

MANUSCRIPT STUDIES, LITERATURE / WRITING CONNECTIONS, AND THE TEACHER- RESEARCHER

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This discussion of the teacher-researcher begins with an observation about the nature of learning that lends a certain irony to current discussions of the role of research in teaching. In his analysis of the growth of mind, Jerome Bruner stresses the importance of treating the learner as a researcher when he states, "There is nothing more central to a discipline than its way of thinking. . . . At the very first breath, the young learner should . . . be given the chance to solve problems, to conjecture, to quarrel as these are done at the heart of the discipline" (446). The irony here lies in the assumption among teachers who choose not to do research that they can manage and direct other people's learning, that they can foster learning in a discipline, without continually engaging in learning in that discipline themselves. Such teachers seem to assume that their learning is completed and that no real advantage accrues from their continuing efforts to know more about what and whom they teach. In this discussion, we take an opposing view and treat the teacher's learning as a necessary starting point for any student learning that can occur in the classroom.

Unless teachers continue "to solve problems, to conjecture, to quarrel as these are done at the heart of the discipline," they can be in no position to help students formulate the problems that can usefully initiate student learning.

Miles Myers has defined teacher research as "any study conducted by teachers of their school system, school, class, groups of students, or one student, either collaboratively or individually" (5). He thus focuses teacher learning on the classroom environment and sees it as exploring how teaching and learning occur within this environment. In this discussion, we will look at teacher research from a different but complementary perspective. The discussion here will explore how teachers can focus their investigations on materials separate from the school environment and then can use what they find to help their students learn in the classroom. Specifically, it will describe a program in which teachers do research on literary manuscripts to address a problem that has received much attention recently—the counterproductive fragmentation of the English curriculum into separate writing and literature components (Horner 2).

The project through which we foster the approach to teacher research described here is a three-year series of summer institutes for high school English teachers funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). In encouraging teacher research into literary manuscripts as a basis for integrating writing and literature instruction, we cultivate among participating teachers what Gerald Bruns has called "a manuscript culture" (as opposed to a "book culture") and enable them to see the texts that they and their students read and write in the context of such a culture. Bruns differentiates between a manuscript culture and a book culture by suggesting that the former highlights the "open text," which is fluid and changeable, and focuses on all of the various versions of a text, while the latter emphasizes the "closed text," the published work that results from "an act of writing that has reached a final form" (44). A book culture, Bruns argues, makes it difficult to address such questions as, "What does it mean to rewrite (or have different versions of) a finished poem? In what does the singleness (or finish) of any poem consist?" (45). Significantly, the interpretive possibilities prevalent in a book culture are also available in a manuscript culture, although the converse is not true. That is, what one can do with a finished text in a book culture remains possible in a manuscript culture, but a book culture precludes investigating

issues connected with the nature of texts and of composing at all phases of a text's evolution.

Approaching texts from the viewpoint of a manuscript culture in the classroom enables teachers to integrate literature and writing instruction effectively in the classroom because students approach each text they read both as a manifestation of the process of composing and as a work of literature meriting study in its final form. This dual approach is possible because a manuscript culture, while interested in all phases of a text's history, recognizes the published form of that text as a part of that history. Most importantly, such an approach enriches both writing instruction and literature instruction by making it possible for students to use what they learn in their lessons on writing to inform their study of literature and vice-versa. The mutual reciprocity here not only enriches the lessons in both writing and literature but also allows the learning in each to reinforce the learning in the other.

The kinds of teacher research fostered in this manuscript-based approach are what Bereiter and Scardamalia call "Reflective Inquiry" and "Text Analysis." The former, they explain, "involves reflection on the information one already has or that is available from ordinary experience" (5). In the context of the approach being described here, this means having teachers consciously explore the patterns in their and their students' experiences as writers and as readers of literature. Bereiter and Scardamalia define text analysis as "trying to extract descriptive rules or principles by studying written texts" (10). They further suggest that "Text analysis approaches texts as complex phenomena that exhibit internal lawfulness" (10). One significant difference between the text analysis fostered in the approach outlined in this discussion and most applications of text analysis is that our approach has teachers concentrate on all of the texts writers, including the authors of literary works commonly studied in English courses, develop on their way toward producing a final product. The range of texts studied, then, includes letters, diaries, notebooks, and the various manuscripts and typescripts leading to the published text. In subjecting a range of interrelated texts to analysis, teachers discover internal laws that reveal much more about the dynamics of composing than would be possible if they were to restrict their investigations to the published text alone. This is a necessary prerequisite to their use of literature to inform their teaching of writing.

Teachers pursuing the approach to research and instruction described above generally follow three stages in their research. First, they identify a wide range of appropriate manuscript materials for the literary texts they teach. Second, they articulate a variety of patterns inherent in the texts and text processes they study. Third, they apply the materials they find and patterns they articulate to their students' reading and writing experiences.

The first of these stages—identifying appropriate manuscript materials—must be the first stage of the teachers' research since the materials often are not readily available. Reflection plays a role in this research because through it teachers can specify the kinds of problems that the manuscript materials must be used to address in the classroom. Once they recognize the issues the manuscript materials must address, they are in a position to find the materials they need. Most teachers have little experience exploring these materials so their research must include learning strategies for finding what they need. They search bibliographies and examine the definitive editions of authors' works to identify manuscript and typescript facsimiles currently in print. For materials not in print, they look into such resources as *The Index of English Literary Manuscripts* and the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*. Once they know where the materials are, they write the curator to determine how to gain access to the materials they need. A rich but frequently overlooked resource is critical and scholarly books and articles that reproduce generous sections from the manuscripts and typescripts for the work or author being researched. A particularly useful resource in helping teachers to identify these books and articles is David Madden and Richard Powers' *Writers' Revisions: An Annotated Bibliography of Articles and Books About Writers' Revisions and Their Comments on the Creative Process*. Not only does this work provide detailed annotations indicating clearly what can be found in a particular article or book, but it also indexes the works covered in five different ways: by genre, by the type of revision problem discussed, by the authors and titles of the scholarly works included, by the authors of the literary works covered in the books and articles, and by the literary works covered in these books and articles. Finally, when a work by a living writer is at issue, several teachers have written directly to the writers, who typically have been generous in their responses.

Articulating the patterns inherent in the texts and text processes is more problematic than finding the materials. Bereiter and Scardamalia note two basic problems with text analysis: 1) different rule systems can be used to account for observed regularities in a text and 2) text analysis does not yield insight into the composing process because a text does not exhibit how a writer's knowledge is brought into play during composing. The second of these is less problematic than the first because, while Bereiter and Scardamalia have the text analysis of the published product in mind, the approach outlined here focuses on analyzing all of the texts writers produce along the way to their published texts. Manuscripts and typescripts exhibit quite clearly a writer's excisions, additions, and redistributions of material at both the microstructural and macrostructural levels. A text analysis concentrating on all of these documents is much more likely to reveal insights into the composing processes of the writers studied than would an analysis of their published products alone.

The absence of a single rule system capable of explaining how a writer exercises his or her knowledge in the process of composing is also minimized by the researcher's concentration on all of the written materials surrounding the production of a particular text. Often, the rule system at work for a particular author composing a particular work is reflected both in the writer's comments in a diary, letters, notebooks, and the margins of the text and in the actual revisions made on the manuscript drafts, typescripts, and galley proofs. Indeed, the patterns of draft-to-draft changes writers make reveal more than anything the most salient characteristics of their composing styles. The shifting of details as the writers move from draft to draft quickly and clearly highlights the issues of particular interest to them as writers and thus suggests where their thinking is as they compose.

The research teachers undertake in identifying appropriate manuscript materials and in studying the internal laws of composing inherent in those materials finally must work their way into the classroom through the teachers' ability to connect the processes behind the texts students read and their students' reading and writing processes. The means through which this transference occurs are the lesson plans the teachers develop. That these lesson plans have been successful for teachers involved in the NEH project is reflected in the comments of students who have experienced

lesson plans based on this manuscript approach. Responding to a lesson based on Blake's drafts for "The Poison Tree" and "The Tiger," two students' comments show how a single lesson can develop students' understanding of writing and literary response at the same time. One student responded more to the lesson's effects on her approach to reading literature: "I enjoyed the lesson yesterday because I became interested in the poems. It was a new twist, instead of the boring study questions that don't really get the student involved. It's a tricky way to get students to enjoy poetry." The other student found in the lesson a better understanding of herself as a writer: "Studying poetry using manuscripts makes it easier to accept yourself and your work, knowing that not everyone can just sit down and write a 'perfect' poem." These responses suggest the teacher's success in all three phases of her research: she found appropriate manuscript materials, articulated the composing patterns inherent in them, and matched them to her students' learning needs. Examining several lesson plans developed in the NEH project might suggest in more detail how she accomplished this.

The teachers' lesson plans demonstrate how research into sources, manuscripts, and typescripts leads to new classroom approaches as well as to an expanded vision of the field. In the NEH project, teachers observe the broad scope of an author's changing ideas and concepts. For example, in the first summer of the project, teachers read *The Great Gatsby* as well as the letters that passed between Fitzgerald and his editor Maxwell Perkins as the novel was being revised. In addition, they had access to the draft manuscripts of the novel. These materials revealed that the completed novel had undergone massive changes in structure during its years of composition. Many of these changes resulted from the correspondence between Fitzgerald and Perkins, others from Fitzgerald's continuing development of *Gatsby's* character. Fitzgerald's indecision about the novel can be illustrated by his quandry over a title. Until the last moment, Fitzgerald had not settled on a title for the novel. Perkins chose the final title, in part because Fitzgerald's letter with one more change did not reach New York until the book had gone to press.

This description of Fitzgerald's writing methods suggests a variety of teaching possibilities. First, the structural changes provide an opportunity for students to compare outlines of the texts to discover what passages Fitzgerald moved and why. Other issues,

for example, his indecision about where the showdown between Tom and Gatsby would take place, provide another kind of classroom activity. Students can read the short passages locating this fight in three different places, first, the Polo Grounds baseball park, then a restaurant, and finally the hotel where Fitzgerald did decide to set the scene. They can debate and decide which was the best choice and whether Fitzgerald should have decided as he did. Perkins' influence provides many more of the same types of classroom activities. He suggested that Fitzgerald restructure the novel so that the reader would come to know Gatsby throughout the early chapters rather than in one chapter as Fitzgerald originally intended. Students can decide whether Fitzgerald made the right choice when he moved the background information on Gatsby as Perkins preferred.

The implications for reading and writing in this consideration of the *Gatsby* manuscript become clear. Students suddenly see how the text grew and that the author made many composing and revising decisions. When they discover the changes for themselves, they are able to evaluate the quality of the choices and to understand that they have the power and right to make those evaluations. They also see that authors have doubts and rewrite, sometimes revising many times before the text finds its final form. Finally, they see in practice what peer review means. The peer becomes a collaborative author. Major, sometimes text-rending, suggestions are offered and considered, sometimes rejected and sometimes used. Thus, students' reading becomes more critical, and their writing and revising reflects an awareness of their own responsibilities as writers and as peer reviewers.

The *Gatsby* manuscript, like the other materials covered in the NEH project, gives many of the teachers a first view of the potential in the concepts of the manuscript-based approach to writing and literature instruction. They soon move from the roles of readers to the roles of scholars, digging for sources that would complement their own research and teaching concerns. As they make discoveries for themselves, they become more and more creative and resourceful. One group of teachers designed a presentation using a poem, a short story, a novel, and a play. They researched the manuscript materials and developed the assignments and connections among their materials as a group. The rationale for their presentation based on their research stressed the need for students to learn not to write too quickly or be easily pleased

with the first drafts of texts. Prewriting activities for the unit included a) writing about a famous person, past or present, of interest to the student, b) describing a favorite relative or best friend, c) jotting down in a journal unusual physical or personality characteristics of acquaintances, d) compiling a list of sensory details gleaned from daily surroundings, and e) writing about an embarrassing or dangerous experience.

Students then received sequential drafts of e.e. cummings' "Buffalo Bill's defunct," beginning with a piece of stationery scribbled with the words "Buffalo Bill is dead" and the word "defunct" written above "dead," proceeding through manuscript and typescript versions written over with many variations in word choice, and ending with the published version of the poem. Specific activities included giving students a version of the poem with blanks to fill in so that they could discuss the word choices they made as opposed to those chosen by Cummings, reading about William Cody to see why Cummings chose "defunct" rather than "dead," and deciding why he rejected other possible wordings such as "long hair like reindeer moss streaming from the old stone of his face," which he replaced with "he was a handsome man."

The writing assignment for this lesson asked students to describe a person, showing how the world views this person and how the person views himself or herself and then to pick out vivid words from the description and fashion a poem from those words, following the method of Cummings as illustrated in the manuscript and typescript. At this point, students could see the poem not only as a construction of the poet's mind but also as an illustration of the method they could use themselves as writers.

The second lesson illustrated in this unit worked with Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. The purpose of this lesson was to demonstrate how additions to and changes in a draft can affect the entire work. Dickens' original ending for the novel worried his friends Bulwer-Lytton and John Forster, who felt that a sparse and depressing ending would not work for the readers of *All the Year Around*, Dickens' weekly journal in which the chapters were appearing. In the lesson, students could discuss which of the endings worked best for them and how the endings changed the rest of the novel. They could then turn to their own writing to see how major changes in the ending would affect their work, consulting with their peer reviewers to discover whether they had read their audiences correctly.

The unit next turned to teaching students when to delete material from a text. Students need to learn to distinguish between functional details that drive a work forward and extraneous details that interfere with its overall progression. Students often lack the ability to make value judgments about the support they use for their arguments or the illustrations they choose for their explanations. John Updike's drafting process for the short story "A Sense of Shelter" provides an ideal mechanism for teaching students this distinction. Updike wrote the initial description of his hero five times, deleting and altering details each time. Using these typescripts for group discussions, students could judge which deletions the author might have made and then compare their judgments with those in the Updike drafts. Students' agreement or disagreement with the author would matter less than their reasons for making the choices they made. The writing assignment for this lesson could ask students to create their own descriptive essays and then work together in groups to make judgments about which details were functional and which could be safely deleted.

The final lesson in this unit applied to the discovery processes of writers, especially an author's discovery of a most appropriate structure for a work. Tennessee Williams restructured *The Glass Menagerie* several times before he was satisfied with the play. Students would have the outline of an early draft of the plays as well as Williams' working outline of *The Gentleman Caller*, a fairly late but not final version of the play. Discussion for this lesson could center around how Williams arrived at the final outline for the play and what he was discovering as he worked through the various plans. The students could then produce plans for papers of their own and discuss in groups whether the plans would work in the order presented or whether alterations should be made.

This one example of the application of manuscript materials shows that the teachers integrated their scholarship in the library with their knowledge of their students' reading and writing processes to produce classroom plans that would move students naturally from the comparisons of versions of a text to decisions about their own writing. Teachers also have commented on the effect of the project on their own writing since they have been viewing literature and writing in the context of a manuscript culture. They, like their students, see that their own processes are comparable to those of writers whose works appear in classroom texts.

This realization has encouraged them in the eagerness to write up their research experiences for publication.

In addition, teachers have continued their scholarship beyond the period in which they are directly involved in the NEH project. One teacher flew to the Frost library in Massachusetts to examine the draft copies of "Design" she wanted for a lesson. Another appeared with her students on a Chicago radio broadcast from the Newberry Library made when her class visited the Newberry's exhibit of Arthurian manuscripts. Many of the teachers have presented workshops throughout Illinois and at the National Council of Teachers of English national conference on the discoveries they have made in their research on manuscripts, particularly with regard to the application of this research to the development of their students' abilities to write and to read literature. Several teachers who have been involved in the project will be using the manuscript-based approach to writing and literature instruction in theses and dissertations they plan to complete in the next year or two. Others have returned to graduate school to pursue the research begun in libraries and classrooms.

Perhaps the final criterion by which to judge any approach to teacher research is the degree to which its processes and results rejuvenate teachers and students. This belief is implicit in the observation at the outset of this discussion that teaching must entail learning, for rejuvenating teachers and students depends on the kind of excitement that comes only from learning. A primary obstacle faced by efforts to interest teachers in doing their own research is the widely held belief that research has little to do with teaching and that it is only appropriate for college and university faculty who must do it for tenure and promotion. The only way to address this obstacle is to persuade these teachers to try doing their own research and then to let them experience for themselves the sense of revitalization that can come from the discoveries they make. In this regard, our approach has been eminently successful as teacher after teacher who has experimented with it reports experiencing excitement as a result of the research they do, of its applicability to the classroom, and of the genuine involvement in learning that it gives them and their students. As one teacher put it at the conclusion of one of the NEH summer programs promoting the manuscript-based approach to teaching English, "After thirteen years' experience, I was beginning to go through the motions in the classroom. But the institute has changed my approach

to my own research and teaching, and it has given me new ideas and materials. I am more excited about starting the school year than I have been in a long time."

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