AFFIRMING THE NEED FOR CONTINUED DIALOGUE: REFINING AN ETHIC OF STUDENTS AND STUDENT WRITING IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

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In the February 2001 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, NCTE published "Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students and Student Writing in Composition Studies." A committee of five individuals, chaired by Paul Anderson, began formulating these Guidelines soon after the 1999 Conference on College Composition and Communication held in Atlanta. This document was months in the making, and its causes can be categorized on the following levels. The immediate cause might be attributed to Paul Anderson's 1998 call for action to "become more reflective about the ethical issues" involved in person-based research (64). In terms of remote cause, the document reflects concerns and dilemmas pervading the English profession over the past decade.[1] In terms of sufficient cause, there is the expanding body of research and scholarship based on student writing. And finally, there is the necessary cause: discourse on the ethics of using students and their texts is not (or cannot) be conducted without using student writing to do so (Michael A. Pemberton's *The Ethics of Writing Instruction* serves as a recent example).

As researchers engaged in quantitative and qualitative studies, the three of us are united in our belief that student writing comprises the most real and compelling texts in composition studies and that we are better thinkers and writers when we use these rich texts. For us, there is no question that ethical reflection and dialogue are pressing necessities. However, we respond in markedly different and even divided ways to the published Guidelines. In the present discussion, our purpose is twofold. We respond as individuals to the Guidelines from our own perspectives as teachers and researchers in the sections titled "Retrospective Studies and IRB Restraints," "Student-Writer as Self-Narrating Agent," and "Representation, Epistemology, and Discourse." Equally important, we unite our voices in an effort to participate and advance discourse on what "ethical practice" means for the composition profession.[2]

Monitoring Research and Students' Rights

At first glance, the NCTE Guidelines might appear discipline-specific, since they do not focus simply on the monitoring of research methodologies and the production of research data, but on *the representation* of student texts in the dissemination of scholarship. However, the principal features of the Guidelines are derived from principles and procedures from the biomedical and social sciences (whose research with human subjects is more clearly distinguished from textual research).[3] Given such grounding, it is not surprising that the primary concern in the NCTE document is the necessity of informed consent, whereby participants are advised of the purpose and benefits of the research along with possible hazards involved, what activities and time commitment will be required of them, what will be done with the information, and whether their identities will be compromised or required as the information is disseminated (486-7). Further restrictions are applied to situations including students who are minors and research conducted involving classrooms of students. Students' rights, according to the Guidelines, are best protected by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) responsible for promoting

and preserving federal research policies, regulations, and laws. Composition researchers, whether conducting formally planned investigations or studies of writing generated in composition classes, student conferences, or tutoring centers, are required to "submit their plans for advance review and approval" and "conduct their studies in accordance with the approved research plans" (486) if the outcome of such investigations and studies involve "general dissemination of the results of research and scholarship," including publications, conference presentations, theses or dissertations, publications on websites, etc. (485).

While composition studies might well learn a great deal from ethical codes already adapted in other professions, we would argue that there is a pressing need for discipline-specific standards. This is not to say that principles already entrenched in these disciplines—advanced consent, beneficence, justice, privacy, and confidentiality—are not values that should play an important part in our dialogue and practices. But transposing procedures from the biomedical and social sciences, where ethical issues are arguably more clear-cut, to the practice of composition equates composition research with scientific research and, what is more problematic, composition practice with scientific practice. The problem, as David Wallace explains, is that composition specialists' attention is being affected by "competing loyalties" (113). What happens when competing values and competing loyalties clash? Do the interests of the majority of the students supersede those of the minority? Competing values and competing loyalties vary from researcher to researcher and from institution to institution. What ethical measurement, indicator, or barometer *can* we use when we as researchers are presented with and inevitably have to choose between several conflicting alternatives? Perhaps more importantly, how do we distinguish but also align our interests as researchers with our role as teachers?

These questions affect even those compositionists who do not involve themselves in formal research studies and, in fact, may glance at the NCTE Guidelines and conclude that since *they* are not researchers, the Guidelines do not impact their teaching

practices. The truth, however, is quite different. The Guidelines do not differentiate between teachers of composition and active researchers in composition. Nor do they distinguish between formal research studies and informal or unplanned use of student work, referring instead to "composition specialists" active in "inquiry" (485). This collapse in itself may not seem alarming, reflecting as it does the true nature of our work wherein our roles as teachers and scholars often overlap.

Yet when the authors of the Guidelines adapt principles and procedures from the hard and social sciences and apply them to the composition discipline, what originally were codes for formal research *de facto* become all-encompassing restrictions on what and how teachers may use materials from normal classroom practice. That is, a wide array of activities now falls within the purview of the Guidelines: not just scholarly publications, conference and workshop presentations, but also website postings, audio and video tapes, photographs—any dissemination of information about students and their writing outside of our academic classrooms and university communities.

While we can invoke no ultimate measure of ethical practice, we argue that the ethics of composition practice—grounded in distinct contexts and unique institutional cultures—should be defined by practitioners in the composition field, for as Rita C. Manning argues, "an ethic grows out of one's lived experience, attachments, and sense of personal integrity" (xiv). The latitude required of professionals to respond to each complex, individual situation is severely restricted with NCTE's emphasis on IRBs.

Discipline-Specific Concerns: Ethical Representation of Students

We further argue that ethical concerns specific to the humanities in general and English studies in particular must focus not simply on the well-being of the student-participants but on how student writing is represented by the scholar-researcher. Researchers' own subjectivity, their position of privilege in the

classroom, and their insistence that research results and interpretation are their personal, intellectual property all create the potential for manipulation and misrepresentation. Edward Said's now-familiar description of the West's construction of the East in discourse—managing or producing an image of the Other—translates into representation of the "student" that may well replace the living, breathing individual in our classrooms who is "a free subject of thought or action" (3).[4] As a discourse, our treatment of student writers "is produced and exists in an uneven exchange" (12) until they can become demeaned as "a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3) of the composition profession.

Tracing how students have historically been depicted in person-based or student-based research in major journals in the field reveals a pervasive and problematic discourse of Othering. For many researchers, as Anderson point outs, the use of pseudonyms and a respectful portrayal of the student, coupled with "the fact that neither the student nor anyone else who knows the student is likely to read the article," is enough to guarantee that students and their writing are handled fairly" (78). However, Marguerite Helmers' *Writing Students: Composition Testimonials and Representations of Students* (1994), in its exhaustive analysis of testimonials in practitioner lore from 1967 to 1990, reveals a different story. Staffroom Interchanges in *College Composition and Communication* from 1967 to 1990, in particular, disclose an almost universal emphasis on the "stupid, beastlike, and childish aspects of college writers," resulting in a "brutal discourse of ridicule and control" (1-2). That the experience represented is universal, Helmers claims, "is reinforced by the teacher's stance as heroic Everyman" (29), who "enters[s] the chaotic worlds of the freshman composition classroom to set things right by [his] methods" (19).

In the early 1990s, however, as composition shifted from writing-as-process to writing that is socially constructed and economically situated (Trimmer 45) and compositionists were exhorted to look for "partial readings, multiple subjectivities,

marginalized positions, and subjugated knowledges" in student essays rather than offering them as "a space where error exercises its full reign" (Miller 395), representations of students and their writing changed. Feminist compositionists, seeking to relinquish their traditional position of power in order to give students some agency or voice, transformed the "lazy, doltish" generic student depicted in Staffroom Interchanges into a resistant, "savvy" student, one "highly literate about how classrooms work" (Nelson), one who gives the teacher what she wants (Loewenstein). But even these depictions of resistant, savvy students putting one over on the system can be read as another face of the Orientalized Other—the Other as devious (Said 39). More recent representations of students and their texts (Durst [1999] and Yagelski [2000], for instance) demonstrate collaboration between researcher and research participants in the interpretation and dissemination of the results.

The NCTE Guidelines register an awareness of a long history of negative representations of students and their texts in their insistence that researchers be "accountable to the data" (489), be "faithful to the students' intentions" (488), and always represent students' statements "in ways that are fair and serious and cause no harm" (489). The assumption, unfortunately, seems to be that care and awareness will ensure that such representations will be fair, that is, faithfully convey the student writer's intent. But, as Min-Zhan Lu points out, "fair" and "objective" are socially—and historically—constructed concepts, and as such may be manipulated (or reconstructed) to suit the unspoken political motives behind our research (Lu 101). In Said's words: "In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presence*, or a representation" (21) that is "embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer" (272).

Three Exercises in Inclusive Dialogue

In using the term "representation" in our headings, we are not only examining practices of interpreting students and their texts,

but creating our own space to have a voice in discussing the ethics of representing students. Like many of our colleagues, we seek representation. The following arguments, based on our personal experiences, capture many of the increasingly problematic contexts that researchers are facing in two- and four-year institutions. Each of us describes a variety of components—problems, values, research design, and the decisions and practices that followed as outcomes—in unsettling but all-too-common situations.

Retrospective Studies and IRB Restraints
Maureen Hourigan

The principles of the Belmont Report are clearly echoed in the 2001 Guidelines, which speak of protecting students' "rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being" ("Guidelines" 485). That the foundation of the Guidelines rests upon formal codes of research ethics in the biomedical and research sciences has troubled several qualitative researchers since Anderson first proposed using these codes "to shed new light on the ethical issues associated with our person-based research" (67). In "Doing Fieldwork in the Panopticon: A Response to Paul Anderson," Roxanne Mountford and Richard Hansberger of the University of Arizona voice the concerns of many compositionists involved in ethnographic research. They fear that "Anderson's essay will constrict and eventually replace the rich discussions of ethics that have been going on for some time now among rhetoric and composition researchers with inappropriate legal constraints," and more importantly, perhaps, "that if the journals and presses that serve our field listen to Anderson, ours will become among the most restrictive fields for qualitative researchers in the humanities and social sciences" (http://www.ncte.org.ccc/7/sub491anderson .html 1/24/01) While I, like Mountford and Hansberger, agree with Anderson when he calls for composition studies to become more "reflective" about the federally mandated legal and regulatory guidelines that govern this research (64), ethnography

included, as a researcher situated in a two-year institution, I am particularly concerned with the Guidelines' reliance on Institutional Review Boards to protect students' rights.

In the July 1999 issue of *College English*, Frank Madden calls upon graduate programs to "expand the parameters of traditional textual, theoretical, and historical research to include ethnographic research and the scholarship of teaching," the "kind of research most productive at the two-year college" (725). For him, given the "diverse student population" and "multiple sections of the same course," which "provide rich sources of comparison," the challenge of how to help students become literate, critical thinkers is a "prime subject for valuable research" (727). A reviewer of a preliminary draft of this article concurred: "There's a pressing need for more inquiry into the nature of writing and writing instruction in two-year college settings." But in their response to Anderson's article, Mountford and Hansberger argue that the strict adherence to legal permissions that Anderson advises "could preclude much ethnographic work," including the kinds of studies Madden finds most productive and sustainable at two-year colleges.

My experience with the submission of an article incorporating person-based research to an NCTE journal following the circulation of a draft of the Guidelines suggests their fears are not unfounded. The article included parts of a previously published case study, which presented two versions of a student's term paper and transcripts of interviews I had conducted with the pseudo-named student six months after she had completed a Composition II course at a two-year college. The student's research paper fit one of those times when, in Anderson's words, "[a]fter a few years . . . [a] paper provides a perfect illustration of a point the instructor wants to make in an article he or she is drafting" (81). In both the monograph and the article, I described the study as situated "'on the blurred edges of several traditions'" (Flynn), for it is clearly not an experiment nor an ethnography nor even so detailed a case study as are Hull and Rose's in "Rethinking Remediation." I was trying to provide another answer to the

question: What tends to happen to the productive and unproductive strategies, habits, rules, and assumptions characteristic of underprepared students' writing and reading skills during instruction? (Hull and Rose 152). As a retrospective study, it was not, according to Anderson, subject to IRB regulation, which pertains only to preplanned investigations (81). While the Student Permission Form (Appendix A) that had accompanied the student's writing had satisfied the publisher of the monograph, reviewers of the article for the NCTE journal required more of the retrospective study: "Maureen could indicate that she has IRB approval . . . for the form . . . and for her way of using it." Moreover, the reviewer added that IRBs at other institutions would not have approved the form or my use of it. Ultimately, one reviewer concluded that the manuscript could be published only "if all studies described in the study that were subject to IRB regulation exemplified such compliance."

The reviewer, of course, would not have known that the retrospective study had been conducted at a two-year community college without an IRB. At the time I was interviewing the student, the faculty manual gave only this direction to those involved in research:

> [O]nly those research requests to several faculty members that involve the name, influence, or prestige of [the college] or involve information normally as part of official records, to be sought from students, or otherwise affecting the operation, organization, or future planning of [the college] should be discussed with the appropriate supervisor [and] if worth pursuing, to the institutional research officer.

Nowhere did the manual mention researchers' use of student writing or the need for a researcher to seek approval for using such in publication.

For those composition specialists who "do not work or study at an institution with an IRB or other review process," the 2001 Guidelines do provide directives. Such researchers are to "contact

colleagues at other institutions so they can learn about and follow the procedures IRBs require" (486). But IRB regulations differ so widely from one institution to the next that such advice is confusing at best and a barrier to the publication of classroom-based research at worst. While the aforementioned reviewer noted that the permission form I used for the case study would not meet IRB requirements at some institutions, Mountford and Hansberger note that at the University of Arizona, for instance, "the ethnographer need only write a letter to the IRB detailing the research project and explaining that the research will conceal the identities of the informants and will be based on interview, observation, or other non-intrusive research in order to receive an exemption." Furthermore, report Mountford and Hansberger:

> The University of Arizona "Human Subjects Committee Manual of Procedures" states in a section titled "Projects Exempt from Human Subjects Committee Review" that
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>> The Department of Health and Human Services has issued certain defined limitations concerning rules and regulations for the protection of human subjects that pertain primarily to projects involving history, social and behavioral sciences. *It is a positive response to the numerous objections voiced publicly and in the press by professionals charging the regulation placed unfair limitations on their investigative prerogative and stifled incentives to conduct research.* The direct result of the action exempts a substantial number of research projects from review by institutional human subjects committees (7; their emphasis).

What, then, should a researcher at an institution without an IRB do? Must he/she follow the strict guidelines of the manuscript reviewer's university or the "Human Subjects Committee Manual of Procedures" from the University of Arizona? More importantly,

which set of guidelines are manuscript reviewers for the major journals in the field likely to deem ethical? Then, too, what will be the fate of such retrospective research as Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* where, despite diligent efforts, an instructor cannot find the student author who has graduated? Anderson himself queries, "Would it be ethical for the instructor to quote from the student's work without permission?" (81). Candace Spigelman, in a recent *JAC* article, considers the question from a different angle. Chronicling the changes in a student's reaction to her interpretation of his paper over the period of two years, she acknowledges that her analysis is possible only because she had reconnected with the student after his move to a different campus. While she had his permission to use his papers, interviews, and e-mail postings, she remains not quite comfortable with the situation: "It is true that few instructors have the opportunity to reconnect with their students in such a deliberate way once the course has ended, and even now, I am not sure such direct responses are always appropriate" (341).

Further complicating the over-arching authority of IRBs as advanced by the 2001 Guidelines is the federal government's move away from local to multi-institutional IRB composition. As *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reports, a federal advisory panel has recently recommended major changes in existing rules involving human subjects. The panel's report, made public in December 2000 by the National Bioethics Advisory Committee, further recommends clarification of existing regulations regarding human-subject research, along with an expanded role for institutional IRBs (Brainard, http://www.chronicle.com/weekly/v47/i18/18a02401.htm). To broaden representation on each IRB, the report recommends that "at least half of the members . . . not be affiliated with the institution, and at least half should not be scientists" (Brainard). In addition, the panel recommends that "all researchers who study human participants and all review-board members who approve such research should be certified by independent organizations." Finally, the panel recommends that a "new, independent agency oversee all

privately financed research" (Brainard); currently only institutions receiving federal funds are monitored to assure conformity to federal regulations. Clearly, the 2001 Guidelines' reliance on IRBs will have to be revised should Congress adopt the federal advisory panel's recommendations.

Student-Writer as Self-Narrating Agent
Janis Haswell

As a teacher and a researcher, I believe that composition discourse has been enhanced, even shaped in fundamental ways, by the texts of student writers. But there are few safeguards that protect and credit those writers the way we protect and credit ourselves in that discourse. I believe that the NCTE Guidelines do not go far enough to ensure that our students maintain their own voices as agents in and of their own writing. As Cezar M. Ornatowski observes in his discussion of ethics in technical and professional communication, "one's conception of ethics is always intimately connected to one's conception of technical communication" (161). In the same way, my conception of ethics in composition studies is intimately connected to my conception of writing and the dignity of writers.

Discourse in composition research has produced promising approaches to student-centered ethical practices in the last decade. But many have proved double-edged. Take the belief that those in power (the teacher/researcher) must equalize power distribution by collaborating with those without (the student/participant). As Gesa Kirsch notes, collaboration for the sake of enfranchising and benefiting students "can lead to the imposition of our values on others and to the continued dominance of our ways of thinking, reading, writing, and seeing the world" (47). Viewing student writers as collaborators able to represent themselves in academic discourse might lead to friendship, but also to "a participant's sense of disappointment, broken trust, even exploitation" (27). In attempting to give participants a voice of their own, researchers

risk creating the illusion of equality when in fact we do not "all enjoy equal amounts of power and authority" (71). Collaboration, care, partnership, mutual empowerment—these are values important to our discipline, but they can conflict (at least in the minds of researchers) with equally important tenets of ownership and authority over our own work.

Nor does purely textual or formalist research protect students. As Robert P. Yagelski argues, reducing student texts down to skills or surface features leads us to overlook "the complex ways in which [their] writing and reading relate to [their] identity and the experiences that have somehow shaped that identity" (15). Yagelski observes in his study, "we valorize the Writer as a paragon of individual achievement, while we tend to denigrate the student writer as a flawed individual" (33). Through such formalism:

> [t]he student writer is thus understood as a kind of faceless individual who possesses (or does not possess) these required skills that are universally applicable rather than as a member of a language-using community or, perhaps more accurately, as a language user moving across the boundaries of various discourse communities. (35)

Such practice ironically silences student writers even as it purports to give them voice.

What seems most promising to me is the tenet that students have a moral right to shape themselves as narrative unities. The "narrative structure of actions and personal identity" has been defined and mapped by Owen Flanagan and Seyla Benhabib, among others.[5] As Flanagan argues, we self-represent to self-understand and to self-actualize (68, 69). For Benhabib, narrative unity "integrates what 'I' can do, have done and will accomplish with what you expect of 'me,' interpret my acts and intentions to mean, wish for me in the future, etc." (5). Yagelski defines "literacy" itself as the socialized yet personalized act of self construction through discourse (9).

If researchers speak for participants, if we appropriate their voices, then we are depriving them of their authority to shape both identity and social relations through their own narratives. Such appropriation can occur at any point in the research process: gaining voluntary consent only at the outset, not throughout the project; misrepresenting the full meaning of the student's writing by neglecting its context; effacing the personal imprint of the student through pseudonyms or genderless/agencyless identifiers.

If this is my over-arching value in composition studies—that student/participants have the same right and authority to generate their own narratives in composition studies as I do—how will I carry out my research? Here are the guidelines that suggest themselves. First, I will use writing that I admire, that I want to acknowledge and celebrate. If my intent is to criticize or denigrate, I would be wrong to use my published voice and professional leverage to attack the student, who has no power to respond. Second, I should maintain constant contact with the writers during the process of analyzing, digesting, and reflecting on their texts and while producing my own. "Contact" means not only getting advanced consent to use the texts, but also following up with conversations or interviews with the writers about the project; informing them of findings and my purpose as it becomes clear through my own writing; and asking them to review drafts of the article before I send it out with the understanding that they have input and veto power over my use and representation of their writing. (Obviously this would prove difficult if my conclusions were inherently negative.) Third, I will seek opportunities for them to respond in print to their published selves, thus furthering their own narratives and involvement in (for instance) this very article that they have become involved in.

I applied these principles in my recent study of how inquiry into the Holocaust improves student writing. Of the thirty-four students quoted, I especially depended on one—the voice of Adrian—to tell the story of the course. These are Adrian's reflections about being studied and published:

I don't see my personal thoughts normally affecting others. It's my own journey. That's why students are not anxious to make moral evaluations. . . . It's a new challenge; we aren't exposed to it and usually aren't asked to do it, being low pegs in the social and academic hierarchy.

I was surprised when I read my own writing in the article. My thoughts didn't sound idiosyncratic but relevant. Since the course, those ideas haven't changed but been reinforced: if human nature isn't restrained, we have genocide. How human beings deal with each other is the most important issue we study. The Holocaust is a vision of heaven and hell—we have to hold people accountable. I guess this is true in terms of using my words to talk about teaching the Holocaust. My writing was used properly, meaning it wasn't represented out of context, it wasn't twisted to argue a thesis I don't agree with. I was aware of its use, willingly participated, and had access to the final product a couple of times. To see my words in print marks a moral pinnacle of my life.

I write now so that other people will read my words. I know I have an audience who will be affected. I want to make readers think and evaluate themselves. To produce writing of consequence—that's rare for a student. . . .

While Adrian's experience proved positive, what is equally significant is that Adrian through his reflections and his texts continues to enrich my understanding of writing and the teaching of writing. Keeping Adrian involved in the process, both to shape conclusions and add texts to the original inclusion in the Holocaust article, reveals how his writing perpetually maintains a role in his life and shapes not only new texts but his sense of a personal and public self. He is a writer with an audience. And we know him by name, just as we know other contributors to composition studies.

In the same way, Victoria—one of the student writers featured in the quantitative study—offers her reflection on the experience:

> Many years ago I was asked to write an essay on my own search for truth. So here I am, come full circle, talking truth once again. . . . I feel that it is vitally important to involve students in research applications because the potential for learning is expanded beyond what is set forth in the typical curriculum. Not only are we able to visualize the learning process, but through our involvement we connect on a personal level.
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> For example, when I wrote my essay, I was operating in a single dimension—the completion of an assignment for freshmen level composition. It was somewhat personal because it involved my system of beliefs. Later, as I talked with Jan and Rich Haswell about their research project, I saw my essay in a much richer context. Apparently, my writing style had unique qualities that caused a variety of reactions from teacher and fellow students. The assumptions and comments they made stimulated my fighting spirit. How dare they label me or judge my work based on gender, real or implied. For the first time I became conscious of my own "voice" as a writer and as I gained control of this concept my proficiency in the medium grew. Imagine my sense of power once I realized I had something nearly as individual as a fingerprint that was flexible enough to control each reader's perceptions and response. The upshot of this was that the more I understood about the results of the study, the more I paid attention to my own writing and that of others. I had confidence in my writing ability and my style matured. Writing gained significance beyond the completion of an assignment. Suddenly aspects of cultural doctrine, gender, and human nature were thrown into the mix. I can honestly say I never looked at my homework the same way again.

What a loss if Victoria's voice were masked, her self (borrowing Yagelski's words) "obscured and the possibility of its agency limited" (63). The more depersonalized, disguised, or abstract the student writers appear in our published work, the greater the danger that we will isolate and objectify their "writing[s] of consequence," thereby severely diminishing what our research should be attempting to do: "help illuminate the individual ways in which students construct their multifarious, contingent, and complex selves within the discourses that in turn inevitably shape those selves" (181).

Representation, Epistemology, and Discourse
Lulu C. H. Sun

While reading Jan's and Maureen's reflections, I ponder a number of issues. And as I contemplate these issues, I realize I have more questions than answers. Questions I had before come back. New questions arise.

For me, knowledge, discourse, and research are interdependent, interwoven, and web-like. This metaphor of the web is an image of unification, connection, interaction as well as one of disconnection. The interconnections between knowledge, discourse, and research are fine and numerous like the threads of a web and cannot be separated. The web extends indefinitely and is limitless. There can be no finished fabric but one that is forever changing, becoming, evolving. So what happens to the web when one thread is severed? What happens when we dislocate one thread of the web? The rest of the web reverberates, setting off a chain reaction.

Having stated that knowledge and discourse are interconnected, what then is the relationship between the two? How is knowledge defined and valued? How is it constructed and shared? Just as importantly, how is discourse defined and valued? How is it constructed and shared? The boundaries between epistemology, discourse, and ethics become blurred when we

examine person-based research. When discussing discourse and ethics in research, we need to discuss epistemology as well, that is, the epistemological context of the research being conducted.

This relationship between knowledge and discourse has been recognized since the seventeenth century. According to Knoblauch, the essential distinction between classical and modern rhetorical theory concerns the relation between discourse and knowledge (31). Modern rhetoric is "epistemic," proposing an interrelation between knowledge and discourse:

> The force of this speculation was to shift rhetorical theory away from the classical view of discourse as a mere display of preconceived ideas for communicative purposes and toward a new view of discourse as a means by which intellectual and imaginative conception occurs. . . . From the mid-seventeenth century onward, discourse comes to be regarded as exploratory and open-ended, . . . a mode of inquiry as free and full of potential as the search for knowledge that it enables. (36)

Hence for Knoblauch and Brannon, the epistemological crisis of the seventeenth century occurred when there was "a preference for empirical, 'scientific' investigations of experience, a recognition of the open-ended, but always ultimately limited, character of human knowledge, and a new dependence on discourse for shaping and extending that knowledge" (51). The authors go on to write that "it is a world in which discourse— writing as well as other modes of symbolic action—constitutes simultaneously the means of learning and the shape of knowledge, so that creating discourse is equivalent to the process of coming to know" (52).

Composing and learning, then, are open-ended processes just as the search of knowledge is. Because there is no ultimate or conclusive knowledge or truth, no conclusive text or discourse will fully convey meaning or knowledge. The Descartian sense of "knowing" is a process, "a connected chain of reasoning which

represents the open-ended struggle to discover new data from experience and new ways of organizing them" (54). Knowledge is open-ended, as is the search for knowledge, as is discourse: "the operations of mind, through the media of its composing instruments, are inseparable from the perceiving and judging of experience . . . the world is only knowable . . . through the operations of mind—that is, through discourse" (54). As knowledge is an activity and is fluid, it can never be separated from discourse. Knowledge is not fixed, nor is it stable.

The effort, or even struggle, to articulate meaning creates the potential for learning and knowledge:

> . . . knowledge is a linguistic construction, a "discourse." Knowing is an activity of creating and shaping "texts," . . . not an absolute state or condition. It is a perpetual struggle to make coherence by ordering sensations, insights, scraps of information, feelings, impressions, imaginative intuitions, partly formed and unconnected ideas within (and by means of) the structures of language. (55)

Discourse, then, has a central role in the pursuit of knowledge. For many seventeenth century philosophers like Descartes, knowledge is an accumulation; it is cumulative, a search continuously in progress. "Discourse enacts the world: its knowledge is not 'about' the world but is rather constitutive of the world" (Knoblauch and Brannon 60).[6] Discourse represents the world.

As knowledge, epistemology, discourse, and meaning are fluid, what happens to the role of research then? I do not believe that as qualitative researchers, or as teacher-researchers or as researcher-teachers, we need to or should follow the traditional paradigm of theory engendering practice, pedagogy or methodology. In fact, practice, pedagogy or methodology engenders theory. Research is a human endeavor, ongoing, continuous, and organic, what I would call "knowledge in action." It is the value of personal

experiences, discourse, epistemology, and methodology fused into an organic whole.

Like Yagelski, I perceive myself as "teacher as researcher." In my research using students' writing, I have always used an entire class's texts—whether written inside or outside of the classroom. No writing was eliminated for whatever reason. The writings ranged from pieces that I admired to those that were problematic and troubling. This practice is counter to work in the field of composition that presents students and/or their writings as racist, sexist, or downright frightening. To advance knowledge, to open discourse, we must write the unwriteable, read the unreadable, speak the unspeakable, and listen to the unlistenable.

A qualitative researcher's background; experiences; the institutions he/she works in; his/her ideologies; and personal, subjective, and cultural discourses all coalesce to construct or represent his/her research. Over the last decade, we have started to recognize more and more the qualitative researcher's role in constructing knowledge (for a more detailed description, see "Special Focus: Personal Writing" in the September 2001 issue of *College English*). "For many, ethical qualitative research practices demand that the researcher reflect on and explain to readers how her own definitive characteristics—such as race, gender, socio-economic background, and so on—as well as those of her subjects influence her findings and the construction of her text" (Hindman 35). Again, think of Said.

Our epistemology, our experiences of coming to know, our experiences with theory, practice, research, and methodology, all form the base or foundation of our own research. As teachers and researchers, we have to be honest and truthful in our research endeavors. We should not be compelled to believe or teach that all research should be Great Research, with a capital "R." Research, for me, is neither hierarchical nor theological, as knowledge and discourse are neither hierarchical nor theological.

To be realistic, there will inevitably be tensions between a researcher's efforts to contribute knowledge in the field and his/her efforts to be ethical in his/her treatments of the students

in the study—what Primo Levi, in a fortuitous phrase, calls the "grey zone" of existence. There will be situations in which our students, through no fault of their own, but because of their age, worldview, or experiences, could not contribute a "self-representation" in a significant and meaningful way. On one hand, students could enhance a study; on the other hand, students could undermine a study as well.

But despite these tensions, intellectual and moral choices, and grey zones, I, like Spigelman, do not wish to shut down or close research, to close knowledge, to close dialogue and discourse. Research provides a limitless and borderless forum where we *can* engage in critical thinking and dialogue, where we *can* advance knowledge through various, diverse, and dissenting voices and means of discourse. Research is a convergence of multitudinous voices or threads, to use the analogy of the web. If we silence one voice, if we dislocate, break, or pluck one visible or invisible thread, the intricate web disintegrates.

Finally, there is a difference between knowing about discourse, knowing about epistemology or knowledge, knowing about representation, and methodology itself. It is not enough to teach epistemology or discourse in our courses or programs. There is an immediate and pressing need to "urge all graduate programs to discuss the regulation with students. . . . We should urge all graduate programs that prepare students to become contributing researchers in composition to educate about these policies" (Anderson 69, 83). Although it was adopted in 1974, the federal regulation on the ethical treatment of human participants in research "still remains unknown to some in our field, including persons who undertake these very kinds of study. . . . Moreover, new members of our field are not necessarily being taught about it. Through an information survey of several graduate programs in composition, I learned that some do not teach about the regulation, not even in their research methods courses" (69).

All graduate programs, especially those that include person-based research as part of the program, should, or rather must, include courses on research methodology as well as policies,

guidelines, and codes on how to conduct person-based research. They must cover or teach the regulations and educate their students on ethical responsibilities to their subjects. Not only should graduate programs begin covering and teaching the regulations, institutions should, when feasible, establish their own Institutional Review Boards and be responsible for their construction, implementation, and enforcement. The enforcement, of course, is another story.

Conclusion

The NCTE "Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students and Student Writing in Composition Studies" is a complex document with many nuances and far-reaching implications. The Guidelines are not binary oppositions and do not present an "either-or" scenario. The document is a work in progress, not a measuring rod that divides good from bad practice, or publishable from non-publishable scholarship. Rather than dictating the "last word," about this work in progress, our responses to the 2001 Guidelines are meant to continue the "rich discussions of ethics that have been going on for some time now among rhetoric and composition researchers" (Mountford and Hansbeger). We invite our colleagues, peers, and students to rethink, reconsider, and discuss them.

In addition, we encourage our readers to integrate the triptych of teaching, scholarship, and research at all institutions, whether they are two-year colleges, four-year colleges, or research universities. More importantly, we can contribute to "a robust literature on the subject that individual researchers can draw on as they confront ethical dilemmas involved with their particular studies" (Anderson 83). We need both a discipline-specific code of ethics and a wealth of literature of case studies.

Finally, when we contemplate the 2001 Guidelines, we need to consider our epistemological stance, our choices in epistemology, discourse, and research and our decisions about *what* and *who* will be presented and represented, and *how* they will be presented and represented. Most important of all, the profession's discourse on

ethics must remain open and inclusive as we strive to broaden our understanding of writing and of writers through teaching and scholarship.

END NOTES

[1] Clearly the trend to student writing has launched the profession into a tangle of legal and ethical quandaries. At the 2000 CCCC Convention, five sessions focused specifically on research ethics, and at least thirty more included presentations on the ethical dimensions of teaching, service, and scholarship in composition. Ethical issues have commanded recent attention in literary studies as well. In the introduction of the January 1999 issue of *PMLA*, Lawrence Buell writes, "As with any groundswell, particularly when the central term of reference already belongs to common usage, the challenge of pinning down what counts as ethics intensifies as more parties lay claim to it. . . . there is no unitary ethics movement, no firm consensus among MLA members who think of themselves as pursuing some form of ethically valenced inquiry" (7).

[2] Our mutual involvement with this subject can be traced back to the spring of 1998, when we first proposed a panel entitled "Spinning Our Students into Gold: Ethical Issues on the Representations of Students in Composition," which we presented in Atlanta in 1999. Soon after this presentation, we began drafting a version of this article, which was first circulated in November, 1999. Our own views have been enhanced by the responses we have received from outside reviewers, especially the anonymous reader from *JTW*. Indeed, this feedback has deepened and expanded the dialogue that this article embodies and seeks to foster.

[3] The biomedical and behavioral sciences have had their own formal codes of research ethics in place since the 1960s and early 70s, based in large part on the federal Belmont Report of 1979. The specifics of the Belmont Report are inspired by three ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

[4] As Edward Said warns, representation is the bane of Western intellectuals. In his demonstration of how the East has been dominated and restructured by Western "authorities," who simplify and manipulate their image to conform to what the West wants to think about the East, Said provides a parallel to another population often viewed as inferior, backward, naive, and needy. An "orientalized" view of students would project teachers as instructing ignorant and often ill-prepared students, advising them on their future choices, judging their performances, and determining if they have met our standards so that they may enter various professional fields. At the same time, students help to

define (always by contrast) our own merits. In Said's words, "they are always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior" (72) to their intellectual superiors.

[5] See also the important work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Mark Freeman, Rom Harré, and Dan P. McAdams.

[6] For a more detailed discussion of epistemology and discourse, see René Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

Appendix A

Student Permission

Student Name (print) _____

Course Number, Name, and Semester

Description of Material to Be Used: Student Themes (I'll add journal entries, too, if I plan to use these)

I would like to keep a copy of the work described above to use in subsequent terms and possibly in scholarly publication. If you are willing to let me use your work, please answer the questions below to tell me how you'd like it used. (Circle Yes or No.)

1. Change the real names in the material.   Yes No

2. Correct minor errors before material is used.   Yes No

3. Give my (student's) name as author.   Yes No

4. Change confidential or identifying material
     before the material is used.   Yes No

_____

Your signature

_____

Your permanent (home) address (Please print or write legibly)

Today's date_____

     Thank you for your help!

     Maureen M. Hourigan

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