

Chapter 8. Making Matters

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It was not always heaven in those days. Small communities can be narrow and tyrannical. We who now salute you belong to a much larger community, those of the generation after World War II. Let me for a few moments engage the questions of who we have been, who we are, and who we might become.

– Richard Lloyd-Jones, *“Who We Are, Who We Should Become,”* 487

I was born in the late 1950s and grew up the fifth of eight children, turned 11 in 1969, graduated from high school in 1976. Like many other white eastern North Americans whose parents grew up in the city and moved to the suburbs, my defining experiences were about moving from one class to another. Economic class, a corporate brat, yes, but also from one school classroom to another. From one side of Rochester, NY, to another, from there to suburban Chicago, and back again to the suburban east side of Rochester. Inside these moves were others from public to private schools or vice versa, until by 1976 I had attended five grade schools and two high schools. I have often wondered how the more general cultural shifts in aspirations in middle-class suburbs for second- and third-generation white U.S. citizens, especially after WWII, has affected the idea that Richard Lloyd-Jones took as a theme throughout his work: that language makes things. Clearly, valorization of “English only” reverberates in making immigrant life a function of a more general historical trend, one in which middle-class life was unilingual, being multilingual a marker either of lower citizen status or, less often, of wealth that provided trips abroad and Ivy League educations. What it has meant to understand reading and writing as relational open spaces within this history has been more than a personal journey, although understanding the personal in varied contexts has defined my academic journey as a first-year writing teacher and administrator in many ways. What does it mean to understand self as maker within the contexts of curriculum design and others’ lives? This was the question Lloyd-Jones posed for us early on, and one we would do well to ask again now. What process is it that we put in motion?

The need for reflection and the making of meaningful lives is a constant source of anxiety in the lives of many of the students and teachers I have worked with over the past thirty years. It frequently manifests itself as an inability to see one’s self as making, being able to make, or sometimes even having made, a life of joy and gratitude, a sustaining existence. Sometimes, students articulate their anxiety in phrases that walk into our writing classrooms with histories of their own.

“I’m not a (good) writer” could mean anything from “I got bad grades in English in high school” to “I am afraid to say what I really need to say,” to “I embody the scars of an educational system in which no one cared about me.” We know these phrases, too: “I don’t have anything to say,” “I can never figure out what the readings mean,” “I’m not really that interested in anything, can you just give me a topic?” Sometimes teachers articulate this anxiety as resistance to the ways of reading that grading seems to demand, ways that bump up against their own histories as readers, writers, and literate human beings in uncomfortable ways. The gulf between reading and grading can be so big that in workshops that shift the ground from grading students to reading student writing, people experience some distress. The papers aren’t meant to be read that way, they’ll say, or it will take too much time. There is a parallel here with shifting the ground from explication to nonfiction: explication can be put on a scale of “correct” interpretation in ways creative nonfiction can’t. When readers respond to texts solely as graders, it puts reading in relation to criteria that precede the act of reading itself. It limits the operationalization of those criteria, interrupting their relationship to the texts that have been made. This doesn’t mean that everyone gets the same grade, or even a passing grade, but it does enable me to explain their grade in relation to the criteria as they emerge through reading and not just through some laying on of the criteria hands. I am still amazed to hear that teachers read a paper for the first time and grade it as they go. I know there are time issues here; I experienced them while teaching 4/4 and 3/3 and at the same time directing writing programs. What I found most effective was to read through the whole stack first as if they were chapters in a collection. This gave me a good idea of the subject matter I was working with as well as how to set the terms for evaluation in relation to the assessment criteria that had been shared or developed with the students when the assignment was set. It also allowed me to clarify which were most ready for that collection, which were at the revise-and-resubmit stage, which were rejections, which were conundrums, and why. It occurs to me now that this is why my assignments have become, over time, more and more like calls for chapters. Phrases such as “just tell me what you want” and others like that may be ways of saying that students know how their work is going to be read in the end, so let’s stop pretending and get to it. How many of us teach writing even as we struggle with our own literacy histories, writing blocks, and rejections from readers whose responses indicate criteria different from those we expected them to use? The relationship between reading and writing, and the fissure between them in most of our lives, cannot be ignored, as they return us to relationships between those who write and those who read in writing classrooms.

For me, these issues collided early on with the common practice of putting students in groups to do peer response. As someone who had gone to so many different schools and who knew what it was like to walk into classrooms not knowing my peers or their histories, I understood the limitations of responding to others from nowhere, or within only a very limited and mostly unconscious

and unexamined set of assumptions (gender, for example). Even with the peer response guide sheet we were given and required to use as graduate teaching assistants, I grew anxious on peer response days. I would tamp down the feeling that I was recreating a situation that favored surface responses, unexamined assumptions about the relationships between readers and writers, and criteria that limited those relationships. Ultimately, I felt I was undoing any chance for getting past the mere laying on of the hands of criteria in the constitution of our lives as literate human beings. It brought back memories of something I still have trouble naming clearly, a vague sense that I was doing what was expected of me, settling for what was “good enough,” but not really accomplishing much.

The fuzzy desire for deeper connections to place, to others, to myself had led me down many paths by this point in my life, and I sat in great discomfort whenever situations made me feel the absence of those connections, but I had no way to do more than experience it. This wasn't about an inability; it was about pedagogical norms that offered no other options, replicating the experience of beginning from nowhere. I was more comfortable than most designing experiences for 14- to 16-week blocks of time. In fact, one of the advantages of the way I grew up was that at a fairly young age I knew what it meant to organize life around fairly small chunks of time. We all bring hidden histories to any opportunity for response, especially in higher education classes where one semester ends and another often begins as if the previous one never happened. I decided that I had to find a way to get reading back into my writing classes and back into curricula, and as much as possible into the lives of the teachers that I was responsible for training. I had to do so in ways that opened up some of these conversations while keeping writing at the center of teaching and learning. I had to rebel against two major disciplinary assumptions that eclipsed Lloyd-Jones's ideal of offering to writers ways to “define themselves as crafters, to govern their own materials, and to relate to the rest of the human world” (“Poesis” 46): that first-year writing classrooms were not places where reading should be a making activity (because literary explication had limited reading for so long) and that the literacy histories embodied in those spaces were merely individual personal narratives.

These assumptions became more than a theoretical issue, and addressing them posed questions for me about the heart and soul of my work as a teacher and as a practitioner who was hired to make things. How had the history of devaluing reading to remove literary explication from the center of the first-year writing classroom in first-wave process model theories reinstated another form of explication at the center of that movement? How was the over-valuation of theory and the absenting of creative nonfiction driving this machine? What discursive tendencies were being reinstitutionalized here? How did these practices replicate structural devaluing of first-year writing programs over time and across radical pedagogical changes? If we weren't teaching writing, what were we doing?

The questions emphasized my status as an outsider in ways both clear and muddy. On the one hand, I knew that class, gender, and a history of not doing

well in school were factors in keeping me out of line with the poststructuralist theories defining subjectivity with which I took issue. I had come to the field from stints in factories and bars and from reading Audre Lorde, Gloria Steinem, and Ivan Illich, books I had procured from the free book rack at the library near where I lived, a place where I dodged in and out of somewhat dangerous alleys and streets to get to other places between shifts. At that time, after flunking out of college twice, I had given up on school. I was struggling to understand my past and what it might be like to conjure a future that wasn't one of living from day to day or paycheck to paycheck (almost making it each week) or even year to year. The loss of hope loomed larger and larger every month. On the other hand, I was in one of the premier rhetoric and composition programs in the field. I had arrived at a time when first-year writing was starting to become the "low" end of the field from the inside, and I had chosen to focus there. But more about that later.

Like many next-generation college students (first generation, but with older siblings who went to college and parents who went back later in life, Dad in his 50s and Mom in her 70s), much of life was mediated by a vague belief that there might, just possibly, be more going on than the surface of our stories revealed. As the reading I was doing before I went back to undergraduate school had made its way into my consciousness and my poetry, I began to think that my educational failures might be connected to something other than a lack of ability. Ivan Illich, Audre Lorde, Jonathan Kozol, Mike Rose, Sherman Alexie: I read these tales of education as one of the characters in the stories, not as ideological tracts or as a critic. It was sometimes painful to read them in graduate seminars and listen to people talk about the characters as if they were mere discursive figures, lives rendered in acceptable or unacceptable ways by a writer who was or was not creating representations through acceptable lenses.

Before graduate school, there had been a successful graduation from undergraduate school, no high honors but a pretty clear introduction to the conflicts of academic life in English studies. It began one morning in the early summer of 1986 when I woke up and took the bus to Nazareth College of Rochester. The admissions office was quiet. The receptionist told me that no one was around to help me. I began to cry. As I sobbed and asked for help, Jonatha Elliott stuck her head around the corner and said she would talk with me. My memory of much of the conversation is vague, but I do remember telling her that I needed to go back to school, that something woke me up and sent me there. She said, "OK, that shouldn't be a problem." Which was fine until I said I had flunked out twice, at which point she said, "OK, now we have a problem." As it turned out I would have to take two classes and get grades of B or better to matriculate and qualify for financial aid. I signed up for Rhetoric I, a class that would fulfill the first half of a general education writing requirement and started a few days later in the first summer session.

I have no memory of how I actually paid for the course. Installments probably. But I do remember working at the bar until well after closing and going home to

either get a few hours' sleep or finish the assignments as they came due. The prof, Dr. Deborah Dooley, met with me throughout the course, holding paper conferences that acknowledged both the importance of how I dealt with subjects and the need for more organized papers with greater clarity of purpose. My most distinct memory from that first course is a conference about the first paper, in which she told me that obviously I had a lot to say and didn't have to try to say it all in three pages. Then she sent me off with the assignment to choose any one sentence from that paper and to write three pages about that. The only reading we were assigned was the first half of Edward Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (the second half was for Rhetoric II). In our individual conferences Dr. Dooley and I discussed the readings I had been doing while not in school, and she suggested some others I might be interested in. Serious issues of being and becoming, of choice as an available alternative to reenacting what Dr. Dooley called the "old tapes" we carry around in our heads, arose as a consequence of our study of rhetoric and the conversations it inspired. By the end of the semester I had my grade of B or better, and with the encouragement of Dr. Dooley, I signed up for her second summer session course to study women's narratives.

I knew when I went full time in the fall—and fully maxed out my student loans each year until graduation—that I would be a writing major. I was lucky, though, because writing majors had to do the full core requirement of the literature part of the English major, and so even though I was an older returning student, I was introduced—mostly through experience—to what was already becoming and would continue for years to be the major tension of the modern process-model movement ideology of the field of first-year writing: the relationship between reading and writing. My undergraduate degree required all writing concentration majors to complete the full literature core requirements, but the literature majors were not required to take any of the core writing requirements. My writing-major peers used to gripe about this; I thought that we were the lucky ones. I also had the good fortune of being introduced to lots more creative nonfiction in women's studies courses. But the disciplinary tensions that dis-integrated literacy studies haunted my graduate school career.

During my M.A. program I chose a second field in literature instead of theory (not a highly valued choice in the program), selecting a focus on modern women's writing that included fiction and nonfiction, and found paths for overlapping that course of study with my work in rhetoric and composition. When I stayed to continue work toward the Ph.D., I added courses in the theory track to meet expectations that had become unspoken requirements. We read some feminism, mostly to criticize it using male poststructuralist theoretical frames. I did find Julia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*; it reminded me of Lorde and Steinem and became a touchstone for my dissertation. But it also became much more than that: it became a way to understand the effects of the historical absence of the poetic, and the absence of creative nonfiction, in my graduate studies and in the process model movement I had been oriented toward. It became a way to

think through the consequences of that absence, rather than merely experiencing it, and it extended even further to the pain and joys of reclaiming the poetic as writer and as reader for myself.

It became a way to understand the effects of that absence in my life, too, and it made central again the question of the relationship between reading and writing to composition studies and to those studying in the field. Like Lloyd-Jones, I watched as the problems of first-year writing—economic, ethical, ideological—became not opportunities for change and inclusion, but grounds for devaluing the field and those who teach and learn under that requirement, sometimes as a hopelessly unethical endeavor and sometimes, as one colleague put it to me, as a course that shouldn't be necessary—i.e., people who need the course shouldn't be admitted to higher education. These things resonated very personally for me—someone who by luck had ended up in rhetoric just by dint of being a continuing education student and tracked into an alternative way of fulfilling the first-year writing requirement, but who was, nonetheless, underprepared. Someone who had flunked out of college twice and who was committed to more open access, second chances, and approaches that acknowledged the complications and histories that could inhibit success for many students (moving from school to school, for example, or being labeled “not college material,” or experiencing financial challenges or benign neglect, or having big boobs at a young age and being sexualized by peers and many adults).

The relationship between reading and writing became a central issue of inclusion not only for me, but for whether students would see themselves as vital and integral to our endeavors. Course anthologies and writing textbooks that included readings became more inclusive of work by multilingual writers, writers from historically underrepresented populations, and writers who presented challenges to mainstream histories of the west. But expectations for student writing shifted less quickly as the question of how to put those readings in relation to writing assignments without reinstitutionalizing explication, exhortation, or exaltation as the end of writing instruction went unasked. How, for example, could we position inclusivity as an invitation to enhanced literacies? How could we avoid positioning diverse voices as objects to be analyzed, argued about, accepted or rejected, and rather engage with them, expanding our own practices as writers and readers? Listening to students, some of whom were genuinely relieved to be reading texts they could identify with and some of whom were stressed out by those texts, I realized that in either case the unspoken source of the relief and stress was, at least in part, because the texts engaged unfamiliar invention, arrangement, and revision practices.

And so, I set out to reclaim invention, arrangement, and revision for purposes not related to those set forth in the classical or mainstream models. I repositioned those tools as transactional activities that move us across reading, writing, and researching. I can't emphasize enough how the move away from criticism and critical theory as the frame for making things with language put me at the edges

of the profession and brought me and the students I worked with to the edges of the limitations of our literacy educations. Centering theory had created a huge gap between the discourse of honor and the discourse of first-year writing students, a gap not unlike the one created by the earlier honoring of fiction and the restriction of student writing to the much less valued discursive forms of explication. The consequences of my migration away from this theoretical gap and the practices it encourages affect me professionally even today, and not in ways that are always comfortable or make me “good enough” in year-end evaluations, annual reviews, merit pay decisions, and other professional structures.

In the spirit of reconfiguring the relationship between reading and writing, I created a set of questions to guide our reading practices and our discussions of readings, including how we read one another’s work. The questions resulted in lists of possible invention, arrangement, and revision strategies students could consider available to themselves as writers and as researchers. It opened discussions about who has access to which resources, whose experiences are considered valid sources of knowledge-making, and whose less so or not at all, whose voices are considered valid in the arrangement of evaluative practices, and many other intellectual, emotional, and ethical questions that exposed the decision-making processes central to our lives as literate human beings. Virginia Woolf’s and Audre Lorde’s essays, poetry, and fiction were constantly echoing here. I have discussed these questions in other places, but will give a quick overview here to set the context for the remainder of this essay. Originally, there was a set of six questions:

What did the writer(s) have to do to create the text?

What does the text hope to create in the world outside of itself?

What’s being put in relationship with what?

How are those things being put in relationship with one another?

What is/are the writers trying to change?

What specific strategies are used to inspire that change?

(There may be some overlap here with invention strategies.)

I had, in fact, been using versions of these question to guide my own (re)reading of feminist texts, including Krista Ratcliffe’s *Anglo-American Feminist Challenges to the Rhetorical Tradition*, Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, Mary Daly’s *Beyond God the Father and Wickedary*, Adrienne Rich’s *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider*, Gloria Steinem’s “I Was a Playboy Bunny” and her later essays “The Masculinization of Wealth” and “Revaluing Economics” from *Moving Beyond Words: Age, Rage, Sex, Power, Money, Muscles: Breaking Boundaries of Gender*, and Kim Chernin’s *Reinventing Eve*. Eventually that process would inspire me to try a hybrid approach to articulating the effects of the absence of feminist rhetorical and creative nonfiction traditions on my own life

as a teacher of writing (“I Was a Process Model Baby”). I had, in fact, been using those questions to begin to build a writing life that would, for many years and many reasons, take me out of the mainstream professional publishing game of rhetoric and composition, a venue that wasn’t very inviting or accepting anyway. As I worked to create inclusive, transactional relationships between reading and writing as a writing teacher and as a writer, then, I experienced what it was like to do so for creative purposes not central to the field, not the least of which has been the creation of enriched and enriching literacy life practices. The invention, arrangement, and revision questions were meant to be more provocative, to position readers in ways that were unexpected. I had little interest in limiting students to explication—accurate or not—of the content of the essays we read or in some “agree or disagree” flattening out of “the” main point, or in their assumptions and/or judgment about the author. I also had to clarify—and still do—that we were not concerned with where the writer(s) sat or what writing implement was used, or even with their intentions, but with what the text inspired us to see as the “Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” (Lorde), and how we might use that transformation to give us ideas about enriching our own lives as writers. (For a longer discussion and examples of the kinds of invention, arrangement, and revision practices that emerged from our work see *Process This: Undergraduate Writing In Composition Studies*.)

Like any first-year writing curriculum pedagogy, this one had its structure and had to be positioned in relation to more general education expectations, but it also allowed for a clearer and more inclusive central purpose: enriching the literacy lives of diverse students in ways that enhance their academic and varied personal lives and relationships to language and in ways that make their writing relevant to a variety of creative processes and writing situations. This was a sort of revolution/revelation about making curricula, especially as it altered assignment frames to invite essays and creative nonfiction that made a difference to the literacy lives of my students and me. I started reading student work the same way that I read the texts we looked at together in class, started responding to the writing and writers in process, reflecting what I saw to start conversations about the relationship between a reader’s view and the writer’s purpose. And you know what? More of those writers started caring more about the ways that they communicated with and inspired readers than I could have anticipated. They pushed me to help them become better writers. They made books of their work to give as gifts. They asked one another for copies of their essays. They asked me for honest reactions to and evaluations of their essays for purposes other than meeting course requirements. They wanted me to get something out of reading their papers, and they wanted to know if I had read them carefully and had not missed their meanings. Some of these students were reading my work for me too—or the ones that wanted to and had time. Some of them still do, current students and students from the past. The first person to read an early draft of this essay was Amanda Fields, from an undergraduate course I led in 1997–1998. In the past month, I have written to, or

with, and read for, or shared my own writing with four students from 20–25 years ago, and even more over the past five or ten years.

This isn't some feel-good story about the hero teacher—although we should be much more careful than we are about criticizing those stories and positioning success as some sort of failure for teachers. It is a story about how a certain approach to curriculum building, pedagogical practice, and open-heartedness affects writing classes and the teachers and students who inhabit them. It is, in fact, a story about how those students sustained me as a writer and as a literate human being when no part of my professional life could—or even seemed to care if it did or not. It is a story about students being successful and how I agreed to embody that success instead of doing something else to their texts. It's not a story about how I must have missed something or the students were just “doing what I wanted” and how there is no way to change or get out of some traditional power dynamic in a required gen-ed course. It's a story about change and all the struggles that change can embody when the goal is something other than replication/explication of the way things already are.

It was no coincidence that at this time I had started doing community literacy work with Project READ in Decatur, Illinois, where I lived. I implemented a service-learning component into the course, tutoring GED (and sometimes other) students. At the time what held most of the GED students back was the writing section. The first-year writing students were brilliant; they noticed the problem right away. The workbook did not tell any of the secrets, so they created a guide: thesis sentence at the end of the first paragraph, consider two sides of the issue in paragraph two, cite a source, preferably a statistic (this could be made up if credible) in paragraph three, assert strongly how this all leads to the favoring of one side over the other, conclude by noting why it is important to take that side. Voila! Everyone started passing that section of the GED. And the first-year writing students gained a tangible picture of the limitations we were up against in creating more enhanced literacy lives. We all knew that we couldn't leave the GED students in this limited relationship to literacy, so after practicing for the test, we would write other things together, such as responses to letters the GED students' kids had brought home and requests for assistance to power companies and revisions of statements from medical professionals that made them understandable.

The silence of my academic writing life bumped up against the ways that I was figuring out how to inspire students to write and how they were inspiring me to live. The creative nonfiction I was using in class collided with my history of writing across genres—personal narrative, poetry, professional writing—in ways that made the absence of writing these genres emerge as a hole in my life. I simply couldn't think about or through some things without them. That's why early on I started writing every class assignment myself. I was in the process of recovering what it meant not to hide from or feel shame about writing as a reflection of the relationships between self and world. And it shifted the way that all of this work became the making of relationships.

In fact, creative nonfiction as a genre, diverse as it is, always opens space for this kind of reflection and action in relation to how language creates—and sometimes restricts—the making of relationships between and among self and other people, animals, nature, things, and ideas. This kind of reflection is vital in academic contexts given the pressure to define oneself, whether student or teacher, more and more narrowly in relation to academic criteria and expectations for what it means to be literate.

While I had been resisting putting these limits on my students by insisting on using creative nonfiction, my own literacy life was, in fact, becoming more and more frantic and split. My narrow relationship to the academic world was defined as a discordant rhythm of “accept me, accept me, accept me” and “I don’t accept the limits you use to define me.” This was no adolescent rebellion; it was a genuine crisis of identity. When I went up for tenure, the department chair wouldn’t sign my letter because he thought it a travesty that someone would use the story of failing in school so publicly; the fact that I was there at all was, he thought, a sign of all that was wrong with higher education in the contemporary world. He couldn’t stop the process, because I had clearly exceeded the criteria for promotion, but he did get away without writing the letter required of him to stand against the case, choosing to make my life miserable instead. I simply couldn’t tell my story within this narrative rhythm. But the curriculum making and pedagogical work I was doing was getting me out of this bind.

This struggle took most of my energy for many years and created a gulf between how I experienced the world and how the world experienced me. Anyone who knew me during this long stretch of time will tell you that I was fiercely and sometimes aggressively committed to the use of creative nonfiction in first-year writing pedagogies, in writing theory courses, and indeed throughout any major that dared to call itself a professional, or creative, or integrated writing major. I was often critical of other approaches in unproductive ways. The kinder version of this story is that I was consumed by my work— and I was. I had defined my work as enriching the opportunities for others to have writing experiences that were transformative. I had been living one of those transformations for years even as I was silenced by some of the things that transformation had brought. And I knew these things extended beyond the semester or one-year time frames that define a life in school. My syllabi, assignments, evaluation tools, and overt reflections on literacy as an untapped human capacity over my time in higher education will attest to that commitment. In 2004 I published *Process This* with Michael Spooner at Utah State University Press, an experience that taught me that a good human being who was also a good editor is one of the truly special gifts for any writer.

As a woman whose life had been saved, quite literally, by the inclusion of creative nonfiction in her writing and women’s studies courses, I couldn’t give it up as a classroom practice. I made the deeply buried, unconscious, disciplinary mistake of thinking that positioning it as reading was somehow enough, as long as the writing spaces were opening for students. There were public fissures, like

the essay “I Was a Process Model Baby,” but they were few and far between. Most of my writing was kept private, especially the poetry that was sustaining me. The first time I went public with paper-published poetry was when I was invited by a former student who was the featured poet one month in *Contemporary American Voices*, an honor that allowed him to pick a few poets’ work to include in the volume. It wasn’t until fairly recently that I realized this was a disciplinary sand trap, one deeply embedded in my graduate training, where even though we were supposed to aspire to the kinds of disciplinary prose held up as publishable in our courses, in our teaching we were to invoke another kind of writing altogether. I had found a way to have a life of connection, but it wasn’t as comfortable as I had expected such a life to be when I was growing up.

These either/or ways of thinking attached to my self-image as an academic, even as I resisted pedagogies that trapped students in literacy limitations, and even as I engaged creative energy to make alternative curricula. As it became more and more impossible to find a professional path on which to explore these attachments, I became less interested in participating in those conversations. Again, it wouldn’t be until years later that I realized how much of my frustration was connected to the fact that I was serious about process, and specifically about opening spaces for processes of expanded notions of self/other and self/world relationships in academic environments that substituted activity for process.

I had been asking “A process of what?” (in response to the assertion that writing is a process) since the late 1980s. When I analyzed the invention strategies at work in Audre Lorde’s essays or in the chapters in Gloria Steinem’s *Moving Beyond Words*, I could see that experience, as well as certain ways of rendering memory and reflecting on the self in context, were vital to the process of writing the self—as opposed to the process of creating a textual ethos so common in process-model pedagogies of the time. Creating the writing self instead of an ethos. In fact, I could see that while a reader could never know the truth of a writer’s process, texts could be read as generative of expanded repertoires of invention, arrangement, and revision. This wasn’t textual analysis of any kind I had seen before. So, I made the questions above to honor the fact that reading as a writer is different from other kinds of reading, especially in writing classes. That sounds simple, but buried within one sentence is a lifetime of creative struggle to move classroom practices from consumption (of texts) to participation, and from adaptation (to expectations for student writing as a genre unto itself) to contribution. Ultimately, this is about reconfiguring the relationship between reading and writing, about reading student papers from the perspective of being not merely audience addressed, but a reader.¹

1. For a discussion of the ways we are all positioned as audience addressed and the ways that that positioning affects how we come to know ourselves, one another, and the world, see Matthew B. Crawford’s *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual In an Age of Distraction*.

This flew in the face of my training, but also in the face of a world in which every space, from cafeteria trays to grocery store carts, from television screens to social media feeds, consistently positions everyone as audience addressed. The luxury of not being addressed has become increasingly rare and expensive. The first textbook I had to use as a T.A. had students think about audience by asking questions about age, gender, class, etc. I wouldn't do it because I was asking myself what you could really know by identifying your audience in these ways. At one point a mentor accused me of not understanding the concept of audience, mistaking my rejection of that configuration for some cognitive failure. I didn't want to be that kind of audience—the textbook kind—for my students' work or our classroom encounters, and creative nonfiction seemed to offer a different way of being the reader who had to grade while continuing the move away from explication as the main genre for student writing. It took a long time to understand how this happened and to fully understand the intellectual and affective impacts of doing this work in the writing classroom. Creating a pedagogical frame for reading that did something else was merely the start of a much longer and increasingly deep commitment that would eventually lead me into conversations about the field more generally—and into conflicts at the institutions at which I worked.

All of these factors came into play as I transitioned from graduate school and the use of prescribed curricula to having the responsibility of framing first-year writing programs to honor the diverse literacy histories, passions, and real needs of students and teachers. Given the realities of many adjunct positions and the lives of people who teach first-year writing from those appointments, creative nonfiction also became a way to design and get implemented policies and procedures that improved their working conditions. Pay, choices for class schedules, consistent full-time employment—these were, for me, matters at the heart of program leadership, and I often wrote policy and procedure manuals in the form of narrative practices. I made charts that clarified the role of department chairs, deans, and others in the conditions that defined programs. Later, when I moved to an institution that sent graduate students from various departments to us for T.A. appointments, the relationship between their program demands and requirements and the training and materials they needed to understand in order to be successful also became important. For them, and for many adjunct and early career faculty teaching in first-year writing programs, the writing class is often also the place where professional development happens. Success meant people had the opportunities they needed to get better jobs. For undergraduate students, the reason for first-year writing requirement is often vague, and the literacy histories they bring to the classroom are often not strongly connected to their work in the course.

All of this can become less daunting when you think about the teaching and learning of writing as an opportunity to develop an integrated literacy life, one that can be richer and hold more opportunities for understanding self and others

and constructing conscious relationships to the worlds (disciplinary and others) you choose to inhabit—or not. Creative nonfiction opens these conversations about language in ways that can be justified in relation to the general goals of required first-year writing courses in the US. Why? Because the genre is self-conscious about being a made thing. And because it lends itself to the kind of reading that can position readers as writers-makers rather than as explicators of other people's texts. This shift—which is monumental—is still in process in writing studies, and depending on where you are, is somewhere between not-yet-started and just-begun and in-recession.

The shift toward participation and contribution (and away from consumption and adaptation to process model guides in textbooks, for example) meant creating curricular frames that students and teachers could individualize, while still experiencing what it was like to do so as part of a larger group of literate people whose relationships to one another could seem random and disconnected. This could be true in one section of the course, and certainly across multiple course sections, especially in a program that sees over 7,000 students per year. Combine that with the fact that you have multiple people teaching—from graduate students to very experienced fixed-term and tenure-stream faculty—whose relationships to one another are organized in equally random and disconnected ways, and you begin to see why the relationship between the pieces of a curriculum had to create spaces for identifying how literacy might create bridges between and among all the people in any given section and across sections. Looking at personal histories to identify how something we loved from that history included skills, knowledge, and attitudes that could enhance our literacy, then, opened the door for the kind of bridging required by the structure and logistics of the program itself. Teachers in workshops and students would select something they loved—playing an instrument, cheerleading, skate boarding or other sports, drawing, quilting, thrifting, collecting vinyl, etc.—and they would explore how loving that thing involved them in certain ways of knowing, in activities, in ways of being in the world and in relationships, and the attitudes that made them successful. As these things are explored, different versions of certain practices like patience, dedication, persistence, attention to detail, rejecting others' low judgments of our performance, trying a new way, for example, would emerge. Differences too would emerge between those passions that could be pursued alone and those that required group or team participation. Students and teachers would then ask: How can the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and practices that make up my relationship with what I love enhance my literacy life? And, specifically, how can they make me a more successful reader, writer, and researcher during my time in this course, as I figure out who I am and who I want to be in this new context, and during my time as an undergraduate student?

The course begins then by exploring what we love, how loving it affects the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and practices we cultivate, and how those can be transferred to other areas of our lives. It also creates a way to begin understanding

ourselves in relation to the literacy expectations affecting our immediate futures, relationships that we could ground in what we bring with us and how that might contribute to our own and each other's successes. The writing assignment asks students to choose an audience who would benefit from the insights they gain doing the reading and invention exercises (including invention, arrangement, and revision analyses, class discussion, teacher presentations about grading, etc.) and to do so in a way that might lead to delivery of the paper, either orally or in writing, to an individual or group. What made us see that this work can be done and delivered was, in part, the short pieces of nonfiction that we read: a river guide who uses her knowledge of cooking to create great tours, a crew coxswain who learned leadership skills, a Harvard dean of education who transfers staid theory into five questions for a meaningful life. We read examples of bridge-building, analyze how they were done, and what things may have led to their creation, what purposes they might serve, what relationships they create and how. We ask how they were made and imagine how they got there. This expands our own repertoires of invention, arrangement, and revision strategies as we create lists of these at the start of the semester and add to it every time we come across approaches new to us.

Reading in this way is also a practice that helps us develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes it takes to do this kind of work ourselves: to read as writers. It embeds reflection into the process at every stage, unlike curricula and pedagogies that must include these things as ancillary or add-ons, separate from the development of meaningful products. Such disconnection is the residue of the long-standing over-valuation of explication in the composition classroom, just another version of read (in this case your own work) and explicate (in this case reflect on your own product). Positioning creative nonfiction as the product flies in the face of that tradition, partly because it repositions our relationships to literacy reflectively, in ways that are enacted rather than deferred.

Each subsequent assignment frame pulls from the last and into the next, creating what I hoped would be an experience of continuity so seldom available in classrooms. The second assignment asks for another way of looking at something familiar, this time something more transparent in our everyday lives, to imagine what it means. Often this involves taking something we usually experience the surface of and slowing down to try to understand not only our own encounter with it, but also why that encounter occurs. To open up these questions, we read together the lyrics of popular songs selected by the students. Students share why they selected those lyrics, including any events they might associate with them. This is often the first time they have seen the lyrics on paper and considered them without the music. We ask how we might come to understand what the lyrics mean. There are the words themselves, of course, and sometimes we need help knowing what the references are (especially true for me if the songs use words or contemporary references I don't know). There are the events mentioned in the songs—a breakup, a riot, the loss of a parent—and questions about

the autobiographical, historical, and other factors that may create a relationship between the singer, songwriter, and events. There are the cultural issues or issues of identity that may explain why one singer uses words that would resonate differently if spoken by someone else in another context. There are patterns of referring to people across the songs—women, African Americans, heartbreakers, liars, mothers, teachers, for instance—and we ask what they can tell us about why such patterns are popular.

One goal is to slow down and move beyond the experience of listening to the song, to explore what it means to like it. This pulls on one thread from the previous assignment, looking at something we love from new perspectives, doing so in a way that poses new questions about where meaning comes from—historical contexts, autobiographical events and experiences, social justice issues, identity, to name a few—to prepare us for a major research project. The list of what we might consider as we try to make meaning is extensive. We can discuss which routes seem best for looking at popular culture artifacts and why, and create a way to have those questions guide us in future situations where research may be necessary, as we create a frame for coming to understand. We can then practice creating individual approaches that fit our own focus, selecting artifacts that will support our process, and identifying resources and paths of access to those resources. The guiding questions for writing sound like this: How did you come to know the words of the songs so well? What do you know about the songs, their meanings, and why you love(d) them that you didn't know before? How did you create a frame for that understanding? What is the importance or relevance of what you have discovered? Who would care? What purpose could coming to these insights serve? What else would you like to explore in this way? The questions take us far past explicating the song lyrics without devaluing the importance of knowing them well, a practice to support student success during the major research project for the course.

I have to pause a moment here to clarify that the effort on my part to create continuity does not mean that the classroom is a calm and happy place. To different degrees, most students are intrigued, inspired, annoyed, and downright angry at the ways the course fails to meet their expectations. They miss explication as the default for their relationship to literacy. Early on they ask, in many ways, including generating pages of explication with paragraphs of reflection at the end, for permission to explicate and then reflect, to keep the two separate, and they promise to say what they think I want to hear in their reflections: "I learned so much, I'll never think about X in the same way again." In some ways they are keeping their end of the writing class bargain, and I'm the one breaking the deal. I hold this discomfort the way that I held not fitting in to school from early years through graduate study. I know that the bargain is a trap, that it limits our relationships to our own literacies and to the possibility of creating a life story rather than just living one. What good is a life if you don't know why you are living it the way you are, what it means, and how knowing what it means might help you live

it more fully or differently? It limits what we ask about the futures we plan, and therefore limits how we can walk toward those futures.

For first-year writing students, walking toward their academic futures is often related to choosing a major. And this is where we turn next: to explorations of the literacy practices of a discipline or field of study selected by each student. It doesn't have to be something they are sure to pursue; it doesn't have to be the thing they came to study. The shift to thinking about one's future in a specific field is informed by our work making bridges and discovering what things mean. By this time, explication has also been positioned as a particular and not necessarily effective way to create relationships to literacy in most situations. As students identify the disciplines/fields they want to explore, I strive to find a piece of creative nonfiction about each. Richard Seltzer's "The Knife," Horace Miner's "Body Rituals Among the Nacirema," Richard Rodriguez's "A Public Language," selections from Mike Rose's *The Mind at Work*, Lex Runciman's "Fun?," Lewis Thomas's "On Societies as Organisms," selections from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, selections from *The Creative Economy*, and an assortment of contemporary pieces about every area of study, from culinary arts to kinesiology. They are out there.

These pieces open up a space because they are often written by practitioners—some new, some experienced—and are written for more general audiences with purposes deeply connected to the writer's need to deal with some aspect of a profession. How does one position oneself as a learner whose goal is to do more than explicate the already known? This gap makes the questions about invention, arrangement, and revision meaningful to our process. They help us begin to understand what it means to learn from our research in a new way. For example, the readings often indicate some of the reading, writing, and researching activities the author engaged in and/or identifies as key to the field under discussion. In Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, the introduction makes clear that years of research and consulting primary resources about the changes in specific health environments and the animals of those environments are key invention strategies. Observation and primary research, then, emerge as potentially important literacy activities for environmentalists. When we step into more scholarly writing in academic publications, we know what to look for and how to read in ways that help us respond as people with our own reasons for reading.

The process begins with the knowledge that the audience will be peers who are interested in pursuing that field. A sense of audience isn't always the best way to frame a writing assignment, but in this case it reminds us to keep asking how and why the information might be relevant and to take notes from the readings in relation to those questions rather than merely summarizing the sources we consult. It also helps us formulate questions for the interviews that are included on the list of sources, moving us to include not only questions of interest to us, but also to consider what will be helpful to ask in interviews and other primary research activities. I explain some of the ways that students have presented what they learned in past semesters: the student interested in film studies who wrote

his paper as the week in the life of a producer, the education major who created lesson plans and narrated the classroom and emotional life of a sixth-grade teacher, the nursing major who illustrated the differences between the literacy challenges faced by emergency room nurses and nurses working in a walk-in clinic, the computer science major who wanted to be the expert user-tester for gaming programs rather than the programmer, the hospitality management major who wanted to work at a ski lodge. These conversations move us further away from consulting secondary and primary sources merely as texts to be summarized and explicated.

I do not hand out sample papers. I often invite past students to my classes at the start of a new semester to answer questions and reassure students that what may seem crazy actually does help. They often tell stories of how they have used specific things from this course in other classes and places in their lives, as well as what has been less useful. This focuses me on what works and starts the class with some awareness that there is value to the discomfort we might experience along the way. Repressing these narratives or making them the object of critique became trendy at some point in our profession, and it did a great disservice to the variety of ways those of us who teach and learn together in writing classrooms understand our own and one another's relationships to literacy, and how those relationships affect our interactions.

Conversations about teacher evaluation will expose how claims that the teacher has all of the power as grader or instructor in any classroom are surface level. I remember the first time I used Herman Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* in an undergraduate course. It inspired multiple journal entries about the ways that positioning people below or above some strata on a hierarchy was a false distinction, that while it seemed to favor people "higher up" structurally, that was only true if the system in question assumed certain values (e.g., capitalism). As a writer I found the repression of narratives about the successes regarding curricula, teaching, and learning in the first-year writing classroom to be paralyzing. As one older student put it in my research for *Process This*, it was like asking a piano student to begin with scales at the start of each new semester. In that older model, my understanding of what students bring to the class was constructed before they got there, and their understanding of me and of the possibilities for learning were similarly constructed before they arrived, the whole thing just a game of making everything fit or not fit those expectations. It blocked any pathway except, perhaps, repetition. It limited identities and repressed or punished difference. It especially and purposefully favored identification of and identification with—the major apparatuses of explication—as the preferred routes to literacy.

For those of us who had not done well in school, who had figured out why, and who didn't want to replicate those conditions, the idea that we couldn't do anything to make things better was just another way to position us as failures. I dare say it worked pretty well. Look around you. How many admitted to grad school were unsuccessful undergraduates? How many who teach didn't like school? How

many of the women who retire without being full professors have chosen a path to avoid being judged again by the same people who devalued their stories about their work in the first place? How many of us might have chosen not to have been made into characters in some story in which we had no agency and in which our choice was not an opportunity for institutional reevaluation? How many of the people who want us to go up for promotion convinced us long ago that we would never be judged as successful by them or those they helped put in power? Look around you before you answer these questions. Do something other than explicate or merely experience what you see in a pre-constructed frame. Take the kind of approach to understanding process that sets aside explication so that you can ask questions. You have to get it out of the way to ask any questions that don't just confirm your assumptions. Those of us who learned this as a survival technique or as a way to open up spaces for our stories know the joy of this struggle. But we often experience it in academia as something to hide, something to protect. As Audre Lord wrote, "your silence will not protect you." We know that pretending explication isn't at the center unless you yourself take it out is a limited and limiting approach to writing studies today. Your explication will not reveal anything; it will merely replicate what is already known, positioning knowledge as power, rather than as a way to offer more open invitations to lives enhanced by the literacies we might develop outside of those limitations.

There are other assignments in the course: a remix and a final paper that is an opportunity to use new invention, arrangement, and revision processes to internalize some understanding about life as a literate human being. They extend and expand the ways we think about and practice other, often unfamiliar, forms of literacy and that reposition us as having possibilities for lives of participation and contribution.

When I read and reread Lloyd-Jone's work, especially "Poesis: Making Papers" (1997), I see in it just such an invitation, one to which the profession has RSVP'd many times. Thank you, it has said, but we'll stick with MLA and APA and maybe a dash of Chicago style. We'll put examples of what look like persuasive or "take-a-stand" essays, shore up the argument culture, and call synthesis higher-order thinking. Students must be oriented to other people's work, must read it not to make something else, but to mimic a student version of it as closely as possible. As a poet who repressed her relationship to that form of language for many years, I know what the repression of one form of literacy does to a life. As a rhetoric and writing scholar, I have seen firsthand what the repression of creative nonfiction in favor of explication has done to our profession. A broad range of writers inhabit our first-year writing courses, and our job is not to make them all one (kind of) writer. The idea that these are mutually exclusive endeavors hurts us all. It is an institutional split that became a professional practice.

Take a look at the final two paragraphs of Lloyd-Jone's essay "Poesis" (which is reprinted at the end of this volume), in which he writes, "I prefer to classify us as poets, primeval makers, enabling the culture to know itself and connect its

people into a productive wholeness.” If writing really is to be a process of something meaningful, we would do well to remember the work of Richard Lloyd-Jones as we create the curricula, institutional practices, and policies that configure the lives of writing teachers and students, especially those in first-year writing classes, and as we create responses to the question “A process of what?”

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