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## Teacher Collaboration: A Discovery of Parallel Lives

by

Eileen Biser, Linda Rubel, and Rose Marie Toscano

*I have followed all the rules. My students have looped, freewritten and brainstormed. The peer response forms are thoughtful, the teacher/student conferences have been pleasant and fruitful—the whole experience a homage to contemporary theory in writing process. Here goes ...*

### “Fascinating to Meet New People”

Two years ago, I went to New Zealand for volleyball as a deaf Olympic. I had met many people from Iran. I had a lot of opportunity to get the experience for learning from their sign language.

*Well, she's trying for a thesis ...*

My significant moment in my life was to learn foreign's sign language because I might be able to find a Mr. Right guy from another country so we could understand each other better with our communication. The big different between American and Iran weren't the same like we have in here, for example, We have a toilet in our bathroom but the Iran don't have it, they only go to bathroom on the floor or on the ground. ... The women only go to bathroom in the toilet and the men go to bathroom on the floor to respect women.

*So much for the thesis statement. ... Maybe if I skip to the end.*

The New Zealand are very clean than American does because they don't throw the litters on the ground, if they did then they will be in punishment, I wish I could live in there but there were alots of older people live in there.

*Is this Stacy, the same young woman who sat with me yesterday, signing fluently, her presence, confidence and maturity filling the confines of my office? Stacy is bright and articulate, a successful athlete chosen to represent the United States in the International Deaf Olympics. She has the savvy of a seasoned traveler. Her reputation as a talented art student is firmly established on campus. ... Who is writing this paper? Who is offering these misshapen thoughts?*

In *Lives on the Boundary* (1989), Mike Rose writes informatively and persuasively of those conditions which set “disadvantaged” students apart from academic convention. He demonstrates how non-traditional students, ranging from Vietnam veterans to single mothers to barrio kids, try to work their way through a world whose language and assumptions are not their own. These students are on the edge, and that is where Mike Rose draws his boundary lines. Mike Rose, you don't know from boundaries. ... You don't know about:

- Mark, who, until he was fifteen, sat at the dinner table not understanding one word that was spoken by his hearing family and finally, in frustration, began eating his dinner on a TV tray alone in another room.
- Jonathan, who is the only deaf student in his school. Surrounded by many, he is alone. He's mainstreamed, they say, but THEY don't know the difference between placement and integration.

- Barbara, whose teacher uses slow and exaggerated mouth movements to ask, "What time is your mother coming?" Barbara understands this question as, "What dib is you mother a be?"
- Or Henry Kisor, who interpreted "What's that big loud noise?" as "What's that pig outdoors?," the title of his 1990 book. Even with years of speechreading training, it is difficult for most deaf people to discern more than 26% of what is spoken.
- Joe, who puzzles over his teacher's statement given in sign language, "Butterfly army match is either/or amount." But the teacher meant, "The German military machine was very powerful." Communication has failed at all levels—appropriate and accurate sign choice, handshape, placement and movement, tense indicators all needed for successful communication in sign language. We cannot assume that Joe is receiving 100% of the message because sign is being used.
- Judy, who sits in her tutor's office crying, because the teacher of her mainstreamed class wrote on her paper, "What's this garbage?"—followed by a note on the next page—"Oh ... now I understand. I just checked my roster and noticed that you are a deaf student." The tutor can't convince Judy that the teacher was not patronizing her. She asks in sign language, "How would *you* feel if a teacher had written on your paper, 'Oh, I just checked my roster and noticed that you are a woman. Now I understand'."

For many of our deaf students at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, their "lives on the boundary" are defined by a different, perhaps more extreme form of isolation, fragmentation, and marginalization than those confronting the students presented in Rose's book.

The 1988 Gallaudet protest brought national attention to discrimination against the deaf. There we saw students "voicing" their demands clearly and articulately, reminiscent of campus political action of twenty years ago. The media linked this group's search for equal rights to similar movements by African-Americans, Hispanics, women, and gays. Socio-politically, these comparisons are accurate. These scenes led us to see deaf persons as living on the same boundary as these other minorities. But what we see in Stacy's paper on Iran, hardly a unique example, forces reconsideration of this impression. For us, two major facts are inescapable: at reading and writing, our students are seldom as successful as they have been at forcing political change; and we, as their teachers, face the unique challenges of these students who live beyond "the boundary."

At first glance, part of our students' difficulties with reading and writing can be attributed to the diversity of their languages. (The focus of this paper is not on those many deaf students with strong written English skills.) Some, like Basic Writers, have a primary language of spoken and written English. Others, like ESL students, come from a solid first-language base—ASL (American Sign Language). And a third group, whose initial language experience has been inconsistent and incomplete, finds itself floundering between spoken and sign language.

Part of our challenge as teachers has been investigating the nature of these language differences and understanding their profound influences on the acquisition and use of information and knowledge. While some critics fault the education system for not exposing American students to the basic facts and texts required for "cultural literacy" (Hirsch, 1987), deaf students, separated from the ease of everyday human interaction, often have limited access to the seemingly incidental, but crucial, information needed for their development as readers and writers. Like some of the children Shirley Brice Heath (1983) observed in rural South Carolina, and like some non-native speakers of English in the United States, a deaf person loses out on the kind of information gleaned from overhearing casual conversations, picking up the telephone, flicking on the radio, or just



being in the midst of people engaged in a lively, oral conversation. It is within that context that we understand the following student examples:

The reason why I would like to reduce the number of nuclear arms is because I have just learned about the nuclear bombs that happened at Hiroshima. I was amazed that the bomb was exploded in Japan and destroyed the city and thousands of people died and were injured. I am afraid that it could happen to us in United States of America. Brenda—20 yrs.

I have read that one cause of the 1988 drought is the pattern of the Jet Stream. Now I understand the stuff that comes out of the back of the airplanes influences weather. Jill—22 yrs.

These missing pieces of knowledge have serious consequences for our students' reading, writing, and thinking skills—consequences which impede their success within the academic community and hinder the achievement of what Mike Rose describes as "critical literacy" (1989, p. 188).

To compound this critical literacy dilemma, daily we stand in front of students for whom reading is, at best, limited to vocabulary recognition. Generally their school experiences in both mainstreamed classrooms and in deaf institutes focused on drill book exercises in reading comprehension. It is not unusual for us to meet students like Joan, who, having earned a high school diploma and having completed college prep courses, reads her first full-length book at age 42, or Steve, whose most challenging reading comes from *USA Today*. Because the language difficulties presented by most texts are so confounding, our students don't read or, when required to do so, will rely heavily on reading materials rewritten in simplified language. Deaf students commonly encounter sentences like the following, from a textbook on adapting written English for deaf students (Crandall, 1979). The original sentence reads: "Futurists talk about the benefits of solar energy but the sun already beams into the kitchen and elsewhere for engineer Charles Gibson." In the adapted text, that sentence becomes: "Some people are very concerned about the future. These people talk about energy from the sun. This power from the sun is called solar energy. Solar energy could be useful in the future. Charles Gibson is an engineer. He is using solar energy in his home right now" (pp. 10-11). Given this kind of student experience with reading short, simple, and filtered prose, how successful can our efforts be to introduce them to college-appropriate texts, those mandated by collegewide requirements?

Equally frustrating for our deaf students are the obstacles presented to them by writing. Willing to admit that they don't read, our students also share and adamantly express their feeling that "deaf people can't write," a belief reinforced by years of teachers and students who equate English with grammar and syntax and who limit composition to storytelling and describing. It is not surprising, then, that in response to college-appropriate writing assignments, students produce narratives using sentence structures that are either short and simple (and thus perceived as childish) or long, cumbersome, and convoluted (and thus incomprehensible). Debbie, in response to an assignment asking her to analyze a movie's significance, writes the following summary:

The movie are called "Friday of the 13th." The boy named is Jason. He was downed at the lake. The young couple went to the lake and looked for him but failed. But, later on, Jason came back to live ...

Conversely, Tom writes of his experience of discovering, in kindergarten, that looking for meaning in pictures could not substitute for reading:



Being an imagination in a center of my mind almost always gave me a credit to me to have an opportunity to discover new many ideas before I tried something excited personally. The reason I had a tendency to desperately depend on my meaningful imagination due to a picture attracted is because each picture (which exists on almost each page where you can find and see) is considered to represent its obvious in my own eyes before my motivation is to learn how to read.

Debbie's control of her language is so strict that it makes her prose sound like a first-grade primer, while Tom's incomplete understanding of the conventions of written English reminds us of a message in secret code, for which there is no key.

For a number of years, instead of adopting the focus on grammar and sentence-level mastery common in the education of the deaf, we subordinated the uniqueness of our deaf students' reading, writing, and thinking skills to the attractions of contemporary writing theory which have their source in work with hearing students. We invited well-known theorists, researchers, and practitioners (Peter Elbow, Andrea Lunsford, David Bartholomae, Lynn Quitman Troyka, to name a few) to discuss their work in composition with us. During this time, our department also negotiated a common philosophy, revised courses and curriculum, and reviewed and incorporated a myriad of strategies and texts that have certainly enriched our teaching. But, as attractive as the recent theories and practices are, as hard won as our new curriculum may be, and as successful as attention to the writing process has been, the writing products of our students continually remind us that more needs to be done than modifying for deaf students the theories proven successful with hearing ones.

To reformulate those theories for our particular population, the three of us designed a project analyzing why particular deaf students (grades of C/D) failed to use our written responses as cues for revision. We collected student drafts, asked student writers to analyze what they understood from our comments, and then categorized our response cues. Attributing this failure to students' lack of understanding of the terminology we were using and the incredible diversity of our responses, we hypothesized that consistency in the language of response would aid these students in the revision process.

We knew that in the struggle to meet the special needs of our students we had developed individual strategies and ways of responding to student texts, a diversity that, from one point of view, could be seen as enhancing and enriching students' experience with writing, allowing them a wider choice in developing voice and style. But, from another point of view, it may be that, instead of resolving the problems they face, this differing pattern of strategies and response cues adversely affected our students. It may be that the richness of variety had become the frustration of inconsistency.

As we developed our research design and compiled examples of the "vocabulary of response" we used for student essays, an unarticulated subtext was emerging. A reading and discussion of our project with colleagues and consultant Bill Coles, from the University of Pittsburgh, helped us move away from a focus on practical response strategies to the effect our work was having on how we were seeing our students and ourselves. We stepped back to look at the process and products of our study and realized that what had originally begun as another attempt at problem-solution ("fix-it") work was evolving into a new focus: our collaborative effort.

Collaboration is hardly a new idea. The term permeates the profession, and most would agree that it has become a desirable approach to enhance students' reading and writing development. During its early stages, talk about collaboration focused primarily on student-centered activities, supporting a pedagogical shift from competition among individuals to responsibility shared within a group. Using social construction and collaborative learning theory, Kenneth A. Bruffee (1973) is largely responsible for bringing to light the uses of collaboration within the classroom. Trimbur (1989) describes this collaboration as taking place at a number of levels: "first in small discussion groups, next among the groups in a class, then between the class and the teacher, and finally among the class, the teacher, and the wider community of knowledge" (p. 602).

The 1990 publication of Lunsford and Ede's *Singular Texts/Plural Authors* chronicles the history of collaboration in general and collaborative writing in particular and shows how other people, such as engineers, chemists, and psychologists, work within a collaborative framework. Within our own profession, however, which stresses competition as an accepted/expected operating principle for faculty, rarely do we see allusion to or reward for teacher collaboration. Ede and Lunsford, in the preface to their book, openly discuss the disadvantages of collaborative research and writing in attaining tenure and promotion. Their cautionary tale offers one reason why we in higher education have not as readily embraced this shift to either collaboration or joint authorship among teachers. Issues of tenure and promotion aside, even if it has crossed our minds to attempt collaborative work, such attempts have often been limited to an "exchange" of philosophy, assignments, strategies, and texts in which casual chatter results in classroom experimentation.

For each of the three of us, the journey to collaboration, as we now understand it, has been neither smooth nor direct. It was serendipitous that the three of us were enduring our own "long dark nights of the soul," feeling frustrated as language and literature teachers of the deaf, and questioning how our pedagogy fit within NTID. Seeking some light, each of us had decided, independently, to focus on the small world of our classrooms, hoping to rediscover our original enthusiasm for and satisfaction in teaching. And each of us found support through fruitful conversations and consultations with colleagues. As members of a departmental Language and Literature Working Group, we debated issues of reading, writing, and thinking, giving us a sense that our classroom activities were less random and haphazard. One more step on our journey brought us to establishing an inquiry group, a small community of colleagues who supported each other with critical questions and honest responses to our individual classroom research ideas. But, despite all of these efforts, we remained—in our offices and in our classrooms—alone.

*I'm stuck. ... I have some ideas about how students interpret or misinterpret my comments, but how do I get started?*

*I can't believe that I have anything to say about sequencing of assignments that hasn't already been said. ...*

*This project on individual conferencing is worth pursuing, but I'm tired of working alone.*

At the suggestion of a colleague in our inquiry group, we decided to experiment with merging our overlapping research projects. This three-way effort began like all others. We worked to develop a common focus, met regularly, often and for concentrated periods of time, re-evaluating and reshaping our thesis. But this undertaking cannot be described simply as a linear process. What was evolving from this joint project was a form of teacher collaboration that was unique to us. We weren't *competing* to achieve individual status, nor were we *consulting* with each other on



a limited and random basis. Our work together had gone beyond the casual *conversing* of colleagues and beyond *cooperating* on a designated task. Instead, we found ourselves reading aloud together, writing, planning, talking, inventing together, revising our ideas about ourselves, our students, our discipline. We engaged in dialogue that was emotive, personal, and intellectual, redefining what Andrea Lunsford described as “composing ourselves—looking more closely and listening more closely—listening to the voices of the other in each of us and in each other, listening to the rich and complex diversity” (1990, p. 78) not only of our students, but also of ourselves.

This process, this collaboration, brightened that “long, dark night of the soul”—a night each of the three of us was enduring for many of the same reasons—at the same time—alone. Our collaboration allowed us to understand and to name some possible sources of that darkness. And only in retrospect have we seen that we, like our deaf students, have been isolated, fragmented, and marginalized. So it is ... Teachers and students—leading parallel lives—on the boundary.

*It's the same at every Writing Series. I keep asking the same questions, trying to get the advice of the “experts.” Why should I bother going to see Toby Fulwiler when he'll probably say what everyone else has said, “Trust yourself. You are the expert on deafness.” But am I an expert?*

Professionally, we feel isolated at many different levels. In terms of theory and practice, we are isolated from our colleagues in the English profession because of the unique challenges our students pose. How many panels at professional composition conferences attend to the needs of deaf college-age writers? And we are isolated from our colleagues in English within deaf education. Even with the few small special interest groups that have developed over the years, there is still little sense of connection and cohesion among teachers of English to the deaf. Controversies abound. We all live in separate worlds.

*So much stuff in my head to use ... All these ideas on composition from Bartholomae and Petrosky, Elbow and Bruffee. Padden and Humphries selling Deaf Culture with a capital “D.” Kisor downplaying his deafness and fitting into the mainstream. The articles I've been reading on teaching effectiveness, ESL, learning styles, and high-risk students. The debate about which language to use in my classroom—signed English, pidgin signed English, or American Sign Language. And as if that weren't enough, I have to go back to Stacy's paper and figure out a way to put an honest grade on it and yet not turn her off completely to me and to English.*

Stacy's paper on Iran which begins this paper represents the writing problems our students typically bring. Like many teachers of basic freshman writing, we are torn. We see these students make significant, sometimes extraordinary, progress in their writing development, but how do we value their progress and encourage their continued work in written English while imposing traditional college standards on their writing products? Too often, these same students, who may have fourth to sixth grade language skills, might have math levels above the norm which allow them to succeed within their technical majors despite their language problems. Yet we in Language and Literature are often the gatekeepers to their advancement, forcing many to leave college with unrealized dreams—without degrees.

And, as hearing teachers of English, we can never experience or fully understand the difficulties, frustration, and feelings of oppression our deaf students endure in their struggle to gain control over written language. Because we are often seen as contributing to this struggle, we are torn by our belief that their mastery of English is key to their success in the mainstreamed world,



yet we understand their intense conviction that English is a barrier and English teachers are the oppressors.

*I can't sleep. I keep replaying the conversation from the cocktail party in my mind. Some nerve ...*  
**"So you teach English? Which period do you specialize in? I'm a Medievalist myself."**  
*"Well, actually, I teach composition."*  
**"Oh. Do they ever let you teach a real English course?"**

We live on the fringe of our profession. Historically, teachers of writing have been teachers of literature who were obligated to teach an occasional composition course. One of the most sought-after "perks" of tenure and promotion was being released from that duty. Consequently, composition teachers were either TA's or failed literary scholars doing the work of second-class citizens. As recently as 1989, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (4C's) felt forced to issue a statement of "Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing," defining the undervalued status and conditions under which many composition teachers work and promoting composition and rhetoric as a distinct and legitimate discipline. As described in "A Progress Report from the CCCC Committee on Professional Standards Report," we are "professionally homeless persons" (1991, p. 336).

Other factors keep us on the fringe. There is the marginalized state relegated to any teacher of the humanities in a technical institute who is neither as highly regarded nor as highly paid as those in the technical fields. Further, most would agree with 4C's former chair, Jane Peterson, that "teaching in general is undervalued in American society ... teaching yields little recognition, respect, or remuneration for faculty. The rank and tenure systems of most colleges and universities have institutionalized a hierarchy that places teaching far below research and scholarship" (1991, p. 26). And do we need to mention our marginalized state as women within the academy?

None of this was exactly a revelation. After all, we had been isolated, fragmented, and marginalized for so long that it was simply the state of our professional lives. But something happened to us when we gave voice to these conditions, named them, and categorized them. We not only saw the parallels between each other and our students, but we also began to reconstruct what Mary Belenky and her co-authors (1986) call our "ways of knowing" about ourselves and, therefore, about our students.

What began as generalized information about a generalized student population was becoming more detailed. The original "snapshot" of our students reduced them to a series of dichotomies: oral/manual, achievers/non-achievers, literate/under-prepared, deaf institute/mainstreamed deaf students. As we collaborated, we developed a composite, like the ones that capture every new generation of sorority sisters. We started to see: deaf students of deaf parents/deaf students of hearing parents, students using ASL/students using Pidgin English, those fully mainstreamed into the dominant culture/those completely marginalized from the dominant culture, deaf students who function as native speakers/deaf students who function as bilingual speakers, and so forth. The group is identified, but because the pictures are small, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish one person from the other. The more we talked, the more we read, the more clearly we began to see the flaws with the composite. Instead of a composite which groups people under one identity, like the sorority, what we wanted were Richard Avedon portraits capturing shadow and nuance—character. We were changing in subtle, yet important ways. "The deaf" as a class/category had ceased to exist for us; we were (are) no longer teachers of "the deaf." We were and are teachers of individuals who are deaf. Bill Coles spoke of this type of transformation in a

1990 address at a Bush Foundation Grant conference: "You can grow up as well as old, you know. And if you don't make any changes in what you do that are consonant with that, you die as a teacher. ... It's a question of evolution."

We thought we knew what had kept our students isolated, fragmented, and marginalized, but our collaboration as well as our evolution as teachers have allowed us to see the subtleties of these student portraits delineated and have hastened our evolving "selves." We have found new meaning in reading David Wright, a deaf South African writer, when he suggests in his book *Deafness* (1975):

If knowledge be compared to light, most hearing people live in a twilight precinct with one or two brightly lit patches—subjects with which they have special acquaintance. But my (deaf) companions, it seemed to me, existed in a pitch blackness shot through with a few concentrated beams of painfully gathered information. (p. 59)

Before, our view of our students had been like light refracted through a prism. Our collaboration transformed refraction into reflection, dissolving the distortions and allowing us to see to the clear center. Before, we had simplified, even reduced, crucial misunderstandings in their essays to a lack of world knowledge. Now, through our different lens, we do not see empty spaces or information gaps, but, as Bill Coles suggested in one of our conversations, individuals "supplying the absent," trying to make sense of their world. For example, Joseph, a 29-year-old accounting major, knew from years of instruction that there was such a thing as "structure" required in a composition. But, unable to grasp what writing teachers had been preaching, he had gathered information to fashion his own explanation of what "structure" entailed; it goes something like this—the first sentence of the introductory paragraph must relate to the first sentence of the first body paragraph, the second sentence of the introduction must relate to the first sentence of the second body paragraph, and so on. It used to be easy to dismiss this schema as just simple thinking. It is harder now to criticize such "painfully gathered beams of light shot through the pitch blackness" that Wright speaks of.

We have found new meaning in reading Henry Kisor, who in his memoir on deafness entitled *What's That Pig Outdoors?* (1990), attaches this anecdote to E. M. Forster's tenet, "Only connect! ... Live in fragments no longer":

For the last forty years, I have visited a single barber in his two-chair shop in neighboring Wilmette. John cut my father's hair and now he shears my sons' mops. He is a man to whom talk is mother's milk; as his scissors snick, he chatters ceaselessly. He cannot bear a conversational vacuum. Nor can he speak to the unresponsive sides and back of my head as he works upon them, but must stop now and then, whirl the chair so that I face him, and ask after my family or inquire about my opinion of a sporting event. He listens gravely as I reply, nods approvingly or commiseratively as the case may be, and returns to his work. Scarcely two minutes later his face, again thirsting for an exchange, reappears in front of mine with another gentle question. Trimming my sparse shrubbery is a drawn-out affair. Am I impatient? No, for John refuses to let my deafness deprive him of his pleasure. He cuts, and he connects (p. 267).

Before, we had simplified, even blamed crucial misinterpretations of information in the classroom on our students' inadequate backgrounds in English. We felt confident that we were conveying information correctly in sign language, supporting that information through visuals



and offering appropriate metaphors to clarify meaning. When many of them still couldn't "get it," we explained it away as their lack, not ours. Now, our talk has shifted the focus from them to us and our need to make connections with our students and to help them make connections on their own. For example, we have become painfully aware that we may have been and may still be contributing to their fragmented understanding. As a result, one path our collaboration has taken is to focus on sign language and its use in our classrooms. We are analyzing together the signs and metaphors we use to explain key concepts, not only enlarging our repertoire of communication strategies, but also confirming the complicated nature of delivering information in two languages. To help our students make their own connections, we show them, more systematically, how their discrete pieces of information can fit into patterns and categories.

We have found new meaning in reading Padden and Humphries who describe being *Deaf in America* (1988), also the title of their book:

In nearly all descriptions of the acquisition of language and culture, it is assumed that children have access to adult models of a human language. It is also assumed that children have access to some historically evolved approaches to interpreting the world, to their parents' systems of meaning. And it is assumed that children have access to their parents' collective solutions to common life problems such as how to carry on conversations and how to conduct other kinds of social negotiation. But Deaf people offer a contrast: in many of their lives there are disconnections with the past. The isolation and deprivation experienced by many young deaf children before they discover the language and the culture of Deaf people—and the sense of light after long darkness when they do discover them—allow us to see more clearly the importance of being connected to the past. (p. 121)

Before, we harbored assumptions about our students' ways of interpreting the world that we thought were informed, but now see as incomplete. For example, when students would barge into our offices without knocking—addressing us as Biser, Rubel, Toscano—we would react, perhaps overreact, to their apparent lack of social skills. We thought we knew the reason for such *faux pas*: lack of exposure to the hearing world and its rules of social behavior. Our mission would be to "teach" them those rules. We resisted looking to the conventions of the Deaf world for an explanation. Our collaboration is helping us work out the contradictions of cultural diversity. It is not a matter of enforcing the rules of the hearing world. It is not the simple knowledge that within the deaf community people walk in without knocking or call each other with name signs which do not include proper address. It is understanding and accepting that conventions in deaf and hearing cultures may conflict. Instead of resolving the dilemma by imposing our cultural values, we now question our own motives for making our students conform to the rules of the dominant culture. In other words, we see beyond the mere words "cultural diversity," recognizing the complexity of cultures living together and finding ways to mediate these differences.

The increasingly sharper images of deaf culture were coming through even in texts that had no connection with deafness. In Paul Bowles' *The Spider's House* (1990), one character, reflecting on Moroccan culture, wishes she knew what "makes them tick." Another character replies:

There's one thing I've found that helps. ... And that is that you must always remember it's a culture of "and then" rather than one of "because," like ours. ... What I mean is that in their minds one thing doesn't come from another thing. Nothing is a result of anything. Everything merely is, and no questions asked. Even the language they speak is constructed around that. Each fact is separate, and one never depends on the other. (p. 187)



Before, we had all seen examples of faulty causal relationships and lack of subordination in student texts and flippantly labeled them “somehow” sentences. For example, as one student wrote, “Somehow the employment agency can’t call the homeless people to get them a job.” Reading together Bowles’ explanation of Moroccan culture and seeing these “somehow” sentences in a cultural context have helped us recognize them as a possible narrative frame for deaf writers rather than as a cognitive issue. We are understanding better what makes our students “tick.”

All of this has been an evolution in the ways we see our students—who remain isolated, fragmented, and marginalized. Our new sensitivity does not mean that we can change those states, nor the history and politics which contribute to their lives beyond the boundary. What we are changing is ourselves, and so we begin the long process of reframing ourselves—in relationship to individual students, to our classes, and to our research efforts. And what shape does this reframing take?

One way is that with each student patience surfaces more often than exasperation.

*Here comes Michelle again. How can anyone have so many problems? One day, it's the car, the next day it's the son who had an illegitimate child, then it's the cochlear implant feedback, then it's the divorce and adjusting at 42 to college life. She's driving me crazy!! She's coming in now. Eileen, force yourself to listen. Don't just dismiss her personal problems and harp on the missing draft.*

Michelle made a special gesture at the end of that conference, touching Eileen on the shoulder and thanking her for her patience. Little did she know how Eileen had been screaming inside just moments before.

Another way is that, for the first time, we do not walk into the classroom alone. As Lisa Ede said in an address to the 1987 CCCC Winter Workshop: “I do not stand here alone. ... Instead, I hope that you will see a dense crowd of people, each of whom has helped me create the knowledge I will share with you today and who are thus speaking through and with me.” Linda, standing in front of her class, is reminded of Lisa Ede’s words and sees, not a dense crowd of people, but Eileen and Rose Marie next to her.

*All this talk about introductions isn't getting across. They just don't get that they have an obligation to get the reader interested. How can I show it to them? Wait a minute! I know Eileen uses the metaphor of the writer greeting the readers as they enter a room, like a host welcoming her guests. If I could do something like that now, my students might see it more clearly. And next quarter, when they're in Eileen's class, that same idea will get reinforced.*

To help her students visualize the role of the introduction in an essay, Linda dramatized a walk through a mall, looking at store windows and asking the students what makes a customer want to stop and walk inside. They brought up color, design, detail. This visual metaphor encouraged them to try new strategies in their own introductions.

Finally, we have reshaped ourselves as classroom researchers. The fight for making classroom research legitimate for us is over now. It's not only Patricia Cross, Shirley Brice Heath, and Dixie Goswami advocating it “out there,” but the three of us—together—embarking on it—here.

No one would think that a project like this one would be worth it. After all, who cares about the terms we use in the classroom and whether they are consistent or not. We were talking about how we explain "topic." Imagine, among the three of us, we use 25 different terms for that one concept.

Rose Marie suggested that we reorganize our teaching schedules, allowing us to follow one group of students throughout our three-course sequence, using a mutually-developed pedagogy. That's only the beginning. The room where we meet is littered with other research ideas, enough to keep us busy for the next ten years.

Many find satisfaction and productivity in working alone. We do not mean to imply that collaboration is "a higher calling" or was revealed by God on the Mount. We see now that, for us, the essence of our teacher collaboration is joy, energy, and a belief that what we can do together will surpass what we can accomplish alone. This doesn't mean that we have not, cannot, or will not be individuals or embark on solitary projects as part of our ongoing personal and professional development since, in fact, each of us has her own research and curriculum interests. Nor does it mean that we have only one voice melding into one personality. Neither have we adopted the model of "master and acolytes." Rather, we acknowledge each other's strengths, depend on these strengths, and value them equally. For example, because we compose and write every word and sentence together, we take for granted that Rose Marie will sit at the computer and type, for hers is the gift of fluency. Linda saves us by fiddling with and fixing each word, sentence, and comma. Eileen spots a gap in logic at ten paces; surveying the flow of ideas is her domain.

Deborah Tannen, in her recent book *You Just Don't Understand* (1990, p. 28), provides us with the phrase "asymmetrical relationships" to describe interactions among men vying for status, while women develop "symmetrical relationships" in their quest for community. The notion of asymmetry can be co-opted here to describe the tension often found in the academy. In contrast to that model, the three of us have created symmetry through our initial cooperative work and continue to refine it through our collaborative efforts.

Our collaboration has enabled us to refine our understanding of different relationships presented by Tannen. This model documents the journey we three have taken to collaboration. These terms are hardly revolutionary, but this model illustrates how our collaboration differs from other types of working relationships.

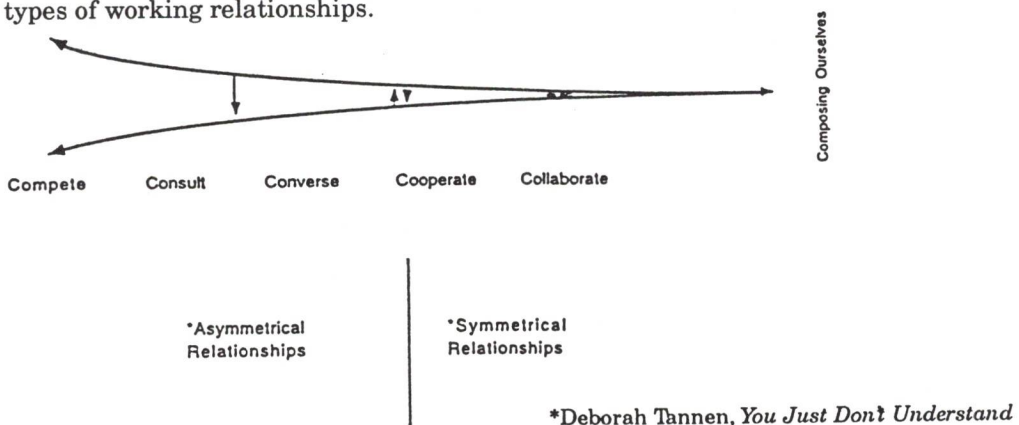


Figure 1. A visual representation of the continuum of working relationships.



Using Tannen's schema of asymmetrical and symmetrical relationships, this chart shows "conversing" as our benchmark distinguishing the two extremes. So, for example, "competition" represents one boundary; we characterize it as a focus on the independent individual whose view of working relationships is colored by rivalry and whose goal is shaded by winning. Implicit in "consulting" is the idea of verticality which underscores the notion of hierarchy, where one person is perceived as more expert than another. "Conversing" can restore a sense of balance between or among members of a working relationship. "Cooperating" moves closer to a symmetrical relationship, but it is primarily task oriented. "Collaboration," in our model, embodies a mutually dependent relationship of equals where the focus is on both product and process. This symmetrical relationship has led to an integration of our professional and personal lives, redefining what and how academic work is accomplished. Collaboration, then, offers a vehicle for "composing ourselves" (Lunsford, 1990).<sup>1</sup>

The isolation, fragmentation, and marginalization that had become so characteristic of our professional lives have not disappeared in a puff of smoke. Many of the issues we raised earlier continue. But we have found a renewed sense of connection and wholeness. We recognize the many facets of each other—as teachers, scholars, women, mothers, wives, and friends, knowing more deeply each other's nuances, weaknesses, and strengths. The boundary lines have not been erased, but our place on the boundary has become more habitable.

"Teacher Collaboration: A Discovery of Parallel Lives." It seemed an appropriate title when we wrote the proposal for this essay. Collaboration was a word we chose easily and whose meaning we thought we knew. In talking, thinking, reading, and writing together, however, our sense of collaboration has become fuller, richer. At that time, the word "discovery" also seemed appropriate. After all, we had found important parallels between each other and our students. Since then, we have found that one discovery after another emerges. As we have been composing ourselves, so do we keep recomposing our title. Today, it is more suitable to say "Teacher Collaboration (with a new meaning): Discovering Parallel Lives."

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<sup>1</sup>The distinctions we make in our continuum are mirrored in sign language. There are, for example, distinct sign glosses for four of these relationships: compete, consult, converse, cooperate. But to convey the meaning of the word "collaboration," sign language uses a variety of sign combinations which depend on the context and the signer.



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