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Baumrind's Authoritative Parenting Style: A Model for Creating Autonomous Writers

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ABSTRACT

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Though Quintilian introduced the term *in loco parentis* in his *Institutio Oratoria* by suggesting that teachers think of themselves as parents of a student's mind, composition scholars have let parenting as a metaphor for teaching fall by the wayside in recent discussions of classroom authority. Podis and Podis have recently revived the term, though, and investigated the ways writing teachers enact Lakoff's "Strict Father" and "Nurturing Mother" authority models. Unfortunately, their treatment of these two opposite authority styles reduces classroom authority styles to a mutually exclusive binary of two less than satisfactory options. I propose clinical and developmental psychologist Diana Baumrind's taxonomy of parenting styles as the ideal way to reform our thinking as a field about the authority model we should adopt in our writing classrooms. While Baumrind includes the inferior models Podis and Podis work from in her authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, she found that the authoritative style, which is both strict and nurturing, promises the best results for parenting children: autonomy and academic achievement. By applying her descriptions of authoritative parents and the outcomes for their children to the practices of composition instructors and their students, I reveal how useful Baumrind's taxonomy of parenting styles could be for a field that often uses nuanced terms for authority without either clearly defining them or backing claims with replicable, aggregable, data-driven (RAD) research. If our field chooses to adopt Baumrind's terminology and definitions, then, we will be able to communicate about classroom authority in terms anchored in a coherent paradigm and garner more respect for our field as we probe the outcomes of Baumrind's authoritative parenting style as a college composition teaching style through our own empirical research.

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Introduction

Teachers really don't differ much from parents. Of course teachers are not the biological parents of their students; of course teachers are not, and should not be, as intimate with their students as parents are with their children. Furthermore, teachers do not live with or take responsibility for their students outside the classroom. Obviously, parents occupy a privileged position in regard to their children—a position that teachers do not desire to overtake. Still, teachers and parents have quite a bit in common.

After all, both teachers and parents attempt to raise something. Parents desire to implant the values, practical skills, and emotional maturity their children will need to survive in the world outside their home. Bill Cosby may have said this best when he intimated, "and those [children] we have we want to get out of the house before we die. Just to get them out!" Cosby humorously reveals the ultimate desire of most parents: autonomy for their children. Parents can measure their success based on whether their child can successfully move forward independently.

While as writing instructors we do not attempt to raise our students themselves, we certainly attempt to raise their writing ability. Like parents, we operate as authority figures trying to model and invest our students in aspects of writing and thinking that they should value and demonstrate mastery of in their own compositions. We teach them how to make judgment calls about what to include in their writing based on a set of writing values. Just like parents, we try to arm them with a practical skill-set, albeit one related to revising, forming paragraphs, making their writing more coherent, etc. Finally, we hope these values and skills will shape them into mature writers who can write successfully outside our

classrooms. Thus, teachers are like parents because their ultimate goal of creating autonomy—in student-writers and children, respectively—is the same.

In *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian distinguishes autonomy as the chief aim of a good teacher: "For what else is our object in teaching, save that our pupils should not always require to be taught?" (II.v.13). It is also Quintilian who introduces the metaphor of teacher as father of a student's ability in the first place. He gives us the concept of *in loco parentis* when he says, "Let him [the teacher] adopt a paternal attitude towards his pupils, and regard himself as taking the place of those whose children are entrusted to him" (II.ii.5). Thus, Quintilian urges the ideal teacher to adopt the frame of mind of a parent as he interacts with his students. On the other end, he urges his students to "love their teachers as they do their studies, and think of them as the parents not of their bodies but of their minds" (II.ix.1). Clearly, Quintilian envisions the ideal relationship between teacher and student as most comparable to that between a parent and child whose interactions are guided by a mutual affection and respect for authority.

Quintilian continues to utilize the parent-child metaphor as he suggests characteristics of the ideal teacher which parallel characteristics of good parents. We see this when he says, "He must not be given to anger, but he must not turn a blind eye to things that need correction" (II.ii.6). This ability to judge the right amount of criticism could apply as easily to a parent as a teacher. Similarly, his advice to "praise some things, tolerate others, [and] suggest changes (always also giving reasons for them)" evokes the challenges of parents who must choose their battles while also giving reasons for expectations in their homes (II.iv.12). Quintilian's treatment of teachers as parents suggests, then, how useful it might be to turn to the best kind of parent as a model for the best kind of instructor.

Following Quintilian's example, I would like to update our thinking on the teaching principles that produce the most autonomous writers by turning to empirical research from clinical and developmental psychologist Diana Baumrind who has formulated a parenting style taxonomy. Baumrind's parenting styles include four different types: authoritarian, permissive, authoritative, and disengaged. Each style is determined relative to two scales—"responsiveness" and "demandingness"—where "*responsiveness* refers to the extent to which parents foster individuality and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's requests; it includes warmth, autonomy support, and reasoned communication" (Baumrind "Patterns" 61-62). Conversely, "*demandingness* refers to the claims parents make on children to become integrated into society by behavior regulation, direct confrontation, and maturity demands

Table 1

Baumrind's Parenting Style Grid

		Demandingness	
Responsiveness		High	Low
	High	Authoritative	Permissiveness
	Low	Authoritarian	Disengaged

(behavioral control) and supervision of children's activities (monitoring)" (62). On this grid of responsiveness and demandingness (see Table 1), authoritarian parents rate high on demandingness— strictly monitoring and regulating their children's activities—but low on responsiveness. On the opposite side of the grid, permissive parents are very responsive to their children—they act supportively and show love—but make no demands. Commonsensically, we can see problems with just one or the other of these styles, but as a discipline we mostly discuss teacher authority in terms of this binary.

Baumrind's ideal authoritative parenting style, though, moves us out of choosing either authoritarian or permissive, with all of their shortcomings, to a new style that brings

with it the positive elements of both inferior styles. Where the authoritarian and permissive styles are high only on one scale (either responsiveness or demandingess) and low on the other, authoritative parents rate high on both scales (high responsiveness and demandingness). This both/and combination yields overwhelmingly positive results. According to Baumrind's research, authoritative parents produced children who "were both socialized and independent. They were self-controlled and affiliative on the one hand and self-reliant, competent, and content" on the other ("Child" 80). Thus, the characteristics of Baumrind's authoritative style have been measured to produce the chief goal of parents and teachers—autonomy—along with a host of other positive outcomes. Surely, a paradigm with such proven success in the realm of parenting should no longer be ignored by composition scholars looking for just such a paradigm after which to pattern their own pedagogical practices.

My goal in writing this essay, then, is to explain just how Baumrind's taxonomy of parenting styles fits into discussions of teacher authority and student-teacher relations already taking place in our field. While we frequently use the same language to discuss differing authority figure types (authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative), and we have even begun to embrace the concept of pedagogical *in loco parentis* (Podis and Podis), these efforts still fall short of establishing a paradigm based on more than impressions, lore, and nuanced terms lacking an anchor. By turning to Baumrind's empirical research based in replicable, aggregable, data-driven (RAD) research on the best ways to parent, we can legitimately transform our pedagogical decisions regarding the best way to interact with our students in a principled fashion that will lead to their becoming autonomous writers.

Problems with Binary Thinking: Strict Father vs. Nurturing Mother

Using a parenting model from the social sciences to transform our pedagogical decisions makes sense in the context of a field where scholars have already discussed parenting as a metaphor for teaching writing. In 2007, Podis and Podis revived Quintilian's term as they delved into the history of the way pedagogical *in loco parentis*, or the way teachers act in place of parents, has been characterized by scholars. They first discuss the way that Lakoff's "Strict Father" model has been enacted in unsatisfactory ways by composition instructors who maintain strict deadlines, set very specific paper length requirements, sharply emphasize correctness (usually in grammar), and discourage collaborative work (Podis and Podis 131). They cite these practices as negative portrayals of pedagogical *in loco parentis* because "in the case of school writing, *in loco parentis*, at least in the Strict Father version, manifests itself as an authoritarian series of prescriptions and proscriptions that curtail opportunities for student writers to employ the kinds of processes that experienced writers rely on" (129). So, one of their main criticisms of pedagogical *in loco parentis* is that a strict and punitive version limits student writers' ability to become autonomous, experienced writers.

But they also acknowledge that there are more positive aspects of pedagogical *in loco parentis*, citing Flynn and Miller as describing the way some composition instructors are "nurturing mothers who replace authoritarian fathers" (134). They review Trimbur and Elbow's contributions to the discussion in suggesting that nurturing mothers can "be empowering figures who may either be 'permissive' or employ 'tough love'" (134). At the end of their essay, Podis and Podis support Lakoff's assertion that, compared to the Strict Father model, "the Nurturant Parent model is superior" (qtd. in Podis and Podis 135); they go on to propose that a nurturing

model is also better for pedagogical *in loco parentis* (135). They do acknowledge, though, that there could be problems associated with being "permissive" as well, and they call for other models and metaphors from future scholars on this topic (135).

This discussion of pedagogical *in loco parentis* is a great beginning for our field's acknowledgement of the power of parenting as a metaphor for teaching, but a few ideas need further development. For one, Podis and Podis treat the Strict Father and Nurturing Mother models as mutually exclusive. In his comment on their article, Taylor points out the need to "think beyond the either/or binary of the disciplinarian and the nurturer as teacher, the strict father or the nurturing mother—both stereotypes that make me pause" (91). These stereotypes make me pause as well for three reasons. First, while we should nurture our students' writing ability through warmth and support, having demanding expectations for student work can have positive ramifications; asserting authority is not always bad. Second, it doesn't make sense that all teachers choose between being strict or nurturing. Surely, student-teacher interactions are more complex than just one or the other of two cookie-cutter categories. Finally, along with Kelly Ritter, I believe that the gendered labels typically assigned to differing types of teacher authority figures are problematic.[1] Women are certainly capable of discipline, and men of warmth, so such labels as "strict father" and "nurturing mother" are not only inaccurate but could discourage beneficial behaviors. Thus, we must establish a model that eliminates the dissatisfaction of being either strict or nurturing, paternal or maternal: an authoritative model.

In their response to Taylor's comment, Podis and Podis do bring up this term, "authoritative," in the following context:

> By contrast [to authoritarian or permissive writing teachers], authoritative writing
>
> teachers may earn students' respect by demonstrating the knowledge, behavior,

and leadership skills befitting a person in authority. Such instructors, we believe, attempt to use their authority to enable the authority of their students. They refuse to see the classroom as an either/or, zero-sum game in which there is only so much authority to go around. (97)

This statement echoes critical pedagogy advocates like Shor and Freire who champion "student-centered" classrooms with "horizontal dialogue" that redistribute authority more equally between teacher and student (Shor 12). I whole-heartedly agree that student-centered aims are worth striving for. I also agree that an "authoritative" teaching style is the ideal goal for composition instructors. Baumrind's ideal parenting style is, after all, the authoritative style. In composition studies, though, this term has floated about unanchored.

<p align="center">Unanchored Terms, Inconsistent Interpretations, Data-less Impressions</p>

Unanchored terms like "authoritative," and even "authoritarian" and "permissive," are frequently used to discuss classroom authority and student-teacher relations, but without consistent definitions that would allow them to uniformly guide pedagogical decisions. Though Podis and Podis bring up the term "authoritative" as the ideal authority assertion strategy, they fail to define exactly what it means or how a teacher might practice "authoritative" teaching beyond its results (more equally distributed authority) (97). Beyond failing to offer teachers a structured way to enact an authoritative teaching style, we also invite confusion by using nuanced terms without acknowledging them as such. For example, we have Podis and Podis using "authoritative" in what seems to be a positive, androgynous way in their response to Taylor (97), but we also have Ritter and Schell using the term entirely differently. Ritter summarizes Schell's argument that "feminist approaches to composition studies" have contributed to a "'maternal approach' . . . [that resists] common characterizations of masculine pedagogies—

which are 'domineering, aloof, authoritative'" (Ritter 392). This usage of "authoritative" is not only masculine but negative, since it is paired with "domineering" and "aloof" (392), which are certainly terms that carry negative connotations. I would suggest that "authoritarian" belongs in this list more than "authoritative," but without consistent definitions of these terms, we have no meaningful way to differentiate between the two. The danger in this is that we all think we know what each term means when we see it, but in reality, we interpret the terms slightly, or very, differently.

Other characterizations of authority—"authoritarian" and "permissive"—are also liable to nuanced interpretations as they float unanchored to specific definitions or paradigms. For example, Gorzelsky champions Shor's ideas about transforming teacher and student authority when she says, "Contending that traditional education has proven itself unequal to its stated goal of redressing social inequities, Shor argues that this inability stems from its inherently authoritarian, anti-democratic structures" (309). In this quote, we find Gorzelsky using "authoritarian" as an adjective to explain something that obviously carries a negative connotation since it is also "anti-democratic" and has failed to accomplish a sought-after goal. But all we really get out of this usage is that "authoritarian" is bad because it limits student freedom, and we need more than that. We need to clearly define "authoritarian" if we are to agree that it is bad and try to avoid it.

Even if we define these terms consistently, though, we still lack evidence to back up our impressions as to which authority style would be best to follow. For example, Podis and Podis use "authoritarian" when they describe the "Strict Father" model, and define the term well by including behaviors it might entail (131), but they do not provide evidence for what outcomes authoritarian behaviors can produce. They similarly use terms like "permissive" in conjunction

with "nurturing," proclaiming that "permissive" is better than "authoritarian" (134-35), but we are still left wanting evidence for these claims beyond theory.

In summary, then, our field frequently uses nuanced terms for authority without acknowledging them as such, and this leaves us with contradictory claims that make it impossible to consistently incorporate our theories into pedagogical practice. We need a paradigm that anchors our definitions of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive so that we can move forward on the same page. Additionally, even when we do define our terms using examples or illustrations of what behaviors these authority terms entail, we still fail to back up such claims with evidence beyond our own impressions and lore. In order to acquire the respect our field deserves, we must do more to incorporate empirical data as evidence for our pedagogical practices. Fortunately, turning to Baumrind's research in the social sciences can suggest a pattern for solving these problems.

Baumrind's Parenting Styles

Baumrind's taxonomy of parenting styles includes all of the categories and terms that we have been using as a discipline—authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Unlike our present discussions, though, it offers us clear definitions of what all three terms mean in relation to each other. Additionally, Baumrind categorizes behaviors of parents who exhibit each of these authority patterns, giving us easily transferable illustrations of types of behaviors we should and should not implement as composition instructors. Finally, through carefully constructed observations of parents and children in homes and labs, statistical analysis of her data, and detailed descriptions of observed outcomes for the children of each parenting style, Baumrind gives us a model for backing up our claims about which pattern of teacher authority is most likely to build better, autonomous writers.

Baumrind's work has been praised in psychology as recently as this year by Criss and Larzelere who assert, "Baumrind's seminal work has had an enduring impact on the field for more than four decades. Hers is widely recognized as the leading typological approach to parenting" (5). Moreover, they point out the applicability of Baumrind's research to other fields and argue that "her theory on authoritative parenting has influenced a variety of individuals from a wide range of disciplines, including students . . . and educators" (5). It is time to follow suit by introducing Baumrind's typology into the field of composition studies.

For the remainder of this essay, I will introduce Baumrind's definitions of the terms authoritarian, permissive, and finally authoritative. I will also detail the outcomes for children of these types of parents to suggest what we can likely expect if we pattern our pedagogical decisions after this empirically-tested data on parents. Finally, I will draw parallels between the actions of authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parents and the same types of teachers, beginning a discussion of how we can implement authoritative teaching into our classroom practices. In order to truly understand the ideal, authoritative style, though, we must first contrast it with the inferior styles—authoritarian and permissive.[2]

Authoritarian: Demanding without Warmth

The first deficient style that comes up in Baumrind's parenting typology is the authoritarian style. On Baumrind's two-scaled grid, authoritarian parents rate high on demandingness and low on responsiveness (Criss and Larzelere 4). Baumrind describes several actions of the authoritarian parent that help us distinguish why that authority style negatively impacts youth. Compared to permissive and authoritative parents in Baumrind's research, authoritarian parents were "less nurturant and involved with their children. They exerted firm control and used power freely, but offered little support or affection. They did not attempt to

convince the child through use of reason to obey a directive, nor did they encourage the child to express himself when he disagreed" ("Child" 81). So authoritarian parents have high expectations for their children, but give no reasons for their expectations or help in accomplishing the feats they expect. Furthermore, authoritarian parents were "less sympathetic and approving and . . . admitted more to frightening the child" (81). In these characteristics we find a harsh figure who demands respect as an absolute authority based on positional power. Since the child's position is beneath the adult's, power is not negotiable or shared between them. Instead of logic, the most common reason to obey an authoritarian parent is *because that's the rule* or *because I said so* (Baumrind "History" 21). Authoritarian figures may be right in what they demand or expect, but they do not rationally justify their expectations or allow the child some power to decide independently.

Most of us view this type of power assertion as negative, in part, because we anticipate the negative impact on those who are governed by this seemingly uncaring, heavy-handed, authoritarian style. Baumrind's data found that children of authoritarian parents "were significantly less content, more insecure and apprehensive, less affiliative toward peers, and more likely to become hostile or regressive under stress" than children of authoritative parents (the statistical levels of confidence were at the 0.001, 0.01, and 0.05 levels of significance depending on the specific outcome) ("Child" 81). An authority type that results in unhappy, fearful, anti-social children who withdraw or act out in challenging situations is certainly contrary to creating autonomy.

Conversely, though, the evidence also points to one positive outcome that comes from authoritarian parenting—academic success. Baumrind's data also found that children of authoritarian parents were "more inclined to do careful work and functioned at a higher cognitive

level" than children who had permissive parents ("Child" 81). So children of highly demanding

parents feel a pressure to perform that does, in fact, increase their academic success—despite the

negative effects of lower self-confidence and overall unhappiness. High levels of

demandingness, then, or having high expectations for our students, could be effective in helping

them develop stronger writing skills. Thus, while an authoritarian style of parenting causes a host

of undesirable outcomes, it has one very positive outcome particularly relevant to our

educational goals which we can't ignore.

Turning now to what an authoritarian teacher would look like in a classroom, Podis and

Podis describe the authoritarian teacher using Lakoff's "Strict Father" model (123). They quote

Lakoff who proposes that the "Strict Father . . . teaches children right from wrong by setting

strict rules for their behavior and enforcing them through punishment" (qtd. in Podis and Podis

123). We see, here, that an authoritarian style of authority is highly demanding—holding youth

to high standards of conduct in accordance with rules—but not responsive, since the enforcement

of these rules usually happens through punishment as opposed to positive reinforcement. They

note that this model often appears in composition classrooms as the instructor takes

"authoritarian control of the writing situation and the written product. This control is often

exercised with regard to both the content and form of student writing, with topics that play to the

authority of the teacher-parent and penalties for those who violate the rules of mechanical

correctness and proper language usage" (123). We are familiar with papers riddled with red-ink

complaints about grammar, despite sound ideas, and the heavy grade deductions often associated

with errors.

This concept of "authoritarian prescriptions and proscriptions" along with punishment,

brings Podis and Podis to their next assertion about the "Strict Father" pedagogical model: "The

operative principle here is power, used in the Foucauldian sense. Thus construed, *in loco parentis* emerges as a well-entrenched 'discursive practice' that constitutes a site of struggle . . . [and] keeps students in an inferior posture" (123). The key point Podis and Podis make here is that an authoritarian teacher is more concerned with the power relationship between teacher and student than with the student's autonomous progress. This obsession with power has caused power and authority to become pejorative terms for many composition scholars. In Baumrind's description of the authoritarian parent, however, we find some important distinctions between how power and authority are used that help us understand why *authoritarian* power assertion deserves negative connotation, even though not all forms of power do.

<div align="center">Permissive: Warmth without Demands</div>

The parenting style opposite authoritarian on Baumrind's grid is permissive because it is characterized by low levels of demandingness and high levels of responsiveness—priorities exactly opposite those of an authoritarian parent (Criss and Larzelere 4). Baumrind's data revealed that the high responsiveness characteristic of permissive parents did have one important positive outcome for their children: they were significantly happier (at the 0.05 level of significance) than children of authoritarian parents. Unfortunately, Baumrind also found that the low demandingness characteristic of permissive parents causes many negative outcomes that make permissive parenting, like authoritarian, a deficient model. Baumrind found that permissive parents "babied their children more" and "engaged in less independence training" ("Child" 82). This babying resulted in children who "lack[ed] . . . self-reliance" (81). So, Baumrind's coded observations of children reveal the unsurprising result that children who are not encouraged towards independence by their parents do not end up acting very autonomously. Secondly, Baumrind's data found that permissive parents were characterized by "a markedly less

controlling manner and were not as well organized or effective in running their households"

("Child" 82). Here we see control discussed not as a punitive or manipulative characteristic, but

one associated with organization. Permissive parents are less effective because they do not

provide a controlled (i.e. organized) environment for learning and growth to take place.

Baumrind supplies us with concrete negative outcomes for this lack of organizational leadership

in her finding that children of permissive parents lacked self-control (81). Children of permissive

parents struggle with self-regulation, then, because they lack a model of control to follow. Thus

while permissive parents nurture their children, their behavior also begets negative consequences

related to autonomy and self-regulation.

　　　These negative characteristics and outcomes would be enough to steer us away from fully

embracing the permissive pattern of authority, but the negative characteristics and outcomes are

even more serious. Baumrind also found that the permissive parents she studied were "self-

effacing and insecure about their ability to influence their children . . . lacking the qualities of a

strong model. Neither demanded much of the child and fathers were lax reinforcing agents"

("Child" 81). Furthermore, they used "withdrawal of love" instead of reasoning or power as

incentives to conform to their few demands (82). Though permissive parents do not use power to

force their children to be obedient like authoritarian parents, they still use manipulation as

opposed to good reasons. From these actions we see that permissive parents may be unsure of

their own ways, so they refuse to attempt to guide their child to follow in their footsteps. These

negative outcomes make the permissive parenting style impossible to accept as a model for good

teaching, but if Podis and Podis, in offering us the most comprehensive treatment of pedagogical

parenting, indicate the state of the field, permissive teaching is the preferred model.

Unfortunately, this view clings to the responsiveness of the permissive teacher but shrugs off the lack of demandingness.

Podis and Podis discuss the permissive style as Lakoff's "Nurturant Parent" who prioritizes "being cared for and cared about" (qtd. in Podis and Podis 124). They champion the permissive teacher over the authoritarian one because of the virtuous emphasis on nurture. This connotes Schell's "ethic of care" as created by feminist ideologies applied to composition studies (74). They summarize and quote van Manen's point of view that "various societal influences have been eroding actual parental involvement, and thus . . . the teacher's charge, now more than ever, is to act *in loco parentis*, using a more nurturing connotation of parenting" where teachers "provide 'a protective sphere' . . . [and where] 'pedagogy is conditioned by love and care for the child as well as 'hope for the child'" (Podis and Podis 124). Podis and Podis express their approval of these methods when they say, "Certainly these are noble goals and well worth consideration of any teacher at any level" (124). Furthermore, they bring this ideal back into our realm as they note, "Even at the college level, many instructors see their courses as transitional spaces where students can learn to perform acceptably while being spared some of the harsher consequences of potential failure" (124). I agree that first year composition instructors in particular may fall into this category of protective nurturing as they help students become acquainted with expectations for their writing in future university courses. Overall, these descriptions of the protectively nurturant teacher who privileges love and care over heavy demands align well with Baumrind's explanation of the responsiveness of the permissive parent. Still, while Peter Elbow and Podis and Podis acknowledge that there can be negative consequences for permissive nurturing like overdependence,[3] Podis and Podis still revere the

nurturant model as the best we have (135). Unfortunately, this view does not place enough emphasis on the negative aspects of permissive teaching.

The warmth of a permissive teacher would play out positively in a classroom environment, but babying our students could easily inhibit their autonomy just as Baumrind found it did for parents and children. Especially in classes largely composed of first-year students, or at least beginning writers, it is easy to justify a certain amount of coddling. Such coddling might manifest itself in e-mails when students miss class or fail to turn in assignments; it might appear in the number of office hours we spend assisting students with their papers; or it may take the form of extra-credit for a reading quiz most of the class did poorly on. None of these things are necessarily problematic alone, but if they result in dependency, then we have not successfully accomplished the goal of creating autonomous writers. As our ultimate goal is to teach our students enough to work ourselves out of a job, failing to increase their independence is the first reason the permissive pattern offers an insufficient model.

Moreover, the permissive teacher would fail to establish an appropriate amount of control over the classroom environment. Even the extremely child-centered learning champion John Dewey advocated control over the learning environment. Fishman and McCarthy summarize his view as follows: "The teacher sets the conditions for learning. Since knowledge cannot be passed directly, it follows for Dewey that the teacher must educate indirectly by shaping the classroom environment" (346). Thus, a teacher must exercise his or her power in a way that establishes an environment conducive for diverse learning abilities and practices. If a permissive teacher fails to do so by failing to provide a structured class schedule, clear grading rubric, or models of excellent student writing, he or she fails to arm students with practical skills and experiences they need to become better writers.

Finally, and perhaps worst of all, permissive teaching would manifest itself in a teacher with little confidence in his or her leadership skills and result in a poor model for his or her students. This would be akin to a teacher who requires a certain format for his or her research paper, but is not entirely convinced that the chosen format is the best one. So, when a student fails to follow the required format, the teacher chooses not to implement consequences. It could also manifest itself in a teacher who constantly goes back on former policies or requirements just because his or her students complain about their rigor. Teachers should not always be unwilling to change their policies or compromise with students; however, the ideal teacher would confidently explain their reasons for their policies and assignments—sharing the logic behind them with their students in a way that will help them understand why they exist. Such skills make up a good leader, and we certainly do not want to promote a teaching style that lacks positive leadership skills.

Ultimately, we find that there is one good reason that composition scholars have revered the permissive style over the authoritarian style: students led in this pattern will most likely be more content and confident than students led by authoritarian teachers (Baumrind "Child" 46). Still, the host of negative outcomes and characteristics Baumrind observed in permissive parents and their children suggests that instead of embracing this style we need to look for an alternative. Though the style is warm and friendly, we certainly do not want to advocate for teachers who don't possess the leadership and organizational skills that offer students a good model for future autonomy in their writing.

<center>Embracing Contraries or Transcending Them?</center>

At this point we are left with two clearly deficient models for teacher authority, both with negative outcomes. Authoritarian parents raise unhappy, sometimes hostile, and less peer-

friendly children. Permissive parents raise children with little self-control or independence. In either case, there are undesirable outcomes. But authoritarian parents also tend to have children who do well in school, and permissive parents tend to have happy children. For composition scholars, these outcomes suggest that we have been stuck trying to decide between the lesser of two evils or the greater of two goods. More often than not, we have been looking at styles of authority as a mutually exclusive binary where we must choose to be either authoritarian or permissive. But because of the negative aspects of each style, choosing one or the other is simply not good enough.

In his comment on Podis and Podis' article, Taylor brings up the need to exercise multiple kinds of authority as a teacher when he says, "What the concept of *in loco parentis* brings up for me is the idea that our multiple roles and personas surface as the rhetorical situations dictate, which is quite similar to how one acts as a parent, in fact. The teacherly stance or persona depends on *kairos*" (93). So Taylor ultimately concludes that teachers need to be different types of authority figures at different times—sometimes authoritarian, sometimes nurturing—depending on the situation. Peter Elbow also brought up this idea in his article, "Embracing Contraries," decades before when he said, "I am also talking about developing opposite and complementary sides of our character or personality: the supportive and nurturant side and the tough, demanding side. I submit that we all have instincts and needs of both sorts" (107). Elbow adds to Taylor's proposition by asserting that people actually have contrary aspects of their personality coexisting. This suggests a hope for the same teacher to be able to enact both authoritarian and permissive styles of authority. Unfortunately, even if one were able to enact both authoritarian and permissive styles of authority, we would still be stuck with the negative aspects of both.

For this reason, I would like to emphasize that the authoritative style is not just a combination of authoritarian and permissive styles—it transcends and transforms them. In my view, Baumrind's greatest contribution to the social sciences'However parental authority conversation was her ability to characterize warmth and demands on two different axes, instead of just one scale. Baumrind explains in her recent survey of the history of authoritative parenting that part of the reason "advocates of child-centered permissiveness, such as Richard Farson (1974) and Alfie Kohn (2005)" have viewed permissiveness as superior to other styles of authority is because they have "treated control and love as a single dimension by equating confrontive behavioral control with rejection and unconditional love with unconditional acceptance" ("History" 13). By contrast, Baumrind's "authoritative parents are neither unconditionally accepting nor rejecting" (13-14). The key idea here is that authoritative parents do not occupy a space between authoritarian or permissive parents—if they did, they would just be a little strict and a little permissive, a little loving and a little demanding. Instead, authoritative parents occupy their own unique space as determined by the intersection of the two axes of responsiveness and demandingness.

In a new iteration of "Embracing Contraries" Elbow discusses the limits to a "compromise" between binary positions when he says that Aristotle does not suggest that "rhetors should find a halfway position where they are *a little bit* good and natural and *a little bit* clever at disguising. Being only somewhat good and somewhat clever is a formula for mediocrity" ("Voice" 174). Though Elbow is discussing a conflict about voice in this article, his comments apply to any binary stalemate, including composition studies' between authoritarian and permissive positions. In another essay Elbow makes this point even more clearly when he says, "The path to really good writing, then, is seldom the path of compromise or the golden

mean. If we are only sort of generative and sort of critical, we write mediocre stuff. . . . We need

extremity in both directions. Instead of finding one point on the continuum between two

extremes, we need as it were to occupy two points near both ends" ("Uses" 54). Here, Elbow

argues for both extremes, for both of the best characteristics, for "the competing positions in all

of their strength" (55)—and that is exactly what the authoritative parenting style offers us.

Authoritative: The Best of Both Worlds

Authoritative parents do not simply occupy a moderate position between authoritarian

and permissive parents—they are a new style that capitalizes on the positive elements of each

style. By transcending either style, they retain the best characteristics and outcomes and

transform the worst into positives. To explain this position Baumrind says, "They are high on

both control and love, and thus the antithesis of disengaged parenting, which is low on both love

and control, not the antithesis of either authoritarian or permissive parenting" (14). Figuratively,

you might think of authoritarian and permissive styles as two points at the base of a triangle.

Authoritative does not occupy the middle of that base, but the apex of the triangle. Thus,

authoritative uses some aspects of both of the lesser styles, but also rises above them. Baumrind

explains this when she says, "Authoritative parents, unlike authoritarian parents, temper high

expectations and demands with sensitivity and open communication . . . By being responsive as

well as demanding, authoritative parents avoid the harmful effects of coercive kinds of

behavioral control" ("History" 27). So, where an authoritarian parent is too strict, in part,

because he or she shows little support and does not allow free choice, an authoritative parent's

strictness avoids the negative consequences associated with very high demands by offering more

choices along with support to help children meet high expectations. Alternately, Baumrind

explains the permissive characteristics of authoritative parents: "In common with permissive

parents, authoritative parents allow their children considerable leeway to make their own decisions and to speak freely. . . . However, unlike permissive parents and in common with authoritarian parents, authoritative parents are ready to back up their directives with sanctions" (27). In this case, where a permissive parent's love hampers any expectations and so results in little achievement, an authoritative leader balances high love with high expectations. So we see that combining high levels of responsiveness and demandingess results in a "syncretic coalition of the beneficial components of opposing dualities . . . [which] changes the nature and effect of each component [responsiveness and demandingness]" ("History" 14). Thus, embracing the best characteristics together—responsiveness and demandingness—allows an authoritative figure a balance that produces new positive characteristics.

This synergistic transformation is reflected by the way children of authoritative parents exhibited far more positive characteristics than children of authoritarian or permissive parents ("Child" 80). While children of authoritarian parents achieved better in school than those of permissive parents, and children of permissive parents were more content than those of authoritarian parents, the starkest differences between groups of children were not between the two inferior parenting styles, but between children of authoritative parents and either of the other styles (80). Baumrind's coded observations revealed that the children she studied who had authoritative parents "were both socialized and independent. They were self-controlled and affiliative on the one hand and self-reliant, competent, and content" compared to children of authoritarian and permissive parents (80). Thus, these children exhibited the ideal characteristics we hope for in our students.

By analogy, students of authoritative teachers would be able to produce competent work independently, but could also participate well in collaborative situations. Additionally, they

would demonstrate positive, controlled, and pro-social behavior as well as happiness in doing so. Baumrind found that children of authoritative parents "were not adversely affected by their parents' socialization and maturity demands and, indeed, seemed to thrive under the pressure imposed" (80). This finding is particularly relevant for us as instructors because it suggests that if we push our students to produce top quality work in a nurturing environment, they will rise to the occasion instead of becoming passive or rebellious (80). Furthermore, other studies of parenting styles[4] have revealed that adolescents of authoritative parents continue to show these positive characteristics of "higher social and cognitive competence, higher aspirations, better grades, better psychological well-being, and better behavior compared to others" (Pellerin 286). These successful applications of Baumrind's work to behavior patterns in young people hold promise for our application of Baumrind to college-level writing. Finally, Kathryn Wentzel's study successfully applying Baumrind's typology to middle school teachers found that authoritative characteristics bred students with the highest levels of academic success (299). Elizabeth Bondy and Dorene D. Ross have also championed authoritative characteristics at the elementary and high school levels in their "Warm Demander," but without connection to Baumrind's parenting styles ("Becoming" 4-5, "Teacher" 55). Still, these studies demonstrate a clear connection between the characteristics of Baumrind's authoritative parent and good teachers—a connection worth exploring at the college level.

Four Dimensions: Control, Maturity Demands, Communication, and Nurturance

The positive characteristics of Baumrind's authoritative parents fell into four main interaction dimensions: parental control, parental maturity demands, parent-child communication, and parental nurturance ("Child" 54). I will investigate each dimension in more

detail than the past two deficient styles of authoritarian and permissive in order to suggest clear methods writing instructors can use to apply similar practices in their classrooms.

When discussing the first dimension of authoritative parents, parental control, Baumrind clarifies that "restrictiveness, punitive attitudes, or intrusiveness" are not included in measures of this characteristic ("Child" 54). Instead, this dimension measures a parent's "consistency in enforcing directives, ability to resist pressure from the child, and willingness to exert influence upon the child" (54). Within this dimension, authoritative parents were firm in regard to rules they had good reason for establishing and did not give in to what Baumrind calls the "*child's nuisance value*" or their "whining, pleading, or crying" attempts to coerce the adult into giving in to their wishes (55). For an authoritative teacher, this would mean he or she would consistently set high standards for work because he or she knows from experience or research that the assignments will improve student writing, despite complaints. Thus, if a teacher has good reasons for a certain policy or assignment (e.g., data shows that sentence combining exercises improve student writing), the teacher does not waver in consistently directing students to follow or complete it. This ability to stand firm in a reasonable policy despite unreasonable types of student resistance is an important characteristic of an authoritative teacher.

The main realm that authoritative parents stand firm in, though, is that of maturity demands. Baumrind describes demands for maturity as "the pressures put upon the child to perform at least up to ability in intellectual, social, and emotional spheres (independence-training)" ("Child" 55). In a writing classroom maturity demands could include communicating high expectations for work as well as confidently believing our students can achieve at those high levels. The second aspect of these maturity demands is recognition of a student's abilities. Quintilian emphasized a teacher's ability to "observe the differences in the abilities of the pupils"

as an important aspect of his own ideal teacher (II.viii.1), along with a teacher's effectiveness in teaching on "his pupil's level" (II.iii.7). Following Baumrind's traits of authoritative parents and Quintilian's suggestions, then, we should administer some sort of diagnostic measure to gauge the skills students have when they come into our classrooms and pattern our assignments accordingly. For example, we cannot reasonably expect them to write a good researched argument if they do not know how to write a good argument without research. Gauging what they know will allow us to build our assignments upon each other so that our assignments increase in difficulty and require the use of past skills along with new ones. This method is also Vygotzkian in its approach because it "scaffolds" learning, or builds new skills upon old skills (Berk 46). According to Baumrind, this pushing and building should help a child develop autonomy because he or she will seek the "continued approval of his loving but demanding parent" ("Child" 60). Ultimately, Baumrind says, these "*high maturity demands will result in higher aspirations, greater self-reliance, and a more buoyant attitude when the parents are nurturant*" (60 emphasis in original). So, if we have high expectations for our students but help them achieve those expectations in a warm and supportive way, they will be more likely to reach difficult goals now and desire future achievement later.

Still, requiring our students to perform at high levels is only the first dimension of having high maturity demands. The second dimension is offering our students the appropriate amount of "leeway" to decide some things for themselves (Baumrind "Child" 55). This means that after we make maturity demands of our students that should help them become autonomous, we need to give them some autonomy. Giving students more choices is fully compatible with aims we tend to value as a discipline—aims like Shor's admonition for us to make the authority in our classrooms more "horizontal" rather than "vertical" in order to avoid becoming the type of

teacher who winds up "talking at students or down to them" (86). This type of composition instructor would dictate every aspect of the writing process: *You will do this type of prewriting, on this topic, for this audience, in MLA format* and so on. Though the authoritative teacher takes control over important elements of the classroom environment, and even the writing process, he or she must make room for choice as well. Donald Murray explains a shortcoming of dictating all the details of our students' writing when he says, "You can command writing but you can't command good writing" (83). For our best shot at teaching good writing, we can give our students an appropriate kind and range of choices.

Choice convert Lesley Roessing explains, "Choice gives the power back to the writer" (42). If we seek an empowering classroom, this must certainly be on our agenda. Roessing goes on to confess that after completing "the twelve-step program at Control Anonymous" she found it much easier to give her students choices; she suggests assigning only one or two elements of the rhetorical situation and allowing students to choose the other(s) (42). In a persuasive writing course, for example, if the student is free to choose his or her topic, the prospect of his or her engagement in the writing is much more likely, even if the instructor chooses the audience and genre. In writing classrooms focused on other genres, the choices given to students are even more plentiful as they may choose what character to assume as the writer or which audience they would like to write for. Aside from the elements of the rhetorical situation, we can also let our students choose which writing strategy to use. For example, an instructor could offer several examples of types of research paper introductions, explain the affordances of each, and then let students choose which to use for their particular paper. Nancie Atwell argues for the benefits of these choices when she explains, "Freedom of choice does not undercut structure. Instead, students become accountable for learning about and using the structures available to writers to

serve their purposes" (15). Thus, by giving our students these kinds of choices we allow them a chance to exercise judgment autonomously.

Taking firm control over a child's environment, setting high expectations for mature behavior, and allowing a child a reasonable amount of autonomy are all enhanced by the third dimension of parent-child interaction Baumrind studied—parent-child communication. An authoritative parent "uses reason to obtain compliance, solicits the child's opinions and feelings, and uses open rather than manipulative techniques of control" ("Child" 56). Ultimately, these characteristics show us that authoritative figures communicate clearly and effectively with their children or students. Moreover, they do not need to use manipulative control techniques like the authoritarian parent's force or the permissive parent's guilt induction and love withdrawal— behaviors that reflect a parent obsessed with his or her power position. Authoritative parents focus instead "on the specific reality to be mastered or altered, rather than on untangling or managing the parental relationship" (61). In comparison with authoritarian or permissive parents, authoritative parents are as transparent as possible about their actions and expectations. Baumrind explains the benefits to this transparency when she says, "By clarifying for the child the consequences of his behavior at his level of comprehension, and by being open and frank about the source of parental power . . . [the parent] increases his child's ability to discriminate, differentiate, and generalize" ("Child" 61). Again, this assists the child in becoming an autonomous decision-maker because "the use of reasoning by the parent to provide the context for a directive permits the child to grasp the rationale behind parental directives and thus to view them as an expression of a larger necessity governing the actions of both parent and child rather than as an arbitrary imposition of parental will" (61). Baumrind also refers to this communication pattern as "reflection-enhancing" because it allows the recipient to grow as a

result of pondering how the reasons apply to the current and future situations ("Patterns" 62). As teachers, then, when we clearly explain the rationale behind our policies, assignments, or grading procedures we take the emphasis off the power relationship between teacher and student and place it on the rational value behind the our activities.

Podis and Podis acknowledge as much in their response to Taylor's comment on their original article. They bring up the need for transparency when they say, "When our assignments lack clarity or when we do not tell our students how they are being evaluated, we become . . . the arbitrary dispenser of enigmatic justice that is impossible to predict . . .Otherwise nurturing instructors who neglect to provide clear rubrics can assume this role as easily as those instructors who are at the more authoritarian end of the spectrum" (96). Since the concepts of transparency and clarity are relatively simple, the main road-blocks we hit as composition instructors are remembering to be transparent and ascertaining the clarity of our communication. We need to remember to communicate the way that even our smaller assignments and class activities contribute to the larger goals of the class. For that matter, we also need to make sure that we have clearly communicated the larger goals of the class. For example, even first day introductions can be explained as a context for future group work and peer writing evaluation. Smaller assignments can be explained in the context of larger assignments and goals (e.g., *"This worksheet will turn into a fantastic outline for your final paper"*). By communicating the rationale behind our assignments and activities, we show our students respect for their time, trust in their ability to see the logic behind our expectations, and confidence in their ability to appropriate the strategies we teach them on their own. Thus, clear communication of expectations along with our reasons for them will help promote student autonomy.

Finally, we must add to these power-asserting characteristics the nurturance that helps students respond to high demands with confidence instead of fear or negativity. Baumrind explains authoritative nurturance as "the caretaking functions . . . that express love and are directed at guaranteeing the child's physical and emotional well-being" ("Child" 57). Baumrind suggests that this nurturance is "expressed by warmth and involvement," as nurturing parents express warmth through "verbal approval, and tenderness of expression" and involvement through "pride and pleasure in the child's accomplishments, manifested by words of praise and interest, and conscientious protection of the child's welfare " (57). This description of loving nurture clearly applies well to the realm of parenting, but can still be appropriately transferred to the realm of teaching.

Other composition scholars have already proved that it is quite appropriate to show our students that we care about them and their progress in our class. In progressive education ideologies, this is defined as "student-centered pedagogy" (Shor 12). In research on the qualities of the best college teachers, Bain found that the best teachers showed interest in their students and compassion for struggles they may have in learning the material based on experiences the instructors had at earlier points in their own careers (141). Vanderstaay et al. also cited an example of a successful composition teacher who exhibited this interest in and concern for his students:

> We were continually impressed by [Bill's] ready access to his students' needs,
> abilities, and motivations. He could list each student's topic and the changes their
> drafts had undergone. Bill garnered his knowledge of his students through the
> hard work of attending to their writing, conferencing over long office hours, and

paying close attention to the dynamics of their classroom behavior and

participation.

This description shows how composition instructors can employ various practices to manifest the

nurturing aspect of authoritative parenting to their students. These nurturing practices could

include any things that accomplish the goals of Baumrind's authoritative warmth and

involvement in our students' progress. This would include Bill's practices of meeting with his

students and keeping track of their progress, but could be as simple as smiling when our students

come to discuss their papers with us or just greeting them with warmth in and out of class. It

would certainly include making sure we know all of our students' names. Most universities offer

flashcards or online student identification pictures that we can utilize as a resource to do so if

necessary. If we can implement even these small and simple things, we can help encourage our

students to comply with our other directives out of a confidence that we would not have high

expectations for them if we did not care about their future success.

In a composition class, particularly, this warmth and involvement should also be manifest

in our verbal and written responses to student writing. We should not hesitate to mark errors

when necessary—this is part of having high expectations for our students' work—but we should

be equally supportive and approving of the good choices that our student writers make.

Additionally, as expert writers ourselves, we should be able to couch our criticism in terms that

encourage future progress. Instead of, "This conclusion is horrible," or even something slightly

lighter, "This conclusion is lacking," we can provide something like, "This conclusion needs

something more vivid to call your audience to action—next time, try a provocative quote, a stark

statistic, or a short and relevant story to really hit your point home." All of these statements

communicate to a student that the work they produced was not entirely up to expectation, but the

last option suggests that the teacher cares about the student's future and arms the student with tools to make autonomous progress. In the end, our comments on student writing should reflect the frame of mind of an authoritative parent who manifests confidence in a student's future success by pointing out places for improvement kindly, and with useful suggestions. This will foster autonomy and better writing; this is the type of teaching we should be striving for.

Ultimately, the authoritative teacher holds high expectations for mature behavior and work. He or she also clearly communicates these expectations, establishes a controlled environment conducive to student success, and expresses warmth toward students by celebrating their successes and suggesting confidence in their ability to make future improvements. These characteristics define the authoritative parenting style, but I have sought to demonstrate that these positive characteristics can be easily appropriated for use in our composition classrooms. This is especially true since we have already been appropriating attributes from deficient styles, authoritarian and permissive, but have often failed to comprehend exactly what makes each of those styles imperfect or how we might revise them. The positive results of the authoritative parenting style demonstrate the potential value of turning away from either/or thinking and toward the both/and of the authoritative style.

It is also important to note here that many of the scholars I have quoted in this essay have established the virtues of authoritative teaching characteristics in their scholarship without characterizing it as such. In this sense, we are already doing great work to build relationships with our students that will be most conducive to their success. Still, as Podis and Podis note in their essay, we lack "alternative modes and metaphors that might complement or supplement a nurturant form of *in loco parentis* as a guiding principle for composition pedagogy" (135). Lofty as the goal may be, I introduce Baumrind's authoritative parent typology into this discussion of

pedagogical *in loco parentis* in order to provide an overarching paradigm that includes the many individual pieces of good pedagogical practice we have already discovered, but also helps them cohere together under the guiding principles that authoritative teaching embraces—high demandingness and high responsiveness. Moreover, the social sciences offer us RAD research that reveals very specific positive outcomes associated with the characteristics of an authoritative leader—facts compatible with many of our current pedagogies which we have proven in theory and practice, but which can now be backed by even more widely accepted evidence. To continue this pattern, I call for RAD research on authoritative teaching in college composition classrooms. I end this essay with the hope that we can further investigate what makes good pedagogical practice under the umbrella of authoritative teaching—a title that avoids being either father or mother, strict or nurturing, "because I said so" or "anything you want."

Notes

1. Kelly Ritter explores problems associated with the lack of prestige of writing instruction thanks to the gendering of the discipline and labor distribution practices of the recent past (390).

2. I will not be discussing Baumrind's fourth style—disengaged—because it is so dysfunctional. A disengaged teacher would be quickly dismissed.

3. Podis and Podis suggest that "the Nururant Parent approach could also have negative consequences, such as encouraging overdependence on the teacher as a source of support or setting the student up for future failure by being 'permissive'" (135). They go on to quote Peter Elbow's "Reflections" in which he says, "It's no good just saying, 'Learn to write what's comfy for you, kiddies,' if that puts them behind the eight-ball in their college careers" (135).

4. See Cohen and Rice, Dornbusch et al., Lamborn et al., Radziszewska et al., Shucksmith et al., and Slicker for additional studies that found numerous positive outcomes for adolescents with authoritative parents.

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