

Learning to Write by Talking about Writing: A Summary of Research on Intensive Peer Review in Expository Writing Instruction at the University of Wisconsin- Madison

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we move from the problems of young writers to those of adults. We gain special access to the writing development of college freshmen as we examine their writing for each other and their discussions with each other about this writing. In this situation, known as peer conferencing or intensive peer review, we see that adult learners confront many of the same problems as their younger peers. Though the intricacies of the written medium, especially orthography, do not present major hurdles for adult writers, they must nonetheless experiment with text options that are essentially defined by the need for reciprocity at the levels of topic, comment, and genre.

WHAT IS INTENSIVE PEER REVIEW?

Intensive peer review is a method of teaching expository writing developed by Professor A. N. Doane and now used extensively in Freshman Expository Writing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Students in these so-called writing studios meet regularly in groups of four or five, and the same groups meet three times a week over the course of the term for the purpose of sharing and critiquing each other's writing. The instructor assigns few if any topics and gives students no checklists to use in monitoring their discussion. Rather, students keep journals and prepare pieces of exposition from these notebooks for presentation to classmates at every class meeting. Students are required to prepare a new paper or a substantial revision for each class. They are instructed to consider the extent to which the author achieves his or her purpose; they are to avoid checking spelling, punctuation, and usage; and they are required to provide each member of their group with a photocopy of their work. Periodically the instructor collects the best papers from each student for evaluation, but she does relatively little direct instruction, and intervention in these groups is minimal.

The use of peer review is not new to writing instruction. The idea dates back at least to James Moffett's *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (1968a); other references include Beaven, 1977; Benson, 1979; Britton, 1971; Bruffee, 1973, 1984; Buxton, 1975; Elbow, 1973; Fox, 1980; Gebhardt, 1980; Gere and Stevens, 1985; Gere and Abbott, 1985; Hawkins, 1976; Murray, 1969; Nystrand, 1983b; Nystrand and Doane, in preparation; Zoellner, 1969. This research finds that peer work contributes to gains in critical thinking, organization, and appropriateness (Lagana, 1973); revision (Benson, 1979); attention to prewriting and increased awareness of one's own writing processes (Nystrand, 1983b); and writer confidence (Fox, 1980).

What accounts for the effectiveness of peer review? Generally, its practice is consistent with what is known about effective response to student writing. For example, Moffett originally justified the method in pragmatic terms as "the only way, short of tutorial, to provide individual students enough experience and feedback [1968b, p. 12]." Even more important, students receive feedback on drafts in process, not just after they have completed their final (or only) draft (cf. Beach, 1979), and in this respect the interactive processes of peer review are very much like those of a writing conference (Freedman, 1981). Peer review also broadens the kind of feedback that students receive, and substantial research shows that writers benefit from more than just teacher comments (Freedman and Sperling, 1985; Gere and Stevens, 1985; Hillocks, 1982). Furthermore, because teachers respond to student writing in several different roles (e.g.,

judge, evaluator, interested reader, copy editor; cf. Britton et al., 1975), they are not always as consistent as students' peers, who, when they say "I don't understand that," always mean exactly that (Freedman and Sperling, 1984).

Immediate feedback, of course, is a sound pedagogical principle. But in light of recent research into discourse production, the composing process, and classroom context, what can we now say about the nature of this feedback in terms of the composing process itself? Exactly how does peer editing impact upon the composing process? And what sorts of classroom activities foster its development?

WHAT SPECIFIC EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT INTENSIVE PEER REVIEW IS EFFECTIVE?

The studies reported here were undertaken in order to examine the effectiveness of intensive peer review in college freshman writing instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In order to see how writing develops in studio and nonstudio classes, many writing samples were collected. These writing samples included argumentative and personal essays, as well as each writer's characterization of her or his writing process. These writing samples were examined not only for writing quality but also for insight into the ideas about writing which students develop in their work with peers. In order to consider the effects of group work, several groups of writers in studio settings were videotaped. Altogether, this study examined 250 essays, videotaped five groups twice each (10 hours total), and compiled 411 composing process profiles—data representing the work of 250 students in 13 classes over a period of 3 years. None of the students in this study was required to take the course involved in these studies, and while no one was therefore a remedial student, very few if any were truly outstanding writers. The average College Qualifying Test (Verbal) score was 42.14; these were average college freshmen.

Results: Writing Sample

One of the writing tasks that students in all classes completed as part of this research was a personal essay, both at the beginning and end of the term. All students wrote about some important personal experience and explained its significance. These writing samples were evaluated using the Britton et al. (1975) scale of "transactional-informative" (i.e., expository) prose. For Britton, writing is largely an interpretive activity, and the development of writing ability is the increasing power to conceptualize experience and render the results in clear, explicit prose. The lower levels of development,

Britton contends, consist of **recording** and **reporting**; the middle levels involve **drawing inferences** and **generalizing**; and the highest level involves **theorizing**, speculating explicitly about one's inferences and generalizations. Britton derives his categories from a theoretical conception of writing ability inspired generally by Piaget's ideas on cognitive development and expressed in slightly different terms by James Moffett in his work at Harvard in the late 1960s.

Based on this conception of writing ability, there were no significant differences among the personal essays written by studio and nonstudio students assessed at the start of the term [one-way ANOVA, post hoc: $F(1, 119) = .079; p > .05$]. By the end of the term, however, the studio students were significantly ahead of their nonstudio counterparts [one-way ANOVA, post hoc $F(1, 119) = 3.018; p = .0023$]. The mean writing ability scores for the two groups at the end of the term were 2.2 for nonstudio and 2.7 for studio writers; 2 on this scale indicates **report**, and 3 indicates **generalization**.

These results were also examined as "gain" against placement and ability test scores. This was done by performing two analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) involving UW English Placement Test (EPT) and College Qualifying Test/Verbal (CQT) scores, respectively, as the two covariates after a separate analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that there were no significant differences among classes on either variable [on the EPT, $F(6, 167) = 1.02; p = .42$; on the CQT, $F(6, 165) = .72; p = 1.00$]. Both the analyses of covariance and the analysis of variance showed positive results. In terms of both the EPT and CQT, studio students made significantly more progress in the development of their writing abilities [on the EPT, $F(1, 107) = 8.62; p < .0001$; on the CQT, $F = 2.26; p = .0044$].

Results: Premises about Writing

Part of the reason studio students made significantly more progress than their counterparts in learning the art and skill of exposition is related to key differences in how the two groups of students learned to revise. Each student was asked to write for 20 minutes about how he or she generally writes, and then these writing samples (which averaged more than 200 words each) were analyzed by two independent readers for what students said about revision and several other things (see "Composing Process Profile" form, Table 8.1). Overall interrater reliability, computed as a Pearson product-moment correlation, was $r = .829 [F(1, 226) = 583.5; p < .0001]$. This analysis showed that, over the course of the semester, *nonstudio students came increasingly to see revision as a matter of*

TABLE 8.1
Composing Process Profile

Read each of the enclosed writing samples on "How I generally write," and rate the writer according to the following categories.

- To what extent is the writer's characterization of his or her composing process *stylized and undetailed* or *personalized and richly detailed*? (Circle one)

1	2	3	4	5	6
stylized	←————— average —————→				personalized
- To what extent is the composing process described as a *recipe-like linear process* ("First I think, then I write, and then—sometimes—I change a few things before I hand it in") or an *unpredictable process of improvisation and experimentation*?

1	2	3	4	5	6
linear	←————— average —————→				improvised
- How much emphasis is there on *prewriting* (gathering thoughts even if this involves writing, e.g., brainstorming, jotting down notes, outlining, etc)?

1	2	3	4	5	6
NONE			SOME		A LOT
- How much emphasis is there on *revising as editing*?

1	2	3	4	5	6
NONE			SOME		A LOT
- How much emphasis is there on *revising as reconceptualization*?

1	2	3	4	5	6
NONE			SOME		A LOT
- To what extent is the reader viewed as a judge?

1	2	3	4	5	6
NONE			SOME		A LOT
- To what extent is the reader viewed as a collaborator?

1	2	3	4	5	6
NONE			SOME		A LOT
- How much does the writer say that *topic* affects his/her writing process?

1	2	3	4	5	6
NONE			SOME		A LOT
- At what level of generality is this description of the writing process organized?

1	2	3	4	5	6
simple report			generalized narrative		lo-level analogic
- To what extent are the writer's attitudes toward writing positive?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very negative			positive		very positive

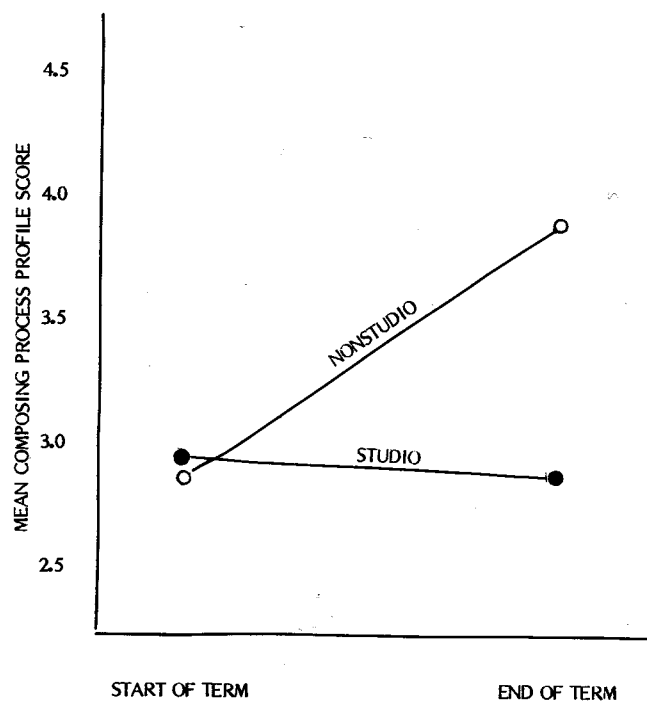


Figure 8.1. Revision as editing.

editing whereas studio students increasingly treated it as a matter of "reconceptualization." Both these changes were statistically significant.

Data from these composing process profiles were then analyzed in two one-way multivariate analyses of variance, one at the start of the term and another at the end. These analyses showed striking contrasts between the studio and nonstudio classes at these two points in time. Specifically, we see that how these students learned to write was significantly related to how they viewed their readers. We gain some insight into this especially as we examine students' ideas of revision. To the extent that these writers viewed their readers as judges, for example, they saw revision increasingly as a matter of editing and tidying up texts [$r = .23$; $F(1, 113) = 6.586$; $p = .01$], and their focus was mainly on lexical and syntactical concerns. The studio sections stand in sharp contrast to the nonstudio sections in this respect. Whereas nonstudio students increasingly treated revision as a matter of editing [start of term: no significant difference; end of term: $F(1, 105) = 15.986$; $p < .001$; see Figure 8.1], studio students increasingly viewed their readers less as judges of their writing and more as collaborators in a process of communication [start of the term: no significant

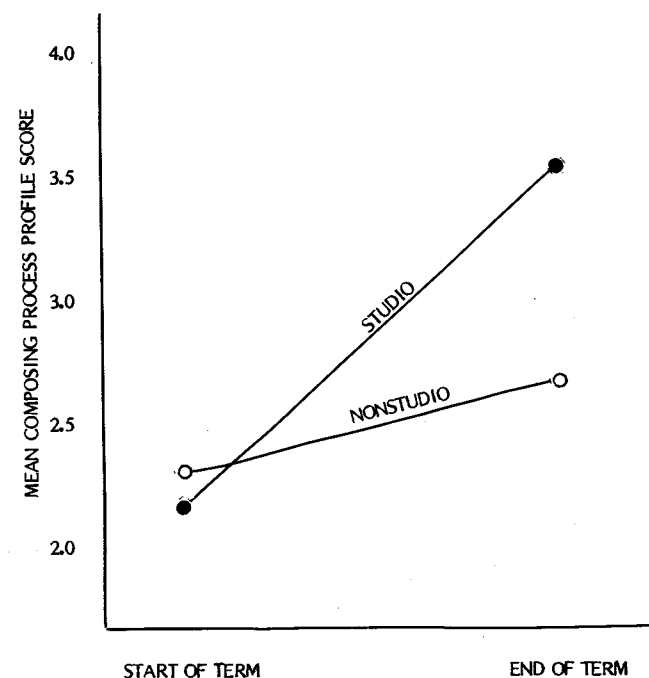


Figure 8.2. Reader as collaborator.

difference; end of term: $F(1, 105) = 7.55$; $p < .007$; see Figure 8.2] and increasingly treated revision as a matter of reconceptualization [start of term: no significant difference; end of term $F(1, 105) = 4.931$; $p = .029$; see Figure 8.3]. Over the course of the term, studio students increasingly saw their texts not as something to be judged (along with them) but rather as the functional means and their best chance for balancing their own purposes as writers with the expectations of their readers. Finally, we see that studio students' attitudes about writing became increasingly more positive [start of term: no significant difference; end of term: $F(1, 105) = 3.465$; $p = .065$; see Figure 8.4].

One college student explains the effects of peer review as follows:

Personally, peer editing has been a success because it suspends any judgement regarding the essay. For example, there is no authority figure in the group who is assigning grades. This relieves a tremendous amount of pressure on me when I write an essay ... because I know that the piece doesn't have to be perfect. I know that I can submit a very rough draft for my group to review and that they'll take it from there. Furthermore, there is no pressure to succeed in my group but rather a genuine desire to do so. In other words, the group is there for my benefit, not my benevolence. This results in a more relaxed attitude towards my writing because

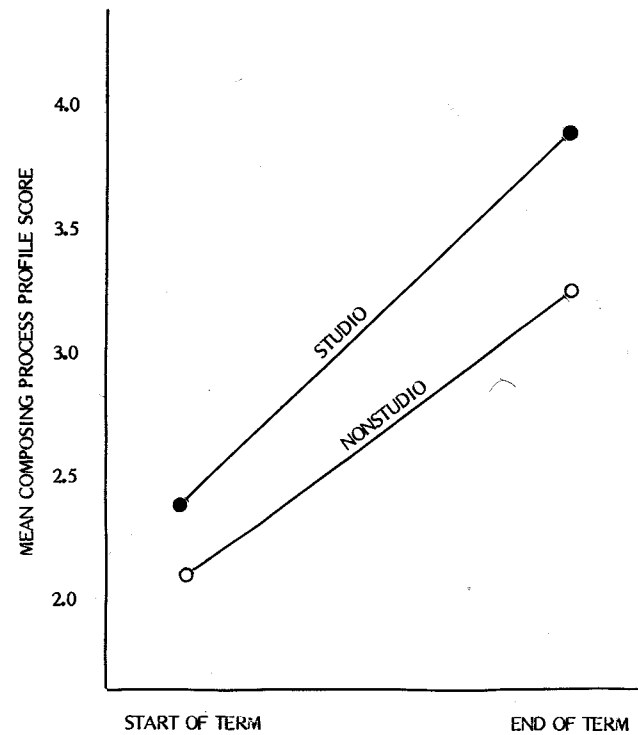


Figure 8.3. Revision as reconceptualization.

I'm not wondering what grade I received on the paper. Rather I am able to concentrate on the piece itself.

In addition, the group has no expectations of a student's writing. The paper does not have to be five pages long, typed and double-spaced in perfect grammatical form. In other words, arbitrary requirements are disregarded. Still, the outstanding advantage of suspending judgment . . . is that the group helps the student see his paper more objectively. They aren't giving out grades and so their suggestions relate to the very core of the essay itself (Alling, personal communication).

Gere and Stevens (1985) come to a similar conclusion. They cogently argue that group response is aimed at "an actual text, one which communicates the meaning students find inherent in the text presented" whereas teacher response is more concerned with "an ideal text, one which possesses certain abstract features of writing quite independently of any meaning. . . [W]riting groups unconsciously assume that the purpose of writing is rhetorical, that it is meant to have some influence or effect on a reader," whereas "the teacher assumes that the purpose of the writing is pedagogical, that it is an exercise meant to train the student in the use of certain

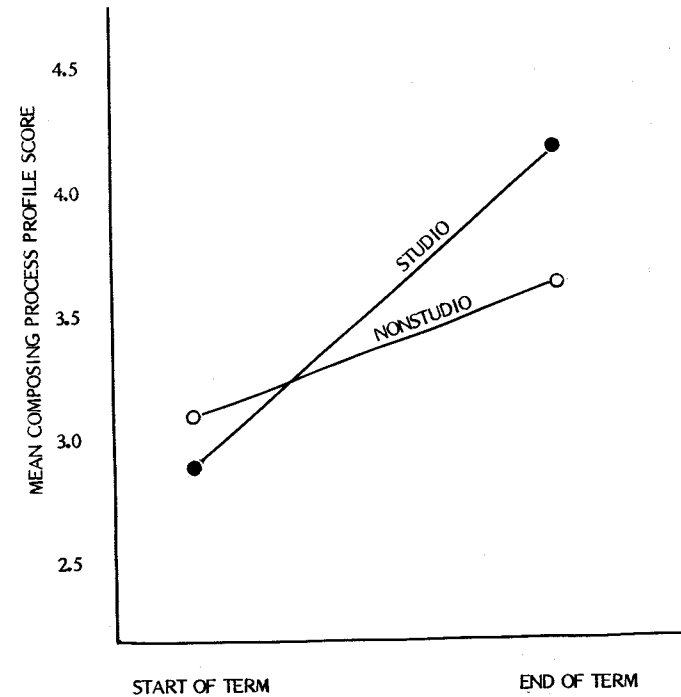


Figure 8.4. Positive attitudes toward writing.

rhetorical forms [p. 103]." Largely as a consequence of this difference in textual orientation, groups tend to deal with errors more functionally than instructors: Groups more consistently than teachers work with errors as evidence of what the writer is trying to say (Nystrand, 1982b; Shaughnessy, 1977).

Composing process research has focused almost exclusively and perhaps necessarily on the writer writing—the solitary situation of the individual confronting (and confronted by) his or her thoughts and a sheet of paper. It is a very lonely situation, no doubt a fundamental fact of the writer's situation. Good writers do indeed, as Flower and Hayes (1981) point out, work more fundamentally and substantially than novice writers at the level of purpose; specifically they plan more. To understand why this should be so, however, requires that looking beyond the individual writer to the context in which he or she learns to write. Then we understand that good writers are good not simply *because* they plan more; rather good writers plan more *because they have grappled more extensively with the demands that are made on writers when they write for authentic purposes with actual readers*. Our study of intensive peer review demonstrates that

classroom context—when its inherent diversity is exploited by intensive peer review—can be an important factor in the process of learning to write. This context offers, indeed it defines an invaluable rhetorical situation in which writers can both heighten their awareness of the possibilities of written text and test their capabilities in addressing readers.

Results: Talk about Writing

To gain some understanding of the kind of talk that goes on when students write for each other and discuss this writing intensively, five groups were videotaped over the course of a semester, each group once near the start of the term and once toward the end.

Generally we find that some writing studio students are initially anxious about the prospect of learning anything from other studio students. (Indeed, some instructors have similar anxieties and wonder how their students will learn if they don't conspicuously "teach.") Many students are initially awkward about their roles in the groups. Some are too polite and superficial in their readings of each other's papers. Others are just the opposite and assume a rather schoolmarmish posture, referring to handbooks and dictionaries as a kind of martial law. In their responses to other students' papers, these students seldom go beyond considerations of spelling, punctuation, and usage. And they don't really interact much either. Instead they recite their suggestions for copy editing and go on to the next paper.

By contrast, the groups that work have extended discussions of substantial issues. They may note spelling and punctuation problems, but they mainly note them in passing on to larger considerations of the writer's purpose, organization, rhetorical effect, and adequate development. They are rigorous and direct in their comments, and the other members of these groups regard such comments as constructive criticism and seriously consider them when revising. When observed at work, these groups have the appearance and character of a busy newsroom.

Effective groups work by collectively examining written texts rather than by merely listening to oral readings by authors. That is to say, some groups proceed by listening to authors read their papers aloud whereas other groups proceed by collectively reading photocopies of the texts which the authors bring to class. This difference between groups listening and groups reading is fundamental to how groups respond to the texts so read. There is an apparent relationship between visually examining (i.e., reading) written texts on the one hand and considering higher order writing problems (such as structure of argument, presentation of arguments, paragraph development, etc.) on the other hand. By contrast, there seems

to be another relationship between listening to oral readings of written texts on the one hand and considering lower order writing problems (e.g., word choice, usage, and phrasing) on the other hand. In short, groups that proceed by listening rather than by reading rarely go beyond sentence-level concerns.

This distinction between oral and written language processes is similar to one made in some developmental research between monitoring production by sight versus sound (e.g., checking spellings by examining the way words *look* rather than listening to how they *sound*). In particular, the use of visual comprehension strategies seems to correlate generally with insights into the possibilities and workings of written text—especially those idiosyncratic features of written language that have no direct equivalents or analogs in the spoken language (including homonym distinctions; most punctuation; quotation marks; upper- and lowercase distinctions; conventions of paragraphing; spelling patterns and other morphophonemic regularities; and certain genres of discourse that do not exist in speech, e.g., essays). It is not surprising, then, that studio groups consider different kinds of issues about writing depending on whether they proceed by listening or by reading.

Groups differ significantly in how they deal with writing problems. Some groups seek to identify a single, general problem ("You need to be more specific"; "Your focus isn't clear") and consider their tasks complete when they have identified one such problem in summary fashion. The problem is only labeled; it is not discussed in terms of particular parts of text. A curious variation of this same procedure is considering an author's points out of context (as from an outline); the validity of the points is weighed, but their presentation is treated superficially if at all. Other groups are more specific about problems (e.g., "You need to give more examples") but still do not actually examine the troublesources in any detail. Yet other groups are not only specific about key problems but also actually work through revisions in some detail.

ANALYSIS OF TALK IN WRITING GROUPS

We now consider this process in more detail by analyzing two discussions of college freshmen about papers they have written. The first is instructive because of the range of text issues—including genre, topic, and comment—that are implicated by the talk. The second is useful because it clarifies the role of such talk in the revision process. By examining these discussions closely, we get a clear sense of how students can learn to write by talking about their writing.

In the first discussion, students discuss the draft of a paper arguing that the newsmedia too often put profits ahead of information. The author develops her thesis partly by relating a conversation she overheard on the bus one day. The group spends considerable time debating whether such personal narrative is appropriate to the intended character of the piece as a critical essay. Consequently the discussion deals not only with the writer's purpose and thesis but also with the group's ideas of a critical essay.

Here is the original draft of the paper discussed:

[NO TITLE]

"The NBC Nightly News", "The Capital Times", "WIBA-AM" and other TV, newspaper and radio stations are constantly competing to get the highest ratings on the largest circulation: Making the news eye-catching can be difficult. Not many people will be alarmed by the invasion of a tiny island, but if the media slants the story or introduces theories that the attack could be a threat to our nation more people will be concerned. The station and papers that are able to catch the audiences attention the best will attract advertisers and advertisers bring money into the market. The media is a very competitive business, and because it is so competitive we need to be very careful about what we will believe as 100% truth.

It is very difficult for us to distinguish between what is true and what isn't. For example the average American is not an economist who can detect when a table or graph has been drawn to accent or hide the current rate of inflation. If the graph just shows how much the price of a candy bar has gone up in the last 20 years of course it will look awful. A rise from 5¢ to 40¢ is a 35¢ could make a graph look terribly depressing. In order to come up with the real increase in cost the graph would need to allow for the increase in wages over the last 20 years. Not everyone would catch the fact that this very important component was left out and they would be astonished at the 800% increase.

One day on the way to school I overheard a conversation that gave a perfect example of a medium slanting a story. A man on the bus was telling another about an interview which led to a story written by a Madison newspaper reporter. The man is a foreign student who is here to earn a degree and then return to his country with his education. His country is supporting him while he is here. The reporter was interviewing the student to find out how he felt about the support that he was receiving from the government in his country. The man explained that he had enough money, but that he didn't receive as much as some of the other students from his country, who were also being supported by the government. The money was given to the students according to need. The paper left out this very important part and made the man's government sound unfair. By carefully choosing which questions and answers to print the paper changed the meaning of the entire story. More people were probably attracted by the idea of another country treating its people poorly, than would have been attracted if the country was fair to its people. Interesting stories attract and retain readers, readers attract advertisers, and advertisers bring money and profit to the paper.

Most people trust the media and rely on it for information. Our opinions about issues are formed largely by the information we receive from the media. We can not all be experts in every area, so we need to turn to some other sources for information. We all need to be aware of the fact that these other forms of

information may be trying to excite us in order to hold our attention. We should not believe everything that the media gives us. We need to use our own instincts to realize when a story sounds a little too dramatic in order to keep a realistic picture of the world.

Part I: Genre

The discussion begins by focusing on the third paragraph. The issue is whether or not the author's reference to a conversation she overheard "one day on the way to school" is too personal a subject for a critical essay about the media slanting of the news. Jean and Tom advise the author to "detach it more," "make it general"—not too "close." There is considerable discussion about what "you can and can't do in 'this sort of paper.'" For example, you can't write about "something that I overheard." The group evaluates examples and presentations that are appropriate to this sort of a text, and in so doing they sort out genre-level concerns. Whereas it was okay for Jean to use personal experience in her personal narrative on high school band, it is not okay for the author to include such examples in her critical essay on media slanting of news; this is not that sort of paper.

Tom. That was really—I—I enjoyed the first paragraph really good. I thought it—um—"slant"—"slant" was a good word—"slant their stories"—um—stuff like that—um—

Jean. Um—this one right here on the second page it says "one day on the way to school"—I think that's too related to you—It's—you gotta detach it more.

Tom. Yeah—Make it—make it general.

Jean. Should I do that on my paper too?

Rick. You can't do that on your paper.

Jean. Maybe my whole paper just stinks.

Rick. No, just 'cause you have personal experience in it doesn't mean it stinks. I don't—*your* paper was about band. When you document—you know—you can't use documented proof on something like that.

Jean. So I have to use my own—right.

Rick. Well, unless you know of something—

Jean. 'Cause when she was reading that through I noticed it on hers and then I thought it's the same on—as mi—mine—like—

Rick. But hers—hers is a paper where she could get—you know?—examples and stories that didn't *have* to deal with her.

Tom. Yeah. I think that would end up—you have to—

These issues about genre lead directly to issues about text. For example, the group discusses whether or not it's okay to use "I" in this sort of text.

Then Jean recommends that the author delete reference to the author's bus ride because "it doesn't have anything to do with the story." And the group debates whether or not reference to Madison is appropriate i.e., whether or not reference to a local setting is consistent with a more universal theme; they conclude it's okay.

Rick. That's why I think that you—it—it—

Jean. You just have to change the phrasing a little bit.

[Author]. How about if I just started out "I heard a conversation that gave a perfect example of the media slanting a story"?

Jean. That's still—I think it's still too close.

Tom. Yeah.

Rick. But if she doesn't do that she's gonna have to like say where—where she got this information from—That's what I—I kinda want to know about this.

Jean. What is the bus? What does the bus have to do with it maybe? Take the bus out too—

Rick. That's where—where she heard it

[Author]. Yeah

Jean. Right. But that doesn't have anything to do with the story.

Tom. No. It doesn't.

[Author]. Okay

Jean. And that's kind of—

[Author]. How could I—how could I introduce the story into the paper so that it didn't sound like something—that—something that I'm just making up?

Jean. Okay.

Tom. Does anybody have that one paper on—um—

Jean. How 'bout for—for instance—um—

Rick. Mention the conversation a little bit.

Jean. "I overheard a man explaining to a man—about something—" okay?—I don't even know if you have to use "I"—in this paper, do you?

The author quickly sees the dilemma created by this suggestion: If she omits reference to herself and recasts her experience on the bus in more general terms, it may not be clear that she is in fact relating a true story. On the one hand, her "I" potentially marks a too personal and perhaps insufficiently "critical" text; on the other hand, the omission of "I" possibly marks a fiction. As the group works through this problem, we see clearly how some solutions to rhetorical problems do themselves create new problems by taking the text in new and unexpected directions. Through a process of trial and error, then, the group benefits not merely by finding acceptable revisions for problem passages but also and especially by

evaluating possible revisions, even if many possibilities do in the end prove inadequate.

In this discussion, the author learns that she needs to establish clearly that this is not just a story she has made up—that it is in fact true. The group acknowledges this problem but wants her to do more than acknowledge its truth; they want her to depersonalize and generalize it.

Rick. No. But if she doesn't do that [mention "I"] then—like the reader's gonna question where this information came from. You know. It doesn't say at all where the information came from.

[Author]. If it was a paper I wouldn't—if I read it in a newspaper or something, I wouldn't—if I read it in a newspaper or something, I wouldn't have to say, "I read it in a newspaper." I would just say, "The newspaper said—"

Rick. Oh, yeah—like—like the *Daily Cardinal* said or the—

Jean. Yeah.

Rick. Otherwise she's not stating her source of information. I—I—think—

Tom and Jean then propose that the author start with a fictitious headline ("Immigrant gets half of what everyone else . . ."), depersonalizing and generalizing everything in a single stroke. But is it fair to make things up in exposition, i.e., in writing that is supposed to tell the truth? The author says she feels uncomfortable "slanting" her piece too much. The author says it's okay to "make things up as long as they're real" and suggests that she factually report a newspaper article that she has learned about only indirectly. After much discussion, the author and her group agree that "you don't have to mention the two people [whom the author overheard on the bus] and yourself. You can just mention this man and his problem," which the author will use as a good example of her more general thesis that the news media sometimes seriously distort the news in order to sell the news and stay on top of the ratings.

Jean. Why don't you start it backwards? Why don't you say—you can make up things as long as they're real, right?

Tom. You can make stuff up.

Jean. Start like—um—start like reading the headline, you saw in the paper—and then—

[Author]. But I didn't read the paper. But I didn't see the article.

Jean. But that's not—you don't have to say that.

Tom. No. You can say you read this article and then—

Jean. And then—

[Author]. And then, what?

Tom. Later—later—the person

Jean. Later—er—later heard—er—an editorial reacted to this—by interview or you—you heard it on interview on television—that would be changing a—

Tom. Isn't it *Absence of Malice* that did this?

Jean. Wouldn't that work though? I mean, wouldn't that get your attention if you started with the headline—um—"Immigrant Gets Half of What Everyone Else"—or something—er—

Rick. No, but that—you're talking about—you're—

Jean. You're not slanting the story too much

[Author]. I know—but then—I'm slanting it

Rick. What?

[Author]. Yeah. Right. But then I'm really slanting it.

Rick. She's—she's using this as a source of evidence—I think when you start screwing around with evidence—

[Author]. I want to keep it clean.

Rick. —on our personal papers it was okay to lie 'cause how would anybody tell us otherwise?

Tom. Yeah.

Jean. Well, you didn't get to see the article, right? Was it a news interview, or was it an article?

[Author]. It was an article, but—you know—you have to interview a person before you write an article. The person interviewed—

Jean. You just have to tell it—

Tom. She's just telling it in a certain way.

Jean. You just have to tell it—backwards—and then go back somehow—you know—tell what the news article said and then go back and show how it was wrong

Tom. Like did you see *Absence of Malice*?

[Author]. I saw part of it and then we walked out.

Tom. Well, there was—it's part of—just—the lady wrote up a story—and then you can just—there was an editorial that—you know—she had to reclaim everything—that—'cause there was just lies—you know—and that's the same thing, you know—you can say it was like—"I read in the paper one day—they reclaimed it and said it was wrong. And that's what you can—I dunno—bring—

[Author]. I just don't know if I want to lie that much because this is true—

Rick. Yeah.

[Author]. You know, and I'm trying to—to use it to back up what I'm saying so that—

Jean. Well, it is true. Just switch—just say the article—you don't have to

say very much about the article, you just have to say what you told us already—and then at the—after you're done describing the article

Rick. Or maybe not even say that—mention an incident—"there was a man, you know"—

[Author]. There was a man who said this? Okay, okay. Yeah. I don't have to—I see what you mean.

Jean. What are—what are you saying?

Rick. Just like when you start. Just say—just say for example, one incident when a man—you know—an incident occur—you know—

Tom. Yeah, you don't—

Jean. You don't have to mention the two people and yourself. You can just mention this man

Tom. Yeah. And you don't have to—Yeah. You—mention the problem. I think it'll be a lot shorter, but leave out "like Madison" or something maybe? No, that's not—

Tom. "Madison"'s okay.

Rick proceeds to suggest a thesis—that "these sources of media are more like businesses rather than—and actually less like news sources." But what is interesting here is not just Rick's clarification of the thesis. The group immediately picks up on this suggestion in terms of its potential for clarifying the genre: "I could say 'business' up at the top too—maybe to get the idea rolling a little bit." By stating this idea explicitly at the start of the paper, the author will clearly establish that this paper is not about her ride on the bus but rather about the character of the news media as businesses.

Jean. I like this—this—I like the part about "a perfect example of a medium slanting a story." I don't—maybe that—

Tom. No. That's good

[Author]. Where? Oh—"gave a perfect example of a medium slanting a story"—

Jean. Well, you can use that. You just have to rephr—put in a different sentence.—okay

Tom. Um—Maybe you can say "the story goes as such . . ." and you can tell them where they slanted it—even though you didn't read the story, you know—you know what went on in it because—you heard—you heard the guy talking about it.

Rick. You might want to bring into the paper—maybe you could persuade us—that us—that's just a general idea. Maybe you can just try and persuade us that—uh—these—these sources of media are—you know—like—that paper that we saw in that videotape? It said like the football teams that were just like businesses.

[Author]. Yeah.

Rick. Well, maybe you could state—stress more that like these sources of media are more like businesses rather than—and actually less like sources of information

[Author]. Yeah. Okay. I tried to do that down at the bottom but I could say it maybe—

Jean. What's the medium?

[Author]. I said the medium [is] a very competitive business but I could say "business" up at the top too—maybe to get the idea rolling a little bit.

Tom. Yeah. Foreshadow and stuff.

Part II. Topic and Comment: Thesis

The group moves now directly to the author's thesis having to do with the business nature of the news media. Jean begins by noting ambiguity in the author's treatment of the topic ("the 'business' word didn't catch my eye"), and the group then proposes and discusses several possible revisions designed to resolve this misconstraint—potential elaborations explicitly stating the author's idea that the newsmedia put business before information.

They also move to strike the author's reference to the U.S. invasion of Grenada in the second sentence of the first paragraph. This inappropriate elaboration not only contributes nothing to the thesis but is actually misleading by suggesting a direction to the paper which the author never follows up. As such, it violates the *elaboration construction corollary*, which prohibits constructions that complicate rather than clarify and thereby threatens rather than maintains reciprocity. Clearly, the first paragraph will be tightened by (a) eliminating potentially spurious interpretations prompted by reference to the Grenadian invasion and (b) buttressing the text at the level of comment by stressing the profit motive of the newsmedia. As we noted in Chapter 3, the writer gets the reader off and running by setting the text in one particular direction rather than another, loading the communication in favor of certain possibilities and interpretive contexts rather than others.

Jean. Um—what is—what is—what are you trying to show us?

[Author]. What do you think I'm trying to show you?

Jean. I didn't see—I didn't—the "business" word didn't catch my mind [*identifies troublesource*]

Rick. See, I think you could make that a lot stronger and strengthen the paper at the same time

Jean. And—all I got was for you to tell people to look closer [*notes insufficient elaboration*].

[Author]. That's—what I was trying to persuade you

Rick. But maybe that would be more obvious if you said like—if you said "Media are . . . businesses and not necessarily—" [*potential elaboration*].

Tom. —"trying to sell a product" [*potential elaboration*].

Rick. "when they're going to sensationalize the story maybe in order to catch the reader's eye or the viewer's eye in order to retain more viewers for the advertising."

Tom. Is that a government public service?

Rick. You touched on—you touched on it—you didn't—I don't think you went into it deep enough that—it was a major point in your paper [*potential elaboration*].

Tom. It sounded like a government public service where they just give you blah-blah-blah the facts.

Rick. Yeah.

Tom. They were boring.

Rick. You were going—I think that you were going sometimes—

[Author]. Okay. I think maybe how 'bout if I—if I cross out this whole thing about the tiny island and stick something else in there. That's kinda—[*identifies inappropriate elaboration: violates elaboration construction corollary*].

Tom. That could help too—that could happen—you know—

[Author]. That didn't really support very much there—that example right away—

Jean. —but that—is that—that's giving personal opinion, you know—you might be alarmed, but a lot of people, you know—

[Author]. Okay—right.

Jean. But to tell you the truth, I don't think a lot of people would be alarmed—if they heard today that some small island was attacked—there's so much other stuff going on that they wouldn't really care.

Rick. No. Madison would—would take offense to any—

Tom. They jump on anyone. They jump on anything. But no I was—

Jean. But what I'm saying is I think she's right. I think this can be edited back into the paper somewhere else.

Tom. But all right, you're offering a different opinion that doesn't fit in the rest of the paper. Right? You don't really give a lot of—

Jean. In your intro you shouldn't really give examples more than you should just state facts.

[Author]. Maybe if I just cross it out, the whole thing would be better—you know—[*reads proposed revision*]: "Making the news eye-catching can be difficult. The station and the papers that are able to catch the audience's attention best will attract advertisers, and advertisers bring

money into the market. The media's a very competitive business and because it is—"

Eliminating reference to Grenada will tighten the paper but possibly create another problem: Will the paper be too short to satisfy the instructor's requirement? This problem, of course, is wholly pedagogical and entirely unrhretorical in nature. Fortunately the group quickly returns to more essential problems of text and spends little time discussing it.

Jean. You know what you're doing? You're gonna shorten your paper a lot—not only taking this out but taking out what we said before. So you're gonna have to lengthen it.

[Author]. Well, I don't care. Maybe I could add—well . . .

Jean. Persuade it.

Rick. I think you can add a lot—when you—

[Author]. I'm not real worried about the length too much because—I dunno—one of those ones that he have us he gave the person an "A" and it only had three pages.

Tom. Yeah, I—uh—yeah—you could add a lot to it too.

Rick. You've got a great paper, and if it's only two and a half pages and—and it would be—it would be senseless to—to lengthen the paper and have it suffer in the end and I think—I—I—I always—if I didn't have enough to write about I would stop way—way short of the deadline if I thought that going on with it would ruin the paper.

Tom. I wouldn't. I'd keep writing so I'd have enough.

Rick. But right here—

Tom. Quantity not quality.

Rick. When you say—you know—maybe you could say it more obviously. In order to keep more viewers they're gonna slant—you know—slant the story or sensationalize it or in—in another situation—like—let's say—well, you could bring in politics—you know—I mean—like—like when you're bringing up this economic thing—I give up—like maybe if you were in a state that was—you know, the majority was Democratic—you're not gonna—you're gonna slant the story—before—to make like the President look bad.

[Author]. You mean so like if it—like if it's kind of a Democratic newspaper or something then they're gonna slant the story to make it seem—

Rick. Well, you know, some states are more—more Democratic or strongly like that they wouldn't probably—like you could find an example of them using a table like this against making—or some public—

[Author]. The thing is that I couldn't find any examples.

Jean. You couldn't find any examples? Hah, hah, hah.

Rick. You know what you might wanna do? Ask—

[Author]. So I didn't really want to say anything about them—

Rick. Ask Prof. Xxx. Say you're writing a paper—

Jean. Well, are you real up on Democratic views—are you real up on Democratic and Republican views 'cause you can read a paper and tell—

[Author]. Yeah.

Rick. You know that it—

Tom. Yeah. That thing on economics in there—

[Author]. If you were in like—maybe a—a state that was mostly Democratic, you're not gonna—I think most newspapers aren't gonna write—something that's gonna make the Republican Party look better. Like they're gonna try and take facts and distort them and make the Republican Party look worse—er—the President look worse—er—the President look worse or whatever—

Tom. Yeah. Maybe you can say something to the elections coming up how they really distort—you know, the elections 'cause they can change a lot of people's opinions—when they go and vote.

Rick. Facts and figures can kind of be twisted around.

Tom. Yeah. And then like—during the election they have all those things like—they—they have what's-his-name out in front—Mondale out in front of Hart out in front or, you know—that's gonna change a lot of people's opinions like especially like during the stupid primaries.

Rick. Yeah. That's a good point, though, 'cause like most of those medias, ours are, you know, they're supported by advertisements. For that you need viewers and so you gotta kinda—

Jean. Did you see that arti—did you see that commercial about—um—this just comes to mind—about that girl who's riding the bike and says all those Democratic ideas aren't so new?

[Author]. Yeah, yeah.

Tom. Yeah, yeah. They go "Of course"

Jean. "Vote Republican."

Tom. Yeah—that's a nasty commercial paper.

Jean. Don't you think that's kind of slanting?

[Author]. Well, no. That's advertising—I don't really want to get into advertising. I want to get into news more because everybody kinda knows that advertisers are gonna try to—you know—

Rick. Well, advertising has to have—I think we expect it out of advertisers and I think they should have the right—they're—they're paying their own way in advertising and they—they did pay for that commercial, you know. It's their time to express their view, but—the news is like something that I think that people have always depended on—for—

[Author]. Straightforward facts—

Rick. Straightforward information—and like if it doesn't come that way, I still think people believe it.

[Author]. Yeah. That's—That's kinda what I said, you know. It's hard for us to distinguish between what's true and what isn't. Because, I mean, you really don't know much about important things than—things we read and hear on the radio. Nobody knows Reagan personally to know if—you know—he really feels this way—or—if this is—you know—the paper's just making it sound that way—or—just really what he's got being him.

Tom. I didn't read that in there. You know. Put that in there 'cause—you know—we're getting this—you know—only half the picture here and that's what most people—

Rick. Just brainstorm for awhile 'cause think if you can [get] more ideas about the paper to add on, I think you could make this a lot longer by putting in some of the stuff you just told us.

[Author]. So what did I just say?

Rick. You said like—well—bring up the example—like if you don't know a person personally for example, the President. If he's misquoted—you know—that can slip right by you.

Tom. Or if the story's slanted, you're gonna go “Oh I really like this guy.”

Jean. Remember that controversy about—uh—Jackson's saying something bad against Jews and he, of course, denied it right away—a media guy picked it up—but you couldn't use that to your benefit.

Rick. Well, how do you know he was quoted right?

Jean. Because later on he said he was quoted right and he—ah—he apologized. Didn't you hear that?

Tom. Well, I don't listen to Jackson anyway. He's a nerd.

Jean. Well, I don't listen to him either.

Tom. He just pulled a lucky one to get that guy out of whatever it was. Israel?

Jean. Yeah, right.

Tom. He just—

Jean. What? What did he do?

Tom. When he got that guy out.

Rick. Don't talk to me about the news. I haven't read a newspaper in—

Jean. I know. I haven't read a newspaper in so long—I never read the newspapers—frequently—like every other day or everyday or—it's too depressing.

Rick. —the presidential campaign. I'm not going to know about it.

Tom. I am—'cause I don't want to study. But anyway—

Jean. I listen to the news.

Tom. I've written about six letters in the last two days.

Rick. Look here—in your first paragraph where you do all that—I think you could be more clearcut and straightforward.

Tom. About—like maybe not—maybe say like just—a money making business—you know—because everything in a sense is a like a business, you know? Bring in the money, you know? Make 'em look greedy.

Jean suggests that the author might go on to discuss the ethics of editorial policies in the news media (“Do they or don't they have the right?”) and then notes that this “could be a whole new paper.” Once again, we see how the solution to one rhetorical problem prompts yet another problem as the text develops. This particular candidate for elaboration—the ethics of the news media—is bound by the *elaboration episode corollary*, which requires that substantially new text segments be marked as such.

Tom. Yeah. I liked the last paragraph.

Jean. Do you want to go into—if you don't have enough room—I don't know if this could be a whole paper that the media doesn't have a right—to—when—

Rick. Do they or don't they have the right, though? That could be a whole new paper.

Jean. I haven't even told you yet.

Tom. Well, they—

Jean. —to say—to say such things like they do—say things that they don't really know—you know? They don't have all the facts on?

[Author]. Yeah?

Rick. I know. But do they or don't they have the right?

Jean. Well, see, with freedom of speech they do, supposedly—but then again, somebody in a crowded theatre couldn't yell fire. You know, I mean—there's a fine line.

Tom. No, but—um—

Rick. That's almost—um—you could go into a whole 'nother paper than that.

Jean. Yeah—I suppose—

[Author]. That's awful—

Tom. But that's freedom of—that's freedom of speech.

Rick. No, I just think that maybe you should make the audience aware that it's a money-making business and that—because if she starts getting into that, she's gonna have to support that.

Tom. Oh, you didn't even—

Jean. Ratings—you could go into ratings.

Tom. Oh, you didn't even—

[Author]. Well, I did kinda, but not really, 'cause I said ratings—you know—because—uhm—advertisers were attacked too.

Jean. You mention that—you went—you went on the surface too much.

[Author]. Well, I did about three times.

Tom. You think there—well, wait a minute.

[Author]. I brou—I kinda brought it up about three times but—

Jean now notes an explanation that is too technical and therefore unhelpful to someone like Jean with only a nonexpert's understanding of economics. Other members of the group, namely those with a background in economics, are not troubled by this explanation, however, and for them it is not a troublesource. Here the nature of misconstraints—discrepancies between what the writer has to say and what the reader expects and needs to know—becomes clear. There is nothing categorical about misconstraints; they are defined entirely in terms of reader expectations. For this reason, Jean's problems provide useful feedback for the author and identify an important troublesource. Elaborations that threaten rather than maintain reciprocity violate the *elaboration construction corollary*.

Jean. Go into more of the money-making things. And I don't understand your example [*identifies troublesource*].

[Author]. Which one?

Jean. I'm—maybe I'm just—I mean, inflation—sure, looking at a graph that five cents that—that went up forty cents now and there's a thirty-five cents difference—also you have to fix that phrase.

[Author]. Yeah, right.

Jean. But I don't understand how that was wrong. I mean, I know it's gotta be wrong.

Rick. I think you gotta make that example real—real clearcut 'cause I understood it but that's 'cause I'm in the same econ class.

Tom. Yeah. I understood it too but—

Jean. I'm not in econ. It didn't make sense to me.

Rick. See, she's showing that—you're making this price—this price increase so dramatic, you know? But they haven't even considered that wages have increased as much or more, you know? If wages increase as much as—as the price does, there's virtually no effect, right?

Jean. But you gotta—

[Author]. Wages could have increased more than that—and then there would be a better deal to buy a candy bar than it would—

Rick. Yeah. Make it real clear cut—like state a couple of examples of wages and freeze, you know? As much—you—you know—there wouldn't be no change—[*potential elaboration*].

Jean. You know, you could—could bring something like—um—no, you couldn't. Forget it.

Then they consider asking their economics professor for examples:

Rick. You know, if you do have time, you might want to ask Prof. Xxx if he knows of any examples off-hand, you know, that would—

Jean. Ask who?

Rick. Our professor—he—he might—he brought this up—this—uh—point about inflation and stuff—how, you know, there's **real** and **nominal** and—if you don't use nominal, you're kind of—

Jean. "Real" and "nominal"—would not—the average person wouldn't know what you're saying [*identifies misconstraint*].

Rick. —doesn't give the whole picture really. . .

[Author]. That's right—so that's kind of my point too.

Jean. That's kind of my point too because *nominal*—you know—you could say that it's nominal and everybody would say "oh, yeah, ok"—it went up so much, and they'd just think it did and it was terrible, you know? But really, nominal—

Rick. But there are other factors if you consider more than wages.

[Author]. So that's—that's exactly my point. People don't understand everything that—they're—that they're being told, you know, and—

And so another rhetorical problem is identified and solved. It turns out, however, that the point of these examples, which introduces a distinction between real and nominal inflation, does itself potentially violate the *elaboration construction corollary*. That is, the proposed elaboration creates a potential troublesource and hence complicates things more than it clarifies. Finally Jean and Tom propose the solution of marking the point as an explanation:

Jean. State a sentence like that and the right afterwards say, "Do you know what this means?" and then go into it [*potential elaboration*].

Tom. Yeah—you can—tell—tell them that the news is taking advantage of them. You know, certain parts of our—our ignorance [*potential elaboration*].

The group concludes by briefly examining the conclusion and the title:

Jean. I liked your conclusion.

[Author]. Oh, that's good.

Tom. Yeah. I did.

[Author]. That's nice. Good. What?

Jean. Bring up the experts on—these areas.

[Author]. Yeah—how 'bout—uh—

Jean. Like something like this—"do the media assume we know more—

does the me—oh—here—like this how—does the media assume we know more or does it want purposely to delude us?"

Tom. Ooh—ooh—that's good. I like that one.

[Author]. I like that one too.

Jean. It just occurred to me.

Tom. "Delude" is a great word—oh, wow—

Jean. What are you going to name—what are you going to name this?

[Author]. Something—something that makes it sound like a business. I don't know yet, but—

Rick. "Fact or Fiction"—

Jean. Ha, ha, ha, ha—

Rick. Sorry.

Tom. "Service or Profit"?—"Provid—Providing a Service or Making a Profit"?

[Author]. That's kinda good.

Tom. I don't know.

Jean. Why—why can't you think of a title for *my* paper?

Rick. "Business as Usual"

Jean. Ha, ha, ha, ha.

[Author]. "Business as Usual"?

Jean. Should I just drop that paper? I still think I should.

Tom. No—no, that paper—you can make something of it.

Jean. What—what did you say?

Rick. I—think "Business as Usual" is quite good, you know?—

Jean. Or come up with one of your own—as usual.

[Author]. But I don't know—what—what did you say?

Tom. "Service or Profit"

Jean. You guys gotta come up with one for me now.

We clearly see in this discussion the process of negotiation whereby the writer shapes her text by balancing her own needs for expression with the expectations and needs of her readers for comprehension. In focusing primarily on their own problems in understanding the text, the readers provide essential feedback to the writer on just which points need attention and just which revisions might help. Many of these suggestions are in the final analysis inappropriate, but it seems clear that much learning, for both the writer and the readers, results from proposing and evaluating these revisions even if, in the end, they are not quite right. In effect, each such revision is a **text hypothesis**, which the writer tests with the group. It is worth noting, furthermore, that many potential revisions turn out to be inappropriate not because they fail to address the problems that prompted

their consideration in the first place but rather because they raise new problems. In other words, elaborations do not just address trouble spots; they can also create them.

At several points in the discussion, we see that members of the group allude to other texts. For example, one person continuously compares her own paper (on marching bands) to the paper under discussion. There are allusions to articles in the *Daily Cardinal* (a student newspaper) and also to the film *Absence of Malice*. At one point, someone mentions previous personal essays written by the whole class, and in another section, someone alludes to the videotaped discussion of a paper written in another class.

There are also several points in the discussion which seem tangential to the actual text in question. For a little while the group talks about President Reagan and then the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and it is not altogether clear that this talk is functional in terms of the rhetorical problems the group ultimately addresses. It seems entirely possible, however, that these allusions help the group think through essential issues mainly by providing foils to the text under consideration. For example, the group decides it's okay to slant advertising (as in the Reagan campaign ads) but not the author's paper, which is not advertising; it's okay to recount "conversations overheard on a bus one day on the way to school" in a personal essay though the same topic can present a problem in a critical essay; and so on and so forth. As with all conversation, there is an ebb and flow to this talk, and while it is not altogether clear whether or not this ebbing is essential or peripheral to the flow, it seems entirely plausible that its function here is to provide the group an opportunity for reflection and free association which is essential for significant problem solving.

We now consider this process by analyzing the talk of another group in which students discuss the draft of a paper arguing that people who frequent bars are "fake." By examining this discussion closely and especially relating the subsequent changes the author makes in his paper, we get a clear sense of how group talk about writing works its way into the author's revision.

Here is the original draft of the paper discussed:

A Particular Spot

I spend a lot of time in campus bars. I like a change of pace so I tend to discover new bars. No matter where or what bar I end up at, one thing is always the same, people are fake.

Friday afternoon I go to a bar called the Black Bear. Everyone at the BBL is fake. Most of the customers are "Harley Davidson" types. Why do these people wear chains, leather, and long hair? They do this because they are fake. They are trying

to tell everybody, "I'm tough, stay away." This is just a front, if they were just themselves they would feel better.

Friday night I do the KK Circle. This is when I go to the Kollege Klub and go inside. I try to walk around but then there are so many students trying to impress each other. Football players flexing girls with tight pants, and well dressed preppies. I start my circle by walking through the bar browsing and staring at everyone. Everyone here is fake also; they are just putting up a front. Not the tough guy front: they have a new front the nice guy. They are playing a Richie Cunningham role. The irony is that they drink, smoke, and fight as much as the "Harley Davidsons."

My third and last stop is at Charlie's Place. Most of their customers are older and more grown up. But they are still fake, just a little bit older. They might be drinking JB on the rocks instead of Huber beer.

What's the difference between a leather jacket, a polo shirt, or a Brooks suit? Nothing is different: it is all a front. It is the same as a red or brown building they are all hiding something. But everything and everyone is hiding something. I am hiding something. Everyone is fake; okay I am fake too.

The group immediately focuses on the author's, Steve's, contention that people frequenting campus bars are "fake," challenging him to explain what he means by it. Steve responds by reassuring everyone that there's nothing wrong with being "fake," but the group emphasizes that the problem is not with their feelings but with his paper: He needs to define "fake" and to explain what he means by it. Specifically the problem is in the commentary of the paper.

Ann. Oh, that wasn't very—

[Author]. I don't think so either—

Mary. I don't think everyone is fake—

[Author]. That's just my opinion—I think everyone's fake—

Ann. I think you go too far though—

Mary. Yea. That bothers me a bit—

Melissa. Do you have any paper?

Ann. Yea. Because—

[Author]. I think everyone is just a little fake.

Mary. Everybody's not just fake.

Mary. They've got something to hide too—

[Author]. Well fine. That's just how I interpret it. But—um—I just personally think that everyone is trying to hide something—

Melissa. But what would they be if they weren't fake then?

[Author]. No. Well there's nothing wrong with it. There's also at the end where I say that I'm fake too. I mean there's nothing wrong with being fake.

Melissa. What would be a non-fake person?

[Author]. It would be new—

Melissa. What would be a non-fake personality—

Ann. Come on—

Melissa. What would be a non-fake personality?

Mary. What do you want to do? Do you want everyone to sit there and tell you that's human nature?

[Author]. No. Everyone's fake—

Melissa. You mean that's human nature?

[Author]. No. I'm just saying—I'm saying that's how it is. That's how it's right. There's nothing wrong with it.

Melissa. But what is—I mean if you took away this fakeness, what would you be left? I mean everybody's fake then.

[Author]. Right. But that's all I'm trying to say. Everybody's fake. That's the way it should be. Everyone's fake. I mean—there's nothing wrong with it—

Mary. There are real people.

Melissa. Being fake. How do you define it?

[Author]. I don't think you can define it—

Melissa. It's trying to be something that you're not—

Mary. What's your definition of "fake"? Let's put it that way.

[Author]. Me, I'm fake. You're fake. Everybody's fake.

Ann. No. That's not a definition. That's examples—

[Author]. Maybe. Ok. I think what you just said; trying to be something that you're not. Is that what you were trying to say?

Melissa. Yea—

Mary. I'm not trying to be something I'm not—

[Author]. I'm not saying you are—

Mary. You say I am—

Melissa. But that's what your speech says: Everybody's fake—

Mary. You could use a—

[Author]. I'm just—that's just a word I thought—Well maybe you could use something else—I mean trying to maybe impress someone or something—I don't know if you understand what I'm trying to say. But that's not what I'm trying to say—

Mary. But everybody tries to impress people—Did you watch David Letterman last night?

[Author]. David Letterman tries to impress people just by the way he is—I mean he's funny. He's trying to impress people to make people think he's funny.

Ann. But if people laugh? What about it?

[Author]. Right—

Mary. He's naturally funny—he's not fake.

Melissa. It's entertainment. You can't—

[Author]. Right. Now you're just—you're trying to say—

Mary. What you're saying is that people should keep their mouths shut, stay inside their houses, do not speak to anybody. You really—?

[Author]. No. I'm not saying that. That's what you're interpreting. I'm not saying anything's wrong with being the way you are. I'm saying—

Mary. But you're saying that everybody's fake because of how they are—

[Author]. You're not interpreting it not the same way I'm interpreting it. And I can't explain it. You're, you're—

Melissa finally suggests that Steve "wrote the wrong word," and subsequently, he begins to develop another line of commentary: "They're not really dressed up—just wearing a different type of clothing and talk real different." He proposes to "throw the word 'fake' out the window"—describing this troublesource as "the way I interpret it is—not the same way you're interpreting it"—and proposes a replacement: "Everyone—the people at the pub are a little different from the people at the KK."

Melissa. Maybe you should—in your first paragraph—you should define it.

[Author]. Right, that's what I've been trying to do—

Ann. Define how people's attitudes are influenced by who's around them—

Melissa. Yea. Different—yea—different environments—

Ann. You could say people are changing—every different atmosphere they're in—

[Author]. Yea, I don't think that would bring across the same meaning that I was trying to say. What I'm trying to say is this: There's a different group of people at every bar, and that this group—each bar—each group of people act differently. But they're not—but they're not—but they're not acting the way they really want. But they're just acting—

Melissa. How about if you put down—if you say or turn it around a little bit and say: So many people are trying to change themselves to be what in their own minds—the perfect—something perfect. So they are trying to impress everybody. But everybody's idea of perfect is different. So everybody's trying to impress everybody.

Ann. And if you don't act like yourself, you're not making yourself happy—

Melissa. But how do you write that down?

Steve tries out his new topic and comment: "There's a different group of people at every bar—" It is precisely this idea that Steve uses in his subsequent revision:

Bars at Their Finest

The University of Wisconsin campus has numerous places to have fun. I especially enjoy going to bars. There are all types of bars to choose from, clean or dirty, big or small, and cheap or expensive, all with various types of environments.

The Kollege Klub and Charlie's Place both produce a white collar atmosphere. Charlie's is more of a graduate or "after work" bar. The professional people will stop here for a Bloody Mary after a day at the office. Generally the men are wearing suits and the women are sporting the newest fashions in women's wear. When I order a common beer at Charlie's I seem to provoke the same reaction as when E. F. Hutton talks. Charlie's Place has a very ritzy atmosphere.

Another bar, I call it Charlie Jr., that produces a similar atmosphere is the Kollege Klub (KK). The people here all have their white collars pointed up meant that I was a little better than everyone else. Almost the same as pointing a nose towards the ski. When I overhear conversations at the KK it sounds like someone is always bragging. Once I heard a person saying, "My mother's best friend's sister-in-law has a friend that sold some Mary Kay Cosmetics to someone that knows Brooke Shields." Occasionally what I overhear is so ridiculous that I don't bother to listen, I just watch. At the KK I often see a football player flexing, a blond's tight ass in Guess pants, and a bunch of fraternity apparel. The KK and Charlie's Place both produce a white collar environment.

The Pub and Black Bear Lounge both produce a blue collar atmosphere. The Pub is a place to go to play a game of pool and to relax. There is always a special on beer ranging from one-buck St. Pauli Girls to a good buy on a pitcher of Hamms. The people here seem to have put in a hard day's work and come here to relax, not to brag. There are a lot of pool tables, so there is never a wait to get in a game. I once saw a man in a wheel chair at the Pub. He put the chair in the corner and used the pool table as a crutch. He won the table and had a great time playing pool. During another visit my partner and I decided to let some girls take us on in a game of pool. They beat the pants off us and continued to win against other opponents. Episodes like these are what add interest to visiting a bar like the Pub.

The Black Bear Lounge also has a working man's atmosphere, but the "Bear" has more of a "tough guy" environment. I once was going to the bathroom when I heard some thugs bickering. They were arguing over who is better, Twisted Sister or Black Sabbath. I decided not to get involved. The bar itself has a few pool tables and a juke box, my idea of a nice, pleasant, and smokey atmosphere. The bartenders are always trying to sell the moldiest beer. The Pub and Bear produce a blue collar atmosphere.

This campus has plenty of places to go to do something wild. There is a bar for everyone to spend money in and have fun. I love going to bars because there is a bar for everyone.

To sum up: The draft is a *personal essay* arguing that *people frequenting bars in Madison are fake*. The revision is an *informative paper* showing *how bars on campus offer something to everyone*. The revision is motivated by the groups' assault on the commentary in the original draft. Finding no way to defend this point, the author abandons it and offers an unassailable alternative. Hence, "fake" becomes "something for everyone." In seizing upon the comment "fake," the group focuses on just that element of the text that most threatens reciprocity, a real troublesource. Unable to treat this troublesource with an elaboration (e.g., explaining what he means by "fake"), the author abandons it entirely and invents a new commentary.

The author abandons no more than he has to. (Generally, there seems to be an inertia about discourse: To whatever extent possible the author will seek to preserve what he or she can.) In this case Steve retains the original discourse topic while modifying it slightly (*people frequenting bars* becomes *bars on campus*) and invents a new commentary. Significantly, this shift in discourse topic and commentary implicates a different genre. Whereas the original discourse topic-commentary [PEOPLE FREQUENTING MADISON BARS] [ARE FAKE] entails an **argument**, the revision [BARS ON CAMPUS] [OFFER SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE] entails a **report**. The shift is comparable to a newspaper editor's moving the piece from the editorial page to the travel section. We note concomitant shifts in person, voice, and tone; the revision is noticeably more bland.

This shift reveals a significant contrast between and motivation for argumentative and informational prose. To the extent that TOPIC + COMMENT assert something fundamentally inconsistent with the common expectations and working premises of readers, reciprocity will be threatened, and argumentation will be required to restore writer-reader balance. By contrast, to the extent that TOPIC + COMMENT assert something essentially congruent with the common expectations and working premises of readers, reciprocity will not be threatened at the level of genre but potentially only at the level of commentary where the author is obligated to explain or contextualize the new information that he introduces. In this sense, argumentation is a more radical form of discourse than information.

Two important points follow. First, genre, topic, and comment all implicate or constrain each other, and a shift in one can have implications for the others. Any given text will be a specific configuration of genre, topic, and comment—each level implicating the others. Second, any of the levels can define an “entry” point for revision considerations. (For further discussion of these points, see Nystrand and Brandt (in press).) In this case, the comment most thoroughly upsets the expected balance between writer and readers, but once the old commentary is abandoned and the new commentary is embraced, the genre itself has changed.

RHETORICAL PROBLEM SOLVING

In both these discussions we see how groups engage in extensive collaborative problem solving. This can range from collaborative conversational repairs (where the speaker searches for a word and the group actively enters into the search) to joint revision of a troublesome paragraph. Their discussion ranges from general characterizations of both strengths and weaknesses of particular texts to detailed discussions about reworking

problem sections. There is an intricate lacing of high-level concerns (such as purpose and organization) with text-level representations (such as paragraphing and development). When peer groups work well and writers confront their readers regularly to review their papers, the groups tend to “gravitate” to those parts of the texts that are unclear or troublesome in some way. As long as groups do not engage in excessive “copy editing” but dwell instead on understanding the writer's purpose and its articulation, the discussions focus mainly on these troublesources and uncertainties of text. More to the point, these groups have a keen sense of what problems need solving. They identify key troublesources and deal concretely with how particular text structures address them. These troublesources, which range from ambiguities of genre (What sort of text is this?), purpose (What's the purpose of this?), topic (What's this about anyway?), and comment (What's the point?) constitute the subject matter of these sessions. In effect, the discussion examines a continuous set of rhetorical problems, which the group collaborates in solving. Hence, by intensively identifying and resolving rhetorical problems, they shore up, flesh out, and sustain just those parts of their papers that otherwise would be weak and unclear. In addition, after several weeks of such work, students can anticipate potential troublesources *as they write*. Indeed, students involved in peer review often say about halfway through the term that they can anticipate their readers during the composing process. That is, they develop a sensitivity to the possibilities of text, which effectively enables them to monitor their composing processes, no doubt the chief long-term benefit of instruction.

In Vygotskian terms, we may regard intensive peer review as a formative social arrangement in which writers become consciously aware of the functional significance of composing behaviors, discourse strategies, and elements of text by managing them all in anticipation of continuous reader feedback. This is not to argue that writers in peer groups come to control their rhetorical problem-solving efforts by somehow conducting “in their heads” the same conversations that formerly were carried out in their groups. Rather, it means that the composing processes and discourse strategies that writers take from their groups largely emerge in ways that are often evident first in the social interaction of peer review.

It is precisely this process of intensive rhetorical problem-solving that defines the effectiveness of intensive peer review. Peer review is not just a method of teaching writing. Used intensively, it creates an environment, somewhat like the social context of initial language acquisition, where the learner can continuously test hypotheses about the possibilities of written text.