"WRITING IS LIKE PLAYING A SPORT": LETTING GO OF GENDERED ASSUMPTIONS AND USING METAPHOR SUCCESSFULLY IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

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I was standing in front of my predominantly male freshman composition class describing how choosing a form for an argument was like choosing what kind of pitch to throw in a baseball game, when I realized that I did not know enough about pitching a baseball to finish the comparison. I have never pitched a baseball, softball, or any other kind of ball. The only kind of pitch I can name is a curve ball, and I do not think I would recognize one if it hit me in the head. How had I gotten myself into this mess? I, like many other teachers, had tried to "pitch" my metaphor to my students based on their gender; specifically, I felt I needed to use sports metaphors in the writing classroom when confronted with a class full of male students. In doing so, I disregarded my own life experience (as a non-baseball player or fan), failed to ascertain anything about my students' experiences with either baseball or writing, and failed to communicate the point I was trying to make about constructing an argument.

I am not alone in falling into the trap of pitching sports metaphors to male students. As I will discuss in this article, common wisdom often suggests that when faced with male students, writing teachers should rely on sports metaphors. This strategy is based on the following assumptions: (1) Male students

are less engaged than female students in the writing classroom; (2) male students are interested in sports (more so than female students); therefore, (3) male students will engage more readily with sports metaphors than other metaphors for writing, and teachers should use sports metaphors even if (4) writing teachers are not interested in sports.

In this article, I will use data from a qualitative study I conducted of eight sections of required writing courses at a mid-sized state university as well as published advice for writing teachers and research from composition and metaphor study to examine these assumptions, to demonstrate how they break down in real classrooms, and finally, to suggest how teachers can use sports (and other) metaphors more effectively to engage all of their students–regardless of gender.

Metaphor in the Writing Classroom

Discussing personal metaphors for writing can be useful in writing instruction for several reasons. First, creating metaphors for writing (or becoming conscious of metaphors for writing already in use) allows students and teachers to better understand their own views and unexamined assumptions. Also, metaphor offers all class members a vivid and concise way to convey what may be complex or abstract conceptions of writing (Ortony). Metaphor has several advantages here over literal speech in that metaphor can tap into students' intuitive "felt sense" about writing, and metaphor does not require the use of technical terms to discuss writing (Tobin 446). As Lad Tobin notes, students may not be able to say "whether their composing strategy is linear or recursive," but they can discuss their writing process in terms of a vehicle they are familiar with, such as "making a phone call to a friend" (446). As James C. McDonald found, students who view themselves as struggling writers often communicate their views of writing via metaphor just as effectively, if not more effectively, than students who view themselves as competent writers (60). Finally, sharing metaphors for writing allows class members to

consider alternative views of writing and sets the stage for potential metaphor change.

This last point is important because, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue in their seminal text *Metaphors We Live By*, "we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of those metaphors" (158). In other words, our metaphors affect how we see and understand the world and how we function within it. For example, a student who views writing as a chore assigned by an authority figure will approach writing differently than a student who views writing as an adventurous journey led by a spirited guide. However, writers do not have to be bound by their current metaphors for writing: "New metaphors have the power to create a new reality" (Lakoff and Johnson 145). A student who begins the term seeing writing as a chore but ends the term seeing writing as a journey will have changed not just his metaphor but potentially his attitude towards, and his experience of, writing. The power of metaphor to help us find new ways to approach complex tasks, what Donald Schön terms "re-framing," makes it particularly useful in the writing classroom, where teachers are engaged in trying to help students develop effective writing processes.

However, as Lad Tobin points out, too often teachers present their metaphors for writing without considering whether they are really communicating effectively with their students. In his article "Bridging Gaps: Analyzing Our Students' Metaphors for Composing," Tobin asserts that it is common for writing teachers to use metaphors to try to persuade students to see writing the way the teachers want them to without considering the students' current views of writing. Tobin admits, "Like most composition teachers, I have always relied on metaphors to get me out of tight spots. Whenever I sensed that my students were confused by or disagreed with a point I was making about writing, I would try to win them over with a comparison to sports, cooking, rock music, travel" (444). Studying personal metaphors for writing in the classroom allows us to examine how teachers might consciously use metaphor to improve communication with their students,

perhaps, for example, by engaging students in discussions about their metaphors for writing.

In the spring of the 2007-2008 academic year, I conducted a qualitative study of four writing instructors and their eight sections of required writing courses at a mid-sized midwestern state university. I wanted to see what would happen when students and teachers discussed their personal metaphors for writing. As a part of this study, I interviewed teachers about their metaphor use in the classroom, asked students and teachers to create metaphors for writing using the sentence stem "Writing is like _____ ," and facilitated class conversations about those metaphors.[1] At the end of the term, I asked participants to complete the sentence "Writing is like _____" again and to reflect on whether their metaphors for writing, and therefore their views of writing, had changed. While conducting this study, I observed that teachers with predominantly male class sections had real concerns about how to reach their male students. Several of these teachers talked openly about pitching sports metaphors to their students and subscribing to the same assumptions I had when I used the baseball metaphor.

Assumption #1: Male students are less engaged than female students in the writing classroom.

Of the four teachers in my study–Winston, Pavil, Kate, and Ray[2]–three (Winston, Pavil, and Kate) had sections of required writing courses that were predominantly male.[3] All three teachers expressed fear or misgivings about these classes, and all three warned me about these classes before I entered them as a researcher. These teachers also made distinctions between their male-dominated class sections and the more gender-balanced sections they were teaching that term. Since I entered these classes during the first or second week of the academic quarter, teachers were responding to their first impressions of these classes, which seemed to be based on the physical presence of so many male students in the classroom. Typical comments about these class sections include the following from Winston: "You

know, that second class . . . from day one, I think I told you, there's this wall of men, and they all look very stern." He continued, "[T]here's this feeling of being this scrawny little grad student standing up there, and how am I going to get through to these guys?" Similarly, Pavil said about his predominantly male class, "Yeah, there are only two or three women in that class, and I was really worried at first. . . . [T]here are a lot of guys on the football team who sit in the one corner. . . ." These teachers' fears seemed to be born out of the physical presence of their male students–the "wall of men" and the block of "guys . . . in the one corner," as well as the perceived distance between the instructor and the students ("scrawny little grad student" vs. "wall of men") and between the students and the subject matter (i.e., writing). As Winston asked, "[H]ow am I going to get through to these guys?" The "wall of men" seemed impenetrable.

This immediate sense that these male students were unreachable (after only one day of class) has roots in our cultural assumptions about gender roles in the writing classroom, as evidenced in several articles advocating the use of sports metaphors to reach male students. In "Hollywood Hair: Using Metaphors to Teach Writing," John McKenna laments that his male students are not involved in the writing classroom: "My first-semester freshmen writers, typically 75% men, are not inclined to credit the recursive effort required [to improve their writing]. Some would rather . . . get major help from their girlfriends" (55). In other words, female students are engaged, even doing extra work for their boyfriends, while male students are unengaged and unwilling to do their own work. Similarly, Eric H. Christenson writes, "We all know that if the star football player used in the English class half of the intelligence and energy he saves for the field, he would be a winner in academics." Again, the cultural assumption (*we all* know) is that male students are not engaged in the writing classroom.

However, the male students' metaphors I collected did not exhibit less engagement with writing than the female students' metaphors did. Out of the 140 students (83 men and 57 women)

who participated in the study, 29 wrote negative metaphors such as the following, which depict writing as a chore or torture:

> *Female from Pavil's class*: Writing is like a chore. Writing is something I put off, dread, and sweat over. I do not enjoy writing and I am not good at writing. I see writing as a talent and love that I do not possess.
>
> *Female from Ray's class*: Writing is like fingernails on a chalkboard. To me writing is unbearable and it's hard to understand why we are forced to write. It makes me cringe just as hearing nails on a chalkboard would.
>
> *Male from Kate's class*: Writing is like work. I have never been a huge fan of expressing myself through writing, so when I do write I see it as being a chore, or work.
>
> *Male from Winston's class*: Writing is like a long, boring day. Writing always makes me tired and is always an excruciating burden on my shoulders. I always put it off until the last second.

Male students wrote sixteen out of the twenty-nine negative metaphors; females wrote thirteen. These numbers, given that my sample consisted of 60% males and 40% females, do not reflect a disproportionate amount of male negativity at the beginning of the term. In addition, the male-dominated classes did not contain an overwhelming number of negative metaphors compared to the gender-balanced classes. In fact, Pavil's gender-balanced class was overall more negative about writing than his male-dominated class. His gender-balanced class of nine men and eleven women wrote six apprehensive metaphors for writing, while his male-dominated class of twelve men and four women wrote only three apprehensive metaphors for writing, and one of those metaphors was written by one of the four female students in his class. Therefore, based on the students' initial metaphors for writing,

male students did not exhibit more negative feelings about writing than female students.

Assumption #2: Male students are interested in athletics (more so than female students).
Assumption #3: Therefore, male students will engage more readily with sports metaphors than other metaphors for writing, and teachers should use sports metaphors in the writing classroom.

The second assumption, that male students are more interested in athletics than female students, was also alive and well with the teachers I studied. At the beginning of the term, Kate and Pavil said they used sports metaphors specifically to reach male students. Pavil, who admitted that he was not a sports fan, described his prior use of sports metaphors in the writing classroom in this way: "I . . . kind of talk about writing more like athletics . . . , depending on who I gauge my audience as, like if there are a bunch of guys who look like they're athletes." Ironically, even Kate, an accomplished former college basketball player and girls' basketball coach, assumed that her sports metaphors would connect with her male students more than her female students. Kate explained her decision to use sports metaphors this way: "I have a class that's mostly men right now, and without making this a gender issue, it sort of is; I mean, more men than women are sports fans in my classes, so I thought about that as well. I've got fourteen men and three women . . . ."

The assumption that male students will be interested in sports leads directly to a third assumption: Male students will engage more readily with sports metaphors than other metaphors for writing, and teachers should use sports metaphors in the writing classroom. McKenna states that the "gender of the students makes a difference in the effectiveness of a given metaphor for teaching writing" (55). He continues, "For men, metaphors tied to sports and competition work best" (55). In contrast, he claims, "With women, metaphors linking attire, grooming, and cooking to aspects of writing are especially effective" (55). Similarly, Kate

and Pavil both believed that they could reach their male students by using sports metaphors. However, by studying students' initial metaphors for writing, I discovered that there are a wide variety of metaphors for writing that might be personally meaningful to students, and that the content of these personal metaphors is not easily predicted by students' gender or appearance. In Kate's class, for example, a female student wrote the only initial metaphor that contained a sports reference: "Writing is like playing a sport. Sometimes writing can be fun and other times it is hard work." In addition, at the end of the term, the student whose final metaphor had the most in common with Kate's own basketball-based metaphor (and therefore the student who may have been most affected by Kate's use of sports metaphors in class) was another female:

> *Kate's metaphor*: Writing is like basketball. Once you learn the fundamental skills, the rules of the game, and the basic game plan, you can develop your own style, perfect your original and unique abilities and wow people with your (rhetorical) moves and your (linguistic) slam-dunks.
>
> *Kate's female student's metaphor*: Writing is like playing a sport for the first time. At first, you understand the basics, but when you know every rule to it, writing becomes something you become very good at and the easier, the more natural, it becomes.

Certainly, some male students did write sports metaphors, such as the following from Pavil's class:

> Writing is like physical conditioning. If you're in a sport or a class you know you're going to have to do it but I don't really want to because it is stressful and difficult, but when it is over and you're in better shape and exhausted, you have a good feeling about what you have accomplished.

This metaphor notably balances the difficult aspects of writing and training for a sport with the benefits of getting "in better shape" and experiencing a "good feeling" of "accomplish[ment]." In addition, other male students in the class wrote metaphors that surprised Pavil with their humor. He cited examples such as the following metaphors from three of his male students:

> Writing is like getting a tattoo on your body. It is a painful experience the first time you do it, but the end result is a beautiful piece of artwork. Good writing would be a tattoo that is meaningful and appropriate to your life. A bad piece of writing would be a butterfly tattoo that you get while drunk on spring break.
>
> Writing is like riding a dolphin nude over a rainbow. This is to say that it can be both liberating and can include several different variables of happiness.
>
> Writing is like Mr. Potato Head. Writing includes emotions. Emotions change, just like Mr. Potato Head's face. Mr. Potato Head can change facial expressions. In writing, not many things are static.

Pavil said he was surprised by these students' initial metaphors and he contrasted his new understanding of his students with his initial feeling of being "really worried" about having them in class. He said, "I feel like that class I have really engaged with in terms of [their] use of humor."

Pavil's experience demonstrates that it is not easy to predict, based on gender or appearance alone, what attitudes students will bring into writing class or what metaphors will lead to useful discussions about writing. This also held true in other class sections I studied, as male students wrote metaphors comparing writing to giving birth, planting a garden, baking a cake, cooking, and watching a flower grow. In addition to these male students using non-gender-stereotyped vehicles for their writing

metaphors, some women (in addition to those I mentioned previously from Kate's class) wrote sports-based metaphors about writing:

> *Female student from Ray's class*: Writing is like a track meet. It can be a short poem, which is the same as a 100-yard dash, or it can be a long novel, which is the same as a mile. And just like not all runners run in the same event or distance, not all writers have the same style in which they write their work.

> *Female student from Ray's class:* Writing is like running. Writing can give you a sense of accomplishment. When a paper is finished the feeling of happiness resembles that of the feelings one experiences when finishing a race. Also, writing can be an emotional release just as running can.

In both of these track metaphors, these young women compare writing to the *competitive* sport of track, not to running merely for exercise. The first metaphor mentions the many different events a track runner can compete in, and the second metaphor describes the feeling a runner has "when finishing a race." These examples demonstrate that some female students can relate to metaphors of sports and competition.

Assumption #4: Writing teachers are not interested in sports.

The final assumption I would like to address is that writing teachers are not interested in sports. Christenson, for example, assumes that teachers will not have sports experience. Therefore, he advises teachers to research coaches' rhetoric and then to employ it in the classroom: "If I, as a teacher-coach, do not disdain going to a few high school games and, better yet, practices, I can hear the coaches' language and catch some new metaphor for winning in composition" (232). The phrase *do not disdain going to a few high school games* suggests Christenson believes some of his readers (English teachers) may have to overcome their extreme

contempt for sports in order to see that they could learn something from a coaches' rhetoric. Yet, just as one cannot predict whether students will identify with sports metaphors or not, one cannot predict whether teachers will have the requisite interest in sports to craft effective sports metaphors.

Certainly it is true that not every English teacher is a current or former athlete or sports fan. I have already admitted my ignorance of baseball (although I am an avid football fan) and discussed Pavil's admission that he was not a sports fan. But the truth is that writing teachers may or may not have a background in sports, just as students (male or female) may or may not have enough stake or experience in athletics for sports metaphors to be valuable to them in the writing classroom. In my study, only Pavil did not have a formal sports background and professed no interest in sports. The other three teachers reported having athletic backgrounds, Kate in basketball, Ray in basketball and track, and Winston in golf. Of the four teachers in my study, Kate, the only female teacher, had one of the most extensive sports backgrounds, having played basketball at the college level and coached girls' basketball.

How To Use Metaphors Effectively in Writing Class

So, if teachers should not assume that sports metaphors are the only metaphors that will resonate with male students, how should teachers decide what metaphors to use in writing class? After observing the metaphor use of the four teachers in my study, I offer the following suggestions for teachers using metaphors (sports or otherwise) in the classroom:

Teachers should use authentic, personally meaningful metaphors.

My observations suggest that teachers should use metaphors that are personally meaningful to them instead of manufacturing metaphors they believe will convince their students to view writing in a certain way. This is because, as I discussed earlier, it is

not easy to predict what metaphors will initiate useful discussions about writing. Also, students may see through manufactured metaphors. Pavil, for example, recalled a time when he used a sports metaphor in class and his students called his bluff: "[S]ometimes [using sports metaphors] doesn't work because I've had students say, 'Oh, teachers always want to compare their stuff to sports.'" Pavil explained that these students thought teachers were only mentioning sports to make writing (or whatever subject they taught) "sound cool." He said these students saw this as a "trick," a rhetorical ploy, and one they were not fooled by. I could not help but wonder if it was because these students could sense that Pavil, like me when I attempted the baseball metaphor in class, did not have sufficient experience to make an authentic comparison. Pavil admitted to me that when it came to using sports metaphors in class, he was a "poser" who did not really relate to what he was saying.

In contrast, although Kate used sports metaphors in part because she believed that they would reach her male students, she also said she talked about basketball "all the time" in her writing classes because it was an integral part of her life experience: "I mean, if I use a dance metaphor . . . I would feel silly because I don't know anything about dance, so what am I going to do?" Because Kate had extensive experience both playing and coaching basketball, she was able to facilitate an engaging class discussion using a basketball metaphor, as I will describe later on in the section about building collaborative metaphors.

Similarly, Pavil found that when he used an authentic metaphor for describing his own writing experiences ("Writing is like squeezing blood from a stone"), he opened up a valuable line of communication with his students, who began to trust him as a real person and a real writer, not just as a teacher who was trying too hard to convince them to love writing by equating it to sports. His students reported that they felt more "at ease" in the classroom, having "realized that even English teachers can struggle at times with writing." As a result, they relaxed and began to "enjoy" writing more.

Does this mean that if a teacher has no sports background (as a participant or a fan) that no sports metaphors can be used in his or her classroom? Not at all. The sports metaphors might come (as they did in Pavil's class) from the students themselves. Again, my research suggests that, instead of forcing sports metaphors on their students, teachers should use personally meaningful metaphors and allow students to develop their own personally meaningful metaphors.

Teachers should offer their metaphors tentatively and alongside other metaphors.

Lad Tobin points out that teachers who "offer their own metaphors for composing as if they were inherently correct, true, accurate, or objective," are not likely to communicate well with their students (451). Tobin suggests engaging students as readers and writers of metaphor as a potential solution. He writes that in order to realize the true "pedagogical potential" of metaphor, teachers should encourage students to "question, criticize, or develop [teachers'] metaphors, [and], more importantly, to develop their own" (446). Tobin argues that metaphors for writing are unlikely to be "integrated into the course as a whole or into students' own conception of and experience in composing" unless the students themselves are actively engaged in creating these metaphors (446). Tobin's assertion seemed to hold true in my study. The teachers I asked to participate in the study were convinced that they would skew the data because they talked about writing as discovery (or art or building) in class, and they assumed their students would say the same thing. However, this never turned out to be the case. Instead, students' metaphors for writing surprised their teachers, and students and teachers learned from each other. Ray said sharing metaphors "opened up some lines of communication between [himself] and the students about writing," and Kate said that sharing metaphors for writing helped her to "understand [her students'] mindset" and to determine "what is going on with *this* class."

Another reason to entertain multiple metaphors for writing in the classroom is that no single metaphor can hold all of the complexities of the writing process for a single writer working on a single writing project, let alone the many different writers and writing situations encountered in writing classes every day. As Lakoff and Johnson emphasize, "no one metaphor will do. Each one gives a certain comprehension of one aspect of the concept and hides others. . . . Successful functioning in our daily lives seems to require a constant shifting of metaphors" (221). As a result, it is a good idea to entertain multiple metaphors for writing throughout the writing class. Kate recognized this and felt that it would be valuable for students to have multiple metaphors for writing (instead of perfecting one metaphor) so that they could be flexible in tackling different genres of writing. She said, "There are so many different kinds of writing that for me it would make more sense to have different metaphors depending on the situation." Because we may use "very different metaphors for different aspects of the process, different kinds of writing, and different audiences," Tobin suggests that teachers "introduce [their] metaphors in an interactive, even tentative way and to ask students to examine their metaphors in terms of change from mode to mode and from the beginning to the end of a course" (451-452).

A good way to foster this kind of reflection is to share personal metaphors as a class, as I asked the participants in my study to do. In each class, there were multiple points of view represented, and this made students and teachers consider the value of a variety of metaphors for writing. After the discussion of the class metaphors, several of Kate's students made remarks such as the following: "I agreed with most of the metaphors because they were all *partly* true" (emphasis added). This student could see the value of multiple metaphors for writing. As another student noted: "My metaphor is not representative of all my feelings. . . . I have just added more metaphors to my collection." The idea of having a metaphor collection, a grab bag from which she could choose,

depending on the given situation, reflects this student's flexibility to adapt to various writing situations.

Anna Sfard states that entertaining multiple metaphors (what she terms *metaphorical pluralism*) allows us to see the shortcomings in each metaphor. Because no single metaphor is fully complete, new metaphors are most useful as "eye-opening device[s]" that allow us to see what is overlooked, missing, left out, or hidden by the overriding metaphor we currently subscribe to (9). Sfard argues that "the basic tension between seemingly conflicting metaphors is our protection against theoretical excesses, and is a source of power" (10). Multiple metaphors, then, become a system of checks and balances that keep one metaphor from skewing our vision too far in one direction, from blinding us to conflicting, and potentially beneficial, alternatives. Metaphorical pluralism keeps us aware that a metaphor *is* a metaphor, and that, for all its inherent power, it is, by definition, partial and inexact (Lakoff and Johnson 153). The benefits of metaphorical pluralism were clear to Ray, one of the teachers in my study, who said, "[I]t's hard to come up with a metaphor for writing that seems to cover all the things you want. You can get a metaphor that covers one aspect of it, like the discovery part, or one that covers practice, but to find a metaphor that seems to work for everything I think and feel about writing is very hard . . . ." Ray said that discussing personal metaphors for writing with his students was useful because it reminded him of the complexities of the writing process: "[A]fter hearing the student metaphors . . ., I thought some of them were really good, and they would capture an aspect of writing that I had neglected . . . ." Ray felt that entertaining multiple metaphors for writing enriched the classroom experience for his students as well as himself.

Teachers should build metaphors collaboratively with students.

When teachers are willing to entertain multiple metaphors for writing, useful exchanges and collaboration with students become possible. Even when teachers present their own metaphors, they

can do so in a way that allows students to engage with, add to, or alter those metaphors. For example, when Kate introduced her "writing is like basketball" metaphor in class, she used diagrams of common basketball plays reproduced on overheads, as well as video clips of famous basketball players such as Michael Jordan, Clyde Drexler, and Larry Bird to illustrate how students could infuse a common assignment with their "own unique style" the way these basketball players made the game their own. By talking through typical plays and showing students film of basketball players, Kate gave all of her students, even those who were not basketball fans, a chance to look for similarities between the game of basketball and the "game" of academic writing and engage in the discussion. It was not a lecture, but an interactive lesson that used concrete examples to help students make connections between the tenor (writing) and the vehicle (playing basketball).

In a more spontaneous discussion of "writing as a process of discovery," several metaphors for the writing process evolved collaboratively in Kate's class. Responding to the writing-as-discovery metaphor, Kate said that, for her, writing is like running: just as "you have to run for a really long time until you hit that runner's high," you also have to "write through" periods of "writer's block" when "nothing flows" in order to reach the "writer's high," which is "that discovery and that really exciting part when things are happening." One of her female students responded to this metaphor and elaborated on it. She said that when she first starts running, she is "kind of stiff," and as she continues to run, her "muscles start to loosen up." She compared this to her writing, saying, "I'll start writing, and I'll be like, 'Oh, my God, this is the worst paper I've ever written,' and then eventually it starts to kind of pick up and I figure out more of what I'm trying to say." A male student then related writing-as-discovery to playing a musical instrument: "I play music, too, and I think it happens in that, too, where you get to a point you would never have gotten to if you hadn't put in the time. It might not have been very enjoyable, but then at some point you hit a part where you go, 'Wow.'" Because Kate was willing to have an open

discussion about writing-as-discovery, her students engaged with this concept in ways that were the most personally meaningful for them–using sports *and* music comparisons. No teacher could predict ahead of time how this conversation would unfold.

A Final Note: Creating metaphors is a team sport.

The discussion about writing-as-discovery in Kate's class illustrates the final benefit of letting go of gendered assumptions about writing metaphors: it can take some of the pressure off of teachers. Instead of looking at their students and having to guess which metaphors will open up a useful discussion about writing with them, or feeling intimidated by a group of students (such as male athletes) they imagine they have little in common with, teachers can capitalize on the wide variety of metaphors students produce. As Ray said, "[D]iscussing metaphors [helped to] establish . . . not a me-versus-them [mentality], but more of a collective effort."

The term after I used the unsuccessful baseball metaphor in my writing class, I told the story of my ill-fated attempt to my students when I introduced the idea of choosing a form for an argument. After we all stopped laughing, one of my female students, a fast-pitch softball champion, offered her own take on how choosing a pitch was like choosing a form for an argument. She said that when she pitched softball, she often relied on an exchange of signals with the catcher to help her decide which pitch to throw. Choosing a pitch, she explained, is a joint effort, just as in our whole class workshops and peer review sessions we pool our knowledge to help each writer find the most successful form for her argument. I smiled and thanked her for her contribution. I could not have said it better myself.

Notes

[1]Technically, this sentence stem, which is based on previous studies such as Tobin's and McDonald's, produces a simile, not a metaphor. I chose to use this sentence stem because it encourages participants to make a figurative comparison, whereas other potential sentence starters such as "Writing is _____ because _____" may produce more literal sentences such as "Writing is difficult because I don't like it." Also, as Cameron and Low note, "If the [topic and vehicle of a simile] relate to very different domains, then the simile will be (relatively) metaphoric" (83). There are interesting differences between similes and metaphors, but in this article, I focus on the metaphoric content, rather than the structure, of these expressions.

[2]All teachers' names are pseudonyms.

[3]While the overall enrollment of the university is fairly balanced in terms of gender, there are no policies or procedures in place to balance required writing classes by gender. Therefore, some sections of these courses end up being predominantly male or female.

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