



WHEN PEER TUTORS WRITE ABOUT WRITING: LITERACY NARRATIVES AND SELF REFLECTION

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For many years, in the discipline of composition studies, students have been referred to in certain and common ways. Most of the professional literature seems to represent student writers as remedial - deficient in grammatical and creative skills and political awareness. While this attention to the basic student is important for many reasons (much can be learned about writing from students who are struggling to learn), it is also limited in its focus. We want to argue in this paper that the story of the proficient student also needs to be told, because there is much to be learned from it. In this paper, we will discuss the research we conducted on the proficient writer, using a training tool referred to by the College Writing Program at Lafayette College as the “literacy narrative” (See Appendix 1 and 2). As we hope to demonstrate, the proficient writer can provide composition studies with an invaluable resource.

This essay is organized into three sections. First, we provide background information about our college writing program. Second, we discuss how students have traditionally been represented in composition studies. And third, we consider the literacy narratives as a reflection of the attitudinal changes and the identi-

ties of our peer tutors. The literacy narrative assignment is undertaken every year by peer tutors in the College Writing Program at Lafayette College.¹ Later in our discussion, we will explain the importance of the literacy narrative materials for gaining an understanding of how students who provide support in writing to other students regard their own work as writers and as tutors of writing. We believe that our findings have significance for how the discipline of composition understands and represents the work of a “good writer.”

Background

We attend Lafayette College, a highly selective, small (roughly 2000 students), liberal arts college located in Easton, Pennsylvania. For many years, Lafayette College has had a strong commitment to writing instruction. In fact, writing courses have been offered since the mid-nineteenth century, instituted by the famed philologist Francis A. March. In the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, the head of the English Department, William W. Watt, was also the author of one of the most widely used composition textbooks in the country: *An American Rhetoric*. Also, since 1986, Lafayette College has had in place The College Writing Program, which provides support to various writing intensive courses across the curriculum. This support comes primarily in the form of the hiring, training, and supervising of undergraduate “Writing Associates.” Writing Associates are sophomores, juniors, and seniors from all disciplines who are assigned to a single course for an entire semester and who meet with every student in the course at least three times in one-on-one conferences. Writing Associates also meet regularly with the faculty member teaching the course to discuss writing assignments and methods of evaluation.

Theoretical Background and Contexts

Our research involved examining the writing of other Writing Associates. While examining the writing of our student colleagues, we became aware of the problems, issues, and difficulties that arise when talking for and representing others. When one talks for others, instead of letting others talk for themselves, one can easily misrepresent the group's concerns, attitudes, behaviors, etc. This has often happened in the field of composition. Composition scholars are often in a position of power where they discuss and reflect upon students - student writing, student attitudes, and even student behavior. Even though composition scholars often interact with students, they are not students. Therefore, they may unintentionally misrepresent students, because they do not allow the students to speak for themselves.

To determine how students have been traditionally represented in composition studies over the years, we reviewed academic essays from the 1930's to the present in *College Composition and Communication (CCC)* and *College English*.² We will briefly summarize our findings, which support the claims made by Marguerite H. Helmers in her important book, *Writing Students: Composition Testimonials and Representations of Students*, published in 1994. Furthermore, we are providing this background to establish how students have traditionally been understood in composition studies before we argue for a new representation of the student. Students have often been represented as "others" who are lacking various skills; however, this representation is problematic and even dangerous.

Helmers' main argument is that testimonials about student writing provided by teachers and professors - like those found in *College Composition and Communication* and *College English* - do not reflect reality, but are actually a genre with conventions that must be observed. However, these conventions are often not recog-

nized as such because the composition discourse community accepts them as second nature; they have become invisible to those who use them. Additionally, Helmers explains that these testimonials can be analyzed and divided into four parts: 1) an argument in favor of a teaching method is provided; 2) students are presented as characters who lack; 3) students are presented as having been transformed by the teacher; 4) the teacher is exalted as a hero. This format has several effects. First, it constructs students as faceless and transhistorical. Second, it creates a binary opposition between the teachers and the students. And third, it creates students as “others;” within this category of “otherness,” students are additionally said to be deviant, mystical, orientalized, or bestialized (Helmers 81). In light of her investigation, Helmers concludes that representations of students in testimonials should be understood as rhetorical rather than grounded in fact.

Through the course of our reviewing academic essays in *College Composition* and *Communication and College English*, we found certain trends that support the claims made by Helmers. As we discovered, during the 1930s-1950s, teachers discuss students as deficient in writing skills especially in grammar and mechanics. The following passage from Ruth Davies’ “A Defense of Freshmen” points to the common perception that students are lacking in these skills: “Are you a reader of freshmen themes? Do you find yourself nervous, run-down, and tired? Do you see red-pencil marks before your eyes, and are you haunted at night by dangling participles, split infinitives, disagreement between subject and verb, and comma splices? Do freshmen and their papers cause you palpitations and give you pain?” (*College English* 441). During this period, students are also described as lazy, cynical, and poorly prepared. None of the essays we reviewed from this time period offered any examples of student writing. As a result, the student voice is never heard; instead, teachers speak for and about their students.

In the 1960s-70s, students are still being labeled as deficient by compositionists, but the nature of that deficiency changes; instead of lacking grammatical and mechanical skills, they are now said to lack creative and inventive skills. For example, in her essay “Transforming the ‘Same Paper’ Syndrome,” Gayle Whittier discusses students’ *lack* of creativity, which leads to the “same paper syndrome:”

Most teachers of literature encounter students whose work in a given semester stagnates in quality and range. The depressing phenomenon of the “arrested” student occurs at every level of accomplishment: one may be just as arrested with a uniform sequence of A grades as with an unbroken series of D’s. Indeed, the “success” of the high grade essay tends towards a special kind of conservatism. (*College English* 151)

Student writing is first cited in the mid 1960s; however, in these years, student writing is typically inserted into an essay to support research claims or the argument. Very few examples of writing are examined in depth. And even then, examples that are provided tend to be written by women and minority students.

Finally, from the 1980s to the present student representation has not really changed much from its earlier years. One difference, however, is that a wide range of students are represented. While students continue to be described as deficient, they are now said to lack political awareness. For example, in her essay “Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone,” Min Zahn Lu addresses this issue of political awareness in the context of style. In this, she connects perceived errors to cultural differences. She writes: “In arguing for a multicultural approach to styles traditionally displaced to the realm of ‘error,’ I align my teaching with a tradition in ‘error’ analysis which views even ‘error-ridden’ student writing as texts relevant to critical approaches available in English Studies” (*CCC* 447).

Unlike the other examples we have used, Lu does not directly criticize students; instead, her explanation of the “errors” in student writing alludes to the common perception of educators that students lack political awareness.

In her essay, Lu discusses how the composition community has traditionally viewed “student” writers as being separate from “real” writers. According to Lu, when students write in a style that does not follow the conventions of academic discourse, they are thought to be making “errors” due to their lack of political awareness. She claims that this is due to the standard that educators often hold students to (but do not always abide by): the criteria that stipulates “until one can prove one’s ability to produce ‘error-free’ prose, one has not earned the right to innovative ‘style’” (CCC 446). Lu finds this standard as problematic, for educators, and thus their students, often fail to acknowledge the social and political forces that act on students’ writing styles. Ultimately, Lu believes that students will come to have a new understanding of style and a less negative view of the “errors” in their writing if they are given the opportunity to gain political awareness through a multicultural approach.

The trends we have discussed up to this point involve how students are represented, but another interesting trend concerns the type of student represented. That is, in *College English*, the articles mainly focused on first-year student writers. Beginning in the 1930s and through 1990s, many articles focused on how first-year composition courses should be structured to accommodate for the poor writing skills of first-year students. In addition to the focus on first-year writers, other articles focused on basic writers and the techniques needed to aid these writers. In only a few instances were “competent” or “experienced” writers the focus of study. While *College Composition and Communication* essays expanded the types of students discussed, the competent writer still remained nearly invisible. CCC articles mostly focused on basic or remedial

writers, although English as a Second Language (ESL) students, women students, minority students, non-traditional students, and first-year students were also discussed. Once again, only a few articles in *CCC* discussed the proficient college writers. In both *CCC* and *College English*, the type of students, regardless of their labeling, attended large state universities.

These findings suggest to us that the discourse community of composition has mainly constructed students as “others” who lack various skills and are in need of help from enlightened and heroic teachers and professors. More importantly, within this discourse community, teachers and professors hold the power. They often use that power to speak for and about students and, consequently, construct an image—a critical image—of students. Critical representations of students are further supported by the type of student the discourse community of composition chooses to discuss in their essays. Struggling or poor writers remain the focus. The preoccupation with “poor” and “struggling” students establishes these writers as the norm and disregards other students, such as competent college writers. We would argue that the traditional representations of students have undervalued and even ignored “competent” writers. As we will demonstrate, much can be learned from the “competent” writer. Therefore, the traditional representations of students are problematic and need to be altered in the current discourse on composition.

The Literacy Narrative

For the past 12 years, as part of an extensive training program, Writing Associates have been required to compose literacy narratives in which they each reflect upon their own development as individual writers throughout their educational histories. The literacy narrative assignment differs for new and experienced Writing Associates. Newly hired Writing Associates reflect on their entire

writing history, told as a story in chronological order. In order to facilitate such reflection, new Writing Associates are asked to consider eight areas:

- 1) their first writing experiences
- 2) the material conditions under which they have written (such as - the type of classes they have taken and the writing instruments used)
- 3) the types of writing they have been required to do
- 4) the types of writing they have done on their own
- 5) the reactions of other to their writing
- 6) how they feel about their writing and the reactions of others
- 7) how such feelings might have changed over the years
- 8) their experiences with academic writing at the college level

Experienced Writing Associates focus their reflection on the past year's writing experiences. Additionally, the assignment is designed to prepare them to help the year's new Writing Associates. Experienced Writing Associates are also given prompts to help focus their thoughts. They are asked to consider any (or all) of the following six ideas, divided into two main topics: their experiences as writers and their experiences as Writing Associates:

- 1) what classes have they taken and how might these have influenced their attitudes towards writing and how do they understand and perceive this work
- 3) in what instances could they see their writing identities or writing processes change or develop and to what do they attribute these changes
- 4) what experiences as a Writing Associate did they find to be challenging, formative, rewarding, etc.
- 5) how has being a Writing Associate changed their attitudes towards writing or their writing processes
- 6) how do they discuss writing with the students to whom they

were assigned and how have these discussions influenced their own writing or attitudes towards writing

Research and Analysis

Our research project focused on literacy narratives written in 1999, 2000, and 2001. We read and examined the narratives from two different perspectives. In the first, we looked for attitudinal changes over time, noting the assumptions about writing, tutoring, and education that the Writing Associates brought with them to the position and then how those assumptions changed from year to year. In the second, we looked for statements about “identity,” focusing on the ways in which Writing Associates view themselves as students, tutors, and tutors-as-students.

Attitudinal Changes

In the first approach, we examined literacy narratives for attitudinal changes over time. To assess such changes, we compared and contrasted the literacy narratives written by the same Writing Associate over the period of his or her employment (typically two or three years). Since we believe that it is necessary, when talking about students, to listen to what the students themselves have to say, we have selected a few passages from two of the literacy narratives, written by two Writing Associates, Greg Stazowski and Kate McGovern.

One assumption that many of the Writing Associates brought to the position is that academic writing is confining and creative writing is unrestricted. In Greg Stazowski’s first literacy narrative (written the summer before he became a Writing Associate), he makes several assumptions about writing, including the assumption mentioned above. In this, he suggests that creative writing is free from form and structure, while academic writing is confined by form and structure. In his literacy narrative he states:

From various newspaper-like articles, to comic book selections, I had found a way to disguise the subject matter in a means that stood out from others. Using these different presentation methods made writing fun for me because it could be personal and not a form style. Difficulties arose, however, when other teachers forced me to write their specific styles.

As his literacy narrative indicates, Greg views academic writing as formulaic and impersonal. Additionally, he identifies style with form. For Greg, writing should portray one's individuality; he felt that certain required forms eliminated that individual and personal aspect.

If we now turn to Greg's third literacy narrative (written after his second year as a Writing Associate), we can see how his assumptions and ideas about writing have changed. Within this narrative, Greg acknowledges that different genres have different purposes, and thus different forms, as well. He explains that he no longer views the required forms of academic writing as negatively as he portrayed in his first literacy narrative. In fact, Greg shows appreciation for such required forms in his statement: "In many instances, a 'typical' style of writing is exactly what these students need to develop, in order to eventually become successful in the world of design engineers." As can be seen, Greg's assumptions about the confining nature of structure and form present in his first literacy narrative are almost completely reversed in his third.

It is apparent that Greg's views about writing changed somewhere between his freshman and senior years. Quite possibly, this would have occurred even if he had not become a Writing Associate. As a student, Greg encountered various forms of writing; his work as a Writing Associate introduced him to the writing of other disciplines. By introducing him to the conventions of writing in many disciplines, working as a Writing Associate allowed him to understand and appreciate the differences in form and con-

vention between the different disciplines. We can speculate that this increased exposure to and education about various kinds of writing is what led Greg to understand and value the required forms of academic writing and, ultimately, changed his perceptions and assumptions about writing.

As can be seen by reading Kate McGovern's literacy narratives, her perceptions about writing also change, but in a different way. While Greg's assumptions were focused on writing, Kate's were more concerned with the work of a Writing Associate and who was qualified to do that work. In her first literacy narrative she writes, "I never considered myself a good writer. I just like doing it." Kate, like many other first-year Writing Associates, felt that, as a Writing Associate, she was supposed to be a perfect writer. She did not feel as though she was a "good writer" and therefore questioned her qualifications. Similarly, other Writing Associates questioned their ability as WAs, wondering how they could be expected to advise other students about writing when they did not believe that they were good writers themselves. This was the predicament that Kate faced. However, in her second literacy narrative, Kate explains how she reconciled this difficulty:

Coupled with my work with my assigned class through the WA program, I realized one of the most common misconceptions about the WA program, particularly the people involved in it. This is that all WA's must be excellent writers. . . . When I wrote my essay to become a WA, I placed a large amount of emphasis on the lack of self-confidence I had in my writing. . . . I still do not consider myself a good writer. What I have discovered, however, is that there is a large difference in my views about what a 'good writer' is. . . . Instead of being a good writer, I have come to the realization that I have developed a decent understanding of how a paper should come together.

As the result of her experience of working with other writers, Kate has come to recognize and denounce the “trap” that she, herself, fell into: the idea that Writing Associates must be perfect writers. Furthermore, through her realizations that Writing Associates should not, and cannot, be perfect writers Kate learned a greater lesson: good writing is not easy to define and, in most cases, lacks a clear definition. As we have seen, Kate’s work as a Writing Associate has changed her views about being a Writing Associate and, correspondingly, has changed her views about writing in general.

The Three Identities of a WA

While the first strategy allowed us to focus on attitudinal changes over time, the second produced, for us, the most interesting results. We learned that while most Writing Associates clearly understand their work as tutors as requiring complex negotiations of several kinds, they also had a difficult time articulating the exact nature of those negotiations. We believe that Writing Associates define themselves in three ways: student, tutor, and tutor-as-student. The student identity, we understand, as one who learns through classes, writing assignments, class work, and guidance from professors. The role of tutor, we understand, as one who teaches and helps others because they have expertise or knowledge that others need help accessing. The role of tutor-as-student, we understand, as one who combines both of these identities at the same time and learns through teaching or helping others. By providing help to students, the tutor is also learning something about himself or herself and his or her own writing processes.

If we examine the literacy narratives looking for these three identities, we can see how Writing Associates struggle with the tutor-student binary as traditionally understood, that is the tutor as a kind of teacher and the student as the learner. The tutor-student

binary is of importance because it so heavily permeates composition discourse community. While students are not the members of the discourse community who hold power—teachers and professors hold the power—they are still members of the discourse community, so they too are still influenced by its ideals. Therefore, it is difficult for Writing Associates to escape traditional teacher and student roles, reflect upon them, and call them into question.

We will first consider the student identity. Andrew Platt explains, “My past year of writing has been characterized by roughly three experiences - one a class, one my personal writing, and one my poetic writing.” He then continues to explain how being a student changed his perceptions of writing. The only mention of being a Writing Associate comes in the final paragraph when he mentions, “Of course, the implications of this for my work as a WA (or vice versa) are not terribly clear.” Andrew appears to solely identify with the student face. He attributes any change in his writing to class work, personal writing, and poetic writing. He makes no mention of his Writing Associate work until the end of his paper, and, even then, he does not clearly relate his student status with his Writing Associate status.

Other Writing Associates represent themselves primarily as students but also touch upon their experiences as peer tutors. For example, one Writing Associate explains, “Due to the nature of the writing assignments I completed over the past year, I have begun to see writing more as a tool and means for exploration rather than a task.”

On the last page, this WA finally discusses how being a Writing Associate influenced her own writing:

Over the past year, my work as a Writing Associate has also contributed to the evolution of my writing identity. After, “WA-ing” for a first year seminar class and reading numerous papers with no thesis, structure, or organization, I learned to

appreciate a writing tool I previously disregarded, outlining. Although I always would scribble a few ideas down on paper before I began to write, I never really made much of an outline for my papers until I saw, first-hand, how beneficial it was to the student with whom I was working. This technique proved essential to me when I set out to tackle my own structural disaster in my Renaissance Literature paper.

Within her narrative, this Writing Associate focuses on her student identity; however, she does mention how the tutor position helped her appreciate outlining. Still it is interesting to note that she ends this passage by referring to her Renaissance Literature paper. Therefore, she still seems to view herself primarily in student position.

The second identity we will consider is the tutor identity. Art Lathers, for example, explains:

When I met with the class for the first time, I warned them about the different writing style involved. I said that the format of the papers was different than other forms of writing and told the class not to worry excessively. Professor X immediately said to me in front of the class “Art, we’re going to have to work on these introductions.” I questioned him about it later, and he explained that the writing style was not much different than other classes; I never believed that. My conferences with the students only revealed the truth of my initial warning. . . . Unfortunately, the majority of my WA conferences did not focus on the body of the paper. I spent all of my effort focusing and narrowing the thesis, which I could not effectively do anyway.

Within this excerpt, Art discusses how he tried to help students in the class. Through the words “I spent all my effort,” Art suggests that he is teaching the students by exerting his effort to help them. Not only does Art identify himself as a teacher, he also seems to

struggle with the professor for “teacher” power and status. Art seems to keep himself firmly planted within the tutor position and gives no recognition that he learned from being a Writing Associate.

Mark Coslett’s narrative slightly varies from the first example. He discusses some of the dangers of located oneself in the tutor position. He explains:

I did mention that I must be careful when talking about structure and style. I have caught myself pressing my style onto the papers I read as a WA. Only after my first semester as a WA did I notice this dictatorship. Now I let the writers be themselves. I merely provide a crutch for their writing. While reading the paper, I note the style. In the conference, I discuss the style of the paper with the writer. I make the writer aware that he or she has a style, and I point out some details found in that style.

Mark appears to be aware of his power as a tutor. He recognizes that he was pressing his style onto students, perhaps “helping” the students too much. Yet it is interesting to note that even after he recognizes his “dictatorship,” he continues to talk about himself in the tutor position. He remains in the tutor position; he just seems more aware of the problems that might result in the tutor situation. Mark’s excerpt shows how powerful the traditional binary is to escape.

The last identity to consider is that of tutor-as-student. Writing Associates who identify themselves as tutor-as-students often understand and attempt to transcend the traditional binary. Vilas Menon writes:

The WA-writer interdependence grew even stronger in the spring of 2001. Prior to the semester, the last time I had written a non-engineering paper in English was the spring of 1999. Thus, when I had to write a 12-page paper for my pol-

itics class, I found, to my shock, that it was going to be a major challenge. I could not rely on a present organization sequence (as in most engineering reports), and I had to develop my own outline. Here, being a WA was a tremendous help. Although I had not written such a paper for the last 18 months, I had read plenty of them. When I had my next set of conferences, I focused on the organization and progression of each student's paper. During the actual meetings, I asked the students how they had decided to structure their paper. A week later, I got to write my own paper, and tried many of the different organizational techniques I had learned during the conferences. I asked myself, "what about this method?" and "why do this."

Vilas acknowledges that Writing Associates and writers share some sort of interdependence connection. He explains that he learned from the writers he worked with, which indicates that Vilas views himself as a learning student. Even though he was being a tutor and asking questions to help the students, he was also acting as a student and learning at the same time. Furthermore, Vilas seems confident that he can and will learn from the students he is helping.

And, finally, Scott Featherman also identifies as a tutor-as-student. He writes:

All kidding aside, my experiences over the past year have demonstrated how valuable being a WA has been for my own writing. I remember that in one of the conferences I had this year, I was trying to explain to a student that the writing lacked a certain "flow." When I used that word, she asked me to articulate, and after thinking for a few moments, I told her that her writing lacked flow because through asides, she was varying from the logical proof of her thesis that was the point of her paper. After saying those words, I immediately realized

that I had made a personal revelation on a weakness in my own writing. It was at that moment that I realized why I am a WA, knowledge of self, rather than the rather large increase in stipend.”

Within this excerpt, Scott notes that he learned from being a Writing Associate. By explaining to a student, Scott became a student himself. So, even though he at first puts himself in the tutor position, he combines roles and acknowledges he can learn and be a student. Therefore, Scott appears to have broken the traditional binary and crossed into the tutor-as-student role.

As our analysis reveals, each Writing Associate has learned something about himself or herself and his or her own writing processes through the experience of working to help other students with their writing. While the Writing Associates may not always consciously understand what they have learned and while they might have difficulty articulating what they have learned, the literacy narratives serve to highlight much of what the Writing Associates have learned and the processes through which they have learned.

In fact, what the literacy narratives ultimately show is that Writing Associates learn from being WAs; they learn about writing, in general, and their own writing processes from the work they do to help other students. First, Writing Associates learn merely because they are introduced to different disciplines and genres. Because they are relied upon to advise other students with their writing, Writing Associates must become informed themselves. Most Writing Associates are not familiar with all the intricacies and conventions of all the disciplines that they will work with. Therefore, they learn about the particulars of a given discipline so that they can better help the students with whom they are working. Second, Writing Associates learn while directly helping those students. They learn the definitions of grammatical terms and how to

articulate what the writing needs in order to help other students. This sharpens their own understanding of writing. Furthermore, by constantly surveying the writing of others with a critical eye, Writing Associates begin looking at their own writing more critically. They tend to see some of the same mistakes in their own writing and they then follow the same advice that they give to the students with whom they are working. Because of this process, Writing Associates learn about what their own writing needs and how to improve them, as well as the process of writing in general.

Conclusions

Our research has brought to light the importance of studying both literacy narratives and competent college writers. In fact, we would argue that any writing program that involves undergraduate tutors (and possibly even graduate teaching assistants) would benefit from the incorporation of the literacy narrative assignment into its training program. The literacy narrative allows students an opportunity to create their own narratives and to speak in their own voices. It also allows students to explore and reflect on the often-unconscious learning process. And it invites students to step back and examine their roles, which allows students a greater level of self-reflection.

But another point we want to make is the importance of such work - the careful reading and interpretation of “proficient” writing by “proficient” writers - for the field of composition studies as a whole. As we noted earlier in our essay, the composition discourse community tends to render the “good writer” invisible, focusing instead on the ill prepared writer - the “basic” writer who “lacks” certain skills or is unfamiliar with the conventions of academic discourse. That emphasis is not surprising, and we do not mean to disparage it. After all, narratives that move from failure to success, from lack to fulfillment, are good stories, interesting to

write and compelling to read. Certainly, there is much to learn about writing from challenges faced by the unprepared or confused writer.

Still, we would argue that there is a great deal that can be learned about writing from listening to what the “good writer” has to say. For example, from our research we learned that the traditional understanding of the teacher/student relationship is powerfully imprinted on students. To transform this relationship from a binary into a dialogical one, much work must be done, and this work, we would argue, is best initiated through extended self-reflections provided by such instruments as literacy narratives. Still, this is not all we learned about “good writing” from examining these narratives. We also learned that students’ conceptions about writing abilities and writing components change over time due to various forces. Most importantly, we learned that student writers need to foster self-reflection by questioning and reflecting upon how their writing histories and their understandings of writing influence their work as student writers and peer tutors.

All these considerations point to the importance of educators’ listening to what students themselves have to say about their development as writers. We sought to do the same in our essay and studies. The literacy narrative is one tool that allows students a forum through which they can explore their development as writers. But there are certainly others, such as portfolios and journals. These devices of writing, reflecting, talking back, talking about, and self-representing all have in common the ability to serve as what Linda Alcoff refers to as a “countersentence.” Alcoff believes that instead of speaking about or for others, we should speak to others so that they can “produce a countersentence that can suggest a new historical narrative” (23). In other words, students need to be allowed the opportunity to engage in the rhetoric of the composition field, so that they can create more accurate representations of them-

selves.

As we have explored throughout this essay, when students are allowed to create “countersentences,” we see a new image of the student appear. We see students with intelligent, well thought out ideas concerning writing, individuality, and learning. The discourse community of composition can then learn about the concerns of student writers and student writing from the writers themselves. Just as we, as students, listened to our student colleagues’ voices and learned a great deal, so do we, in turn, invite you to listen to the voices of others.

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Notes

1. We will be referring to our peer tutors throughout the essay as “Writing Associates” and “WAs,” not peer tutors. Within the College Writing Program at Lafayette College, we have made a conscious decision not to use the term “tutor” because students at Lafayette College have come to associate tutors with those who work with remedial students. At Lafayette, we wished to depart from that common understanding; we chose “associate” so that both students would have the understanding that they are considered as equals, working together towards a common goal.
2. We found approximately 94 articles that were relevant to our study. We have selected a few articles that we found most helpful.

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Appendix 1

NEW WRITING ASSOCIATES

Your Literary Narrative

Project for Workshop

Due –

Format: 1 diskette and 1 hard copy

Describe your history as a writer, from your first attempts to write in (or even before) elementary school to your experiences as an "academic writer" in college courses. (PLEASE do not refer to faculty members at Lafayette College by name.) Focus most intensely on the experiences-positive and negative-that are most meaningful to you.

To construct such a personal history—a narrative of your growth in literacy—you should consider the material conditions under which you have written (the kinds of classes, the kinds of implements such as pen, pencil, typewriter, and computer), the types of writing you have been required to do or have done on your

own, the reactions of others to your writing, and your feelings about writing and about the reactions of others to your writing (and whether or how such feelings have changed over the years).

Rather than record every detail and capture every memory (though we do want you to be thorough), you may want to identify a handful of **formative** experiences from your earliest school years to college courses that have shaped you into the kind of writer you now believe you are.

Here are some questions to start you thinking. Please do not attempt to answer them all. Also, please construct this story as a story, arranged in chronological order (“my earliest memories are . . . “ “in fourth grade Mr. Grimley . . . “ “my high school physics teacher assigned . . . “ “my first year seminar was like a bucket of cold water thrown in my face . . . “).

What was your very first writing act, and when did it occur? What are your earliest memories about writing? What kinds of “school writing” (genres like argument and research paper) have you been asked to produce over the years, and how clearly have these genres been explained to you? Have you ever used “creative” writing forms or more informal types of expression, like journals and freewriting (and if so, when), and did you do this kind of work on your own or was it assigned? What kinds of comments have teachers made about your writing over the years? Have you ever shown your writing to friends or family? How have their comments or teacher comments made you feel? Have you tended to agree or disagree with them, and why? When you graduated from high school, did you feel you were “adequately prepared” for college writing (and what did the idea of “adequate preparation” mean to you)? What expectations about college level writing did you have? Did your first year writing experiences at Lafayette College confirm or challenge those expectations, and how? What has been your best experience as a writer? Your worst experience?

The purpose of writing such a narrative is to reflect on your own history as a writer. It is a rare opportunity to understand how you got to where you are today, as a new Writing Associate who will soon serve as an informed reader of other peoples' writing. As a Writing Associate you will have to deal, implicitly or explicitly, with the effects of other writers' histories.

Your narrative should be approximately 7 typed pages, double spaced.

Appendix 2

RETURNING WRITING ASSOCIATES

Writing Like a WA

Project for Workshop

Due –

For this year's project, describe your history as a writer **over the last year**. Since in the past we received from you a "global" history of yourself as a writer, it makes sense to ask for a focused and detailed history of the recent past which could serve as an addendum—but also as a development of some of the questions posed and discoveries made previously. It also makes sense to focus only on the 2000-2001 year since some of you have already written about '99-'00. Finally, we ask you consciously to include new WAs in your audience and to think of this paper as a presentation to them of what it might be like to "Write Like a WA"—at least the way you have done.

As you compose, you should apply in detail many of the same questions from the first assignment to your work as a writer from August 2000 to the present. (The old assignment is provided here for you.) You may refer to some of the same instances about which you wrote previously, and you may recall new early experiences, but if you do you should attempt to place them in a new context, as background to the featured discussion of 2000-2001.

In this paper, you should review in detail the most crucial writing and WA experiences you had last year. **For example:** Which, if any, writing experiences would you call formative? typical? difficult? rewarding? In which experiences could you see yourself developing, changing, or establishing a writing identity? a different writing process? What obstacles did you encounter? new disciplines? new expectations from different audiences? new research methodologies or theories to apply? new expectations of your own? Give some serious thought, too, to how working as a WA played a role in last year's writing history. Did you find yourself challenging the advice you give out to other writers? Breaking rules you had thought were absolute? Turning to other WAs for advice? Mirroring any behaviors of the writers you conferred with? Asking different questions of your professors?

When you saw your first student writers in conference, what authority did you draw on to help them? Did any of last year's writing experiences bring your WA-work into clearer focus? Or prompt you to approach your conferences differently? How do you see yourself beginning the academic year now? What kinds of summer experiences might play a role in your writer's history? What is some of the most valuable advice you could share with new WAs?

Once again, the purpose of writing such a narrative is to reflect on your own history as a writer—this time your recent history as both writer and WA. Doing so will heighten your awareness of the fact that each writer you see has his or her own history, much more than what the single draft you work with in a conference will reveal. Furthermore, your reflection on your recent WA/writer experiences will prepare you to lend a hand to the new WAs coming on board this fall.

Your narrative should be approximately 7 typed pages, double spaced.