

MANAGING TO MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE

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As we grow older and lose the ability to see the immediate world in vibrant detail, many of us are forced to put on bifocals to read and see. Those of us who were nearsighted are left unable to see what's in front of our face as well as things coming at us from a distance. We shift our gaze back and forth across that line between nearsightedness and farsightedness, creating areas of striking acuity separated by a distorted boundary zone, usually centered on exactly what we are looking at. In popular books and films on academe, and often in our own departments, we have encountered the caricature of the bespectacled professor who abstractly rocks his or her head back and forth to negotiate the discontinuity between the page and the world beyond. The absent-minded professor who looks somewhat askew is a popular image for the sort of myopia that generally befalls professions when left to their own devices. Of course, bifocals can enable us to see our surroundings more clearly, in a sort of divided and distracting way. By making the discontinuity between our object of study and field of vision no longer seem quite so natural, bifocals force us to attend to the zone separating near at hand from further afield. As a rhetorician who works in writing program administration, I believe that such a bifocal perspective has pragmatic value because it can help us reflect on what it means to be farsighted and nearsighted about what we do and the boundaries our profession imposes on what we see.

Writing programs create a rush of daily challenges that can keep us perpetually in a crisis management mode. If we can take the time to look up from the stacks of papers on our desks, we may be able to take a more long-term perspective that can be strategically useful in assessing the positions of writing programs. Some of us have maintained that it is unprofessional to set up an independent writing program without adequate research-oriented faculty, because a program comprised of lecturers will tend to be defined as merely a service unit. By not making

research part of what writing teachers do, such a program undermines the disciplinary standing of composition studies and reinforces the dysfunctional dualism of skills and content that positions teachers of writing as assistants to faculty who teach more substantive bodies of knowledge. Nationally, independent writing programs have significantly higher percentages of nontenure-track and part-time instructors than those that operate within the boundaries of the discipline, suggesting that independent programs may be bad for teachers as well as researchers (*MLA Survey*, 1999). This line of analysis seems generally valid to me, but my institutional perspective is rather limited—confined as it is to large public universities. In many institutions, local factors can make an independent program a compelling pragmatic alternative even without a critical mass of tenure faculty. In making such practical judgments, we need to acknowledge that research-oriented faculty speak from privileged vantage points that are often removed from the positions of writing teachers, who as a class have about the worst working conditions in the higher education system. This system perpetuates itself by keeping such teachers focused on keeping the paper mill running and reserving time for critical reflection to those with more standing in the profession, who tend to be vested in the hierarchies that structure it.

Some of the basic hierarchies we work with arise out of the historical contradictions between the public positions and professional functions of American colleges and universities. Writing is everyone's concern and nobody's responsibility because prevailing reward systems devalue teaching in general and the teaching of writing in particular. In fairly systematic ways, college faculty have failed to come to terms with the fact that they teach for a living, because they have been rewarded for thinking otherwise. Ironically, writing programs and colleges of education may have helped disciplinary specialists to think in such ways by making writing and teaching distinct fields of professional specialization rather than part of the shared work of college educators. Some of the prevailing misperceptions of what we do arise from the institutional workings of professionalism. Professions generally ignore how they are rhetorically constructed because they gain authority by teaching practitioners and the public to see them as autonomous fields of expertise (see Russell 1991). When a profession attends to how it is composed, it opens itself up to questions about its public responsibilities, and the opening that often gapes for attention is the initiation of new members into the field. Not surprisingly, when a field of work becomes professionalized it

formalizes the processes of credentialing new members and creates codes of conduct that consolidate the internal workings of the discipline in order to make it self-regulating (see Thomas Bender). After access and interventions have thereby been limited, a profession tends to ignore these processes as much as possible, enabling it to blame individual initiates if they cannot master its expertise and to download more onerous responsibilities onto marginal members of the profession, such as paralegals, nurses, technicians, and lecturers.

A rhetorical stance on such tacit processes can foster critical thinking about how they work and how we can help them work differently. Work with writing makes learning visible, creating opportunities for critical reflection upon the purposes served by a profession's hierarchies and the methods that perpetuate them. In our collaborations on the teaching of writing, we have witnessed those eye-opening moments when a disciplinary specialist comes to see that a student's composition is not simply a faulted version of what they know but a competing vision of what they are about; and we have seen the epiphany that dawns on students' faces when they realize that they can write their experiences into the work of the academy. As learning becomes visible at such moments, people come to see knowledge making at work. Such moments present rhetorical situations of tremendous pedagogical potential. Such a moment faces our profession with the composition of independent writing programs, and it is useful to step back and look at what we are making of it.

To provide a model for how a rhetorical stance on writing can help our students and colleagues see the critical potentials of their situations, I will offer a rhetorical analysis of the political possibilities and institutional constraints that need to be considered in assessing independent writing programs. The studies in this volume present a rich set of case studies that is aptly complemented by the scenarios in Linda Myers-Breslin's *Administrative Problem-Solving for Writing Programs and Writing Centers*. I want to move dialectically from their practical insights to the historical issues that rhetoric might help us to see in these situations. I believe that some of the disabling dualisms that constrain our efforts can be effectively mediated by rhetoric, if we view it as a pragmatic philosophy of social *praxis* and not simply a set of techniques for writing. When understood as a civic philosophy of deliberative action, rhetoric can help us to bridge the gaps between professional discourses and personal forms of writing, between belletristic and utilitarian value systems, and between research and service missions, if we can put on our bifocals and

shift our gaze back and forth between its immediate practical applications and more long-range reflections on the situations, audiences, and purposes that confront us. Rhetorical concepts such as *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, provide a historical alternative to the modern tendency to model practical understanding on the logic of scientific inquiry, which assumes the stance of the critical observer removed from the perspective of the agent always and already in the situation of having to choose how to act. This alternative can be of practical value now. Beyond the immediate pressures facing us, we can see converging historical transformations in the technologies and economies that shape how knowledge gets made, used, and valued. Computers are obviously not simply new tools for writing, and the service economy is more than a vague abstraction for the changing socioeconomic functions of universities and colleges. It can be hard to keep these complex transformations in focus when the pressing needs of writing programs take up so much of our field of vision; but if independent programs are to make a difference for teachers and students, we need to think dialectically about how they can help us to achieve the potentials of historical changes in literacy and learning.

#### ON BECOMING PRAGMATIC ABOUT SERVICE

One of the basic challenges that confront independent writing programs is to harness the power of providing an essential service without becoming defined as essentially a service provider. Such contradictions can tear a program apart by pulling people to identify with opposing values; but a rhetorical stance recognizes that such conflicts in prevailing assumptions or *topoi* are sites where alternatives can emerge out of oppositions and hierarchies that are ceasing to make sense of the needs of a group or institution. We often experience such competing identifications as pressures to advance research or devote ourselves to teaching. The challenge is to redefine the opposing terms to create more dialectical and holistic ways of understanding the inescapable contradictions that writing faculties need to manage to work together. One rhetorical strategy for confronting a divisive dualism is to shift focus to a third point of reference. The obvious third category for definitions of academic work is service. In evaluations of academic work such as annual reviews, service tends to become the lowest priority, but this value system is becoming unstable as universities and colleges are pressed to give new accounts of the services they provide. These pressures can be put to good uses by redefining the purposes of composition programs in

broader terms. A comprehensive writing program needs to be networked with schoolteachers as well as college faculty. Our outreach responsibilities arise from our positions as “bridge” programs charged with teaching entering students how to write their way into the academy, and many programs offer teacher development workshops, sometimes under the national Writing Project or as parts of articulation or assessment efforts. These collaborations expand the power base of composition programs in pragmatically useful ways, as is evident in the model discussed by Parks and Goldblatt. Similar partnerships with alumni associations, business organizations, professional associations, and civic groups can expand our base still farther, giving us leverage in dealing with administrators concerned with fostering such relationships.

These collaborations can also help us make productive use of another contradiction that confronts writing programs: while everyone has an opinion on how to teach writing, most would prefer to tell somebody else how to do it rather than do it themselves. Writing programs need to have deliberative forums where people from across the university and beyond can be brought together to discuss writing instruction and be educated about what it entails. If managed well, faculty and other advisory committees can be used to support reforms and slow down administrators who want to do things quick and dirty. Such forums are crucial to educating public constituencies about our work so that they can support it more effectively. Of course, we need to avoid defensiveness and be willing to explain over and over that teaching writing entails more than correcting errors, but when a writing program embodies a more comprehensive sense of its duties, the differences between correcting papers and supporting student writers can be made evident. Through such deliberative forums, those who work with writing can make learning visible not just in individual classrooms but in the general institution as well. A comprehensive writing program needs to be networked with student life offices, faculty and graduate student development programs, and teaching with technology initiatives. A full service writing program can help develop coherent networks out of overlapping and ill-defined systems for supporting students and teachers. Writing is a converging concern for reforms of assessment and instruction, and writing programs present broadly persuasive models for peer tutoring, performance assessment, and student-centered instruction oriented to learning by doing.

We need to develop collaborative networks to expand our service mission, as discussed by other contributors to this collection (see, for

example, Turner and Kearns), but many programs are so overwhelmed with the demands of staffing first-year composition classes with reasonably trained teachers that taking on such expanded responsibilities can seem impossible. First-year composition requirements provide the justification for many, though not all, independent writing programs (see Rehling and Aronson and Hansen). Some of us have spent years defending such requirements as essential to meeting the needs of students, especially those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and who may not connect with faculty in larger, more impersonal classes. We have struggled to make such courses central to English departments' sense of their mission and faculty's sense of the development of student writing. Such struggles have gotten us so deeply invested in first-year composition courses that we often do not have the time to develop more comprehensive programs for supporting student writers. While I oppose the general abolition of first-year composition requirements, abolitionists such as Crowley have made arguments that are quite compelling. They have convinced me that where a composition requirement has created indefensible staffing and training standards, administrators and teachers need to deliberate upon reducing or even eliminating it, if for no other reason than to negotiate the resources needed to teach writing well. First-year composition requirements can instill a misleading confidence that we are taking care of our core responsibilities. However, students can now conveniently purchase college credits for high school courses through dual enrollment programs that provide at best a distant sense of what it is like to write and do research in college. These courses have become a common distance-learning offering; and any composition program that unduly depends upon them could be outsourced, which would be but a logical extension of the historical tendency to temp out writing instruction as marginal to the professional responsibilities of disciplinary specialists.

Such trends bring to the surface another basic contradiction: writing courses seem unimportant because they are seen as marginal to scholarly disciplines, even though universities are being pressed to develop different accounts of the services they provide to the public and, within many disciplines, critical intellectuals are arguing that the margins are places of power where dominant ideologies can be called into question against broader needs and values. Rhetoric provides a set of categories that can help us to put these institutional needs and interdisciplinary trends to good purposes. Rhetoric has historically functioned as the art

of mediating between learned and public spheres of discourse, though it has traditionally served to give virtue to power by making educated, property-holding, white males the voice of the public. If it is reconceived to treat differences as resources for imagining alternatives, rhetoric's historical engagement with the arts of citizenship can be used to focus writing courses on techniques for applying received beliefs to changing needs. Such an orientation can help us to make common cause with other outreach programs, with national efforts to make civic duties a part of general education, and with critical studies of gender, race, and class issues, which are too often uninvolved at a practical level with the communities that are being represented. More than perhaps any other course, composition occupies a public space in the curriculum by virtue of the fact that it has been required of all students, all the faculty have an interest in it, and the public identifies it as essential to all educated citizens. We need to exploit the civic potentials of our position by developing public outreach, making political rhetoric part of the teaching of writing, and creating forums where specialists can speak to public debates, as we do in our program by integrating interdisciplinary colloquia, rhetorical analysis, and local issues into our curriculum.

#### ON BECOMING RHETORICAL ABOUT PRAGMATICS

My analysis of how networked programs can fulfill their public duties has thus far concentrated on the principal analytical categories of rhetoric: situation, audience, and purpose. This rhetorical trinity sets out the commonplaces of the discipline and thus encapsulates its philosophy of practical understanding—a philosophy oriented to making productive use of the sort of constraints and opportunities that face us here and now. From the basic assumption that the contingencies of a situation define its possibilities, rhetoric looks to purpose as the guiding concern in deliberating upon what should be done. Rhetoric concerns itself with the resources of situational contexts as the means to realize such purposes and treats the transactional relations of authors and auditors as fundamental to dialogical forms of collaborative reasoning toward shared purposes. Of course, rhetoric does not have sole purview over these concerns. Linguists invented pragmatics to reinvent rhetoric when it came to seem anachronistic from a scientific perspective, and post-moderns have made the precepts of rhetoric foundational to critiques of foundationalism, without invoking rhetoric as more than a trendy term for discussing how knowledge is socially constructed through discourse.

Some have gone so far as to argue that in an era of “rhetorality,” rhetoric has become merely an object of nostalgia for the ideal of the good man speaking well for the common good (see Bender and Wellbery). In my estimation, such critiques demonstrate the need for rhetoric, while denying it, for they are characterized by a disengagement from practical agency that is all too common in contemporary critical theory. Rhetoric’s traditional concern for the situated, purposeful, and dialectical dynamics of communication maps out a field of study that can help us reorient ourselves as we move beyond the traditional boundaries of English departments. Indulge me for a couple of paragraphs, and I will briefly survey the oldest of rhetorical questions: what is rhetoric and what good is it?

A rhetorical stance is oriented to purposeful action, not merely criticizing or theorizing, but applying critical understanding to the question of what and how one should act in this situation here and now. Rhetoric’s objects of study are the controversies that issue from arguments about such questions. Such arguments embody the methods, hierarchies, and purposes that define a domain of discourse, traditionally categorized into the three genres of classical rhetoric: judicial reviews of what has been done, epideictic celebrations of the values that shape what can be done, and deliberative arguments over what should be done. Such controversies are defined according to whether the arguments turn on questions about facts, definitions, evaluations, or procedures (for example, was someone killed, was it murder, was it defensible given the situation, and is this the appropriate place to make such a judgment?). Looking back upon rhetoric’s practical concern for the status of a controversy at issue, one can see that the methods of rhetoric are concerned with discovering the arguments that can enable one to achieve the purposes that are possible in a domain of discourse. Rhetoric has traditionally concerned itself with the domain of popular opinion that lies between what can be assumed and what is beyond question. Cultural studies of that domain can help us expand its critical possibilities. If we look beyond the details of traditional genres and the categories used to represent them, we can see that when rhetoric is reduced to a set of mechanical techniques such as ethical, logical, and pathetic appeals, the art is transformed into a mere *techné* or technology that is less broadly useful as a practical guide to critical thinking and deliberative action. From Aristotle and Isocrates through Cicero to the civic tradition, the *topoi*, maxims, and commonplaces that constitute a

genre of discursive action are conceived to be its resources for collective action, its characteristic *ethos* and ethics, and its political means and ends. From a civic perspective, rhetoric is about doing and making as a means to becoming by achieving the potentials of deliberative action. The critical possibilities of traditional rhetorical techniques become evident when we consider concepts such as the enthymeme not as an informal abbreviated syllogism but as a transactional model for how audiences make sense of an argument by filling out its premises from their own experiences. Such concepts provide heuristics for thinking purposefully about the sorts of concerns identified with ethnography and other grounded modes of investigation that focus on situated cognition, enactments of shared beliefs, and interpretive frames or schema.

Rhetoric can be oriented to critical purposes by focusing on the dynamics of how disciplines and social groups construct shared knowledge through collaborative deliberations. This process begins with the historical experiences of the group, which give rise to a set of shared expectations that are codified in the norms that shape how the group acts and communicates. To help our students and colleagues think critically about the possibilities of genres, one can begin with readers' responses to texts that seem conventional or unfamiliar and work back to the sources and assumptions underlying the generic conventions. The familiar rhetorical appeals provide a useful set of heuristics for helping people examine how conventions represent experiences and shape expectations. Questions about the strategies authors use to claim ethical credibility lead into analyzing what seems logical in this genre and therefore authoritative in this domain of experience; and pathetic appeals can be viewed as attempts to identify with shared values, if we can look beyond our culture's tendency to divide human understanding into logical thinking and mere emotion. As Kinneavy and other proponents of the "new rhetoric" discussed, the ethical, logical, and pathetic appeals open up the resources of a communication situation for studies of how authors claim authority, marshal evidence from the topic at hand, and draw on their audiences' attitudes and associations. These categories are common parlance for helping students and teachers interpret a text against its context or write with an eye to their rhetorical situations. The "proofs" may well be our most familiar heuristics, but like so much of the art, we have often used them as mere techniques and failed to consider them as parts of a humanistic discipline worthy of study. This field of study can help us to redefine our work with literacy as

we look beyond the literary ideologies that privileged the autonomy of individual texts and authors and expand our field of vision to include networked models of collective action.

As we expand basic composition courses into fuller programs of study, we need to step back and reevaluate the subject of rhetoric as a philosophy of social praxis. Rhetoric has the potential to become a discipline that builds on the fundamental assumption of critical pedagogy that literacy involves a dialectical interplay of action on the world and reflection on one's self (Freire 68). Our traditional engagement with learning by doing has far more power than we often recognize, because it presents a potentially radical critique of the scientism that has dominated higher education in the modern period. The research university was founded on the Enlightenment assumption that the way to know is to step back from an experience and assume a disinterested stance. The perspective of the detached observer became the disciplinary vantage point not just for those who reduced politics to a science but also for those who institutionalized a modern sense of literature as a narrow canon of nonfactual, nonutilitarian texts set apart in a privileged domain divorced from the political purposes, economic motivations, and popular uses of literacy. This perspective is collapsing in on itself because its account of how people learn is losing its value, as literacy and learning become networked, the book ceases to be the depository for all that is worth knowing, and the flow of information bursts the borders of traditional fields of study. A rhetorical perspective can help overwhelmed inquirers respond to the prevailing tendency to reduce human understanding to information processing by enabling them to realize the power of developing a shared sense of purpose, critiquing information against its contexts, and working collaboratively on problem posing and solving. By attending to the contingent and contested process of composing professional expertise, rhetoric can help us help students and colleagues think critically about how writing becomes a science or an art at the point of contact.

#### IS IT CRITICAL TO BE PROFESSIONAL?

To achieve such purposes, the faculties of independent writing programs have to struggle to attain the sort of professional credibility that comes naturally to those working within an established discipline. As detailed in the contributions to this collection, entrenched hierarchies stand against those who teach off the tenure track in programs that are

perceived to be basic skills units. Academic disciplines are defined by the scholarship published within them, and such definitions treat much of what we do as useful but unprofessional. Faced with such hierarchies, many of the contributions included here are characterized by an understandable ambivalence about how to negotiate conflicting professional goals and institutional needs. Some of the contributors have openly expressed their sense of being torn between attending to what needs to be done and striving for professional status; and some of the programs negotiate these challenges by positioning themselves with respect to disciplinary trends, and others by reference to local needs. The disabling dichotomy between the needs of the institution and the priorities of the profession can be mediated by a civic orientation. To be persuasive, this orientation needs to be grounded in a pragmatic commitment to making colleges into institutions of public learning by fostering collaborations on teaching and writing and by extending those collaborations to involve public constituencies. It is critical to making this commitment work that we take account of how professionalism has been institutionalized within the academy in ways that foster a cosmopolitan identification with disciplines that alienates academics from becoming more actively involved in the communities in which they live and work. We all know colleagues who are more likely to read the *New Yorker* or a scholarly journal than the local paper, who are conversant with specialists around the country but have never talked to a local teacher, and who view service and teaching duties as distractions from the research needed to move up in the profession.

The tenure system channels such aspirations into professional hierarchies that systematically devalue much of the work we do. Discussions of the tenuous positions of writing instructors often focus on how the increase in nontenure-track instructors threatens the tenure system. As Murphy discusses, this system has already been so compromised by increases in part-time instructors that such defenses tend to serve to preserve the privileges of a few and thereby to limit broader-based coalitions aimed at confronting the conditions at work in colleges and universities. While faculty tend to blame corporate-minded administrators for this situation, Murphy seems to be right to focus on how tenure-track faculty have been complicit in creating this economic system, which has enabled them to download more onerous responsibilities onto those with marginal professional status. Because I have personally benefited from this professional economy, my assessments of it need to

be analyzed rhetorically against the position I occupy and the purposes that it makes evident to me. While it is traditionally defended as a means to protect the freedom of speech of the professoriate, the tenure system has helped ensure that academics devote most of their critical energies to talking to themselves. Tenure criteria have systematically devalued any work done outside the profession, not just teaching and service but also publishing in popular media, collaborating with those beyond the field, and pursuing applied research to meet their needs. The tenure system upholds the general value system that has functioned within English departments to give low status to research on teaching, to distinguish literacy from literary work, and to maintain the distinction between creative and more popular and utilitarian forms of writing. In these and other ways, tenure has protected academic work, while also making its critical possibilities merely academic by containing them within specialized discourses that limit their rhetorical potentials.

While I am ambivalent about arguing that the tenure system has worked to contain the critical applications of public education within professional fields, it is clear that revising tenure and devising alternatives are crucial to broader reforms of higher education. Alternatives to tenure have been proposed in recent articles by both Murphy and Harris, and general guidelines for considering such positions can be found on the websites of professional organizations such as the American Association of University Professors and the Modern Language Association. At the University of Arizona, pedagogy has already become a well-recognized area of scholarship in the humanities, and alternatives to tenure have been developed for academic professionals of our Composition Board from models drawn from the professional staff positions held by research librarians, who participate in a review and promotion process that provides continuing status comparable to tenure. The board (which was founded upon the former University of Michigan model) oversees placement and midcareer assessments that serve almost ten thousand students a year. While students have generally been placed from writing samples (assessed in tandem with high school grades and test scores), Drs. Anne Marie Hall, Tyler Bouldin, and other members of the board have developed a portfolio initiative that brings local teachers and college instructors together to assess students' high school writing in order to place them into ESL, honors, standard, and basic course sequences. The board also manages the midcareer assessment program that supports the teaching of writing

across the curriculum by bringing faculty together to discuss how they respond to writing. On the basis of their contributions to such programs, members of the Composition Board have been promoted to associate rank and given continuing status. Through our collaborations on review committees with staff and faculty from outside the program, we have developed job descriptions that establish strategic benchmarks that value the work that needs to be done if curricular reforms and instructional innovations are to be pursued in a scholarly fashion. One of our most important reforms has been to get institutional research and leadership on curricular reforms recognized as scholarly contributions comparable to published research. When written into official documents, such benchmarks can provide people with legal protections, and the process of making such assessments official can be used to articulate these assumptions through institutional channels.

On a good day, I feel that such positions can enable us to institutionalize a commitment to the work of making universities into institutions of public learning. On a bad day, I worry that we are complicit in establishing second-class faculty categories that make the teaching of writing manageable, thereby enabling research professors to continue doing what they have done without having to come to terms with changes in literacy and learning. On most days, I understand rhetoric as a means to negotiate between the pressures to get the job done and our hopes that it can be redefined to serve changing needs. If rhetoric is to become an aid in negotiating the conflicted goals of writing programs, we must expand our fields of vision to include the domains where it has practical import. Graduate and undergraduate studies of rhetoric need to include grounded research on labor organizing, social movements, state educational systems, and institutional reforms. Rhetoric and composition has been limited by its concentration on academic discourse, and we should look to rhetoric in communications for models of how to work with organizational communications, political movements, and group dynamics. Communications has been shaped by scientific methods and functionalist orientations that need to be critiqued against more humanistic perspectives. For just this reason, communications presents a model for what may become of us if we fail to maintain a critical stance on some of the very institutional trends that are supporting the establishment of independent writing programs. The isolation of literary from literacy studies helped reduce the teaching of writing to mere mechanics concerned with utilitarian purposes, but the disabling

dualism of the fine arts and the useful sciences will not be left behind by moving out from under the belletristic value system that limited English studies to a privileged canon of nonutilitarian, nonfactual texts (for a historical study of this system, see my *Formation of College English Studies*).

As we consider the broader history of the discipline and the pragmatic potentials of the alternatives that are emerging, we need to focus squarely on the teaching of writing and on teachers of writing if we are to see the power in what we do. Introductory literacy courses have the power to reinterpret prevailing assumptions against changing needs by teaching students how to make productive use of the differences they bring to the process of making knowledge. Focusing squarely on this place of power can enable us to shift our gaze from trickle-down views of change that look to elite institutions for sources of reform. Our disciplinary histories, and some of the case studies here, cite developments in prestigious private universities to explain changes in more broadly based institutions. Such an orientation is an understandable attempt to gain professional credibility by identifying with the prestige of the traditionally privileged. If we look critically at such programs, we can see that they depend upon a continuous turnover in teachers that prevents them from organizing themselves into an institutional threat to established hierarchies, even while enabling those teachers to market themselves by banking on the prestige of the institutions. Such teachers inevitably learn more from the system than its good intentions. In elite institutions as elsewhere, such systems for making the teaching of writing manageable can make it invisible, in part by keeping writing teachers moving on from institution to institution, where they become but fleeting shadows in crowded hallways who can be ignored by “regular” faculty. The invisible men and women of the profession haunt our dreams as we haunt theirs, much like Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, whose main character looked to a prestigious college to gain professional standing and left with nightmares that his letter of recommendation amounted to a single line: keep this boy running. One way that the higher educational system has kept itself running is by keeping teachers of writing on the move, looking to find a place for themselves in a profession that has depended upon their absence for its sense of itself.

To achieve the possibilities posed by their often marginal situations, independent writing programs need to have a bifocal perspective that can enable them to shift their gaze back and forth from the immediate needs of teachers and students in their institutions to the disciplinary

trends that are transforming literacy studies, not by the filtering down of new theories but from the generative possibilities that are rising up from work with literacy and learning. We also need to focus more on that “contact zone” that lies between the individual institution and the general profession—that civic field of vision that can enable writing programs to see ways to work through introductory literacy courses to connect with broader constituencies, especially those groups who must be brought into a public university if it is to become more than an oxymoron. Perhaps what we need is not so much a bifocal as a progressive lens, though a progressive viewpoint may too easily efface the difference between here and there. We need to attend to the boundaries that separate the positions we occupy, distorted as our sense of them may be, for it is at such borders where power is gained—and denied. Bifocals can make us aware of the spaces between us, but bifocals are really not so much about space as they are about time. Not simply the time that passes us by when we are unawares, but the time that needs to be taken to reflect upon such things. By taking the time to write this for you, I have tried to convey some of what I see in the work that we do together, while recognizing that our positions in the field may be quite different and that those differences may give you a very different perspective on what it is about, if you can make the time to think critically about it.