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OF MERLINS AND KING 'AUTHORS': A FREIREIAN ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING NARRATIVE

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OF MERLINS AND KING 'AUTHORS': A FREIREIAN ANALYSIS OF THE
FIRST-YEAR WRITING NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

Of Merlins and King 'Authors': A Freireian Analysis of the First-Year Writing

Narrative

This thesis uses a Freireian analysis to unravel underlying ideologies in the university's first-year writing curriculum. By examining the characterizations and plots of the writing classroom narrative, we discover where issues of conflicting purpose and structure arise within frameworks of ideological constraint. This thesis considers the student-hero, the antagonistic qualities of the general education and state-mandated standardized curricula, and the role of the teacher who lies between these two entities. The Learning Community (LC) model provides a dialogic revision to current classroom practices in the student/teacher dynamic. The LC model accepts Freire's socially and ethically responsive *conscientização* as a way to illuminate student engagement through writing.

Key words: narrative analysis, first-year writing, Paulo Freire, Learning Communities, *conscientização*, composition pedagogy

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take that passion and with it, create a thesis.

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The thing to determine conclusively is whether you are in a comedy or a tragedy. Have you met anyone who simply might loathe the very core of you?

Harold Crick:

I'm an IRS agent. Everyone hates me.

Dr. Jules Hilbert:

Well, that sounds like a comedy!

--Stranger Than Fiction, 2006

PREFACE: TEACHING THE HOLY GRAIL

I found I have often related a semester's syllabus to an epic adventure—complete with fire-breathing dragon--and which, if conquered, would mean a proverbial happy ending for me, the students, and the department. I have seen myself as a mythical Merlin, spreading magic and writing wisdom to the hapless "King Authors" of the classroom Round Table. This "happily-ever-after" story I have inadvertently employed made me realize that we all teach towards the same morality of Aesop's fables—what are final grades if not a judgment of how well our students have navigated an ethical and academic journey?

Paulo Freire notes that we typically operate in a "banking" model of education, where students are plotless, empty containers which can only be filled by our narratated knowledge ("Oppressed" 173). Although the metaphor of Merlin and King Author may suggest I have already situated this narrative similarly to the suffocating one admonished here, I choose to revoke that uncomfortable association in favor of an ambitious tale I imagine quite differently.

The story I write allows me to invite students to sit at a circular table, where knowledge is plentiful and the hunger for cultural consciousness through the art of writing may be satiated. My students were never invited to join this

conversation before, and they are doubtful they will have much to add in comparison to their accomplished tablemates. The wizard-teachers they join may grumble, some may even leave in protest (sorry, there are no adult or children tables here). Some students will deny the invitation and in doing so, lay down their swords, perhaps forever. But for those who remain, the exchange of past and present, of poetry and politics, the dispersion of narratives—not narration—will serve well when each returns to their own individual quests. The only difference between the elder wizards and their protégé is not intelligence or imagination; the disparity was found in the consciousness of their magical capabilities and the world.

Today, these mythic narrative lines are in danger of being pushed into the margins of idealism. As educators, we've seen our students submit to the easy, silent slump of passing; the erudite student who may have yearned for an adventure is propelled now by grade inflation or stupefied by the challenge-less inadequacy of General Education. Although it is easy to suggest so, the situation of this learning business doesn't rest entirely on the shoulders of teachers. John Keating, played by Robin Williams in *Dead Poets Society*, reminds his students that they must take up their own quest for the holy grail of education.

Boys, you must strive to find your own voice. Because the longer

you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it at all. Thoreau

said, 'Most men lead lives of quiet desperation.' Don't be resigned

to that. Break out!

And so, we teachers must put on our armor and meet our students at the

front lines.

CHAPTER ONE

As a writer-teacher, it is easy for me to understand the privilege and risks associated with putting words on paper; for most of my students, their consciousness of the ability to author for themselves ranks somewhere between being able to speak and eat. They don't understand that their creative license to employ words (which is sorely underused) has been *granted* to them; they see it as a natural, innate freedom. My students have no consciousness of the privilege they own, particularly not the classroom with computer technology, or the rhetoric textbook with images of protests, wars, and popular culture. My students—for all their amazing qualities—are illiterate.

<u>The Plot Thickens</u>

To alleviate their burdensome ignorance, Freire encourages dialogic consciousness-raising classrooms where students not only become self-aware of their communities and ideologies therein, but also how to become critical of them. The concept of university, at its most progressive, believes it is able to do this by offering students a period where they are removed from their previous communities—global and local—to a neutral occupation as learner and critic (Smith). Ideally, students not only criticize the previous communities, but also comprehend that future action must be discursively motivated.

Unfortunately, this hopeful outcome is rarely the M.O. in most writing classrooms or at the university. The university often simply replaces the high school bubble and submerges students in another engulfing community with its own sets of ideological issues (Herndl 350). As Patricia Bizzell explains, "Our dilemma is that we want to empower students to succeed in the dominant culture so that they can transform it from within; but we fear that if they do succeed, their thinking will be changed in such a way that they will no longer want to transform it" (7).

In particular, it is important to understand why the writing classroom, more than any place else, is in need of critical examination.

> At all levels of formal education, the reading and writing curriculum immediately raises deeply ideological issues: literacy is after all, both a technology and a privileged form of knowledge. A practice of whose history inevitably embodies its culture's deepest social, political and economic arrangements. (Ohman 134)

This ideological tug-o-war is seen in the pedagogical differences between institutions' first-year writing programs. Some programs encourage workplace styles of writing, others encourage strong academic research writing, and still others encourage students to find their own writing voice among the many given options. The writing process is seen as an important component of most of these classrooms, as may literature and grammar instruction. Certain classrooms are

de-centering the authoritative teacher figure with the student-centered approach to pedagogy; others are allowing for more Writing Across the Curriculum-style activities to increase breadth and depth of topics; many are employing Vygotsky's scaffolding techniques for Montessori-style learning. There is no seminal pedagogy, although many programs seem to be infused with postmodern approaches and a strong focus on students' ability to think critically, a step in the right direction.

But ideologically speaking, even (especially) the writing classroom must examine the goals of its curriculum. We teach students how to write, but about what, and for whom? At Clemson University, we naturally ask our students to understand the writing process and the necessary formats, but allow the topics of our study to focus on the social. We ask them to see how they relate to the universal narrative, through writing, and to discover where their own ideas and opinions may lie. Particularly in the writing classroom, we have a unique opportunity to approach student learning differently, to encourage students to narrate their story, our story, *the* story through writing; in other words, to become culturally *literate*.

These idealistic battles of self-discovery were seen as a viable goal for

Paulo Freire. Freire saw *conscientização* as cultural literacy which could liberate

students and teachers alike:

> Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words, or syllables…but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context. Thus, the educator's role is fundamentally to enter into dialogue with the illiterate about concrete situations and simply to offer him the instruments with which he can teach himself to read and write. (Freire, "Literacy" 404)

We must account, however, for ideology. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Freire believes that we are all part of a major narrative; the problem is that we

don't always communicate our narratives to everyone and thus some people are

exiled from the societal homeland of literacy and freedom. Freire even believes

that some people aren't aware that a story is going on at all (Freire, "Heart" 42,

101). This illiteracy in the human narrative functions as an ideological constraint

on the marginalized voices (Freire, "Adult Literacy"). Although Freire's valiant

goal was to liberate the uneducated peasants of Brazil from political and social

ideologies, our classrooms too often face an oppressive ideology of governmental

standards which threaten the relationship between our students and active

learning. With a fearful eye on standardization of first-year classrooms, we must

consider exactly where these classroom curriculum fall; how do they serve to

illuminate student voices and literacy, how do they fit in the narrative of the university?

Freire's suggestion of acquainting students with t*he* narrative—our social narrative—has very specific purposes. There is a human need for rationalized stories (Fisher); unfortunately, it seems to me that the English classroom, while being a very renowned narrative, is wrought with conflicting pedagogies and goals. This, in essence, creates what Fisher refers to as an unreasonable narrative, or a thing which goes against the constructions of reasoned knowledge. Conceding this, perhaps we should consider that a narrative analysis could provide insight into the well-worn epic of the writing classroom. The purpose being to identify the inconsistent and unreasonable parts of this pedagogical narrative and to re-write the story's ending. Perhaps, by examining the current conflicting pedagogies of the English classroom, we can re-evaluate how these structures may be re-organized to encourage Freire's self-consciousness theories.

In particular, the frustrated pedagogical dynamics give cause to examine the Learning Community model which may offer Freire's dialogic *conscientização* a fresh platform in the U.S.?. Classrooms often seem mechanical and utterly judicious; the only sounds which emerge are the lecturing tone of the teacher and the tippty-tap of students on their laptops, not paying attention. "…students'

participation in college classrooms is relatively passive, that 'learning appears to

be a spectator sport where faculty talk dominates'" (Fisher and Grant in Tinto

600). It seems there are no communities in these rooms, just individual entities

trying to eek by. Communities are but people with similar or divergent stories;

stories which will mediate their social interaction and progression. Our

classrooms, as the most basic community in our educational system, demand

collectivity, a concept which deserves to be reexamined and embraced. I have

found that like me, many teachers recognize this loss of community and are

searching for a way to activate classrooms.

The Learning Community model (LC) is a hopeful concept that emerged

more prevalently throughout university programs in late 1980s and has

remained a fixture in over six hundred university settings today (Smith; Ellerston

and Thoennes 37). Its original intention was to provide a space separate: from the

public or from other communities. The separation quality allows for the

community concept to prevail, whether motivated naturally or with intention,

and it is the separateness which encourages critique of the *other*. The community

model—that thing which may engulf, engage, or separate our students—

warrants re-examination by our discipline as a way to bring students together.

It occurs to me that the messy alignment of these three dialogues—

community learning, college Writing classrooms, and Freire's *conscientização*—could provide us with a new model for telling future classroom stories with epic appeal. These very relevant, yet very separate paradigms might provide a somatic solution versus a deconstructed system. The LC model may allow the community necessary to encourage socially-driven discussion; discussion engages members in a consciousness of their own location in the global as well as their dis/connection to others. In addition, the community model changes the way we write—we encourage students to see writing as a socially responsible and ethical course of action. We can reconnect the body (LC) with the soul (praxis and *conscientização*).

This conversion to a dialogic pedagogy creates the need for us to explore the classroom space as it is now with all its diverse technological and societal purposes. The questions which are generated by examining first-year English narrative will serve as a guideline for how to approach the classroom itself: who are our protagonists? What is the theme? Is the conclusion anti-climatic? Are these characterizations consistent with our socially constructed reality? The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to consider where the teacher, students, assignments, grading, and the ethos of *conscientização* are situated in our first-year writing course narrative. This research will also encourage Paulo Freire's

conscientização as a revision to the story by situating the first-year writing course within the Learning Community model which serves as the impetus for dialogic pedagogy. Quilting these pieces of established theory with my own analysis, the aim is to make our classrooms a social and libratory space for our student-writers to develop consciousness; we must consider what prevents us from doing so now. We Merlin-teachers must revive the eternal King Author-students, writers, and inquisitors the composition classroom needs.

CHAPTER TWO

> Frankly, I don't think messing with your head is a problem. I think messing with your head is what all scholarship should be and do. It should be dangerous, it should expand your mind. It should open locks, provide pathways, offer a language capable of inspiring personal, social, and institutional liberation. I think it should help people think and behave differently, if they choose to. Writing that doesn't mess with your head isn't very good writing."
>
> --H.L. Goodall Jr.,
> *Writing the New Ethnography*

My students often begin their work with a definition of some god-term; typically in our technological era, this definition comes from an internet dictionary source. I have consistently tried to break students of this habit; after all, why would they want their first words to be those of another? Still, for Socrates, the basis of an argument was to come to terms on definitions and how to approach the argument space. And so my students, in their rhetorical way, confess that if it works well for Plato it works just as well for them. Although I abhor god-terms their use is undeniable in our theory; for me, it is the gnawing creep of potential ideology.

For those of us in education (god term), pedagogy (god term) has become the omnipotent challenger of classroom custom and assessment (god term). Everyone subjectively believes that their system can corner the market on

students and the classroom experience. I, myself, struggle with whether students in our contemporary society can really know what they want; and, like the ubiquitous parent, is what they want always what is best for them? This "best for them" mentality has shaped our pedagogical interests; just in first-year composition theory alone there are a myriad of god-terms and dialogues concerning assessment, social-epistemic rhetoric, and writing processes, which permeate our journals and conferences. A consistent theme which flows through most of these discussions involves a neo-postmodern composition course which focuses on the social/society as a subject and transfiguration of ideologies as its terminal goal. Not only are theorists suggesting that writing be a tool for overcoming ideologies, but have taken a step further and suggest that we should see student writing as a product which might shape new ideologies (Herndl 350). We bridge poetry and math, and we have adapted writing to be purposeful in the workplace and voiceless when necessary. All which strive to provide a democratizing approach to writing that can function beyond the classroom.

Although I inherently agree that we must begin thinking outside the classroom walls, what have we left behind to adopt this new approach? Have we confused our students? At the end of a socially constructed class, what have our students really learned? By giving our students numerous options have we

instead encouraged them to choose none? Has the presence of choice given our students a lazy, narcissistic ideal that learning revolves around their own interests? Why shouldn't learning revolve around their interests? Have we abandoned grammar, mechanics and structure for content and appeal? In our constant quest to find the holy grail of writing instruction, have we forgotten the many treasures we've accrued along the way?

In the end, our classrooms have perhaps become an academic landfill of sorts. Like Freire's banking model suggests, we truck our loads of knowledge into the classroom. Teachers trudge through pollution-filled paths of media, politics, and Friday night parties hoping we lead our students to recycling this knowledge into shiny new ideas which might add something to a rhetorically eco-friendly future. Unfortunately, students often only absorb that which they find useful for themselves and leave the rest behind. The refuse begins to build up; it stagnates in its inertness. And for those of us who have the students only for freshman semesters, our education remains at the bottom of the heap as more is piled on, eventually leaving the knowledge no other recourse than to decompose.

The only answer for this accumulation is that students must process the data dump, consciously getting themselves culturally dirty. For *us to help* them

sift through the knowledge to make something useful of the parts—and not just

the parts we've provided for them, but a truly interdisciplinary recycle. Learning

Communities with a focus on civic engagement lets our students clear up their

own environments and be responsible for what they do with the space left over.

<center>Negotiating the Space</center>

At the heart the contemporary classroom is the post-modernist movement,

which has allowed for a critical modification in how we view the classroom

narrative. Hailed by such contemporaries as James Berlin, Lester Faigley, and

M.I. Bakhtin, post-modernism reclaims the classroom by advocating social

construction and "rethink[ing] the dominance, the persistence of such notions as

authenticity and authority" (Flannery 711-712). The post-modern guardian has

created a course that allows students and teachers to explore and develop ideas

together, to forgo objectivity for discovery. At the same time, post-modern

classrooms must scrutinize current culture to understand where our history and

our present intersect and what these dis/connections mean for the future.

Most basic writing courses are part of a core curriculum or general

education program. The induction of the first general education program in Iowa

in 1944 marked a new era in higher education (Crowley 132). Designed to

introduce or refine student skill sets and knowledge, General Education often

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touches on the basics of art, humanities, mathematics and science, and

communication (Fosen). Composition or writing courses often fall into the

communication category, or are consistent with critical-thinking objectives. In

addition, many programs provide different titles for the basic writing course,

including Writing Seminar, English 1, Writing 103, and Critical Writing. This

scattering of course titles admits the pervasiveness of defining the socially

constructed genre. To create a course which is complimentary to the goals of the

institution, Fosen suggests that like the General Education programs at most

schools, the reins of composition courses are tightly held by administration,

which may be problematic.

> The purpose of [General Education] is often not how students could use their general learning to act upon the world, but how they could best absorb core values in order to accommodate it. Many attempts at early general education narrowed the focus of education to correcting student cultural deficiencies through a menu of required courses in the sciences and humanities. (Fosen 11)

The basic writing course has the potential to become stagnated in systemic

policy, not to mention indoctrinating faculty to accept a defined syllabus, a

crushing blow to the post-modern identity. This being said, it is important to

examine what goals have been set for writing courses.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators has recommended

students should be responsible for the following concepts during a first-year

writing course:

- Rhetorical knowledge

- Critical thinking, reading, and writing

- Ability to participate in the process of writing

- Knowledge of conventions (Yancey 323-325)

These goals are useful in the sense they provide direction for the teacher and

immediate class. However, they fail to account for the long-reaching goals of the

class—what do we want our students to be able to accomplish with this

knowledge after the course is completed? We all too often create a binary

opposition between poetic writing which is useful in the academy and

"practical" writing which is useful for the workplace (Britton 14). The latter

workplace scenario being the one we encourage our students to remember.

> We want, then, to help the students towards exploring, defining, and so in
> part mastering themselves and the world around them, which is largely a
> world of words. We want them to be a larger part of the world and we
> want the world to be a larger part of them. We want to enlarge their
> boundaries—not just the boundaries in which they think, but also those
> boundaries in which they act. A person is, at least to others, what he does,
> how he acts, and a large part of what anyone does is use words. What one
> does with words is to a large extent what he is, to himself as well as to
> others. We should like the composition course, finally, to provide the

student with the verbal and intellectual tools for criticism and self-
defense. (Stade 42)

These statements echo my own belief that our composition classrooms must become the space where students learn to connect the dots of their other experiences. Our goals should be to provide our students with a meaningful way to express these ideas and their implications for our society.

Recently, I was asked by my department to have my English 103 students complete the PRiSE survey from the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. The survey was measuring why some students choose science-related fields of study and why others don't (judging from the questions it is based on their early exposure to the field from their family and the degree to which family and school impress the importance of the scientific field upon them). However, more interesting than this was how such a survey ended up in the English classroom; Harvard-Smithsonian states "The survey is being given out in college English courses across the nation because college English is the best place to gather information on both students who want to persist in science and those who do not" (Hazari).

If this is true, if our English classrooms are the epicenter of student experience and education at the university level, we must discover what our students are capable of committing in the space of our curriculum.

Once Upon A Time…

Although composition is perhaps the oldest course in history, the first documented required introductory composition course was established at Harvard University in the late nineteenth century (Crowley 4, 49). The formation of this course was fraught with debate over what could be gained from the addition of composition courses to the curriculum (And we must keep in mind that "student" at this time was a while, upper-class male). Many saw the course as redundant for the educated man, as the purpose of such a course would be to refine written and oral skills; some opponents believed these skills could be polished in literature courses or by writing for other subjects,

> 'Effective self-expression is, in fact, characteristic of the cultivated man; his speech, including conversational style, shows the influence of his reading and his writing shows it.' Courses in grammar instruction and mechanics would be remedial. (Crowley 147)

As the departments began to separate into literature and composition, activists for the course launched their own campaign for the necessity of composition study. Sharon Crowley offers a "rough historical order" of the

arguments, even those in present debate, established by the advocates of

composition courses:

> Students should be required to study composition in order to develop
> taste, improve their grasp of formal and mechanical correctness, to
> become liberally educated, to prepare for jobs or professions, to develop
> their personalities, to become able citizens of democracy, to become
> skilled communicators, to develop skill in textual analysis, to become
> critical thinkers, to establish their personal voices, to master the
> composing process to master the composition of discourses used within
> academic disciplines, and to become oppositional critics of their culture.
> (6)

Those opposing a "liberal culture rhetoric," which would include a basic

composition course, argued that it was unnecessary, claiming that students'

writing instruction ought to be handled in high school ("Rhetoric and Reality"

Berlin 35). Still, others suggested that composition courses could act as a final

remediation between students' previous education and the ideal sophisticated

gentlemen they should be by their upperclassmen years of college. In other

words, "Freshman English is supposed to fix students' supposed lack of literate

mastery once and for all, so that teachers of more advanced courses do not have

to bother with such things" (Crowley 8).

Although the course has been accepted within our current educational

system, it is still seen as a burden to the university. Often its departments require

the most faculty members, due to the large numbers of students who must enroll

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in the course. Sloughed off by tenured faculty as a rote course which provides no

opportunity for research, the composition seminar has become the playground of

untenured faculty and graduate students (Crowley 4). The required composition

course is bounced between English, Writing, and General Education

departments, none wishing to take responsibility for a generic curriculum.

Composition studies only recently gained momentum, in 1963, as a viable

discipline (Faigley 13) and has since grown pedagogical roots heavy with

rhetorical discussion. The official recognition of composition theory as an area of

study has allowed those professionals in the field to defend their interest in

research and pedagogy concerning the discipline. Largely, the field of

composition theory struggles to understand exactly what its subject is, and more

importantly, what the purpose of the composition classroom should be.

> …it is our obligation to teach students to write and read for and within curricula made by academics for academics. Others would say that our responsibility is to assist students in resisting the constraints. The former position is, for example, the traditional objective for conservative writing across the curriculum programs. The latter view is, or perhaps has become, the definition of a critically (self-) conscious liberal education. (Blitz and Hurlbert as qtd in Hardin 3)

This statement by Blitz and Hurlbert showcases the disruptive struggle to situate

the field. Often associated with student literacy and mastery of mechanics, the

composition course is antagonized when student papers fail to appear scholarly

(Crowley 1). The course still rages against being compared to literature or English studies, but because it is often considered to lack its own subject just as rhetoric did for Plato, it is asked to adopt the subject of other disciplines and departments, or worse yet, to teach composition without "considering issues or subject matter" at all (Brodkey 146-147).

> Discourse dealing with imagination was made the concern of the newly developed literature department. The writing course was left to attend to the understanding and reason, deprived of all but the barest emotional content. Encouraged by the business community with the tacit approval of the science department, composition courses became positivist in spirit and method. (Berlin, "Writing Instruction" 9)

Berlin, a heavyweight in the field of composition theory, suggested that rhetoric is the most basic subject of composition. The word "composition" itself suggests that rhetoric may be an appropriate topic for discussion as rhetoric is a discipline concerned with the creation of messages for an audience, by a writer, based on an exigency. Crowley notes she believes rhetoric is the only responsible subject for composition studies to envelope, because all writing, without specific awareness as to its intent and purpose, can be written recklessly and read without context. Although indirectly, this sentiment echoes Plato's *Phadrus* (275e):

And every word, once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect itself. (Plato in Bizzell and Hertzberg 166)

In a technological age where digital information seems to flow with few gatekeepers, it is important for our students to understand how to criticize and create rhetoric. Bakhtin suggests that our rhetorical situation—subject, speaker, exigence—are a bare-bones structure to all communication and suggest specific social and hierarchical factors (Halasek 17, 22). Because of its powerful capabilities to lay out ideological frameworks, rhetoric demands at the very least comprehension of its capabilities and use.

Berlin notes three types of rhetoric which are prevalent in composition theory history: objective theories of rhetoric, subjective theories of rhetoric, and transactional theories of rhetoric. "Observational, positivistic rhetoric" was also known as current-traditional rhetoric. Its purpose was to

…[teach] the modes of discourse, with a special emphasis on exposition and its forms—analysis, classification, cause-effect, so forth. However it also pays special attention to language…through which truth is discovered. [Current-traditional rhetoric] was the rhetoric of the meritocracy. In short….[it] was designed to provided the new middle-class professionals with the tools to avoid embarrassing themselves in print. (Berlin, "Rhetoric and Reality" 7)

The second, subjective rhetoric asks the individual to arrive at the understanding

of eternal truth on their own. In line with Plato's theories of transcendent truth,

and Freud's intuition, the teacher of such a class "cannot communicate truth.

Indeed, the teacher cannot even instruct the student in the principles of writing,

since writing is inextricably entwined with the discovery of truth. The student

can discover truth, but truth cannot be taught; the student can learn to write, but

writing cannot be taught." Indeed this model also encourages an elite class of

capable learners, privileged with the ability to arrive at higher fields of

knowledge (Berlin "Rhetoric and Reality," 13).

 "[A] third approach to writing instruction emphasized writing as training

for participation in the democratic process—a rhetoric of public discourse"

(Berlin "Rhetoric and Reality" 35). This transaction model has its basis in socially

constructed knowledge and is the model we use in most composition classrooms

today. Transactional rhetoric insists that students' ideas coalesce with their own

vocabularies and understanding, and that a forced ideal or system of thought

denies an individual's reality.

> ….reality as social construction, a communal creation emerging from the
> dialectical interplay of individuals. Reality is thus neither objective nor
> external, as current-traditionalists believes, nor subjective and internal, as
> proponents of liberal culture held. It is instead the result of the interaction

between the experience of the external world and what the perceiver brings to this experience. ("Rhetoric and Reality" 47,48)

To subdue the Platonic purists, Scott explained how the transactional model would in fact, encourage Plato's ideal, "Good discourse is that which by disseminating truth creates a healthy public opinion and thus affects, in Plato's words, 'a training and improvement in the souls of citizens'" (Scott 415). So, although writing has often meant students should "master principles of arrangement and sentence construction…correct grammar and usage," post-modern acceptance of the transactional model allowed for a new perception of the purpose of composition classrooms (Crowley 7).

> Composition scholarship typically focuses on the processes of learning rather than on the acquisition of knowledge, and composition pedagogy focuses on change and development in students rather than on transmission of a heritage. Composition studies encourage collaboration. It emphasizes the historical, political, and social contexts and practices associated with composing rather than concentrating on texts as isolated artifacts. (Crowley 3)

This philosophical approach to composition has been called critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy allows students to be "taught the skills needed to write and read within the standard conventions of cultural and academic discourse, but what sets [it] apart is that [students] should be taught to interrogate, critique, and in some cases, resist those values promoted by those same discourses (Hardin 2).

Berlin's hopeful objectives of rhetoric as a life skill found presence in the struggle over the composition classroom, saying,

> When freshman learn to write or speak, they are learning more than how to perform an instrumental task, useful in getting through college and in preparing for professional life. They are learning assumptions about what is real and what is illusory, how to know one from the other, how to communicate the real, given the strengths and limitations of human nature, and finally, how language works. ("Rhetoric and Reality" 2)

These lofty aspirations helped situate the composition course as one which might have more purpose than simply upholding the traditions of grammar and writing mechanics. Pedagogy theorists believed that the transactional, expressionist rhetoric classroom could restore "individuals to their identities," and "awaken the individual's sense of [her] political responsibility and power" (Holloran as qtd. in Berlin, "Rhetoric and Reality" 88). Berlin begs us to consider rhetoric as a "holistic response which involves the ethical and aesthetic as well as the rational"; failing to do so "denies the totality of human response" ("Rhetoric and Reality" 81)

This view of the learning process as a socially responsible act dates back to classical rhetoricians like Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates. In more contemporary history, Scott and Dewey are seen as the forefathers of the American form of democratic rhetoric through public discourse (Berlin 50). Dewey's principles

supported transactional rhetoric as the ideal, believing that "progressive

education reflect[s] [the] conviction that the aim of education is to combine self-

development, social harmony, and economic integration" (Bowles and Gintis 20-

22).

Dewey was part of the Pragmatist movement, an "action-oriented,

forward-looking philosophical orientation that eschews the search for first

principles; that is to say, it is more interested in the questions "what shall we do,

and what are the consequences of our actions" than it is in metaphysical

questions such as 'what is true?' or 'what is real?'" (West 5)

 The Pragmatists sought an emphasis on

> processes and relations; a naturalistic and evolutionary understanding of
> human existence; an analysis of intellectual activity as problem-oriented
> and as benefiting from historically developed methods; and an emphasis
> upon the democratic reconstruction of society through educational and
> other institutions. (Dewey as qtd in Crowley)

Unfortunately, Dewey and the Pragmatic movement were met with

opposition,

> Critics…have joined a larger questioning of the role of literacy in our
> society. Discussions of literacy within the academy often follow the
> tradition of John Dewey, whereby one of the main goals of teaching
> literacy is to create more politically active citizens. The radical pedagogy
> of…Paolo Freire, is frequently cited in these discussions, but efforts
> similar to Freire's in the US to teach literacy so that people might

challenge exist social and political orders have not been widely praised or supported. (Faigley 69)

The public apathy toward socially responsive academic goals is echoed by John Trimbur who notes "…how the retreat from public life has privatized experience and diffused collective energies into the atomized channels of careerism and consumerism" (17).

Other critics of Dewey called him a contemporary sophist who discarded "all permanent values and all tradition" (Foerster 19). Dewey rejected these claims stating that it was necessary for students to embed themselves in "newer and complex environments" to "stimulate [students] to change and grow" (Crowley 163). This notion of stimulating activity which breeds change and growth was called radical liberalism (Crowley 166). To activate the pedagogical ideas of Dewey's "progressive education," the University of Iowa created a new general education model which individualized the curriculum.

> It should be designed so that every student will have a chance to acquire both the basic skills and the fundamental understandings he needs to live in the modern world and meet the social and ethical responsibilities which he must face as a good citizen of a democratic nation. These, we felt, he would acquire more readily from a dynamic and active process of learning than from passive receptivity to teaching. ("The New Program" as qtd in Crowley 168)

This philosophy of education included the conversion of classes from lecture based sessions to student-centered discussions. Because the subject became society and culture, it was necessary for students to have the authority to "articulate their own experiences" as a way of developing critical thinking (Smith 42). Gallagher improves upon the "student-centered" theory with the notion of a *pedagogy-centered* curriculum which would allow individual teachers to improve upon or eliminate standardized syllabi based on the needs of their classroom dialogues.

> When we talk about a pedagogy-centered curricula, then, we are talking about a vision. But it's a vision that can never be enacted the same way twice because any vision will evolve out of local practice and the enactment of what I have called institution literacy. The concept of pedagogy-centered curricula, while consonant with the best of Dewey's thinking, takes a step beyond student-centeredness. Specifically it describes the act of developing curriculum out of the dialectic between students' and teachers' experiences, knowledge, and interests. …Progressive curricula would refuse the familiar notion that the goals of establishing curriculum are stability and standardization, opting instead for flexibility and diversity. (Gallagher 155-156)

This newly opened classroom proved to be the window for many other discussions, including how we grade and judge students' work if it is subjectively composed; what authority can the teacher can maintain in the classroom; to what end do we teach? Crowley details a story in which two

professors of freshman English, Charles Townsend Copeland and H.M. Ridout, at Harvard University describe the purpose of "dailies," a writing observation, was to get students to "'open their eyes and keep them open to scenes and events near at hand'. What happened was that reading dailies about students' observation and experiences put the professors in the position of passing judgment on the students' intelligence and character" (Copeland and Ridout 8).

Berlin comments that the majority of the pressure indeed falls on the cohort of faculty and theorists, concluding, "We need to be aware of what we are teaching, in all its implications. The way we teach writing behavior, whether we will it or not, causes reverberations in all features of a student's private and social behavior" ("Writing Instruction" 92).

The burden for the students, however, remained even less clear. Crowley notes a defining quality and perhaps weighty issue for the composition discipline to consider.

> Introductory composition is still the only required course in which students are still asked, repeatedly, to express their opinions on a variety of topics not generated by their study of a field or subject matter. Composition teachers are the only teachers who are still asked to evaluate students' character rather than their mastery of a subject matter. (57)

This issue creates ethical and moral complications for the teachers and the students to either adjust to inherent ideological frameworks, or construct

frameworks for the class itself through dialogic interaction. Again, this asks

students less to consider the process of arriving at a final product and more the

correctness of the final product itself.

Because of the program's inability to define itself we leave students

uncertain as to the purposes of the class as well. At Clemson University where

the program is held in the English department and is listed as an English course,

students may enter the class expecting to study the dynamics of English

language and structure. However, what they find is a course more linked to

Dewey's principles of radical liberalism: we encourage students to seek answers

by exploring socio-economic rhetoric—the story of their present.

Although Freire and Dewey promote the ideal of active citizenship

through education, some critics believe students have chosen to ignore this lofty

value to focus on the consumerist draw of a college education, including the

students themselves.

> Almost no students value activity as a citizen. Passive in public, they are
> hardly more idealistic in arranging their private lives. Gallup concludes
> they will settle for 'low success, and won't risk high failure.' There is not
> much willingness to take risks (not evening business), no setting of
> dangerous goals, no real conception of personal identity except one
> manufactured in the image of others, no real urge for personal fulfillment
> except to be almost as successful as the very successful people. Attention
> is being paid to social status (the quality of shirt collars, meeting people,
> getting wives or husbands, making sold contacts for later on); much, too,

is paid to academic status (grades, honors, the med-school rat race). But neglected generally is real intellectual status, the personal cultivation of mind. (Students for Democratic Society as qtd. in Faigley 57)

"The life of the universities for a thousand years has been tied into the recognized professions of the surrounding society, and the universities will continue to respond as new professions arise"(Kerr as qtd. in Miller 19). But it still remains important for our goals of producing civic-minded citizens who are active in our communities, to find the missing piece between these two worlds: academia and everything else. I believe that the Learning Community Model provides an outstanding way to bridge the gap between students' affairs. The living and learning model is an ideal structure, as it never draws a line between the classroom and life outside. Although it is not necessarily a viable option for all students or schools, a modified version can bring the cohesive elements needed to our composition classrooms.

Conclusion

The composition classroom has multiple and varied histories and purposes; its narrative now depends on finding a theme which it can sustain and build upon for future student-characters. Although it has struggled to build a story, the composition class has a rich foundation upon which to grow. Its

advocates are passionate and concern themselves with citizenship, democracy,

and ideological freedom. In Chapter Three we will consider how these thematic

elements can evolve the composition narrative into a resonant tale which

appropriately chronicles the development of the student-writer-citizen. Finally,

we will consider the Learning Community model as a solid structure to house

the composition course; a place for students to explore and discover their own

stories within the classroom narrative.

CHAPTER THREE

*"This once-in-a-lifetime turn of the century seems an auspicious time to
ask some simple questions: if we were to start from scratch and create a
system of higher education focused on student learning in the first year,
how would it look? Who among us would we choose to deliver knowledge,
however it is defined, to the newest members of the academy? What
structures or techniques would we use in the transmission of knowledge?
And how would learning be measured?" (Barefoot 18)*

In the U.S. a variety of mythic allegories permeate our narrative

structures: Christ's resurrection, Merlin and King Arthur (or some variation on

the quest for the Holy Grail), and the cowboy of westward expansion and

capitalism which personifies the American Dream. Although "the idea was

abroad in the 1990's that narrative was in its final throes…and that the grander

narratives of human emancipation" would replace the need for narrative

communities, it seems that day has not yet come (Fukuyama as qtd. in Colbey

188). Indeed, narratives are embraced in new forms of communication, including

online social networks, weblogs, and media, including television and film.

For Fisher and other narrative theorists, however, narrative remains the

explanation for rationality, community, and history—the very being of

humanity. Fisher says, "Any ethic, whether social, political, legal, or otherwise

involves narrative…Humans are essentially storytellers" (Fisher "Narration" 3,7).

Fisher believes hotly in narrative as the most basic communication because "all persons have the capacity to be rational in the narrative paradigm," making it a democratic opponent to traditional scientific rationality systems of "expert domination" (Fisher, "Narrative" 9-10). For the purposes of this thesis, we will undermine traditional theories of rationality to consider that narratives bring about a type of *reasoning* which can offer one a voice in the conversation of socially constructed realities. Stories "establish ways of living in common, in intellectual and spiritual communities in which there is confirmation of the story that constitutes one's life (Fisher "Narration, Reason, and Community" 63). In other words, narrative provides a space to study the symbolic meaning behind human events and sequences, associations and outcomes; it validates our experience and allows us to confirm these associations with other members. Essentially, narrative allows us to step back, make sense of our understanding of events, and then re-create a representation of those situations we deem legitimize the experience.

Before the written word became a popular way to express narrative stories for audiences, often it was the oral tradition of storytelling which held together

the seams of national identity and tradition with themes that were considered

"universal" (Colbey 38-39). Because the contemporary "individual" often

overrides the community concept, some would say that these universal stories no

longer exist; yet one cannot deny that individual stories may make up a

universal narrative—similar to the theme of the American melting pot. Sartre

expanded upon this idea, saying, "…man is always a teller of stories, he lives

surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that

happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were

recounting it." Similar to Burke's terministic screens, it is understood that we all

come to the larger narrative with our own stories to share; our communities

validate the coherence and fidelity of the stories based on our socially

constructed realities, and once validated we see those stories adopted as true and

they in turn, become part of our history.

    If narrative breeds understanding of social histories and beliefs, then for

Freire narrative literacy and educated dialogue between members of the human

community is crucial:

> If men are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and
> thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the
> wake of change. They see that the times are changing, but they are
> submerged in that change and so cannot discern its dramatic
> significance. (Freire, "Education," 7)

In other words, those who cannot participate in the scheme of literate narrativity

fail to be part of society, but instead become stock characters in the narrative at

best. In no other place is it more important to identify and move the "otherwise

chaotic, shapeless events into a coherence whole filled meaning" than in the

classroom (Bruner 22). We should see the classroom as Charles Dickens saw the

novel, "the vehicle of understanding the instrument of self-examination, the

parade of morals and the exchange of manners, the factory of customs, the

criticism of laws and institutions of social dogmas and ideas," (qtd. in Martin 20).

Freire saw the classroom as the place where social ills could be quelled if we only

adjusted the way we spent our time there.

> Our experience at university tends to form us *at a distance* from
> reality. The concepts that we study in the university can work to
> amputate us from the concrete reality they are supposedly referring
> to. The more we are like this the farther we are from the masses of
> the people, whose language on the contrary is absolutely linked to
> the concreteness. (Shor and Freire 19)

Visually, the contemporary university moves like this:
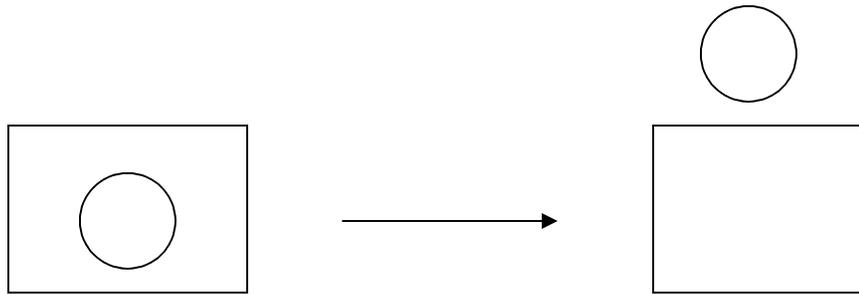
Before university students are submerged in society with little consciousness of ideology, global narratives, and their own placement in history. They lack cultural and critical literacy.

During university we often ask students to extract themselves from society and look upon it critically; however, we never ask them to re-align themselves.

This (tends to)) creates intellectual class privileges and lessens the chance students will ever choose to be part of the community again; they have become individualized and culturally elitist. To find this concreteness we must dialogue about our socially-constructed reality, we must allow the global relay of narrative in our classrooms, based on our personal experiences and terministic screens, to thrive. Freire suggests we adopt a situated pedagogy in which "we discover *with* students the themes most problematic to their perception…This gains intrinsic motivation from subject matter of key concern to students while also giving them a moment of detachment on their previously unreflected experience (emphasis mine, Shor and Freire 18). In other words, we should allow

students to discuss the narrative structures they see in our society and what these

narratives generate and produce. Students should maintain involvement with

the society while still discerning the systems and ideologies with a critical eye.

By removing them completely from the present narratives, we instead create an

intellectual elitism that resists the outcome of the "hero" narrative structure.
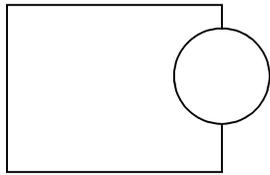
We should focus not on removing the student from the community/society but integrating them into the space while still allowing for critical reflection upon history and ideology. This way, students maintain the importance of their role within the community and remain invested in the narratives generated there.

As the student becomes aware not only of their own social narrative, but also

of the global schemas and themes, they are liberating themselves of their cultural

illiteracy. This awakening of critical awareness is what Freire refers to as

conscientizacao ("Education" 19). He claimed that only as "men grasp the themes

can they intervene in reality instead of remaining mere onlookers"; what I am

suggesting then is that the structure of the contemporary writing classrooms—as

the space that vividly portrays the entire university experience—is failing to help

our students grasp the themes in any meaningful way ("Education" 5). We are

speaking *at* them instead of *to* them. In addition to cultural literacy, we must be

optimistic that educated individuals can obtain *critical* literacy, "whereby a person becomes empowered to unveil and decode 'the ideological dimensions of texts, institutions, social practices and cultural forms…in order to reveal their selective interests (McLaren 307).

As noted in Chapter Two it does not appear that students are voluntarily seeking or finding this *conscientizacao*. To determine *why* students are not achieving this kind of awareness it becomes essential to examine the classroom and the people working within. I believe that a narrative analysis can help us locate the plot of the first-year writing classroom and determine where our characterizations play out and how we might improve the structure to encourage a more fulfilling ending.

For Fisher, the narrative is dependent upon two things to maintain a narrative rationality: probability (coherence) and fidelity (truthfulness and reliability) (Fisher 47). We must ask: whose probability and fidelity standards are we considering? At best, we can hope it is the socially constructed realities we create for ourselves which deny or accept us into society based on our adherence to them. Fisher admitted that reliability is based largely on the Aristotelian idea of "narrative modalities"—probability, accident, knowledge or ignorance, good or bad—he believes these modalities coincide with phronesis, or

appropriateness, for the community (Martin, 101; Fisher 119). This means any value judgment made based on the coherence or reliability of the narrative is made in the interest of the community and the need to maintain an appropriate status quo. That same philosophy applies to my own analysis of the first-year writing classroom.

<div align="center">Dissecting the Writing Classroom Narrative:</div>

<div align="center">The Methodology of Discovering the Antagonists</div>

"Narrative can serve as an interpretive lens for reflecting the storied nature of human lives, for understanding the moral complexities of the human condition, and for enabling classrooms to expand their borders as interpretive communities" (Witherell, Tan Tran & Othus 40). Since narrative functions so effortlessly across boundaries, it seems quite appropriate to submit the classroom to its scrutiny. There are many ways to approach a narrative analysis; postmodern narratology resists concrete "rules," but insists upon using narrative to search for social, economic and ideological structures inherent in stories (Herman & Verbaeck "Handbook,"19). Since our goal is to determine the issues in the narrative of the writing classroom, we must consider whether ideological factors play a role in the disruptive structure.

According to Fisher, "a master metaphor sets the plot of human experience…subsume[ing] the others (Fisher "Human Communication" 62). The traditional structuralist approach to narratology breaks down the story into meaningful units in which to examine the narrative with an objective, scientific persona. The ideas are further divided between "'story,' (the chronological sequence of events); 'narrative' (the way in which these events are presented, e.g., using the perspective of one or more characters); and 'narration' (the verbal rendition of this presentation)" (Herman and Verbaeck, "Ideology" 219-220). "Story *seems* to pre-exist its rendering. A story is composed of action (an event or events) and characters (more broadly existents or entities)" (Herman and Verbaeck, "Ideology" 41).

In Fisher's narrative paradigm he supposed that we are naturally storytelling beings and that we have an inherent ability to determine the "coherence and fidelity of stories [we] tell and experience" based on our own experiences (Fisher 24). With this mindset, all activity is simply a series of plot twists and characterizations in the scheme of the stories we tell. Further, Fisher invites us to use our own definitions of what passes for a community and a story, thereby refusing the traditionalists' attempts at denying social construction.

Like the contemporary dichotomy between science and literature, Fisher

theorizes that the issue critics of narrative theory have is in the definition of logic

and its attempt to link narrative-poetry, as an alternative to positivism, as

reasonable and logical (Fisher 24). The narrative paradigm theory, then, is an

attempt to call poetry and science into equivocation by stating that narrative,

while a form of poetry, can also reveal human socially constructed truth:

> The narrative paradigm can be considered a dialectical synthesis of two
> traditional strands that recur in the history of rhetoric: the argumentative,
> persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme." The narrative
> paradigm implies that human communication should be viewed as
> historical as well as situational, as stories or accountings competing with
> other stories or accounts purportedly constituted by good reasons, as
> rational when the stories satisfy the demands of narrative probability and
> narrative fidelity and as inevitably moral inducements. (Fisher 58)

Fisher states that these narratives depend on coherence and fidelity to narrative

logic, which we construct socially as well as individually, as their experimental

reasoning for validity and induction representative of the human conversation.

The human conversation, Fisher notes, is similar to the metaphor drawn by

Kenneth Burke of the eternal parlor which is entered and exited by all and which

will ceaselessly hold the philosophical conversation of "Where do our narratives

get their materials?" (Burke "Grammar" 63). I think Freire would agree that

conscientizacao is indeed one's awareness that such a parlor of discussion exists.

For Freire multidisciplinary dialogues could provide us with a reference

to see social truth. Fisher points out that this romantic notion of dialogue was

eliminated as a possibility as foundations of knowledge were grounded in

scientific rational superiority (Fisher 24). What resulted is our contemporary

system of higher education, divided and sectioned off into departments like head

from body, each claiming to be a foundation. For Fisher then, a narrative

analysis asks us to look at a story holistically and determine its reliability and

coherence based on our own systems of belief. Applied to the classroom, we

must consider whether the narrative we've created can be accepted as a story

which represents our students and society rationally and with accuracy.

Archetypal Imagery

> For four years you have been secluded in the ivory tower of the
> world, reading papers, making love, attending meetings,
> expressing opinions, playing or watching games, enjoying all the
> delights of suburbia. Now you are going out into the great wide
> university, and whatever you profession, for the rest of your lives
> you will have to assume the responsibilities of university teachers.
> Other people, including your children will get their notions of the
> university through you; and whatever you do or think, the
> university will be doing or thinking too, in the place where you are.
> You have been at Western: now you are going to be in *the*
> University, along with St. Thomas and Milton and Einstein, and
> most of you will feel grateful to Western as long as you live because
> it has given you your passkey to your own real society. (Frye
> "Teaching" 83)

Northrop Frye describes, succinctly, the story of the universal student narrative. And yet, this only touches on the experiences the students will have throughout their cycle at the university. Frye describes the university experience with mythic tones, highlighting episodes which have purveyed the students into a new world—that of post-graduate society. The students Frye speaks to have passed some sort of test and have their diplomas to prove it; they have personified the hero myth. However, it is doubtful students see this moment of sublime acceptance as so; this momentous occasion only propagates the divine movement into personal responsibility.

In today's story of the student we see a collection of contradictions: education is both an opportunity and a habitual obligation; it is both a necessary awakening and also compulsory movement in the capitalistic quest. To this end, Barton and Barton suggest that in an "age of growing disillusionment with science and technology the lay audience generally configures the story of their achievements and events as a tragic emplotment rather than a romantic emplotment of optimism and success" (36-48). Students may look upon matriculation as a necessary means to their high paying job ends.

> "This is a culture in love with self-made men…As a result of our historical experience, the ideas of social intelligence and political empowerment have less creditability than individual efforts…The

conservative restoration of the 70s and 80s split this political
marriage of personal and social change by promoting the notorious
'me-cade.'" (Shor and Freire 23-27)

The heroic quest to seek sacred knowledge seems long past; Frye tries to remind

students that the mythic quality still remains:

> I consider it a genuine achievement for you to have your degrees.
> When we hear so much nonsense about how a degree is a mere
> piece of paper, a mere this, a that, it is perhaps as well to say that
> you have a degree not only because you have done the work
> required of you, but because you have had the moral courage to
> concentrate on it…It seems a natural and healthy instinct for you to
> think of the university from which you were graduated as your
> lifelong intellectual home. But still a convocation is a separation, as
> each one of you leaves the [university] to become the [university] in
> yourself. It is a kind of benediction indicating that the essential
> ritual act has already taken place. (Frye "Teaching" 87)

And who is to blame for creating this ironic narrative of not only the University,

but subsequently, the writing program? Is it the students whose apathy affects

the system? The department in their goal for increased literacy rates through

standardization of syllabi? The teachers, often graduate students or adjunct

faculty, with too many other obligations? Bruner described narrative as being

"concerned with explaining human intentions in the context of action (Bruner

"Narrative" 100). Freire might suggest that each of these characters is responsible

for the lack of cohesiveness and foresight in this narrative, because there is no

communication, no action, among them.

The story presented by Frye follows an interesting timeline: it is similar to that of the mythic hero. The hero myth is type of "grand" narrative which is pervasive in nearly every culture and can be likened from classic tales of King Arthur, and biblical characters, to many of today's television and film characters. Our attempts to identify these themes which repetitively appear in our community narratives have led to many of the literary conventions that we use today (Martin 26). For Polkinghorne, myths do not merely report on an event, but actually represent reality; "myths think themselves through people, rather than vice versa" (Katz, "Rhetoric" 125). Frye suggests that the theme of a "hero's quest" [is] the adventure or journey through which prosperity and/or order is restored to a community in decline (Frye, "Anatomy"). "If the hero succeeds, reappears, and is reunited with his community", says Frye, "we have comedy or romance, if he loses, or does not reappear, we have tragedy or irony" (Frye, "Anatomy"). Although matriculation rates appear steady, if the student has not gained knowledge—shifted their cultural literacy—then they have still lost. How do we prevent our classrooms from writing a very unfortunate tragedy?

Carl Jung was a premiere psychologist who believed that our human narratives could be organized into archetypes or stories which will continuously

appear because they are the basis of all human psychology. The hero myth is so

pervasive because

> …each reader can substitute himself [sic] for the hero, the "I"
> figure…it rests on the medieval analogical view of human
> character: the "I" is not so much a "rounded figure"…as a pair of
> eyes and an affective system no different than our own. Like us he
> is lost to begin with, but if we stay with him (in him?) we too will
> be led to vision or understanding. (Josipovici 78)

In the hero archetype myth,

> The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle is
> lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of the
> adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the
> passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the
> kingdom of the dark…or be slain by the opponent and descend into death
> (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero
> journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate faces, some
> of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid
> (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he
> undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward…The final work is that
> of the return…The hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return,
> resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir).
> (Campbell 245-246)

If we begin to imagine that the student is the hero of our story (after all, aren't

they the reason we tell the story to begin with?) then it becomes important to

map out the parallels of our metaphor of the journey through the university as a

descent and into the forest-classroom fully. For example, who is our antagonist?

Who is the narrator? The author? How can we expect the student-heroes to

wholly survive the forest challenges? Before we delve too far into our story, we

must lay down relevant parameters in which we'll work. It is necessary, then, to

explicate some basic literary analysis terms; Fisher calls the basic elements of a

narrative "'fabula' or story (the prior events which are to be narrated); and

'sjuzet' or plot (the organization of events to highlight some events and

downplay others)" (Colbey 15). Hermeneutics can "push the narrative forward

towards disclosure and simultaneously…retard the narrative's progress by way

of 'equivocation,' 'snares' and 'false replies.' …can also be understood as

detours…[which] are woven so imperceptibility into narratives. Will the hero

uncover the extent of the conspiracy? Will s/he triumph over the villain?"

(Cobley 13). In the analysis which follows, I will be identifying these elements in

the classroom narrative as well as exploring the characterizations which bring

this academic space to life.

<div align="center">Identifying the Current Student-Hero Myth</div>

<div align="center">*Fabula*</div>

The student must attain education in order to be successful by American

standards, which includes the completion of a mandatory writing component,

designed to aid the student in functioning as a career-driven individual.

Sjuzet

Students will complete a series of writing exercises designed to test the student's rhetorical, research, and writing process capabilities. Students will adhere to the syllabus due dates and read the assigned chapters. Students will be required to edit and write with other students in a collaborative manner but will not use their peers to tackle fire-breathing dragons or other assignments which require creative input. At intervals students will be informed of their progress in the class, with allowances for those failing to remove themselves from the quest. Students may request one-on-one time with the Teacher if additional guidance in the journey is needed.

Hermeneutic Detours

Students will be introduced to a variety of university programs (summer reading programs, orientation), some of which will divert the students to a side road until it meets the primary path of writing performance again.

Narrator and Author

It is impossible for the narrator to lack the author's awareness and voice, even if the narrator is an omniscient entity. Identifying the author of the writing story is a daunting task because it opens responsibility for the success of the story. Once we have identified the author, we then must question to whom it is

they have entrusted the story to be told, who narrates the story and with what degree of reliability? "Two aspects of narration that always have significant consequences are the sensibility of the narrator and his or her distance from the action"; a more removed voice would care less intensely about the status of the characters and the outcome of the story than one who is immersed in the story too (Abbott 42).

It is easy to presume that the teacher is the author of the story; she is responsible for the syllabus and is the judge of whether a student has successfully completed the story with an A or a F. However, I believe that the authorship for this narrative is shouldered by manifold parties. The bulk of the story comes from the university, through general education program, and rests in the writing departments, which define the outcomes to which the course(s) will subscribe. Often these parameters are based upon university goals, implicating the university general education in responsibility as well. The teacher is then asked to round out the plot, to configure how imagination and possibility will fuse with reality.

Setting

It is important to determine our time line immediately; for example, are we considering the students' entire educational stories or their first semester of

college? Is it *just* a semester or their entire writing career until that point? Frye noted that most narrative romance follow four phases that are associated with, the cycle of the seasons. It is usually autumn when the hero departs and descends into the underworld, winter when the hero disappears in battle, spring when the hero reemerges and summer when the hero returns and is reunited with society ("Anatomy" 185-206). For the purposes of this analysis we will be considering one semester, which is the average amount of time one student will spend in a writing classroom. Although prior events have allowed them to create varied writing narratives, we are most directly concerned with the one they create at the university and in the future. Although we are not considering a full season cycle, I believe that these seasonal elements still remain in the semester timeline.

If we place the classroom as our setting we will see an interesting parallel appear. Our students may begin their first-year writing course in the actual autumn; many are coming from summer vacations and senioritis has only begun to wear away. The students are bright and fresh and curious about this new college experiment; they are eager to please their teachers because they have submitted to a great deal of authority until this point and have learned that first impressions are hard to dismiss. Perhaps they are scared too, uncertain of how a

college writing class will make their lives and their grades different. Now, they peer upon your syllabus like a sunrise (or a sunset); are they ready to take this journey? Perhaps they understand why the expedition is necessary, after all they will be faced with this challenge of writing again and again; perhaps they just know they have to go and weary or not, they must put on their battle gear and prepare.

And what do they see? Perhaps it is a classroom with desks toward the front of the room; it doesn't seem so different from their home high school. But this classroom is deceptive; although they have their laptops, there is no cheery wall art to zone out into. This place is serious. The teacher appears and hands out a scroll, or at least it seems that way.

Or perhaps for those who take the course in the spring, school feels like a settling down, a beginning of a hibernation period; this is also autumn for students. At the beginning of class there are latent expectations that will typically begin to be fulfilled closer to mid-term, when the first papers are due; it is here we begin to move into winter. If the student continues to brave the fierce weather they will shift into a sunnier clime of spring, where the ideas begin to make sense, perhaps. Typically, however, our students never consciously make it to summer. They continue in their college setting, in an eternal spring. There is no

returning home; the knowledge is no longer shared, it is internalized. Grades are

given and we return to our fall season. This denies Freire's sense of praxis and

phronesis as the newly acquired knowledge has no outlet for reflection and

action. The landscapes of the story change may change based on the university,

but this chronology remains the same.

Story and Plot

It is well-known in narrative literature that there is a vast different

between story and plot. Story is the events that occur; plot is the way in which

they happen. The familiar example is this: the king died and then the queen died.

In that short sentence we have a complete story; however, if we add detail to the

occurrences we have plot. For example, the king died from a mysterious illness,

the queen died shortly after of a broken heart.

> Plot is also used to refer to the combination of economy and
> sequencing events that makes a story a story and not just raw
> material. Thus Aristotle's concept of "muthos," often translated as
> "plot," is the fashioned story, shaped with a beginning, middle,
> and end. Plot in this sense is a device that brings the story to its
> fullness and authenticity as a story. In Ricoeur's words, plot is "the
> intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in a story…A
> story is made out of events to the extent that plot *makes* events *into*
> a story. (Abbott 43)

In literary and narrative analysis, the story follows a basic structure; a derivation from this structure is used to increase suspense or provide a hermeneutic shift. A basic story arc looks like this:

C

B

A
D
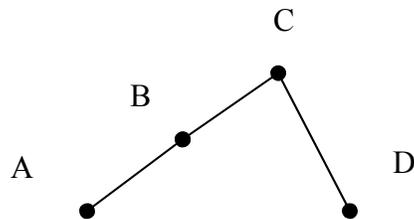
AB represents the exposition, B the introduction of the conflict, BC the "rising action," complication or development of the conflict, C the climax, CD the denouement, or resolution of the conflict (Freytag qtd. in Martin 81). The story we are considering is this: students must successfully complete a first-year writing course. Naturally, the plot allows for much more involvement and variation.

The plot begins with the authors--the department is partially responsible for authorship; it is they and the general education program creating the standards for which the writing classes are taught. Although university standards vary based on the size of the institution, most universities require some sort of customary first-year writing course. This course is typically part of a

General Education requirement, and as we saw in Chapter Two, these requirements often strangle the departments with standardization and prescriptive agendas. "The effect historically [is] that students often either [accept] General Education courses because they [reinforce] home or professional values or they [dismiss] them as irrelevant to their future" (Fosen 20). Students already approach the writing story as one they've been repeatedly told, without even considering the option of a fresh ending.

This course is fractured by various themes on how to improve student writing: themes which suggest it is best to focus on technical writing, others for academic research, and still others for remedial skills in fundamental expository structure. "Under this skills mindset, individual composition classes reproduce education as the acquisition of basic tools that have value only in the progress towards a degree, not in their meaningful or disciplinary use" (Fosen 20). This misstep in university and state mandated standardization provides the basic story of the classroom, and leaves the teacher to fill in the plot.

Unfortunately, the course has also succumbed to the "catch-all" syndrome associated with general education requirements, surrendering to summer reading programs, student assessment, and library orientation sessions (Fosen 12). Each alternative affects the outcome of the story arc, some acting as

hermeneutic "detours" to both disrupt and progress the story. With so many subjects and topics, students may not understand what the true purpose of this classroom experience is.

The structure of the courses and the criteria for testing out of them varies by institution, so some students based on standardized test scores, will never enter this story at all. Two common class schedules are an inclusive 103 course which combines the theory and goals of 101/102 classes, or a two-or three-tired series which may include a lab, a writing in the major seminar, technical writing, or other supplemental course. Since many classrooms assume that students at the college level have familiarity with grammar and basic sentence structure, remedial courses are available on an as-needed basis, or students are encouraged to visit the writing centers on campus.

Although I will primarily focus on the two sample programs as James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina, to provide comparison I've taken note of two prominent ivy-league institutions and the core writing requirements and goals for matriculation from their programs,. The programs are listed based on their complexity and the responsibility they ask of student time, in other words, the story of the first- year writing classroom. In addition, each program highlights at

least one element which would serve well in the ideal first-year writing learning

community-style classroom.

Stanford University	Story Points (Standardized Objectives)	Analysis
Stanford University maintains a progressive three-course system which is assumed throughout the students' first, second, and third year.	WR1 focuses on engaging students in carrying out significant research that leads to polished and persuasive research-based argument. WR2 aims to develop further students' skills in writing and, increasingly, in oral and multimedia presentation, emphasizing the ongoing development of content, organization, and style. Writing in the Major provides students with focused opportunities to develop writing skills in the context of their chosen fields, beginning the process of learning to write effectively in discipline-specific formats and styles (Stanford University).	This unique program promotes a series of writing courses which ideally dismisses the notion that writing is simply a general education class. Through this series of increasingly specific courses, the process of writing becomes actively associated with their entire curriculum experience. However, this program seems to be missing a praxis element: there is little civic reflection or engagement inherent in its structure.

University of Pennsylvania	Story Points (Standardized Objectives)	Analysis
The course catalog for the University of Pennsylvania offers a basic description and objective set for their single required writing unit: The goal of the critical writing seminar is to help our students become better writers. Writing is a skill that improves with practice. Our objective is to equip students with the mean and motivation to develop as writers beyond the writing classroom.	Writing is a social act and therefore writers must understand the conventions and expectations of audience, as well as anticipate the effect of their writing on that audience. Writing is a process including observation, consideration, and revision, as well as a product	The University of Pennsylvania program supports the social construction theories of Freire's cultural literacy by addressing the writing process as a powerful tool in communication. In addition, the program readily admits writing is a social act which includes observation and consideration, but has not considered *conversation*. The writing environment discussed here would be an ideal candidate to implement a learning community approach to writing as social action is already established as a foundation in the program.
	Writing improves writing	
	Writing is an act of cognition, a way of thinking, as well as an act of communication.	
	Offer a series of courses based on the student's level of writing, native abilities.	

James Madison University GWrit 103	Story Points (Standardized Objectives)	Analysis
This institution offers a single Writing 103 course adapted to represent the same skill set and information found its former 101/102 requirement. Students may also take an elective course in college-level reading and writing. In Writing 103 students are asked to:	Develop and support a relevant, informed, argumentative thesis or point of view, that is appropriate for it's audience, purpose, and occasion (rhetorical knowledge);	This program, while providing a short experience in the writing classroom, does ask students to see writings as a "civic responsibility." This could ideally be taken a step further to *use* writing for civic responsibility. However, students do spend considerable less time in a writing classroom here and may test out of the class all together, forgoing any writing experience at all.
	Analyze and evaluation information to identity it's argumentative, credible and ethical elements, students should also be ale to reflect on civic responsibility as it relates to written discourse (critical thinking, reading, and writing);	While the learning community classroom element is not present in all 103 courses, the Teer Learning Community is an excellent example of bring writing across the curriculum together for a specific purpose: community service.
	Demonstrate an understanding of writing as a series of tasks involving invention, research, critical analysis and evaluation, and revision for audience purpose and occasion; effectively incorporate and document appropriate sources to support an argumentative thesis, or	

	point of view;	
	Exhibit control over surface conventions such as syntax, grammar, punctuation and spelling that are appropriate for the writer's audience, purpose and occasion (knowledge of conventions).	

Clemson University	Story Points (Standardized Objectives)	Analysis
The goals for the writing program at Clemson University are simple and concise. Currently, students are responsible for completing English 103 as well as a simultaneous lab component.	Demonstrate effective communication skills appropriate for topic, audience, and occasion	Clemson's two-tiered classroom approach would work beautifully towards a Freireian approach if its classes linked into a more intentional Learning Community framework and adopted an official pedagogy of dialogic and civic learning.
	Write coherent, well-supported, and carefully edited essays and reports suitable for a range of different audiences and purposes	The linked lab component gives students additional time in a writing classroom which works to build trust and community among students as they become engaged in the work of their peers. It also gives students time to develop a relationship to assignments which carry over into two classroom periods.
	Employ the full range of the writing process, from rough draft to edited product	
	Incorporate both print and electronic sources into, speeches, presentations, and written documents	

For Aristotle, the crucial elements of plot structure are recognition

(involving ignorance and knowledge) and reversal (of intention or situation)"

(qtd. in Martin 117). Again, this altering of consciousness is similar to Freire's

conscientizcao. We must then ask, to what degree is this classroom plot allowing this shift to occur and are the students aware that it is happening? Based on the descriptions of these four institutions the central goal, the climax for our classrooms, is that students become aware of the writing process. While the process versus product dichotomy is important to explore, the more valuable moral may be in the critical thinking and evaluation aspects of the research, both social and academic. After all, Merlin did not simply want Arthur to pull the sword from the stone; he wanted him to understand the significance of the act and what kind of effort it would take.

Teachers must take this story and fill in the gaping holes between idea and experience with a semester-long syllabus Depending on the teaching style, and what relationship the professor maintains with his students, this experiential classroom may actually blossom in the space between the standards and the writing. Classrooms which are discussion-based they may provide students with an arena to be political and socially vocal, or to discover, defend, or deny their own belief systems outside of familial interests; in other words, for students to seek critical and cultural literacy and reflection. Most of all, it is important to question whether these syllabus-plots express to our students the magnitude and

relevance of challenging themselves as writers; have we given them enough reason to understand the consequence of failure: illiteracy?

<div align="center">*Characterizations*</div>

There are three basic characterizations we will consider: the hero, the guide, and the antagonist. Although there are many other characters in this story, these play to most pivotal roles in the plot development. In addition, we will explore the depth of the relationships between characters.

<div align="center">*The Student/Hero*</div>

As Freire notes, "it is the educator who knows, and the pupils who don't"; our goal is to remove students as the object of the classroom and instead make them the subject. Bakhtin calls the "subject" of any story the hero—making the student the hero of our classroom narrative (Halasek 83). It is an interesting responsibility which these students agree to take. In the push-pull of American education, they are at once a lone cowboy searching for their own gold—they use education to sift out the shiny fool's metal—and a mass exodus rushing forward with indulgent capitalistic tendencies—they seek to purchase an education with which to maximize their future profit. While they wait for these projects to manifest by clocking class time hours, they appreciate social ventures which far outweigh the classroom in their appeal for participation.

Bizzell indicates a rationale for this apathy: "Basic writers suffer less from academic ill preparedness than from epistemological or ideological disenfranchisement. Their difficulties…are best understood as stemming from the initial distance between their world-views and the academic world view, and perhaps also from the resistance to changing their own world-views that is caused by this very distance ("What Happens" 297). It may be understood then, that students have not felt welcomed into our academic forum, they feel dismembered from this community. Bakhtinian principles suggest that students may simply mimic texts in order to assimilate themselves to our community, which would give some explanation for their inability to see the writing classroom as an important quest for self versus an initiation system into academia (Halasek 40).

This issue may be fixed by employing the Freierian suggestion that community and dialogue are basic premises of educational relationships. Fisher advises that communication which is monologic lacks any real relationship quality, an attitude we should abandon when entering the classroom (309). The relationship between a student and a teacher should indeed be a very real discussion of communicated experience. Socrates "brought students together in a fashion that required them to investigate collaboratively [with him] the nature of

truth, for "truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual

person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process

of their dialogic interaction" (Halasek182). In Platonic dialogues, the cards were

always stacked in favor of Socrates, and the search was for fixed truth, thus

making the dialogue ideologically different for Plato than the one advocated by

Freire. We will discuss more implications of this relationship between the hero

and the teacher later.

Jung notes that if the "novitiate-hero is to develop, he must respond to the

call in the affirmative," meaning that students are very much responsible for

their own eagerness to take part in the journey. Freire agrees,

> …the responsibility for education is in the hands of the pupil
> himself. It is the student who has the possibilities for growth and
> self-evaluation. Education should be centered on him instead of
> being centered on the teacher or on the teaching; the pupil should
> be the master of his own learning. …Education should have a
> vision of the pupil as a complete person, who has feelings and
> emotions. (Gadotti 111-112)

Perhaps then it is necessary to reestablish the adventure element of the

heroic journey for our students. We must ask them to "enter the 'perilous

forest' of political and philosophical complexity, where there are few

answers but increasing compelling questions (Mayes 96). Jung purposes a

psychological goal of *individuation*--similar to Freire's consciousness—

"where the premium is also placed upon self-discovery and social

responsibility to deep engagement…"(Mayes 109-147).

This is not to say that the student journey should be easy or

perpetually enjoyable. We have replaced a once challenging exertion of

academic exercise and replaced it with mechanical syllabi and classroom

hours. Jung admits that "*katabasis*, a Greek term of the descent into the

underworld, is the requisite for psychospiritual maturation," meaning

that while education should emphasis growth and development of

students it doesn't necessarily mean it must be risk-free (Mayes 109). The

hero narrative would not be complete if there was not a task to conquer—

this [task] requires the young hero to discover a newer world by seeking a

higher wisdom (Mayes 127).

The Teacher/Wise One

The interaction between teacher and student is woven so deeply
into the fabric of what it means to be a human being that it is
impossible to conceive of the human situation without it…. the
hero meets the Wise Old Man. These Wise Ones successfully
completed their own archetypal quests many years ago when they
were young and now often possess powerful amulets and
knowledge about potions. Guiding the young travelers these Wise
Ones are, above all else, teachers. They often speak in riddles to
spur their young students on to intellectual and moral growth.
(Mayes 96)

The teacher of the writing classroom finds themselves at the border of a

daunting assignment: comply with the standards of the department, university,

and state, which often require quantitative results and authoritative approaches,

while inspiring student interaction with text, peers, and ideas. When put into the

perspective of the hero narrative, the teacher finds themselves in the thrust of an

impossible situation: as they aid the hero in their discovery of which paths which

will continue their quest, the professor must still answer to the laws of the

kingdom, which often leave their hands metaphorically tied.

> The teacher walks into a classroom, provokes some illumination, like
> turning a light-switch, and then walks out, mission accomplished. On
> to the next class, where once again the teacher lights some lamps and
> calls it 'empowerment.' (Shor and Freire 22)

Although archetypes are a broad generalization, there is truth that some of these

qualities *do* exist in professorship today. The Professor archetype can be coolly

analytical, insular, inflexible, and yet genuine; he or she stands at the front of the

class in their limitless wisdom and profess the logics of the world with an

informed air. The Professor archetype has his or her own plans and keeps those

locked away high above his work with the student population (Cowden, LaFever

and Viders 31-37). For example, in classrooms not taught by adjunct or graduate-

student faculty, the professor assigned to the first-year writing classroom is likely

to be there on a rotational basis within the department, giving up "this one semester" until they can continue work on their personal research projects, also sanctioned by the university. Although many composition courses have pared down classes to 25 students or less per section, too many classrooms still operate with a distance between the professor and the students—the teacher remains at the head of the class as the knowledge-giver and the students remain the receivers.

For Freire this distance is the causation of so many classroom issues; Jung believes that this space can only damage teacher development stating, it is crucial to consider that the teacher is both an artist and a politician who may use dialogue as a way to reflect on reality *with* their students as they make and re-make it (Shor and Freire 11). Jung adds, "the teacher examines and critiques himself and his practice in psychological and political terms to see if he is being as sensitive and fair with all his students as he can be, or if he has unresolved issues or prejudices that are standing in his way (Mayes 115).

By reflecting upon his classroom practices, teachers will begin to form obvious relationships with the students as the teacher seeks to understand how they can challenge them in "academic terms to embark on a mythic quest in search of a valid ideological grail (Mayes 128). Jung concludes that without

humility in the classroom teachers become like Icarus, "the wax wings melting into the unforgiving daily sun of the classroom reality" (Mayes 135). Jung further meditates on the hero's "return to society" at the end of his quest and its implications for the teacher.

> The Hero returns to society from the underworld to teach his people about what he has learned there. This suggests that the Hero and the Teacher are so similar in their ultimate goals as to be finally indistinguishable. Just as the mythic hero must become a teacher, then, so may the teacher learn to become the mythic hero. (Mayes 136)

The teacher's ability to do this will depend on many factors including how the "plot" has been laid out for them.

The Antagonists

Although it would be unfair to suggest that the totality of the tragic elements of the story lay at the feet of the department, it is fair enough to discuss how the department can change its pedagogical approaches. First, it is important to note that often the status of first-year writing programs must account for general education requirements set by overarching university standards, which are strongly influenced by state-mandated requirements. These institutions often deny much power to departments, whether it is through strict standardizing

policies or a tough numbers game. So while departments often handle the pressure of scrutiny, they may often fall prey to systemic regulation.

The departments currently base the students' need for the first-year writing course upon standardized test scores, entrance essays, and AP/IB placement. Without idealizing, if this course is indeed the epicenter of the student experience, we should approach its parameters much differently by making it a course all students should take part in versus seeing it as remedial.

> …Public schooling over the last 120 years has become increasingly "atomistic" and "authoritarian" in that it imposes on both the teacher and the student a mélange of disconnected facts that the student memorize—usually in order to score well on a standardized test. Such curricula are insensitive to—and indeed destructive of—those rich variations in personal and cultural perspectives and talents that are vital to psychosocial health and creativity. (Cremin as qtd. in Mayes 98)

Instead, class time should enrich students understanding of how they communicate within their social schemas, as well as how others will attempt to communicate with them. It should encourage students to explore the various techniques and styles which are appropriate for diverse types of interaction.

> Education should not be reduced to a technical rationality. It cannot be the aim of education to turn out rationalists, materialists, specialists, technicians, and other of the kind who, unconscious of their origins are precipitated abruptly into the present and contribute to the disorientation and fragmentation of society. (Frey-Rohn as qtd. in Mayes)

The heart of the plot mis-structure is that students rarely take this course, or general education, very seriously. There are no consequences, no action for this program; the format is presented as merely a passing phase in which only total inertness will respond with failure. It is also seen as a preparation versus a true process in itself. Dewey warns us that "mere activity does not constitute experience. Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it" (Dewey 146). Like Freire's ideas of *conscientização*, we must dialogue and reflect on the power of what we have learned in order to act upon it.

It is crucial for departments to allow the class itself to become a *process not a product*, that which post-modern programs demand of the writing itself. In the ideal classroom dialogue is the pedagogical impetus for change, it allows the hero to ask questions of the Wise Old One, the Merlin, the Professor.

> …knowledge is from the very beginning a cooperative effort of group life, in which everyone unfolds his knowledge within the framework of a common fate, a common activity and the overcoming of common difficulties (in which, however, each has a different share) [sic]. (Mannheim 29)

<u>A Revisionary Hero-Student-Teacher Narrative</u>

We teeter between hoping for the ideal and settling for the reality. It is easy enough to allow ideas and projects which work to remain status quo, even at the expense of "tragic" endings. The writing classroom is one which can benefit from reflection and dialogue between its characters to change the course of its plot. In this revised version of the dialogic writing classroom we can strive to create relevant and authentic connections between our class time and our community to avoid the slothful intellectual elitism associated with academia today. Our students can once again find themselves on a mythic journey of epic magnitude as they navigate our social and ideological landscapes.

Fabula

The student must attain education in order to be successful by American standards. At the epicenter of this education is the writing classroom which will open further academic doors for the student. The student must not only complete the writing course successfully, but should be more socially conscious and able to converse not only in their own community discourses but also in the universal community dialogues as well.

Sjzuet

Students meet their teacher for a semester-long conversation not only about academic subjects, but where the students find themselves among the great picture of society and ideologies. The student will inevitably meet with uncertainty or doubt, which will spur him to engage the teacher, his peers, and himself in discussion of academic and social inquires to dispel these issues. The teacher poses questions in return, articulating her own experiences as possible, but not definitive, answers. The students are allowed and encouraged to make final judgment of the evidence presented and mistakes are encouraged if they are not repeated. The teacher provides adequate resources for the student to fulfill these inquires and encourages the unearthing and dissemination of information once it is found. The student is appointed to showcase his new consciousness in an innovative and community-centered way; his ability to manifest his knowledge appropriately will consider whether he has successfully navigated his quest. If successful, the student will reflect on his experiences and journey, and how this new wisdom may be appropriately conveyed and practiced with his peers and a larger, universal audience.

Author: Teachers, Students

Hero: Students, Teachers

Teacher: Professor, Student

Antagonist: apathy, standardization, monologic conversation, student isolation

 from academic peers and community including teachers

Donor/Dispatcher: department, university

Setting

One semester within a lifetime of learning experiences

Conclusion

 If we consider the "story points" of each of our four universities, we will

find the core of our distressed narrative. Stanford University, while representing

the ideal way of teaching a complete series of writing courses is missing the core

element of student involvement. Clemson's two-tiered classroom approach

would work beautifully if its classes linked into a more intentional Learning

Community framework and adopted an official pedagogy of dialogic learning.

James Madison University's Teer Learning Community has the optimal LC

framework, as well as the active praxis element; however, it fails to encompass

writing as its primary focus for cultural literacy. The University of Pennsylvania

program supports the social construction theories of Freire's cultural literacy through dialogue, but fails to implement student action or the writing process in a meaningful way. These stories are still missing the seasonal summer of our hero narrative: when exactly does the hero return home, to share his new [cultural] knowledge?

For Freire the solution was as simple as praxis, or engaged, intentional action based on reflection. For our students, who spend hours reflecting on writing and its processes, it must at some point become real; they must have a meaning for their mythic journey. These programs have a structure which their university deems valid; without losing this story, we can change the plot, the way the events happen, the depth and proximity of the learning and the characters. Our plot, then, should consider how dialogue and community-oriented learning will allow our students to progress from their sapling-like quality of springtime to a more mature summertime.

This adventure of discovering writing as a social and communicative act is a thrilling one for students and teachers. This is their journey—the one we where we are allowed to whisper well-intentioned advice into their ears—as they concern themselves with finding their way to a [new] home. As Fulwiler and Young note, "The best teaching is not the mere

transmission of knowledge, but the transmission of the means of creating

knowledge and the excitement that accompanies that" (2). It is time for our

students, and for us, to complete the story.

CHAPTER FOUR

> If you are a dreamer come in.
> If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,
> a hope-r, a prayer, a magic-bean-buyer
> If you are a pretender, come sit by my fire
> For we have some flax-golden tales to spin
> Come in! Come in!
>
> Shel Silverstein
> ("Invitation" 9)

> Reflection on a shared learning event can capture the realm of
> personal meaning and connect life stories to a larger public
> meaning.
>
> Goodson and Walker, "Telling Tales"

The first day of my freshman writing course in August of 2002 was also my first introduction to college academic study. We didn't meet in a classroom; we met in a residence hall lounge. We sat in a lopsided circle of sofas and introduced ourselves. We played two truths and a lie. An electric buzz permeated the circle as we looked at the faces of our peers and our teachers—there were three of them. We discussed the purpose of this particular Learning Community—community service—but also how our unique classrooms would work. We could use these spaces to learn about our peers and ourselves, and we would create our own service project based on what *we* perceived was needed in the community. Over that semester, I learned a great deal about those 19 people

and what they reflected back of me. Our conversations carried over to the dining hall or at night while we watched television in our suites. In the classrooms we continued dialogue which seemed relevant in multiple spaces and posed ideas *to the teachers*. And then the semester ended. I assumed that would be the end of our connections but living together we seemed to bump into each other regularly, only to further continue conversations or reminisce about our experience. And this is why I believe Learning Communities will provide our writing classrooms with a solution: I have seen it work.

For the last four years I have worked with Learning Communities (LC) peripherally and in depth, as both a resident advisor for a series of living and learning communities, and the director of the Second-Year Experience (SYE). Each of the Learning Communities I've worked with varied; some were communities based completely on clustered class-time experiences, others were focused on a theme, still some others were residentially-based. My most recent experience with the LC model was as a teacher at Clemson University during fall 2006. I learned mid-semester that one of my courses was a LC of male engineering students—much too late to situate my coursework around their residential community. The students missed an outstanding opportunity, for

they were as close as brothers and as critical as them too; this community would have found group work to be a better option.

<div align="center">Enter, Stage Left: The Learning Community</div>

"In 2003, learning communities were implemented in various forms at over six hundred college and universities in the United States" (The Evergreen State College as qtd. in Ellerston and Thoennes 37). Although the integration of this program into schools has largely been related to retention and persistence goals of the university, the learning community model offers a unique forum for intellectual discussion and learning to take place.

The Learning Community (LC) concept, though liberal in nature, finds its history in classic Greek education; if not ideologically in Plato, then in the opposing school in ancient Greece, that of Isocrates, who taught his students to write through oral and social dynamics for civic and moral development of the classroom and the larger pan-Hellernic community (Katz, "Epistemic" 95-104). In American history, Learning Communities began with the colonies—a community of scholars with common values (Lenning 23). "From the early lyceums to Emerson's "circle of friends" to…graduate seminar[s], education has always possessed special communities of learners for whom shared experience has special meaning (McEwan qtd in Lenning 23).

The contemporary LC model is founded upon the ideas of Alexander

Mieklejohn and Dewey; each saw a deep division among departmental and

university goals as well as student interest and retention of information.

Meiklejohn briefly implemented his own "Experimental College" at the

University of Wisconsin from 1927 until 1932, as a place for students to develop a

new type of educational experience not seen at universities during this era

(Talburt and Boyles 212). Meiklejohn supported an idea he called "liberal

learning," in which students "merged liberal arts study with their free speech

rights to criticize society." This program was collective in nature, encouraging

students to think critically about their own placement in society and draw

conclusions between disciplines. The students often also lived together in a

shared dorm, similar to the living and learning environments of today (Talburt

and Boyles 212).

"Meiklejohn's solution was to restructure the curriculum, pedagogy, and

the roles and relationships of students and faculty" (Smith). The pedagogical

approach at Meiklejohn's Experimental College "stressed active learning,

discussion, and collaborative work, and it helped students develop analytical

and problem-solving skills rather than memorize specific bits of information.

Challenging assignments encouraged the students to apply the theories they

read about to real-life issues" (Smith). The students were part of a two-year curriculum based on ancient Greece and contemporary U.S. society, first and second year, respectively which aimed at giving students a foundation for understanding the responsibility of democratic citizenship (Talburt and Boyles 212).

Although Meiklejohn's Experimental College was discontinued not long after its inception, the pedagogical underpinnings have remained a lofty goal for many liberal universities. At the epicenter of Meiklejohn's goals are an important understanding that university classrooms should be aimed at challenging students intellectually and preparing them to carry these discussions into social settings. This coincidentally overlaps the hummings of many postmodern literary and composition theorists.

Dewey, also a progressivist, agreed with this idea, believing that communal discoveries could incite change more quickly than lone discovery. Although they were adversaries in their beliefs about the systems of social class, both philosophers believed that learning and teaching could not occur within a confined structure and without consideration to context and growth. Both also aggressively pursued activism and citizenship as a crucial element to education (Talburt and Boyles 212-214).

Typically, LCs are touted as an exemplar, progressivist program which improves student interest and retention (Talburt and Boyles 211). LCs have been noted as "positively related to diversity experiences, student gains in personal and social development, practical competence, general education, and overall satisfaction with the undergraduate college experience" (Smith). As Wolfson explains, "In post-modern society we have become so alienated and isolated from each other that we have to artificially re-create the guise of learning communities" (23). Sports teams, classrooms, and workplaces each mirror community-oriented learning; boarding schools take the living and learning idea to heart as well.

Although Learning Communities have been placed into genres, (experiential learning, internships, volunteering, interest-based community, living and learning environments, and academic major communities, for example) the programs are mostly individualized to the university. Associated with first-year student involvement in the social mores and academic rituals of the university, the hallmark of most programs is the manifestation of involvement (Andrade 2). "Well-conceived student learning communities are intended…to help students perceive their cumulative education as part of the big picture of life" (Lenning and Ebbers 28). Unfortunately, these ideals are lost as

LCs are often seen as a romantic representation of a nostalgic idea which cannot

be found in today's large, bureaucratic university systems.

> The version of the college learning community refers to an idealized version of the campus of the past, where students and faculty shared close and sustained fellowship, where day-to-day contacts reinforced previous classroom learning, where the curriculum was organized around common purposes, and the small scale of the institution promoted active learning, discussion, and individuality. (Gabelnick et al as qtd. in Talburt and Boyles 211)

Still, upon studying contemporary LC programs, the outcomes are undeniable.

Lenning and Ebbers conclude that benefits of learning communities are:

achievement, retention rates, satisfaction, improved thinking and

communicating, better understanding of self and others, bridge the gap between

academic and social worlds (6). Learning Communities also

- Improve student learning, satisfaction, and retention,

- Enrich and strengthen disciplines by linking them with other [sic],

- promote synergy not homogenization,

- create holistic campus experiences for students and

- build consensus across division and disciplinary boundaries (Masterson

  as qtd. in Gessell and Kokkala 3)

Browne and Minnick offer critique, stating that we should encourage the development of "moral reasoning" and "critical thinking" as the primary pursuit of "elevated university goals." Moral reasoning and critical thinking should be seen as the university's most important role in "training" of democratic citizens. Browne and Minnick found "…Little support for the belief that learning communities focus on intellectual development." They believed that "[Learning Communities] may work quite effectively to strengthen a sense of belonging and build social and personal skills that might function in other more intellectual settings" but still lacked intellectual weight (Browne and Minnick 775). I find it improbable that Dewey and Meiklejohn's purposes could have been missed so completely in the hundreds of Learning Communities which exist today. Additionally, since contemporary LCs have been studied primarily for their ability to socially acclimate students and help their persistence towards matriculation, and *not* their ability to help students make informed moral choices or think critically, this short analysis seems wholly unfair.

Critics of the Learning Community concept also question whether the LC model can overcome ideological constraints characterized in socially constructed communities. For example, if the students are a community, will they not eventually adopt an ideology for their own, placing those systems at the

forefront of their interactions? This organization of "theory hope" negates the crucial activity of a community to constantly reorganize itself. "Community can take on a coercive, prescriptive tone rather than one that describes emerging identifications and purposes" when students' try to avoid conflict (Talburt and Boyles 216). However, it is my belief that this concept of "group think" can be actively avoided with the aid such a mythical Merlin-teacher. Furthermore, Roberts-Miller notes we should "theorize a public space in which people rely on rational discourse to determine what is the universal best interest—and are still able to remain individual and resist the pressures of conformity" (539).

Two Learning Communities I have worked with specifically geared towards writing as a communicated subject are at James Madison University and Clemson University. I have described my experience at JMU in some depth in this chapter; in addition to the Teer Learning Community (TLC) that I was a part of, JMU has a variety of LCs designed around students specific interests although no other LC integrates the writing course. The TLC offers a unique experience for students to see their writing come to life as they discuss and map out particular community service experiences. As they enact these service endeavors, they begin using the skills from the business and communication classes they take in conjunction with the writing course; again, the skills they are learning begin to

leap off the paper and into their hands. Because this LC maintains three different teachers for three different subjects—all who work towards a common goal—the dialogues in place are varied and offer a myriad of perspectives on issues. While it is easy to see how such a community requires diligence on the parts of the coordinators and teachers, it affords all involved with a singular class time experience.

Likewise, Clemson University currently maintains a unique curricular format. Like many math or science classrooms, English 103 holds a once-weekly lab component which supplements the core course. The core course and the lab are taught by two separate instructors but share common ties. Although the course is not intentionally created as a Learning Community, the effects are the same; students build trust based on their additional interaction time and because many of the activities become group-oriented, the students begin to establish bonds which lead to authentic peer reviews.

Often, the lab component is used to build on basic mechanics and grammar instruction as well as provide workshop time for projects in the core class. The core class, as mentioned before, focuses on visual and textual rhetoric in the social context which allows instructors to implement activity in the university community. While this system does not allow the student to see

writing as a continuing process throughout their education, it does provide space and adequate support for a solid writing class to take place.

In each of these Learning Community classrooms, it is the instructors which maintain a key role in ensuring the success of the community. Based on dialogic interaction with students as well as communication with other teachers, the facilitating member of such a community, be it a teacher or student-leader, is a ubiquitous and contingent component of the community, as they are often responsible for sketching out the story arc of the LC experience.

Learning communities are defined and yet ambiguous. The purposes of each community are folded within the needs of their respective members, the effectiveness of the community lies here as well. The model may be adapted based on university resources but should always emphasize dialogue that carries over the boundaries of time and space.

Conclusion

The crux of the matter is this: each institution has its own ideologies which will influence the structure of the first-year writing course. This issue reminds us to be careful of our own ability to easily standardize the system with our individual philosophies and pedagogies, and for theory hope to emerge. What I have laid out here are suggestions, based on my own experiences and research.

I am far too realistic to ever assume that a Learning Community will provide a truly happily-ever-after narrative to the writing story. However, I do believe with ardent passion and experience that these dialogues with the students and the teachers, and the department, and the university will open a fresh perspective on the situation.

Despite what plot the university may create, it is most important for the story to be re-written. The story demands that we engage students in a challenging adventure where they—with guidance and a few potent spells—will learn to lead themselves through the pitfalls of writing their own narratives of *conscientização* and praxis. I fear that we attempt to narrate the story for them, but no second-hand description of a road not taken, a sword pulled out of a stone, will ever be the same as seeing it for themselves.

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