

Everyday keep pushing never said i am going to give up now.

"I felt like the only way how would change." Indepentdent had go through fire it's about suffering in life. I knew that going in there were a big challenge. taking going and learning a lot experience each day living. Growing is going through difficult struggles to me everything test. The reason why because the responability's that we hav's as

"People everyday life." Me my decisions it's in God Jesus i know that would be two people make for me. The regealious I am Christian and go to Chruch. In life you got to be a very big humble person. Staying very strong. Don't never give up your dreams just following them at all times.

"I know the type of person i am Positive." The reason why because how far now i am now. Did not never give up and strive to achieve what's my life. Knowing the second year in ACHS about to be finish school saying look i made it next step to go somewhere. Learning and remember in school from the program taught me be a obience person how to be respectful at all times. Took a path now got fnish what i starting now.

"Where is now looking back." In order to go on life it's about experience. Suffereing big time fire. It's a big mission to make at. I fell like all the decision that were made is good. The reason why because the man up stairs say your going to be alright don't worry. In ever new so much you got go through and see to make a very humble person and make it very far life now.

"My decisions in life now." Is to keep in mind everything was taught me. Don't forget nothing and look back what you had to go through each year. Because it is easy to live but harder to die. I take life as experience, grow, improve, prosresity make it ok

everyday. Achieve what earned and go on.

The situation I faced after reading this paper is almost an archetypal scene for
inexperienced basic writing teachers, the moment when we confront the enormity and
complexity of our task—the responsibility to respond to something that seems foreign to
us. Probably the most well known example comes from Mina Shaughnessy in her
landmark book *Errors and Expectations*:

> I remember sitting alone in the worn urban classroom where my
>
> students had just written their first essays and where I now began to
>
> read them, hoping to be able to assess quickly the sort of task that lay
>
> ahead of us that semester. But the writing was so stunningly unskilled
>
> that I could not begin to define the task nor even sort out the
>
> difficulties. I could only sit there, reading and re-reading the alien
>
> papers, wondering what had gone wrong and trying to understand
>
> what I at this eleventh hour of my students' academic lives could do
>
> about it (vii).[45]

In this situation, it is difficult not to feel overwhelmed, and, as someone who had
taught three previous basic writing classes but had no training in the teaching of basic
writing, I was overwhelmed. I realized that I lacked the background knowledge
necessary to make even the most rudimentary response to this paper. Its syntax seemed
tangled beyond comprehension. The most basic elements of school writing, as I

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[45] I hope to return to some of the ideas in this passage later, problematizing Shaughnessy's use of the terms
"unskilled," "alien,' and "eleventh hour." My main point here is that the emotions Shaughnessy felt were
very close to those I felt, several decades later.

understood them, were missing. The paper was a mess, and I was responsible for straightening it out. What seemed worse was that I sincerely liked the student who wrote this paper. He arrived early, eagerly participated in classroom discussions, was charming, and claimed to love reading and writing. He even brought a book to class to prove it—a young adult fantasy novel. I was eager to help him realize his ambitions. I knew that there must be something that I could do to move this student toward writing proficiency, but I didn't have the faintest idea where to start.[46]

Here is the entirely of my response to TJ's essay, penciled in tentatively on the top of the paper:

- A little difficult to grade

- Not a 5P

- Some really positive stuff

I am now embarrassed by my response, or, more accurately, lack of response, but at the time even those three bulleted points took more time to formulate than grading and responding to all of the other papers, with their more garden-variety assortment of fragments and missing articles, combined. Maybe, I argued with myself, against my previous convictions, there *were* writers who needed practice in the five-paragraph essay form, who needed help arranging their disparate ideas into a neat and simple structure. This was an idea I had always dismissed in my teaching. In the three bullet points, I was essentially giving TJ formal advice, while trying to hold onto my practice as a nurturing teacher. All of these comments point to my experience as an organism within this

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[46] I had not even begun to question the idea of what makes a writer "proficient," or to consider the controversies involved with bringing students into conformity with the conventions of academic discourse.

rhetorical ecosystem—one very much struggling to survive. I had believed that the ecosystem was stable—students were going to produce a certain kind of writing and I was going to respond to it in a certain way—but this paper wrenched my perceptions of the ecosystem.

When talking to TJ individually, I tried to help him organize his thoughts into an acceptable, academic form. I suggested that he think of the three main things he had gained from his military experience—maybe, I suggested, "survival," "maturity," and "discipline." My comments, both written and oral, were focused exclusively on form and organization, virtually ignoring content. "Some really positive stuff" does little to validate a writer's sense of himself as a writer, and was obviously my paltry attempt to think of something, anything, positive to say about the paper. The overriding, implicit message in my response was: this is simply not *right*.

This chapter is an attempt to analyze my response to this paper more clearly and to push myself as a writing teacher, and the field of composition and rhetoric in general, in the direction of a more contextual approach to response. My skewed perception of the rhetorical ecosystem is fertile ground for analysis. The first thing I need to do is give this paper a close reading, a reading that respects it as a work of communication, belatedly giving it its due.

A Close Reading

TJ's more-or-less narrative essay is more than simply the story of "a big decision." It is the story of a charming, determined, sincere, and humble young man struggling against great difficulties—"suffering big time fire." As an adolescent, the

writer was separated from his parents and lived alone with a younger brother. His decision to join the NJROTC—the Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps—was complicated by many questions: which branch of the military to join; whether or not he approved of or wanted to participate in the wars being fought at the time in Afghanistan and Iraq; whether to pursue a career in the military or to realize his academic ambitions, which stemmed from a love of history. Once in the NJROTC, TJ struggled, which complicated all of his subsequent decisions. In the end, all that the writer can do is turn to God, with no more answers now than he had had at the beginning of the essay. It is almost impossible to read this piece without sensing the tenacity and strength of the writer. From the very beginning of the piece, TJ works diligently to forge human connections—mentioning his proud family and his chief, and introducing himself to the reader. ("Name TJ.")

Instead of a single overriding decision, the decisions in the narrative are multiple: first TJ has to decide whether or not to join the NJROTC; then he has to decide what to do afterwards—whether to continue in the military or pursue a college education. Confronted with the unknown, the only option TJ has, as a young faithful Christian, is to turn to God. He places all of his faith in God and decides to attend college. During his time in the military, the writer had developed many positive attributes—obedience and respect, in particular—and in the paper he combines these attributes with the humility of his Christian faith. TJ is analyzing not only a decision, but, what is more significant, the results of that decision. Through his experience in the NJROTC, he found himself talking and acting differently, becoming a more respectable and respectful person. The fact that the writer is conscious of this personal change is a step toward the kind of self-

reflexivity that writing teachers should be encouraging in their students. *This is where I am,* the paper seems to be saying, *but that's not as important as where I am going.* This move toward self-reflection is seen in the second to last paragraph as well. "'Where is now looking back.' In order to go on life it's about experience." TJ is not interested in dwelling on the past but in propelling himself forward.

Strength, humility and charm are clearly evident in the paper, but equally important is what's missing. There is no mention of anyone who was important in TJ's high school career—no teachers or guidance counselors who had a significant impact on these decisions. In Deborah Brandt's terms, there were no literacy sponsors, at least not in the school system. His two years at Atlantic City High School were "distructable." Although I'm not entirely sure what that word signifies, what life experiences are buried beneath that word, I assume that the term is not positive. Although the writer allows the reader significant access into his life by talking about his missing parents and his brother, he withholds much from the reader, as well. This is not the work of someone who thinks he has it all figured out, but the writing of a student who is thirsty for new knowledge, for understanding—a writer using writing to develop his thinking. And, despite a fairly traditional conclusion that might be considered the appropriation of a commonplace, the voice of a teacher or an elder, there is a sense of ongoing change and process to the paper. This ability to forestall closure is another attribute that we look for in our best students. There is, in fact, "some really positive stuff" here. It would have helped me to reflect on and understand exactly what I meant by that phrase so I could have helped TJ develop that positive stuff further.

The overarching "theme" or "thesis" of the paper seems to deal with suffering and

perseverance, specifically through faith in Jesus Christ. Rather than abdicating responsibility for his own life, the writer is acknowledging difficulties and searching for answers. One answer comes from the respect he gets and gives in the military. Another answer comes from his faith in God. The paper, like the writer, is a work in progress, not yet fully developed but showing great potential. The two answers are traditionally not welcome in academic writing—an appeal to Christ may seem un-intellectual, and the obedience required by the military may seem less than conducive to the critical thinking skills we wish to develop—but I would argue that allowing TJ to develop those answers further would have ultimately been of more value to him than ignoring his faith or his military ethos. It would have also helped to find the boundaries of this ecological situation—the interrelations between decisions and situations in the writer's life are too vast to fit within five paragraphs (which is why it is ten paragraphs).

Yet, even though the situation seems unbounded, the paper also illustrates a will to organization. The piece is organized chronologically: it starts from the "beginning," TJ's enrollment in the NJROTC; then it proceeds to detail his tortured decision-making process, his struggles through big-time fire and his appeal to Jesus; and it ends with a realization that the NJROTC has made him stronger. There is no final closure because there was no closure to that situation. Other signs of organization are evident. The paragraphs are standard length, and each one begins with a sentence set in quotation marks that acts as a topic sentence. Admittedly, the sentences following these topic sentences are not always tightly related, but they are all at least loosely related to the topic at hand—"a big decision," "looking back," "changes made," etc. The paragraph that begins, "Where is now looking back" is focused around looking back and assessing

decisions. What Donald Murray called "man's abhorrence of chaos" is in evidence here. The writing is finding its own meaning—even though it is not finding meaning in a way that composition teachers might be accustomed to.

Most importantly, the piece does what we want all of our students' writing to do: it communicates. By fits and starts, even someone acculturated to reading only standard edited English can make sense of the paper. It is a story of strength and perseverance, a powerful work of autobiography. A general reading provides clues toward a more meaningful, ecological way to approach and respond to the paper, and also, importantly, suggests that there is a reason to dig deeper, a reason to ask for and to try to see more from this piece of writing. In order to crack open new responses to this paper, and papers like it, it's necessary to investigate possibilities of response and the response situation itself—finding ways that it is similar to and different from other response situations.

Response, From Transactional to Ecological

Initially, I was tempted to respond to this paper from a transactional standpoint. Maybe, I thought, TJ did need to learn the "rules" of academic writing. Maybe he needed to be "corrected," in order for him to survive as a student. A transactional approach might have found one aspect of writing that TJ could have worked on—fragments, for example. The only thing that stopped me from making a more transactional approach was an inability to understand what this student needed in order to be "corrected." I was swimming in grammar rules and syntax patterns. A transactional response was simply beyond my means.

A dialogical approach seemed more helpful. I had read and appreciated Donald

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Murray and Peter Elbow, and I wondered how they would approach this piece of writing. Nothing I had seen in either of their writings, or subsequently in Knoblauch and Brannon or Straub, featured writing like this. I tried to find something positive to say about the piece ("some really positive stuff"), but I struggled here, too. Neither a transactional nor a dialogical approach to response helped me. Now I would like to move toward a more ecological, contextual approach—first by describing the response situation more clearly, and then by exploring one possible contextual approach, which deals with difference in a new way. Only by opening a fuller view of the response situation can difference be used positively.

It is always misleading, or, at best, incomplete, to remove a piece of writing from its context and assess or analyze it as a stand-alone text, but we do this all the time, both as composition theorists and as writing teachers. In a way, that *is* our job. We are guided by only the limited slice of context that we glimpse in the classroom. There is no way that we could immerse ourselves deeply enough into each of our students' worldviews to make complete sense of their writing, especially when we teach students who are radically different than we are. Although I would argue that it might be ideal for us to understand and empathize with all of our students, in a wildly heterogeneous classroom like the ones common in community colleges, and, increasingly, small colleges and state universities across the country, this is simply impossible. Expanding our own knowledge base on different cultures and English language diversity is essential, but it is not enough.

As writing teachers, we are repeatedly faced with the same situation—students hand us their papers, we respond, they revise, and we evaluate. This situation, with some

variation, has become, to forward a term from genre studies, stabilized-for-now. Teachers make certain generic responses to students according to the specific response situation in which they find themselves. To illustrate this idea, I will analyze the ecosystem in which I was an organism when I responded to TJ's paper. By looking at four components shared by all response situations—the student's position, the institutional situation, the writing task, and the teacher's position— I hope to show how my responses were constrained by and partially created by the generic situation itself.

At the outset, TJ's position as a student has to be considered. TJ's position was clearly very different from mine. He had had experiences that I had not—one of the most basic being his childhood as an African American male in a post-industrial New Jersey city, not to mention his time in the military. He was a young man who told me that he spoke in a completely different way outside of class, on the streets of "AC." I don't think it's unfair to say, judging from what he writes in his essay, that TJ was underserved by the public educational system. School districts in southern New Jersey could be seen as a case study for Jonathan Kozol's *Shame of the Nation*, with towns very close to each other having widely divergent, de facto segregated school systems. Still, as a student in the community college, TJ put a great deal of effort into his work and took the class seriously. His aunt had told him that he was a gifted writer, and he carried himself with deserved confidence. Although there is no way I could climb into TJ's head to discover his true feelings about writing, he seemed to view it in a positive light, at the beginning as well as, despite my pedagogical missteps, at the end of the course. During the term, he struggled significantly with required grammar tests, but he seemed to separate these drills from writing itself, a separation I encouraged.

It is also significant to consider TJ's life situation at the time when he was taking the class. He was living with relatives and working at a restaurant in one of the many casinos in Atlantic City—a job that often required him to work double shifts, sixteen hours in a row, without being asked. In this kind of situation, finding the time to develop writing skills is inevitably difficult. Many community college students are in similar situations, struggling just to find time to attend class, let alone draft essays the way they need to be drafted. Working toward literacy in a situation like this is difficult and requires schools like the extension campus at which I taught to become sponsors of literacy.

Although it would be ideal to explore and elaborate on TJ's worldview and see how it conflicted with an academic worldview[47], we do not always have that luxury in a diverse classroom. A student's full, situated position is often incompletely imagined by writing teachers, a fact that has repercussions for response. A limited understanding of a student's position, or, maybe worse, a stereotyped and/or false understanding of a student's position based on race, creed or any other cultural marker, can make our response inappropriate or unhelpful. *To take an ecological approach means to honor the individual experiences of students even as we come to understand the ways in which their culture has influenced their writing.*

Although his history, except for what he shared in his writing and what he told me about his life in AC, was hidden from me, TJ *did* influence the response situation by treating me with respect and taking the work of the class seriously. This fact may open up considerations about assimilation. Did I respond to TJ differently, and more

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[47] Bizzell suggests exactly this approach in "When Basic Writers Come to College."

positively, than I responded to other students because he showed a willingness to assimilate to academic literacy? I believe that I did, and I also believe that the positive view I held of TJ helped to shield me from the necessity of acknowledging differences between us, differences that may have been generative in the classroom. Taking a more ecological approach would have required me to think beyond the strictures of the five paragraph essay or grading when responding to TJ and get at more essential and productive conflicts in his essay—such as how to determine the boundaries of his decision-making. Questions I could have asked include: Which is more important to TJ—the decision he made about joining the NJROTC, or the decision he must make in life now? Who is he writing the essay to, and why?

Another aspect of the response situation is institutional. In this case, my institutional implication was fairly clear. I was a new, low-level adjunct instructor who was required to use specific textbooks and a standard syllabus, which I was able to modify in only minor ways. I was allowed to design the five, paragraph-long assignments my students were supposed to write. My first decision was that five paragraphs was not enough actual writing in an eight-week term, so I treated the assignments as slightly shorter composition assignments—a sign that I was not lock-and-step with the institution. The non-credit-bearing, basic writing class, called "Reading & Writing I," was an early gateway toward (or obstacle to) credit-bearing courses. After completing this course with at least a C, students would be required to pass yet another basic writing class before entering composition classes and finally earning college credit. Students were placed in the class as a result of "Accuplacer" test scores. Additionally, a number of students in the class had previously passed ESL courses. Paying for courses

that did not bear credit, these students were well aware that they were junior members in the higher education hierarchy.

There has been much written about the stigma of remediation (see Mary Soliday especially), and that sense of stigma is relevant in this writing-response ecology. Although not called "remediation" by the community college, the clinical stain remains. Because of their institutional positioning as outsiders, students most likely did not expect to do heavy intellectual work. They probably viewed the class as a burdensome requirement, yet another hurdle to jump. This fact influences response because we have to be careful not to further stigmatize students by focusing only on grammar and form—which is exactly what is encouraged in this institutional situation. Error is viewed as something to be cleaned up and sanded away before "real" academic work can take place. This view can be seen in the textbooks themselves—one grammar drill book and one basic writing book that did not ask for significant academic work. The one other book assigned to the class, James McBride's *The Color of Water*, provided a more compelling and relevant experience for students.

A third aspect of the writing-response ecology is the specific writing task. The assignment that I gave TJ's class was a classic five-paragraph essay, taken directly from the textbook. I wanted to get this assignment out of the way. I had decided to teach the five paragraph essay because I knew that many teachers at the college considered the five paragraph essay to be a fundamental form, one that all students were expected/required to "master." In short, despite my discomfort with it, my students would see it again, and probably often, in their college careers. I tried to explain to the class that the five-paragraph essay was a limited form but that it could be helpful, especially when taking

timed tests. At the same time, I urged students to find their own purpose in their writing.

I had not yet begun to think about exigence at the time, but I did want students to focus

on something that they cared about. I offered a series of prompts I thought would have

some value to students, one of which was "A Big Decision in My Life." I realize now

that I sent mixed messages with this task. At the same time that I told students that the

five-paragraph form was instrumental and uninspiring, I also wanted them to write about

something in which they were personally invested. What we ask for determines how we

respond, but often we aren't aware ourselves of what we're asking for. Knoblauch and

Brannon's "Ideal Text" is relevant here. When teachers grade, consciously or

unconsciously, with an ideal text in mind, it "tends to show students that the teacher's

agenda is more important than their own, that what they wanted to say is less relevant

than the teacher's impression of what they should have said" (158). A five-paragraph

essay pushes us to respond in a proscribed way—does the thesis have three main points?

Is each point elaborated on in its own paragraph? Is there a conclusion that repeats the

three main points? And so on. The five paragraph clearly comes with its own shadow

text—the Ideal Five Paragraph Essay. *A more ecological approach would subordinate*

forms to purposes.

　　　　Likewise, a constrained prompt like "A Big Decision" guides teachers to look

for certain aspects in the writing. The "Big Decision" prompt would be tackled most

effectively with a personal, narrative essay. It would be a tough fit for a five-paragraph

essay format for even experienced, confident, academic writers. The writing task itself

was flawed, a fact that clearly influenced my response, causing my response to short-

circuit altogether. *A more ecological approach would be sure to theorize writing tasks*

differently so that a mismatch like this could not occur. As writing teachers it's not enough to make our expectations clear to students—we should also ensure that our expectations are clear to ourselves. If we want personally invested writing, we should trust students to find their own topics and then we should help them discover the forms most appropriate for those topics. All elements in the writing-response ecology are interrelated, and the institutional setting influenced the writing task—in that certain "skills" were being called for and expected. I did not yet have the experience necessary to develop those skills in any but the prescribed way—via five paragraph essays.

The fourth aspect of the writing-response knot I will look at is the teacher's position. There are two strands to this for me: my situated position, and my teaching persona. My situated position was certainly far removed from TJ's. I grew up in a place that was about as suburban and as white as they come: Salem, New Hampshire. I had been fairly well served by a suburban public school system and had grown up in a stable family that overtly valued literacy. There were always books in our house, as well as newspapers. My experiences as a literate, middle class father and creative writer are part of the context of the response situation as well. I had never had to struggle with writing in the way many of my students had to struggle with writing. I believed in that amorphous force called the "imagination." And in many respects, I still do. I also believed in the value of examining the past, of self-reflexivity, which came directly from my situated experience, which valued abstract thinking.

Like many who teach in the community college, my educational experiences had been "strangely unpredictable." I had dropped out of college my first attempt, and found myself returning only after my wife became pregnant. In the meantime, I worked menial

jobs: at a t-shirt factory for the longest period of time—seven years. I had also been writing creatively for all of that time. After earning a BA, I got an MA in Writing Studies while assuming the duties of a stay at home father. Following that, I worked in education, spending a year as a seventh grade special education aide, and teaching high school English for another year. After my contract was not renewed, I pursued adjunct work at a local community college and found myself enjoying the diverse atmosphere and experiencing the feeling of "finally." Finally I had figured out where I could function best as a teacher. Although fully aware that I didn't understand all of their troubles, I found that I was able to empathize with at least some of the difficulties my students experienced as they tried to navigate their lives, cramming their educational work in between the responsibilities of jobs and childcare.

These life experiences all informed my response, mainly in positive ways, but I hadn't yet pushed myself to accommodate other ways of knowing and presenting information. I was very much stuck with my own way of responding. Without being conscious of it, I responded to TJ as a white, middle class male (which does not mean that this is a stable subject position—only that certain moves I made were constrained by who I was). My lack of experience with other cultures, beyond reading, made me ignore or minimize the religious aspect of TJ's paper. My lack of experiencing "big time fire" myself caused me to overlook what TJ was trying to communicate. Much of what TJ assumed was communicated was not, at least partially because I lacked certain experiences and didn't take enough time to look beyond my own viewpoint. This is something writing teachers, especially ecologically minded teachers, should be aware of. We may be capable of changing our teaching personas, but our situated positions change

us, influencing how we respond whether or not we are conscious of it. *Becoming more ecologically minded means becoming more conscious of our situated perspectives*.

In my teaching persona, especially at this time, I was a "nurturing" teacher. I wanted to help students to write "better," and my modus operandi was encouragement. Without being fully aware of it, I was following in the footsteps of writing teachers like Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, unreflectively valuing personal writing and individuality, while also trying to fulfill my role as a teacher of academic writing—an often uncomfortable juxtaposition. The nurturing process persona took precedence over the hardened academic teacher. Some of these qualities I continue to find valuable as a writing teacher. I am tempted to believe that teaching writing is mostly about the relationships we forge with our students, and I try to come across as both a real person and as a real, interested reader to my students. Another part of my teaching persona is a desire to push against constraints, especially when they don't seem conducive to student interest. I urge students to go beyond the actual assignments that I give them. I value the slightly transgressive. This influences my response in what is probably a negative way: giving students mixed messages about the relative value of form and content. The encouraging part of my persona influences response because I act as a coach, trying to dialogue with students to produce writing that is personally meaningful to them.

This is a mere sketch of the writing-response ecology, but it should help to shed light on some of the ways that I responded to TJ, as well as point to more meaningful, informed options that can be extrapolated from this response ecosystem to other, similar ecosystems.

One move toward a more contextual approach to response is to consider ways

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in which a student's position can be used as a resource, rather than as a deficit or a sign of estrangement from academic writing. Arnetha Ball and Ted Lardner, in *African American Literacies Unleashed*, provide one example of how we can attend to a student's experiences differently. Their attitude, if not their specific findings, which center on African American Vernacular Literacies, can be extended to ecological response in a heterogeneous, multicultural classrooms. I would argue that multicultural classrooms are becoming the norm, especially but not exclusively in community colleges, and that, as a result, writing teachers, of any background and in any setting, would benefit from considering difference a resource. Since Ball and Lardner's ideas are directly applicable to students like TJ, I will spend some time examining their ideas here. Ball and Lardner offer writing teachers twelve pieces of advice, which they call "the dozens," for dealing effectively with students who are literate in African American Vernacular English, but can also be extended to other student populations. Four of these tips are most germane to my response to TJ's paper: "integrate performance into the classroom;" "position students as informed interpreters;" "recognize, accept, and incorporate varied oral and written discourse patterns;" and "reassess approaches to assessment." I will consider each of these pieces of advice in order, because I believe they build on each other, and because the last point is both the most important for my study of response, and the most generalizable. These strategies are all, clearly, contextual, encouraging us to enlarge our view of literacies in specific ways. They are all examples of a more ecological approach to response.

Ball and Lardner claim that performance, defined broadly, is a key component of African American Literacy. They point to the value of "performance as transformative

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experience," and continue: "Techniques used to create a performance vary across different sociocultural communities, and, within the African American tradition, include such phenomena as the rhythmic use of language, patterns of repetition and variation, expressive sounds, and phenomena encouraging participatory sense making such as dialogue, tropes, hyperboles, and call and response" (158). It seems obvious to me that TJ's text already takes advantage of performance. In fact, the entire piece *is* a performance.[48] Hello, the writer seems to be saying, my name is TJ, and here is the tribulation that I have endured. It is a testament. Besides the direct address, there are other elements of performance in the piece, including dialogue and metaphorical tropes. To explain his struggles through life, TJ uses expressive phrases— for instance, "big time fire" and "long journey road," that are more powerful than more traditionally academic diction would be. He also incorporates the words of others, particularly his chief and lieutenant. His dialogue with the chief is an impressive piece of performance. "Chief saying son your going to be alright son, I see something in you speaken me." In just this short passage, the reader can hear the supportive voice of a professional military man.

There is also a sense of rhythm to TJ's writing, a sense that pervades the piece and is noticeable in the following passage: "Thinking always about the wars were going on. Standing strong in program. I wanting to expand and grow. Learn things know a lot love history, don't look treadys going on. Staying in there going through a lot things." A beat pulses behind these words. This is not the simple, regular rhythm that might result from "parallelism," but it is an intentional use of complex rhythm. Talking through the rhythm of the paper with TJ would have been a very different, more hopeful way to

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[48] Lunsford and Fishman's ideas about performance, discussed in chapter one, may also be relevant here.

respond to the paper. Asking students what rhythm they hoped was projected through their writing, and helping them find ways to frame their rhythms which would be acceptable to different audiences, might help them see how their writing can be developed further, facilitating revision. Getting TJ to perform this piece out loud might have also helped me to understand where a simple unfamiliarity with words might have led TJ astray. Responding to performance would also help to maintain the writer's sense of purpose in a paper. We would be wrestling with what the writer wanted the paper to do, the *writer's* most ideal text, what the writer was bringing to the class, rather than with what the teacher was expecting as a final product.

Part of the performative aspect pointed out by Ball and Lardner is reflected in the African American community's relationship with the Christian church. This relationship is important to TJ's text, as evidenced by the following: "In order to go on life it's about experience. Suffereing big time fire. It's a big mission to make at. I fell like all the decision that were made is good. The reason why because the man up stairs say your going to be alright don't worry. In ever new so much you got go through and see to make a very humble person and make it very far life now." There is a sense here that TJ is testifyin'—a possibility that I had not even considered when I read the paper the first time, as a relatively young, white, middle class man. As Geneva Smitherman defines it, testifyin' refers to "a ritualized form of black communication in which the speaker gives verbal witness to the efficacy, truth, and power of some experience in which all blacks have shared. In the church, testifyin is engaged in on numerous symbolic occasions…. A spontaneous expression to the church community, testifyin can be done whenever anybody feels the spirit—it don't have to be no special occasion" (58). Whereas I had

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believed that all I had to do was educate TJ in academic discourse, to show him the way

that writing was done in college, I now realize that we both would have been better

served if I had spent more time educating myself about his environment. I don't think

it's unfair to say that many teachers are in a situation similar to the one I was in, teaching

students whose ways of knowing and expressing differ from their own. By talking about

the way in which TJ was testifyin', by making *that* a part of the response situation, I

could have opened up possibilities, helping him to find his own purpose and to

communicate it to a wider audience.

There are other ways to talk about or respond to a piece of writing in light of this

sense of performance, drawing a connection between performance and such standard

disciplinary terms as "point of view" or "voice." We could compare TJ's piece of writing

with an academic piece of writing such as Richard Roriguez's "The Achievement of

Desire," or other, not necessarily academic works, such as *The Color of Water*, which we

used in the class, and decide how the performances differ. By examining the efficacy of

the performances, and paying attention to the persona expressed in each piece of writing,

we could find commonalities and differences.   This is one instance when a bridging

pedagogy might have been a helpful step toward more resource-oriented teaching. By

looking at the performances of all the writing students in a classroom, we could celebrate

the diversity we would undoubtedly find.

I recognize that I am risking naiveté here. There is certainly a lot of work that

needs to be done with a student like TJ, and I am not advocating an unproblematic and

wholehearted acceptance of his current writing style. I am not advocating an easy view

of difference-as-a-resource in which every difference is heartily embraced, but a more

vigorous attitude that acknowledges and challenges our own assumptions, while we also challenge our students' assumptions about writing. I believe we have an ethical responsibility to inform TJ that his writing will not be acceptable to most academic audiences, and, even if we don't agree entirely with the idea of standards and propriety, *why* that writing would not be acceptable. At the same time, ignoring the performative aspect of the piece, and therefore ignoring the piece's strengths, now seems equally wrong to me.

The next point from Ball and Lardner—the drive to make students "informed interpreters of their own experience"—is directly related to performance. Students can only perform what they know, and becoming more informed interpreters will make their performances richer. This is also clearly a situated move—calling on the writer to understand his or her environment. After all, TJ is interpreting his own life in this paper. He is the only person who is capable of analyzing these important decisions in his life. In the essay, as it stands, TJ begins to interpret his life by pointing out the hardships he has endured, by elaborating on what he gained from the military, and by calling on God. Calling on God might not be an academic commonplace, but it is something that should be respected, maybe even, in this case, since it is so clearly intertwined with TJ's intentions as a writer, encouraged.

Stemming from the idea of making students informed interpreters of their own experience, one possible response I could have made to TJ's paper would be to push for deeper interpretation, urging TJ to write in a more "academic" way about the incident. There are countless ways he could have theorized this experience differently than "A Big Decision in My Life," which, after all, is not a promising or intellectual point of origin.

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It's possible that TJ's writing is so tangled because he has no way to grapple with the complex material of his experience in a similarly complex way. By this point in his life, TJ had gone through twelve years of public school and been forced to write assignments just like this one all of his life. "A Big Decision" is not significantly different from "What I Want to Be When I Grow Up." It is a stock prompt, begging for a stock response. Now that TJ is in a college course, shouldn't he be afforded with new interpretive tools? One fault of basic writing pedagogy, in practice if not in theory, is that students are often not asked or allowed to truly *think*. If we can clean up the surface of their writing, we pass them on to credit-bearing courses. We seem to believe that they can *think* later. The truth is, they are thinking now, reaching out for new ideas and new ways to understand their experience. This is one aspect of David Bartholomae's work, as seen in "Inventing the University," challenging students in intellectual ways, that rings true.

TJ was struggling to think through recent experiences in his life, and, as his writing teacher, I was positioned to offer him support in that struggle. Ball and Lardner put it this way: "Writing projects or assignments set up to put students in between experiences with which they are immediately familiar and discussions or thematizations of those experiences by others allow strength and room for growth" (164). Instead of only looking at a "big decision," TJ could have explored the role of the military in his life, and extended that to look at the role of the military for minority populations, possibly exploring the racial history of the military itself. Accounts of military men could have been found to help thematize his experiences. Or, following another tack, he could have been encouraged to elaborate more on his experience with the church.

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Richard Rodriguez's clash with academic culture might have been relevant. In short, my response could have focused on expansion and development rather than on form and correctness.

Nancy Welch has written about the idea of "sideshadowing" a student's text, and her ideas about response are relevant here. Welch claims that, "Reality as we have it in the reading of a student's draft is only one of many; neither inevitable nor arbitrary, our reading bears within itself other possibilities" (376). Rather than *fore*shadowing an "Ideal Text," Welch calls on writing teachers to *side*shadow the numerous possible texts that are nascent in any draft. She believes that a student should "work with, think through, and write from her draft's contradictions and shifts" (384). Welch has her students write marginal comments on their drafts before she writes her own comments, hoping to create a sense of "trialogue between him, this text, and me" (38). Welch has her students continue to develop their drafts throughout the semester, giving them access to different writing on the same subject. This is an exciting possibility for me, a tangible way to respond to individual students in a complex way. While making the teacher's job more difficult and almost certainly messier than it would be in a more controlled classroom, this approach clearly works from the core principles of helping writers find their own purpose, keeping the authority with the student, and building complexity, all of which will be most easily done if we place students in a position to be inside interpreters.

Ball and Lardner also call on writing teachers to "[r]ecognize, accept, and incorporate varied oral and written discourse patterns," a move consonant with ecological response. Many teachers are working from a model that sees academic discourse—defined in the narrowest manner possible—as the only acceptable option, refusing to see

difference at all. Others may agree with Patricia Bizzell's early claim that students will freely choose academic literacy because it is good for them, or a textbook's claim that it is the only acceptable option in college and the work world, and, therefore, what we have to teach. What would happen, though, if we expanded our view of academic discourse—not jettisoning standards and conventions for an undefined state of anything goes, but acknowledging the rhetorical effects of different forms and providing students with what Stephen Lyons has called "rhetorical sovereignty," the right to their own rhetorical means? I would like to use TJ's paper as an example, exploring the repercussions that might have followed if I had encouraged TJ to explore different discourse patterns, incorporating the conventions of academic discourse and those of African American Vernacular English into his writing. For one thing, TJ would have become more mindful about the differences between discourse patterns.[49]

If the goals of composition classes, as Elizabeth Wardle claims they should be, are: "explicitly abstracting principles from a situation… Self-reflection… [and] Mindfulness—'a generalized state of alertness to the activities one is engaged in and to one's surroundings, in contrast with a passive reactive mode…"(771), then the use of different forms would give us a way to expose those central concepts to students. Looking at language use in different rhetorical situations would help students abstract principles, writing about those situations would lead them to self-reflection, and a combination of the two would encourage mindfulness.

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[49] Although he was already cognizant of the differences, evidenced by his discussion about how he used language differently outside of the classroom, being asked to incorporate the two styles would help him become *mindful* of the differences.

One significant problem with approaching TJ's text in this way is that it is not a straightforward example of African American Vernacular English. I know that TJ talked differently on the street because he told me that he did, but, beyond some patterns and rhythms, AAVE is not used consistently in this piece. TJ does "[i]ndicate tense (time) by context, not with an 's' or 'ed'" and uses "be" to "indicate continuous action" (Smitherman 13), but not always. For instance, he writes: "All the months being in there. Each month learned something, many times saying i can do it," but he also writes: "Growing is going through troubles." Maybe, taking June Jordan or Geneva Smitherman's approach, we could have discussed AAVE in general in class, exploring the patterns typical in this language, and TJ could have been allowed to choose between the two. Maybe it would have been helpful to ask TJ to write one version of the paper to his friends in Atlantic City, and another version to his class. That way, any dialect difference would have become clearer, easier to delineate. There is, in fact, no discrete thing called Standard Edited English and no discrete thing called African American Vernacular English, but there are certain traits that can be explored, a continuum that can be traced.

In this sense, importantly, Ball and Lardner are not considering only what the *student* can do differently. A teacher, they note, has to learn to "recognize and accept," these new discourse patterns. This requires education and a new orientation—a willingness to see difference as a resource. Along with Rashidah Jaami Muhammad, Ball has elsewhere written about the importance of teacher education in meeting the needs of a diverse population, and teacher education is fundamental to an ecological approach to response. Looking at language in this way would also place the student as the expert, as

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someone who could lead the teacher to an understanding of the differences that exist between the language he speaks in the streets of Atlantic City, or in his extracollegiate life, and the language she encounters in the textbooks of her college courses, and, further, what language is used in community venues, in different courses, in the work world, in the public sphere, etc. Language is, after all, always heterogeneous—maybe more so now than ever.

The last Ball and Lardner "tip" I'll examine is to "reassess approaches to assessment." Since assessment and response are so often yoked together, it is natural to talk about them at the same time. What seems clear is that traditional notions of assessment alone do not serve an ecological approach to response. Take, for one extreme example, a rule followed in a community college for which I worked before meeting TJ. If a student's essay included a single run-on sentence, comma splice or sentence fragment, that paper would receive a C. More than one sentence error would result in an automatic F. If I were to respond to TJ's paper in this manner—and evaluation is, after all, a limited form of response—my life would become instantly easier. The paper would receive an F, I would be done with TJ, and neither he nor I would learn anything. The field of composition and rhetoric, of course, knows that a rule like this is counterproductive and hearkens back to dark days in writing instruction, but the fact remains that it, or similarly proscriptive and prescriptive rules, is not uncommon in practice.

Along with Ball and Lardner, I agree that we shouldn't be unduly distracted by surface errors, and I also agree that we shouldn't ignore errors altogether. Ball and Lardner call on writing teachers to deal with a limited number of skills in each

assignment. This seems feasible, similar to the approach one might take following Mina Shaughnessy and doing error analysis. But isolating one skill from its rhetorical context does not go far enough, and may make writing less meaningful than it could be. The relationship between assessment and response is complex. Ultimately, I don't believe a skills-based approach, no matter how attuned to different patterns, will make much difference.

More helpfully, Ball and Lardner call on us to recognize "that linguistic systems should be evaluated by whether they are the most appropriate or most effective variety of English for the communicative situation at hand" (172). Ecological response is rhetorical response. Both students and teachers should determine when a particular linguistic system is most appropriate and effective, both on a one-to-one basis and in writing workshops. In this way, the writing classroom, especially a multicultural, heterogeneous college classroom, becomes a language laboratory. We should be investigating, with our students, the many different linguistic systems within which each of us functions, as well as any potential crossover between systems. I could have placed TJ's essay into dialogue with the work of the international students in the class, comparing and contrasting the different "errors" we would see in each, and, most importantly, determining the best ways to respond to a communicative situation. Although, in this respect, more attention needs to be paid to assignments and how they are structured (which I will be doing in the following chapter), often an idea of the rhetorical situation can come from the student's draft itself. For instance, it seems to me that TJ's essay is struggling to reach out and find its proper audience. It appears to be explaining to a fairly broad audience—both broader than the classroom and broader than the streets—the struggles of this strong young man.

Getting TJ to question the efficacy of his choices *within a certain context* would have gone further toward promoting his development as a writer than assessing him in a traditional manner ever could. And, because his authority over the text would be maintained, he would have become mindful of language in a different way.

The metaphor of negotiation could be helpful here as well. Along with Knoblauch and Brannon's notion of negotiation, discussed in chapter one, Bruce Horner, in his and Min Zinh Lu's influential collection *Representing the 'Other,'* suggests that we negotiate editing standards with our students.   Instead of changing students and forcing them to write in academic prose, or Standard Edited English (which June Jordan calls "white English"), Horner promotes the idea of viewing revision and editing as negotiation. According to Horner, errors are social in nature, "representing flawed social transactions, instances of a failure on the part of *both* the writer and reader to negotiate an agreement" (141), rather than linguistic or cultural in nature. Viewed in this way, error does not diminish in importance, but involves "questions of meaning, purpose, and relationship" (159).

This idea of negotiation seems promising for ecological response. If we were to negotiate with TJ on his paper, we might point to the conventions of academic prose that he neglects or transcends, questioning his choice, for instance, to write a ten paragraph long five-paragraph essay. We might ask him to investigate, possibly in writing, why he chose to ignore that rule, or how he interpreted the task. We might open up the idea of grammatical rules, rules of spelling and syntax, and engage in negotiation. Horner writes about "the difficulty of determining whether a given notation… represents an error or, say, an effective stylistic device" (141). We can see this difficulty when responding to

TJ's essay. How effective might his free modifiers be to different audiences? For some

audiences, they might be the most effective rhetorical choice. By negotiating, the student

is no longer the only one responsible for revision. The teacher must also be accountable,

trying to convince the student that certain standards, in certain communicative settings,

do matter.

What I'm really calling for the field of composition and rhetoric to do is not only

to view difference as a resource in ecological response, but also to view difference as the

necessary ground of a successful writing class, and as a motivating reason to change how

we think about writing. If I had known in the summer of 2007 what I know now, I would

have used TJ's essay, along with each one of his classmates' essays, as a text to analyze

within the classroom. In that single class, there were several varieties of "Global

English," there were Englishes inflected with various vernacular traits, and there was the

English written by those who had been told that they had learning disabilities. Response

in a class like this would be not only a way to push students toward further drafts, which

is significant in and of itself, but also a part of the intellectual work of structuring and

teaching the class.

The ideas that I've presented about response here—the possibility of treating

writing as performance, encouraging intellectual extensions, making language study a

part of response, or concentrating on the communicative situation—are by no means a

coherent plan for ecological response. What these ideas do, though, is suggest that the

act of response is complex and variable. What a student needs, and when, is still subject

to pedagogical insight. What I would like to do is push composition teachers to think

about response in different ways, ways that our students have never seen before, and

ways that we have never tried before. The old, formalistic, directive response style is

deeply flawed, and a facilitative style that doesn't keep difference in mind does not go far

enough. We need to break out of the stabilized-for-now generic situation of student

writes-teacher responds-student revises-teacher evaluates. There are any number of ways

to do that, but they all rely on a new appreciation of student writing, especially writing

done by those students who are often seen as "estranged" from the university. To do this,

we need a new, wider view of what we accept as academic writing, and a different view

of the rhetorical ecosystem of the first year classroom.

Chapter Four

Call and Response

In the previous two chapters, I examined situations in which context was either incomplete or misread. In this last case-study chapter, I will expand context, attempting to come to tentative conclusions about a more ecological approach to response.

Cheryl was in her early fifties when I encountered her in one of the first basic writing classes I taught. A tall, thin, African American mother of three, she would ride her bicycle to the community college's extension campus in Atlantic City on class days wearing headphones, and, when she got off the bicycle, she would often be singing a rhythm & blues or disco hit from the 1970s. Possessing a distinctive and robust sense of style, Cheryl was always talking to fellow students, security guards and professors on her way to class, making them laugh and laughing herself. A drummer, she had played music professionally in clubs around Atlantic City, and when I first met her she had been working as a teacher's assistant for a local Head Start program for a few years. Cheryl enrolled in four writing classes with me, over the course of four consecutive summers: Reading and Writing I, Reading and Writing II, Composition I, and Composition II. In the end, we became somewhat unlikely friends, and I continue to communicate with Cheryl on a regular basis. I am looking forward to being invited to her graduation party in the near future. I have spent more time with Cheryl than I have with any other student. Our working relationship during the four year course sequence provides a natural case study to explore many issues that I am interested in in this dissertation—including the

drive to value other patterns of organization, the promise in making students informed interpreters of their own lives, and, most significantly for this chapter, the importance of exigence in ecological response. Writing about Cheryl will also give me an opportunity to think about adult learners and how they differ from those students who enter college straight out of high school, highlighting yet another ecological difference that students bring into the classroom with them.

By the time Cheryl had landed in my Reading and Writing I class, she had already spent a significant percentage of her life out of school. Most of her time in school had not been enjoyable for her. She was reticent to talk about her earlier school experiences, even when I asked students to write a literacy narrative. All I truly know about her earlier schooling is that it had been so difficult that she hesitated to talk about it. "I had a hard time, Jamey," was about all she would say. She was also uncomfortable writing about "personal things." She had no desire to replay her past for a writing teacher when what she really wanted was to learn how to *write*. From our first class together, I assured her that I wasn't necessarily looking for "personal" writing, but it would come to be a running issue between us, Cheryl assuming that I wanted more personal divulgence in her writing (in fact I heard her tell a fellow student "Jamey likes that kind of personal stuff"), while I assumed there were ways we could work around the personal issue.[50] This divergence will become more important as I detail our interactions.

I will attempt to find a shape for and tell a story about our four years of interactions. As with any narrative, much will be left out of the story. What I want to do

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[50] I find Richard E. Miller's attempt to problematize the academic and the personal in *Writing at the End of the World* useful in thinking about these issues now.

is trace changes in Cheryl's writing style and suggest ways that it was never as limited as I assumed it was at the time, and also how I could have taken advantage of Cheryl's literacies by responding to her in a more ecological manner. I will use call and response as a metaphor for how to approach ecological response practically.

Am I Blue?; An Early Example of Style

From our first class together, it was clear that Cheryl lacked confidence in her writing, at least in an academic setting, and the first pieces of writing I saw from her were fragmented and tentative. What follows is an example of that kind of writing. I am not claiming that Cheryl has been "cured" or "remediated" of this kind of writing because of my interventions, or that what follows is completely untutored and unacceptable writing. I am merely claiming that it is fairly indicative of her style at the time that I first met her—at least the style that she was willing to show me in the classroom. Students in this class had just read "Am I Blue?" by Alice Walker, an essay that details Walker's time renting a house in the country, where she had enjoyed a view of mountains and a horse in a meadow. The horse was left alone for most of the time. When the narrator interacts with the horse, she notices that he is lonely. "I was shocked that I had forgotten that human animals and nonhuman animals can communicate quite well," Walker writes (353). The recognition of the horse's loneliness leads Walker to think about human slavery, about the slaughter of natives, about mail-order brides, and about the mistreatment or neglect of the young—all examples of uneven power relationships. Finally, another horse appeared in the meadow and "Blue" seemed much happier, yet the horse was merely being bred and after a brief period Blue's companion disappeared

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again. Blue's loneliness was replaced by apparent hatred. The essay is a powerful piece

with many unique turns in the narrative, and students generally respond well to it. Here

is Cheryl's response to the piece:

"The writer wants you to feel what he feels. His pain, his being torn apart. The

inhumanity of how some people do things without concern for others feelings. The

horses feeling of despare. His soul mate ripped from like a thief in the dark. Waitng for

his child to be born, not knowing what sex it is. Never to be seen again. Hoping things

will change at any minute. Meeting a new friend, caring for each other. A delightful

treat of apples, how special was that? Waitng at the fence, hoping for a visit from a

friend. The feeling of lost and mis trust from others. The feeling of betrayal of others

and uneasyness. Why has all this happened to me? Someone decieded to make changes,

that aren't always for the good of things. No one knew the wiser. No human compassion

was shared. Just witing in the wind."

When I first read this piece, I considered it a prime example of "writer-based

prose," thinking about Flower and Hayes' well-known distinction between reader and

writer-based prose, in which writer-based prose is seen as an apprentice form that does

not take enough account of the reader and is not fully rhetorical. There *are* certain

writer-based qualities to this piece. For instance, I am still not entirely sure who the "he"

refers to in the first sentence. Cheryl may be erroneously calling Alice a "he", my initial

reading, but it seems more likely that "he" refers to the horse and the horse's pain (and

Alice Walker *does* want the reader to feel what the horse is feeling). Cheryl may not

have provided enough context for the reader to make an accurate reading.[51] We also get the sense that Cheryl is grappling with the essay as she reads it, another quality of writer-based prose. This is the story of her thinking—what Flowers might have called an "'I thought/I felt/I did' focus" (383).

Yet, especially after I had typed the passage and imagined what Cheryl must have been thinking while she wrote it, I'm not convinced now that this piece *is* writer-based, although thinking about it through these terms may be helpful. What strikes me now is actually how reader-based and rhetorical this response is. The piece moves from explanation to interior monologue seamlessly. Analysis is mixed with summary—and I often tell my students that summary *without* analysis is meaningless. With the use of rhythm and imagery, the writer seems attentive to what a reader may take from the piece, even as she doesn't always provide enough context to ensure an accurate reading. As someone who has just read the text, the reader should know what she is referring to when she mentions a "delightful treat of apples." Explaining the fact that in the essay the narrator gives the horse an apple probably seems unnecessary to the writer—possibly even insulting. *You did read the essay, right?*

One traditional, transactional approach to response would assume that Cheryl would benefit from understanding the characteristic moves made in academic writing. Cheryl doesn't recognize the need to present a complete context because she assumes that the reader has just read the essay. The commonplaces of the discipline need to be taught—and one commonplace is to provide a full context. Bartholomae's "Inventing the

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[51] On the other hand, needing to read student work quickly in order to respond to all of it could also have prevented me from making a more accurate reading at the time. As Knoblauch and Brannon illustrate, writing teachers read professional work much more generously than they read student work.

University" may lead us to believe that Cheryl is relying on the "wrong" commonplaces in her writing. The commonplaces she uses are considered clichés—"like a thief in the night," "no one was the wise," the evocative conclusion. As writing teachers, we would like to provide students with access to these academic commonplaces without forcing them away from their own preferred ways of writing—a difficult task. As Dawn Skorczewski has written: "when we interpret clichés as merely unfortunate intrusions or weak spots in their writing, we miss opportunities to learn more about what we can teach our students and what they might be able to teach us" (222). I would argue that Cheryl is using clichés here not because she's using a nonacademic lens to see the world, but because these clichés actually capture something essential about the contingency of Walker's essay. Steering Cheryl away from clichés, or damning them in the writing itself, will not help her develop as a writer or a thinker. And advocating a stable, reified notion of "academic" is clearly might not be the best way to give students rhetorical sovereignty, to use Scott Lyons' terms. We have a responsibility to teach students analytical, academic writing, but it shouldn't be *all* that we do. One option is to treat academic writing as rhetorical—to suggest the ways in which all writing is rhetorical and reaching out to various audiences. As we saw with Mary's paper in chapter two, not all writing takes account of audience, but audience is always implied. Making that audience more visible is a move toward a more ecological conception of the writing-response situation. I would like to consider what Cheryl did as a rhetorical writer in this passage and imagine how these moves could be used in more exigence-based writing.

Even in this short passage about "Am I Blue?" we can see a number of opportunities for positive development. There are aspects of her writing that I admire.

Cheryl throws out some striking phrases. She is making a move toward empathy. There are examples of evocative writing ("His soul mate ripped from like a thief in the dark") which, at the very least, *attempt* to go beyond cliché. The short, choppy sentences are used intentionally and rhetorically, to establish a sense of rhythm and emotional power. "The writer wants you to feel what [she] feels." She is trying to use style in her writing in order to influence the feelings of her audience—not necessarily a typical student error (this piece of writing may also, like TJ's, be fruitfully viewed as a kind of performance and responded to in that manner). Cheryl's response paper also takes into account the *contingent* nature of Alice Walker's essay, which was one thing that I had hoped students would appreciate about the essay. In class discussions, we had talked about how Walker was more interested in raising questions than in answering them—that this was as much an example of inquiry as rhetoric. Cheryl makes a similar move to resist closure in this piece. Changes "aren't always for the good of things." There is no final judgment here. Just "witing in the wind." The writer attempts to end on a powerful note. If we can look beyond our expectations as English teachers, in fact, I would argue that this *is* a powerful ending. It gets at the idea of contingency that Walker was aiming for—a difficult task when dealing with such issues as slavery and subjugation. Cheryl has a clear drive to communicate and shows promise as an analyst. This is not an example of flat writing, written for the teacher's eyes alone. Instead, it is evocative, communicative writing that simply lacks some of the qualities of academic writing. Many adult students may share this drive to communicate and may have an easier time than younger students stepping outside of themselves and gaining the critical distance necessary for good writing. Cheryl was thinking carefully about her audience (her primarily audience being myself)

as she wrote this piece, ensuring that I would experience this piece of writing in a certain way. She also begins to analyze the piece. "Why has all this happened?" seems like ripe ground for further analysis. Alice Walker clearly has ideas about why things like this happen, and drawing an analysis out of this response would not have been difficult. Importantly, Cheryl *was* able to communicate some of what Walker was doing in her essay for a secondary audience.

But we also have to acknowledge that this piece diverges from what we consider academic writing. This is simply not what most English teachers would consider acceptable writing. Stylistically, it is built on fragments, a quality shared with most if not all of Cheryl's previous writing. Even after spending two terms with two different college-sanctioned grammar workbooks, which forcefully steered students away from fragments, Cheryl seemed unable to stop herself from using them. Fragments are not a damnable offense, but Cheryl, in order to write the way she wanted and was required to write, needed a wider repertoire of sentence types. The way she eventually got that wider repertoire was by reading for my class and other classes and by thinking about her audience as she was writing. Even though this piece about "Am I Blue?" was going to be read only by myself and, possibly, her fellow students, Cheryl was able to put herself in a position to write to others, a point that will become more important below.

I believe that writing this piece probably helped Cheryl, as a reader, grapple with some of the issues in the Walker essay—though the paragraph is far from a complete analysis. Cheryl never attends to an essential moment in Walker's essay, the point in the essay when the writer draws a connection between the concept of animal cruelty and other forms of cruelty, including slavery. Cheryl never critically questioned the essay.

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She was willing and able to be critical of other works, but, for whatever reason, here she couldn't. If I were to respond to this piece today, I would ask for more context, helping Cheryl see what is expected in academic writing, and asking her to dig deeper into the meaning of the essay, pinpointing the "why do things like this have to happen?" question. At the time, I did the best I could and responded only on a fairly superficial meaning level, letting her know that she had not talked about the extension in the essay, and praising her attempt at connection and her recognition of contingency.

Ecological Analysis

Throughout my four years of working with Cheryl, one of the most significant difficulties I experienced was self-doubt. As with my response above, I was not always certain that I was doing the best thing for her as a writing teacher. In fact, I'm still not certain. Cheryl developed as a writer during the time that I worked with her, but anyone writing for four years will develop simply from the force of habit. My self-doubt was part of the ecosystem, but I am also hopeful that an ecological analysis will help me determine what to do in similar situations with other students in the future. Like TJ, Cheryl was required to take two separate basic writing classes before finally being allowed to register for credit-bearing courses. Unlike TJ, Cheryl's college writing instruction was entirely provided by myself.

Each class, by design and because of my involvement as a teacher, took a slightly different approach to writing. Reading and Writing I relied on two books—one a traditional grammar workbook called Evergreen and the other a basic rhetorical reader. Reading and Writing II utilized a similar grammar book and a memoir, *The Color of*

Water, by James McBride. The skills orientation of the course was meant to be complemented (or offset) by the literary nature of the memoir. The textbook for Composition I was *Patterns for a Purpose*, a book that takes a "modes" approach, while the textbook for Composition II was *The Presence of Others*, a rhetorical reader arranged topically, as well as a research handbook. Although one course was meant to build on the next, there was little curricular coherence or direction given by the English department. For example, five paragraph essays were expected for Reading and Writing II, while writing in the modes was expected in Composition I. If there was a unifying goal, it was stated, vaguely, in the standard syllabus for Composition I: "To enable students to write clear, well-developed essays and to become aware of and learn from their own process of writing."

While I attempted to honor the objectives of each class, I did not consider myself the perfect representative of the academy. At the time that I first met Cheryl, I had not taken any classes toward my PhD. My interest in writing stemmed from my experience as a creative writer and my time in a writing studies program. I sensed the disjunction between my own experiences as a writer and the way in which writing was expected to be taught in the community college. At the same time, because of my inexperience, I relied more heavily on the textbook than I would now, even as I recognized that grammar skills were not being transferred from the textbook work to actual writing tasks. Students who passed the grammar quizzes continued to commit the same "errors" in their writing as they had at the beginning of the term. During our second class together, although I had still not begun my PhD coursework, I had decided that I needed to do more research into the teaching of writing. During that term I set up a blog with students, structured more

engaging discussions about the memoir, and introduced more dynamic writing assignments, but I continued to rely on the textbook for grammar instruction. During the third year, Composition I, I had just completed a semester-long independent study on Place Studies that delved into human and critical geography and place-conscious education, and I hoped to carry those ideas into my teaching. I was quickly confronted with the difference between theory and practice as students complained about how often I was talking about Atlantic City, which I was hoping to make the conceptual focus of the class. With some modifications, I was able to carry through with those ideas. In this class I was more interested in inquiry than in other kinds of writing. During the last class Cheryl took with me, I was more confident in the kinds of writing I wanted students to do—rhetorical, analytical, and inquiry-based writing, which enabled us to look at the differences between those kinds of writing.

My subject position as a teacher, as the above summary suggests, was far from stable. I was not always comfortable with my role in higher education in general. Richard Miller has written about the complicity writing teachers necessarily have with the university. Because of our position in one of the only required courses in the university, and because of institutional expectations, every writing teacher is influenced by certain demands. Miller writes about institutional autobiographies, something that might be relevant here. In my own teaching, I had not yet "located [my] evolving narrative within a specific range of institutional contexts, shifting attention from the self to the nexus where the self and institution meet" (138). Even during Cheryl and my last class together, I believed myself to be in but not of the university. That influenced my response in ways that weren't discernable to me at the time. I wanted but also didn't

want students to write in academic contexts. I wanted but didn't want personal writing. By our last class together, I had become more skillful at managing these disjunctions and letting students know what I expected, but my expectations were not stable. I could tell students what I wanted after the fact. Since that time I have begun to expand the kinds of writing I look for and ask students for more reflection about their writing—goading them to think about how different purposes call for different styles. This includes the demands that the school puts on them, but also includes other settings—the work place, the public sphere. This is a more ecological approach to writing, but I suspect my position as a teacher is still not as stable as I believe it to be. My path to the PhD has been more fractured and wayward than some, and my position as a creative writer probably disposes me to a kind of writing that other English teachers may want to banish.

Cheryl's position as a student is significant in this ecological knot as well. In each of the four classes that she took with me, Cheryl was the oldest student in the classroom. In none of them was she the only returning student, but in each she was in the minority of students over twenty. Her vibrant personality sometimes rankled other students. In small group settings during class time, she functioned acceptably, but during a long-term group project her group self-destructed, in part because of differences between Cheryl and the others. As the sketch introducing this chapter suggested, she had been away from the classroom for a number of years. In fact, she informed me that I was her first "man teacher." Eager to follow protocol in the classroom, Cheryl did not always recognize what that protocol entailed. She would often offer comments at "inappropriate" times or on "inappropriate" subjects. She was the only student I have ever received flowers from—a generous gesture, but not a common one in the classroom.

Even beyond her writing, then, Cheryl's facility with academic protocol was limited. She made up for this by being charming and showing effort. My response was in part influenced by her eagerness and her divergence from standard academic behavior. I made an effort to reach Cheryl in any way possible—realizing that, often, the informal conversations we had before or after class were as important to her development as a writer as the formal comments I wrote on her papers.

None of these aspects of the response situation—my position, Cheryl's position, the stated objectives of the class—is trivial. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly what the result of our four years of interaction was—there is no easily quantifiable formula for measuring writing progress—but these four years were important for both of our educations. I believe that I can point to signs toward a more hopeful writing pedagogy because of my time with Cheryl. Over the course of four summers, my response to her writing improved dramatically: from the first class, when I felt frustrated by her fragments and openly communicated that frustration; to later classes in which I was able to sit down one-on-one with Cheryl and work through different strategies of development and pull out what she really wanted to say, by carefully listening. Listening is part of response as well. As Julie Jung writes about the responsibility of the reader and the teacher in Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts: "revisionary rhetors can learn to respond to texts they fear they cannot understand: They relinquish claims to mastery; by doing so they fall into despair; by falling into despair they become ready to listen" (26). This kind of listening is essential to ecological response.

Ecological Response

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I would like to take more responsibility for the response I made to Cheryl at this time. The following essay provided certain challenges and opened up a new way for me to work with Cheryl. The subject of the essay is Cheryl's job as a teacher's aide at Head Start. The assignment, which I developed after reading Mike Rose's *The Mind at Work,* asked students to write analytically about work that they had done or planned to do, attempting to make them "informed interpreters" of their experiences. This assignment makes me realize that, as Cheryl had always averred, I *do* want personally invested, if not personal, writing from my students. Personally invested writing is the best way that I can think of to bring real analysis and exigence into my classroom. The assignment asked students to analyze the cognitive demands of the work that they did, or work that they hoped to do, in a way similar to the way that Rose analyzes the work of a hairdresser, a waitress, a carpenter and others in his book. Here is Cheryl's essay on work:

"Teacher"

"I work in a HeadStart with children. Ages 3 years old to 5 years old. I'm a Teacher's Assistant. I, with the Teacher's supervision, get the kids ready for the big school. I enjoy helping the kids learn. Practing our ABC's and writing their names. It's just amazing what little kids can do. Learning how to count , and singing songs with numbers. Teaching the kids how to set up the table for meals. I really enjoy story time. The kids enjoy listening to the wonders of the story. I ask them questions about the story, and the do answer. The kids enjoy arts and crafts and so do I. At the end of the day I hang their work for all to see. The kids are so proud of their work. Nursery rhymes are a plus, The farmer in the dell and Twinkle little star. Music is really fun, the kids get to express themselves. I really like when the kids want to dance with me. Tripa are always

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fun to go on. The kids parents get to go on trips as well. On our trips we have a picnic. Being a Teacher can make a childs world, fun and exciting. I enjoy my job teaching the kids. You don't get paid much, but the rewards come from the children. Knowing what they have learned is more important. I'm going to school now to better myself as a Teacher. To be the best Teacher I can be. To give the children the education I can."

When she first submitted a much shorter, earlier draft of this piece, I made a quick, basic response to it. It was simply too *short*, I told Cheryl, and I could not accept it for a grade. She needed to develop it further. The above version of the piece is what resulted from that response, and from Cheryl and myself sitting down and talking through the essay. It is still far too short for a college paper, and it does not analyze work in the way I was hoping it would, but in the process of revising Cheryl learned a great deal about writing. Cheryl was most likely frustrated with my initial, dismissive response, but it forced her to turn in a stronger work that could at least get us started thinking about writing as a process, as well as what it really means to be a teacher. In order to complete the assignment more faithfully, she would need to explore her relationship to teaching more.

Even though the writing did not satisfy the assignment, the most significant work I ever did in my time with Cheryl may have been to sit down with her and work through various issues with this piece, one-on-one. On a day that the class was meeting in a computer lab in order to work toward a research paper, I sat next to Cheryl and asked her to read the work out loud. She often stopped herself to fill in the gaps that she hadn't realized were there until she read it aloud, obviously more confident in her ability to speak than in her ability to write. After she had read the entire essay, we both talked

about how it could be improved. I asked her several versions of the question, "What do you mean by that?" For instance, in the first draft she wrote about "trips" that the class went on, but she never mentioned where the class went, what happened during those trips, or why she thought those trips might be important to her students' development. It quickly became clear to her that too much was hidden from the reader.

As I worked one on one with Cheryl, I realized that part of her problem with writing had to do with the technology we were using in the classroom—basic word processing and computer technology that I expected everyone to be comfortable using. I didn't suspect that word processers and email would be beyond anyone's capabilities in 2008, but Cheryl did not possess the basic skills necessary to use these tools effectively, even though a basic computer class was a prerequisite for Composition courses. Cheryl experienced basic difficulties: She pressed "return" at the end of every line and had difficulty figuring out how the mouse in her hand and the cursor on the screen interacted. Her typing was slow and torturous, which gave me a new perspective on the brevity of the initial draft. For Cheryl, even typing a short paragraph was time-consuming. Part of what I had to do was simply get Cheryl familiar with the keyboard and word processing program. Simply and quickly, I was able to show her some "tricks" that made writing on the computer easier for her. In this way, traditional response failed earlier, in my two previous classes with her, because some of the issues that I had attributed to inability or a lack of writing skills were, in fact, due to technological limitations. With older students, especially, this is something we have to be attentive to when responding to student writing. Only a more embodied, ecological approach to response helped me understand some of Cheryl's difficulties.

Other issues in Cheryl's writing, however, were not caused by technology. Even when handwriting, Cheryl wrote mostly short, choppy sentences, fragments that were meant to pack an emotional punch but which distracted me as a reader, and would surely distract most college teachers. By sitting down and talking through the piece, Cheryl could see what she had unintentionally left unsaid, what the reader had to fill in on his/her own because of the fragments. The suggestion not to use fragments was no longer a senseless injunction or a matter of "correctness"—it was a rhetorical matter. During our one-on-one conversations, I never said that Cheryl should *never* use fragments, but working on this piece helped her to see that limiting them would help her communicate her point more effectively.

Talking through the piece also made me realize that there was untapped linguistic potential in Cheryl. When she was allowed to speak and to explain the piece verbally, she could fill in many of the details effectively, using much more advanced diction than she would normally use in writing. This is still not evident in the writing, and I would not have been fully aware of this aspect of Cheryl's literacy without taking the time to sit down with her. Our discussion also opened up opportunities for development. The lines "I enjoy my job teaching the kids. You don't get paid much, but the rewards come from the children" came directly from our discussion. While it's still a rough and almost clichéd idea, there is potential for development here. I tried to get Cheryl to develop the idea further. *How* did the rewards come from the children? What did that mean? What rewards had she received from working as a teacher? Was there any potential problem with that idea? Whose purposes did it serve? By sitting down with Cheryl, I was able to become a co-inquirer, finding these areas for development, which directly points to

another positive outcome of sitting down with Cheryl to work on this piece: It helped to build the relationship between us. Cheryl was appreciative of the time and patience that I put into working with her. We worked on the piece even after the rest of the class had left for the day. Sitting down with her one-on-one may have been the most significant response that I provided over our four years together. The simple fact that Cheryl recognized that I cared whether or not she developed as a writer was significant to our working relationship. I don't believe it's unrealistic to imagine a situation in which one-on-one instruction and interaction is possible with each one of our students—whether that interaction occurs during class-time, during conferences, or even via video. A hefty teaching load may preclude these kinds of interactions, but, like many others in the field of composition and rhetoric, I'm convinced that they are necessary. Written response that is not one-way but which asks for further response is a substitute for one on one interaction, but it's not enough, not, especially, for students, like Cheryl, who may have a negative history with writing instruction.

As far as the piece of writing itself goes, there are some positive aspects to pull out of it. While we talked through the piece, it became clear that Cheryl was letting the subject of the writing influence how she wrote about it, matching style with content. She sang the nursery rhymes, used strong emotions while reading, and laughed often. There is a sense of "voice" and personality in this piece of writing as she displays her love for her job through the language she uses. She also keeps her focus where it should be—on the students rather than on herself. Again, to fulfill the assignment she would need to start analyzing her experience more, but I'm willing to trade that goal for the more significant objective of growth. I still have doubts that what Cheryl produced here can be

considered "college-level." An intelligent woman in conversation, her writing was at times deceptively simplistic. Even at the end of our four years together, I don't think she was able to write as cogently as she could speak. The rhetorical pieces that I will discuss next *do* convince me, however, that Cheryl can function as a literate citizen, able to stand up for her rights and address local concerns on paper, and the writing I have already considered convinces me that she is capable of *thinking* at a college level. She is approaching facility with written language and the kind of thinking required by "the academy." Her development in that regard did not end when she passed her last class with me. It will continue throughout her education, as well as throughout her professional life in education.

The assignment that elicited the writing about Cheryl's job was closer to what I want to do with students, but it is still not *all* that I want to do as a writing teacher. Basically, it is the start of an analytical paper that aims to lead students to look at their experiences in a new, more informed way that actually validates that experience. I've carried this idea into assignments based on the topics of work, place, and education, and I consider these to be valuable assignments in my classes, ones that work on skills that can be transferred to other academic situations as well as to situations in the workplace and the public sphere. Still, they are not as transactional as the kind of writing I would like to discuss next.

Adult students, in particular, have resources that writing teachers can and should tap. One advantage adult students have over their eighteen and nineteen year old counterparts is that they have almost inevitably participated in the world of work and community. They possess richer life experiences. Sometimes it seems unrealistic to ask

nineteen year old students, sequestered in their academic bubble for four years, to write about "real" issues. That's not to say that they don't *have* real concerns or aren't participating fully in life, but older adults generally have an advantage when asked to find an exigence that they can address, to figure out what in the world they really care about and would like to see changed. It is easier to conceive of or recognize a "rhetorical situation," in Lloyd Bitzer's terms, in which older adult students can participate.

Exigence

Because of my interest in encouraging students to write about matters that engage them, I developed an assignment that asked students to write to a real audience about something that they were concerned about. I began the assignment with an exercise called "Getting Mad and Getting Even," in which students freewrote about all the things that they wanted to see changed in the world. Afterwards, we discussed as a class which of those issues might make good papers, asking which of the issues would lend itself to writing that truly engaged the matter at hand and had the possibility of influencing the course of action. I urged students to at least consider sending the resulting letters and editorials to their respective real audiences, but I didn't demand it because I find it ethically questionable to do so. Cheryl wrote two letters to two different audiences, one of them a letter written to the mayor's office in Atlantic City that landed her an intern position with the city (a position which she enjoyed briefly, before having to give it up due to medical problems beyond her control). The other letter, obviously of great importance to Cheryl, follows:

"Cheryl XXX   8-14-08

614 XXXX Avenue

Atlantic City, N.J. 08401

Dear M_____:

   I wanted to talk to you about what you said to me. You mentioned to me last

September, that I would have my own class. All the year, I looked forward to having my

own class. I was never so excited about my up coming classroom.

   I was looking forward to buying my house this year. Getting Teacher's salary. When I

asked you about my class, you told me honey, I don't have the power to give you your

own class. I was shocked, I couldn't believe my ears. I was devastated by what you said.

I feel I would be a great asset to our school. You see how I am with the children. You

see how I work, and I enjoy what I do for a living. You've even given me compliments

on my job performance.

   I would like to talk with you about this matter.

   Thank you for your time.

(Signature)"

        This letter is not perfect from either a formal or a rhetorical standpoint, but I

consider it one of the most successful pieces of writing that Cheryl did in her time with

me. It served a purpose in the world beyond the classroom, and a reader can sense the

care that went into writing it. On a basic, formal level, there is only one sentence

fragment. The earlier writing style that had relied on evocative, choppy phrases has been

replaced by a much more professional tone. What impresses me most about the piece is

that it is clearly driven by the student's own sense of exigence, and because of that, I

would argue, it is technically more well written than the other works, the pieces that Cheryl produced because she was in a writing class and was simply required to write. I don't want to claim that every assignment in a composition class should be directed to an audience outside of the classroom, or that analytical writing done in the classroom is meaningless or somehow artificial, but I believe that this kind of assignment makes for a healthier writing ecosystem and has much to offer students, especially older adult students and students who may be considered "nontraditional." According to the National Study for Education Statistics, almost 73% percent of all undergraduates in 1999-2000 could be considered nontraditional, a number that has likely increased since then. Many nontraditional students are "nontraditional" because they felt disconnected from schools due to the artificiality of the schooling situation. If they couldn't swim in the classroom, they sank. It is vital to consider ways to make writing relevant in the lives students already live, and in the lives they are working to make for themselves. If we have students write to real audiences, we can then draw connections between rhetorical writing, analytical writing, inquiry-based writing, and reflection. This is where ecological response becomes relevant. Ecological response would help students draw connections, asking them to attend to the boundaries of the rhetorical system. Ecological response might ask Cheryl to think more about why she's been denied a classroom, as well as how the writing in this letter differs from the writing in previous papers.

Cheryl's paper has the look and feel of a real letter, because, in fact, it *is* a real letter. It is truly transactional. Cheryl expected a response from this letter, and that expectation required her to write in a certain way—as a professional educator. Asking her to role-play another subject position, a fairly standard practice in writing classes,

could not have produced the same kind of paper. Cheryl included a proper heading, an appropriate two paragraph body, and she carefully signed the letter. She took care with all aspects of the process, because she knew that the stakes were higher for this paper than they were for other assignments. This was not a letter with an audience of one—the teacher. This letter will likely remain on Cheryl's file at her workplace, a fact that underlines the importance both of how Cheryl thinks about her audience and of how writing teachers think about how they approach this kind of writing in the classroom. The pressure is on, for both writer and teacher.

Clearly, this letter could be developed and/or improved. What I've reproduced here is a late draft, the product of much discussion and revision, but if I were to receive the letter again I would ask for still more development. I would ask Cheryl to consider whether the beginning of her second paragraph is appropriate to the rhetorical situation. Does she really want to talk about money in this situation, or does she want to keep things on a more professional, career-oriented level? I would ask Cheryl to think even more deeply about her audience. How will the audience respond to the letter? Still, as every writer knows, any piece can be improved and what Cheryl accomplished with this letter is significant. In addition to the improved formal aspects of the writing (none of which were precipitated directly by my teaching), Cheryl also had to think deeply about how her audience would respond to the letter. In one-on-one conversations with me, usually after class, it was clear that Cheryl was irate about the situation at Head Start, but she wisely realized that anger would not be rhetorically effective in this instance. In the letter, she calls her supervisor to account for what she has said in the past, but Cheryl knows that anger will get her nowhere. She offers a nuanced appeal to the woman's

sense of professionalism, suggesting that she would be a great asset to the program as a teacher and asking her supervisor to think about how she interacts with the students. She ends the letter with a respectful request to speak about the matter, placing the matter squarely back in the woman's hands.

An exigence-based piece like this one calls out for a response that is different from the response we would give a piece of "school writing". In order to respond to the piece—and my response was mostly verbal—I had to become a co-inquirer, a co-rhetor, trying to find all "available means of persuasion" in this rhetorical situation with Cheryl. I could act as a proxy audience as well, but only in a limited way. More important was asking questions and pushing her thinking in a more ecological direction. If we're writing to outside audiences, we want to know how our pieces are received, which points to a procedural difficulty with this kind of writing: time. If students do opt to send their pieces out into the public sphere, we likely won't know what the reaction will be. So, was this letter successful? On one level, no. The letter did not immediately secure Cheryl her own classroom. On another level, though, I believe that it *was* successful. Cheryl was able to write cogently about her situation and increase her professional standing at work, making her desires for advancement known while gaining self-confidence in communication. At the very least, she told me that it was good to be able to address the issue with something other than ineffectual anger.

Assignments like this, which reach beyond the classroom to find real audiences, have a lot to offer students, but there are also challenges. Developing a letter like this with a student requires the teacher to know more about the students' life than is sometimes feasible. To develop a relationship in which the teacher is not only a writing

instructor, but a valid advisor on serious matters that will have consequences in students'

lives may seem unreasonable, or even unethical, to some. I would argue that *ignoring*

students' real lives is even more unreasonable and unethical. And this is where response

can make a crucial difference. Response should be understood not as merely end

comments, as *only* the textual or oral commentary made to individual pieces of writing.

My work with Cheryl has convinced me that response has to include one-on-one

interaction, that it has to be based on a mutually respectful relationship between student

and teacher, and that it has to consider the full context of the response situation, including

the teacher's position, the student's position, institutional constraints, past histories, and

the surrounding community. Dawn Skorczewski raises some legitimate objections to a

more situated approach to response when she explains the problems with it in this way:

"First the practical: who of us has the time to consult our students about every word they

write in a paper… Second, and more important… is that this gap between our students

and ourselves, like the gap between every writer and reader, can never be fully bridged."

(235). Nevertheless, I think it's indispensible to situate ourselves and our students in the

same rhetorical environment, not as two clashing individuals having two different and

separate worldviews, but as two organisms within the same ecosystem. We won't have

the same goals or the same experiences, but we are in the same situation, positioned

between the institution and the public sphere. Responding to the multiple exigences of

multiple environments within the ecology of the classroom will be more effective than

promulgating standards of middle-class discourse. Ecological response cannot be

theorized without thinking about the kind of writing we're asking for. I believe we

should think more widely about the *calls* that induce our *responses*. Call and response is,

of course, a traditional African musical term, heard in work songs in which one person *calls* while the other workers *respond*. In some forms of music, the call and the response are identical, while in others the melodic line is stated in the call and then answered in the response. Following are some thoughts on the "calls" of our students' writing. I recognize that there are other "calls" that we could answer—calls from the academy at large, or from society—but I'm most interested in trying to hear the calls from my students. I am going to answer the calls with thoughts about response.

Call

In order to validate his belief that students should write about sustainability, Derek Owens states: "For me the challenge becomes how to create a classroom environment where students have the freedom to pursue writing projects that matter to them, and yet where, as an instructor, I not only remain energized by their questions and pursuits but also consider the ongoing conversations to be of paramount importance to my students' short- and long-term survival" (7). Although I am not as interested in pursuing sustainability, per se, as Owens, I agree with his fundamental justification and his beliefs as a writing teacher. Composition teachers have both the opportunity and the responsibility to make writing classes *matter* for students. Whereas Owens sees "sustainability" answering the needs of his students' short and long-term survival, I'm more inclined to allow students to determine for themselves what their most pressing exigences are. I'm interested in trying to hear their calls.

The real questions in writing instruction come down to engagement and importance. If students can write about *anything* in writing classes, what *should* they be

writing about? Owens argues that sustainability is and will continue to be important for contemporary students, and it's difficult to argue against this claim. I would suggest, however, that not every student will find sustainability immediately important or relevant to his or her lives. Owens might argue that it is our rhetorical responsibility to help them realize the importance of sustainability, but I'm more interested in allowing students to figure out what is important to them by considering where and how they live, and what they would like to see changed within their rhetorical environments—ripe ground for exigence-driven rhetorical writing. This is the work I was starting to do with Cheryl in the sequence of assignments discussed earlier. I don't want to argue for the importance of any specific calls that our students make, but for the importance of "listening rhetorically", which Julie Jung describes as "a process through which a listener speaks back, thereby giving voice to—and becoming publicly responsible for—the ways in which she has heard others" (58).

Leading students to write with a sense of exigency is a difficult task, however, especially in heterogeneous classrooms. In a more homogenous classroom, exigence-based writing may look and function differently than it does in the more prevalent, diverse U.S. classroom—it may even be easier to realize. I'm thinking here about Nan Elsassor and Kyle Fiore's 1982 article "Strangers No More." This essay details a successful course taught in the Bahamas to a class consisting entirely of local women. The end product of the class was an open letter from the class to Bahamanian men, detailing the women's very real and legitimate grievances, and proposing solutions. There are many things to admire about how this class was run. The drive to have students write about something that they were directly concerned about, helping them to

find their own exigence, the care that the students took with their writing during every stage of the process, the engagement that they experienced with other texts as well as with their own evolving class text, and the spirit of collaboration that drove the project are all admirable. There are many pedagogical insights that I would like to borrow from Elsassor and Fiore to use in my own teaching, but the essay also leaves me wondering. The authors claim that teaching this class was going to help drive their basic writing pedagogy at the University of New Mexico and the University of Albuquerque, two large research universities. There is no documentation, as far as I know, about how or if the transfer of knowledge from the Bahamanian class to the university setting happened. I would assume that transfer would be difficult because of the heterogeneous nature of most U.S. classrooms. "Strangers No More" contains a lot of insightful material, but it does not provide a model. It's difficult for me to imagine an entire classroom in any community college, or even small college or university, coalescing around a single issue the way that the women in the Bahamas could and did coalesce around the issue of women's rights. The "good stuff" of this class, as it so often is, seems dependent on context.

I can envision two alternate possibilities stemming from ideas in this essay, however. I can imagine classes coming together around a cluster of issues, doing collaborative writing on a certain number of interesting topics, and I can imagine individual students finding their own exigence. I have recently introduced Bitzer's rhetorical situation into some of my classes to try to get students to understand exigence and how they can use exigence to drive their own writing, but I'm not convinced that we *have* to have students read Bitzer in order for them to find their own exigence. Bitzer

writes: "Any exigence is an imperfection marked with urgency; it is a defect, an absence, something wanting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (6). I am fairly certain that each of the students I've interacted with could have found an issue that is calling out to be addressed. The world our students, young adult or older adult, live in is imperfect and often imperiled. I am interested in finding ways to get coalitions of students to form in my classrooms and respond to current exigences. I am not advocating an un-theorized or naïve embrace of "authenticity" here, but a drive to have students truly engage with their own writing, which I believe is the only way to get them to develop as writers. By engagement I don't mean simply that students should write about what they want to write about. True engagement is an active practice—it requires writers to seek other opinions and drives them into argument, in the most positive and social definition of that term. The most realistic way to get students to engage with their writing is to provide authentic learning tasks targeted to actual audiences.

Cheryl was able to find exigences centered on her work and her community—two areas that many students will find fertile ground for writing. Students in community colleges, since so many of them are nontraditional, answer a different exigence than students in traditional residential universities, though the two populations are becoming less divergent. We can lead working/fathering/mothering students to exigence by allowing them to write about their lives in new ways, finding rhetorical situations, seeking out incidents in the community that will engage them, and helping them develop relationships through their writing. An orientation toward listening and exploration seems appropriate to a writing teacher with this mindset. Cheryl was able to write about Atlantic City—her experience in its Head Start program and the lack of recreational

facilities for residents—in a way that should have driven me to explore Atlantic City in a different way myself.

There are also other calls from students that writing teachers can respond to. They are not all "out there" in the public sphere, distinct from the classroom, and I don't believe that teachers should ask students to produce rhetorical writing exclusively. Analytical writing is also beneficial, and many students want to produce and benefit from writing in multiple genres over the course of a semester. Along with multiple genres (including "the real essay," personal essays, summary and analysis essays, evaluations, editorials, open letters, etc.), I also give students the opportunity to compose in multiple modes in writing classrooms, using sound and image in both rhetorical and expressive ways. This is another attempt to answer my students' call. Although I've focused on exigence-based writing in this chapter, the need to listen to our students extends to all purposes for writing, whether that purpose is rhetorical, analytical, or reflective.

How do we answer the various calls of our students? We start with the actual students in front of us, determining what they need to know, what they want to know, and how we can help them develop their ways of knowing. We start with a belief that writing is, in and of itself, a valuable activity. We attempt to answer calls every time we design a new course, or evaluate how an assignment fared in the classroom, or respond to student writing. Answering students' calls is already part of our practice as teachers; I am suggesting that we spend more time thinking about the process, theorizing it in an ecological way that takes the environments in which students live and write into account. Following are some thoughts about how we can respond to the calls in our students' writing—focusing on exigence-based writing.

Response

No matter what the assignment may be, writing teachers assume multiple roles in their response to student writing, a point that many response theorists, from Straub to Haswell, have stressed. Each writing assignment requires us to be a different kind of reader, and each student has different needs. The task of response is necessarily a pedagogical challenge. In what follows I explore some roles that I performed, or should have performed, while responding to student writing, including Cheryl's. When responding, writing teachers are always playing multiple roles at any one time, but the following roles make sense in rough sequence. More specifically ecological aspects of response will be explored in the last chapter. Students will benefit from a teacher responding sequentially as: a real reader, a collaborator, a master craftsperson, and, lastly, an editor.

The Real Reader

Many students have experienced difficulty with writing in a school setting, and I suspect that what many of them lacked most was a sense of engagement. No matter how far afield the subject may be, or how many times they have read papers on the same subject, writing teachers have a responsibility to interest themselves in their students' writing, to make a good faith attempt to connect with the material. In my response, I try to ensure that my marginal comments make it clear that I am reading for content and engaging with ideas rather than simply and exclusively scanning for errors. Students have to see writing as transactional. Often, it's the teacher's fault—both as an

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assignment-maker and as a respondent—that the writing situation feels staged or artificial. With Cheryl, I made an effort to voice the ideas that seemed to be lurking in her imperfect prose and engage with her. Because she recognized that engagement, she worked hard to improve. There will always be times when student and teacher do not connect (I considered one of these examples in chapter two), but even with students who are very different from us we should be able to form some common interest.

The following anecdote should help illustrate this point. During the first day of my first semester as an adjunct writing instructor at a local community college, I walked into a classroom to find a student sitting directly beneath a "No Food or Drink" sign, eating and drinking. She wore a white do-rag and dark sunglasses, and she had staked out the space around her with various snack food bags and an enormous cup of soda. I was faced with an immediate pedagogical decision. I ignored the display and treated the student as I treated all of the other students. I had seen more extreme posturing in my one year of high school teaching, and I was not willing to let confrontation ruin this first class. I was there to discuss writing.

The student was not openly disruptive for the first few classes, but she seemed distant and dismissive. She was dismissive, at least, until I handed back her first piece of writing, an intense diatribe against inequities in her former schooling. In my marginal comments, I told her how much I liked her writing, which was full of "voice" and promise. Taking my comments into consideration, she revised that piece of writing substantially—not just copyediting but actually revising for ideas and coherence. "If my last teacher could see me now," she said, laughing. This might be an extreme example, but this is what responding as a real reader can do for our relationships in the classroom.

I did not lie to this student. I genuinely found her writing evocative and interesting. I could have focused on her run-on sentences, but she would not have developed as a writer if I had.

Responding honestly to writing can also lead to possible conflict. If we engage honestly with material, students may believe that our opinions are influencing our grading. We will have more difficultly responding to some pieces of writing than to others. Our predilections as English teachers (or creative writers) may come into play. This is why we have to listen rhetorically to our response and take responsibility for it. Are we responding to that paper on Christianity negatively because it lacks support and does not make a claim, or because we are secularists? We can and should help our students separate our response from our evaluation. I make it clear to students that my responses have little to do with my final evaluation. Requiring and responding to multiple drafts helps makes that clear. By giving students with differing opinions an honest reaction, I think the students I disagree with often have an advantage. They are able to see their papers from a dramatically different viewpoint. This role, as a real reader, should be enacted early in the process, with early drafts, rather than with final products.

Haswell attributes the idea of the real reader to Elaine Maimon, and explains the role in this way: "To the class the teacher reads unrehearsed through a student's first draft, thinking aloud, or more exactly responding aloud, all along the way." In this vein, I have recently begun videotaping responses to student papers for online classes, reading them aloud and sharing my comments. This is one option, but what I mean by a "real reader" is a more general engagement, the kind of engagement we would give to any text,

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whether it's an editorial in the newspaper or a short story. I am referring to our initial

reaction as practiced readers and writers. In order to be a real reader, writing teachers

must, in fact, be writers. I do most of the writing that I ask my students to do because I

want to earn the right to be viewed as a real reader. Someone who is working on the

same issues with a student is not handing down verdicts from on high, but responding

from a different standpoint, engaging in a different way. Students have often responded

positively to these steps, but responding as a real reader is only a start, a step toward a

more meaningful, effective response.

The Collaborator

After responding as a "real reader"—and often at the same time—writing teachers

should respond as collaborators. If we are interested in our students' ideas, we should be

able to offer them advice about how to develop those ideas further. We should be able to

offer sources, or at least provide ideas for where to find sources, on specific topics. We

should drive our students toward deeper thinking. Our position as writer-teachers will

also help in this area. As writers, we have long experience with finding solutions to

writing problems, questioning our own ideas, and deepening our own understanding. We

also know how helpful it can be to get a colleague or a group of colleagues to respond to

our writing.

Straub writes that "any response that promotes a detailed, honest interaction about

a piece of writing will contribute to the writer's work in revision and her ongoing

development as a writer" (392). That belief is something of an article of faith, and

"detailed, honest interaction," as Straub defines it, is not easy. It's possible to be a

collaborator even when we are not in agreement with what a student is arguing, though there are certain kinds of writing I believe we cannot accept in a classroom. I will not help my students develop homophobic or racist pieces. At the same time, I do want to welcome minority views into the classroom, offering conservatives and the religious a way to write in the academy, seeing difference as a resource in this instance as well. As collaborators we may sometimes expect some specific line of development from our students, may push them too forcefully in one direction and fall into the Ideal Text trap. We should attempt to honor students' sense of exigence, *their* motivations for writing.

Collaboration is where students' ideas should be pushed and questioned. Because we have read widely, we know what has already been said on certain subjects. In explaining her revisionary feminist pedagogy, Julie Jung writes, "revising requires us to pay attention to the ideas and passages we wish we could ignore" (154-5). Collaboration is the place where paying attention to things we might want to ignore becomes possible. Reading as a real reader initially should help put students at ease (though it shouldn't be only that—lulling them into a false sense of security), while collaboration should push them deeper. I am not interested in getting students to produce one specific, stable document, but I am trying to help them produce something that will be considered worthwhile in the scheme of higher education—not always an easy thing to define. Like Richard Miller, I am interested in helping students "to pose their questions about the work before them in ways that invite response" (141). In collaboration, authority is not entirely given up, but it is pushed to the side. In collaboration there are two goals: development—the development of a student's thinking and writing, and the end product.

The process to get to that end product is long and difficult, and it's where the real work of a writing class should happen.

The Master Craftsperson

Since writing is an act that produces something, it can be beneficial to view writing as "crafting." This view of writing as a matter of craft, or techne´, is popular in creative writing programs, and it can and should be carried over to composition classrooms. The response we make to students will necessarily change if we consider writing a craft, and I would argue that this change will be a positive one, one that uses the subject position of writer-teacher to its best advantage. The main difficulty with this orientation may come in viewing each student's work, where student work is so commonly undervalued, as a piece of craftsmanship. But if we can consider student work as crafted pieces, we can develop apprentice-craftsperson relationships in the classroom.

I would like to think about response in light of my position as a writer-teacher, as someone who writes in multiple genres that include: poetry, fiction, scholarly articles, this dissertation, editorial pieces, and blog entries. Donald Murray and Wendy Bishop are my guiding lights in this regard. Only by actually writing ourselves, having a wealth of experience with the tricky turns of all kinds of writing, can we become master craftspeople. I believe that we can and should take this approach no matter what kind of writing our students are doing. Although literature and poetry may still be (over)valued in English departments, analytical and rhetorical pieces are *also* crafted, as Cheryl's letter suggests. The work of writing consists of the use of words, how the words on the page or screen present a claim or an ethos or a narrative, the craft of using words to construct.

In his article "Craft Knowledge," Robert R. Johnson attempts to further the use of the terms "techne" and "craft" for composition studies by pointing to the four different causes of writing: How, What, When and Why. For my purposes, the "how" is most important. If we can give students an idea of how they can craft their pieces, we can make the writing classroom a workshop in more than just the traditional notion of that term. Taking this approach to response is not necessarily advocating "creative" or "personal" over any other kind of writing. It is more an orientation, an attitude that we can bring to our response. It concentrates on writing as both a verb and as a rhetorical act. The main question we can ask as writers is: How can we best manage specific writing situations so that in the end we have crafted something meaningful, engaging, valuable? One way we can respond as craftspeople is to develop a working vocabulary of terms to use with students. Key terms in writing can include "voice" and "tone," as well as "narrative summary" and "real-time explication." I have started to develop these vocabularies with students on wiki pages, and I believe it helps students make use of my responses to their writing.

When I was a young apprentice fiction writer, I joined a writing group run by a local, professional novelist. Directly after joining the group, I was confused by many of the terms that were tossed out in a casual manner and which seemed to prove only that I was the only one who didn't know what they meant. I didn't understand the difference between "character-driven" and "plot-driven" fiction, didn't know what "profluence" was, didn't understand the difference between "third person omniscient" and "third person limited omniscient" points of view, and, most importantly, I did not truly understand revision. Nearly every week, the novelist would repeat William Faulkner's

quote that sometimes writers have to "murder their little darlings." I grew tired of hearing that phrase. I thought I understood what it meant, intellectually, but it wasn't doing me any good as a writer.

Then, while revising a short story, I realized that one section of the piece had to be cut. The section was lyrical and contained what I considered some of the best writing I had ever done. During the previous revisions, I had not cut the section solely because of the strength of the writing, the quality of the words themselves, but now I knew that those words had to be cut because they didn't serve the character-driven story. An epiphany. I suddenly understood the Faulkner phrase. The phrase had something to do with revision, but it went beyond revision to encompass matters of control, style, and intention. It was a significant moment in my writing life. That same kind of discovery and development should be made possible for our writing students as well. I am not advocating a return to a specialized vocabulary of modifiers and clauses, but a push to find a more idiosyncratic vocabulary, which could come naturally out of each class. As Fife and O'Neill put it, we should "position students to speak authoritatively not only *through* their writing, but also *about* their writing and writing decisions" (304). There is a way to talk about writing that facilitates writing. Teaching as *writers* can provide that facilitation.

Of the four roles discussed above, I believe that the role of the craftsperson is the most important. It has the promise to produce the greatest impact on students. In order to be viewed as a "master" craftsperson, a level of respect is required. A writing teacher earns that respect by writing along with his or her students, showing students that, even for a master craftsperson, the task at hand is difficult and never really complete, as well

as sharing "completed" pieces—published essays, in process dissertation chapters, creative writing, job-related writing, etc. This changes the ecology of the writing classroom in a positive way, reconfiguring us as organisms struggling with the same contingencies.

The Editor

Lastly, I think that we have to act as editors, in the best possible definition of that term, when responding to student writing. We are doing students a disservice if we don't act as editors in the classroom. This should always be the last role that we play in response to students' drafts. We should be able to show students where their work is grammatically problematic, and why that's a problem. Bruce Horner's move to negotiate error with students may be helpful. We should also not function as mere proofreaders but as editors, and the professional aspect of an editor can be effective in the classroom. We need to be tough with student writing, but we also have to recognize that there is a limit to how much editorial advice a student may be able to absorb and put to use.

Adult students, like Cheryl, may be more willing to work with an editor than younger students, who most likely have fresh memories of red pen-wielding grammarians. Adult students who have had experience in the workplace will understand that there are demands in the marketplace. We have to make it clear that grammar is rhetorical, and that editing, rather than copyediting, is an integral part of the writing process. We have to make students care about their writing enough to give it the attention editing demands—something that Cheryl clearly did with her letter. Although adult students often have additional burdens that university students do not—work and

family—students who have worked understand the importance of an editor. The best editors I have worked with have also been writers. To earn the right to offer editing suggestions, we need to show students our own work.

These four roles are in play at different times and in different ways while we work with students within the classroom ecology, and sometimes they're at work at the same time. We should deploy them pedagogically, and we can start by explaining to students the different roles we will play with regard to their drafts. If students understand why we're doing something they will be more likely to take our advice. Unfortunately, I believe an honest engagement with student texts is not always the norm. A recent student wrote: "I was in another class recently, where the instructor threw in the prefix of "Dr." everywhere – in every post, assignment, communication, etc. The communications were like orders from a drill sergeant and feedback was short, quick to the point and focused on the negative." This approach to responding to students is too common. Writing teachers should do a better job of explaining to students *how* they are looking at their writing.

The way in which we assume these roles is going to be different from teacher to teacher, from student to student, and from assignment to assignment. I chose to explore the roles in this chapter because I believe that they have a lot to offer when working with adult students. There are also additional difficulties involved with working with adult students. There is a flip side to a student's work and home experience. These students are placed under additional burdens, and the burdens should influence how we respond to students. This added burden should not, however, lead us to expect less from students. In "Location, Location, Location" Johnathon Mauk claims that: "In composition studies,

we need to recognize the spatial complexities that define our students' (and our own) lives, but not in order to vanquish these complexities, to wish them away, but to include them in our understanding of how to write" (214). While I think it's becoming increasingly important to value other processes, I don't believe that the answer is to truncate the writing process. No matter what we do, writing will always be difficult—a long, recursive, but ultimately rewarding process. Being attentive to the fact that students will often have other responsibilities is important. Pedagogical flexibility is important. When I respond to students, I am able to bring my own past experiences into play. Like many of them, I was once a part-time, working student, with the additional responsibility of a new family. We need to be realistic with students—sometimes you have to fight for those fifteen minutes of editing time—but expectations should not be lowered. This is another place where being a teacher-writer can help us—we have struggled for the time and space necessary to do quality writing.

The relationship that developed between Cheryl and myself was unusual, and by looking at it as a case study I am not asking teachers to befriend each of their students, but I believe that this relationship provides one useful example of response in the composition classroom. Although I made wrong turns as a teacher, the moves I made toward a more ecological approach to response, by tapping into exigence, were positive. Ultimately, as a writing teacher, I would like to forge a strong working relationship with each of my students. I believe that those students who are willing to engage in working relationships with me, who are willing to see themselves as organisms in a shared environment, benefit most from my classes. These relationships are not always conflict-free, but they are always beneficial. The question is: how do we create these

relationships? By remaining interested in what interests our students, in helping students find topics that are of real, lasting interest to them, by helping them to answer their *own* calls at the same time as we fulfill our roles as representatives of an academic culture. We are not alone in creating the ecology of the writing classroom, but we can help define it in healthy ways.

Chapter Five

Implications and Extensions

Implications

Examining three situations in which I have had difficulty responding as a writing teacher, especially in a traditional manner, has led me to certain conclusions, which point to implications of ecological response as well as extensions that can be made as a result of thinking of response, and writing more generally, ecologically. Clearly, response is a deeply pedagogical act, a dynamic practice that cannot (and should not) be codified. Each class and each teacher-student interaction is unique and calls for a flexible approach. At the same time, an ecological standpoint allows us to better understand the multiple factors involved in teacher-student interactions, driving us to think contextually. Writing done in college is always, to one degree or another, transactional, and our response to it can and should be dialogical, but response does not need to stop with the dialogical. Examining context more fully may allow us to rethink our interactions. In what follows, I will examine some of the factors in a general response ecology, drawing out implications for practice.

Our position as writing teachers is one factor of the writing-response ecology. Who are we? How do we read? What do we value in writing? I have attempted to answer some of these questions for myself. I am a college writing teacher, as well as a creative writer. I am attempting to value and understand different ways of writing and making meaning. I value critical thinking, creativity, and writing that is clearly self-

motivated. These aspects of my situated position drive my teaching. While my situated position influences my teaching persona, my teaching persona remains relatively fluid. I attempt to respond to students rhetorically and pedagogically, pushing them in new directions and honoring their writing by acting as a real reader, a collaborator, a master craftsperson, and an editor. These four roles help to define my approach to teaching writing—the roles are mainly dialogical but, especially in the case of the master craftsperson and editor, they point toward the contextual. Taking an ecological approach, writing teachers would work to better understand their own positions and how these positions influence response.

Another factor in this ecology is the student's position. Obviously, students' positions are multiple and complex. No one-size-fits-all approach will work for each student. We can think more about two interrelated aspects of a student's position: cultural differences and the literacies that students already possess when they enter our classrooms. As chapter three details, Arnetha Ball and Ted Lardner provide us with some pertinent ideas to work with students with African American Vernacular Literacies. If they are right that students possessing these literacies respond well to an approach that pays attention to performance, positions them as informed interpreters of their experiences, appreciates and takes advantage of varied written discourse patterns, and rethinks assessment, then the field of composition and rhetoric should view difference as a resource. By examining the different styles of language used by students in the classroom, writing teachers can make classes function as language laboratories—which will influence our response. Different kinds of ESL students, students who have been told that they have language disabilities, and speakers of dialects all need to be treated

respectfully, their various abilities brought into the classroom. Ways should be found to bridge their literacies with the literacies expected in college classrooms, the public sphere, and the work world

Other literacies that students already possess should also be honored and developed. In *The Way Literacy Lives*, Shannon Carter writes about her basic writing pedagogy at Texas A&M University, Commerce, in which students' literacies in computer gaming or sports are used to bridge them to academic literacy. In a similar way, I have attempted to use sound in the classroom to allow students to use the literacies they already possess. In terms of response, this means that we can and should look for areas of development where the literacies students possess can be used to drive them toward new, possibly more academic kinds of writing.

A third factor in the writing classroom ecology is the kind of writing we ask for. As chapter three suggests, teachers all too often design assignments without being entirely clear about what they are asking for. An ecological approach to response would drive us to think about assignments more carefully, not allowing a mismatch to exist between an assignment and what an assignment is calling for. If writing teachers want students to bring real purpose to their writing, they should allow them to pick their own topics. If they are working on specific skills, they should highlight those skills in the assignment itself. We can also think differently about how we sequence assignments. We should be clear about what we're doing with each assignment and how our response may drive change in students. We can also allow different kinds of writing into the classroom—welcoming alternative discourse, contrastive rhetoric, and different varieties of Englishes. We should encourage students to develop their own exigences—finding

things that they would like to see changed in the world, and writing toward that change. Response can help students see writing as meaningful, partly because it should be understood as more than simply end or marginal comments.

In that vein, another important factor of the writing classroom ecology is *how* we respond. As my time with Cheryl suggests, writing teachers can do more than simply comment on students' papers. No matter what our institutional setting may be, writing teachers can make response more embodied. In online classes, this might mean moving toward video responses, giving students the sense of a real reader quite immediately. In face to face classes, one-on-one interactions can become more prominent. Many writing teachers already conference with students, and I believe conferences are a positive move in this ecology, one that should not be sacrificed due to heavy course-loads or logistics.

Writing teachers can also help their students think about the various strands within the environments, academic and otherwise, in which they function. In the previous chapter, Cheryl's experiences offer a cogent example. Cheryl was not comfortable in an academic environment until carry-over could be made between her "real" life and the academy, via a public writing assignment that asked her to write to an outside audience. Two different environments—the college class and the workplace— are at play here, but they are not necessarily distinct. How can writing in one environment interact with the writing done in another environment? "Part of becoming a successful student… is predicated on juggling different ways of seeing," Kristie Fleckenstein writes (86). Perhaps this juggling, an acknowledgment of the different ways of seeing necessary in different environments, is part of what we should be teaching our students. Our purpose in teaching and our students' purposes in writing will help

determine how we want to define the boundaries of an environment. We can pay attention to not only what a student writes, but to how they are writing it—both stylistically and physically. Especially in commuter colleges, our students have jobs, families, responsibilities. An acknowledgement of those complexities should be part of ecological response.

In practical terms, ecological response calls on writing teachers to reorient their commentary by attending not only to discrete acts of literacy (typically the "major paper"), but also to reflect on the student, the rhetorical situation, and the wider ecology in which students are operating. TJ's essay about a hard decision in his life offers a good example. Because TJ was unable to fully understand how to function within an academic environment, he struggled to communicate, either as he wanted to or as I wanted him to. Rather than trying to force TJ to accommodate himself to the academy, an ecological teacher might find ways to understand the environment TJ is coming from and help him cross the (porous) boundary into a more academic environment. Allowing TJ to fully "testify," or asking him to write the same paper to both academic and home audiences, would have helped him see differences between environments more clearly.

Ecological response may push us to ask different questions of students, questions that may include:

- How are you implicated or positioned within this rhetorical ecosystem?
- Where are the boundaries of this rhetorical ecosystem? Who do you want to influence within it?
- What is the historical context of this ecosystem? Who has been affected? How?

- Who would be affected by your proposal?

- List some of the terms in this debate. How are they "interested?"

- Draw the reaction you expect to get from your audience.

- How does place—the built environment—influence the situation?

- What ideologies are at play within this environment?

Clearly, the implications of ecological response are significant. The implications are largely pedagogical and not amenable to easy classification. There is no formula we can use to determine how to respond in each situation. Grading and responding to student papers will always be a time consuming process, but the implications of thinking ecologically could lead us to forestall some comments, to hold back on formal comments temporarily and widen perspectives rather than closing down options for students. What comments do our students need now, in this environment? How can we get them to think more contextually? These are questions I hope to answer in my own practice as a writing teacher.

Extensions

As stated in my first chapter, the main difficulty in assuming an ecological view of response is in determining how to isolate elements of the environment in order to analyze them. I recognize that I have not always focused on response exclusively, because I find it impossible not to begin thinking about larger, related issues such as the assignment sequences we create and the purposes behind writing. In this dissertation, I have already slipped into extending the view from response to other aspects of

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writing/reading/teaching. Still, I have not even begun to fully explore how viewing

response as ecological can be extended.

There are multiple ways, for instance, that ecological response can be extended in

light of new media and technology. Technology offers us different ways to respond,

which include but are not limited to commenting features in word processing programs,

track-changes options, and videos. As writing assignments become increasingly

multimodal and multigenre, so should our response. To extend the scope of response to

these technological domains in other ways would not be difficult. Technologies open up

a new view of ecology that mixes image and text and dissolves the boundaries between

the two (see Fleckenstein's *Embodied Literacies,* Jeff Rice's *The Rhetoric of Cool*, and

Wysocki et al's *Writing New Media*). How do we respond to something as unstable as

the rhetorical situations in which our students increasingly find themselves implicated,

situations that mix text, image, audio, and video seamlessly and threaten to become

naturalized for our students? It will take more than being facilitative or directive—it will

require us to rethink how our students process information, and how to compete with the

blasts of multimedia that saturate their everyday environments.

A new media extension could include developing instruction and, by extension,

response along the lines of MMORPGs (massive multiplayer online role playing games).

In "Gaming, Student Literacies, and the Composition Classroom," Jonathan Alexander

posits that students could gain "literacy reflectivity, trans-literacies, collaborative writing

literacies, multicultural literacies and critical literacies" through thinking about online

gaming (45). It is also possible to think about the communities that develop within

gaming cultures. I can imagine online education becoming a dynamic site in which

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students form communities of learning, pushing their own interests and development further as educators facilitate them and encourage them to think more critically about literacy. This may seem (or be) a utopian vision, but moving in this direction would help students benefit more from their online learning. Instead of thinking about literacy in only its narrow linguistic and textual meaning, we should explode the notion of literacy to include multiple modes and capabilities, and we should engage students on multiple different levels. Technology could be used to spearhead that change in literacy, a change that it already well underway (see Brandt, Gee, Carter).

Ecological response could also be extended by thinking more clearly and deeply about evaluation. Response and evaluation interact in important ways. Trying to separate the two can be difficult, especially with a student population that has come to overvalue grades. Ecological response further validates calls for portfolio grading and multiple drafts (Elbow, O'Neill). Ecological response may also push us to think about how we can include the reaction of outside audiences into evaluation. We might want to recast the term "evaluation" altogether. Considering the current trend toward "accountability," it's difficult to imagine doing away with the term, but we can become more responsible toward our students and their development by thinking about evaluation ecologically. How are our students going to be judged as writers in the "real world"—in any rhetorical situation in which they may find themselves? Standards and expectations are important in this regard. Standards should be seen as changeable and cultural. As Horner and Trimbur write:

> If we grant that definitions of academic discourse and competence in it are
> arbitrary, then the notion of leading students through a fixed

developmental sequence of stages to mastery of that language has to be

rethought… recognition of the heterogeneity and fluctuating nature of

writing, including what's called academic writing, requires that we

incorporate attention to such heterogeneity and fluctuation in how we

design both individual writing courses and curricular programs… This

doesn't mean the abolition of standards but the development, by students

and teachers working together, of different standards, understood as

contingent, local, and negotiable. (621)

At the same time, many students *do* want to know how to "write well" as defined

by the job market or the public sphere, and we can't ignore that aspect of the

environment.

There are many opportunities for future research in this area, both with response

in particular and with ecological conceptions of writing in general. As Fleckenstein et al.

claim, an ecological model requires a different kind of research, including "multiple sites

of immersion, multiple perspectives, and multiple methodologies within a particular

discipline and research project" (401). In the area of response specifically, we can extend

our means of response and think more about the feedback that institutions are giving

students, particularly working class students, who are already overextended.

Fleckenstein writes: "Through inflexible scheduling, inadequate satellite classrooms, not

to mention increasing tuition costs, institutions prevent working-class students from

matriculating into and graduating from a university… While institutional edicts may not

create the students' material conditions, those edicts make the students' material

conditions matter" (66). The feedback to these students is that they are unwelcome in the

classroom. More research into how institutions welcome or fail to welcome students is

needed. Ongoing analysis into the identities that are privileged and how that privilege

feeds back to our students is important, as are situated ethnographies of response. A

more rigorous case study may help to consider some of the issues raised by this inquiry-

based dissertation by experimenting with different kinds of response, and attempting to

determine whether one kind of ecological response, for instance response that attends to

the literacies students already possess, or pushes them to think of the different

environments in which they write, would be more efficacious to student growth than

another approach.

There is also an opportunity to make ecological response more *literally* ecological

by considering how response and writing are always enacted within a natural

environment. As C.A. Bowers writes, "individuals are nested in culture, and culture is

nested in natural systems" (172). This could be another aspect of making writing and

response more situated and ecological. Education is always, in this way, ecological. To

further examine how higher education interacts with culture and nature, how each is

influenced by the other, could be a fruitful research agenda.

"Ecological" and "environment" are not merely buzzwords that have temporary

valence in the field. They are essential conceptual tools that can help us rethink response

(and teaching writing in general) in flexible ways, ways that will allow us to better tackle

the changing trajectory of writing in the twenty first century.

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Jamey Thomas Gallagher

280 Marshallville Road
Woodbine, NJ 08270
609.628.4428
jameyg@comcast.net

Education:

Ph.D. Candidate, Composition and Rhetoric, Lehigh University (2011, expected)
> Dissertation: *Call and Response: An Ecological View of Response*
>> Director: Barry Kroll
>>
>> I argue that the changing demographics of students in higher education, with more nontraditional students and students for whom English is a second language, and the shifting rhetorical landscape push us to rethink how we respond to student writing. I explore different conflicts and suggest that thinking of writing in an ecological sense, being conscious of students' cultural experience and the purposes for which they write, helps us approach response differently.
>
> Exam Fields (2009):
>> Major: Composition and Rhetoric, with distinction
>>
>> Minor: The Contemporary American Short Story, with distinction

M.A. Writing Studies, Saint Joseph's University (2005)

B.A. English Language & Literature, Southern New Hampshire University (2003)

Alternate Route Certification Courses, Stockton College (2005-2006)

Professional Experience:

Instructor, Southern New Hampshire University, online, Composition I and II.
> (2009-Present)

Instructor, Saint Joseph's University, Writing the Unspeakable, graduate course.
> (Summer 2010)

Teaching Fellow, Lehigh University, Composition and Literature I and II. Instructor of
> record, developed syllabi. (2008-2010)

Instructor, Atlantic Cape Community College, Composition I, Composition II, Basic
> Skills Writing. (2006-2009)

Instructor, Cumberland County College, Fundamentals of Composition, Reading,
> Composition I. (2006-2007)

English Teacher, Oakcrest High School, Ninth Grade, World Literature, including special education, general level and college prep classes. (2005-2006)

Special education aid and substitute teacher at Epping Middle High School. (1999-2000)

Academic reading and writing skills tutor at Sylvan Learning Center. (1999)

Related Experience:

2010-2011   Served as peer reviewer for *Teaching English in a Two Year College*

2008   Completed training course in teaching online at Southern New Hampshire University.

2004   Member of editorial board for *Avenue*, the literary magazine of Saint Joseph's University Writing Program.

1997-1999   Member of a writing workshop led by Andre Dubus III.

Teaching/Research Interests:

Writing Studies, Genre Study, Ecocomposition, New Media, The Contemporary American Short Story, Creative Writing.

Selected Publications:

scholarly publications
"Embracing Vernacular Literacies: A Review of *The Way Literacy Lives*." *Pedagogy*. Dec 2010.
"As Y'all Know: Blog as Bridge." *Teaching English in a Two Year College*. March 2010
"A Place for Diversity in the Community College Classroom." *Diversity in the English Classroom*. Fountainhead Press. 2010.

fiction
"Kavita" *Cutbank*, Spring 2011 (forthcoming)
"Whippet" *Adirondack Review*, Spring 2011 (forthcoming)
"A Closer Walk With Thee," *Long Story*, Spring 2010 (nominated for Pushcart Prize)
"Brzezinski's Gambit," *LIT Magazine*, Spring 2008 (nominated for Pushcart Prize)

nonfiction
"Bicycling Frees Both the Mind and Spirit," *Portsmouth Sunday Herald,* August 2000
"Exhuming an Anarchist," *New Hampshire College Journal,* Spring 2000

Various book and literary journal reviews, *Newpages.com*, June2003-January 2004

Conference Presentations:
"Public Writing in the Composition Class," Two Year College Association Northeast Conference, Washington, DC (November 2010)
"A Model Composition Course," Roundtable Discussion, National Council of Teachers of English, San Antonio (November 2008)
"Letting the Outside In: Teaching Atlantic City in a Community College," Two Year College Association Northeast Conference, Atlantic City (October 2008)
"A Post-Literate Pocahontas: *The New World* and Filmed History," Pennsylvania College English Association Conference, State College (April 2008)

Fellowships and Awards
2008-2009 Teaching Fellow at Lehigh University
2007-2008 and 2010-2011 University Fellow at Lehigh University
2007 Pep Grant to CCC Conference in New York
2005 Saint Joseph's University Writing Studies Award for Academic Excellence

Affiliations and Licenses
Two Year College English Association
National Council of Teachers of English
New Jersey High School English Teacher License

References:

Dr. Barry Kroll, Robert D. Rodale Professor of Writing, Lehigh University. (610)758-5635.
bmk3@lehigh.edu

Dr. Ann Green, Assistant Professor of English, Graduate Director, Writing Studies Program, Saint Joseph's University. (610) 660-1889
agreen@sju.edu

Dr. Ed Lotto, Associate Professor of English, Writing Program Director, Lehigh University. (610) 758-3097.
eel2@lehigh.edu