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AUTHOR Bocchi, Joseph
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ABSTRACT

The popular model of collaborative learning views classrooms as contexts where nonmembers of "valued" communities become members by mastering accepted knowledge, discourse forms, and methods. Although attractive to educators, this model allows only for changes in individual students, not in "valued" communities. Further, its emphasis on "normal discourse" maintains established knowledge, promotes static definitions of communities, and suppresses the creation of new meaning and the dynamic process of communal redefinition. If educators seek to prepare students for the kinds of communities and organizations they will enter, then current collaborative methods are effective and appropriate. However, if their role is to promote critical thinking and to nurture students' existing power to define their communities and to act within them, then methods that are dialogic and that focus on problem-posing must be explored. As a first step, educators should refuse to confine collaborative methods to classroom "peer groups." They should promote the "abnormal discourse" that occurs when disciplines, departments, and classrooms come together. Redefinition of learning, thinking, and writing must be university-wide and must involve students in the process of critiquing the current educational system. (Author/RS)

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If educators seek to prepare students for the kinds of communities and organizations they will enter, then current collaborative methods are effective and appropriate. However, if their role is to promote critical thinking and to nurture students' existing power to define their communities and to act within them, then methods that are dialogic and that focus on problem-posing must be explored.

As a first step, educators should refuse to confine collaborative methods to classroom "peer groups." They should promote the "abnormal discourse" that occurs when disciplines, departments, and classrooms come together. Redefinition of learning, thinking, and writing must be university-wide and must involve students in the process of critiquing the current educational system.

Collaborative Learning in the Classroom Context: Toward an Integrated View of Communities

Joseph Bocchi

Much of what has been written about collaboration and community in academic settings assumes that classrooms are places where nonmembers (students) of desired communities become members by mastering the knowledge, discourse forms, and methods of those communities how members converse, think, act, and come to know, and what members view as valued knowledge. The classroom context serves as surrogate of sorts for those other communities. In "Collaborative Learning and the `Conversation of Mankind'" (College English, Vol. 46, No. 7, 1984), Kenneth A. Bruffee attempts "to encourage other teachers to try collaborative learning and to help them use collaborative learning appropriately and effectively" (635) [my emphases]. Bruffee promotes a "writing-to-learn" approach, arguing that students must master the "normal discourse" (Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Mankind, 1979) of the "academy" and of the "discipline" under study in order to gain entrance into and to excel in those communities. The kind of writing students find most useful to learn in college, claims Bruffee, is appropriate not only to work in fields of business, government, and the professions, but also "to gaining competence in most academic fields that students study in college" (643). The classroom, as a community of "status equals: peers," approximates the kind of "community of knowledgeable peers" that exists in everyday life (644). According to Bruffee,

> collaborative learning provides the kind of social context, the kind of community, in which normal discourse occurs....[It] provide[s] a context in which students can practice and master the normal discourse exercised in established knowledge communities in the academic world and in business, government, and the professions. (644)

The appeal of such a model of classroom learning is great to many educators, especially when it is compared to the traditional restrictive classroom

that seems to privilege the mere transference of knowledge through a lecture format. Collaborative learning involves language-use activities that are interactive: reading, writing, listening, and speaking are perceived as interrelated activities upon which communities of meaning-makers are built. Collaborative learning acquaints the student with the norms of valued communities - in this case, those presumed to be the established and defined communities referred to as the "academy," the "discipline," and the "profession." While learning collaboratively, the student acquires the "passport" language of the discipline and masters core concepts; in the process she develops those interpersonal communication "skills" that the model claims are applicable to communities outside the classroom context. Bruffee claims that this acculturation thus readies the student to enter what Michael Oakeshott has called the "conversation of mankind" ("The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," Rationalism in Politics, 1962) - the ability to participate in continual conversation or dialectic.

Yet, however attractive this model of collaboration and community defined by Bruffee and promoted by many writing-across-the-curriculum programs, educators need to determine before implementing collaborative methods whether there is indeed a relationship between the kind of collaboration practiced in a classroom and the kind that takes place in other, perhaps less artificial communities and organizations. Furthermore, educators should attempt to determine the nature of collaboration in their own communities, should, in fact, work toward better defining those communities and their interrelateness. This could lead to a greater understanding of how a classroom "community" is one context within many overlapping contexts.

To achieve such a holistic view of collaborative learning in our classrooms and our institutions, we need to question this model's basic assumptions about thinking and writing. We need to determine how thinking and writing, once exclusively associated with individual cognitive processes, are

integral to the nature of community. We need to ask how our classrooms can or cannot be communities of "knowledgeable peers," why it is important that students master "normal discourse" and enter "our" communities, and how "our" communities either change to accommodate them or remain unaffected and immutable. We must address how our "collaborative" methods enable or oppress students, how such methods reinforce or alleviate students' already existing sense of alienation.

Thinking and Writing as Social Acts

The popular model of collaborative learning claims the primacy of language-use activities in acquiring knowledge and generating knowledge, and in entering established "communities," labeled variously in the literature as "discourse communities," "speech communities," "interpretive communities," or simply as "cultures" or "societies." The model assumes that thinking is internalized conversation and that writing is externalized thinking within specific social contexts. This view of language use moves from an individualistic, cognitive model of thinking to a social constructionist perspective whose major assumption is that all thought (meaning-making) has its origin in social interaction.

Bruffee, relying on a host of disciplines and fields including cognitive psychology (Vygotsky), anthropology (Geertz), philosophy (Rorty), literary theory (Fish), and sociology of science (Kuhn), argues that thought and meaning-making are language-dependent and context-specific:

> Many of the social forms and conventions of conversation, most of the grammatical, syntactical and rhetorical structures of conversation, and the range, flexibility, impetus, and goals of conversation are the sources of the forms and conventions, structures, impetus, range and flexibility, and the issues of reflective thought. (639)

Writing is re-externalized conversation, says Bruffee, "the acquired ability to carry on the social symbolic exchange we call conversation" (642). Any effort to

> understand and cultivate in ourselves the kind of thought we value most requires us to understand and cultivate the kinds of community life that establish and maintain conversation that is the origin of that kind of thought. To think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively - that is, we must learn to converse well. The first steps to learning to think better, therefore, are learning to converse better and learning to establish and maintain the sorts of social context, the sorts of community life, that foster the sorts of conversation members of the community value. (640)

The teacher's role in establishing such contexts has been outlined by Harvey S. Wiener in "Collaborative Learning in the Classroom: A Guide to Evaluation" (College English, Vol. 48, No. 1, 1986). Addressing the issue of teacher evaluation in collaborative classrooms, where performance cannot be easily judged by an evaluating observer, Wiener attempts to establish "standards for judging our attempts to implement the evolving concept of teaching and learning as a social act" (53). Wiener advocates that we seek "...to define for ourselves what we see as efficient classroom models for collaborative learning....[and] to pass on to beginners the standards by which we measure our own performances so that new teachers seeking membership in this intellectual community have a clear paradigm to study" (54). This approach to teacher-training would seem to contradict the dialogic nature of collaborative learning and clearly assumes the existence of an established (and teachable) body of "appropriate" knowledge and practice; however, the role Wiener assigns to the teacher of a collaborative classroom is typical of the popular model.

The teacher should, says Wiener, create a collaborative context by acting as a task setter who generates assignments and methods that "demand consensual learning [and unify] the group activity" (54) through negotiation and debate. This involves providing "a good written statement of task" that

includes "questions requiring the kind of critical thinking that leads to sustained responses from students at work in their groups" (56). Since collaborative group work normally should, according to Wiener, move toward consensus, "instructions almost always should require a member of the group to record this consensus in writing" (56). In addition, the instructor "may have to guide the manner in which students attack the task by reviewing some of the principles that need attention if activity is to move forward before the group work begins" (56) [my emphasis].

The task-giver role assigned by Wiener seems to approximate more the job function of an on-the-job supervisor than that of the knowledgeable teacher-guide suggested by Bruffee's model; when theories of collaborative learning are translated into practice, the result typically is this sort of covert authority. More insidious, perhaps, is the goal of such "learning": that some product be produced to demonstrate not only what was "learned" but to document the "process" of learning. Conversation is valued only when conversation leads to negotiated meaning and to the packaging of that meaning for a teacher-audience who is, in fact, an outsider to the students' "community of knowledgeable peers." As Wiener himself states, "the teacher in the collaborative classroom must plan and organize the session so that students know that the end is not simply to work in groups but to work in groups in an effort to reach consensus for an important task" (61) [my emphases]. The teacher, here, has not entered a reconceptualized classroom community of peers: her traditional job as knowledge-giver has only been transformed, temporarily, into task-giver and facilitator.

Although the basic assumption of collaborative learning - that all knowledge is social artifact - is well grounded in the work of Vygotsky, when it is applied to contexts beyond the scope of Vygotsky's developmental model it invites circularity and conflicts with a social constructionist view of language use, which holds that any conversation originating in a community

must, by its very existence, be both a product and process of that community and thus define community boundaries. The popular collaborative learning model claims privilege only for certain kinds of thinking and conversing and for certain kinds of communities, though it does not establish the grounds for such assignment of value; nor does the model place its assumptions and methods in political, economic, and historical contexts. It ignores the educational system's unquestioning acceptance of the values, knowledge, methods, and beliefs of those larger contexts. Furthermore, the model supports separation of and competition among communities rather than their integration, despite the apparent goal of a liberal arts education that the student be "holistic" - capable of joining the conversations of their own communities as well as those of our "departments," "institutions," "disciplines," and "professions."

To be accepted into these communities, the student of collaborative learning must first be able to, through conversation and with the guidance of the teacher, recognize what the community considers to be valuable thinking and conversation. This, however, assumes that some thinking and conversation are not valued; but not valued by whom? Implicit in the collaborative learning model is the necessity for the student to abandon her communities, her ways of conversing and thinking, for the more privileged ways aligned with move valued communities. The student may be encouraged through "informal," "process," and "writing-to-learn" activities to "apply" the methods, knowledge, and beliefs of those communities to her own life outside the classroom; but ultimately the collaborative classroom is not a juncture of communities, not a place for dialog among knowledgeable peers.

Normal Discourse, Consensus, and Communities of Peers

It is the teacher's role in the collaborative classroom community to "ensure that students' conversation about what they read and write is similar

in as many ways as possible to the way we would like them eventually to read and write. The way they talk with each other determines the way they will think and the way tney will write" (Bruffee, 642). "Effective" collaborative learning can be accomplished only when the teacher establishes a "particular kind of community - a community of status equals: peers" (642). Such a community, Bruffee claims, approximates "the one most students must eventually write for in everyday life, in business, government, and the professions" (642). In these "everyday life" communities, Bruffee believes, writing typically is intended to inform and convince "other people within the writer's own community, people whose status and assumptions approximate the writer's own" (642) - in short, an audience of knowledgeable peers: "a group of people who accept, and whose work is guided by, the same paradigms and the same code of values and assumptions" (642).

What maintains the existence of communities of knowledgeable peers, according to Bruffee, is "normal discourse." And "mastery of a knowledge community's normal discourse is the basic qualification for acceptance into that community" (643). Although students lack an understanding of the norms of their disciplines and the norms of the university,

> pooling the resources that a group of peers brings with them to the task may make accessible the normal discourse of the new community they together hope to enter. Students are especially likely to be able to master that discourse collaboratively if their conversation is structured indirectly by the task or problem that a member of that new community (the teacher) has judiciously designed (644).

Learning, under this model, is working "collaboratively to establish and maintain knowledge among a community of knowledgeable peers through the process that Richard Rorty calls `socially justifying belief'" (646). According to Bruffee,

> we establish knowledge or justify belief by challenging each other's biases and presuppositions; by negotiating collectively toward new paradigms of perception, thought, feeling, and expression; and by joining larger, more experienced communities of knowledgeable peers through assenting to those communities' inter-

ests, values, language, and paradigms of perception and thoughts. (646)

This view claims that knowledge is negotiated and that individuals in groups engage in argument and debate toward the goal of consensus. Consensus it not to be confused with relativism, the model argues, nor is it a type of majority-determined reality. Knowledge is not to be mistaken for the concrete reality of a chair against which I might bruise my toe. The model acknowledges that the meaning of the chair is continually made and remade through conversation and through the evolution of the language community itself; meaning is always meaning in context.

The matter of consensual meaning, however, especially consensual meaning among knowledgeable peers, becomes problematic in this model when applied to the classroom. In "Reality, Consensus, and Reform in the Rhetoric of Composition Teaching" (College English, Vol. 48, No. 2, 1986), Greg Myers argues that "if what we take as reality is always a social construction, then to accept the reality we see now is to accept the structure of illusion our system gives us. Worse, it is to see reality as something natural, outside our control, rather than to see it as something we make in our actions in society" (157). Meyers contends that "if what we think of as facts are determined by our ideological framework, the facts cannot themselves get us beyond that framework" (161). Furthermore, Meyers notes, "if conflict is part of the system, and is necessary to change the system, then consensus, within the system as it is, must mean that some interests have been suppressed or excluded" (161).

What Meyers here implies is that critical examination of and change in communities cannot occur unless paradigmatic constraints allow members to step outside closed perceptual systems to collectively expand the boundaries of those communities. The constraints of the "educational system," the "discipline," and the "profession," when administered in the classroom con-

text, typically do not empower students as a community to examine or affect those larger communities. Although the model intends to establish the classroom as a community of knowledgeable peers, through its emphasis on consensus and negotiated belief, one major constraint shared by those more encompassing contexts is reliance on competition and individualism, not collaboration and socialism. Those students most adept at deploying "classroom community" knowledge and methods, and at engaging in informed dialectic, win the right to influence and thus to effect change. Rewards typically are individualized, in the form of better grades, greater recognition, and greater allocation of discussion time; students who excel in acquiring acceptable values, knowledge, and methods are recognized as class leaders and are allowed to speak more, thus acting as surrogate teachers in influencing other students, by modeling and through their discourse skills, to embrace valued ways of thinking and conversing. The reliance on normal discourse thus creates a closed, hierarchical system in which action and change, and consequently the power to define community, are functions of authority and privilege, not of community.

Wiener's profile of the "teacher as synthesizer" would seem, on face value, to address this conflict between community collaboration and individualistic competition in the classroom. The teacher performs in the role of synthesizer <u>after</u> the activity in groups is complete, helping "the class as a whole to make sense and order out of the sometimes conflicting and contradictory reports" (58). The teacher's role, says Wiener, is to lead the class to consider the similarities and contradictions in the recorded points of view.

The obvious danger with such an approach, however, is that the teacher "has merely embodied his or her authority in the more effective guise of class consensus. This guided consensus has a power over individual students that a teacher can not have alone" (Meyers, 159). The goal is, ultimately, conformity - a humbling of students before <u>the</u> ideological framework of val-

ued communities, as represented and interpreted by an individual teacher. This approach assumes that the intent of discourse is "to make sense and order" out of conflict and that conflict need be confrontational rather than dialogic. It also assumes that authorities (teachers, managers, and others holding higher positions within hierarchies), not communities, are responsible for synthesis, meaning-making, and arbitration - are responsible, in short, for imposing consensus and for determining what constitutes valued knowledge.

The intent of this approach - indoctrination - becomes clear in Wiener's next step for the teacher-as-synthesizer:

> With agreement, then, the teacher's role once again changes. The teacher now must help the class move further toward joining another community of knowledgeable peers, the community outside the classroom, the scholars who do research in the discipline, who establish the conventions of thinking and writing in those disciplines, who write books and articles and read papers on the problems at hand....By synthesizing results of the individual groups, and comparing that synthesis with the consensus of the larger community of knowledgeable peers - the teacher's own community - the teacher helps complete the movement into this larger community. (59)

Part of this task involves leading students "to consider how their consensus differs from the consensus of the larger community" (59) - to see clearly, that is, that they are not members of that community, that their collaboration has been an exercise to discover to what extent they are not members of that community, and consequently, to what extent they must go to become members. Who, exactly, now comprises the community of knowledgeable peers that students should hope to join is not clear from Weiner's account. If indeed "scholars" are responsible for establishing the conventions and thinking in the specific discipline, what role does the classroom teacher play in <u>this</u> community, what power does she have to influence consensual knowledge?

Achieved in the typical collaborative classroom is not a pluralistic community of "knowledgeable peers" - one in which all members of the community create, maintain, and modify meaning in context. Because this model is

based on an ideology that values consensual meaning through argumentative strength, only a certain core of that community - those who are best adept at using the established discourse of the community and most knowledgeable of community conventions and content - is acknowledged as membership and holds power to act and to define. While students are encouraged to perceive their collaborative small-group work as emulating what occurs in communities, they are not afforded the opportunity to shape those "larger" communities, nor are they allowed to influence the methods and values of their own classrooms as community; they are required, instead, to "join" them.

Meyers recommends that the teacher recognize that her "course is part of an ideological structure that keeps people from thinking about their situation, but also [that the teacher believe] that one can resist this structure and help students to criticize it" (169). Indeed, perhaps the greatest failing of the popular model of collaborative learning is that it views "valued" communities as defined and static - established products of the work of scholars, researchers, and authorities - although such treatment contradicts the basic assumptions of the model. At the same time that the teacher uses interactive methods and demands that students embrace the belief that meaning is made as communities remake themselves, she presents the "discipline" and the "academy" - the "communities" that students must enter - as determinant, impermeable, and hierarchical. At the very least, students learn that they must enter these "communities" before they can act as definers and meaning-makers.

As Joseph Harris, in "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing" (College Composition and Communication, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1989), contends, the "communities" to which many theorists (and teachers) refer when they promote and practice collaborative learning exist

> at a vague remove from actual experience: The University, The Profession, The Discipline, The Academic Discourse Community. They are all quite literally utopias - nowheres, meta-communities - tied

> to no particular time or place, thus oddly free of many of the tensions, discontinuities, and conflicts in the sorts of talk and writing that go on everyday in the classrooms and departments of an actual university. For all the scrutiny it has drawn, the idea of community thus still remains little more than a notion - hypothetical and suggestive, powerful yet ill-defined. (14)

Despite this, Harris says, the task of a student in the classroom community is "imagined as one of crossing the border from one community of discourse to another, of taking on a new sort of language" (16). But "one is always simultaneously a part of several discourses, several communities, is always already committed to a number of conflicting beliefs and practices" (19). "The task facing our students," he says,

> ...is not to leave one community in order to enter another, but to reposition themselves in relation to several continuous and conflicting discourses. Similarly, our goals as teachers need not be to initiate our students into the values and practices of some new community, but to offer them the chance to reflect critically on those discourses - of home, school, work, the media, and the like - to which they already belong. (19)

Harris states that rather than frame our work in terms of

> helping students move from one community of discourse into another...,it might prove more useful (and accurate) to view our task as adding to or complicating their use of language.
>
> ...What I am arguing against...is the notion that our students should necessarily be working towards the mastery of some particular, well-defined sort of discourse. It seems to me that they might better be encouraged towards a kind of polyphony - an awareness of and pleasure in the various competing discourses that make up their own. (17)

The Role of Abnormal Discourse in Collaborative Learning

Although normal discourse is said to ground a community, the discourse involved in <u>generating</u> knowledge, according to Bruffee, "cannot be normal discourse, since normal discourse maintains knowledge. It is inadequate for generating new knowledge" (647). Relying on the work of Rorty and Kuhn, Bruffee claims that "abnormal discourse" occurs between "coherent communities or within communities when consensus no longer exists with regard to rules, assumptions, goals, values, or more" (648). New meanings only can be

created through interaction among communities or when a community's paradigm is not firmly established. Based on this view of abnormal discourse, it appears that new knowledge would be best generated through dialogue that is not among "knowledgeable peers" but among equals in a task that can be described as problem-posing - a self-definitional act that allows for diversity.

What complicates our efforts as teachers to use abnormal discourse to establish such a dialogic community of critical problem-posers is that, according to Bruffee,

> we cannot teach abnormal discourse; we can only teach the tools of normal discourse, though we must not teach these tools as universals. We must teach practical rhetoric and critical analysis in such a way that, when necessary, students can turn to abnormal discourse in order to undermine their own and other people's reliance on the canonical conventions and vocabulary of normal discourse. We must teach the use of these tools in such a way that students can set them aside, if only momentarily, for the purpose of generating new knowledge, for the purpose, that is, of reconstituting knowledge communities in more sacisfactory ways. (648)

Bruffee's model thus becomes problematic in that it intends both to allow students to converse, think and write, through normal discourse and through acquiring consensual paradigmatic knowledge, in a way valued and prescribed by a specific community or group of communities, and to allow neophyte members to concurrently critique that discourse and challenge that knowledge. The model hopes both to maintain knowledge and to create new knowledge through methods that call knowledge itself into question.

The way around this seeming contradiction is for teachers to make students aware of the process of learning, to make them question the authority of knowledge and the content, values, methods, and beliefs of established paradigms:

> By changing what we usually call the process of learning - the work, the expectations, and the social structure of the traditional classroom - collaborative learning also changes what we usually call the substance of learning. It challenges the authority of knowledge by revealing, as John Trimbur has observed, that authority itself is a social artifact. This revelation and the new awareness that results from it makes [sic] authority comprehensible both to us as teachers and to our students. It involves a process

> of reacculturation. Thus collaborative learning can help students join the established knowledge communities of academic studies, business, and the professions. But it should also help students learn something else. They should learn, Trimbur says, "something about how this social transition takes place, how it involves crises of identity and authority, how students can begin to generate a transitional language to bridge the gap between communities" (private correspondence). (Bruffee, 648-49)

Notice here, however, that it is the "student" who undergoes the crises of identity and authority, not the teacher, the institution, or the discipline. The critical act of examining how we come to know has not been placed into the context of an educational system that remains untouched by this process. Indeed, within this system, teachers still possess an authority retained through their association with the scholars and authorities of more valued communities, although these communities often have reached no consensual paradigm and teachers often have had no voice in the conversations of the communities. Their role, "[a]s representatives and delegates of a local, disciplinary community, and of the larger community as well...," is to "perform as conservators and as agents of social transition and reacculturation" (650). Teachers must continue to "conserve" the larger "communities" they "represent," while at the same time create opportunities for students to join and perhaps one day change those communities. Students must defer to authority - to their teachers' interpretation of valued communities. Students must change their ways of thinking, conversing, and doing, while the educational communities of which they are now a part do not change.

"Writing To Learn" as Abnormal Discourse

"Abnormal discourse," in this collaborative model, is reduced to the less-valued and less-threatening form of writing often labeled by writing-across-the-curriculum programs as "informal," "process," or "writing to learn": journals, free-writing, etc. Students are encouraged through this type of discourse to draw associations between their own experiences and the

experiences. knowledge, and methods of members of valued communities, to "apply" acquired concepts to their own lives outside the classroom and typically outside the university setting. But this bridging "the gap between communities" relies more on the individual student's personal experiences than on her contact with and understanding of those communities she is now, and has been, a part: families, neighborhoods, athletic teams, clubs, schools, dorms, classrooms... In addition, although "process" writing may permit students to critique the norms of valued communities within an safe setting, the forced distinction between this kind of writing and the resulting formal product reinforces the perceived split between those primary knowledge communities often referred to as the "humanities" and the "sciences."

In "Rhetorical Constructions: Dialogue and Commitment" (College English, Vol. 50, No. 2, 1988), C.H. Knoblauch considers how writing-to-learn methods reflect the traditional division between the "expressionist" and "objectivist" perspectives. Knoblauch claims that the expressionist perspective "situates knowledge in human `consciousness,' specifically in the imaginative capacities of language users" (131), while the objectivist perspective "locates knowledge in human intellectual activity as it acts upon experiential information" (130). The expressionist perspective emphasizes

> the heuristic potential of language use and encourages reading and writing in different disciplines primarily as a means of learning the concepts and modes of inquiry characteristic of them. The expressionist perspective tends not to emphasize the discrete features of different genres as a goal of instruction, partly from the conviction that personal inquiry usefully precedes professionalization within a discipline;...and partly from the hope that an expressive focus through the disciplines may serve to enfranchise students who are otherwise excluded from or intimidated by the mysterious and self-important rituals of disciplinary practitioners. (137)

The objectivist perspective considers empirical discourse to be "naturally privileged over any other because it depends, in theory, on unbiased observation and rigorous argumentative procedure, thereby supposedly avoiding the

beliefs, superstitions, emotional excess, and prejudices of less disciplined, `subjective' language use" (130). While such a perspective encourages curriculum in which "modes of reading and writing are regarded as absolute systems of rules, manifested as genres that precisely regulate the practitioners of disciplines" (137), the expressionist perspective promotes the enfranchisement of students through a nonthreatening process that relies on the creative capacities of students as language users.

"Writing to learn" as a form of abnormal discourse is not capable of generating the kinds of new meaning that occur when the paradigms of coherent communities collide or when "consensus no longer exists with regard to rules, assumptions, goals, values, or mores" within communities (Bruffee, 648). Although Rorty defines abnormal discourse as occurring "when someone joins in the discourse who is ignorant of" discourse conventions or who "sets them aside" (320), the collaborative model does not invite students to join in normal discourse from the vantage points Rorty assigns. Instead, "writing to learn" serves a secondary role as a personalized, first-step toward a more valued writing, the function of which is to demonstrate what has been "learned." By reinforcing the hierarchical relationship between the "humanities," with their attendant "expressive" writing, and the "sciences," with their "formal," "objective" writing, this model teaches students that the knowledge, discourse forms, and methods of the "scientific" community are privileged, determinant, and unchangeable.

The writing that is valued - writing that will demonstrate the student's worthiness to enter a discipline or profession - is "formal," normal discourse, and it is evaluated. "Writing to learn" may engage students in one process of learning about one theory of how we learn, and it may allow them to see how they can challenge the authority of knowledge; ultimately, however, the results of that challenge do not affect any recognizable community of knowledgeable peers, as the collaborative learning model promises, nor

does it change the classroom context; in the final analysis, students, teachers, and institutions alike know what counts and how it is counted.

What Is Missing

What is missing in the collaborative learning model is an opportunity for students to critique the educational community, itself, without fear of penalty and with the goal of effecting change: to call into question systems of evaluation that contradict the theoretical intent of collaborative practices; to examine how the "tools" Bruffee claims we as teachers equip students with may or may not prepare them for the organizations they will enter; to recognize that organizational constraints and certainly political considerations often dictate what, how, why, and when they learn; to see themselves not as humble would-be members of valued communities, but as active participants in many integrated communities, all of which have value and deserve respect.

But that opportunity is not often ours to provide as teachers, let alone exercise ourselves. It is the rare educational hierarchy that will tolerate such real collaboration and dialogue, because to do so would be to abandon power, to turn definitions of education over to communities of students and teachers, rather than to retain the definitions of administrators, scholars, and "programs." It would be, in essence, to admit that a university is not a community of status equals; that its systems, values, and beliefs often are at cross-purposes, though these conflicts are seldom exposed or explored; and that segmentation, not integration, is the norm.

What I am advocating here is not that institutions and language programs "attempt to encourage...teachers to try collaborative learning and to help them use collaborative learning appropriately and effectively" (Bruffee, 636). Instead, I am suggesting that we refuse to confine our collaborative and dialogic methods only to our classroom "peer groups," and that we promote

the abnormal discourse that could occur when groups and communities, such as those represented by students and teachers, come together, and when paradigms, such as those supporting inappropriate educational models, are no longer adequate. That is a first step in a process of redefinition that must be university-wide, a process in which our students should, indeed must, participate; for we are still defining what it means to know and to think and to write, what it means to learn and to teach.

We need to admit that our institutions are not monoliths but are instead networks of diverse communities in which the occasion for abnormal discourse and dialogue is ripe. Our students may see this diversity: they move from class to class, from content to content, and from method to method. But they do not see integration and plurality; they do not see how one class relates to another, how one discipline relates to the next. If they perceive anything at all, it is that the promotion of competition and individualism is valued, whether that individualism takes form in a particular teacher, administrator, program, or department.

Back to the Future

Earlier in this essay I raised the question of whether our classroom communities could, through collaborative methods, emulate the kinds of communities and organizations students will enter when they leave our care. My answer, with some reservation, is yes: yes, tasks will typically be assigned by a supervisor; yes, groups of employees may produce a single text through negotiation;* and yes, language is powerful, influential, and definitional -

*Most writing, however, as my research and the research of others seem to confirm, will be done by individuals, will not be shared with colleagues for review in formalized peer groups, and will be redmarked by a supervisor and returned to the writer for revision.

it is a tool to compete and advance and scale the hierarchy. If we aspire to prepare students for those worlds, then we are on the right track; we are arming them with the normal discourse and knowledge and indeed the values they will need in normative settings. We are preparing them to maintain the systems that have and may continue to oppress them and us.

If this is our job as educators, then we are using collaborative learning effectively and appropriately. But if our role is to promote critical thinking, to help students see integration rather than segmentation and competition, to nurture those powers which our students possess to define their communities and to act within them, then perhaps we need the abnormal discourse of models of collaboration that exist beyond the boundaries of Western Culture's established paradigms - models that promote socialism rather than individualism, encourage dialogue rather than dialectic, center on problem-posing rather than problem-solving, and recognize the dependency of systems rather than their competition. Collaboration and community within our classrooms and without must be based on dialogue - dialogue that takes place within historical, social, and political contexts; dialogue that involves creating meaning (not negotiating it) and defining ourselves and our acts of definition; dialogue that promotes an integrated, holistic view of communities that accounts for their interdependence; dialogue that embraces pluralism (not relativism); dialogue that encourages critical thinking and a resistance to accepting, without question, ready-made answers to ready-made questions.