

Ann E. Berthoff

WHAT WORKS? HOW DO WE KNOW?¹

ABSTRACT: We know that what we are doing is working when the response to our assignments is lively and substantial. That happens when we "begin with where they are"—not with their weaknesses but with their strengths. We must appreciate the interdependence of personal and public, the particular and the universal, the individual and the group. The success of that mission depends on recognizing the logical role of interpretation in all meaning-making. (Paulo Freire's "pedagogy of knowing" remains useless without this principle, which he calls conscientization.) And it means that we must set about reclaiming the imagination—the powers of the active mind, the powers our students have for making meaning.

I want to warn you that since I've been retired for several years and am no longer in the front lines, I may have succumbed to utopian thinking. I used to count on my graduate students—mostly teachers from the Boston public schools and those of the environs—to keep me honest, but I no longer benefit from their response to my claims. On the other hand, I frequently succumb to despair about what we are up against. Not seeing my old friends as frequently, not meeting new teachers as often as I once did, I do not have ready infusions of hope. Despair is easily fueled, is it not? Here are two examples which came to my attention during the time I was working on this paper.

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You've read about the young boy who was allowed to "divorce" his parents—a regrettable metaphor, but probably a good solution to a terrible problem. The account of how his foster father first met him included the following:

Russ said he first saw Gregory sitting reading a book at the ranch (the boy had been for some months at a ranch for boys) while other boys played around him. "I just had an immediate feeling he needed somebody. He needed help."

Granted that an immediate feeling might not be entirely rational, but isn't it curious that for this man, somebody reading is taken as a sign of distress? There are no qualifications, no second thoughts about what he said . . . or at least none is reported. What he *said* was that when he first saw this boy sitting reading a book, he immediately felt, "He needs help."

And then there is Gerald Graff who without shame tells us that he disliked books from the first and became interested in literature only when he found that critical debates among academics about texts engaged his attention. Graff tells us that learning to talk like teachers is the way to gain access to literature. But that is not so: it's the way to gain access to the favor of terrible teachers. Professor Graff exhorts us to "teach the conflicts," but I see no evidence that an interest in *The Conflicts* ever led him to literature; he claims that it's what led him to become a professor of English, but that, as we all know, is not the same thing.

Graff remarks that under the spell of great teachers "it often *seems* as if the work is itself speaking directly to the student without intervention from the teacher's interpretations and theories. But this spell is an illusion. If books really taught themselves, there would be no reason to attend classes; students could simply stay home and read them on their own." Do you agree with me that that is consonant with Mr. Russ's comment about needing help if you are reading a book rather than playing with the boys? Maybe you would also agree with me that Gerald Graff apparently suffers from a serious deficit: he has no imagination . . . or he never developed his God-given power to imagine. I would guess that nobody ever read to him; *he* never went around chanting "Dr. FOSTer went to GLOUcester . . ." He probably never had the chance to find relevance in the story of Peter Rabbit's socially constructed experiences.

I could go on about such gangster theories as "teach the conflicts," but, as Chekhov would say, that is a tune from another opera. I'm here today to talk about composition. And I'm happy to be here.

The reason I accepted George Otte's kind invitation was not just because I'm still a zealot longing to convert people to the doctrine of the Interpretant, longing to preach the gospel of the uses of chaos and the making of meaning, to bring the good news that we are all language animals, able to name and transform the world. I accepted because he told me you were having trouble with deans! I have a lifelong antipathy to deans, taken as a breed of those who do not understand what we are trying to do, do not value our hard work, do not hesitate to tell us what we should be doing instead. In preparing these remarks, I have tried to keep in mind the importance of justifying what we are trying to do in teaching composition—well, not *justifying*: that sounds too defensive. But I do think we must be ready to explain our purposes and our procedures, how each informs the other in the dialectic of our theory and practice. I am heartily tired of that term, *dialectic*, and have been relying instead on a term of Schleiermacher's: the word is *Ineinandersein*: *the in-one-anotherness* of purposes and procedures. Please indulge me: I will use *Ineinandersein* to represent the mutual dependence of the *what* and the *how* of all we are doing.

Now of course some deans are "invincibly ignorant," as the medieval church said of those men of classical antiquity born before Christ and therefore logically incapable of being saved. I'm thinking of one dean who recently told a young friend of mine that she must stop what she's been doing (and it happens that she's been doing the right things) and instead must teach to a multiple choice grammar test. "Students must learn to write a Five Paragraph Theme," he said, sounding as if he'd just invented the genre. This dean probably is invincibly ignorant, but you never know until you find out. Could my friend Amy make the case that in the business world—her dean comes from the B. School—what is needed is skill in assessment and decision-making; that both these skills depend on interpretation, and that interpretation is what we are teaching when we teach composition—reading and writing. She couldn't make the case to the dean in those terms, simply; she would have to show him an example of what we are likely to get from many students, including a majority of those we most want to reach, if they are taught The Five Paragraph Theme. I do not believe in the precept "Show, don't tell." We can't do one without the other: Show-and-tell constitutes an *Ineinandersein*. So the point would be to show how the dean's alleged purposes require a pedagogy which cannot lead students to write anything that is worth reading. It may well be that an invincibly ignorant

dean could not recognize terrible prose when he sees it, but I have an example which is really rather unsettling. It's your first hand-out, entitled "Violence."

Violence in the cities today is very common. Some is due to crime both organized and unorganized other violence occur naturally in the streets. Frequently, such violence result severe injury or even death, In order to control this growing problem it is necessary to reinstate capital punishment.

Frequently, violence gets out of hand. For instance, I was on my way to work one morning on the train, right besides me there was a vacant seat, so this elderly person got on the train and made an attempt to occupy the seat, but before doing so someone else got there before he did and took the seat. Instead of getting out of the seat and let the elder person have it, when he was asked to do so by another man who saw the incident. The man who was holding the seat refused. This then started the issue of who should have the seat. The argument then lead to a fight, and the use of knives in the crowded train.

Innocent people got hurt, and one person was killed. I feel that if these young men knew that they would be punished for this crime they would have controlled their temper.

Statistics shows that states that have reinstitute capital punishment have a thirty-percent lower crime rate. On account of this there are less crime in the streets.

People are more willing to conduct themselves in an orderly manner when they are faced with a difficult situation. These things are hurting organized crime because people are aware of this law.

Now you and I know—do we not?—that this terrible piece of writing is an artifact of a terrible assignment, which was . . . ? The pitiful five nonparagraphs give it away. I would guess that the teacher thought she was offering useful guides by "limiting" the topic: "Violence—and Crime" . . . "Violence and Capital Punishment." But the idea of "limiting" the topic before it's been developed destroys any chance of teaching the invaluable conception of limits as heuristic. (My favorite text on that point is Allen Tate's observation: "A poet is a man [sic] willing to come under the bondage of limits—if he can find them.") My thought was that Amy could say to her dean: "You wouldn't want somebody in

your office who wrote like *this*, would you?" An invincibly ignorant dean would answer that you have to be a good teacher and that whoever taught the writer of this paper was clearly incompetent, etc. To this kind of response, I do not have an answer. As an old Quaker I knew used to put it, "You can't argue somebody out of something they haven't argued themselves into."

But there is an equally disheartening response: When I have given this paper to teachers and tutors, asking how they would proceed in conference, the response has almost always been something like this:

Well, I think I would ask the writer to tell me more about the incident. You can see he really relates to that incident, but he didn't give us enough detail. Why did it seem so important to him?

That response seems to me entirely inappropriate. Unless the incident is interpreted in the light of a carefully explored topic, a concept which is being formed; unless it can be given one or more contexts so that we can judge its significance; unless we have other incidents so that we could begin differentiating; all the detail in the world will not yield a concept. Concepts do not just appear: they must be formed and forming entails the *Ineinandersein* of particularizing and generalizing. Here is Vygotsky on this score:

When the process of concept formation is seen in all its complexity, it appears as a movement of thought within the pyramid of concepts, constantly alternating between the two directions, from the particular to the general, and from the general to the particular.

This profession is still chained to the idea of a ladder of abstraction; to the positivist doctrine that "the particular" comes first. We are continually told that narrative is more natural and hence easier; that detail is easier and hence more natural; that the personal is more important than the public, or vice versa; that orality is prior to and therefore superior to literacy. In *Reclaiming the Imagination*, I have gathered texts which I believe can help us liberate ourselves from this positivism. And I think that is what we must do, if we are to have any chance of reaching the almost invincibly ignorant deans.

What could we do to explain to them that this is terrible prose? I mean beyond the "bad grammar" and execrable style. Because of course it's not just a matter of faulty parallel construction, incomplete sentences, agreement errors, etc. Nor is it a matter of "insufficient detail"!

What else could Amy do? Could she present an alternative, showing and telling how and why a good assignment must provide a useful point of departure? Could she not prepare a portfolio which would demonstrate the nature of the composing process, conceived of as a process of interpretation? As the making of meaning? Such a portfolio would include the chaos generated by students working in small groups; followed by conceptual maps, what I call “oppositions,” glosses, whatever you think of as ways to get started in the matter of forming concepts. There would be sample paragraphs from phases of the composing process, annotated to suggest what is happening at one point or another. And there would be a few authentic paragraphs about a topic which has been developed, carefully analyzed, reviewed, and responded to in language in which words have work to do . . . real work.

As an example of a point of departure for such work in composition, I am suggesting Rodney King’s press conference. A friend of mine said after reading this transcript in *The Boston Globe*, (see below) “You can see he’s brain-damaged.” Well, maybe he is, but this bit of discourse would not surprise most Freshman English teachers in the real world, insofar as it exemplifies incoherence.

‘People . . . can we all get along?’

People, I just want to say, you know, can we, can we all get along? Can we get along?

Can we stop making it, making it hard for the older people and the kids and, I mean, we’ve got enough smog here in Los Angeles, let alone to get killed with setting these fires and things.

It’s just not right. It’s not right. It’s not going to change anything. We’ll get our justice. They’ve won the battle, but they haven’t won the war. We’ll have our day in court, and that’s all we want

I love – I’m neutral, I love every – I

love people of color. I’m not like they’re . . . making me out to be.

We’ve got to quit. We’ve got to quit. You know, after all, I mean, I could understand the first two hours after the verdict, but to go on, to keep going on like this, and to see that security guard shot on the ground.

It’s just not right. It’s just not right, because those people will never go home to their families again, and I mean, please, we can get along here.

We all can get along. We’ve just got to stop. You know, I mean, we’re all stuck here for a while. Let’s, you know, let’s try to work it out. Let’s try to work it out.

But I’m confident you would agree that the difference between The Five Paragraph Theme on “Violence” and “People, can we all get along?” is very great, very important. The sudden bursts of eloquence, the haunting repetition of the rhetorical question, the balance of image and “topic,” of particular and universal—the

transcript gives us language in action: a mind is engaged and a full heart is expressed. Clarence Page on *The MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour* did a superb editorial in which the resonance of “We’re all stuck here for awhile” became very moving indeed. And Charlene Hunter-Gault conducted a series of interviews in which the many dimensions of Rodney King’s question were explored. I see no reason why we couldn’t do the same: the semester’s work could proceed under that rubric, “People, can we all get along?” The writing produced would be worth revising and the final products would be worth presenting to a dean (or to the local newspaper editor). The contrast with “Violence” would be palpable.

How do I know? Because Rodney King’s press conference engages our minds—not because of detail, not because he told us why it is important to him! It engages us because it is dialogic . . . not just because it is based on a question, though that is important, but because we are provoked to ask, “What? How come?” We want to say, “Yes, but” As we read this transcript, a real and authentic dialogue gets a start. “We’re all stuck here”: we know that *here* isn’t just L.A.; *We* is not just African Americans. We see the violence Rodney King is talking about as representative of something larger; HE sees it that way too. That’s why it’s powerful: the power of the discourse, the interest of these statements, lies in the *Ineinandersein* of the particular and the more general and, indeed, of the universal facts of human life. Don’t let anybody fool you into thinking that everything is “socially constructed,” in some narrow, ideologically determined sense: some things go back to Cain and Abel.

This discourse draws on experience—whether for reader or writer, whether actual, personal involvement, or by way of the accounts and records and representations of violence which have become part of our lives. Everybody knows that it’s important to begin with experience, but it’s not because the personal is more important (or because it’s a source of “more detail”); not because it’s more real or more natural, but because its representative character can be identified. These resonant sentences mean something; they make meanings to which we must attend: that is what it means to say that this discourse is “compelling.” Rodney King’s press conference provides the kind of point of departure we should look for, because it is at once personal and public. You can see the *Ineinandersein* if you follow the sequence, “I’m not neutral. I love people of color. I’m not like they’re . . . making me out to be. We’ve got to quit.” We have to fill in the contexts, read between the lines, hypothesize what he meant. We have to do here, I think, what we

have to do in reading any piece of difficult discourse. Here, the difficulty arises because Rodney King is not in control of his language; he can hardly make it do what he needs it to do, but he's working it hard and it has work to do. I think students would be very interested in helping him make his language work, and in the process they would learn, for instance, how he gets from *I* to *we*. Again, the reason that the transcript is a better point of departure than any inert topic—no matter how up-to-date or how carefully limited by the teacher—the reason that the transcript will lead to learning something about life and language is that it engages our minds. We must work our imagination to read it, but as we interpret, we discover the meanings Rodney King was trying to make and they are worth reading about, thinking about, writing about.

A third thing Amy might try is to say that in teaching her students to read and write, she must *begin with where they are*: that is a trap because the almost invincibly ignorant dean will leap to agree because he thinks that means “begin with where they are in their abysmal ignorance of the English language; begin with their errors.” I don't have to tell the colleagues of Mina Shaughnessy that that is a foolish precept, a spirit-killing injunction—at least in the sense in which it is usually taken.

Perhaps you will remember this passage from *Errors and Expectations*:

Without strategies for generating real thought, without an audience he cares to write for, the writer must eke out his first sentence by means of redundancy and digression, strategies that inevitably disengage him from his grammatical intuitions as well as his thought. (82)

“Begin with where they are” must always include the idea of beginning with their strengths, with their capacity to teach one another. I'm not telling you anything you don't know, but I'm saying that you have to learn how to tell the dean what *he* doesn't know.

Let me return to the trap I think Amy should set for the dean: “begin with where they are” should mean, as well, “begin with where they are as citizens, as members of the public.” I believe that every composition course should include examples of contemporary public discourse. We should offer our students assisted invitations to participate in this discourse as attentive listeners/readers and as attentive participants. We will need to provide opportunities for our students to see themselves as dialogue partners. For such purposes, a transcript of the Clarence Thomas

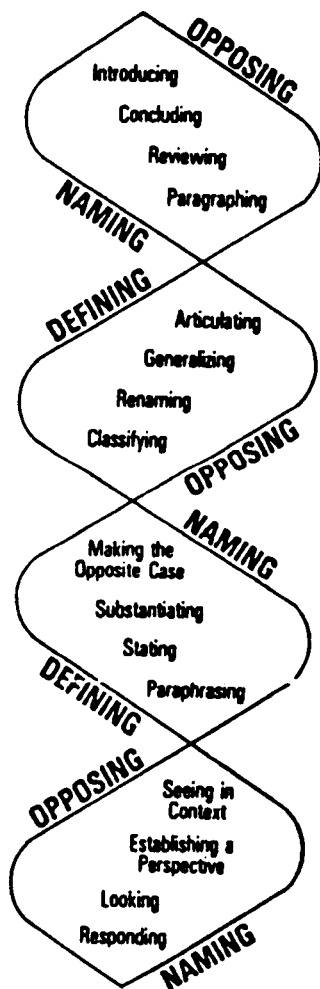
Hearings would serve. I am thinking, for instance, of the day a panel of women opposing the nomination offered testimony. Molly Yard was there; she was recovering from a stroke. Now, it's very easy to be nice to someone recovering from a stroke, and the Senators fell over themselves saluting her, but it seemed clear at the time that the main purpose being served was to cut down on the time the panelists had. There was a young African American woman from a self-help cooperative—and she was furious: “Clarence Thomas has misrepresented our history!” And she rolled out a list of hospitals, schools, associations which Negroes, Colored People, Afro-Americans, Blacks, people of color have invented in the past three hundred years. If we began a course with a transcript of these Hearings, think of the “topics” which could be generated collaboratively, beginning with *definition*, *exemplification*, *analogy*, and any other rhetorical concept you might want to exemplify! Students working together could easily identify their own topics, which might include ones like these: the history of self-help; the concept of fact; the idea of community; what is meant by “natural law”; the use and misuse of allusion; the fictionalized autobiography of Clarence Thomas' sister. And teachers of such courses could work together to develop a pedagogical guide for Joe Biden, who seemed to think that the way to explain something is to slow down and raise your voice.

When we “begin with where our students are” as members of the public, that should not be seen as the antithesis of where they are as individuals. The most pernicious consequence of poststructuralist theory is the spurious validity given to a dichotomy of the personal and the public. When we begin with students as citizens, we are not “privileging” the public over the private or setting aside personal concerns or individual experience. The essential principle to hold on to is that there is an *Ineinandersein* of public and private. That principle allows us to understand the individual as representative of humanity, *not* just of one ethnic group or another. I urge you to read David Bromwich's *Politics by Other Means*, in which you will find this idea explored very carefully.

“Begin with where they are” should also mean begin with students as symbol-using animals, as language animals—*Language* with a capital L. We do not have to teach our students *how* to symbolize; what we teach is THAT they symbolize. And this is what Paulo Freire means by *conscientization*: as learners come to an awareness of *what* they are doing, they will discover *how* to do it. One of the things they discover is how they might transform the

world on the model of how they use language to represent their experience.

I have represented the *Ineinandersein* of the *what* and the *how* by means of the metaphor of the double helix (see below). You are meant to read from the bottom up, noting that *naming/opposing/defining* are continuous and that in each lozenge, you can read up or down. Naming/opposing/defining are the ways by means of which we make sense of the world. Any and all acts of mind can



Composing As A Double Helix



From *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers* (Boynnton/Cook, 1981), Ann E. Berthoff.

be defined in these terms; any and all language acts can be identified in terms of naming/opposing/defining. These acts go on simultaneously, continuously, and correlatively throughout the composing process.

Another important *Ineinandersein* about language I take from Edward Sapir, the linguist we should be reading instead of Jakobson, Chomsky, Fodor, inter alios. Sapir spoke of “the linguistic process.” Any process wheels on a polarity—think of polar opposites as an axle on which the wheel of process turns. The polarity of the linguistic process Sapir called “projection” and “the resistance of linguistic structure.” The mind projects—*seeing as*, apprehending analogies; such projections are checked by the structures which language provides, those heuristic limits which morphology and syntax provide. For example, the artist Saul Steinberg frequently draws in the mode of physiognomic perception, as when he represents Summer as the open sea, Spring as an island, Autumn as a bay, and Winter as the blank mainland. In *Forming/Thinking/Writing* (Boynton/Cook, 1988), I have used Gombrich’s “parlor game” of ping/pong: if you had only two categories, ping and pong, how would you classify elephant? And what about a mouse? It gets problematic, of course: is Marilyn Monroe ping or pong? Games with “Physogs,” as I. A. Richards called them, illustrate how we project bodily impressions, how we map reality on our bodies. They demonstrate certain powers we all have to make meaning, certain unconscious instruments of thought.

The other pole of the linguistic process which is constituted by formal structures, is illustrated by what I call a Machine for Making a Toy Poem. (See next page).

This machine was originally devised to explain the *Ineinandersein* of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes: you remember that Jakobson defined poetic discourse in terms of the dialectic of these axes. But what it also demonstrates is the heuristic power of syntax. The power of syntax is that it runs along: that is what *dis-course* means. And as it runs along, it brings thought with it. Those of you who have read James Britton’s work will be familiar with “shaping at the point of utterance,” which is in fact the translation of a famous essay by Kleist “. . . the gradual readying of thought while speaking.” *Shaping at the point of utterance* is a slogan which can remind us of the fraudulence of modeling language on the garment: we have ideas which we SOMEHOW “clothe” in words. We all know how important fluency is, but in my opinion it has been oversold as a means of helping students

It is comprised by a syntactical frame, a semantic schema, and an ordering guide, which indicates which slots should be filled first. Experimenters have a lexicon of twelve or so words for each slot. Here is the frame:

All 1 in the 2
I 3 4 5 in the 6 .
7 ! The 8 has 9 .

As an example of "output," we have:

All white in the buds
I flash snow peaks in the Spring.
Bang! The sun has fogged.

Poem example reprinted from *The Times (London) Literary Supplement*
18 June 1970: 667.

find a voice. Yes, it does that, but its most valuable use to us pedagogically is that fluency allows a student to take advantage of the power of syntax to help him think. As Sapir said, "Language is itself heuristic."

The machine is also *fun*: I'm tired of all the talk about the AGONY of writing; I think we should let our students in on the fact that it can be fun, at times. Bright students will chafe under the restrictions provided by this machine; they will have fun devising their own syntactical generators. And everybody finds that they are composing a poem almost in spite of themselves. I have never found anything so useful for showing students how the linguistic process can engage them.

Now if we interpret "Begin with where they are" to mean begin with our students both as members of the public and as members of the species, that is to say as the *animal symbolicum*, the language animal—the result is revolutionary. The conjunction of the political and the essentially human—or, we might say, the spiritual—this conjunction is at the heart of Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, which is a pedagogy of knowing. If you take only the political, only the public, you get the nonpedagogy of those who think that teaching is itself an act of oppression. If you forget the personal, the individual—conceived as representative of the universals of human life—you will have cut yourself off from the greatest resource any teacher has, namely, the knowledge that language belongs to us all, as persons and as members of society;

that the capacity to make meaning is not itself socially constructed but biologically determined; that the human mind provides the wherewithal for teaching interpretation, which I believe is what we teach when we teach reading and writing.

Interpretation, like composition, is of course a symbolic act. Not far from where we are today, at the Cooper Union, Susanne K. Langer gave a lecture in 1958 called "Man and Animal: The City and the Hive." (Collected in *Philosophical Sketches*, 1962.) Mrs. Langer held that all knowledge is interpretation and in this witty and provocative lecture she rejects the image of the hive as a model of human society. We are not, like the bees, semi-individuated but fully individuated. That does not mean that we are not involved with our fellow and sister human beings: Langer argues for the *Ineinandersein* of individuation and involvement which is motivated by our foreknowledge of death. Man is the only creature who knows that he will die and is therefore able to imagine representation, to carry out symbolic acts. It is a very carefully argued theory which she went on to develop in *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*. Susanne Langer is the philosopher we most need if we want to know what it means to say, "Begin with where they are." A socially constructed student who has been deprived of individuality and persona is no more an emblem of Man the meaning-maker than the purposeful voles, concerned tadpoles, communicating amoebas and all the other anthropomorphized denizens of the Public Television forest. Mrs. Langer concluded her lecture with these words:

Our world is a human world, organized to implement our highest individuation. There may be ten thousand of us working in one factory. There are several millions of us living in a city like New York. But we are not the masses; we are the public.

There are, I'm sure, many other ways to begin by beginning with "where they are." I will conclude by noting one which some would want you to forget. I believe that we should begin with our students as inheritors of literary traditions. I do not in any way mean what E. D. Hirsch means by "cultural literacy." That is a program without a pedagogy which is intended to get students ready to read the Great Books, if they ever get to college. It is a superb example of what Sartre ridiculed as *education alimentaire* . . . and what Freire calls "the banking model" of education. I mean, rather, what Louise Rosenblatt means . . . what Dan Fader meant in *Hooked on Books* . . . what Jane Addams meant when she

read George Eliot aloud to the women at Hull House. I could tell you dozens of stories from my forty-five years of teaching, stories of how students came to life in reading literature which the Posties would have you believe is an oppression. But I don't want to play Ms. Chips. I will tell you, though, what L. C. Knights, the literary scholar, told me. I heard this distinguished critic give a lecture in the late sixties about how he forced himself to answer the insolent and ignorant questions of his radical students who wanted to know why they should read "that rubbish." His lecture was on teaching Wordsworth's "Westminster Bridge" and it was superb. Afterwards I thanked him and told him that I was trying to assure that my UMass students had the chance to read something "great" every semester—like "Coriolanus," in a course my colleagues and I had dreamed up, "The Intellectual Confronts the Social Political Order." He agreed about the importance of this enterprise and quoted his wife who taught in a workingmen's institute. What she said was this: only the best is good enough.

I used to think that it was a matter of *books, numbers* of texts. I soon learned that that was not realistic; but superb paragraphs and beautiful sentences can be made accessible. I have always wanted my students to think of themselves as wealthy in the matter of literature. (That is why I've never agreed with those who want student texts to be the only ones in the composition classroom.) We work to assure that by reclaiming the imagination.

I don't know how to make that enterprise palatable for an invincibly ignorant dean, but that's not the point really: the aim of reclaiming the imagination is a covenant between you and your students. That's the most vital *Ineinandersein* of all, because of course they teach us how to read when we are all reading the best. Perhaps that is the most utopian thing I've said, but I have tried throughout these comments to be practical: *practical criticism* is what we teach in teaching reading and writing and I've been claiming that if we are to be good pragmatists we must be able to show and tell why what we are doing works and how we know. We know that what we are doing is working when the response is lively and substantial. We know that this happens only if minds are engaged and that *that* happens only when what our students read is seen as dialogic—when the *Ineinandersein* of the personal and the public is apprehended—the *Ineinandersein* of now and then, here and there, particular and universal, the individual and the group. And we can assure that our teaching is informed by such representations of *Ineinandersein* if we proceed with an understanding of language as a process of making meaning, and of

interpretation as the *logical condition* of signification: there are no clean machines. Ask the dean if he holds with Charles S. Peirce that the meaning relationship is triadic. Offer to provide him with a bibliography so that he can follow your argument. Better yet: invite him to your class and suggest that he should have three writing assignments completed before you next meet. That last is not utopian, but it probably would be counterproductive; I don't want you to get fired! But I passionately believe that ours is a philosophical enterprise and that our pragmatism should include ways to clarify our expectations, to explain them to those who think that our mission should be to teach the correction of error.

Note

¹This paper was originally the keynote address at the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors (CAWS) Conference in October 1992, held in New York City.