

## **(RE)READING IDENTITY NARRATIVES: DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR NEGOTIATING AUTHORITY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM**

*Megan Trexler*  
*West Chester University*

As part of an independent study on the teaching of college writing in Spring 2006, I became a teaching intern in a general education composition class called Critical Writing: The Multidisciplinary Imagination (WRT206). My role as a teaching intern changed as the semester progressed. In the beginning of the semester, I did the assigned course work and acted as if my role in this class was that of any other student. As the semester progressed, my role transitioned to that of tutor. I worked with the students during activities and moved around to various groups of students to assist them with assignments. By the end of the semester, I was leading in-class conferences with groups of students and even taught a lesson on the use of imagination in a specific text that the students were required to read for class. Throughout the semester, I met with the teacher (Dr. Victoria Tischio) to discuss the class and readings on composition theory and pedagogy from *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. My experiences in this independent study gave me insight into the challenges and resistances that shape my rhetorical interactions with students and helped me demystify my own complex experiences as a teaching intern in this general education research-based writing course.

This article focuses on my self-reflective process of unraveling my narrative of identity as I searched for ways to successfully negotiate the conflicting power relationships in the classroom. The term “narrative” works purposefully in my argument, helping me theorize “identity.” Like writing a narrative, I author the ongoing story of my identity through the interactions and situations that call my identities into question and compel me to deconstruct them to reach a greater awareness of their complexity.

My argument is divided into three parts. In Part I reflect on my experiences and theorize my formation of identity in relation to authority; here I draw most directly on Lad Tobin’s ideas regarding the ways narratives are involved with identity. After this process approach to identity, in Part II I look at the processes that teachers follow when creating authority, using feminist theories. Part III theorizes student perspectives and rereads teachers’ responses to student behavior, including my own interactions with students. In Part IV, I provide strategies that teachers can use to develop responses to the dynamic nature of authority in the classroom.

Throughout, I use data collected from interviews with several faculty in composition and rhetoric at my home university to help broaden my perspectives on my experiences as a teaching intern in WRT206. My overall conclusion is that it is important for all teachers to be aware of the ways that their various identities (gender, race, class, age, institutional status, and so on) influence their use of authority in the classroom, so they can make productive use of the tensions that inevitably arise.

## **Part I. Approaching Authority through the Chaos of Multiple Identities**

The establishment of authority, although a common obstacle for teachers of varying identities and teaching methodologies, can be more difficult for those assuming positions of authority for the first time. As a teaching intern, one of the first things I became aware of in the classroom was the tenuous nature of my authority. For inexperienced teachers, conflicting feelings of authority could result from the demand to perform authority in a way that could ask them to juggle “two seemingly incomparable personas” (Powers-Stubbs 312). bell hooks explains that the role of a teacher requires that individuals develop authority: “The professor will always be more responsible because the larger institutional structures will always ensure that accountability for what happens in the classroom rests with the teacher,” but when teachers proceed toward authority without first reading the intersections of their own identities, authority can become an even more problematic issue (8).

If institutional accountability rests with teachers, then careful attention to the intersections between identity and authority becomes especially important for new teachers who lack experiences to draw upon when negotiating power in the classroom. As I began this independent study and assumed a role that was somewhere between student and teacher, I possessed limited insight into the complex nature of authority and initially failed to broaden my perspective to consider related issues. I could not draw on prior experiences as a teacher to handle accountability and authority, so I looked closely at my identity. I realized I could now approach these interactions as both a teaching intern and a student. This sense of double consciousness—perceiving and being perceived as both a teaching intern and a peer—provided two locations from which I could reread my narrative of identity.

In order to approach these interactions with my double consciousness, I began to reconsider interactions with students from these fragmented perspectives, specifically those of student, classmate, and teacher. As Michelle Payne reflects on the construction of her own concept of self, she draws on the theoretical frameworks of social constructionism and post-structuralism to argue, “An individual is more than a unitary, coherent self—she or he is ‘constructed’ of all the prior texts and prior discourses she or he has engaged with. I have very little difficulty agreeing with this; my sense of self has always seemed fragmented, fluid, and dialogic” (403). Like Payne, I also have little difficulty in recognizing the texts and discourses that write my narratives of identity and construct my own sense of self within this classroom. Nonetheless, I experienced conflict and tension between my roles as student and teaching intern at the start of the independent study. This more complex perspective prevented simple readings of my claims to authority and interactions with other students.

Looking back, I see that this divided perspective broadened my interpretations of specific encounters with students (who were also my peers). One experience that brought the divisions between me-as-student and me-as-teaching-intern into focus occurred when one student continually waited for me after class, despite my emphasis that I did not want him to accompany me. I sensed that he was attempting to challenge my position. I naively expected that students would treat me in a professional manner; however, this experience (among others) highlighted the fact that my authority as teaching

intern was less solid than I thought. One example of my tenuous authority occurred on the day after my first attempt at leading the class through an activity. I received an online message that said, “Very informative class yesterday . . . any chance you can become our permanent teacher?” Although it is hard to read tone in email messages, I sensed a sarcastic note in this message that seemed to suggest that my lesson was anything but informative, which made me feel a little angry. It also read as flirtatious, which undermined my authority on yet another level, making me feel disrespected. While these students’ aggressive behavior left me confused about their aims, I was reluctant to see these acts as sexist because I wanted to cling to a more democratic model of classroom relations. I chose to avoid these interactions and downplayed the inappropriateness of their behavior; however, I was not sure if I should read these situations as threatening to my authority. I was caught off guard by these incidents and struggled to form an appropriate response. I was not able to articulate the reasons for my discomfort. My “instinctive” response was avoidance because I was not aware of the depth of this situation or the way that my identities might be deeply involved in these exchanges. I repeatedly declined invitations to date students from the class, asserting that it would not be appropriate because of my position. I had an immediate emotional response to these interactions as challenges to my authority, without considering alternative explanations for their behavior. Over time, I questioned whether students would have sent such an online message or attempted to walk me to class if I had been a male teaching intern. I started to wonder if these male students felt challenged by a female teaching intern who resembled a peer but actually held authority over them within the classroom. These possible explanations for their aggressive and disruptive behavior are complicated by my identities as peer, teaching intern, and woman. Before I could understand students’ reasons for these actions, I needed to consider the ways that students interpreted these aspects of my identity. I will later reread students’ perspectives on these identities to gain a more complex view of these interactions.

Through this project, I revisited these comments and experiences with an eye toward seeking the productive questions that might emerge from them. I needed to expand my reading of these interactions to consider gendered identity, context, or possibilities that multiple readings could coexist without classifying any of them as misreadings. At first I was reluctant to believe that students would allow their personal (sexual or, worse yet, sexist) feelings to override the respect that they should bring to the classroom setting, and therefore, was unwilling at first to recognize that I was being harassed. I slowly became aware that I needed to develop a more subtle approach to authority, which led me, under Tischio’s guidance, to begin reading feminist theory and pedagogy. I was influenced by Diana Fuss’ claims that “Nowhere are the related issues of essence, identity, and experience so highly charged and so deeply politicized as they are in the classroom” (Johnson 388).

Decisions regarding the type of authority that best works for the teacher, the students, and the course objectives will not always be obvious to new teachers, but if left unaddressed, they could potentially creep up during the course of the semester and present themselves when least expected. I gained some insight on this issue through an interview with Juanita Comfort in which she said, “There are a number of different issues in terms of establishing authority that hit you in the face. . . . Unless some-

body really gives you a heads-up beforehand . . . we're all walking blindly into that." With these interactions behind me, the process of revisiting these experiences to read them with an eye toward issues of authority became especially significant for preventing further problems from unexpectedly recurring later in the semester.

Reflection eventually brought clarity and greater insight to complex dealings with authority. It helps to think of interactions as the texts that are written between the students and the teacher (or intern) that can be (re)read and revised. As an inexperienced teacher, I read others' identity narratives (both in published scholarship and through personal interviews) as a way of developing further insights, helping me create a synthesis of our experiences. Multiple readings of texts complicate our process of meaning making, but with the process of analyzing others' narratives, beginning teachers can extract enough strategies and insights to develop our own responses to the texts. To create better responses to my own experiences, I drew on some of the premises of process pedagogy, incorporating Tobin's idea that process encourages using "chaos in meaning-making" (3). Rather than looking at chaos as a problem, chaos should be approached as an opportunity for discovery and creation of new meaning. I learned to "use the chaos" that was manifested between the students and me and that arose from the presence of my multiple identities (intern, student, young, female, etc.) in this classroom to discover a range of responses for future interactions with students.

Over time, I came to see that my classroom authority is based on multiple identities; talking with professors helped me draw on the identity-authority relation in others to effectively develop my own strategies for establishing authority in the classroom. Applying process pedagogy to my experiences, I read my experiences as texts and located my voice among many others, offering an effective synthesis of identity and authority. Because I brought identities such as peer, tutor, Honors Program student, and English major, among many others, to the classroom, I was trying, at first, to understand how to locate myself in relation to the students, thinking that I needed to take on only one role in the class—intern. The students might also have been coping with their own confusion as to how they could understand my atypical role in the classroom, and consequently, respond to my presence. My sense of a peer relationship with some students became chaotic because I determined my interactions with them by drawing on prior relationships; I had previously tutored some of them with another on-campus tutoring program, and I had taken classes with others. For students who had taken honors courses with me for the past three years, my role as a teaching intern created confusion regarding how this position changed the nature of our in-class interactions from our established relationships in other classes. A theoretically based reading of the chaos helps me develop a better understanding of myself and my position in the classroom, a greater awareness of how students read and respond to my conflicting identities, and improved management of my presence in the classroom, bringing about better results for me and the students.

## **Part II. Constructing Knowledge through Experience**

Before I even stepped foot into the classroom as a teaching intern in a college composition course

I questioned my knowledge on the course concepts and my ability to productively tutor and teach students of my own age. *Critical Writing: The Multidisciplinary Imagination* asked students to look at writing as an inventive process in which one writing assignment leads to the next and to think about how imagination is used in different disciplines. These course goals were challenging for both the students and me because they asked us to think against common sense in some ways and challenged us to reconsider imagination as an important part of knowledge making in different fields. In addition, since I was the same age as some of these students (unlike when I tutor in developmental writing classes), I found it natural to identify with them as peers. As a young teaching intern, the inherent peer-to-peer relationship seemed difficult to transcend, just as peer relationships can occur for young teachers or tutors. In an interview with me, Merry Perry describes a similar sense of conflict between her identities as a student and teacher. Confusion arose for her when conflicting interests of both identities emerged in her interactions: “In the beginning [of my teaching career] I wanted to be their friend. And then I had to learn, I am not their friend, I’m their teacher.” Perry believes that she was still identifying herself as a student: “Even though I was older than them, I could still slip into the persona of student. So you are jumping back and forth from all the identities.” From this discussion I was able to gain insight on how I might be similarly moving back and forth across these two identities in ways that cause confusion for me and the students. In this way, I was able to utilize her experiences to give me greater control over my identities in the classroom.

Teachers’ lack of understanding regarding their identities complicates the process of negotiating authority. To emphasize the significance that experience plays in teachers’ strategies for locating themselves within classrooms, Cheryl Johnson references Diana Fuss’ claim that “‘Experience’ emerges as the essential truth of the individual subject and personal ‘identity’ metamorphoses into knowledge. Who we are becomes what we know” (388). While I am not suggesting that we must limit our ways of knowing to the use of personal experiences alone, experience does provide us with opportunities to locate ourselves within classrooms, negotiate authority in relation to our identity, and respond to students. Most significantly, experience presents us with interactions to reflect upon, thus creating more complete learning situations for students and ourselves.

The knowledge gained from other teachers can help novice teachers better understand the identities they embody, the expectations students put on them through reading those identities, and ways of familiarizing unexpected identities that teachers and students bring to the classroom. Referencing Adrienne Rich, Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie claim that “theorizing begins with the material, not transcending the personal, but claiming it” (7). However, claiming the personal often involves retelling our narratives from a specific location within these experiences. Kirsch and Ritchie go on to make a case for the value of the personal in “validating experience as a source of knowledge.” They advocate the need for locating ourselves within our research, which can take the form of our experiences, because this process acts as a stimulus for understanding our motivation and promotes self-reflexivity. Although they argue the need for including personal experience in composition studies, they warn against limiting our focus to the experience itself by failing to broaden the critical reflection to the social relation-

ships and identities that inform the way we read these experiences (9). Combining Kirsch and Ritchie's claim for the necessity of critical self-reflection and contextualization with Tobin's ideas on process and reading narratives of identity enabled me to develop methods for rereading my experiences more productively. I contextualized my own experiences by engaging in personal interviews that positioned my experience within a range of other teachers' experiences of race and gender. By engaging in a process of telling our truths or personal experiences, we narrate the stories of these experiences from certain locations. In the act of retelling these stories, teachers become more cognizant of their location within experiences and how this location influences their readings, thus becoming more reflective on situations and making productive use of chaos.

Experienced composition teachers can attest to the complexity of issues surrounding authority, as Comfort, who brings twenty years of teaching experience to the classroom, explains: "Every time you enter a new teaching situation, even if you've had teaching experience in the past, you still have to rethink authority." Comfort demonstrates that reflection on experience leads to new insights that can help teachers develop a better sense of how to manage the variability of identity and authority in the classroom. Experience provides a basis for locating ourselves within the classroom and negotiating authority; the process of "telling our own truths" (as Tobin puts it) or theorizing the material (as Kirsch and Ritchie describe) pushes us farther because it takes into account the contextual nature of authority and the variables among teachers and populations of students.

During an interview, Hyoejin Yoon elaborates on the complexity of her identity, emphasizing how social context shapes her sense of self as a teacher: "I don't consider it just an embodied identity because I think of identity not as . . . essential. I really consider identity as something that is formed by society and things that we learn by moving through time, space, and different situations." Yoon offers a view of identity that encourages a continual process of rethinking the way our identities are constantly changing as we grow and develop as people and professionals. For all teachers, classroom presence is anything but static; like Yoon, as we move through our own lives and careers, we must adapt to the ways that our identities change, possibly altering the way we negotiate authority.

Drawing on the knowledge of these more experienced teachers, I could now see how the slippage in my identities needed to be more carefully managed, and I could imagine how authority gets tied up with these roles. With each interview, I was invited into another individual's world of experience, which provided valuable insights that I might never experience in quite the same way because of the differences in our identities and lenses of perception. As I slowly accumulated more experiences through interviews with professors, my understanding of my own experiences became slightly more complex and clear at the same time. By synthesizing their vast experiences with my own and reflecting on each fragmented experience in relation to mine, I was able to locate my conflicts within a larger body of experience.

### **Part III. Responding to Difference: (Re)reading from Students' Perspectives**

Because teachers can only speculate on the cause or purpose of students' behavior, teachers' mul-

multiple readings of their own responses become increasingly necessary in reevaluating the tone and message of those responses. Suzanne Diamond emphasizes teachers' abilities to control their choice in how they respond to resistance when she says, "Searches after origins [of students' resistance] are often bound to be futile, and I believe this is true in the quest to know definitively how and why students resist, it is in our responses . . . that we can be most effective" (28). Diamond goes on to say that the causes of student resistance are often "speculative," but our responses have the power to "make a huge difference in classroom functioning."

The idea of social construction of the student gaze is especially significant. Students have preconceptions about the "teacher," based on their prior experiences, attitudes, and predispositions toward learning. John Haber explains Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze in cinema this way: "The look is defining, but the male is always the looker, while the female is the observed" (3). If Mulvey's concept is applied to the classroom, then the students act as "active subjects" imposing their readings on their teachers as "passive objects" of their "desires." However, this essentialist reading of the observed and the observer can be disrupted and complicated by strategies that teachers can use to develop voice. Comfort attributes some potential resistance in her classes to the distance between students' socially informed expectations and the reality of the teacher's identity when she explains, "I think that the more the students' teachers resemble whatever kind of notion or preconceived stereotype . . . they happen to have in their heads going into the classroom, the more that the teacher, when he or she walks in, matches up with that, I think the easier time it will be." As an African American woman, Comfort has faced resistance from students who may feel uncomfortable because they lack prior experience with teachers who do not fit the white middle-class norm depicted in films and found in many suburban schools. The students' gaze is constructed through gendered as well as racial and class-based preconceptions. The normative gaze isn't just male in the classroom, but also white and middle class.

My identity, as read through my physical presence in the classroom as a young, white female teaching intern of about the same age as the students, may have invoked from the students the most traditional of male readings; read in this way, I became the object of desire—the teacher and lover fused as one—which negated my own desire to be taken seriously. If I was attempting to gain similar authority to that of a teacher (not lover), then the obvious differences between my presence and that of most teachers (who students recognize as having authority due to age, gender, title, etc.) might have worked against me. The "conferred" authority that my position granted (as "intern" I am aligned with the teacher) was "overwritten" by students' readings of my physical characteristics such as age and gender, which might have been different from the students' socially constructed expectations for the typical profile of a teacher or teaching intern. Tischio describes the ways that physical presence can work against institutional authority: "Race and gender complicate issues of power in the classroom for educators, who find that their physical presence is overwritten with difference in ways that undermine their authority as teachers" (28). The students who expected a certain type of teacher could be challenged by the presence that I brought to a position that is usually occupied by those with very different identities. In response to this challenge, some students might have attempted to construct their meaning of

my role through other methods, perhaps from placing me into categories that lent themselves to the understanding of my identities. This demonstrates that the students' gaze, although socially constructed, is not unitary, but that it, too, is complicated by context, which, in this case, seemed to cause confusion for them and me, as we all struggled to rectify apparent discrepancies between certain aspects of my identity, such as age and degree status, and my position as teaching intern.

Students grasped for methods to create meaning from the confusion of my various identities, seeking any identifiable symbols of peerness as a way of associating me with an already existing category in their conceptual framework. Likewise, Yoon offers her reading on what she interprets as students' processes of assimilating her identity as a young female; she describes a student's evaluation that commented on her student-like attire. Although she felt that the student was showing appreciation for her approachability, Yoon says, "I also read the subtext of her comment as an impulse . . . to include me in her world of experience. My clothing was perhaps, a contradiction to what the rest of my body signaled; perhaps she was simply noting the one thing that made me familiar to her" ("Reflections" 21). If students focus on the visible aspects of my identity or attune themselves to the discourse markers that suggest our belonging to a community of peers, then my former readings of their behavior as challenges to my authority must also be read as attempts to bring me into their "world of experience." And if this assimilative process emphasizes my peer identity more than my role as a teaching intern, then students' interactions with me might follow patterns of those between peers rather than the expected student-teacher relations.

Like Yoon's, my rereading of my narrative of identity, including the incidents that I labeled as challenges to authority, becomes slightly more complicated when I consider the students' perspectives and socialized expectations. From multiple readings, the online message that I received from one of the "resistant" students, which said, "How about that [other resistant student], I think he thought you were eye-flirting with him . . . he has a big head it seems," could reveal a misinterpretation of my behavior, possibly caused by a misreading of my role as a friend or peer, or even as available female or potential girlfriend rather than teaching intern or tutor. If the student interpreted my presence as a peer or as a "flirt," then my attention might have been misconstrued as my being impressed or finding his behavior humorous, or even attractive, because when peers show each other this type of attention in class, the attention might indicate interest or at least a positive response. However, had this student understood me as a teaching intern or someone aligned more closely to the position of teacher, then he might have read my glances as a very different message, as an attempt at surveillance, for instance. Perhaps I should have focused on the confusion of my identity as that of an interested peer rather than attempted to reestablish authority over these students. Reasserting authority over students who are not making deliberate stabs at teachers' institutional authority but are struggling for ways to understand their teachers' presence can frustrate teachers and possibly even encourage further conflict if students see these reassertions as teachers' attempts to create authoritative classrooms.

While peer-like relationships can seem difficult for new teachers to transgress, they can be equally troubling for students, resulting in inappropriate interactions between teachers and students.



Correlation between students' perception of their teacher and their behavior toward the teacher is evident in at least one case for a young teacher. Perry describes an incident in which a student touched her in an inappropriate way: "He was a little too friendly. I think the students, because I was so close in age, thought that I was their friend." This student's behavior indicates he was having difficulty distinguishing between the identities of teacher and potential date. For Perry, this experience invited reflection that promotes deeper awareness and sensitivity to her students' readings of her identity.

Inexperienced teachers can read their interactions and the narratives of experienced teachers to understand students' readings of their identity and develop strategies for authority. Johnson expands these rhetorical interactions to consider the contextual influences on those writing the texts: "The questions I continue to ask myself about the social construction of the student's gaze, the body as text, the spoken/written text(s) as text, and the perils of participatory rhetoric occasion my attempts to continue my interior/exterior dialogue with myself and others about these issues" (389). The same texts that prompt Johnson's questions, along with my participation in the rhetorical interactions that wrote many of these texts, become the subjects of my continued dialogue with myself and then with others. At some point, every narrative of identity intersects with those of others, continuing the texts that perpetuate these narratives and possibly reshaping or reaffirming the ways we understand ourselves.

As I create productive dialogue with experienced teachers and with others who have had similar experiences, the chaos, confusion, and seemingly divided perspectives that arise from encounters in class can, with a (re)reading of these interactions through both theoretical lenses and the perspectives of others, be used to develop classroom strategies that take teachers' identities and students' perspectives into account. To this end, Johnson offers a strategy for reaching greater insights into the expectations, responses, and perspectives that surround classrooms. Despite potential challenges to teachers' authority, Johnson allows space to confront these undercurrents in the classroom; despite acknowledging the tensions, Johnson's choice to make space for these situations encourages students and teachers to confront differences with the goal of reaching deeper understandings of ourselves and our interactions, thus transforming chaos and confusion into productive meaning.

#### **Part IV. Strategies for Empowerment: Discovering and Developing Methods of Response**

In my initial interactions with students, I did not trust my instincts as much as I should have. As Elizabeth Nollen says, "If I could go back and change things or advise younger teachers, [I would say], 'Trust your gut.' And when you go home and you're upset and you think 'I should have said that,' then say it." Although neither Nollen nor I can go back to change the way we ignored our feelings, teachers will encounter continual opportunities to develop strategies of empowerment, especially their use of voice in the classroom. The concept of "authority" implies that an individual has a sense of empowerment and a voice. This doesn't mean that teachers will no longer feel conflict but that they will be able to think through conflict and respond in productive ways.

When teachers travel further through the process of confronting positions of authority for the first time, they can recall the prior texts, contexts, and experiences (or narratives) that constructed their sense

of self. Whether these experiences are formed through certain roles they played, positions they held, or relationships they shared, these fragmented self-concepts, which are created through each of these isolated experiences, can be used to handle the demands of their classroom authority or drawn upon for personal empowerment as a teacher. When developing an empowered voice, our identities become especially influential in drawing on the “fragmented, fluid, and dialogic selves” that Payne refers to (403). Payne says that her “personal history” has been built upon one view of herself, but that the texts that form her multiple selves “‘deconstruct’ themselves regularly” (403). Because institutional authority does not necessarily allow teachers’ voices to be received with “legitimacy” or “power,” as Jennifer Bay claims, non-academic roles become especially valuable in providing appropriate sources of authority for responding to students (42). Tischio also sees her classroom as containing voices that carry differing levels of authority, noting that in addition to gender, one’s disciplinary identity influences the way a teacher is perceived and treated, while Comfort and Yoon cite race as a specific factor that influences how power is distributed in the classroom. All of these aspects of “identity” remind us that the role of teacher is not unitary but multiple and thus, negotiating authority in the classroom means that teachers need to be attuned to various sources of students’ responses to their presence as “authorities” in the classroom.

Perry describes the way she applies a non-academic role, specifically her role as a mother, to students’ resistance. “I told them, ‘You do not talk to me that way.’ Very calmly I said, ‘This is a professional environment. I am your professor. You will not come into the class and speak to me or anyone else that way.’” In this situation, Perry’s experiences as a mother provided her with a developed voice to use in her interactions with students. The voices of authority that teachers develop in other areas of their lives can be drawn upon when they are faced with new and confusing situations as teachers. Young teachers may not be able to draw upon experiences as parents, but they may have had experiences dealing with difficult customers on the job or with raising delicate issues with their parents or supervisors that can act as a place from which they draw an empowered voice.

Teachers can create classroom environments that encourage a diverse range of student interactions without compromising the teacher’s necessary authority. Hannah Ashley explains some of the ways that issues of identity and authority are complicated for teachers of composition when she says of her own unavoidable subjectivity: “There’s no way for me to be neutral. And I think that the best thing that I can do is to acknowledge that and to have conversations with students about that.” Taking the time to discuss how one is positioned on an issue, whether by choice or by social constructedness, can foster open dialogue in the classroom and may even help students see how their perspectives are constructed as well.

Strategies for developing authority become increasingly important because the directions that courses take can shift as the semester progresses. As these shifts occur, teachers can show students that although changes occur and directions shift, they have not lost control over the course itself. In an interview, Seth Kahn explains his process of meta-teaching, which he says narrates “how I see things going and why we’re [the class] doing the things that we’re doing.” He goes on to explain how he reorgan-

ized the order of assignments on the syllabus for his general education research-based writing class called *Entering the Public Sphere* (WRT208); rather than leaving students to speculate on his reasons, he stated them, explaining how his reflections on the struggles of previous students influenced his decision to set up the assignments differently for his current class. Kahn says that he felt “compelled” to explain these changes because “I wanted them to have some context for why we do what we do.” This narration can help decrease confusion and misinterpretation for both teachers and students because teachers inform students of their actions while students are invited to ask questions and discuss decisions that affect their situations in class.

Although there are many ways for teachers to gain awareness of the influence that their identities have on their use of authority, their institutional accountability requires that they address issues of authority and take responsibility for classroom interactions. In the midst of dynamic classrooms, pausing to reread our participation in the rhetorical interactions that create confusion and chaos become moments of multiple rereadings, new perspectives, and consequently greater awareness for teachers. As I continue to reread my narratives of identity, I engage in dialogue with those who can provide new angles to approach my confusing interactions with students. Whether these teachers can offer more classroom experience or the perspectives of those who bring different identities to the situation, I can select stories of their identity narratives to synthesize with my own, and possibly create more insightful and effective strategies than I could have formulated alone. Young teachers can draw on the empowered voices of others (teachers, parents, bosses) as they discover their own sources of empowerment and develop classroom authority. Although young teachers might lack the range of classroom experiences that other teachers can reflect on, the empowerment from outside experiences can be applied in the classroom. The numerous identities that teachers juggle, if acknowledged and reflected upon, can provide useful experiences for developing classroom presence. They can also invite students into a more open dialogue regarding their pedagogical commitments in the classroom, creating a more transparent and respectful classroom atmosphere.

I would like to thank Victoria Tischio, the director of my project, for her guidance and for all that she taught me during the process, and I would also like to thank the following professors for their advice and contributions: Seth Kahn, Merry Perry, Hannah Ashley, Juanita Comfort, Hyoejin Yoon, Elizabeth Nollen, Rodney Mader, and Andrea Fishman.

## Works Cited

- Ashley, Hannah. Personal interview. 19 Apr. 2006.
- Bay, Jennifer. “Who’s Afraid of Their Male Students? Voicing Discourses of Authority, Resistance, and Harassment in the Composition Classroom.” *Dialogue: A Journal for Writing Specialists* 5.1 (1999): 31-45.
- Comfort, Juanita. Personal interview. 13 Apr. 2006.
- Diamond, Suzanne. “When Underlife Takes Over.” *Conflicts and Crises in the Composition Classroom—and What Instructors Can Do about Them*. Ed. Dawn Skorczewski and Matthew Parfitt. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2003. 27-33.
- Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Haber, John. “Feminist Cinema and Visual Pain.” *Haber’s Art Reviews: Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”* 19 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.haberarts.com/mulvey.htm>>.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Johnson, Cheryl. “Participatory Rhetoric and the Teacher as Racial/Gendered Subject.” *Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the 90s*. Ed. Lad Tobin and Thomas Newkirk. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1994. 388-97.

- Kahn, Seth. Personal interview. 11 Apr. 2006.
- Kirsch, Gesa, and Joy Ritchie. "Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research." *College Composition and Communication* 46.1 (1995): 7-29.
- Nollen, Elizabeth. Personal interview. 3 May 2006.
- Payne, Michelle. "Rend(er)ing Women's Authority in the Writing Classroom." *Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the 90s*. Ed. Lad Tobin and Thomas Newkirk. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1994. 398-410.
- Perry, Merry. Personal interview. 19 Apr. 2006
- Powers-Stubbs, Karen. "Watching Ourselves: Feminist Teachers and Authority." *College Composition and Communication* 43.3 (1992): 311-15.
- Tischio, Victoria. "Speaking the Fool's Rhetoric: A Woman's Critical Praxis for Power-Sharing in a Gendered Writing Classroom." *Composition Studies* 31.2 (2003): 27-49.
- Tobin, Lad. "Process Pedagogy." *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. Ed. Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick. New York: Oxford UP, 2001.
- Yoon, Hyoejin. Personal interview. 20 Apr. 2006.
- . "Reflections of an 'Other' Teacher: Contrapower Harassment, Social Power, and Institutional Authority." *Dialogue: A Journal for Writing Specialists* 5.1 (1999): 12-30.