

The Wadsworth Series in Composition Studies

Collaborative Writing in Composition Studies

Sheryl I. Fontaine

California State University, Fullerton

Susan M. Hunter

Kennesaw State University

THOMSON



WADSWORTH

Australia • Canada • Mexico • Singapore • Spain
United Kingdom • United States

THOMSON

WADSWORTH

Publisher: *Michael Rosenberg*
Acquisitions Editor: *Dickson Musslewhite*
Editorial Assistant: *Dawn Giovanniello*
Marketing Manager: *Carrie Brandon*
Advertising Project Manager: *Brian Chaffee*

Editorial Production Manager: *Michael Burggren*
Manufacturing Supervisor: *Marcia Locke*
Cover Designer: *Dutton & Sherman Design*
Production Service/Composer: *Integra*
Cover / Text Printer: *Webcom Limited*

© 2006 Thomson Wadsworth, a part of The Thomson Corporation. Thomson, the Star logo, and Wadsworth are trademarks used herein under license.

Thomson Higher Education
25 Thomson Place
Boston, MA 02210-1202
USA

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution, information storage and retrieval systems, or in any other manner—without the written permission of the publisher.

Asia (including India)
Thomson Learning
5 Shenton Way
#01-01 UIC Building
Singapore 068808

Australia/New Zealand
Thomson Learning Australia
102 Dodds Street
Southbank, Victoria 3006
Australia

Printed in Canada
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 08 07 06 05 04

Canada
Thomson Nelson
1120 Birchmount Road
Toronto, Ontario M1K 5G4
Canada

UK/Europe/Middle East/Africa
Thomson Learning
High Holborn House
50/51 Bedford Row
London WC1R 4LR
United Kingdom

Library of Congress Control Number:
2004098268

ISBN 0-155-06968-3

For more information about our products, contact us at:
Thomson Learning Academic Resource Center
1-800-423-0563

For permission to use material from this text or product, submit a request online at
<http://www.thomsonrights.com>.
Any additional questions about permissions can be submitted by email to
thomsonrights@thomson.com.

CHAPTER

1

You Think/I Think; Therefore,
We Are: How Do I Need to Think
About Knowledge and Language
if I Am to Write Collaboratively?

I'm much better as a solitary writer now than I would have been had I never collaborated. [...] You develop as an individual out of a social relationship that you find. That's how people learn.

And collaboration is an instant proof of the way the social construction theory works.

—Hephzibah Roskelly (Interview)

All of us who make meaning through writing and reading—scholars, teachers, students—do so in community with others who share our interests in the knowing and the knowledge-making processes that constitute our fields of inquiry.

—James Reither and Douglas Vipond (866)

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry [people] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

—Paulo Freire (58)

To explain language and knowledge as we believe you must in order to try out dialogic collaborative writing, in the field of Composition we routinely invoke a scenario in which you enter a parlor

where a conversation is already in progress. You listen carefully so that you may join the conversation. After you leave, the conversation continues. The scene that follows has come to be known as the Burkean parlor, named after philosopher Kenneth Burke.

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar.

Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (110–11)

With this parlor-metaphor, Burke intends to show how thinking is influenced by the language contexts each of you enters and how you, in turn, influence these contexts with the perspectives and experiences that you bring to them. You all enter into and out of a myriad of such social interactions—"parlors"—daily. What follows here is a recasting of the parlor scene in ways that, we think, will sound familiar and will demonstrate a rehearsal of some conversations or instances of shared meaning-making. With these two scenarios, we also intend to show you how crucial it is to understand language and knowledge as always embedded in social and collaborative practices. This understanding is crucial if you are to be open to the kinds of cognitive and social activities writing collaboratively entails—if you are to be ready to write collaboratively.

Scenario One: Listening to Others and Being Influenced by What You Hear

Imagine you are a graduate student arriving late to a party. Most of the guests are already engaged in conversation with one another, standing in small groups of four or five or in more intimate groups of two or three. Hearing familiar laughter, you see a good friend standing with three other people whom you have seen around campus but have never met before. You approach them as the laughter fades into more conversation. The only phrase that you catch, before the laughter begins again, is your friend's

final words: "[...] and landed on the floor!" You stand next to your friend, smile uneasily, hoping that he will let you in on the joke or that its topic will quickly become clear through the conversation. For unless you determine what is being talked about, you can't add to the discussion or even be sure how to react appropriately to comments others are making.

Fortunately, without your conscious effort, your brain has already started to help you. Much like a computer, the brain does a kind of "search and match" process based on the bit of information it has already received. It seeks the topic of discussion by searching information that is available and appropriate given who you are (a graduate student), who you know to be engaged in the conversation you are listening to (your friend who is also a grad student), and where the conversation is taking place (a party where the guests are university students and faculty). Using "and landed on the floor" as its keywords and the situation in which they have been uttered as the context, your brain searches for potential "matches." It may come up with several possibilities: the day you dropped your tray in the student union, the time your friend tripped while giving a class lecture, and an incident in the University library last semester.

But, in the split second that your brain has begun its search, one of the group members turns to your friend and asks, "Was this during the lecture?" "Lecture" is immediately added to the keywords in your search. Some topics can now be excluded as your brain gets closer to identifying the subject of the ongoing conversation you have entered. Then, you receive the last bit of information you need. Your friend replies, "Yes, Professor Jones, this was during the discussion of literacy narratives that I was leading."

At this point, you have two key pieces of information: one that lets you verify the topic of the story as the time your friend tripped and fell during a class lecture and one that identifies a member of the conversation as a college professor. And while knowing the *topic* of the conversation is essential, the latter piece of information is equally critical. For though you are familiar with the events of the story, what details are included, excluded, emphasized, or overshadowed will depend greatly on the *context* in which the story is told. And since you originally heard this story when your friend told it to other students over lunch in the student union, you assume that telling it to a professor must have influenced its presentation. For example, you suspect that he didn't mention how he had punctuated the fall with a stifled invective or that one of the reasons he fell was because he had been so tired from the events of a long weekend. Yet both of these details had been focal points when he had told the story in the student union. Your suspicions about

how the story had been presented are confirmed when Professor Jones comments that he, too, has found the lighting in that particular lecture hall to be very distracting, making shadows that can play tricks on the eyes.

Now the conversation turns to the physical hazards on campus and the difficulty of getting the University to respond to requests for repairs and improvements. Other members of the conversation add stories from their own experiences on campus. One of the women complains about the poor lighting near sidewalks and parking lots and the risks that this raises for evening students. Someone else mentions how dark the library stacks are now that the University has expanded its energy conservation program.

For the most part, you listen to the comments being made. But, at the same time, you are recalling a late afternoon class you taught last fall and how eagerly some of the young women in the class had darted out of the room when the class discussion had gone long. At the time, you had attributed their eagerness to boredom with your class. But the present conversation provides you with a new way to interpret their actions. Class had met in a building at the far end of campus; walking back through the shadowy walkways and dusky parking lots must have been disconcerting for students, particularly the women. In this context, your habit of keeping class 10 or 15 minutes overtime seems selfish rather than a mark of your intellectual rigor. And the University's interest in saving money on electricity seems extreme to the point of endangering students. You decide that this semester you will be sure to end your classes on time and to find out if any students want escorts or rides to outlying parking lots. And you might even make a phone call to the campus facilities department, urging them to increase the wattage of lights on campus.

Bringing your mind back to the conversation at hand, you find yourself nodding in agreement with your friend who concludes that using the library and computer facilities in the evening is potentially dangerous, particularly after this commuter campus becomes increasingly deserted.

When your friend had told his story in the student union, the emphasis had been on events of the weekend that resulted in his inattentive state and classroom fall. And you had joined more actively in that conversation, adding your own perspective on the events of the weekend in which you too had participated. The group of you had also shared observations about undergraduate students' commonly lethargic behavior on Monday mornings and how to adjust classroom activities either to accommodate or to take advantage of their state of mind.

Because your friend was now telling his story in a different setting and to a very different group of individuals—at a University party, in the presence of a mentor professor—the effects are also different. Because of the context of the conversation and the particular contributions and interplay of its participants, a very particular direction is taken, a particular focus emerges, and you come to think about the events of the story and your professional life in a way that you hadn't until you entered the conversation.

Time for Reflection

Recall a time when you heard a friend or relative tell a story about the same event to two very different groups. How different were the ways your friend or relative chose to tell the story? What characteristics of the audiences do you think accounted for those differences? How did the two conversations you heard play out differently?

Establishing a Position and Creating New Ideas in the Ongoing Conversation

A second scenario that follows here illustrates the deeply collaborative nature of language, the way you enter into and move between and among communities of speakers in your daily lives. Every day, each of you enters any number of parlors or ongoing spoken or written conversations. In each of these "parlors," you are involved in the two-way process of having your thinking influenced by the conversation that has preceded your entrance into the conversation and at the same time influencing the direction that the future conversation will take.

For example, in conversations that are, quite literally ongoing, like the party we have just described or a class discussion, club meeting, or family gathering, collaborative participation in the conversation is marked by routine cognitive activities: listening and responding, collecting and recollecting information, and experiencing immediate adjustments in thinking and, consequently, in comments. In the first scenario, what influenced the conversation consisted of, for the most part, recollections and experiences of the conversants. In the next scenario, we expand the influence further to include the written word as well.

Scenario Two: Making Choices When You Enter into a Conversation

Imagine being at a family reunion. Your mother complains about how crowded the local restaurants and stores become once classes begin at the nearby college. Although you could respond in several ways, you choose to mention a recent study that found undergraduate degrees to be as common and easy to acquire as high school diplomas. Given how crowded the town has become, you express your agreement with the study, adding that such overpopulation of college campuses has negative consequences that extend beyond their boundaries. Your mother glares, and suddenly you remember that your cousin, who is standing next to you, had just flunked out of college.

However, had you remembered your cousin's situation, that the summer before she started school she had had a baby and accepted a new job, you might have provided another response to the conversation, one that extended your own thinking on the subject in a different direction. You might have, for example, used the intersection of the report on college degrees and the situation your cousin was in to reflect on how many studies of college students reported in the popular media don't take into account how difficult the life of the undergraduate has become. Most have to work part- or even full-time, and many are raising families while earning their degrees. Furthermore, you add, perhaps rather than using such studies to disparage undergraduates, colleges should be designing curricula and class schedules with students' lives in mind.

Engaging at once the conversation of the moment, the texts that you have read, and your own personal perspective, your comments could extend the conversation with your mother and your own thinking about the subject at hand in several directions.

Even when each of us enters those conversations that have been ongoing for a much longer time—that have continued as individual humans develop ideas, record their thinking, respond to the thoughts and ideas that previous generations have expressed—we can see our knowledge of a topic and our own reflections on it being powerfully influenced by the written and spoken conversations that preceded. Indeed, as we have been illustrating, knowledge—ours and that of those around us—is actually constructed in light of the conversations one enters or overhears. Through a process of assimilation and accommodation, each of us adjusts the things we hear and read to what we already believe and adjust what we

believe to the things we continue to hear and read. In this way, knowledge is always under construction, always being shaped by and shaping the ideas with which it intersects.

Constructing Knowledge by Joining Ongoing Conversations

We begin our discussion of collaborative writing with these illustrations of the Burkean parlor because they provide one important basis from which to understand a conceptualization of language that is both preliminary and fundamental to its value. The process of meaning making that we describe here is identified by philosopher Richard Rorty and others as social construction. Composition scholar Kenneth Bruffee explains Rorty's ideas in "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" an essay that has become a cornerstone of the field of Composition. Bruffee writes that "Education is not a process of assimilating 'the truth' but, as Rorty has put it, a process of learning to 'take a hand in what is going on' by joining 'the conversation of mankind'" (647). This understanding of education and knowledge as being productive and generative denies what may be more familiar to you, that is, the Cartesian formulation that knowledge is to be retrieved as a "reflection and synthesis of information about the objective world" (Bruffee 649). If you are to write collaboratively, it is essential that you understand how writing, by its very nature, enacts the social construction of knowledge. Writing collaboratively will give you a palpable experience of this process of constructing knowledge rather than retrieving it. We aim next to help you understand how to connect the social constructionist quality of knowledge with the dialogic and instrumental qualities of language. That is, the fact that language engages people in dialogue with others and that it is used as a way to understand and make meaning contributes to the social construction of knowledge. Speakers and writers construct knowledge out of experiences using the productive capability of language as the tool.

In the rest of this chapter, we will establish the dialogic and instrumental quality of language and, ultimately, of thought by invoking the ideas of scholars that Composition repeatedly turns to in its continuing attempts to understand how writers produce texts as part of a social process. For it is the way in which our language and our thinking happen in necessary relation to others' words and experiences that provides the natural bedding out of which collaborative writing grows.

Writing as Dialogic

While the Burkean parlor illustrates the dialogic nature of language, there are philosophical and psychological characteristics of language that help to explain the dialogic nature of language even further. In the field of Composition, the theories about the social, dialogic qualities of spoken and written discourse that we'll call upon here to establish the epistemic and cognitive grounds of collaborative writing are also raised in other discussions about composing and pedagogy. So, in learning about these theorists in terms of collaborative writing, you'll also be learning to recognize these authorities when they are cited in other arguments to support ways of thinking and being in Composition.

To show that language by its very nature engages an individual in a conversation, a dialogue with others, we look to the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. According to Bakhtin, all meanings—for our purposes, all language utterances—are part of a greater whole of meanings wherein there is constant interaction, where all meanings or utterances have the potential to influence one another (*The Dialogic Imagination* 426). And so, in as much as the “language stream” has predated all of us who use language, there are no true monologues: Every spoken or written utterance is dialogic or in dialogue with pre-occurring utterances (426). Because of this pre-existing language stream, each word we utter is partly our own and partly someone else's (345). This dialogic quality of language contributes to the process of social construction of knowledge.

But the individual is not lost in this involuntary, collaborative process. For in addition to being dialogic, actual language is also context-specific or heteroglossic. That is to say, while the dialogic nature of language results in a discourse that necessarily occurs in relation to pre-existing discourse, each utterance is specific and peculiar to the conditions in which it occurs (421). The moment the words are read/spoken/written has an influence that incorporates and supersedes the dialogue of other moments.

Another way Composition scholars have come to explain social construction is by applying the work of European psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva who herself builds on Bakhtin's idea of dialogism. Kristeva coined “intertextuality,” a useful term for our purposes here that you may have come across in literature or critical theory courses. Explaining Kristeva's term, Composition scholar Richard Selzer notes that intertextuality captures the idea that discourse is always “an event, a kind of dynamic collaboration among seen and unseen writers and readers and texts, all cooperating in the creation of meaning [...] the sum of relationships materialized in discourse” (174).

When we speak or write, then, we necessarily do so in response to all that has been spoken or written before us; however, the particular moment and context in which we make our utterance assures that our discourse is unlike any that has been uttered or will be after us. So, on the one hand, our speaking and writing have essentially collaborative qualities—our meanings are conditioned and shaped by and will, in turn, condition and shape others'. But, on the other hand, ours is a dialogic language production that is unique to the moment in which it is uttered, the individual from whom it emerges, and the context within which it occurs. For instance, before writing an academic paper on feminist criticism, you may read about how feminist criticism emerged from social and cultural history, what its initial arguments posited and to whom, how it has necessarily evolved and developed its own internal controversies. If this is the portion of the feminist criticism conversation that you overhear—rather than a portion in which its roots in ancient rhetoric or its emergence as a political movement are established—you might enter the conversation by “constructing” ideas about the limitations of feminist criticism. You might integrate these ideas into your own conclusion that “the extent to which feminist criticism is tied to social and cultural history has resulted in both its intellectual value and its current acrimonious factions.”

It is through entering these conversations—integrating others' topics and perspectives with your own and with others you have heard—that you make new meanings for yourselves, that you come to understand events, emotions, behaviors, and so forth, in ways that you didn't, that you couldn't have before you entered these conversations. Recall the conversation at the party: By hearing about your friend's experience in a new and very particular context, with the comments, reactions, and questions of a particular group of individuals, you came to understand something about yourself, about learning, and about students that you didn't before.

Time for Reflection

Imagine that a fellow student has asked you to explain Bakhtin's concepts and how those concepts apply to collaborative writing. Write a few sentences in which you do that. Now go back and look at what you have written in terms of dialogism itself. Identify the strands of influence in what you have written—influence from reading, writing, conversation, experiences.

Writing as Instrumental

Kenneth Bruffee, a Composition theorist and teacher whom many in Composition refer to in theorizing the work of writing centers and peer response, describes this same dialogic quality of language in his discussion of the "conversation of mankind" (sic), a conversation into which all human beings enter each time they speak or write. Bruffee claims that "knowledge is the product of humans in a state of continual negotiation or conversation" (647), a conversation that began "in primeval forests and [was] extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on in public and within each of ourselves [...]" (Oakeshott qtd. in Bruffee 638).

Notice that where Bakhtin focuses on the dialogic qualities of *written* and *spoken* utterances, Bruffee significantly expands the argument to say that the "conversation of mankind" is equally influential on human *thought*, the conversation "within each of ourselves." For Bruffee, then, human thought is dialogic, a negotiation or conversation with pre-existing or pre-occurring exchanges. To establish this claim about the dialogic nature of human thought, Bruffee cites Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky who demonstrates, through his study of children's language development, an interconnection between the social and instrumental qualities of speech.

According to Vygotsky, initially, "*children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech*" (26, emphasis original), using externalized speech with others to coordinate perception and action, "[they] [plan] how to solve the problem through speech and then [carry] out the prepared solution through overt action [...]" [S]peech not only facilitates the child's effective manipulation of objects but also controls *the child's own behavior*" (26, emphasis original). As the child matures, externalized speech becomes internalized speech. Moreover, through systematic observation, Vygotsky determined that in children's developing language capacity, the greatest change is "when socialized speech (which has previously been used to address an adult) is turned inward" (27). So the child who would ask her parents how to write the letter "s" or how to put together a puzzle will turn those questions inward, reflecting on what she knows and has experienced to solve the problem by engaging in answering her own questions in her mind.

Instead of appealing to the adult, children appeal to themselves; language thus takes on an intrapersonal function in addition to its interpersonal use. When children develop a method of behavior for guiding themselves that had previously been used in relation to another person,

when they organize their own activities according to a social form of behavior, they succeed in applying a social attitude to themselves. The history of the process of the internalization of social speech is also the history of the socialization of children's practical intellect (27).

In other words, initially, children direct speech to others (a form of dialogue), using language as an instrument or tool through which they can affect their own behavior—making plans and solving problems. As their language skill develops, children's externalized speech moves inward, and rather than directing their speech to someone on the outside, they direct it to themselves as they take both parts of the conversation. Yet, even though the speech has been redirected and the members of the conversation have become one, language continues to be used as an instrument to affect change. With inner speech, as with external speech, humans use language to make plans and solve problems. Collaborative writing expands this same model of knowledge-production and problem-solving by taking the process one step further to *re*-externalize inner speech. The previously internalized questions about what to write, how to write it, where to begin, and so forth become questions that the collaborative writers ask one another and solve together.

Not All Writing Is Collaborative, but Collaboration Is at the Heart of All Writing

And so we arrive at the structural and rhetorical equivalence between thought and language and, consequently, their equivalently collaborative qualities. The work of Bakhtin, Bruffee, and Vygotsky help to explain how all instances of language and thought occur in relation to other instances of language and thought. Return to the Burkean parlor; recall the instances in which spoken and written language was affected by pre-existing language. The words you think, write, and speak are partly your own and partly someone else's—the meanings that you utter or think are influenced in deep, even unidentifiable ways in the course of their coming to be by the stream of conversations in which you, as language users, exist.

We seem to have reached the point of defining all writing as collaborative, to be offering no distinction between the process of writing alone and writing together. But those of us who have written with others know quite well that there are tremendous differences between these two processes, specifically in how, when, where, and why these processes happen and how others receive and judge their products. Our goal in this

chapter has not been to establish that all writing is collaborative writing; rather, we want to define for you the theory about the nature and development of language from which selected instances of collaborative writing organically grow. That is, collaborative writing is compatible with the profile of language that we have been drawing—as a conversation, a dialogue, a tool for solving problems. Indeed, the more common image of the writing process—that of a writer who writes alone—belies the social, instrumental, collaborative nature of language.

To understand collaborative writing as we are proposing, you must also understand the nature of written language and knowledge making as we have described them. That is, we ask you to imagine the writer who writes with others as engaged in the recursive, two-way, turn-taking process of sustained, ongoing conversation and dialogue. To think otherwise makes collaborative writing an aberrant activity tacked on to a curriculum or turned to when writers are lonely or blocked rather than a writing process that grows out of the very nature of language.

Trying Out Collaborative Writing

Working with a group of at least three other students, on a sheet of paper and so the others can't see, write a sentence that you imagine could begin a brief fictional scene. Then hand the paper to the person next to you who will read your sentence silently, writes a follow-up sentence, folds your sentence over so that it cannot be seen, and passes the paper on to the next person in the group. This person reads the second sentence only, writes a sentence to follow up to the second, folds the second over, and passes on the paper with only his sentence showing. Keep doing this, letting the next writer see only the previously written sentence, until you have generated about 15–20 sentences. Once this is done, open the whole sheet and read all of the sentences.

Briefly write what you observe about the nature of this collaborative writing and the "text" that this process generated.

Works Cited

- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- Bruffee, Kenneth. "Collaborative Learning and 'The Conversation of Mankind.'" *College English* 46.7 (November 1984): 635–52.

- Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1967.
- Freire, Paulo. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1986.
- McNenny, Geraldine, and Duane H. Roen. "The Case for Collaborative Scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition." *Rhetoric Review* 10.2 (Spring 1992): 291-310.
- Reither, James A., and Douglas Vipond. "Writing as Collaboration." *College English* 51.8 (1989): 855-67.
- Roskelly, Hephzibah. Personal Interview. 14 April 2000.
- Selzer, Jack. "Intertextuality and the Writing Process: An Overview." *Writing in the Workplace: New Research Perspectives*. Ed. Rachel Spilka. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993. 171-80.
- Vygotsky, Lev S. *Thought and Language*. Cambridge: MIT, 1962.

For Further Reading

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986.
- Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Ed. J. V. Harari. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979. 73-81.
- Bruner, Jerome. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986.
- Farmer, Frank. *Saying and Silence: Listening to Composition with Bakhtin*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2001.
- Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Ed. J. V. Harari. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979. 141-60.
- Inge, M. Thomas. "Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship." *PMLA* 116.3 (2001): 623-30.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language*. Ed. L. S. Roudiez. Trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine, and L. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.
- Leonard, James S., et al., eds. *Author-ity and Textuality: Current Views of Collaborative Writing*. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill P, 1994.
- McComiskey, Bruce. *Teaching Composition as a Social Process*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2000.
- Romano, Tom. "Writing Through Others: The Necessity of Collaboration." *Vital Signs 2: Teaching and Learning Language Collaboratively*. Ed. James L. Collins. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Boynton/Cook, 1991. 3-12.

Stillinger, Jack. *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.

Thralls, Charlotte. "Bakhtin, Collaborative Partners, and Published Discourse: A Collaborative View of Composing." *New Visions of Collaborative Writing*. Ed. Janis Forman. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Boynton/Cook, 1992. 63-81.

Trimbur, John. "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning." *College English* 51 (October 1989): 602-16.

1 + 1 > 2: What Changes Must I Make When I Move from Solo to Collaborative Writing?

I would rather collaborate than write alone; though I find myself writing alone a lot. Writing alone is easier in many ways. It takes less time for one thing.

—Lil Brannon (E-mail)

In terms of process, I doubt if we've changed each other all that much—I'm talking about the basic day-to-day habits of a writer. What's interesting to me is that the personal habits have little if any negative effect on our collaborations. The influence for me comes when I write poems or criticism or scholarly things alone—I know darn well I've picked up perspectives via osmosis from [Wendy]—ideas, habits of experimentation, rhetorical moves.

—Hans Ostrom (E-mail)

Dividing the Tasks and Assembling the Products

Imagine your most familiar “collaborative writing” experience. Most likely, it was a classroom experience that appeared on a syllabus as “group project” somewhere midway or more through the semester. The class instructor made the group assignments either from randomly drawn lots, a list created on the basis of some mysterious sorting system

(writers of the same or mixed caliber, equally driven or mixed-achieving level students, students with similarly declared interests, and so forth), or the risky but popular student self-selection method. The instructor either determined and assigned a general subject area within which each group was to define a topic or, limiting choice further, the instructor assigned each group a particular topic of study. The final product was a written document with particularly defined sections or an oral presentation with "parts" for each member. And it is likely that your individual grade was closely tied to your participation in the group or replaced with a single grade for each group.

The first time your group met, things were a bit uncomfortable, especially if you didn't know one another. Maybe there was some grouching: "Not another group project!" or "What does the instructor expect us to do?" Finally, after the group meandered around for awhile, rereading the assignment and making jokes, one group member took charge: "OK, so how are we going to get this done?" At this point, there may have been discussion about what had to happen in order for the assignment to be completed—what had to be written, how many people needed to be responsible for each section, what order the work should happen in, and what deadlines had to be set. The self-assigned "leader" collected phone numbers and e-mail addresses and solicited group members' available work times. The other members of the group fell into roles according to personality and experience: a first lieutenant to assist the leader, a group entertainer who continued to joke around and wander off-task, a note-taker who volunteered or was volunteered by someone else who wanted to avoid the task, a loner self-identified by his or her silence and sullen agreement. With roles in place, the leader orchestrated the designation and selection of actual writing tasks, how the work would be divided and distributed. Once the tasks had been identified and parceled out, the group members went their separate ways, and, from then on, any "collaboration" took place during periodic meetings at which members reported on their individual progress and a final meeting or two at which the various pieces of writing were assembled. In the end, the group was deemed successful if all members completed their individual assignments with equal effort and quality and if a single, completed product was assembled from the individual pieces of writing.

Lunsford and Ede would categorize such a collaborative experience as "hierarchical"; that is, it is organized in a linear fashion, structured by the roles of each participant, and driven by the goal of accomplishing a particularly defined task (235). After assigning roles, members of the

group work independently of one another, coming together occasionally for progress reports and, finally, to assemble the pieces of product supplied by each member. In fact, because situations like these rely so much on independent work, they can be labeled as "cooperative" rather than "collaborative" (Yancey and Spooner 50). That is, their success depends on the degree to which group members can cooperatively coordinate individual writing assignments with one another to achieve a shared goal of completing a task.

Cooperative writing appears to require little change or adaptation on the part of individual writers who, once writing tasks have been defined among group members, actually write their parts alone, solo. The most apparent changes are procedural ones that occur when the overall writing task must be divided up among multiple writers. Rather than one solo writer completing the whole project, then, multiple solo writers spin off with each completing a portion of the whole before returning to attach it to or fit it in with the others' portions.

But, if this division of labor is the only change necessary for cooperative writing experiences to be successful, then what accounts for the high occurrence of group projects that don't succeed? Ask yourself how many successful group projects you have participated in. Their lack of success is commonly due to the fact that the very structure of a cooperative experience can serve to encourage members' belief in the existence of the solo, independent, asocial writer—a belief that often works to erode group members' commitment to and production of a common, shared project. When cooperative writing experiences are successful, it is most likely because in spite of their belief in the solo creative experience, the writers coincidentally share an overriding intellectual investment in the quality and quantity of their work. Or, the writers—consciously or not—embrace an image of the writer that is contrary to that of the writer alone, silent, cut off from the world, and chained to the blank screen or page.

Time for Reflection

Recall a time when you were assigned a collaborative writing project. Write about how the assignment was structured, what was expected of each group member, and how successfully the goal of the group was accomplished. Write, too, about why these parts were or were not successful.

Changing Your Mental Image of the Writer

The image of the lonely, garretted writer is easy for most individuals in English Studies to conjure. It may even be the image that attracted them to the study of literature: the lone, perhaps lonely and usually male writer, working selflessly to translate the words of his Muse into a masterpiece. Bruffee believes that graduate training in English has taught students that any other image would be not only foreign to the discipline, but inappropriate ("Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" 645). Consider, now, the significance that such an image holds for one's understanding of collaborative writing. That is, if writing is believed to be the activity of individual, independent minds, then the possibility of two or more people writing together is difficult to imagine. Bruffee describes the way most members of the profession think about collaborative writing:

Most of us are not in the habit of thinking about writing nonfoundationally as a collaborative process, a distanced or displaced conversation among peers in which we construct knowledge. We tend to think of writing foundationally as a private, solitary, "expressive" act in which language is a conduit from a solitary mind to a solitary mind. (*Collaborative Learning* 54)

It is not only teachers of literature who are responsible for planting this image of writing in students' minds. As Linda Brodkey explains, in spite of available research to the contrary, teachers of writing promote the same image in the minds' eye of novice writers:

Those who teach as well as those who take composition courses are influenced by the scene of writing, namely, that all of us try to recreate a garret and all that it portends whether we are writing in a study, a library, a classroom, or at a kitchen table, simply because we learned this lesson in writing first. Further, those of us who have since learned no other lessons, who can image no pictures of writing other than the writer-writes-alone, are the most likely to pass that lesson on to a new generation and are the least likely to reconceptualize writing in any of the ways it is being represented by research in composition. (397)

Holding onto and nurturing the image of the writer-writes-alone cannot only impede the success of writers working together but can completely undermine the value of collaboration. In fact, getting rid of this image is the single most significant change that writers must make as they move from solo to collaborative writers. Those who engage in the kind of cooperative writing that we described at the opening of this

chapter may be able to circumvent failure and find ways to get the work done in spite of this image. However, for those who engage in *true* collaborative writing—a “dialogic” collaboration where members’ roles are loosely defined and structured, shifting as the collaboration unfolds—success can happen only if the image of the solo writer is replaced with the image of a social, interactive, writer-in-the-world. Moreover, when writers exchange the image of the writer-writes-alone for that of a writer-in-the-world, they naturally find that the creative and generative value in the ensuing collaborative give and take, listen and respond, say and say-back processes of articulating and defining goals supersedes the value of the goals themselves (Lunsford and Ede 235).

While it may seem hard to believe that the mental image or picture writers hold can have such an impact on their actions, Brodkey explains that a mental image is much more than a static picture we carry in our mind’s eye: “It is not enough to say this is a picture, for such pictures provide us with a vocabulary for thinking about and explaining writing to ourselves and one another” (349). Citing Kenneth Burke, Brodkey claims that any “representative anecdote” that constitutes our mental picture, “generates ideology” (401). And so, it may not be merely writing procedures that must be changed in the shift from solo to collaborative writer, but the very ideology or theory of writing one embraces. Writers who hold fast to the ideology that writing is an asocial, solitary process will limit themselves to a form of writing that is, at best, cooperative, not collaborative.

If we are correct, you are being acculturated to a profession in which, despite research that would support a contrary representation, the image of the writer-writes-alone has been passed on from generation to generation of student. In fact, as Candace Spigelman’s research with peer writing groups shows, students continue to enter writing classrooms with notions of “autonomous originality and private production” firmly entrenched (71). And such an image is more than just a picture you carry in your mind’s eye, “it provides us with a vocabulary for thinking about and explaining writing to ourselves and to one another” (Brodkey 349). Because you can engage in hierarchical collaboration and still hold onto your belief that writing is a solo, individual, independent activity—work with your group but then return to your garret where you create your own ideas and embed them within your own sentences—the need for a change in ideology can be easily overlooked. And even once you agree to such a need, you cannot change ingrained images and well-accepted ideologies by blinking your eyes and willing it so. The change will occur

only if you look closely at the kind of research outlined in Chapter 6 that supports this ideological change and consider the consequences such a change would have to the teaching of writing as well as the way you write. Finally, if you are to engage in true, dialogic collaboration, you must exchange this scene of writing for another. For dialogic collaboration emerges from a genuine belief that all writing is, by its very nature, a collaborative activity, that it is social and naturally includes other people and other writers.

Consider the following notes written by three students about their collaborative writing experience. Notice how these students—Deb, Tracey, and Kathy—get beyond dividing up tasks and use the computer to help them move from solo to collaborative writing. Notice how Kathy's retrospective account dramatizes that what began as cooperative writing became an instance of dialogic collaborative writing:

We began with a dialogue on the computer. We took turns writing observations and responses about our books over the courses of a week or so during our free periods and after school. We didn't talk to each other in person about what we were writing; we just wrote and responded on the computer. [...] I felt Deb and Tracey were a "safe" audience and I knew much of what I was writing was going to be scrapped, so I felt free to just ramble on about whatever happened to come to mind.

The next step was to print out a hard copy which we then went over in class. [...] We made a list of what seemed to be the most important points we wanted to cover in the actual book review. We came up with a total of six points which we divided between the three of us. Once we had our assignments we worked individually on them, then brought our work together and merged it onto one disk.

Maybe the most important part of our collaboration was the conclusion, since it is the only part of the paper that we truly wrote together. Tracey and I had each written a paragraph that would have served as a conclusion. Deb and Tracey experimented with brand new conclusions for 15 to 20 minutes while I typed. They were both getting frustrated, so I joined them when I finished. I suggested we make a list of what points we wanted to make in the conclusion, so we brainstormed for five minutes. Then we all started throwing out lines and writing down the ones we liked. After we had a few of them, I moved over to the computer and asked to read back what we had come up with so far. I typed it in and they looked over my shoulder. We read it out loud and spent about twenty minutes changing a word here, a phrase there, trying to tie our points together. (Reckendorf qtd. in Elbow and Belanoff 95-97)

Time for Reflection

Draw a diagram or tell the story of something you recently wrote. Start at what you consider to have been the very beginning, include as many moments in the process as you can recall. Once you are done, go back and indicate all of the moments that involved other people. Next, working in small groups of 1-4 members, explain to one another the diagram of your writing process that you created for the last writing activity assignment. Then, using your experiences as your source of information, make some generalizations about the way other people are integrated into solo writing activities.

Moving Apart and Coming Together

We have explained the changes in ideology that occur in the shift to being a collaborative writer and the ways in which conversation, in the context of this new ideology, comes to play a defining role in the process. Now, consider the value of working with other individuals who have skills, experience, and knowledge that is different from your own and the implications of this value for your writing. Although solo writers may have conversations with others throughout their composing process, they don't engage in the same degree of interaction as collaborative writers. For the latter, the interaction becomes a process in and of itself, one that Jerome Bruner, building on Lev Vygotsky's notion of a "zone of proximal development," identified as "scaffolding."

As workers build or repair a large building, together they create a parallel structure called a scaffold. From this scaffold, itself a fairly intricate and highly durable piece of workmanship, the construction crew reaches out to build, resurface, paint, and repair the main structure. Unlike a ladder, which comes prefabricated and can hold one worker at a time, the scaffold must be created anew with each building so as to properly shadow its shape, and when complete, it can hold the weight of several crew members, all working together to accomplish a single task.

Now apply this metaphor to writing. Together, two or more writers "scaffold," creating a joint process that will hold them both as they work on the common task. Just like the construction scaffold, this one is built by several workers together and allows individual crew to go higher, reach further, than they could on a single ladder. And so

the collaborative writers work with one another's "assistance that enables [them] to accomplish together what they can't do individually" (Burnett 128). In a collaboration, human nature assures us that there will be differences among the writers that will, in the end, allow the writers to accomplish together what they could not alone. By engaging one another's attention, interests, and feelings with a task and using shared expertise to fill in the gaps that one writer alone would have, writers complement one another and augment the quality of the single task (Bruffee "Writing and Reading" 161). Vygotsky first explained this concept in the context of children who, working with adults or with peers who are slightly more developmentally advanced, stretch beyond where they would go working alone. With adults who collaborate, it isn't that they are stretched to the edges of their development; rather, they are stretched to see ideas in different contexts and from different perspectives. Ultimately, both collaborative writers' views are stretched to a new place, one that, in order to accommodate both views, is different from the place that either writer alone would be. "Collaborwriters" Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweet describe how their minds work in this complementary way:

If Charlie suggests what he considers an innocent line of dialogue, Hal, seeing it in a different light, might point out its lack of logic. [...] Even now, rereading this paragraph, we can't remember if Hal said this or Charlie said that; we said it all. [...] Maybe our collaborwriting isn't so much two heads but, as psychological studies are showing, an instance of being able to integrate Charlie's right brain and Hal's left brain. We're not saying that we're a pair of half-wits, but that we have complementary personalities. (42)

Blending the Voices

As a result of scaffolding, of writers working together to build a process and, in turn, create a piece of writing, the voices of the individual writers blend into a third. And this blended voice may be the most magical consequence of collaboration. Whether you chose to call this a blended voice, "third voice," "common voice," or "shared voice" (Alm 134), it is evidence that true collaboration occurs "when the product is so well integrated that it seems to be the creation of one mind" (Spooner and Yancey 52). This shared voice is evidence of synergy—the ability "to accomplish things together that neither [writer] could have accomplished alone"

(Reither and Vipond 858). As many collaborative writers attest, this new, synergistic voice can have power and presence much greater than either voice alone:

Together we had a more powerful voice than each of us could muster individually. [...] Our two voices together [...] somehow could speak to audiences that might not have listened to either of us alone. [...] We remain in this [academic] world largely because that voice has been created in our collaboration [...] collaborating in our talky way allows—even insists on—a speech-like quality in the discourse that gets inside even our most academic prose. [...] As we write, we imagine [...] speaking [the text] together. And because we now theorize this double-voiced relationship consciously, we now recognize the process and the style that has come out of it as one strategy of resistance to the formal, impersonal, discourse and modes of the academy. (Ronald and Roskelly 256, 259)

Perhaps because they have experienced the creation of a distinct, blended voice, when collaborative writers return to solo writing, the voices of their coauthors are not silenced, but internalized. Each writer's style becomes more self-conscious because each has had the experience of becoming intimately familiar with another's voice and with blending that voice with his or her own. Moreover, this experience has left with each writer the voice of his or her coauthor, a voice that inspires confidence, that provides an ever-ready audience:

Even when you're writing something alone, whether it's an article or another project or a memo or a committee report or whatever it is, it's easier. And I'm a very halting writer, and it's very easy for me to censor myself and say "I can't do this; I'm not doing this," and to get up and walk away. But the thing a writer needs is an audience who believes in you and to listen to what you have to say. Now, having written with Hepsie for all these years, she's in my head. And so, her voice, "Yes, you can do this. You're good. You're clever. You're smart," is right there next to that little editor that says, "You can't do this." And that, to me, is an amazing benefit of collaboration. (Ronald, Interview)

Pat Belanoff observes how her solo writing process and her style have been changed by overhearing her writing partner's voice inside her head:

Our styles were really very different, and I certainly know that I have moved toward Peter's end of it. [...] I hear Peter's voice often. Particularly for me, when I'm working with a tangled sentence, and I realize that it's one of those things that in the past, I would have tried to develop some sort of complicated syntax to deal with the idea, and then I hear Peter's voice, and I realize that what I need to do is break it down. (Interview)

When writers make the move from solo to collaborative writing, then, they not only produce a written product that is greater or different from what each would have written alone; they also accrue enormous benefits when they return to writing solo. The habit of coauthoring allows writers to incorporate into their own repertoires the strategies of another writer.

Time for Reflection

Describe your writing process when you write alone. As an experienced writer, you probably have fixed writing strategies and habits. What rituals do you follow? What steps do you go through? Do you write with pen or pencil on paper or use the computer keyboard and screen? Try to imagine what habits you have as a solo writer that you'll have to change when you write with a partner.

Individual Changes for Individual Writers

In this chapter, we have outlined several changes that we believe to be necessary if one is to shift successfully from solo to collaborative writing. Starting with a paradigmatic ideological change, these changes also include changes in specific procedures and behaviors that occur throughout composing. While we don't feel at ease making an argument about changes necessary due to gender-defined characteristics, some researchers have done so. For example, collaborative writers and partners Kami Day and Michele Eodice argue extensively about the "feminine sensibility" that defines all collaboration (184). Citing Mary Lay, they maintain that "collaboration calls for a fundamental change in the self-image of men" (172). Certainly, collaborative writing experiences require coauthors to work in close physical, psychological, and intellectual proximity. The more they can do this with caring and respect, the greater their trust and the stronger their voice will be. Is this kind of working together something that is more difficult for men than women? If so, is this difference the result of cultural conditioning or genetic programming? Rather than try to answer these difficult questions, we ask you to look closely at your own ability to work with others in the manner necessary for a successful collaborative writing project. What kind of personal shifting from solo to collaborative writing will be necessary for you?

Trying Out Collaborative Writing

Based on shared interests or friendship, form writing teams of two or three in order to begin to work together on a writing project. It doesn't matter what the project entails, what its purpose is, or who its audience is. If you can't quickly think of a project, ask your instructor to "assign" one. Begin working on the project together by talking. After a period of sustained conversation to get the project underway, stop to consider together where the conversation has taken you. Are you ready to put words down on paper or up on a screen? To read or research? To give up on the project and start anew?

Talk about the talk, the turn-taking process you enacted. What connections can you make between your experience of moving from solo to collaborative composing and those you've read about in this and previous chapters? What differences can you notice? How effective was this attempt at writing together?

Works Cited

- Alm, Mary. "The Role of Talk in the Writing Process of Intimate Collaboration." Ed. Peck and Mink 123-40.
- Bishop, Wendy, and Hans Ostrom. E-mail. 27 September 2000.
- Blythe, Hal, and Charlie Sweet. "Collaborwriting." *Writers on Writing*. Ed. Tom Waldrep. New York: Random House, 1985. 39-43.
- Brodkey, Linda. "Modernism and the Scene(s) of Writing." *College English* 49 (1987): 396-418.
- Bruffee, Kenneth. *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.
- . "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" *College English* 46.7 (November 1984): 635-52.
- . "Writing and Reading as Collaborative or Social Acts." *The Writer's Mind: Writing as a Mode of Thinking*. Ed. Janice N. Hays, et al. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1983. 159-69.
- Bruner, Jerome. "The Role of Dialogue in Language Acquisition." *The Child's Conception of Language*. Ed. A. Sinclair, R. J. Jarvella, and J. M. Levelt. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1978. 241-56.

- Burnett, Rebecca E. "Decision-Making During the Collaborative Planning of Coauthors." *Hearing Ourselves Think: Cognitive Research in the College Writing Classroom*. Ed. Ann M. Penrose, and Barbara M. Sitko. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. 125-46.
- Day, Kami, and Michele Eodice. *(First Person)²: A Study of Coauthoring in the Academy*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2001.
- Elbow, Peter, and Pat Belanoff. *A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995.
- . Telephone Interview. 1 May 2000.
- Knoblauch, Cy, and Lil Brannon. E-mail. 20 February 2001.
- Lunsford, Andrea A., and Lisa Ede. *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990.
- Peck, Elizabeth G., and JoAnna Stephens Mink, eds. *Common Ground: Feminist Collaboration in the Academy*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1998.
- Reither, James A., and Douglas Vipond. "Writing as Collaboration." *College English* 51.8 (December 1989): 855-67.
- Ronald, Kate, and Hephzibah Roskelly. "Learning to Take it Personally." *Personal Effects: The Social Character of Scholarly Writing*. Ed. Deborah H. Holdstein, and David Bleich. Logan: Utah State UP, 2001. 253-66.
- . Personal Interview. 14 April 2000.
- Spigelman, Candace. *Across Property Lines: Textual Ownership in Writing Groups*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2000.
- Yancey, Kathleen, and Michael Spooner. "A Single Good Mind: Collaboration, Cooperation, and the Writing Self." *College Composition and Communication* 49.1 (February 1998): 45-63.

For Further Reading

- Dale, Helen. *Coauthoring in the Classroom: Creating an Environment for Effective Collaboration*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1997.
- Forman, Janis, ed. *New Visions of Collaborative Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1992.
- Kleinmann, Susan. "The Reciprocal Relationship of Workplace Culture and Review." *Writing in the Workplace: New Research Perspectives*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993. 56-70.
- Knox-Quinn, Carolyn. "Collaboration in the Writing Classroom: An Interview with Ken Kesey." *College Composition and Communication* 41.3 (October 1990): 309-17.

Lay, Mary M. "The Androgynous Collaborator: The Impact of Gender Studies on Collaboration." Ed. Forman 82-104.

Locker, Kitty O. "What Makes a Collaborative Writing Team Successful? A Case Study of Lawyers and Social Workers in a State Agency." Ed. Forman 37-62.

Rogers, Priscilla S., and Marjorie S. Horton. "Exploring the Value of Face-to-Face Collaborative Writing." Ed. Forman 120-46.

Selfe, Cynthia L. "Computer-Based Conversations and the Changing Nature of Collaboration." Ed. Forman 147-69.

Sharples, Mike, ed. *Computer Supported Collaborative Writing*. London: Springer-Verlag, 1993.

York, Lorraine. *Rethinking Women's Collaborative Writing*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002.