
5 What Did WAC Experiences Mean to Faculty?

There was an instant sense of community.
—Geography, UC

What did these faculty remember about WAC groups and workshops after two, five, ten, in some cases fifteen years? In a word, they remembered *community*. Their perception of that community shaped how they would later remember and use their WAC experiences. For most of them, the community experience in WAC had been energizing and instructive. They reported using it as a model for their own teaching and their own collegial relationships. And some extended the WAC community across time and across boundaries, weaving a connective web of relationships that both sustained and supported their teaching and their further growth. In contrast, a few remembered disruptions to the community they sought.

Our interviews and faculty-authored accounts collected on all campuses across the years, and especially in 1993–1995, were our main data sources for this chapter.

WAC Programs: A Brief Description

In order to understand faculty members' recollections, we need to describe the workshops and groups our interviewees attended at the three schools. All three institutions have continued to hold workshops and other activities, but since our long-range study concentrates on faculty who attended the early activities, this description focuses on those.

At UC and Whitworth, the early experiences were workshops of two to five days, held in a peaceful setting on or off campus, each attended by fifteen to thirty interdisciplinary faculty. Especially notable is the setting for UC's workshops—a restored Shaker village in the rolling, green hills of rural Kentucky. There the religious society called "Shakers" lived and worked, sharing all goods in common, striving to create a visionary society of God, and constructing the

strong and simple buildings, tools, quilts, and furniture among which the workshop participants ate, slept, and talked for two days. It is not insignificant that at UC the workshops were almost universally referred to not as "the workshop" but as "Shakertown"—a clue, perhaps, to the impact of this visionary community upon the communities that formed within the workshops themselves.

At UC during 1989–1991, before Walvoord's arrival, Toby Fulwiler and Henry Steffens of the University of Vermont used the methods described in Fulwiler's "Showing, Not Telling, at a Writing Workshop" (1981). The workshop typically had twenty-five to thirty faculty, many of whom did not know one another. The Fulwiler-Steffens workshops stressed journals and other types of informal writing, peer collaboration, and guiding of the writing process, including draft responses. The two-day sessions began with workshop attendees reading Scudder's account (see Bean 1992), in which he describes how a professor made him *look* at a fish for hours on end. Participants wrote responses to this article, often wonderfully imaginative and thoughtful ones. They shared them in groups, revised, wrote responses in a different vein, shared, and revised again. Small groups met, as well, to discuss various teaching problems raised among the participants. The idea was that, by writing themselves and sharing in small groups, participants would *experience*, not merely be told about, the power of writing for learning. The energy and commitment generated by the writing and small groups powered the production, by a volunteer group of faculty after the workshop, of an in-house booklet containing nineteen of these "Fish Stories."

At Whitworth, from 1989 to 1992, Walvoord ran workshops more like the one described by Herrington (1981), which began with learning goals and followed the course-planning process. Held from three to five days in a quiet room on campus, the workshops included twelve to fifteen faculty, all of whom, at this small school, knew one another. The workshop began by asking participants to define, in writing, the kinds of learning they wanted from their students in a particular class. That writing became the basis for pedagogical planning. Participants in small groups responded to one another's developing course plans and assignments. Some of the small groups working together during the workshop were the interdisciplinary faculty teams who team taught CORE courses. They knew each other very well, watched each other's teaching on a regular basis, and knew that after the workshop they would actually teach the course they were planning and would continue to work closely together.

Walvoord's workshops emphasized linking writing assignments to course goals, using informal as well as formal writing, designing and sequencing assignments, stating criteria and expectations explicitly, getting lively interaction in class, and using draft response as well as other ways of guiding the writing process. WAC director Linda Hunt later collected faculty members' stories about how they had changed their teaching, and she published them in a 1992 in-house booklet. The stories focused on how faculty had related assignments more effectively to course goals, had given students fuller guidance, had instituted particularly successful assignments, or had introduced informal writing as a tool for learning.

Towson's program, much older than the others, had a more varied range of activities. In 1976, Towson's faculty revised its general education requirements to include a writing-intensive course, usually taken by students in their major field. By 1982, formal WAC faculty development was in place. Dowling coached faculty and observed classes. After 1984, two-day workshops presented an overview of the writing process, assignment planning, generating ideas, responding to drafts, and evaluating writing, with a segment on "writing-to-learn." These workshops were held in two adjacent, comfortable classrooms set up with tables that would seat four to six participants and include a coffee-and-donuts area. The presentations were structured, but the atmosphere was informal, with both leaders and participants exhibiting a great deal of enthusiasm. Analysis of the end-of-workshop participant responses from these workshops indicates a sense of pride among the participants that members of their own faculty could lead these workshops. Ninety-minute workshops concentrated on a single aspect of writing—using peer-response groups or helping students edit for style, for example. These Towson-led workshops were supplemented by a rich array of other resources in the area, including the Baltimore branch of the Maryland Writing Project, the Baltimore Area Consortium for Writing Across the Curriculum (a coalition of local colleges and K-12 schools), and neighboring universities and colleges (for more on the Baltimore Area Consortium, see Walvoord and Dowling 1990).

In addition, Towson's WAC coordinator, Fil Dowling, sponsored a Faculty Writers' Response Group for faculty (and has done so since 1985), which met regularly to respond to drafts written by its participants. Dowling, in the 1980s and early 1990s, also worked intensively one-on-one with twenty-one individual faculty, observing their WAC classes for three or four weeks, talking with their students, and consulting at length with faculty about their writing assignments, teaching modes, and evaluation methods.

Faculty Remembered WAC as a Community

Did the differences in the WAC events of each school create differences in our faculty members' memories and responses? We noticed some differences in emphasis when faculty described "What I learned was" Walvoord's workshop participants tended to reflect her emphasis on goal-driven course planning and articulation of teacher expectations. Fulwiler and Steffens's participants at UC reflected the emphasis on journals and collaborative student groups. Towson State participants reflected a wide diversity of the themes and emphases they had encountered. But those slight differences in themes were overshadowed by the shared sense among participants at all three schools that WAC events had given them a *community* which shared certain important characteristics. The communities of WAC often spoke to deeply felt needs. Faculty members' yearning for community was strong and consistent in our data. WAC experiences were not always perfect—and we will present in this chapter some accounts of disappointing or flawed communities as well as successful ones—but most faculty we interviewed felt very positive about their WAC experiences, and for many of the same reasons.

Our findings here affirm those of the match-to-sample surveys we summarized in the introduction—that is, faculty reported enthusiasm and appreciation for the WAC workshops. But those surveys focused on the *teaching strategies* faculty had learned and, more generally, the *change or improvement* faculty judged WAC to have helped them realize. Our findings point to an additional factor—the *community* formed in WAC. Our data suggest that the experience of community was, for some faculty, as important, or more important, than particular teaching strategies.

What were faculty members' perceptions of the outstanding characteristics of WAC communities?

WAC Communities Were Safe and Liberating

One aspect of the WAC community which participants felt strongly about was its safety. The Faculty Writers' Response group at TSU, for example, was, as one faculty member put it, "a sanctuary away from invisible college politics—a safe place to expose one's thoughts and ideas."

Characteristics of the WAC community:

- *Safety*
- *Liberation*
- *Naming*
- *Support*
- *Validation*

Safety was the basis for liberation, a chance to explore, to risk, to be creative. A Whitworth musician remembers: "The liberal arts really means liberating things. And what this workshop did was to liberate me to be more creative in developing work that's meaningful to the students." A UC political scientist affirmed that, since the workshop, "I'm willing to risk more."

Part of liberation, too, was to be freed from fears. One fear some participants mentioned was that the workshop would require them to become English teachers. A Whitworth communications professor remembers:

The greatest moment of relief for me came when Barbara [Walvoord] set me at ease by telling me I didn't have to become an English teacher to be involved in the workshop. I didn't have to be the final say on a student's grammar and punctuation. Going in, I had thought, "Writing Across the Curriculum"—what I'm going to do is be transformed into adjunct faculty in English." I was relieved to find out I didn't have to be something that I wasn't prepared to be.

Another fear was connected to participants' own writing. In the TSU Faculty Writers' Response group, a health sciences faculty member recalled confessing to her writing group colleagues that she was neither motivated toward, nor successful in, writing for publication and asked for their advice: "Fil [Dowling] made the most startling suggestion—write about what you do best! I found this statement overwhelmingly forgiving." It was the key. She began to write about teaching and learning and to find publication outlets for her work. Her writing group became a safe place to overcome her writing fears.

WAC Communities Conferred the Power of Naming

Another aspect of community for faculty at all three schools was the workshops' function of naming—of giving language to participants' thoughts and experiences. A UC faculty member in criminal justice, who had been using writing in many ways, found the workshop helpful in "just knowing that there was this school of thought about using these different kinds of techniques." A communications faculty member at Whitworth muses about the power of naming both for teaching and learning:

Something of what happened at the workshop for me is that the writing episodes in my teaching got renamed. Naming and renaming is extremely powerful. As teachers, we name and rename experiences with our students. As we name and rename with one another and for ourselves, our lives change.

Naming, an act performed in community, itself helped to build community.

WAC Communities Mutually Respected and Supported Their Members

Mutual support, respect, encouragement, and cordiality were other characteristics of the WAC community that many faculty appreciated. A UC professor recalls:

Shakertown was an open discussion, and people weren't saying, "Oh, John did not write in complete sentences" or "His ideas don't seem to be consistent with what we're thinking." It was a supportive group, and I'm talking about the cordiality among people. They asked, "Did he really mean that?" instead of automatically assuming the comment was meant in a critical way. For example, I said, "We don't want to emasculate this thing. . . ." And some women colleagues were very offended by that term. . . . And I could understand it was an inappropriate term, but I didn't mean it in that way. . . . And they didn't immediately assume that I meant it in a very chauvinistic way. . . . We have to have a little bit of leniency and support or compassion for each other. That's what happens when the student writes something—you don't immediately say, "That's wrong." And that's what was so exciting to me about the workshop. You've got to establish an environment where the student is willing to say whatever he or she is thinking, and be encouraged to do that. Now, we can't get to that point if we, ourselves, can't get to that point. It was respect, mutual respect.

WAC Communities Validated the Importance of Teaching

For many faculty, another positive aspect of the WAC community was that it validated the importance of teaching. This was especially strong among faculty of those UC colleges that emphasized research (UC also includes some two-year and open-access colleges where teaching is the primary mission). Faculty felt that the workshop demonstrated some concern at the university level for the quality of teaching. One UC faculty member says:

I just don't feel we talk very much about teaching in my department. I feel like I have a very different perspective on teaching than my colleagues do. I find that very frustrating.

Another UC faculty member adds:

We still live with an old reward system that says research and publication are really all that's important. If you can get a grant, what do you have to worry about this stuff for? Now, on the other hand, the provost was very supportive, and he funded these workshops.

The WAC communities, then, when they worked well for faculty, were characterized by safety, liberation, naming, support, and validation.

Divergent Voices

Two of our respondents pointed to elements that could spoil the sense of community: too much talking by leaders and a "true believer" mentality that quashed skepticism.

A TSU faculty member contrasts some of his workshop experiences with others:

Well, the [ninety-minute] faculty development workshops on the Towson campus are a mixed bag. Typically, you walk in, you sit down, people talk at you, and then you leave. But the series of seminars on teaching the adult learner, the [Johns] Hopkins [University] seminar on the syllabus as a planning tool, and the five or six other seminars that I took over the course of a couple of years—these were just excellent practical experiences where what was talked about was modeled at the same time.

One of our UC respondents resisted what he saw as the "true believer" mentality of the workshop:

I can remember having long discussions at the workshop with people we began to label as the "true believers." They insisted vehemently that all you have to do is be enthusiastic about this yourself and believe in it enough, and the students will do any exercise that you ask them to do. Classes that used to sit there sullen and silent will, all of a sudden, break forth into intelligent discussion. A lot of us just didn't buy it. . . . There was this wonderful scene at the workshop where we broke into little groups that were supposed to solve a particular problem about writing. The group I was in was supposed to solve the problem I just mentioned: What if the students won't play? What do you do? Well, it so happened that one of the most ardent of the true believers was in this group, and she spent the entire time insisting that there was no problem, that it would never happen that students wouldn't play, and that therefore we didn't need to come up with any answers. And I regret so much that it didn't occur to me to point out to her that she herself wasn't playing.

We believe this faculty member's experience points to the difficulties of the "resistance" or "conversion" frame we discussed in the introduction. This faculty member's report suggests to us that a "conversion" frame can also cause problems in the WAC communities themselves. Much more healthy, we believe, was the conclusion drawn about a UC workshop by another participant: "You don't have to be a convert."

Clearly, the same workshops can be perceived differently by different participants. These differences are influenced, no doubt, by many factors which the workshop leader does not entirely control—participants' personalities, moods, habitual ways of working, and understanding of community. But our findings suggest that the kind of community that WAC participants experience creates enduring memories and is crucial to WAC's impact upon faculty.

Faculty Saw the WAC Groups and Workshops as Models for Their Own Colleague and Classroom Communities

Many of our faculty saw their WAC experiences of community as a model for the kind of classroom communities they would like to create—classrooms where, in one professor's words, "you don't immediately say, 'that's wrong,'" and where "the student is willing to say whatever he or she is thinking about." That same theme comes through very strongly in a Towson State faculty member's story. As his Faculty Writers' Response Group responded to drafts of his textbook, he in turn developed ways of using student-response groups in his classes and then integrated that knowledge into his textbook and into his work with other teachers:

The writing group—a peer-response group itself—demonstrated to me not only how to use the technique with my students, but also how to experience and appreciate the power of the process myself as a writer and teacher.

Many faculty created analogies in this way between their WAC communities and their own teaching. Fulwiler's (1981) sense that WAC workshops are more about "showing" than about "telling" seems borne out by our data from all the WAC experiences, even those whose content and emphasis were somewhat different than his. The demonstrated community of WAC becomes a model for participants' classrooms.

The ideal classroom community, as outlined by Parker Palmer (1983), closely resembles the WAC communities as we have described

them. The “spaces for learning” we create in our classrooms, Palmer says, should have three characteristics: openness, boundaries, and an air of hospitality. An open environment removes impediments to learning around and within us, sets aside barriers behind which we hide, and helps us resist our tendency to clutter up our consciousness and our classrooms. Firm boundaries provide a structure for learning, a space that has edges, perimeters, and limits. A hospitable environment is one where we receive each other, a place for newborn ideas to emerge, where we lose our fear of not knowing. It would be possible to see the WAC workshops and groups, as faculty portrayed them, within Palmer’s frame, though Palmer was describing classrooms, not faculty workshops. No wonder, then, that our faculty easily created analogies between their WAC communities and the classrooms they yearned to create. A later chapter will show that one of the most common reasons faculty gave for adopting or rejecting a particular WAC teaching strategy was whether or not that strategy helped them build the longed-for community in their classrooms.

Some Faculty Extended Their WAC Communities

We were struck, in our data, by powerful stories from those faculty members who had found ways of extending, across time and across disciplines or distances, the communities they formed in WAC. We include three of those stories here. Each represents a different site for community. Sociologist Don O’Meara, who teaches at one of the two-year colleges at UC, built community through his department’s reworking of a course they all taught, through faculty development workshops on critical thinking, and through sessions of his national sociological society. Whitworth’s Barbara Filo, in art, built community through working with a strong mentor and through team teaching. Towson’s Barbara Kaplan Bass, in English, built community in a series of close-knit support groups, including an ongoing WAC Faculty Writers’ Response Group and a women’s studies group. All three stories also reflect the faculty members’ increasing ability to bring their own students into community. These powerful stories suggest, we think, the importance of providing ways for communities to continue after WAC.

The first two stories are taken from interviews. The last, written by Barbara Bass herself and read for response in her TSU Faculty Writers’ Response Group, is a more polished piece. The excerpts are fairly long, because we wanted to present enough scope to show the

ways in which faculty extended community and to give our readers a sense of the rich and intricate connectedness of these faculty lives—a connectedness that we believe WAC and other faculty development programs need to understand and build upon.

Building Community through Department, Workshops, and Professional Conferences

—from a 1994 interview with Don O'Meara, Sociology, Raymond Walters, College of UC (two-year, open-admissions branch campus)

*Community
through
departmental
colleagues
attending a
workshop.*

For the past four to five years, the other sociologists in the department and I had been looking at the intro sociology sequence because it didn't focus as much as we wanted it to on issues and problems. And we wanted to get more articulation with the main campus. A couple of the sociologists in the department and I had attended a couple of workshops on critical thinking. That probably stimulated our thinking about critical thinking even before the WAC conference. At first, I saw the WAC thing as a mechanism for the critical thinking. But then I began to see that WAC is critical thinking. And the WAC and the critical thinking became a stimulus. It seemed like, OK, this is the time to do it; the pieces are coming together.

*Community
through the
national
professional
association.*

Another piece was that I went to the American Sociological Association's national convention—I always try to get to that—and I discovered a new book on introducing critical thinking in the classroom.

So, the other sociologists in the department and I revised the third quarter of the intro sociology sequence. It now uses a lot of worksheets [Figure 5.1], students do lots of readings and articles, and then in class, there's a lot of group discussion on what these authors are saying and what they're not saying, what's good and bad about the articles, in terms of these principles of critical thinking developed in the book. It was astounding. In my classes, I went from students who didn't know the difference between a value and a fact, to the end when they would say, "Hey, that's a value, that's a fact. Hey, yeah, we know that." And they did. They really did. The course now does a good job in writing across the curriculum. It's very writing based, has lots of oral communication, and a good, sound structure on critical thinking.

**Guidelines for Completing
the 4-Step Critical Reasoning Worksheet**

Step 1: Identify the Five Topics of Reasoning

A. Definition of the Problem:

1. Clearly *state* the basic thesis of the article.
2. *List* any vague or undefined terms which are important to the thesis.

B. Cause-Effect Relationships:

1. *List* the cause-effect statement(s) critical to the thesis.
2. *List* any other relevant cause-effect statements.

C. Values:

1. *Identify and list* any value terms which convey the author's basic value orientation.

D. Evidence:

1. *List* the basic sources of evidence used in the author's argument.
2. *Identify* each source of evidence as primary or secondary.
3. Briefly *describe* the methodology used to collect primary evidence.

E. Solution (or Nonsolution):

1. Briefly *describe* the author's solution to the problem.
2. Briefly *identify* any nonsolutions which the author identifies.

Step 2: Criticize the Adequacy of the Five Topics

A. Definition of the problem:

1. Is the thesis clearly stated?
2. Are the key terms and concepts clear?
3. Are the terms used consistently?

B. Cause-Effect Relationships:

1. Are the causes complex or simple?
2. Are the effects clearly linked to the causes?
3. Are these links plausible?

C. Evidence:

1. Are the sources of evidence identified?
2. Are the data objective?
3. Are the data accurate?
4. Is the methodology clearly described?
5. Are there drawbacks to the methodology?
6. Are there any sweeping or hasty generalizations?
7. Is the evidence communicated clearly?

Figure 5.1. Sample worksheet for Don O'Meara's sociology class.

Figure 5.1 continued

<p>D. Values:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are the author's value criteria identified? 2. Are there any values which you infer from the article? 3. Are the values well defended by the author? 4. Are the values distinguished from the evidence? <p>E. Solution:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the solution stated clearly? 2. Does the solution deal with the problem? 3. Is the solution plausible? <p>Step 3: Summarize the Author's Line of Reasoning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Look over</i> your entries in Steps 1 and 2 and your narrative in Step 3. 2. <i>Write a brief narrative</i> linking the five elements of the author's argument: thesis, principle cause-effect relationships, evidence, values, and solution. <p>Step 4: Criticize the Author's Line of Reasoning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Look over</i> your entries in Steps 1 and 2. 2. <i>Write a brief narrative assessing</i> the author's argument. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Is the argument coherent? If not, identify what is not coherent. b. Do the parts of the author's argument fit together logically? If not, identify the gaps. c. State briefly the principle strength and principle weakness of the author's argument. d. State brief overall personal assessment.

Community through departmental curriculum planning.

Challenges to community: integrating part-time faculty.

Those of us who taught it the first time will be meeting again to see what went well, what we want to revise, what we're going to do spring quarter. We're so happy with the way it went that we're probably going to revise Soc. 102, start integrating some of the critical thinking steps, so that, by the time they get to Soc. 103, they're even more prepared.

There are real challenges with doing that course because I have part-time people teaching it, too, and that's a real issue out here at this college. They have to be trained to teach the course, and there are even legal issues as to whether you can ask a part-time person to do that or not.

Barb [Walvoord] came out and spoke to my department on how to develop a general education course, and that was very helpful. [At UC, general education courses must have critical-thinking and communications components.] We had a little workshop with her. [It] overwhelmed my faculty [chuckles], but they had a real strong sense of what they had to do. So I think it was a very positive thing.

Several of us have participated in the oral communication workshops. I haven't, but several others have. And we participated in another critical-thinking workshop.

Community through departmental meeting with WAC leader.

Community through ongoing workshops.

Building Community through Team Teaching and Mentorship

—from a 1994 interview with Barbara Filo, Art, Whitworth

I think what I remember most about the workshop was the interaction of the other people. . . .

I'd taken courses from Dr. Bill Youngs at Eastern. He teaches history, but he is very interested in writing. He writes himself, and then he requires quite a bit of writing from his students. I had three courses with him, and they were all writing intensive, and they drove me crazy, but were very valuable. And so I've used some of his ideas, and also his course certainly helped my own writing.

I've team taught . . . a number of courses [and on] the CORE team; also the "Introduction to Fine Arts" with Randy and Rick, and then later with Rick and Dick Evans. Sounds like a comedy team. And then I team taught with Corliss Slack. On the CORE team there was a change, so there were several people in that group. And then with the British Isles course I taught with Forrest and Arlin and Michael Bowen and Corliss again. And I can't remember about the others. Quite a number of different faculty members. And I've learned from all of them. It's just been wonderful to watch them teach. It lifts my spirits and makes me feel invigorated, and I want to get to my class and try this new thing.

Community through mentorship.

Community through team teaching.

Building Community through Close-Knit Support Groups “Tapped Resources”

—by Barbara Kaplan Bass, English, TSU

[Note: The following essay by Barbara Kaplan Bass, which she entitled “Tapped Resources,” was written in response to our request that she write about what WAC had meant to her. Her Faculty Writers’ Response Group at Towson State served as responders in the development of the essay.]

Students sprawl across the floor, oversized sheets of newsprint at odd angles underfoot, multicolored Magic Markers™ in hand. A faculty member passing by looks into the room and snorts, “What is this, third grade?”

Well, no, it’s not third grade—it’s—it’s thirteenth grade. These are college freshmen, writing similes on newsprint to be displayed around the room: “Writing is like making orange juice—it’s worth the effort, seeds and all!” “Writing is like having a tooth pulled—it’s painful, but it has to be done.” These composition students are comparing their writing experiences, making friends, creating a writing community.

While they are working I step out into the hall to track down my colleague. I locate him across the hall, behind his podium, lecturing to students who are obviously not participating in the making of meaning. He is probably repeating in his classes what his professors taught in theirs.

Who taught me? A third-grade language arts teacher from a rural county, a middle school teacher from the inner city, a women’s studies instructor—too many to list here, but all have had a profound influence on who I am and how I teach. They released me from the lectern, from the tyranny of grading, and from the boredom of the five-paragraph theme. Most important, they connected me to an invaluable network of teachers from whom I continue to learn.

Before I opened myself to these connections, teaching for me, as for many others, had been a solitary profession. Good teachers knew all the answers and hoarded them in their private collections of lesson plans. During my college teaching practicum, my “cooperating” teacher told me that student teachers were “a necessary evil.” I stumbled out into teaching, young, alone, and unsupported, and became a teacher’s guide junkie, looking for quick classroom fixes, but not understanding why they worked or not.

When I was offered a visiting instructor’s position at Towson State to teach [first-year] composition, I had no one to ask for advice. I went to a college bookstore and hunkered down amongst the handbooks and rhetorics piled on the shelves, looking for guidance, and—not knowing any better—chose one that mirrored the way I had been taught. I followed its prescriptions, but it didn’t feel right. I was confused, but an admission of confusion would be an acknowledgment of incompetence. I stumbled on, not knowing there was a better way, teaching against my better instincts, remaining as alone in my college teaching as in my high school teaching.

Several years after beginning my college teaching, I was still using a traditional rhetoric, but supplementing it with articles on current issues, trying to create a course that was useful and practical, but still not articulating to myself my own teaching philosophy. When I was asked to participate in a workshop designed to mainstream women's studies into writing classes, I jumped at the opportunity to meet other faculty and to learn how other instructors taught composition. What I found there was my first real connection to a teaching network, a group of women committed to effecting change and establishing a community on campus. Our group unofficially expanded to include faculty from physical education, philosophy, and administrators from our university.

"What we do is *degrading*, not grading," I heard one of the women's studies members of our committee say. Yes, I thought, that's exactly how I feel. But I still wasn't brave enough to agree with her out loud.

"I am so frustrated with my advanced comp class. I'm not getting anywhere," another teacher complained. "I feel like my students resent my help."

I couldn't contain myself any longer: "You do, too? I thought I was the only one who felt that way!" We began sharing our teaching stories, drawing comfort from our mutual frustrations, discussing ways to improve our teaching.

Another women's studies faculty member offered: "All writing isn't argument. It doesn't have to be hierarchical. Have you ever seen a five-paragraph theme in real life?"

"It isn't? It doesn't? Well, no I haven't!" I responded. But what do I know, I thought to myself.

It turned out I knew quite a lot. During that year, the six of us learned from each other, experimented in our classrooms, traded theory as well as practice, and effected real change. We presented a panel at the annual [meeting of the] Conference on College Composition and Communication. I was able to abandon my old rhetoric text and handbook and approach the teaching of writing honestly for the first time. I could take some risks now. I was no longer alone.

At that point in my teaching career, I was still wedded to teaching the patterns of organization. Every rhetoric I had reviewed that summer in the bookstore had organized its chapters around those patterns. That format was even mandated by the English department, so I had assumed that it must be the way to organize my course. Before I chose my text for the next semester, I brought up this issue at one of our mainstreaming meetings. Those of us who taught this way felt uncomfortable with the method.

"How do you yourselves go about writing?" one of our group tossed out to us. We all agreed that we often did not know what we had to say until we began writing. We didn't always begin with the thesis statement that we insisted our students use. Often, one idea jumped backwards to connect with another, and another spiraled out to connect with nothing.

At our next meeting, another women's studies instructor brought us each a copy of *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al. 1986). We discovered that most women write the way we do, recursively, not hierarchically. We decided that the next semester, we would teach the required patterns, but for two days rather than for fourteen weeks! I began *offering* the patterns to my students rather than forcing the patterns upon them, explaining that they may be used as a guide, not a strict prescription. Such a discovery was liberating. As a solitary teacher, I might never have given myself permission to abandon tradition and follow my instincts, to share my classroom practice with others and benefit from theirs.

The mainstreaming workshop also enabled me to do my own classroom research, opening up a part of me that is now crucial as I grow as a teacher. I had asked my students to write about an admirable character from a book of their choice. I was surprised to find that of my thirty-six students, both male and female, thirty-three had chosen male characters; the three who had chosen women had chosen the autobiographies of Joni Erikson and Jill Kinmont, women who were paralyzed—strong, yet immobilized women. The next semester I provided the students with books that had strong female characters—for example, *The Color Purple* and *The Stone Angel*—and gave this same assignment. This time thirty-five students chose women characters, and the one who didn't chose a compassionate male. My subsequent article based on this classroom research was accepted by the *Maryland English Journal*. I was now a published writer—an official researcher. Since then I have published regularly on pedagogical issues and have written a chapter for a book. With the help of my colleagues from across the curriculum, I found a voice.

The next semester, primed by my mainstreaming workshop experience, I had my eyes and ears open for more connections. One morning, as I hurried to class, a brochure lying on the corridor floor caught my eye. "Writing Matters," it said. "Well, yes it does," I thought. I was intrigued. A few weeks later I found myself at an extraordinary conference sponsored by the Maryland Writing Project, interacting with teachers from all disciplines and across all grade levels. What an opportunity to extend my network! I signed up for their five-week Summer Teacher Institute. In that dynamic workshop, it was the elementary participants who taught me about using newsprint and Magic Markers™, the middle school teachers who turned me on to webs and Venn diagrams. And in the years since that summer, I have been able to share with them, through MWP-sponsored study groups and conferences, the work I have been doing in raising student awareness about racism and sexism through writing, writing over time, and alleviating writing anxiety. The institute coordinators directed me to authors such as Donald Graves and Donald Murray, Linda Flower and Lucy Calkins, all writing and thinking about how students write, from first grade through college.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the Maryland Writing Project, though, is its focus on one's own personal writing—probably the scariest

aspect of the summer for me. I didn't have time for personal writing. I had papers to grade, diapers to change, syllabi to organize, carpools to drive, and I certainly was not comfortable sharing my writing with anyone else, especially public school teachers. What could a third-grade teacher have to say about my writing that could be of any use?

That summer, though, for two afternoons a week, I met with three other institute participants in what would become my first official writing group. At our first meeting, too afraid to try a new piece, I brought an essay I had written years before and hoped it would pass muster. By the time of our second meeting, I felt comfortable enough to risk writing a piece about my adopted daughter, then ten years old, who had come to us with more than we bargained for. Another group member, a middle school English teacher from the city, wrote about her father who had passed away, whose voice she no longer could remember. Another, a high school social studies teacher from a rural county, wrote about becoming a grandmother at forty. The fourth member, a suburban elementary teacher, bared her soul about her teaching fears. By the end of that session, I couldn't wait to go home and write more. Since that time, I have continued to write personal essays, many of which have been published in local newspapers and magazines; the first essay that was accepted was the one I was brave enough to write for my MWP writing group.

By this time, I was hooked, primed for more faculty interaction, when I noticed in the *Towson State Faculty Newsletter* Fil Dowling's brief announcement for an interdisciplinary Faculty Writers' Response Group. I thought this new group might help guide me into more professional writing.

When I arrived at my first writing group meeting, I found several members of the English department, one from history, two from nursing, one each from health science, management, mass communications, and chemistry. The historian wrote poetry, the nurses were working on an article for a professional journal, one of the English faculty was preparing a presentation for a conference, and the mass comm professor was writing a chapter for a book. Not everyone brought something, but everyone shared ideas. Their drafts were messy, written on, some of the papers unfinished. After we had discussed the last piece, I hesitantly brought out the piece about my daughter that I had started during the Summer Teacher Institute. It was perhaps the tenth draft. My fears resurfaced: I was afraid they would judge me too harshly; I didn't know them well enough for them to see my writing, warts and all. As I sat there waiting for their comments, I realized that my students must feel this same fear when I ask them to share their writing with each other in class. Once I overcame my initial fear, this group gave me invaluable help. Our management member taught me about subheadings, our health science person helped me to organize, the mass communications person could see "the big picture," and everyone taught me new perspectives on words and language. Since then, I won't submit an essay to the newspaper,

an article for publication in a journal, or a proposal for a conference without first running it by my group. We even developed a workshop for the Conference on College Composition and Communication where we demonstrated how valuable these faculty connections are and how a cross-disciplinary writing group can work.

The last two summers I have helped coordinate the Maryland Writing Project's Summer Teacher Institute. One of my favorite days during the workshop is when biologist Ginny Anderson comes by with her caterpillars or baby mice to share her ideas about writing in the sciences. As I look around the room at the new crop of participants who listen, fascinated by Ginny's ideas, I think about how far I've come, how much I've learned from teachers from every level and every discipline. Each summer I have seen experienced teachers on that same precarious perch I had been on—clinging to old ideas only because that is all they know, yet ready to fling them off. I also see brand new teachers who are beginning their careers as part of a supportive network, empowered from the start. At times, I envy them, saddened by how I shortchanged myself and my students for so long, relieved that I came to understand the power of connections, of writing, and of teachers themselves who have so much to offer. We are a too-frequently untapped resource:

"Are you in room 109?" one of my colleagues asks. "What are those similes on the wall in there? Where can I get that paper they're written on? Does the department have Magic Markers™?"

Another stops me in the hall. "I've seen your students working together in groups on their writing. Can you explain to me how you organize them?"

Any time.