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ABSTRACT

A study examined how novice instructors become professional writing teachers. Subjects, 7 men and 13 women each teaching 1 section of regular freshman composition and 1 developmental writing class, participated in a weekly seminar designed to provide a "comfort zone" to which they could bring their questions about teaching and discuss their triumphs and failures of the week. Data consisted of tape recordings of the weekly 2-hour seminars and the subjects' journals. Data were analyzed using William Labov's scheme for analyzing the structure of what he calls "natural narratives." Four of the narrative episodes were selected for detailed analysis. Results indicated that these narrative events permitted teachers to confront openly and cooperatively challenges they faced daily as teachers in a large urban university striking in its cultural diversity, and that the communal value of storytelling has the power to articulate values as well as engage and bond members in a group. Findings suggest that retelling of personal anecdotes by teachers was a most purposeful kind of activity that used storytelling to shape and give meaning to their experiences as teachers. (Extensive selections from the transcriptions of seminar discussions are included; 20 references are attached.) (RS)

THINGS BETTER SHARED OVER COFFEE: Tales of Teaching to Learn

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I begin with a journal entry, addressed to me by a member of my seminar for new writing teachers:

> I realize that the intent of this class is to allow us new teachers the opportunity to discuss problems as they arise. And that you are trying to discover any patterns in the way new teachers' concerns change over the semester and so try to interfere as little as possible. But this laxity at times seems to lead to a waste of time. It would be ideal if you could, when the discussion drifted to retellings of personal anecdotes, redirect the discussion to more critical issues. We all like to talk and we get carried away because no one else is bringing up any "useful" topics. I can say this knowing full well that I am one of the offenders. One of us starts a story, then another -- we babble about things better shared over coffee.

My response to Clarissa, and the purpose of this article, is to show that in their retellings of personal anecdotes, in their "babble" about things "better shared over coffee," Clarissa and her colleagues were in fact engaged in a most purposeful kind of activity, using storytelling to shape and give meaning to their experience as teachers.

It hardly seems necessary any longer to defend a narrative way of knowing, so commonplace has the notion that we live storied lives become. When we talk about narrative these days, we plunge into a conversational stream being fed by many currents. Thinkers in fields as varied as anthropology, history, philosophy, psychiatry, and of course literary studies have acknowledged the power of narrative to inform and shape human experience. In fact, in Human Communication as Narration, Walter Fisher has gone so far as to argue that "all forms of human communication need to be

seen fundamentally as stories - symbolic interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture, and character" (xiii). We may be more comfortable maintaining Jerome Bruner's distinction between narrative and paradigmatic modes of ordering experience, the narrative serving to represent reality, the paradigmatic to define it, but in making the distinction betwen the modes explicit, Bruner acknowledges the power of narrative as a mode of cognition.

Bruner would not be alone among cognitive and social scientists in suggesting to Clarissa that narrative is a primary way we make sense of experience. Robinson and Hawpe have observed that although stories are spontaneous and pervasive enough to suggest the contrary, experience doesn't automatically assume narrative form. Rather, they assert, narrative thinking constitutes a heuristic process, stories being "a means for interpreting or reinterpreting events by constructing a causal pattern which integrates that which is known about an event as well as that which is conjectural but relevant to an interpretation. In this respect narrative thinking resembles other acts of comprehension and problem solving" (In Sarbin, 112).

While DiPardo, in Narrative Knowers, Expository Knowledge, argues for narrative's power as an explanatory tool in composition studies, and while Connelly and Clandinin trace a tradition of narrative inquiry in educational research, Lunsford was right to point out in her 1989 CCCC Chair's address that we still know very little about the particular story of becoming a composition teacher. (This is an intuition borne out by Russell Durst's recent review of research in English studies which reveals that out of 1,557 studies surveyed, only 48, or 4%, dealt with teacher

education, and by Jane Tompkins' recent observation that she spent many years wondering "by what mysterious process others managed their classes, since no one I knew had been trained to do it and no one ever talked, really talked about what they did") (655).

Since our motives for research in composition studies are largely pedagogical - we want to be able to do our job of teaching more effectively - it's ironic that as a disclipline we've paid so little attention to the preparation and education of those who teach. Ruszkiewicz has acknowledged that "training teachers is a process, too," and a few books have appeared on the subject of preparing composition teachers (see Gere and George), but these tend to be collections of essays that merely gather disparate topics, from ways of training graduate students of literature to teach technical writing, to methods for cutting down the paper load, to strategies for readying peer tutors to staff a writing center, under one textual roof. With the possible exceptions of Something Old, Something New, Wendy Bishop's recent study of writing teachers in a doctoral program, and Perl and Wilson's wonderful account of elementary school writing teachers in Through Teachers' Eyes, few probe the actual experience of novice composition teachers in a systematic way or describe coherent programs for preparing teachers.

San Francisco State University has such a program. The core of a Master's degree program in English/Composition, the training program is open to graduate students other than those pursuing the composition MA, and although it offers a solid theoretical foundation for a pedagogy balancing a strong process approach with a healthy recognition of the claims of academic discourse, it is weighted toward the practical. While my purpose

is not to describe the program in detail here, this article does focus on a group of new teachers whose notions of teaching composition have been shaped by their training, a course of study which included an apprenticeship with a mentor teacher as well as a sequence of three semester-long seminars devoted to such pedagogical practicalities as planning a composition course, designing effective writing assignments and responding to them, understanding and working with developmental writers, and a good deal more. These were teachers who had, in addition, passed both a written and an oral exam about teaching composition before being hired as part time lecturers to teach it. In sum, they were better prepared than most to begin their careers as writing teachers, a fact the program has supported through its insistence that its composition instructors are just that, instructors, not TA's - a tradition under attack even as I write this, but that's another article. Nonetheless, the semesters during which this study was conducted were the first in which each confronted alone the realities of daily life in the freshman composition class, and some of the teachers were in fact still playing out their graduate student roles even as they grappled with the demands of their new role as lecturers.

During this first semester, we met weekly in a seminar designed to provide a comfort zone to which they could bring their questions about teaching, could discuss the triumphs and failures of the week. It was also a place where they could share and test ideas, get a number of responses to students' papers, help design and refine new assignments and lessons, and discuss in the context of the real world of the classroom those things that had before remained largely hypothetical. In short, it was a place where,

with their peers, they could engage in the discourse of the profession.

For fourteen weeks during two fall semesters, hoping to understand more about how novices become professional writing teachers, I recorded each of those two hour sessions and collected weekly teaching journals from the participants, four men and seven women in one section, three men and six women in the other, each teaching one section of regular freshman composition and one developmental writing class. The recordings are rich with discussions of the teachers' questions and worries about planning successful lessons, devising effective writing assignments, evaluating student writing, constructing professional identities. While not surprising, what is striking about these conversations is the number of stories embedded in the discussions. I want to assert that the teachers use these stories to raise significant questions, build hypotheses, speculate about the purpose of their work, and to generalize about issues of teaching and student learning. The stories also reveal suggestive patterns in the strategies teachers use, consciously or not, to define their roles.

There are many ways to look at the structure of narrative. But from the Russian formalists' "fabula"/"sjuzet," to Barthes'proairetic and hermeneutic codes, to Chatman's story and discourse, to Bruner's landscape of action and landscape of consciousness, most begin by distinguishing between the raw material of the narrative and the shaping of it that results in plotted narrative discourse. Though undoubtedly useful, structural descriptions don't account very well for the process of story-telling; for that, we have to look at stories in the context which provokes them. Embedded as they are in the context of the weekly conversations about teaching, the stories that follow come close to capturing the process of

the teachers' struggle to understand and interpret their experience. In addition, what structural accounts may imply but do not make explicit is the social context of narrative, the way it functions to help one understand the actions of others and oneself in relation to others. Structural descriptions also cannot account for the frequently collaborative nature of story making, especially of oral narratives. For that, we must turn to the actual group process; for that, we must turn to the audiotapes themselves.

In selecting among the many narrative episodes embedded in the discourse of the conversations I studied, I used sociolinguist William Labov's scheme for analyzing the structure of what he calls "natural narratives," a shape he claims corresponds to the structure of all stories. Labov's scheme is especially useful here because it is derived from oral narratives of personal experience and because it takes into account the role of what Pratt has termed "tellability" in story telling, a function that highlights the role of the listener and thus renders the story-making explicitly social.

According to Labov, a fully developed natural narrative is composed of the following elements:

> the abstract: a short summary that "encapsulates the point of the story" and is usually provided by the teller just before recounting the story itself;
>
> the orientation: which serves to "identify in some way the time, place, persons, and their activity or situation;" it usually comes before the first narrative clause;
>
> the complicating action: which begins with the first narrative clause; and the result or the resolution, which usually ends with the last narrative clause;
>
> the evaluation: which is the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, why it was worth telling.

> (While the evaluation usually appears in the section preceding the resolution, evaluative devices can be found throughout the entire narrative.)
>
> the coda: whose general function is to close off the sequence of complicating actions and indicate that none of the events that followed were important to the narrative.

Although anecdotes abound in the taped conversations, I selected for discussion here only those corresponding to the minimal requirements of Labov's natural narratives. While the stories are not brief, I hope readers will bear with me. I reproduce them here with a minimum of editing in order to capture not just the structure of the narratives themselves but the process by which the group collaborates in assigning them significance.

As products of a training program small and coherent enough to articulate a clear set of values about teaching, this group of teachers both constitutes and represents a culture. But no culture's values are monolithic, and the occasions for their stories are often precisely those points of tension the new teachers experience when they try to achieve what they come to realize are conflicting goals. Relatively confident that they have command of a pedagogy that will help their students master the composing process and develop rhetorical and sentence level skills (the major focus of their training), the teachers are nonetheless troubled by the complexities they face in implementing what they've learned. What seemed unequivocal in seminars about teaching takes on the shadowy contours of ambiguity as the teachers confront the reality of conflicting claims: they need to maintain order but to respect individual differences and learning styles; to provide individual attention but serve the needs of an entire group; to maintain authority but encourage critical thinking, all the while presumably sorting out the personal conflicts embodied in their

own dual identities as students and teachers.

Not surprisingly, early on in the term the teachers are very concerned with image, with how they appear to their students, with how comfortably they at least seem to be playing the role of professional. In Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences, Polkinhorne has observed that "we achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story" (150). So it is with a teaching self. One function of the group's story telling is to help individuals come to terms with the events shaping their lives as teachers. Consider in this regard Diane's tale of her basic writers' refusal to do an assignment precisely as it had been handed to them. [The assignment asked them to compare several articles on the differences between masculine and feminine conversational styles and to recommend one as the most potentially helpful to a newlywed couple.] Note not just Diane's retelling, but the group's responses to her story, for they serve both to validate her concerns and to refocus the entire group's attention on the real purpose their "authority" ought to serve, that is to encourage students to engage critically in the process of writing.

(abstract)

DIANE: Well, my class had a mutiny. Does that happen?

JO: Yes, it certainly can. (laughter) Did somebody bring in three little silver balls?

SAM: Can we see the whip marks on your back?

(orientation)

DIANE: Last week I was feeling very smug in this class, because

you all seemed to be having trouble with the assignment and to me it seemed fine. They had gotten into the essay and they had a lot of ideas about the topic.

Well, the day after we met last time, they were supposed to bring outlines to class. We had already talked about things they'd want to include, because I knew that they would be pretty weak, since it was their first time. I had some kids put outlines on the board.

(evaluation)

One of the mistakes I made was I should have worked in groups first and had them compare what they'd done. But I just had people put them on the board.

(complicating action)

We started talking about them. And some of them, this little mutiny arose. They thought both of the essays were stupid. They couldn't possibly recommend either one of them to a newlywed couple, because they were both boring and stupid. (laughter)

So first of all, since I didn't want them to get away with saying they're boring and stupid, we went back and did what we'd done on Tuesday talking about the strengths and weaknesses of each one. But in the end, most of them had fairly rational arguments that the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. And they, of course, tried to get out of this assignment.

(resolution)

So, out of this great dramatic flourish, I just erased the outlines and said, "OK, then, what is it writers do when they research a topic and discover that what needs to be written hasn't been written?" So I changed the assignment and they ended up writing the essay they thought needed to be written to newlyweds.

(evaluation)

I felt they were really testing me. I'm afraid that I came away - even though I didn't let them just get out of the assignment - giving them the impression that they can persuade me with snottiness to change the course of the class anytime they feel like it. So, I don't know what else I could have done, but the thing that worried me was that they felt comfortable doing that in the first place; I think what I did was okay, but I'm not

> sure how I gave them the impression that they could get this snotty attitude. It just concerns me that maybe I'm being too casual in class. I've never been tested this way before. My class is very active, which I enjoy. They're really chatty and usually to the point. They respect each other pretty much. They have good conversations but it just felt out of hand to me.

(coda)

> Yesterday was fine. We had a great class. So, I don't know.

Note that Diane's first concern, expressed in her query, "does that happen?" is that her experience not be singular, that others have experienced student resistance. Bruner has noted that the typical situation giving rise to a story is one in which the protagonist must account for a deviation from a cultural convention, from "canonical representations of the social world" (Acts,68). Diane is worried not only because her class threatened to deviate from the established convention according to which teachers give assignments and students unquestioningly complete them, but also because she appeared to allow them to do it, and in the process undermined her own authority. This discomfort may account for the repeated use of "they" and "them" in Diane's recounting of the mutiny, and the fact that she only names "my class" at the very end of the story, otherwise distancing herself from the students via the pronouns. This is a pattern borne out in other narratives, as if despite their genuine concern and affection for their students (whom several of the teachers refer to as "kids), the teachers persist in seeing them as Other. Nonetheless, Diane feels strongly that the convention of an orderly classroom with the teacher in command conflicts with her belief that "real" writing emerges only when writers have a stake in what they write.

The first group member to respond validates Diane's concern with her authority as a teacher by including her in the larger group of novices:

DAVE: That's a concern of all of us, especially the first time teachers. We're probably sending out signals that we don't know about...

DIANE: Yes. Maybe I should go out and change my wardrobe.

But very soon the group begins to reflect on the significance of Diane's experience with a rebellious class, gradually and collectively helping her to gain some perspective on it.

SUSAN: But one point that I don't think you should overlook is that they really got engaged in the material enough that they had an opinion. Which is a pretty important starting point for English 50 students to connect to writing.

DIANE: I think you're right. It's just the direction it was going. Maybe you could just visit this class and see if I'm being too casual.

MIKE: I think I'd almost not worry about it unless it happened again. It sounds like you've handled it and got them to do something they thought was more significant ...

JAN: And next time it comes up you'll recognize the warning signals and you can immediately stop it before it even gets to the point where they ...

MIKE: Why would you even want to stop it though? Why would you want to stop it?

DIANE: Yes. I can't imagine having responded any other way, saying, "this is what you have to do."

SAM: It sounds like what's happened is that they sort of like galvanized as a class.

DIANE: Yeah, against me. (laughter)

SAM: When I look up at the class, I'd much rather see skepticism than blank.

ALL: Yes.

DIANE: That's true. And I do teach at 8:00 in the mornings, so I've been real lucky that they're awake.

By the end of the episode, the group has mollified and pretty much convinced Diane of what she already knows, that the challenge offered by her students was a strong and very positive signal that they were actively and critically involved in the class and thus far better equipped to begin writing than had they not been so engaged, and that her authority was probably not in jeopardy at all, something Diane herself acknowledges in her coda. Though she may know these things, Diane tells her story in order to gain support and validation from the group. She gets it, and in the process the group confirms a communal value: that part of their purpose as writing teachers is to encourage and recognize an active critical stance among their students.

If image is a vital concern for the group early in the semester, as the term progresses their attention turns to matters of classroom strategy.

Whereas Diane's narrative served as a request for validation, the ostensible purpose of the next story is to get help in solving a problem of what we might call "technique" - how to get inattentive students involved in what's going on in class. But as we can see from the reponses to it, Toni's story doesn't just lead to a number of concrete suggestions, although it does do that, but raises sensitive issues of tact and pedagogy as well. Like Diane's, Toni's story opens with a question:

(abstract)

TONI: So what do you do if ... Okay, I've been randomly calling on people who weren't paying attention or who are shy and who I kind of figured had the answers but ..

(orientation)

today I called on this one woman. She sits in the back and she's really pretty and she sits next to a guy who's really pretty, too, and they're always talking to each other. And the guy's one of the more vocal people in the class and she never talks.

(complicating action)

So today I called on her, because I knew she wasn't paying attention, and she just ...it was a simple question, the answer was already on the board. And she just stood there. And she just stared for a very long time. And I didn't say anything. I let her have time. But then the guy that she's always talking to, next to her starts going, "Dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, dum," and I'm like "Shit!" And so then, finally, she gets a face like she wants to die, and

(evaluation)

I felt so bad, I felt really bad, and I didn't know what to do. It was the only time that happened, that I had a bad experience in calling on someone.

Toni's story, in which her "personal," colloquial self interrogates her professional one, first elicits a flurry of very concrete suggestions.

DIANE: What I've done, I've put them in a circle and I told them ahead of time and I said, "I'm going to go down and just call on you one at a time, If you don't feel like talking about it, just shake your head. So that's not quite the same situation, but I made a kind of general announcement that I like to call on people.

TONI: Maybe that would be good. I just wanted to bring her into the class.

SAM: I would call on her once a day. I would say keep calling on her...she can't resent you for calling on her in class; she's <u>in</u> class. That's what I do if

my people, you know, if I see they're not paying attention.

In what follows, Mike extends Toni's initial query by asking about those students who seem "never to have anything to say," and thus stimulates another round of problem solving by the group. It's significant that these contributions tacitly confirm potentially competing communal values: that all students be encouraged, even tenderly coerced into participating in class discussions and that teachers should accomplish this without embarrassing those students who, like Melville's Bartleby, would prefer not to.

MIKE: What do you do if they never have anything to say?

SAM: What I do is I wait ...I'll even repeat the question. I don't make them feel bad," Why weren't you paying attention?" or something like that. I make them feel like, " Okay ..." Because I know everbody spaces out in class, so it's not like they're criminals for looking out the window. I'll repeat the question in as kind a way as I can,to not have them be embarrassed, but to let them know that if I call on them, they can't get out of it by not knowing the answer. They have to say something.

JAN: It sounds silly, but it's also good if you say their name and then the question. So if you're going to call on somebody, you say, "Terri, what do you ..." At least it perks their ears up, and they listen to the question the first time when you say it.

TONI: Yes, it wasn't like she was yawning; it was that she was more interested in this guy.

DIANE: I have a question about how much to interfere with their right to sit there and be silent. I know often when I'm in classes, I've opted to just sit back and not say anything but that doesn't mean I'm not paying attention.

TONI: Right. See, I wouldn't have called on her if she was like

that, like some others in the back of the room that I feel are insecure. She just is not interested. I wanted to like say "you can't just be chatting with the guys in the back. You're a member of this class."

SUSAN: The other thing I've done is where the few people I've called on and they haven't had the answer and it was clear they were going to die if I waited for them, is to say, "Okay, we'll get back to you on the next question," and then do. They're a little more prepared that way.

TONI: That would be good.

Sam's final contribution, a small story in its own right, serves to place this discussion of classroom particulars into the important larger context of these basic writers' prior school experiences.

SAM: One time when I was apprenticing last semester I called on someone and not only did he not know the answer, he didn't even know we were doing an exercise. He had tuned out for a minute. And he wasn't a bad kid either. So I just said, "Okay, I'm going to wait for you now. We're on the bottom of page three. You can do this. Look at it now and tell me the answer." And that's what he did. And later, my master teacher said, "That was a good thing you did. And especially in English 50. The reason most of these kids are here is because no one ever waited for them."

Several subsequent responses I haven't included here cautioned against a tendency to allow a punitive impulse to motivate the teachers' reasons for calling on people. ("Yeah, that's what I felt," Toni admitted.) It remained for Jill to add one more crucial point:

JILL: I hope we're not giving the idea, especially with the writing assignments, that there's a right answer, because that could be why they're reluctant to talk. Maybe we need to remind ourselves to talk in terms of ways to

> approach this topic- like, well, you could organize it this way or flip it around and do it this way. I think that's really important because one, that's the way good writing gets done, it's not to a box. And it makes them a lot more comfortable about venturing a response, because they believe us when we say there's no right answer, that we're working out strategies for doing this essay. And that's really important because it has as much to do with the dynamics of the writing process as with the dynamics of the class.

Whether their stories highlight particular concerns about their images as teachers or raise questions about specific classroom techniques, beneath the surface of virtually all their accounts lie the teachers' attempts to formulate general principles and address issues fundamental to their role as educators. At the same time that Dee's very compressed story below illustrates her attempt to align the theory she has been taught with the reality of the students she teaches, it raises the ultimate question, "Can we teach?"

(abstract)

DEE: I've been thinking lately, when I took comp. theory all this stuff about developmental theory, I was never very impressed with that because I thought it was unfair. But now ... (laughter)

JO: Would you like to make a guest appearance in my seminar?

LARRY: Stages, you mean?

(orientation)

DEE: Yes, well, you know, the whole developmental theory like Piaget and stage models and you know. Because I was thinking about, well, for example, I was having my [basic writing] students compare, or join two sentences.

(complicating action and resolution)

And first of all they had to decide whether they were illustrating a difference or a similarity. And the sentences were "Charles Dickens, the English novelist, only received a few years of education." And the second was, "Thomas Edison, who invented the light bulb, only graduated from elementary school." Obviously it's a similarity, right? I coaxed and I guided, but they couldn't see that. They tried, but they couldn't do it.

JOE: Because it was two different people?

(evaluation)

DEE: Yes, ... you know, they just couldn't see. And I'm wondering, because it struck me. I'd never even seen it.

CONNIE: They have to get beyond the literal, beyond the rule. They have to look at the meaning, we have to say, "what are these sentences about?"

MARY: I don't think it's just a matter of their not being able to get beyond the literal. I think they don't trust themselves as an authority at all. They don't feel like their own opinions and their inferences are worthy.

(coda)

DEE: So, I just had a question relating to this. How can we teach? I mean, how do you get them beyond it? Is it just exposing them again and again and trying to draw them out and get them to read?

The group doesn't directly answer Dee's question, one that vexes even the most experienced among us; instead the others respond with a new round of stories affirming her experience with complementary ones of their own, in particular focusing on strategies for helping students to develop their ideas more fully. Certainly they're not alone in occasionally feeling despair at the thought of making their 15 weeks of instruction compensate for what they perceive as many years of others' neglect, a perception that may in fact help them in defining realistic expectations for their own as well as their students' success. But their practical

responses do serve as an implicit answer to "how do we teach?" Through them they remind one another that they've been equipped with a methodology for teaching writing that can at least begin to redress the failures of their students' previous classroom experiences or to move their better prepared students to a higher level of proficiency.

The stories so far have mainly tested and affirmed beliefs and values particular to the classroom. This next one resonates beyond classroom walls, reminding us (as do the others, of course, though in smaller measure) of the ways in which teaching reflects the tensions and imperatives of a larger world outside. The assignment that prompts the story is one in which students were asked to discuss a way in which they had been stereotyped and to analyze the effects of that experience. Once again the story begins with a question, acknowledging the teller's understanding of narrative's heuristic power, if not to solve difficult problems quickly, then at least to begin to understand their complexity. In fact, the entire story <u>is</u> a question, and it's also important to note, especially in light of the communal and heuristic nature of storytelling I'm arguing for here, how perceptive and engaged the respondents become in interpreting the story's significance.

(abstract)

JAN: I have a question. This is really specific, but I'm a bit uncomfortable.

(orientation)

I have a student who is, he's black, he comes from, I think from L.A. or something. He has no, uh, he doesn't speak with a black dialect or anything like that. I spoke to him two or three times. He was talking about doing his stereotype essay on calling the stereotype the contented slave, so I said, "What's

that?"

(complicating action)

He said, "well, you know, people come up to you and say like they feel comfortable making racial jokes around you because ... and then he went on and told me a bunch of other stories about what he was talking about, that people think it's okay, they sort of disregard the fact that he might be black and sensitive to these kinds of issues. But I was trying to talk to him about maybe it was, I mean this contented slave idea seemed like not exactly what he wanted to say. But I started getting real uncomfortable. I talked a little bit about code switching and that that affects who you are and people don't know how to quite deal with you. They assume that if you don't speak this way, you're not that.

(resolution)

He seemed to understand. But I don't know.

(evaluation)

I don't even know if this is an answerable question, but...

JIM: What's your question?

JAN: I don't even know, do I? Well, when you get into issues, like you're standing there and you're talking to a black person and you're a white person, and you start to feel weird about it -- do you know what I mean? When you're talking about stereotypes and trying to ... well, how would you ... what would you have ...

CONNIE: Sounds like you might have been trying to rewrite his paper.

JAN: Well, you know, you have to have one of those times, "Well, I have this idea. Use that." That's probably what I did, I don't know.

GENE: I hear a different question coming out of this. The subtext of this is you as a white person telling him what to say about his experience and how you feel.

JAN: Yes.

LARRY: I've had that feeling about some other ethnic students when I don't know their perspective, really. I mean I know intellectually, but I've not gone through their experience.

(resolution)

JAN: I left it alone. I mean I talked to him a few minutes and I said, "It sounds interesting. I don't know what a contented slave is. Go for it."

Jan's story may have come to its structural resolution, but the issues it raises are a long way from being resolved, as the many hesitations in her narration suggest.

JIM: I've kind of gotten almost a little paranoid about anytime anything ethnic comes up in class. Maybe it's just my own awareness of being a white male.

(coda)

JAN: It's funny, because the class, after this conversation I was telling you about, they sort of sympathized with me for my ineptitude, cause the student obviously was the expert and I was feeling stupid about not understanding.

CONNIE: I was just going to say that also if he was coming to ask about the thesis of his essay then your role isn't to comment on his experience but to comment on its use as a thesis.

EMILY: Which I think is exactly what you did - but I mean, the problem is when you start, when it starts shifting to feeling like a comment on a personal experience.

JAN: We start getting into interesting conversations, right, then you start to talk about it and then you go, "Well, it's time to draw back now, because I don't really know how appropriate this is, right?" But I might be saying something that's awkward. I started to feel self-conscious suddenly, even though what we were talking about was real interesting and ...

EMILY: I think it's, I mean it's something all of us feel. We've all been raised in a racist culture. And we all have, no matter how unracist we have worked to be, we still have to confront our racist attitudes on some level. Probably, you were getting beyond that sort of level of being uncomfortable about here I am a white person talking to a black person and what's going on and are they seeing me as a white person...

ALL: Right. Yes.

EMILY: ...and will they expect me to react a certain way because I'm white because this guy is talking about how

whites stereotype him. So I think that kind of discomfort is, I mean it's natural that you might feel that way. And how you deal with it... I mean I don't know... I think there's just some level you sort of have to acknowledge maybe that you're not totally free from racism and sort of realize that you're working with that, too. And that if someone sees that you're doing that and that you're not coming at them from a perspective of being racist but you're not also saying totally like, "I have this issue totally under control and I'm totally resolved about it."

ALL: Yes.

MARY: Like, "I'm totally resolved about sitting here with you and talking about your being black or Asian," when you aren't.

JIM: Yeah.

EMILY: That's where you really get problems.

Certainly it's too much to claim for any narrative that it resolves a problem as tormenting to our culture as racism or even that it tempers the tugs of white liberal guilt. But Jan's story does permit these teachers to confront openly and cooperatively a challenge they face daily as teachers in a large urban university striking in its cultural diversity. It enables them to articulate the terms of their struggle to deal honestly and tactfully with the complexities of their responsibilities as they try to serve their students well. Like the other stories, it demonstrates, I think, narrative's power to construct and interpret knowledge. They remind us that if we look through a narrative lens at a picture we've been accustomed to viewing paradigmatically, we gain the advantage of a different, perhaps deeper and wider perspective and can capture the process by which experience is engendered.

What do we see? The stories highlight the teachers' recognition of the ethical claims teaching entails. Each of the stories retold here

arises from such a claim, and while it is true that the teachers' practical preparation may free them somewhat from having to figure out how to design a lesson on subordination, for instance, and thus allow them liberty to concentrate on more "human" issues, they must still design lessons daily. Nevetheless, it is not lesson design that they are preoccupied with. Composition is perhaps unique in the opportunities and challenges it affords teachers and students for close collaboration. (Students frequently observe that their writing teacher is the only faculty member on campus who knows their names.) As a consequence, writing teachers are often more sensitive than others to the subtleties of classroom and interpersonal dynamics, or so we like to believe. Their stories suggest that these new teachers <u>are</u>, and that we need not simply to validate but to anticipate and address such concerns in our training courses.

The more subtle patterns of proximity and distance and the inclination toward defensiveness reflected occasionally in the teachers' references to their students reflect their ambivalence about their position, not just their dual identities as graduate students and lecturers but their status in the university as a whole. At the same moment they've joined the ranks of a select group of professionals awarded a small number of faculty positions by virtue of their superior abilities, they also have become members of a group that at best enjoys low status, at worst is exploited by the institution they serve. Although the narratives do not address these conflicts directly, certainly those of us who work with part time faculty ought not to forget that their status affects their identity and thus their performance as teachers, and that we should continue to work toward gaining writing instruction the recognition it deserves.

I'm dismayed at a certain violence I've done to these stories and to the integrity of the group process merely by selecting some and not others, and by extracting them from the context in which they were embedded. I worry that read off the page they will seem flat. On audiotape, they retain their extraordinary charm and good humor; I can hear the frequent laughter as well as the occasional whine of despair, the pauses for reflection as well as the warm murmurs of encouragement and assent the voices, male and female, offer one another, encouraging a colleague to continue her story, secure in the knowledge that they all have something to contribute to and something to learn from its telling. Much of this is lost in the translation from spoken to written text.

But I hope the stories have been able to capture something of the communal value of storytelling, its power to articulate values as well as to engage and bond the members of a group. Certainly it's not lost upon me that in this paper I have embedded these narratives in prose belonging firmly inthe paradigmatic mode. Nor is it my intention to argue against the value of empirical research to help us learn more about what the teachers we're preparing need to know. But I do believe that we must listen to them if we are to discover what they need; and when we listen, what we hear are their stories.

We hear much talk these days about community, whether of the discourse or the interpretive sort, yet paradoxically, what often marks our condition as teachers is a profound sense of isolation from our peers. As much as anything else these stories reveal the teachers' power to support one another in very concrete ways. I would hope they encourage those of us who help prepare writing teachers to take pains to create communities in

which new members can tell their own stories of becoming teachers and we can begin to listen and learn from them.

NOTES

I would like to thank the members of the teaching seminars of Fall, 1989 and 1990 for their energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to teaching their students well. I really couldn't have written this without them.

1. Some important exceptions to this are Nancy Sommers, who stressed the value of student narratives in a paper she delivered at the 1989 CCCC Convention and Richard Beach, whose 1987 study of narratives written by 7th graders, college freshmen and English teachers revealed that the young students merely retold a story, whereasd mature writers reflected upon events, producing what Beach terms "point-driven" narratives.

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