RETURNING STUDENTS' WAYS OF WRITING: IMPLICATIONS FOR FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE COMPOSITION

ALICE M. GILLAM

Alana, a thirty-one-year-old secretary by day and college student by night, spends countless hours generating drafts for her first-year composition class: "I have no idea what I am doing. I spend hours just trying [to produce a draft of one or two pages]. I'd say from maybe 2:00 in the afternoon till about 10:00 at night, just sitting there writing until I get tired of it and then continue the next day." She worries, in particular, that this "inefficiency" in her writing process will make it impossible for her to pass the university's ninety-minute proficiency examination which students must take to gain junior standing.[1]

Robert, a thirty-year-old computer programmer, ekes out 250 words for a profile of his high school football coach, only half of the essay's required length. Later, he complains to an interviewer, "As time went on, I became frustrated while trying to fulfill the teacher's desire for descriptive sentences. I'm more of a factual writer."[2]

Patti, a forty-year-old housewife, writes a witty first essay about the many interruptions in her day and an awkwardly stilted sec-

ond essay on the difficulties involved in quitting smoking. In response to her instructor's questions about the difference in voice and style, Patti replies that since she was citing sources in the second paper, she felt she should "take the piece out of the realm of personal experience and write about something objectively" (Newkirk 50-55).

To those of us who regularly teach returning adult writers, the above accounts of Alana's time-consuming efforts to produce a draft, Robert's difficulties with elaboration, and Patti's problems in shifting from personal to academic writing will sound familiar. Understandably, the return to school writing can produce initial difficulties and frustration. For some, the years out of school have involved little writing beyond grocery lists, insurance forms, and notes to a child's teacher. For others, the intervening years have included regular writing on the job or frequent personal correspondence with family and friends. But it is unlikely that the years of school have afforded opportunities to practice the kind of writing required by the academy.

In spite of the adjustments required, many returning students (those twenty-five-years-old and older) go on to become successful—even enthusiastic—writers. To date, however, most of what we know about the initial needs and subsequent development of this population of writers comes from anecdotes like those above. As Irvin Y. Hashimoto notes, "the literature on composition instruction . . . has given scant attention to the specific needs of this population," a population that comprised 34.3% of all students in higher education in 1980 ("Adult Learning and Composition Instruction" 55). Between 1970 and 1989, returning adult enrollment increased by a dramatic 141%, and between 1989 and 1996, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) predicts another rise of 8% (NCES 159).

As adult educators continue to remind us, we have yet to adjust our pedagogical assumptions and practices to suit the needs of this substantial new population of students. In particular, such educators argue that the tendency to disregard students' "histories" and prior knowledge is shortsighted and mistaken (Knowles 43; Belenky *et al.* 193-198; Coles and Wall 298-299). To better understand the relationship between returning students' writing histories and their initial attitudes and writing performance, I studied two small populations of older student writers.[3] In the essay which follows, I report on one of the themes which emerged from these

studies of returning students at two state universities. Specifically I report on the gender-related difference in out-of-school writing experience and its implications for teaching.

Clearly, a product of socially constructed gender roles and not a product of biological or psychological givens, these differences are always inflected by other social factors, such as race and class.[4] Since, however, the two groups of returning students which I studied were relatively homogeneous in terms of race (95% white) and class (93%), gender-related writing experience seemed a more significant factor in explaining certain attitudes and behaviors than did these other social factors. Nevertheless, as K. Patricia Cross reminds us, generalizations about returning adults are hazardous since this population of writers is widely diverse in terms of age range, life experience, academic background, and socio-economic status (77). My intent, then, is not to suggest that these patterns of difference are generalizable to other populations of returning adult writers, but rather to suggest that adult students' writing histories and the social influences which have shaped those histories ought to be considered in designing writing courses which include returning students.

GENDER-RELATED DIFFERENCES IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL WRITING EXPERIENCE

In a society still influenced by traditional sex-role expectations, it is not surprising to find gender-related differences in the writing experience of returning students. Although this may be changing, my studies suggest that returning men are more likely than returning women to bring work-related writing experience to the composition classroom.[5] Moreover, for those who bring such experience, the nature of this work-related writing differs for women and men. By contrast, returning women are more likely than returning men to bring extensive experience with "private," personal writing—letters, diaries, and journals. Forty percent of the thirty-four returning men in my two studies reported some experience with on-the-job writing while only 24% of the thirty returning females named such experience. More dramatically, 60% of the women reported regular experience with personal writing since high school whereas only 18% of the men mentioned such experiences. The results of an NIE-sponsored research project involving 114 high school students suggest that this latter contrast

in experience begins early. Researchers Leu, Keech, Murphy, and Kinzer found that 43.9% of high school girls kept diaries or wrote frequent letters while only 14.3% of high school boys did such writing (252).

If, as some adult educators claim, past experience affects adult learning even more powerfully than it does that of children, then this difference in experience warrants close examination. As Malcolm Knowles, a prominent adult educator, explains:

> To a child, an experience is something that happens to him; it is an external event that affects him, not an integral part of him. . . . But to an adult, his experience *is* him. He defines who he is, establishes his self-identity, in terms of his accumulation of a unique set of experiences (*Modern Practices* 44).

Thus, we might expect the nature of the adult's writing experience, its purpose and audience, to influence returning students' attitudes toward and concept of writing.

The work-related writing reported by the men in my studies included "brief inter-office memos," "procedures used in chemical experimentation," "personnel evaluations," "sales proposals," "office documentation," "technical reports about machine problems," and "social histories" taken at a social service agency. What's notable about these tasks is their highly structured form, pragmatic purpose, clearly specified audience, and assumption of the writer's authority. In another study of returning adult writers, one which did not indicate the gender of participants, the returning students described their work-related writing as message-oriented, purposeful, succinct and factual in style, and, perhaps most important, written *from* authority (Gremore).

Those women in my studies with work-related writing experience mentioned two kinds: writing as part of their paid employment and writing as part of their volunteer work. In the first category women, like Alana, mentioned clerical writing—business letters and memos—most frequently. The only other kinds of on-the-job tasks named were those relating to nursing—charting patients' histories and writing nursing care plans. Writing mentioned in the second category included minutes taken for church groups and the PTA. Like the work-related experience reported by returning men, most of these tasks are formulaic in structure, formal in tone, and written for a practical purpose to a known but not intimate

audience. However, in both job and volunteer situations most of the women cited tasks in which they acted as a scribe or editor, not as the author or "maker of meaning." Only the nurses described situations in which they wrote from authority.

The personal writing reported by the returning women differs in form, purpose, audience, and authorial role from the work-related writing just described. Specifically, women noted such occasions for writing as the following: "I've kept a journal since I was first told I had cancer eight years ago"; "Since my family lives far away, I write many letters and when I get started I usually write about seven pages or more"; "I've written letters to people that I've never sent because afterwards I realize I needed to write it for me and after I've written it, I look at it, and I've worked things through and I throw it away"; "When I was thirteen years old, my best friend moved to California. This event, along with leaving me bereft and mourning in New Jersey, produced one startling side effect. It took writing out of the realm of school assignments which were obligatory, dull, and not of much use and brought it into the critical area of surviving with my friend 3,000 miles away."

Here the audience is oneself or a familiar other; the form is organic, not prescribed; the voice is conversational and intimate; and the purpose is expressive, to clarify one's feelings to oneself or to make connections with others. Furthermore, the kind of writing just described differs from work-related writing in its significance to the writer. Such writing is viewed less as a product and more as an extension of oneself.

Not surprisingly, these out-of-school writing experiences influence students' initial attitudes and performance in first-year college writing classes.

GENDER-DIFFERENCE IN INITIAL ATTITUDES AND PERFORMANCE

The anxiety that I have observed among returning adult writers is usually what Daly and Hailey would call "situational anxiety," a "transitory" feeling produced by a particular writing situation—unfamiliarity with the task, insecurity about performance, fear of evaluation (259-60). A predictable response that can affect initial performance, situational anxiety usually subsides with practice and an encouraging teacher. Although there has been little research

on returning adults' writing anxiety, one study suggests that returning women feel this situational anxiety more keenly than men.

In her 1981 study of returning adult writers, Merle Thompson found that the returning women were significantly more anxious about writing (as measured by the Thompson Attitude Scale) at the outset of their composition courses than were the returning men in her sample. Although she does not describe the effect this initial anxiety had on writing performance, she reports that after a quarter of instruction, both men and women were similarly less anxious, suggesting that women were not seriously disabled by their initial anxiety. Thompson theorizes that the initial difference was due to men's on-the-job writing experience (5-8).

Unlike Thompson, I found no significant difference in the initial writing anxiety scores of returning men and women as measured by Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test (WAT).[6] However, I did find a gender difference when I conducted an item analysis of these students' WAT responses. Initially, 70% of the women in my study expressed anxiety about having their writing evaluated while only 33% of the men expressed this anxiety. Another difference between the responses of women and men was that more women than men cited organization as their chief writing problem while more men than women cited idea development.

Although I do not wish to overextend the implication of these findings, these differences in attitude and self-assessment do seem related to the differences in background just mentioned. On-the-job writing often involves response from the intended audience or evaluation by a supervisor. Thus those with this kind of writing experience might be expected to be somewhat less apprehensive about the prospect of evaluation. Letters to family and friends and journal entries, by contrast, are private discourse, written to a trusted, familiar, and usually uncritical audience or for oneself. Further, on-the-job writing is almost always highly structured transactional writing, requiring brevity, simplicity of syntax, and minimal elaboration. Consequently, those practiced in these forms of writing might be expected to be more confident about their ability to organize ideas than about their ability to develop ideas in academic discourse. On the other hand, the expressive writing with which many women are familiar is associational in structure and often rich in detail, perhaps explaining these women's anxiety about producing properly organized academic prose.

Related to this difference in self-assessment are initial differences in performance which can also be traced to writing

background. As might be expected, these variations involve essay organization, development, and authorial voice.

To cope with the unfamiliar tasks required in college writing, women and men quite naturally draw on past writing experiences, sometimes resulting in lengthy unfocused prose or terse underdeveloped prose. The former tendency is more frequently noted in articles about returning adult writers than the latter and is usually identified as characteristic of returning women writers.

These reports suggest that initially returning women overwrite both in terms of essay length and time expended, producing essays which are rambling and unfocused in form and content. In "Teaching Composition to Re-Entry Women," for example, Natalie Foulkes and Beatrice Taines comment on the lengthy, disorganized prose of many of their students, claiming that the women with whom they have worked often produce 2000 words when assigned 500 (9). Similarly, James East and Ronald Strahl report that the largely female population (80%) whom they teach in a shopping mall spend fourteen hours, on the average, writing each essay as compared to five hours spent by the younger on-campus students. Here, too, they claim the chief weakness is structure: "The result is that while the essays are brimming with numerous examples, anecdotes, details, and descriptions, paragraph unity is often destroyed, topic sentences are contradicted, and the patterns of development are illogically ordered" (217).

Distressing in these reports, however, is the pejorative attitude toward returning women's writing which Foulkes and Taines describe as "dull" and "gossipy" (9). Rather than seeing these writing behaviors as context-related, attributable to prior experience, and potentially beneficial, Foulkes and Taines seem to regard these behaviors as deficiencies which are dispositionally female. A refreshing contrast is Pamela Annas' feminist reading of her work with returning women writers in which Annas describes these ways of writing as a result of complex political pressures (362). Moreover, Annas notes various patterns among returning women writers, women who "turn out polished, correct, and fluent essays which generally engaged only the surface of their selves," as well as women who write in "diffuse and scattered way[s]" (368).

In my view, the behaviors described by Foulkes and Taines, Strahl and East, and Annas stem partly from situational anxiety but more importantly from reliance on past experience with expressive writing where recreating experience for oneself or others

is primary. Moreover, the fluency and diligence suggested in these accounts often result in rapid writing growth for returning women writers.

Yet another gender-related difference in performance is the matter of voice, an admittedly elusive term. By voice, I mean point of view, individual style, the writer's authority in relation to the audience and topic, the "self" which is created in the text. Although both returning men and women experience uncertainty about authorial voice, as do most younger students for that matter, the source and dimension of the problem differ between younger and older students and between male and female students. Because most adults have a "history of independent thought and action, of responsibility for themselves and others" (Gaff and Gaff 643), they feel uncomfortable in situations which call for a sense of authority (the writer's role) but where they have no clear sense of such. As James Bartell explains in "Child Writers and Adult Readers: The Paradox of the Composition Class," the traditional composition classroom puts adults in a situation where they are expected to assume authority as writers but where they have little control over the circumstances surrounding their writing—the topic, genre, and evaluation criteria (23-28).

Returning men sometimes hide their uncertainty by adopting a formal reportorial voice, producing terse fact-laden prose. Or, they produce essays in which the voice shifts awkwardly between a formal and informal register, as is the case in Ben's draft which will be discussed shortly. Women, on the other hand, especially those without work-related writing experience, may treat transactional or persuasive tasks as though they were expressive ones, thereby allowing them to use a highly personal voice and sidestep the questions of authority. The example of Naomi which follows illustrates this strategy. It may be, too, that the verbosity just mentioned is a way of blunting the authority of the message. Also contributing to women's uneasiness about authorship (the claim of authority in a text) is their lack of confidence in the relevance and authority of their personal experience in the academic setting (Connors 264; Foulkes and Taines 9; Newkirk 53).[7]

This difficulty with authorial voice is particularly obvious in situations which call for an integration of personal analysis with secondary source material. Patti, the returning writer mentioned at the beginning of this essay, exemplifies the struggle to relate "personal knowledge to that given by secondary sources" (Newkirk

51). Or as another returning student asked, "Professor, how do I footnote my own opinion?" (Day 2). Explaining Patti's problem, Thomas Newkirk writes:

> She construed objectivity to reside in researched information which she felt was solid and valid, and she excluded first-hand experience which she felt was inconsequential, unauthoritative, even common. . . . These misconceptions about the nature of objectivity and the hierarchy and the incompatibility of different kinds of information kept her from attempting an analysis of personal experience that she could do authoritatively (53).

Intimidated by what Newkirk calls the "authoritative quality of print," Patti discounted her own experience with the topic and deferred to the authority of published fact and opinion (53).

Although such intimidation is felt by all students, I contend it is more deeply felt by returning women who initially feel insecure about their place in the academy in terms of both age and gender. Traditionally, the academy and the knowledge it represents have been a male sphere (Rich 125-55). Written authority has most often come from men and has reflected male experience and views of the world (Caywood and Overing xii-xiii; Belenky et al. 5-6). Consequently, women have tended to value the scholarly writing of men more highly than that of women in the same field (Goldberg 28-30). In addition, since women's experience is seldom reflected in what they read, their sense of being outsiders in the realm of published discourse is heightened (Schweickart 31-62; Showalter 9-35). Yet another factor which undoubtedly affects women's voice in writing is women's speech, specifically women's hesitancy to make unqualified assertions (Lakoff 8-19; Kramarae 17-24).

THE CASES OF NAOMI AND BEN

To illustrate some of the gender-related performance characteristics just discussed, I now turn to two case study examples. During her fifteen years out of school, Naomi, a 38-year-old nurse, regularly kept a journal and frequently wrote personal letters, sometimes working out her feelings in letters never sent. (Her comment on this latter use of writing appears earlier.) Ben, a 26-year-old cabinetmaker, wrote specifications for cabinet-making

jobs during his eight years away from school. A deeply religious young man, Ben, unlike most of the returning men I studied, kept a journal from time to time, mostly for religious reflection.

Naomi and Ben's drafts were composed in a sixty-minute protocol session during the second week of the quarter. Although these drafts are what Donald Murray calls "discovery" drafts ("Internal" 86), they illustrate typical responses which I have found among newly returned writers. The task to which Naomi and Ben were responding was the following: "In your opinion, is the University of Illinois at Chicago sensitive to the needs of returning adults? Write a letter to the editor of the UIC student newspaper presenting your opinion."

Naomi's draft (See Appendix A.) begins like a journal entry or a breezy letter to a friend, but later shifts to a pep talk to prospective older students. She starts without introduction and with only a hint about the writing context: "This is the end of my second week of classes." The ideas are presented in random fashion with no clear purpose emerging until the last paragraph. The tone is highly informal, full of exclamatory statements. At times the letter is elliptical. For example, in line 4 she states that it is "amazing" that she "made it here," but fails to explain why this is so. Having not yet clearly identified her audience—is it to be the university community at large or just prospective returning students?—or her purpose, Naomi assumes a familiar audience who know of her situation and with whom she does not have to establish authority and an expressive purpose. Thus, the voice in the text is the conversational one Naomi uses with friends—honest, intense in her likes and dislikes, enthusiastic about everything she undertakes. She understandably approached this transactional/persuasive writing task as she would have an expressive writing task, producing journal-like, writer-based prose.

Ben's response (See Appendix B.) to the same approach differs in somewhat predictable ways. Though written in first person, Ben's letter is more formal in tone than Naomi's and clearly persuasive in intent. Unlike Naomi, Ben refers to the topic at the outset and mentions his qualifications for addressing the topic. Ben shows some rhetorical savvy when he suggests that the university might do well to attend to his complaints since he is suggesting ways to "keep returning students longer." Accustomed to precision, Ben includes a lot of specific factual detail—times and places—and specific suggestions. Although there is disjuncture be-

tween paragraphs two and three, Ben's letter is less associational in structure than Naomi's and demonstrates some audience awareness. Yet it lacks the clear sense of voice found in Naomi's letter. Awkwardly inconsistent, Ben alternates between a matter-of-fact and at times didactic voice (line 42) and a folksy one—"Keep up the good work!" (line 47)

In both cases, these rough drafts illustrate Ben and Naomi's reliance on familiar discourse modes—the factual report in Ben's case and the journal and personal letter in Naomi's. Rather than being deficient efforts, these drafts suggest various strengths that the writing teacher may use as points of departure in helping these students revise. In the case of Naomi, for example, the teacher might capitalize on the fluency and unaffected voice in the draft, asking her to translate her experiences with registration into criticisms and recommendations and her frustration into an assertive tone. Similarly, the teacher might encourage Ben to use his organizational format as a framework within which to refine his argument and clarify his rhetorical stance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Put simply, I view the differing writing backgrounds which returning adults bring as resources to be utilized rather than as deficits to be remediated. As Mimi Schwartz suggests, experience in one writing role can carry over into others, and so can the skills. Experience in journal-keeping, for example, can make essay writing "more fluent, less affected" (1). Experience in writing business letters can enhance one's sense of audience in academic essay writing. Past learning, in other words, can and should be used as a bridge to new learning (Knowles 43). To capitalize on adults' prior knowledge and skills while at the same time addressing their concerns about the return to school writing, I suggest beginning with experience portfolios. Although the strategies which follow are neither new nor applicable only to returning students, they are particularly well suited to the needs and strengths of returning adults and effective in classes of only returning students as well as in those which include students of all ages.

First suggested by Johanna Sweet for use with high school students, experience portfolios offer a particularly fruitful beginning point for returning adults. Sweet's notion of the portfolio, however, is a checklist with items ranging from dirt-biking to col-

lecting mushrooms (51). What I have in mind is an experience portfolio including a prose vitae describing significant life experiences, a writing history and writer's profile, and writing samples. Defined broadly, the writing samples would include both public and private writing that the student was willing to share—informal notes and lists, personal and business letters, journal entries, school writing, memos, minutes taken for meetings, articles written for the church paper, technical reports, nursing care plans and so on. Those with little or no writing experience since high school would be asked to produce writing samples based on various adult roles and experiences—a letter of application for a job, a personal letter to a friend or relative, a how-to essay, a narrative describing their typical day. Gender-related differences in background are both indirectly and directly addressed in the activities which follow.

The contents of the portfolios may be used in a variety of ways to demonstrate that students do have something worthwhile to say, to point out skills and knowledge developed through various writing experiences, and to make conscious the tacit knowledge about language gained through participation in adult discourse communities (Bruffee 644). The prose vitae (a single essay, or series of essays or paragraphs), for example, can be used in teacher/student conferences to identify subjects about which the student might write with authority and in small groups to demonstrate the range of life experience and expertise brought by individual students. Additionally, group interchange establishes a relaxed classroom atmosphere, creates the sense of community which Troyka claims is vital to returning adults (256), and sets the stage for later response group work and writing workshops.[8] If the class includes younger and older students, group interchange quickly dispels adults' fear of being out of place, and often they are pleasantly surprised at the younger students' acceptance and regard.

The writing histories and profiles (accounts of how students go about a writing task) also serve multiple purposes. Such narratives reveal attitudes and assumptions about writing, significant experiences (both positive and negative), writing anxieties, and blocks. Simply identifying common struggles and fears relieves some anxiety because students find they are not alone in their difficulties with writing. Sometimes dysfunctional habits come to light—the student who perfects each sentence as she writes—or particularly painful memories—the time the teacher ripped up the student's research notecards in front of the class. Both the teacher and stu-

dent have more control over these matters once they are acknowledged. Similarly, the histories and profiles elicit crippling myths about the nature of writing and the writing process which the teacher can then confront directly. Writers' diaries and samples of work in progress counteract some of these myths by illustrating the complexity of the process and the varieties of composing styles. Such discussions take some of the mystery out of writing and make it seem a more accessible skill: "Writing is a craft before it is an art; writing may appear magic, but it is our responsibility to take our students backstage to watch the pigeons being tucked up the magician's sleeve" (Murray, *A Writer Teaches* 4).

For many older students, the notion of writing as a process is entirely new. As one student said, "They hadn't heard of revision when I was last in school." Thus the various strategies for getting started, planning, drafting, and revising are revelations which offer a sense of options and control. A repeated theme in the end-of-the-quarter questionnaire responses I gathered was the value of this metacognitive learning. Furthermore, students' comments coupled with their course grades suggested that they had translated this knowledge into what Robert Bracewell calls "metacognitive skill" (183), enabling them to monitor, manipulate, and interpret their process productively (Gillam-Scott 155, 339-40).

The third component of the portfolio, the writing samples, provide yet another way of using prior knowledge as a bridge to new knowledge. In small groups students share their writing samples by reading them aloud as the others listen or follow the copy they have been given. After the writer has read his or her personal letters, technical report, church fund raising letter, journal entry, or list of things to do, the group discusses the purpose, form, audience, authorial intention and voice. To work best, groups include returning writers with varied writing backgrounds. After the groups report their findings, the teacher can initiate a discussion of how the rhetorical situation shapes both form and content in all writing. The characteristics of a personal letter—associational structure, elliptical references, intimate voice—presume a trusted and familiar audience for whom one does not need to explain everything. The features of a memo—its prescribed layout, clear and simple syntax, and authorial tone—reflect its pragmatic purpose and the relationship between the author and audience. Practice in any of these public and private modes of discourse develop particular skills which can transfer to school writing. The journal

keeper has learned fluency and the importance of sensate detail; the technical writer knows how to organize information and to write concisely. The gender differences which undoubtedly emerge during the examination of writing samples offer an occasion for discussing sexist language and the relationship of sex roles to social roles and writing roles. Why, the teacher might ask, are women usually the ones asked to take minutes at a meeting? Do people take writing by men as more authoritative than writing by women?

A related activity is the examination of representative samples of everyday public and private writing—junk mail, business reports, love letters, PTA minutes, letters of recommendation, neighborhood newsletters, xeroxed Christmas letters—in terms of their rhetorical features.[9] Exercises based on their samples demonstrate to students how much they already know about the social functions of writing and remind them of the importance of familiar genres such as the letter, which Edward P.J. Corbett claims is the "major form of written discourse that many of us will be called upon to produce after we leave school" (606), and which Shirley Brice Heath cites as the primary vehicle through which colonial and 19th century American women developed writing skills (322-34).

By revealing the knowledge and skills adults bring to the writing classroom, experience portfolios bolster confidence, reduce anxiety, and encourage a sense of the writer's authority. Further, examination of familiar writing tasks provides students with vocabulary and concepts for analyzing the demands of less familiar tasks. Finally, these activities involve no-fault writing practice, collaborative learning experience, and diagnostic information for the teacher.

In subsequent writing assignments, the teacher can use the information elicited to design assignments which draw on the students' past experience yet offer practice in typical academic discourse modes. Since fear of evaluation is one of the chief causes of situational anxiety, particularly for women, clearly explained procedures are crucial. Evaluation practices which reduce anxiety include selective marking, group-generated criteria, opportunities for feedback and revision through teacher/student conferences and response groups, and choice about which essays will be graded.

Unlike students of traditional age whose most recent writing experiences may have been "obligatory and dull" school assignments, adults, if they have written at all, have written for practical or personal purposes and for "real" audiences. Although they may be apprehensive about the return to school writing, they

do not question the importance of developing writing skills. No adult, in my experience, has ever agreed with the statement "Writing is a waste of time" on Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test, and nearly all claim that writing will be important in their professional lives.

Except for seriously underprepared adults, the strong motivation and consequent diligence result in rapid growth for many returning writers. Drawing on her nursing background, Naomi, for example, used her expressive writing skills to write an impassioned *and* logically argued research paper on the biographical factors which influenced Margaret Sanger's birth control crusade. Ben pursued his interest in improving UIC's program for returning adults by conducting interviews and researching other schools' programs, producing a carefully written paper of recommendation which he submitted to university administrators.

Returning students' writing background can and should be the matrix out of which their abilities develop. Such a pedagogical approach reverses the traditional practice of "confirming" students as "knowers" only at the end of a college education and instead offers "confirmation and community" as foundations for learning (Belenky et al. 193-95). Moreover, such an approach recognizes that adult students "have for years been thinking and using language in complex ways for a variety of purposes" (Coles and Wall 299). As many writing teachers can testify, the diversity and diligence found among returning adult writers often produces engaging and engaged writing, and their presence in first-year writing classes enriches the learning environment for all.

NOTES

[1]Alana was a part of a 1987 study of writing center tutorials at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. A fuller account of her return to school writing will appear in "The Role of Authority and the Authority of Roles in Peer Writing Tutorials," in preparation by Alice Gillam, Susan Callaway, and Katherine Hennessey Wikoff.

[2]Robert participated in my 1982 study of returning adult writers at Ball State University.

[3]The two studies include a study of twenty returning adult students enrolled in a first-year composition class at Ball State University in 1982 and a study of forty-four returning adult students enrolled in first-year composition classes at the University of Illinois—Chicago (UIC) in 1983. The data collected in the Ball State study include end-of-the-term questionnaire responses and interviews; the data in the UIC study include beginning and end-of-the-term questionnaire

responses and pre- and post-responses to Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test (WAT). The UIC study also included in-depth case studies of four of these returning writers.

[4]Elizabeth Flynn's study of the writing of traditionally-aged students suggests that there are essential gender differences in men's and women's ways of writing. Unlike Flynn, I am not suggesting that there are essential gender differences in the writing of returning men and women but rather that socially influenced differences in writing experience result in gender-related differences in initial attitude and performance.

[5]These statistics and observations about the gender-related differences in men's and women's out-of-school writing experience are based on the sixty-four returning students involved in the two studies.

[6]This finding is based only on my study of forty-four UIC returning students.

[7]In her lecture on "Women's Work at Home: Towards a Feminist Methodology" at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Dorothy Smith noted that women's work in the home is invisible and is often not recognized or valued as work by either women themselves or society in general. This might explain why returning women without job experience indicated that they felt their life experience provided them little about which to write (Connors 264).

[8]See Barbara Cambridge's "Equal Opportunity Writing Classrooms: Accommodating Interactional Differences Between Genders in the Writing Classroom," *The Writing Instructor* 7.1 (1987): 30-39, for suggestions about how to manage small group and whole class discussions in ways that incorporate both male and female interactional styles.

[9]Bob J. Frye, "You May Have Won the Chevrolet Camaro," suggests ways in which the junk mail letter can be examined in terms of rhetorical features.

APPENDIX A

This is the end of my second week of classes at the UIC campus. Aside from feeling frazelled (spell?) and tired from all the walking, I'm probably as excited about being here as anyone can be! It's amazing to me now that I think of it that I made it here. All the rigamarole involved in registering is ridiculous! When I saw the lines on Taylor street outside of SES, I couldn't believe it! And the hours for that were totally unexceptable. It's fine to stand in line for over an hour when you have nothing better to do, but when you have to leave work early to do it, it's hard not to feel agravated. I really don't consider myself a violent person ~~when~~, but when the man at the table where I presented my #2 card threw it back at me telling me I needed another form, I had this strong desire to leave a bomb under his table. He was the first person I'd met here who was rude & I'm really sorry I didn't tell him so.

Obviously, there need to be more courses offered in the evening. The selection is so limiting that this may be the only quarter I will be able to take in the evening.

So, at this point, you must be asking yourself why is she excited about being at UIC? Well, first of all I feel "turned-

on" to opening myself up to learing in an institution that I think is respected. I'm ~~excited~~ thrilled that I finally made it here ~~and~~ after thinking about doing this for so long, I feel like I'm starting a new growth period in my life. That in itself is personally satisfying.

I've heard from other students that the instructors at Circle are great, and so far, I can't help but agree enthusiastically. They seem to be the ones who really appreciate what it's like to return to school. Yet I don't feel coddled (spell?). I want to feel that I can stand next to any student on campus in the courses I'm taking—so that is very important to me. But, they are expecially supportive of us older students and it feels good.

I would suggest to any one of you considering returning to school, or starting out after you've been working even a long time—to first be sure it's what you want. Go for it—and don't be discouraged by the initial hassles. The "fun" starts when you walk into class the first day, and if your reaction is anything like mine, you'll feel like you made your 'A" already by just being there. It will be all downhill after that!

Naomi's Draft for Protocol Session #1

APPENDIX B

(After having been being here at Circle Campus for a week, I ~~feel~~ think that I have some ideas •on how I feel the university is meeting my needs as a returning adult.) If an older adult is returning to school after a period of absense (sp), he usually brings with him fear. If a school is able to give a returning student effective tools in dealing with ~~the university~~ these fears, I think he university will keep that student longer.

During the week before classes started there was an opportunity for all returning adults to spend 3 hours at U. of I. campus. The faculty gave seminars on 4 topics which they felt may best give returning students handles on dealing with different problems. I feel that these seminars gave basic guidelines in working through ~~your~~ my fears about entering college, but they fell short of actually giving ~~one~~ me a sense of comfort in all areas. Some ways to improve the seminar next year would be to lengthen the seminar from half day to a full day. This would increase the time in each mini-seminar from 3/4 hr. to 1 and 1/2 hr. giving the leaders more time to deal with specific problems. Also I feel that giving returning adults an orientation of the campus would be helpful. I have yet been taken through the library to learn what all is avaible there. And if I would not be taking Comp. 102, I may not get the opportunity this quarter to

find out what is avaible (sp) at the library. Using the
library is a tool that I will need during the ~~duration~~ course
of my college education, therefore making it an important
item to know how to use, and something that should picked up
in orientation.

In response to professors' attitudes and teaching
styles, I find as a returning student that ~~they~~ the profes-
sors are very helpful. I especially enjoy their excitement
for teaching. All four of my profs have a real desire to
teach ~~to~~ ~~others~~ the class their ~~own~~ unique way of understand-
ing the ~~class~~ topic. Even with a class size of 200-300 stu-
dents, all the professors seem to take a personal interest in
~~your~~ my thoughts and problems. As far as teaching styles go,
I feel that my four professors teach very differently. All
All of the professors have very effective ways of teaching,
they stimulate my mind with each class session. ~~To all my~~
~~professors I say "Keep up the good work!~~

In closing, I wish to admonish (sp) the administration
in their program for returning adults. I feel that more
should be done to orientate (sp) those of us who come back
after periods of being away from the books. Secondly, I wish
to thank the faculty for the involvement in educating return-
ing adults. To them I say "Keep up the good work!"

Ben's Draft from Protocol Session #1

Alice Gillam is Assistant Professor of English and Writing Center Director at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

WORKS CITED

Annas, Pamela J. "Style as Politics: A Feminist Approach to the Teaching of Writing." *College English* 47 (1985): 360-72.

Bartell, James. "Child Writers and Adult Readers: The Paradox of the Composition Class." *Arizona English Bulletin* 19 (1976): 23-28.

Belenky, Mary Field, et al. *Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

Bracewell, Robert J. "Investigating the Control of Writing Skills." *Research on Writing: Principles and Methods*. Ed. Peter Mosenthal, Lynne Tamor, and Sean A. Walmsley. New York: Longman, 1983. 177-203.

Bruffee, Kenneth A. "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'." *College English* 46 (1984): 635-52.

Cambridge, Barbara. "Equal Opportunity Writing Classrooms: Accommodating Interactional Differences Between Genders in the Writing Classroom." *The Writing Instructor* 7.1 (1987): 30-39.

Caywood, Cynthia L., and Gillian R. Overing, eds. *Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender, and Equity*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1987.

Coles, Nicholas, and Susan V. Wall. "Conflict and Power in the Reader-Responses of Adult Basic Writers." *College English* 49.3 (1987): 298-314.

Connors, Patricia. "Some Attitudes of Returning or Older Students of Composition." *College Composition and Communication* 33 (1982): 263-66.
Corbett, Edward P.J. *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1971.
Cross, K. Patricia. *Adults as Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981.
Daly, John A. and Joy Lynn Hailey. "Putting the Situation into Writing Research: State and Disposition as Parameters of the Apprehensive Writer." *New Directions in Composition Research*. Ed. Richard Beach and Lillian S. Bridwell. New York: Guilford, 1984. 259-73.
Day, Mildred. "Strategies for Teaching the Non-Traditional Student." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English. Cincinnati, Nov. 1980. ERIC ED 198 518.
East, James, and Ronald Strahl. "Learn and Shop: Teaching Composition in Shopping Centers." *College Composition and Communication* 33 (1982): 267-75.
Flynn, Elizabeth A. "Composing as a Woman." *College Composition and Communication* 39.4 (1988): 423-435.
Foulkes, Natalie, and Beatrice Taines. "Teaching Composition to Re-entry Students." *Community College Frontiers* 6.3 (1978): 8-12.
Frye, Bob J. " 'You May Have Won the Chevrolet Camaro': 'Junk Mail' as a Resource for the Teaching of Writing." *Freshman English News* 15.2 (Fall 1986): 16-18.
Gaff, Jerry G., and Sally Shake Gaff. "Student-Faculty Relationships." *The Modern American College*. Ed. Arthur W. Chickering et al. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981. 642-56.
Gilliam-Scott, Alice. "Writers with More at Stake: Returning Adults in the Freshman Composition Classroom." Diss. Ball State University, 1985.
Goldberg, Philip. "Are Women Prejudiced against Women?" *Trans-Action* 5 (April 1968): 28-30.
Gremore, Robert. "Approaches to Teaching Adults." Paper presented at the Annual Conference on College Composition and Communication. New York, New York, March 1984.
Hashimoto, Irvin Y. "Adult Learning and Composition Instruction." *Journal of Basic Writing* 4.1 (1985): 55-67.
Heath, Shirley Brice. "Toward an Ethnohistory of Writing in American Education." *Writing: The Nature, Development, and Teaching of Written Communication*, Volume I. Ed. Marcia Farr Whiteman. Hillside, NJ: Erlbaum, 1981. 25-44.
Knowles, Malcolm. *The Modern Practice of Adult Education; From Pedagogy to Andragogy*. Chicago: Follett, 1980.
Kramarae, Cheris. "Women's Speech: Separate but Unequal?" *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (1974): 14-24.
Lakoff, Robin. *Language and Women's Place*. New York: Harper, 1975.
Leu, Don, et al. "Effects of Two Versions of a Writing Prompt upon Holistic Score and Writing Processes." National Institute of Education Grant #6 80-0034. San Francisco: U of California, Berkeley.
Murray, Donald. "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery." *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*. Ed. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1978. 85-103.

____. *A Writer Teaches Writing*. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.
National Center for Educational Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics*. Washington: GPO. 1990.
Newkirk, Thomas. "Barriers to Revision." *Basic Writing* 3.2 (1981): 50-61.
Rich, Adrienne. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.
Schwartz, Mimi. *Writing for Many Roles*. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1985.
Schweickart, Patrocino P. "Reading Ourselves: Toward A Feminist Theory of Reading." *Gender and Reading*. Ed. Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocino P. Schweikart. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986. 31-62.
Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." *Writing and Sexual Difference*. Ed. Elizabeth Abel. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982. 9-35.
Smith, Dorothy. "Women's Work at Home: Towards a Feminist Methodology." Lecture. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, 25 Feb. 1987.
Sweet, Johanna. "Experience Portfolio: An Approach to Student Writing." *English Journal* 65 (1976): 50-51.
Thompson, Merle O'Rourke. "The Returning Student: Writing Anxiety and General Anxiety." Paper presented at the Northeast Regional Conference on English in the Two-Year College. Baltimore, October 1981. ERIC ED 214 558.
Troyka, Lynn Quitman. "Perspectives on Legacies and Literacy in the 1980s." *College Composition and Communication* 33 (1982): 252-66.