

TEACHERS AS WRITERS: TENSIONS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Bruce W. Robbins

"Teachers of writing should be writers themselves."

Of course. Common sense suggests that teachers ought to do—or be able to do—that which they teach. That teachers of writing should themselves be writers is a familiar idea, one especially associated with process-based approaches to writing instruction. The maxim suggests that many teachers do not write and, more important, that if teachers were writers, the effectiveness of their composition instruction would improve—in part because their own writing experiences would draw their conscious attention to those composing processes they need to teach students.

That teachers of writing should be writers sounds simple, but the more one looks, the more complex the idea becomes. Authors such as Donald Murray and Dan Kirby and Tom Liner advise composition teachers to write in order to experience writing from within, to understand writing more as a writer than as a critic. Others, like Nancie Atwell and Donald Graves, stress the values of teachers' writing as an instructional technique in the classroom. Lillian Brannon and Gordon Pradl suggest that teachers may be unaccustomed to reflecting about how their own writing might inform instruction. In her research, Marie Nelson describes teachers who are not writers as having "professional split personalities" for simultaneously accepting "two logically inconsistent frameworks"—one for teaching and another for writing (3480). In their case study of

six teacher-writers from the New York City Writing Project, Sondra Perl and Nancy Wilson conclude that “the mere fact of writing in class was not in itself as illuminating as how each teacher used writing to express his or her own temperament, tone, and personal concerns” (255). Responses from secondary school teachers to the idea of teachers as writers have ranged from exasperated rejection (Jost 65) to enthusiastic acceptance (Gilespie 1).

The more I considered teachers of writing being writers themselves, the more questions I had—especially for teachers at the secondary level whose working circumstances usually provide little reward and virtually no time or other tangible resources to support teachers’ own writing. Among my questions were these: When secondary school English teachers do write, how are their own writing and their teaching of writing related? What do teachers think it means to be a “writer”? How do teachers’ own writing experiences call their attention to, or help them better understand, composing processes? What relationships do teachers see between their own writing and the writing of their students? What role does their own writing play in teachers’ writing instruction? What contextual factors influence teachers’ writing and the uses of their writing in their instruction? Why do some teachers seem to usefully employ their writing experience in their teaching more than others? In other words, how true is it that teachers who write modify their teaching of writing in light of their own writing experiences?

To explore these questions, I conducted a year-long study with the generous cooperation of twelve English teachers in a Midwest high school in which I investigated relationships between teachers’ own writing and their approaches to writing instruction. This group of teachers, nine of whom had taught fifteen years or more, held diverse viewpoints about composition instruction, and several teachers reported that they wrote regularly. During the school year I interviewed the teachers, made classroom observations, and collected samples of documents written by the teachers, such as curriculum statements, teaching materials, and self-sponsored writing. While it is fair to conclude from the literature on this subject that teaching effectiveness should improve when teachers draw

upon their writing experiences as a resource for their teaching, my purpose was not to judge the effectiveness of these teachers' writing instruction. Instead, I wanted to describe and better understand the idea of teachers as writers, the potentials and the problems, as the idea looks in practice. How had these teachers' own writing experiences influenced their approaches to teaching writing, and how might these influences or modifications be understood as a part of the idea of teachers being writers?

As I interviewed the teachers about their own writing and watched them teach writing, I saw that the way these teachers thought of writing and instruction—colored by their different writing experiences, training, and viewpoints—profoundly shaped not only their teaching practices, but also the role that their own writing might play in their teaching. What follows is a look at three of the teachers whose personalities, writing experiences, teaching practices, and viewpoints provide opportunities to consider better the idea of teachers as writers. Following each teacher sketch is a short discussion of a question raised by the sketch, along with comments and experiences offered by other teachers in the study about the question.

Jeanette: When the Teacher's Writing Doesn't Count

During the year of my study, Jeanette's teaching assignments included sophomore English, journalism, and senior composition. In the more recent of her nineteen years of teaching junior and senior high-school English, Jeanette has participated in an NEH writing institute and several conferences and in-service sessions on teaching composition. She says she is familiar with process-based writing instruction, but she is uncertain of its value in her own teaching.

Jeanette has also been involved in some important personal writing. When her son recently became engaged to a girl from Sweden, Jeanette wrote to the girl's mother to say she understands the anxiety of the parents about their daughter marrying an American and leaving her homeland and family. Jeanette wanted the Swedish parents to know that their

daughter “had a friend and a resource” in Jeanette and her family. The Swedish parents wrote a letter of response, and now Jeanette’s continuing correspondence is building a positive relationship between the two families.

Although Jeanette does writing that is personally meaningful, she does not consider herself a writer because she has not written “anything of great moment,” by which she means literature or other serious, published writing. As a teacher and department chair she does a good deal of writing, including curriculum plans, teacher evaluations, philosophy statements, and other accreditation documents, but she does not consider this writing as serious or “real.” Although Jeanette has considered writing about her students, she doubts there would be an audience for that kind of writing. Generally, though, she does not feel a particular urge to write. Jeanette feels that her duties as an English teacher impose severe time limitations. “One sees oneself coming and going and feels fragmented,” she explains. There never seems to be enough time to do the most important teaching tasks, such as preparing for classes and marking student papers, let alone finding time to write. Time she spends on her own writing, she notes, is time taken away from her students or family.

When I ask Jeanette if students can be writers, she identifies three current students from her newspaper staff as writers. She describes them as intelligent, self-motivated, analytical young people who are good readers, are capable of original ideas and clever word play, have large vocabularies, learn from models, are competitive without being overbearing, and like to see their work published. Jeanette describes adult writers primarily by what they write and student writers primarily by personality traits, but for Jeanette, in both cases, to be a writer is to be exceptional.

As a teacher of writing, Jeanette emphasizes teaching students to construct prose that is clear, logical, and correct. She explains that this kind of writing will best serve students in college or the workplace. Jeanette usually assigns writing according to form or genre. Her English classes practice forms such as the summary, comparison, essay, character description, and research paper, although more often composition serves as

the means for evaluating her students' reading of literature. Occasionally, she says, she might use "the process":

I'll look at it in several stages. When I look at their first draft, I really want to correct it. But I know not to. I take a look at thoughts and how thoughts flow from one to another, and transitions and that kind of thing, and not to worry about all the other little editing. I refrain from doing it, but it's difficult. They say to me, for instance, does spelling count? I said well, spelling always ultimately counts, but here get as close as you can so that I can read and understand it. But yes, spelling does count down the road, but this is not the "down the road" piece.

A good deal of Jeanette's writing instruction happens in her journalism class. Process-based instruction seems inappropriate there, she explains:

It is journalistic writing, so they don't do much in terms of the process. I mean, we don't do a lot of prewriting and that sort of thing because they all have a very defined assignment. They are trying to write a news story, a feature, a review, an interview, an editorial, and probably a sports story. And of course that organization, the framework, is really provided for them because a news story is presented in a particular way. You know, you have the lead, and then everything is done in sort of an inverse pyramid. So the format and the style requirements are not necessarily something that they generate.

Criteria of the written forms in English and journalism are Jeanette's primary basis for instruction and evaluation: the content of the writing primarily provides the material for students to practice or demonstrate the form. Jeanette's source of knowledge about forms comes not so much from her own writing or reading of journalism and literature, where she acknowledges that genre boundaries are often blurred, but from textbooks. If textbooks sacrifice some authenticity, she feels they also make forms of writing and instruction simpler and more comprehensible for students.

Jeanette's reading of student writing is not limited to format, however, but is more broadly analytical. She stresses that she wants her instruction in composition and grammar to be

. . . not naming parts, but logically making sure that things fit, to look at what they do, how they relate to other words, how these words all relate, how they fit together, how when you speak and when you write you could produce something that is orderly, fluent, clear, and makes sense. Because the whole idea is that we're going to make sense to each other. We're going to be clear. That's the whole purpose of any language, I think.

When Jeanette began the semester, her senior composition students told her that they were "sick of" process-based composition instruction. Jeannette defines process-based instruction as marching a class through a series of steps in which everyone makes a list, web, or cluster; writes a rough draft; exchanges papers; fills out a critique sheet; revises; and so forth. Jeanette tells her seniors that "since you already understand this process, I will assume that you will go through the process when you do your assignments, but I am not going to grade you every step of the way. So what's going to happen is I will grade your final product, essentially."

Jeanette confides that although her way of teaching composition is "not the currently popular way," it is effective. Jeanette's instruction not only focuses her attention primarily on students' written products rather than processes, but also determines that her main responsibility as a composition teacher is to be a reader, not a writer. While she values her own writing as useful for job-related tasks like producing accreditation materials or for personal uses like composing letters to Sweden, her own writing does not seem very closely related to her teaching. By her own definition, Jeanette is not a writer.

Who Is a writer?

According to authors like Murray and Tom Romano, a teacher-writer is simply one who writes. Jeanette, and most of the members of her department, hold a different opinion: a teacher-writer is a publishing author. Many state that their image of “writer” came from their college English training in which a writer is one who creates literature, or, a few note, at least one who publishes professional books and articles.

During the first interview, I ask each of the twelve teachers if they consider themselves to be writers. Given their definition of “writer,” and the fact that some do not consider their own journals and letters to be “writing,” it is not surprising that eight of the twelve answer “no.” More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that during the school year (at no instigation from me), eleven of the twelve teachers do engage in some personally valued, self-sponsored composing beyond job-related writing of lesson plans, progress reports, and so forth. At least occasionally they write short stories, sketches, essays, poems, extensive journals, and thoughtful letters. Most of the teachers, however, do not believe their writing makes them writers, nor do most see much connection between their own writing and their teaching.

I also ask Jeanette and the other teachers about the idea that teachers of writing should be writers themselves. Instead of considering their own writing as a way to better understand composing processes, as much of the literature on the subject argues, nine of these teachers speculate that teachers who are writers could use their own finished pieces of writing as models of exemplary composition for their students to analyze and imitate. But since published examples of writing by acclaimed authors are readily available, these teachers conclude that their own writing is unnecessary in their teaching. In addition, several teachers note that in focusing their effort toward their own writing, teacher-writers might be turning their effort away from students and teaching. One teacher reasons that since he is not a writer—even though he has been teaching writing for years—it must not be necessary that teachers of writing be writers. A few of the teachers, however, do claim to be writers—“at least with a small *w*” as one put it—

and use their writing experience in their teaching. One of these is Rebecca.

Rebecca: Making Students the Stars

In her fifth year of high school teaching, Rebecca describes herself as entering teaching backward, since she had previously worked for publishing firms, earned a doctorate in English education, and supervised student teachers. Supervision made her want to teach high school English herself. As a result of her experience, Rebecca is aware of current issues and practices in composition instruction. She enjoys high school teaching, where her responsibilities include “basic” sophomores, “gifted” juniors, and “nonacademic” seniors.

Rebecca is one of the few teachers in her department who considers herself a writer. She describes her own composing process as working from messy, multiple drafts in ways that are “anything but linear.” Having always kept journals, she makes entries each night, thinking of her journals as free writing from which she might later draw materials for more formal pieces. Rebecca uses writing to reflect on personal experiences: “I write about my own life and past experiences I still haven’t worked out,” she explains. She is working on a novel based on her parents and her childhood experiences, and she has submitted some of her poetry for publication. She has written short stories and half a dozen sketches of adolescents she has known through her teaching, focusing on poignant characteristics or moments in their lives. Journal writing and poetry are personal genres of writing to Rebecca. She feels free to use her own voice in them and not to compare her own writing to the professional writing of this kind which she reads. With prose fiction, however, she does compare her writing to literary masterpieces and sometimes becomes discouraged when her own work does not meet such high standards.

Rebecca balances her personal writing with more analytical work. In addition to job-related writing, her experience includes collaborating on a published curriculum guide and writing a doctoral dissertation. Rebecca usually feels a general urge to write, sometimes deferring projects until summer and sometimes needing to write about an idea or

experience immediately. However, Rebecca observes that during the school year her need to write is diminished. "Teaching is so gratifying for me," she says, "that it fills a need that writing used to fill." She compares teaching to composing and describes her students as an immediate and better known audience than she usually experiences with her writing. She acknowledges that writing sometimes makes her feel vulnerable, especially when she writes for an audience she considers faceless, distant, and perhaps judgmental. During the school year she prefers teaching, in which she knows her audience well, compared to writing, where her knowledge of the audience is less certain.

Building personal relationships with students is a key component in Rebecca's approach to teaching, in part attested to by the numerous students who come by to talk with her before and after school. Broadly, she says, her goal is to "help kids be better human beings." In composition instruction, Rebecca's major goals are to develop fluent, honest voices and to promote student empowerment. She encourages these features in part by searching for ways for students to become personally involved in what they write. She asks them to write about personal experiences, dreams, friends, special objects, things that make them happy, and personal responses to literature. Ideas come before form, and fluency before editing. To encourage honest voices, she states, "I ask them to pour their hearts out, really." She views student writing as an act of empowerment, transferring to students as much responsibility and ownership for writing as possible.

In composition assignments, Rebecca balances writing of personal expression with more analytical writing, believing that the two kinds of writing develop mutually beneficial skills. She sets up writing sessions in which students write freely, often in journals, and then look back for potentially useful pieces to develop into more structured compositions. An essay in response to a short story by Faulkner, for example, begins with such journal entries as developing ideas from key words and associating colors with characters and scenes. In discussions about writing with her classes, she tries to portray herself "as a writer who goes through the same kind of agony, the same kind of surprise and vulnerability" that student writers

experience. "In that way I get very personal. I feel like I have to, and I think I get the best writing that way."

As a resource in her teaching, Rebecca draws upon her own writing experiences for class assignment ideas and for composing strategies to suggest to students, such as developing more formal pieces from journal entries. In class, she explains, "I model a writer's feelings, talking with students about the joys or frustrations of writing." However, she does not actually compose in the classroom or share her own writing with her students, except in very brief examples on the chalkboard. She often suggests strategies to her students, but she is careful not to let them know which ones she uses herself. She is concerned that because of her strong personal influence, her students might limit themselves only to strategies she prefers and ignore other potentially useful strategies that she does not use herself, such as listing or clustering. She observes that egotism, "using the classroom as a place for her own little captive audience," is a danger for a teacher sharing her own writing with students. Rebecca emphasizes that at school she is a teacher first, not a writer. "In my classroom," she explains, "I want the *students* to be the stars."

Practice What We Preach?

Frequently teacher-writers are advised to write along with their students, in part to stay in touch with the processes of composing, but also to model writing behavior and to lend authority to their instruction. Rebecca's writing outside of the classroom does keep her in touch with composing processes and provides her a resource for writing instruction. Her effort to maintain instructional focus on the students, though, requires a student-centered model of authority, one which Rebecca feels could be threatened by direct demonstration or modeling in which she uses her own writing rather than student writing.

In this English department, few of the teachers write with students. Two of the teachers in the study, however, report that in the past they have written assignments along with students at the recommendation of a university composition director. For Lucy it was "a tremendous, extra burden." She feels her

writing, while good, had not been exemplary enough to serve as a model of outstanding writing. She shared her writing along with the students, but she wondered, "What were they supposed to get from that?" Having no answer for herself, she soon stopped. Jasmine, on the other hand, reports that writing along with students had invited useful discussions about composing problems and strategies. She could not, however, devote much time or concentration to her own writing in class because of the need to monitor classroom activity and be available to students, and writing at home increased her preparation time. The author of several published curricula, Jasmine observes that composing her own writing feels different than writing with students. In class, she is conscious of writing partly for demonstration, rather than entirely focusing on the more genuine audiences and purposes she tries to arrange for her students, and that creates an artificiality for her as a writer which she does not experience with other writing. So while Jasmine finds writing with students to be useful for her teaching, her own writing with students creates a tension between her roles as teacher and writer, roles that are often assumed to blend harmoniously.

Jasmine also remarks that in her experience "students can be pretty nasty critics," leaving the teacher feeling vulnerable about sharing her own writing. Both Jasmine and another teacher, Shelly (who has also written along with her students), note that it is probably good for teachers to feel as anxious as students do about sharing their writing so that teachers will be more empathetic with student writers. But they also observe that their own most meaningful writing is often the most personal, the kind of writing they are least likely to share with anyone, especially with students. Lucy maintains that unlike students, English teachers are often expected to write perfectly. If teachers accept this premise, as Lucy does, they feel they have more at stake with their writing than students do, and are therefore more assailable.

Robert: A Writer Who Teaches

As I began this study, nearly every English teacher told me that I should talk to Robert because, unlike them, he is a writer.

Over the past thirty years or so Robert has consistently published his writing and earned awards and a national reputation as a poet and also as an artistic photographer. His teaching assignment often includes creative writing classes.

Robert thinks of himself primarily as a writer who teaches rather than a teacher who writes. He began writing poetry in college and began publishing it soon afterward. His early work was influenced by poets whose work he admired, including William Carlos Williams, Dylan Thomas, and the Beat poets. Teaching and family responsibilities afford him less time for writing than he had planned: he speaks of “stealing” time in order to write. Over the years, however, he has steadily composed and published his work, including several chapbooks and a book of collected poetry.

Robert writes during sustained periods of at least an hour and a half, often on weekends. He sometimes draws ideas from unfinished manuscripts going back twenty-five years. He also gets ideas from reading other poets’ work, looking at photographs, and experiencing certain moods. Rainy days, for example, often “open up a channel” for him.

Robert describes his composing process as jagged or erratic, not linear. Although his writing experience is not always the same, usually he writes many drafts. Robert often writes free verse, in which he lets “the form start to take shape on the page” and plays with the shape of the poem, its visual appearance on the page, and the way it sounds as he reads it aloud. The poem’s subject and voice could determine line and shape. In recent years, he has felt fewer ideas “pressing” on him, so he is “mining them more, living with them longer.”

It takes a lot of questioning to get at Robert’s writing process. He is very cooperative, but after so many years of writing, Robert points out, he is not very aware of his process: it is mostly unconscious and automatic. He tends to focus on *what* he is writing, not on *how* he is writing it. Besides, his writing process is intuitive and changing, not easy to articulate and not simple enough to reduce to a procedure for himself or others.

Robert meets about once a month with a group of poets who share pieces of their work. Most of his fellow English teachers have read and admired Robert’s poetry. He derives some satisfaction from being a teacher of writing who actually

writes and publishes, but mostly he writes for himself because he feels the urge. “The joy of discovery through the imagination—that’s the reason to write poetry,” he explains. Imagination and the wisdom possible in the act of discovery make writing poetry for Robert almost “a kind of ritual, a kind of prayer.”

Robert says he assumes students learn to write as he did, from reading and imitation. “It’s like painters who go to the Louvre to copy the masters. You begin with imitation until you can work away from it and find your own voice.” His primary goals are to help students find their own voices, free their imaginations, express themselves, become more familiar with contemporary literature, and identify their own talent. He hopes his classroom provides a setting for “the structured discipline necessary for serious writing.”

Robert uses his personal writing experience in a number of ways in his creative writing class. He gives advice to students based on his personal writing experience, assigns some writing of the types he has done (family story as a poem, description of an object), uses his own published work along with other contemporary models, speaks of other authors from personal acquaintance, and sets the class up as a writing workshop similar to workshops in which he has participated. He clearly draws upon his writing experiences to inform his teaching of writing.

In Robert’s workshop, students select one genre (poetry or short fiction) to work on for the semester. Robert then gives them a sequence of writing assignments mostly according to form, with related models to read. The forms of writing (sonnet or character description, for example) are predetermined by the assignment, and content and processes are left up to the students. Class time is given for reading and writing until a due date, at which time a few students are called upon to read their papers aloud for gentle critique by Robert and the class. One day more is allowed for optional revision before the assignment is submitted for a grade. Robert alternates his teaching between the poetry and fiction groups, spending his time explaining assignment requirements, critiquing student writing on due dates, and explicating models from readings by calling students’ attention in traditional literary fashion to

accomplished features of the finished products. When Robert is explaining assignments or conducting critiques with one group, the other group of students works independently. He sometimes allows them to do other homework during class provided they write at home, which he tells them he would prefer to do himself. When both groups are writing or reading, Robert grades papers or works on preparation at his desk at the front of the room.

Robert has never written along with his students and has never shown students his own works in progress. When I ask why, he notes the risk of vulnerability that he would feel with a piece that is not completed or sanctioned by publication, and as part of that vulnerability he notes that “quite often students will attack something original or good” because of their limited understanding, because it is “not in the mainstream of what they’re used to.” Even with their peers, he notes, they often fail to recognize good writing.

Members of the Community?

One reason teachers are advised to write along with students is to become participating members of what Steven Zemelman and Harvey Daniels call the community of writers in the classroom. A number of teachers in this study do not describe their classrooms as writing communities, or like Robert, they do not view themselves as members of those communities. As these teachers describe it, their instructional role is to explicate other people’s writing—literary authors as well as students; their function as teachers is to read and explain, not to write. So the majority of these English teachers do value personally their own writing but see little application for it in their teaching.

Atwell and others stress that, ideally perhaps, the experience of composing should be essentially similar for all writers—students, teachers, and professionals alike—albeit at different levels of sophistication. A number of teachers in the study, however, describe their own writing experience as fundamentally different from that of their students. One teacher, Leigh, explains that adults are concerned with stylistic or conceptual issues quite different from those that concern

students. Ted believes that writing helps students become reflective, but that it is a more utilitarian activity for adults whom he describes as already reflective. Other teachers in the study also describe writing as a different kind of experience for adults than for students. Certainly the teachers do not produce on demand required compositions in specified forms for purposes of examination, and their students nearly always do. More fundamentally, these teachers imply a distinction between students who are learning to write and adults (teachers) who have already learned. Teachers who believe that their own writing differs in kind from the writing of students, therefore, would be unlikely to draw upon their own writing experiences as a resource in their teaching, no matter how much writing they do.

Discussion

Despite her in-service training in process-based instruction, Jeanette adheres to a more traditional viewpoint that the students' role is to practice forms in order to rehearse for potentially genuine or at least utilitarian writing later as adults. The teacher's role is to provide instructions that clarify formal expectations and to judge the rehearsal attempts. From this viewpoint, the teacher's own writing is not an integral part of such a role; it does not make assignments more clear or judgments more accurate.

In speculating about why process approaches to writing instruction fail, Applebee asserts that teachers inadequately and improperly conceptualize these approaches as a series of discrete steps, leading to activities as pointless as the exercises they were meant to replace. Applebee's remarks reflect Jeanette's description of process approaches to writing instruction, which she expresses less as orientation than as procedure. Jeanette is able to appropriate from process approaches some procedures to incorporate into her classroom practice without changing her view of composing as discrete, linear steps that recreate predetermined forms, a view that conforms to her analytical framework for writing. As Applebee suggests, without embracing attendant epistemological principles such as recursiveness, variability, or individual

differences in composing processes, and writing for genuine audiences and purposes, Jeanette's procedural practice with process approaches becomes ineffective in ways that for her justify discarding it.

Jeanette divides student writers into a few who are creative or gifted (and thus need little instruction) and many for whom the instructional goal is logical, functional literacy. Jeanette's case is reminiscent of the contention that teachers who do not think of themselves as writers will not be likely to think of most of their students as writers either. Although Jeanette writes, her own writing experience does not appear to draw her attention to composing strategies or processes or to consider her own current writing experience as a resource for teaching.

Describing the school day as hectic and fragmented, Jeanette thinks it difficult at best for teachers to make opportunities for their own writing. Yet under such circumstances, some teachers write and others do not, or like Jeanette, some write but do not perceive their writing as related to their teaching roles. While time constraints certainly must restrict all secondary school teachers' opportunities to write, Jeanette's viewpoint suggests that perhaps a more significant factor concerns priorities. Given the limited time and other constraints of the school day, if teachers are to incorporate their writing with their teaching, then they must view their own writing as an important part of their class preparation, instruction, and/or responses to student writing or other activities of very high priority. For teachers who do not believe that their own writing directly relates to their preparation, instruction, or responses to student writing, there will probably never be enough time for teachers' writing. Ironically, though, Jeanette's separation of her own writing experience from her teaching, as with her separation of writers from nonwriters and of school writing (forms) from more authentic writing, may contribute to her feeling of fragmentation.

Rebecca's beliefs about writing, learning, and knowledge are closer than Jeanette's to the constructivist assumptions which underlie most process-based approaches. Thinking of herself as a writer, and of all her students as writers, Rebecca believes that learning to write, like all learning, is a lifelong

process in which teachers as well as students participate and that she is a member of a classroom community of learners. Regularly engaging in composing herself, she uses her writing experience as a reference for planning and teaching. Her own writing experience does call her attention to composing processes and strategies to suggest to students.

Although Rebecca draws on her writing experience to plan instruction and empathize with student writers, she does not write with her students or share her writing with them, either in draft or finished form. While many theorists view teachers' sharing their work-in-progress with students as useful for demonstration of processes or participation in a writing community, Rebecca believes that sharing of her writing might disrupt the establishment of her student-centered classroom. Rebecca's point that teachers may use their own writing to serve their own egotism is an important reminder of the potential for abuse of this practice, and of the delicate balance implied in the classroom relationship between teacher and student writing. Teachers could easily focus attention on their writing as a performance to be admired rather than as a contribution to the group's construction of knowledge about writing.

At first glance, Robert may seem the prototypical teacher as writer. Robert writes, and his writing experience clearly influences his writing instruction. But Robert's teaching also raises some interesting anomalies in process-based assumptions about teachers being writers. While writing experience is presumed to increase teachers' awareness of composing processes, it is Robert's extensive writing experience that accounts in part for his *unconsciousness* of some aspects of his own composing processes. When composing, Robert focuses his attention on *what* he is writing more than *how* he is going about it. When teachers or others compose for genuine audiences and purposes, such a focus on product seems as likely a result of writing experience as a heightened awareness of processes. Robert considers his composing processes to be variable and idiosyncratic. Teachers who suppose that the nature of writing for most people is more orderly or formulaic than it is for them, or who feel that teaching demands more order than individual composing processes allow, might

naturally tend to devalue their own writing experience as a resource for teaching others.

As extensive as Robert's own writing experience is, it does not lead him to use a process-based approach to teaching. His instruction comes primarily before students write and then after they have written, usually focusing more on the finished product than on strategies or processes useful for producing them. Although ideas often determine form in his own writing, in his classroom forms usually come first. Although Robert usually takes his writing through multiple revisions, in his classroom he provides only one day for optional revision. Although for Robert the important work is to enter into an imaginative process of discovery, for his students the important work mostly seems to be to complete assignments by due dates. In this regard, Robert's teaching partly reflects his training from pre-process days, but Robert's model of conducting a writing workshop also comes from his experience as a writer and workshop participant. Workshops like Robert's mirror those of the Iowa creative writing program, which Joseph Moxley (*xiv*) has pointed out are more product-oriented than process-based workshops such as Atwell's.

In the classroom, Robert's role is that of the kindly mentor whose knowledge comes largely from experience. The students respect him as a writer, which gives him credibility. However, even though Robert provides his students with models from his writing, he does not provide modeling of his writing behavior. Robert notes that student writers learn from imitation, but in the art studio students learn from watching the artist as well as from imitating finished pieces of art. Being a teacher-writer does not suggest active modeling to Robert, only producing models. As a result, Robert has his students' respect, but for many students the respect comes because he can do well what is difficult for them. In that sense, the more accomplished the teacher-writer, the less students may be willing to accept him as a writer who is going through experiences similar to their own.

Implications

The case studies included here describe a teacher who writes but does not connect her own writing to her teaching, a

teacher who takes a process approach to writing instruction but does not use her writing directly in instruction, and a teacher who writes and uses his writing in instruction but does not take a process approach. Eleven of the twelve teachers in this study did compose some self-sponsored, personally meaningful writing, yet the pedagogical uses these teachers made of their writing varied considerably. The mere fact that teachers write does not tell much about the relationship between their writing and their teaching.

For some teachers in the study, like Rebecca and Jasmine, the teachers' own writing appears to serve some useful purposes in their teaching. Other teachers, like Jeanette and Lucy, also write but do not find their own writing a very useful resource for teaching. The contrast may reflect fundamental differences not only in the teachers' approaches to teaching, but also in their beliefs about the nature of composing, teaching, and learning. Although the familiar product/process dichotomy has often oversimplified issues in composition studies, it may be a useful starting point in distinguishing between those who find their own writing useful in teaching and those who do not. In this instance, those who draw upon their own writing experience in order to guide students through the act of composing are likely to find their writing experience more useful than those who assume that their own writing would be helpful for supplying finished written models. Rebecca and Jasmine, for example, sometimes use their own writing to identify potentially useful strategies to suggest to students, to promote discussion of processes and strategies within the writing classroom, and to better empathize with student writers. Teachers' definitions of "writer" – either as one who engages in writing (as something everyone can do) or as one who has created or published written products (something only the gifted can do) – also appear to identify teachers whose own writing may be influential in their teaching.

The notable exception is Robert, who does use his own writing to supply some of the finished written models he uses in class. Robert's writing experience influences his teaching, but perhaps not in the process-based ways assumed by many of those who exhort teachers to be writers. His case should caution those who espouse process-based approaches that the

idea of teachers as writers may encompass many different kinds of writing experiences and many different meanings that the writers may attribute to their experiences. Nevertheless, Robert's successful publication record distinguishes him from the rest of his colleagues who hold similar views but do not produce their own models or find other instructional uses for their own writing. The difference might be explained by Robert's motivation to write. As a "writer who teaches," rather than a "teacher who writes," Robert's instructional uses for his writing are secondary, a kind of bi-product of his primary effort to write for publication—a path that many teachers may not follow.

The experiences and viewpoints of the teachers in this study imply some complexities, tensions and inconsistencies between theory and practice. Nelson characterizes teachers who operate within such inconsistencies as having "professional split personalities" for their simultaneous acceptance of "two logically inconsistent frameworks" for their own writing and for student writing (3480). Instead, I suggest that such inconsistencies may be seen as reflections of some teachers' individual, personally coherent, and even logical conceptions of writing and of their beliefs about how students come to be competent writers. For teachers who conceive of knowledge about writing as impersonal and received, transmitted from teachers who possess pertinent classroom knowledge to students who lack this knowledge and acquire it through guided practice, there can be few logically consistent connections between teachers' writing and the writing of their students.

Although asking teachers of writing to be writers may sound like simple advice, it is in fact a complex request, one that implies acceptance of a constructivist view of composing, the broader philosophical beliefs of process-based instruction, and a progressive view of education. In order to put teachers' writing to effective instructional use, teachers like Jeanette who do not hold very compatible philosophical views would have to alter not only their writing and teaching practices, but also their beliefs about writing, learning, teaching, and knowing. That teachers like Jeanette perceive their own alternative belief frameworks as logically coherent probably renders such

teachers even more resistant to the kind of potentially profound epistemological change implied in the simple dictum that teachers should write.

In writing workshops and college classrooms teachers are often asked to become writers, in part as a way of becoming more effective teachers of writing (Gray). This study shows that no matter how engaged some may become in their writing, their writing experience alone may not have much influence on their teaching, or may influence teaching in unexpected ways. Robert Parker has argued that "very seldom is the problem of how writing is taught in schools analyzed in terms of the personal theories of writing instruction that teachers already have and operate by in their classrooms" and that "solutions which aim only at changes in teaching methods without corresponding changes in personal theories may well be addressing symptoms and not causes" (20). This study of teachers as writers supports Parker's call for "critical re-theorizing" or reconstruction of personal theories in relation to methods or procedures if "more fundamental and permanent effects" are desired (20).

However, such a desire for change should itself be subject to critique. Striving to improve writing instruction is a worthy goal, but attempting to alter teachers' very beliefs is a tricky and questionable business. Those who would enter into the business of instructional improvement with practices like asking teachers to be writers must remain sensitive to the possibility that there may be many effective ways to teach writing and many ways to conceptualize writing instruction. This study of teachers as writers serves as a reminder that teachers often hold a multiplicity of beliefs and that only when innovative teaching practices correspond to teachers' beliefs are these practices likely to be influential in the classroom.

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