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ABSTRACT

Noting that the paper might never have been completed if the authors had not used Dissoi Logoi to allow themselves to disagree and converse on paper, this paper suggests that consensus in collaborative writing happens but that forced consensus is a bad influence on imaginative scholars. Written in a "double voice," this paper highlights some moments in the history of the social constructionist practice of collaborative learning, suggests some theoretical and practical answers to the problem of consensus, and discusses the authors' processes of composing. The paper does not project a single authorial voice, nor does it hide the disagreements and conflicts two people find when writing together "or that one person naturally finds when writing alone." The paper identifies two voices: a straight voice that is at home in normal type "and that contains single ideas, specifically stated" and a comic "or commentating" voice whose entrance is indicated in bold italic type "and that contains many ideas not necessarily clearly focused." Using as an example the writing of this paper, the paper shows how disensus and the process of Dissoi Logoi, rather than consensus, can characterize collaborative writing. Contains 16 references. (RS)

Collaboration, Consensus, and *Dissoi Logoi*

Kerri K. Morris and Dana Gulling Mead

When authors write together, we in composition studies call the process collaboration. ***Donald Stewart explains, however, that during World War II a collaborator was "In the occupied countries...a person who assisted the Nazis, even to the point of betraying his or her countrymen" (Stewart 66).*** When authors write together, they often write as if one voice were speaking. That is, they produce texts that are univocal, coherent, and unified, that look and read very much like one person has written them. Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede even considered combining their names--Annalisa Edesford or LisaAnn Lunede--in order to appear as one author in their book, *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*. ***The two become one.***

The process of two writers composing one text takes place in a variety of ways. Writers may assign tasks, making each person responsible for distinct aspects of a written work. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, were responsible for separate chapters in *Madwoman in the Attic*, and in their preface include who wrote which ones. ***More precisely, Gilbert wrote the first draft for the sections on Milton and*** Jane Eyre ***wile Gubar wrote the first draft for the sections on Jane Austen and George Eliot. But they both exchanged and discussed all of the drafts (xiii).*** Writers may share authorship, ***but not the writing.*** For instance, sometimes the name of a "known" scholar is included in a byline in order for the essay to get published, even though the student or novice may be responsible for most of the writing. ***"Intertexts," a recurring section of Ede's and Lunsford's book records the experiences of collaborating writers, including the story of Jesse O.***

Cavenar, Jr, who successfully sued to have his name listed as top editor of a textbook. The publisher argued that another man's name should be first because he was better known, thus making the book more marketable.

Writers may actually write together at the same time, as Gilbert and Gubar have been doing recently, and as the two of us did for four hours one afternoon, wrestling with every word in an attempt to write an abstract. ***We wrestled with more than words, though. We discussed ideas, explored possibilities, struggled for a better understanding of our views.*** Writers may exchange drafts of a piece of writing, which each person revises and develops, perhaps even arguing with one another in the process, and often ending up in each other's homes or offices to pore over final revisions together. Lunsford and Ede, the writers of *Women's Ways of Knowing*, and Douglas Vipond and Russell A. Hunt all tell anecdotes about this process, ***which may also include marathon cooking sessions, struggle and tears, and even one writer "grabbing the keyboard out of the other's hand" (Reither and Vipond, 858).***

Kerri and Dana ***Dana and Kerri*** eventually wrote our first collaborative essay, a 350-word abstract, this way because the process of poring over the same sheet of paper at the same time was tedious and time consuming. ***We wrote two sentences in four hours.*** We wrote more than two sentences, but instead of arguing about what to say, we were overtly ***overly*** careful about listening to the other person's perspective. We listened so carefully to each other, in fact, that we didn't allow ourselves to speak. With experience in the art of collaboration, this process no doubt becomes smoother and develops its own rhythm. Interlocutor/writers become more comfortable composing and offering their own ideas, questioning, revising, even challenging one another. ***Or violently wresting keyboards from each other or dumping pans of pasta over their collaborator's head, whichever is more convenient.*** The process eventually becomes more natural, and writers function as ***a*** writer in a productive collaborative spirit. ***Perhaps the two become one in the way Socrates and his daimon were.*** This

seems to us the happy version of the story.

What happens when one writer doesn't get to speak her or his thoughts and is forever contaminated by the other's voice? ***A colleague, whose essay had been unfavorably reviewed, promptly explained that what had gone wrong was his co-author's doing. "I tried to show him these problems. None of my ideas was criticized."*** What happens when, despite two names on a text, one person always gets credit? How often have you heard *The New Rhetoric* by Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca referred to as Perelman's book, the ideas as Perelman's ideas? ***A professor in graduate school actually suggested that Olbrechts-Tyteca didn't have that much to do with the book, that Perelman was doing her a professional favor.*** What happens when you disagree vehemently with each other, and one of you either feels compelled to agree or simply does agree in order to continue working? ***Consensus in collaborative efforts seems to us the unhappy version of the story.*** Instead of two voices speaking harmonically ***or discordantly*** only one voice is heard. Instead of a writing process, collaborating becomes the process of sifting ***shifting*** power. Who's name is more marketable? ***Will I get more money if my name goes first?*** Whose ideas are these anyway? Who gives in when there's a disagreement? Who takes responsibility, or credit, for the text? ***Who is its*** **real** ***author?*** Even when the text faithfully represents both writers' perspectives, it visually reflects unity and a univocal voice. ***The*** **Harbrace Handbook** ***insists that essays should begin with a thesis statement "which contains a single idea, clearly focused and specifically stated..." (373).*** A real sense of dual authorship or identity or an awareness of two or more people conversing evaporates.

For example, Edward Huth, a physician and editor, attempts to clarify the quagmire of authorship when he writes in his *How to Write and Publish Papers in the Medical Sciences* about the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' 1985 statement on authorship. ***He offers a single idea, clearly focused and specifically stated.***

These guidelines make collaboration sound simple:

> Principle 1. Each author should have participated sufficiently in the work represented by the article to take public responsibility for the content....
>
> Principle 2. Participation must include three steps: (1) conception or design of the work represented by the article, or analysis and interpretation of the data, or both; (2) drafting the article or revising it for critically important content; and (3) final approval of the version to be published....Authors must also have sufficient involvement in writing the [article], either in drafting the initial version or revising subsequent versions to insure validity of the argument and conclusion, to be able to defend the article as an accurate report...of the work that led to it....
>
> Principle 3. Participation solely in the collection of data (or other evidence) does not justify authorship....
>
> Principle 4. Each part of the content of an article critical to its main conclusions and each step in the work that led to its publication...must be attributable to at least one author. (229-30)

But those of us who collaborate know it's not simple at all. Our current method of collaboration, and the one this article illustrates, does not attempt to project the appearance of a single authorial voice, nor does it hide the disagreements and conflicts two people naturally find when writing together ***or that one person naturally finds when writing alone.*** Instead we identify two voices: a straight voice that is at home in normal type ***and that contains single ideas, specifically stated*** and a comic ***or commentating*** voice whose entrance is indicated by bold italic type ***and that contains many ideas not necessarily clearly focused.*** Following Winston Weathers' concept of double voice as outlined in *An Alternate Style*, we enhance his notion of one author using more than one voice to express a variety of views by increasing the number of authors as well. ***We springboard from Weathers' discussion:***

> Writers use double-voice many times when they feel that they could say this *or* that about a subject; when they feel that two attitudes toward a subject are equally valid; when they wish to suggest that there are two sides to the story...; when they wish to distinguish between their roles as (a) provider of information and data, and (b) commentator upon information and data; or when they wish to effect a style corresponding to ambiguous realities. (24)

Weathers' model has one becoming two. We have allowed two authors to each have more than one voice, moving from a monologic text to a dialogic or recursive one. While we use bold italic as a visual signal to distinguish the "voices," we do not, however, identify ourselves with any one voice or assume responsibility for writing one voice. Instead, Weathers' double voice technique enables us both to provide information ***and to commentate on that information***, allows us to make a statement ***and invert it***, encourages us to seriously explore an idea ***and playfully critique it.*** Most importantly, perhaps, it allows us to share one text and fully participate in its creation, complete with our disagreements and second thoughts. ***Our process and our thoughts about it are not simple at all. They are complex, confused, and sometimes passionate.***

Because discussions about collaboration are controversial, ***In fact Donald Stewart wrote, "My point is that this movement*** [collaborative learning], ***if it takes a wrong turn, leads to totalitarian societies in which the individual is completely subjected to and subjugated by the will of the group" (74)*** and because these discussions raise concerns that we share, ***Do we share that concern?*** because of these difficulties, we'd like to highlight some moments in the history of this social constructionist practice, suggest some theoretical and practical answers to the problem of consensus, and discuss further our process of composing, our experiences with and the resulting texts of double voice collaboration.

Kenneth Bruffee, in his landmark 1984 article, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" outlines the beginnings of the collaborative learning

movement. Remember that one model for collaboration was a group of medical students in the midst of rounds. ***Sounds vaguely like Huth's discussion, but not as clinical.*** Instead of asking one student to diagnose a patient, M.L.J. Abercrombie discovered that to ask students "to examine the patient together, discuss the case as a group, and arrive at a consensus, a single diagnosis that they could all agree to" was the most effective way of acquiring "good medical judgment" (637). ***Collaboration and consensus here mean working together for the health of a patient, searching for the opportune moment. Did you know the word*** kairos, ***or opportune moment, originated in medical documents?***

The collaborative learning movement is deeply rooted both in teaching environments and in the process of conversation. ***Doesn't this remind you of Plato's Socratic dialogues?*** This notion of conversation as emblematic of the collaborative effort is important for us to investigate because it is where the notion of consensus can best be explored and resolved. ***Notice the assumption that consensus solves something? Why does a conflict have to be solved, or solved again?*** Drawing on the work of Lev Vygotsky and Michael Oakeshott, Bruffee proposes that "human conversation takes place within us as well as among us" and that the learning process or "reflective thought" is "social conversation internalized," which is then re-externalized through writing. ***So is Bruffee engaging in the discourse of a new community here? Isn't he engaging in a scholarly conversation with Vygotsky and Oakeshott?*** The conversations we have with peers are preparation for the conversations we have with ourselves; in fact they constitute the learning process. According to Bruffee, "Knowledge is the product of human beings in a state of continual negotiation or conversation" (646-7).

Further Bruffee introduces us to Richard Rorty's notion of "normal discourse," which is, of course, borrowed from Thomas Kuhn's notion of normal science. ***So whose ideas are these anyway? Is this documentation or a conversation? We***

spend an inordinate amount of time documenting the source of our ideas, without acknowledging the role of conversation or of the interplay of ideas on the development of those ideas. Bruffee asserts ***with his conversants*** that normal discourse is the discourse that we participate in within our own disciplinary communities, made up of individual conventions and values and that determines "what counts as a question, what counts as having a good argument for the answer or a good criticism of it" (643), and it is this discourse, or this conversation, into which we must introduce our students. ***Egad! Do we really want our students to write in the tortured academic prose style found in journals? It's so boring! What happened to conversational style and personal writing?*** We must help them to successfully participate in a conversation with a particular discourse community and to establish "socially justifying belief[s]" (Bruffee 646). Bruffee explains, "We socially justify belief when we explain to others why one way of understanding how the world hangs together seems to us preferable to other ways of understanding it" (646). Groups of "knowledgeable peers" work together to decide what is socially justifiable, to establish knowledge.

Shifts in normal discourse occur when rare individuals come along and offer their "abnormal discourse, [which] sniffs out stale, unproductive knowledge and challenges its authority, that is, the authority of the community which that knowledge constitutes" (648). ***So, is this article "normal" or "abnormal" academic discourse? Are we sniffing out stale ideas? Of course, everyone wants to challenge authority and write that rare, new idea, "abnormal" at least by Bruffee's definition.*** Of course we're engaging in normal discourse; we're participating in the conversation of our discipline. Instead of "abnormal discourse," we prefer the term *dissoi logoi*, or the double-sided argument, to describe what we do in collaboration and what we're spotlighting in this article.

Collaborative learning, then, is steeped in the model of a conversation, whether

internal or within and among our discourse communities. Conversations involve exchanges: your words responding to my words, ***your words interrupting my words,*** my words revising your words. Conversations involve misunderstandings, ***corrections,*** interruptions, ***revelations,*** sometimes explorations, and they suggest more than one voice: ***a cacophony, a carnival, heteroglossia.*** Collaboration in classrooms or in scholarly writing may go wrong when it either doesn't involve a conversation or when it doesn't self-consciously reflect one. Clearly when people aren't willing to discuss, ***argue,*** exchange, ***share,*** modify, ***play,*** or explore together, collaboration doesn't have much point. There doesn't seem to be much point in two or three or four writers acting like one, either, when they have multiple opinions that don't cohere to a thesis, when their explorations have revealed more than one answer, ***when their essay doesn't begin with a thesis statement containing a single idea, clearly focused and specifically stated.*** We don't feel compelled to speak with one voice in our own private thoughts. ***We talk to ourselves.*** Even Plato, father of the organic, unified, coherent view of composition, speaks in more than one voice in his dialogues, sometimes never deciding which view he really believes. ***But don't forget that Plato spends much of his time in*** Gorgias ***and*** Phaedrus ***criticizing the Sophists, the notion of*** dissoi logoi, ***and multiple truths.*** Conversations, even Plato's, allow, even encourage, a multiplicity of views more efficiently than they do consensus.

In his 1989 article, "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," John Trimbur explores consensus and redefines it, focusing on Bruffee's notion of abnormal discourse and the process of "disensus." ***Trimbur, too, converses with his sources.*** Not only does collaboration encourage consensus, critics worry, but it also reaffirms normal discourse, thus miring people in the views of existing power structures and stealing from them the power to change. Trimbur encourages collaborative learners to focus on disagreements, silenced or marginalized voices and to allow abnormal discourse to serve as a process for redefining issues. In short, consensus is for Trimbur the process

through which groups "open gaps in the conversation through which differences may emerge," leading them into disensus. He offers the term "struggle," to define the process of disensus, a term we hear often from collaborators about their work. Instead of seeing consensus as an end, Trimbur views it as a means, "as the desire of humans to live and work together with differences" (615).

This is where we see* dissoi logoi *entering the conversation, because it is the Sophistic process of focusing on difference. The Sophists were grounded philosophically in the concept of* kairos *or the opportune moment, where any given truth could be dominant or appropriate, thereby allowing rhetoric to be an ethically neutral tool. They embraced multiple truths; if any one truth could be valid at a given time, then of course rhetoric could "make the weaker argument seem to be the stronger." And that's what got them in trouble with Plato. Plato's idea of the only appropriate use of rhetoric was in the service of Truth, not in that of weak arguments prompting false, or momentary, truths. Plato was grounded in dialectic, an inherently conversational model, in which interlocutors collaboratively sought a univocal Truth. ***On the surface this is a conversational model, but Plato forces his interlocutors to reach consensus on Plato/Socrates' definition of the issue at hand, be it love, rhetoric, or knowledge. Because he is the philosopher, he has a purer view of Truth, and his duty is to reveal this Truth to lower beings, i.e. students, Sophists, dictators. That's a pretty insidious use of consensus and conversation.***

Consensus, Trimbur reminds us, however, can reveal to us where we can begin our conversations. ***But consensus for Plato was where conversation ended.*** Although much of our writing seeks to tell what it knows, sometimes we write in order to explore what we don't. Perhaps this is why we collaborate, to foreground the conversations we have within ourselves and with each other, ***to experience on paper the* dissoi logoi.**

In our own era, the sophistic double-sided argument or *dissoi logoi* has been viewed as a will to power. It is tainted with notions of conflict and hostility. ***It often is hostile.*** Feminist scholars Carey Nelson and Ellen Cronan Rose, for instance, describe their quest for power during the 1970s.

> Although we were frequently scared and tentative, we groped toward empowerment. We became feminists. Our kind of collaboration may be the product of this specific history. Can today's young feminists, among them some of our junior women colleagues, understand our collaboration without having lived our history? What must it be like for junior women in a professional environment where competition with women seems inevitable? For all our sense of exclusion from the boys' club, we had solidarity with women. It was clearly us versus them. For today's junior faculty, "them" can be us. Sisterhood has given way to rivalry. (554-5)

We think we've found a way to preserve both sisterhood and rivalry. The double voice process of thinking and writing has allowed us to tolerate disagreements and to grow as friends. Two voices can speak and be heard.

Let us take you back to the first example of our own collaboration/exploration. Remember the angst-ridden scene with each of us paralyzed with fear of offending the other? Well, the MLA proposal was rejected, but we still wanted to write together. So we pared down the original proposal and submitted it to CCCC. It was accepted, and then we began to procrastinate. ***In all honesty, we took jobs 600 miles apart and became immersed in our lives.*** Forced to deal with the added problem of distance, we eventually came to accept that we'd have to at least talk to each other extensively before writing the paper. ***And who was going to do the traveling? It had gotten to the point that phone calls weren't enough*** and were getting expensive; ***neither of us had a modem,*** but we both had access to fax machines. So we met over a spring break ***Dana's break at Kerri's house*** about two weeks before the paper was to be

presented, a little wary of working together after our first experience. We can't remember exactly how we came to decide to use double voice, but we did find our brainstorming notes and a work schedule. The notes reveal early decisions about content, but not whose ideas they were. We cannot remember much about the early decisions, only that they were made in conversations either face to face or on the telephone. ***It's interesting here that we still tend to privilege, even in our memories, the product over the process of writing.***

The abbreviated version of the work schedule looks quite clean and straightforward. ***Maybe it's the desire of all collaborators to make the job look simple.*** Here's the schedule:

3/7 Kerri writes first draft of straight text ***and can't resist a few bold italic remarks***

3/8 Kerri gives first draft to Dana, ***nervous about what will happen next***

3/10-12 Dana revises and develops straight text, generates commentary ***and some comedy, even some unprintable puns***

3/13 Dana faxes paper to Kerri ***and wonders if she's violated federal law***

3/14 Kerri revises revision of straight text, revises commentary ***and adds some of her own unprintable puns***

3/16 Kerri faxes back to Dana ***and hopes they've violated*** some ***law***

3/17 Dana calls Kerri to brush up text and practice once ***and to delete some exuberant and unprintable puns***

3/21 Perform for Betsy and Sherry ***in a hotel room in Chicago the night before the paper when it was far too late to make changes***

3/22 Present ***and realize that in an oral presentation each of us must own one voice or the other***

This outline looks like some models we described at the beginning of our paper, but we discovered in actually writing that the double voice allowed us to continue the conversation

on the page, *what former CCCC chair, William Cook, says is "to transform the silent and silencing texts...[and to] restore the speaking power of the page" (16).* Throughout the process we gave ourselves the freedom to disagree, and the form allowed us to express the disagreement *in another voice* without fearing we might hurt the other person's feelings or silence the other *or ourselves,* both of which we were acutely aware of after our attempt at writing together. Now we've grown more comfortable with the process, but we still don't strive for that single authorial autonomy. *In fact we are uneasy about even being identified with one voice or another.*

One of the most important things we want to stress is that while often we can remember who wrote what, *for instance, Dana wrote the pasta joke on page four,* more often, we can't remember who wrote what. Even our conversations have changed to reflect this shared ownership when we talk about our writing, even about a rough draft that one person has solely written. We speak of it as if both had written it: "We say here that..." automatically making the two one. *This sounds like consensus to me. Aren't we supposed to be foregrounding disensus,* dissoi logoi? Well, yes, it is a point of consensus, but the double voice allows us each to have ideas that disagree, that normally wouldn't appear in the same paper together, and to express them, one in the straight text and one in the dissenting/diabolical/evil text. *I prefer to think of it as comic.* Then in the process of revision, we are each free to assume either voice and respond to *react against* our own original idea. In other words, we both get to engage in *dissoi logoi, with each other and with ourselves.*

A second and related point is that a by-product of our not being able to remember who wrote what allows us both to take credit for both voices; no one person is identified with any one voice. For example, in our 1990 CCCC paper Dana read the deviant *comic* text while Kerri read the straight *dull* text, while in 1993 the roles were reversed. This sharing is especially important in getting "credit" for collaborative work. *We'll always and forever only get credit for "half" an article.* Tenure review committees

might be inclined to look at the comic ***deviant*** text as less serious, less substantial; certainly it uses fewer words. Yet, it's where the process of *dissoi logoi* collaboration has become so valuable to us, by interrupting our flow of ideas, interrogating our normal discourse and suggesting flaws in our assumptions. ***You're not suggesting the comic voice is abnormal discourse are you?***

To summarize, consensus in collaborative writing happens; ***forced consensus is a bad influence on imaginative scholars,*** and we certainly don't want to diminish the consensus we experience ***and enjoy*** ourselves. But we firmly believe that if we hadn't resorted to using double voice and *dissoi logoi* to allow ourselves to disagree and to converse on paper, ***we'd still be sitting in front of the computer, quietly trying not to hurt each other's feelings,*** or one of us would have a pan of pasta on her head.

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