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REVISING MUSES: IRRATIONALITY,
CREATIVITY, AND COMPOSITION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Matt Cliff Cofer
May 1992

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Matt Cliff Cofer

ABSTRACT

Today, Composition is widely held to be a completely rational activity, with identifiable steps and procedures to be taught, learned, and followed. There are, however, a significant number of Rhetoric/Composition theorists (both ancient and modern) who have explored the realm of influences in writing which are not limited to conventional rationality (such as inspiration, intuition, emotion, etc.), often in the context of "creativity." As a counterpoint to the predominating rationalist approaches, this paper examines a number of these "supra-rational" (beyond the rational) works, in an effort to identify key common elements, beliefs, assumptions, etc., and to consider ways to successfully implement these insights in the Composition class.

Some of the key elements identified in these works include: acknowledging the limitations of overly rational approaches, affirming the value and significance of "supra-rational" processes in writing, and validating the creative potential of each individual student.

The paper concludes that a writing (Composition) teacher can help students develop writing skills which lead to creative, original, quality writing products by, among other things, describing writing processes in terms of "supra-rational" experiences, and by facilitating such experiences through certain kinds of writing assignments.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Creativity" has consistently been perceived as something magical, mysterious, and/or incomprehensible. "Creative" musicians, painters, poets, orators, architects, even scientists, have been seen as "gifted" individuals, blessed with divinely inspired genius which elevates them from the common lot of the ordinary populace. Yet, "creativity" may be one of the English language's most often used but least often defined words. In the context of writing, for instance, poems, plays, and fictional stories are labeled "creative" writings, while the types of writings usually done today for an English Composition class (autobiographical, informative, research, analysis, etc.) are not labeled "creative" (?). And Creative Writing and Composition are segregated and seen as, apparently, significantly different activities, in spite of many similarities.

The key to deciphering the mysterious separation of Composition from Creative Writing may lie in the perceived definition and function of "rationality." For whatever reasons, Composition has been and is still largely seen as a very rational, logical activity which can be controlled, understood, and taught in purely rational terms. This view is based on the perception of an objective, static, consistent reality, where two plus two always equals four, and cause/effect relationships are determinable.

So called "Creative Writing," on the other hand, though it deals with seemingly rational concepts such as "plot" and "characterization," is still perceived as something which draws from irrational realms. In fact, the term "supra-rational" may be a better term than "irrational" for referring to realms which go beyond rationality (involving things like intuition, subconscious processes, inspiration, natural talent, emotion, muses, etc.). And Creative Writing is usually associated with the mysterious realms of the supra-rational, as is "creativity" in general.

Perhaps the most identifiable criterion for creativity is "originality." Time and again "creativity" and "originality" are used synonymously, though their interchangeability is almost always expressed tacitly rather than explicitly. And creativity/originality is almost always portrayed as desirable, something associated with "quality." D.N. Perkins, for instance, claims that "...creative means original and of high quality" (6), which is about as explicit as such definitions get. In fact, Mr. Perkins goes on to say:

There is no way that an account of "creating" or "creative" can get explicit about the many partly tacit criteria of originality and quality that apply in different contexts, especially when invention often makes its own standards of quality, by leading people to discover kinds of

quality they had little awareness of before.

This is the way it is, and we will simply have to live with it." (6)

Yet, surely "quality" and "originality" are criteria which are applicable to Composition assignments. For instance, it does not seem like a contradictory impulse to desire an "original" research paper. Assuming that most Composition teachers would find "originality" and "quality" to be recognizable, desirable traits in student writing, how can Composition teachers stimulate more creative work from their students? In this context, answers may be possible through an examination of the written works of writers who have dealt with supra-rational processes and writing (not just "creative" writing)--identifying (if possible) common elements, assumptions, ideas, etc., and contrasting these to the more dominant (currently) rationalist worldview.

Painters, musicians, and even scientists have often claimed that their original ideas and works were spurred by supra-rational influences, rather than figured out in a rationally controlled manner. Yet, the very thought that Composition may involve inspiration, talent, or some irrational, uncontrollable influence, for instance, seems to arouse considerable fear in the minds of many modern Composition theorists, as if such a notion was a hideous fiend to be kept at bay, or locked in a dark prison until

some proper form of execution or banishment could be found.

Lucy Mc Cormick Calkins, for example, claims that writing as process had been ignored "until recently . . . probably because we assumed that good writing flowed magically from talent, inspiration, and the poetic muse" (126). Another example comes from Timothy R. Donovan and Ben W. McClelland, who write that while their old (former) teachers "were hunting down topic sentences and crucifying their shapes on the black-board, they often failed to wonder how sentences were first shaped in their students' minds. That, presumably, was left to the muse's inspiration, or lack thereof" (ix). Linda Flower and John Hayes (leaders of the "cognitivist" inquest) are also among the "muse-bashers," claiming that "The notion of discovery is surrounded by a mythology which, like the popular myth of romantic inspiration, can lead writers to self defeating writing strategies" (92).

This expressed fear probably stems from a widespread misperception about creativity--that it is only available to the elite, to certain geniuses who just happened to be born with gifts. In fact, assumptions that writing processes are beyond understanding (and therefore cannot be dealt with) have actually been used as justification for only dealing with (in the context of teaching writing) written products, and especially with the grammatical elements of these products. But modern Composition theorists have, for the

most part, realized that to embrace this worldview while trying to teach writing, especially to the kind of diverse student populations at today's college campuses, would be (is) problematic at best. And Composition theorists who decry elitist assumptions do so based on an assumption that all students can be taught to write, at least in terms of the type of assignments given in a Composition class, including instruction in the process of writing.

But in the effort to refute the approaches of those who paid lip service to the sublime mysteries of writing, while eagerly cramming grammatical correctness down the gullets of baffled students, many modern Composition theorists seem to have overreacted to the extent that they have internalized an equally insidious assumption--that all aspects of the writing process can and should be understood and controlled in purely rational terms (leading to step-by-step, "blanket" strategies, techniques, etc.). And while theorists who disparage the role or benefits of irrational (supra-rational) influences in composing may sometimes also appear to embrace them (given proper labeling and classification), the drive to reject irrational influences and develop totally rational theories, may be a somewhat dangerous trend, with potentially harmful side-effects (especially for students).

There are, though, a significant number of Rhetoric/Composition theorists (both ancient and modern) who

have addressed topics, issues, concerns, etc. in the context of supra-rational influences in writing and creativity. In fact, there are enough such works that comprehensiveness may be virtually impossible except in a most voluminous manuscript--which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Instead, an attempt will be made to provide a sampling which presents something of a representative variety of approaches and ideas--looking to identify common elements which might then be distilled into some kind of applicable advice regarding supra-rational processes and the stimulation of quality, original, "creative" student writing in the Composition classroom.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ANCIENT WRITERS

Today, the notion that writers are influenced by deities, spirits, etc. is usually perceived as something of an irrational superstition. Ideas regarding writing, creativity, and non-rational experiences, however, are probably as old as writing itself. In Homer's day, it seems that "invoking the muse" was simply what poets, orators, writers, and other artists did. The experience of composing was something that just couldn't be limited to human consciousness and was therefore attributed to "divine" influence (And the early Greeks were certainly not alone in their reverence for words produced under the auspices of divine guidance). But is the "muse experience" of these ancient people totally alien to twentieth-century Composition students?

The roots of Rhetoric and Composition reach deeply through history into the ground from which they originated and from which they still draw nourishment: ancient Greek and Roman writers. And while they often addressed composing in terms of oral communication, their works are written works which are certainly applicable to writing. These writers lived in societies where rationality was the new "religion." Beliefs in supernatural deities and the like were disappearing, as philosophy, science, logic, etc. provided more and more rational, logical explanations for "natural" phenomena.

Yet, in the midst of this rational whirlpool, writers such as Plato, Cicero, Quintillian, and Isocrates continued to express ideas regarding the value and function of "supra-rational" (beyond rationality) influences in composing processes. And it may be worthwhile to look at some brief excerpts of what these "founding fathers" of Rhetoric and Composition, so often perceived as denizens of logic and rationality, had to say (write) about the realms of the supra-rational.

Whatever Plato's "Phaedrus" may be about, it is not farfetched to say that it takes place in the context of a pedagogical discourse: Socrates, a great instructor, is attempting to teach Phaedrus something. Neither is it difficult to see the character Phaedrus as being representative of youth in general--the "dear imaginary youth" (127) to whom Plato addresses his work for instructional purposes. In this context, it is interesting to note the emphasis which is put on the role of spiritual guidance, and the handling of the muse idea/metaphor.

Socrates reveals an extreme detestation for and fear of people using the guise of muse invocation/divine inspiration to lend false credence to their words. He chastises Phaedrus, using ironic flattery, about appearing to be inspired (118). Socrates then speaks of "ancient sages . . . who . . . would rise up in judgement against" him were he to agree with Phaedrus that no one could do better than

Lysias on the topic of love, and he seems serious about this statement (119). Socrates, however, then gives a rhetorical disclaimer, stating that his upcoming speech is not an invention of his own. This is almost certainly meant in an ironic or satirical way--making fun of this mode of discourse. Phaedrus' "that is grand" comment, his accusing Socrates of "putting" on "airs" (119), and Socrates' later statement that this had "no truth or honesty" (122) all support such an interpretation. Further evidence of Socrates' jabbing at the "invokers" of false inspiration can be seen as he goes into his lengthy, showy, satirical muse invocation, pausing in his speech to make sure Phaedrus notices that he is "inspired," and may soon "appear to be in a divine fury" (120).

Socrates' style and tone are much different, however, as he moves into his second speech. Compare, for instance, from the first speech: "And now dear Phaedrus, I shall pause for an instant to ask whether you do not think me, as I appear to myself, inspired" (120) with the line from the second speech: "Do you not perceive that I am already overtaken by the nymphs to whom you have mischievously exposed me?" (122). While the first example is rather lengthy, formal, and pretentious, the second is concise, direct, and forceful. This change parallels/illustrates a change from false to actual inspiration. Socrates hears a voice in his ear and is quite clear about what must be done.

And it seems quite clear that Socrates is in earnest with his inspiration this time. "How prophetic is the human soul!" he exclaims (122), and from this point on Socrates, "with forehead bold and bare" (123), gives one of the most "divine" and "inspired" speeches in all of literature.

Regarding "the madness of those who are possessed by the muses," Socrates says that "he who, having no touch of the muses' madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art--he . . . and his poetry are not admitted" (124). Here, and elsewhere in "Phaedrus," Socrates indicates that art (technique), rhetorical conventions, and logical thinking are somehow inadequate not just for creating a speech, but for fulfillment in life itself. He proposes that some divine or spiritual element is needed as well.

This inspiration is not a matter of outward appearance: "the vulgar . . . do not see [when one] is inspired" (126). Nor is this something to be gained from book learning: "And what is well and what is badly--need we Lysias, or any other poet or orator, who ever wrote or will write either a political or any other work, in metre or out of metre, poet or prose writer, to teach us this?" (130). This inscrutable element is somehow discovered in the context of trust in the supra-rational, a willingness to look to the "clearness" and "perfection" which are "a man's legitimate offspring;--being . . . the word which he finds in his own bosom" (140).

This apparent "inward" focusing creates a seeming contradiction if muses are perceived as "external" entities--for how can this inspiration come both from within and without? The problem here stems from the nature of logical, rational, objective (dualistic) thinking, which claims that a thing either exists or does not exist, is either animate or inanimate, exists either inside or outside of a particular boundary, etc. (this "Western" mindset is often credited to, or blamed on, Aristotle, who came along a little after Plato). What Socrates describes is an experience, and the nature of human experience is such that it transcends the boundaries of logic, entering the realms of the supra-rational, where concepts like "inside" and "outside" lose their "solidity," where a writer may not know (or care) where a "voice" is coming from.

It may seem odd that Socrates should give Phaedrus this lesson, considering that throughout much of Plato's work Socrates constantly advocates the power of logical thinking through his dialectical approach and disparages uncritical thinking--especially in the context of attempted persuasion. But there is an important distinction to consider: actual inspiration vs. false or contrived inspiration. As shown earlier, Socrates goes through elaborate contortions to make fun of those who put on an outward appearance of inspiration in a rational, calculated attempt to bypass listener's critical faculties, and to persuade via some kind of

"divine" prestige. This was apparently a very real danger to Socrates and Plato, and is probably at the root of their expressed distrust for poetic orators, who most likely went through muse-invocation displays before stirring up their audiences to emotional but uncritical states of mind in which ideas, stories, persuasions etc. would be more likely to be accepted without questioning.

Socrates, however, does not say that such divine connections do not exist. In fact, there are many instances in the Platonic canon where Socrates refers to his own dependence on spiritual guidance, and his lessons for Phaedrus advocate getting in touch with this. But Socrates proposes this connection as an individual concern, not something to be found by following or imitating someone else's ideas.

So, Socrates, one of the most intensely rational thinkers in history, uses the muse idea/metaphor as one way of describing his own experience of irrational (supra-rational) influences in the process of creating a speech, as well as indicating the importance of these influences in such "creative" endeavors. It also seems rather likely that the writer (Plato) who brings Socrates' ideas to light would agree. In fact, it is indeed impossible to know what to attribute to Plato and what to attribute to Socrates, but the messages are what count.

Another influential ancient writer who expressed ideas

regarding supra-rational influences and creative processes was Cicero. It's interesting to note that in his "De Oratore," Cicero has his mouthpiece, Crassus, say: "what is so marvellous as that, out of the innumerable company of mankind, a single being should arise, who either alone or with a few others can make effective a faculty bestowed by nature upon every man?" (emphasis added) (Benson & Prosser 92). While Cicero is aiming at the development of a perfect orator, he indicates that the "faculty" or potential exists in everyone. This concept seems to be fairly in line with Socrates' statements about individuals having their own innate knowledge and ability. But Cicero seems a bit elitist when he has Crassus state that "no one should be numbered with the orators who is not accomplished in all those arts that befit the well-bred" (B & P 100). From this, it appears that Cicero believes an orator's abilities come solely from formal (rational) training--learning the proper methods, devices, etc. Cicero, however, goes on to give a detailed, revealing explanation.

When Crassus is finally cornered into answering the question of whether there is an art (technique or science) of oratory, he says he thinks that "there is either no art of speaking at all or a very thin one," and that "all the quarrelling in learned circles" is "really based upon a dispute about a word. For if . . . an art is defined as consisting in things thoroughly examined and clearly

apprehended, and which are also outside the control of mere opinion, and within the grasp of exact knowledge, then there seems to be no such thing as an art of oratory" (B & P 107). So, Cicero indicates that oratory is not reducible to the kind of precision or logic associated with science. Cicero does go on to acknowledge the value of rational thinking, but without limiting oratory to it. And he does not seem overly rigid about what elements to include in this "art" of oratory.

Cicero's Antonius also speaks of the element of emotional appeal: ethos. He notes the power of emotion, using the example of how he is moved by an actor's performance:

Now if that player, though acting it daily, could never act that scene without emotion, do you really think that Pacuvius, when he wrote it, was in a calm and careless frame of mind? That could never be. For I have often heard that--as they say Democritus and Plato have left on record--no man can be a good poet who is not on fire with passion, and inspired by something very like frenzy. (B & P 174)

He goes on to say, regarding his famous defense of Manius Aquilius, that he did it "not by way of technique . . . but under stress of deep emotion and indignation" (B & P 174). Here, Cicero, through Antonius, portrays emotion (an element

of the supra-rational realm) as a powerful force in the process of spontaneous composing.

Quintillian is another ancient writer who dealt with supra-rational influences in composing processes. In "Institutio Oratoria," Quintillian, regarding inspiring feelings in others, indicates that "the man who will best inspire such feelings in others is he who has first inspired them in himself" (Benson & Prosser 122). He also writes that "the authors who have discoursed on the nature of virtue must be read through and through, that the life of the orator may be wedded to the knowledge of things human and divine" (B & P 126). Quintillian's focus on feelings/emotions and spiritual concerns seem similar to some of Plato's and Cicero's ideas. And his ideas regarding the limitations of an exclusively rational approach to composing also display significant similarities:

the science of dialectic . . . is often useful in definition, inference, differentiation, resolution of ambiguity, distinction and classification . . . yet if it claim to assume the entire direction of the struggles of the forum, will merely stand in the way of arts superior to itself and by its very subtlety will exhaust the strength that has been pared down to suit its limitations. As a result . . . certain persons who show astonishing skill in philosophical debate, as soon as they

quit the sphere of their quibbles, are as helpless in any case that demands more serious pleading as those small animals which, though nimble enough in a confined space, are easily captured in an open field. (B & P 127)

Quintillian, furthermore, indicates that it is not possible "to lay down general rules which would suit all subjects. . . . and since . . . there has never been found one single case which was exactly like any other, the pleader must rely upon his sagacity, keep his eyes open, exercise his powers of invention and judgement and look to himself for advice" (B & P 207). And this "advice" regarding looking to one's self seems parallel to that of Plato's "word" that is found in one's "own bosom," and Cicero's individual "faculty" or potential.

Isocrates was yet another influential ancient writer who affirmed the role of supra-rational influences and the limitations of rationality in composing. In "Against the Sophists," he marvels at the ignorance of those "instructors of youth who cannot see that they are applying the analogy of an art [science] with hard and fast rules to a creative process" (Benson & Prosser 44). This sounds very similar to Plato, Cicero, and Quintillian, but Isocrates is somewhat unique in his emphasis on individual natural aptitude or talent.

Isocrates claims that "formal training" "cannot fully

fashion men who are without natural aptitude into good debaters or writers, although it is capable of leading them on to self improvement and to a greater degree of intelligence on many subjects" (B & P 44, 45). He goes on to say that a teacher must "leave out nothing that can be taught, and for the rest, he must in himself set such an example of oratory that the students who . . . are able to pattern after him will, from the outset, show in their speaking a degree of grace and charm which is not found in others" (B & P 45).

Isocrates' beliefs and attitudes were possibly very influential in the development of twentieth-century approaches. His statements regarding what can be taught and natural aptitude can be (and probably have been) interpreted as elitist and exclusive. And it does not seem farfetched that many twentieth-century, Composition theorists (American ones at least), who were (are) attempting to educate masses of people from many socioeconomic backgrounds, saw (see) these attitudes as subversive to their efforts to develop "blanket" strategies for teaching the writing process (whether they have read Isocrates or not). This perception, in turn, may quite possibly be behind the apparent effort (as mentioned earlier) to eliminate "myths" about natural aptitude, inspiration, individualism, or anything that can be seen to contradict the idea that anyone can be taught to write well through the discovery, creation, and/or

application of particular "how to," textbook, step-by-step, rigidly rational techniques, methods etc.

But, to gain a more complete understanding of Isocrates' views it is important to consider the context he operated within. Isocrates lived in a society where a person's educational opportunities were largely determined by social status. Displaying a "natural aptitude" for something was probably the only way for someone of borderline social and/or economic status to gain an opportunity for instruction in that field. In fact, more often than not, this has been the case throughout most of the history of Western Civilization until very recently. Except for the wealthy, many families, if they could scrape together the money, had to choose which, if any, of their children would receive advanced education based almost solely on natural aptitude. Isocrates made his living as an instructor of Rhetoric, and as such probably desired (required) students who displayed some talent for oratory and/or writing. Since his reputation and income depended on the success of his students, he desired those who were likely to develop "a degree of grace and charm which [was] not found in others."

Isocrates' "practical" concerns, however, do not invalidate or diminish the significance of his approach to teaching. He perceives composing as a "creative process" which is somehow beyond the scope of set rules; and his

statements imply that attempting to make this process conform to rigidly linear, step-by-step rules is not only futile, but harmful. He also places a high value on the assets individuals bring to composing processes. He does not claim that "formal training" cannot be helpful, but that there are other important factors outside its domain.

While there are numerous other works by these and other ancient writers which could be discussed here, this sampling reveals some important common elements. Firstly, the process of composing cannot and should not be limited to exclusively rational techniques, approaches, etc. Also, the experience of supra-rational influences in composing (such as emotion, inspiration, intuition, etc.) should be affirmed, valued, and invoked, rather than denied and disparaged. Furthermore, individuality should be recognized and affirmed, and the innate experiential knowledge of each individual should be tapped and utilized.

But, having exorcised the ghosts of misguided grammatical approaches, contemporary Composition pioneers, often led by cognitive theorists, press onward in the quest for the "promised land" of perfect theory, to mine the diamonds of imminently teachable techniques and blanket strategies, so the secrets of the writing process can be revealed to and logically understood by all. In fact, as brain research advances, writing teachers may become proficient accupuncturists, able to stimulate quality

writing with "pinpoint" accuracy and efficiency. Along the way, primitive, irrational myths about inspiration, muses, individual natural ability, and the wayward, flaky writing conceptions of poor bumpkins like Plato, Keats, Wordsworth, and Shakespeare can finally be banished, or at least explained and understood in logical terms. But before all writing teachers are forced to take brain anatomy courses, and the last muse is blasted into extinction, or dissected and placed into alphabetized, formaldehyde-bearing containers, it might be wise to consider sparing some of this endangered species, and to lend an ear to those poor muse worshippers who saw and those who still see magic, mystery, and wonder as part of writing.

CHAPTER THREE: MODERN COMPOSITION THEORISTS

There have been numerous attempts to categorize and classify the approaches, philosophies, techniques, etc. of twentieth-century Composition theorists. It is interesting to note that, by and large, these efforts tend to reveal a noticeable split between those who favor/emphasize rational, logical, "classical" approaches, and those who focus on irrational, holistic, "romantic" approaches.

One of the most revealing of such attempts is Richard Young's division of modern theorists. He sees all modern theorists as disciples of "the new rhetoric," those who have "been devoted to finding ways of teaching the process of discovery and of making it a part of a rhetoric that is not only new but practical" (Young 132). Young, however, identifies "two apparently irreconcilable positions" among these theorists (132). On one hand there are "the new romantics," who maintain that because it is "associated with . . . mysterious powers," "the art of writing cannot be taught," but that the teacher's function is to "present students with situations in which [writing] can be learned more easily" (134). On the other hand, there are the "new classicists," who are concerned with "the knowledge necessary for producing preconceived results by conscious, directed action" (134). And, indeed, there seems to be a significant disparity between these views. Young, however, thinks "that there may be a basis for accomodation between"

these two groups. His answer? "Heuristic procedures" (especially those associated with "tagmemics"), which he seems to see as something of a balanced compromise. Young says that heuristics provide "a series of questions or operations whose results are provisional. Although more or less systematic, a heuristic search is not wholly conscious or mechanical; intuition, relevant knowledge, and skill are also necessary. A heuristic is an explicit strategy for effective guessing" (135). As an example of a heuristic procedure, Young offers directions for an assignment (based on Francis Christensen's ideas): "Study what is being observed, write a base clause about it, and then try piling up at the end of the clause analogies, details, and qualities that serve to refine the original observation" (136-37). Young also offers an example of a tagmemic rhetoric heuristic, one which asks the writer to look at a "unit" (subject) "as a static, sharply defined particle, as a wave of activity, and as a field of relationships. In each mode [the writer is] asked to note the unit's contrastive features, variations, and distributions" (138).

Young goes to great lengths to demonstrate that heuristics do not lean too strongly toward rationality, concluding that "overrationalization is a danger, but it is not an inevitable consequence of the theory" (139). And to his credit, Young says, regarding the "two conflicting conceptions of art," "that in some sense both are true, in

spite of their seeming incompatibility," and suggests that teachers can "live with the conflict, exploiting one or the other of the conceptions as it suits [their teaching] needs . . ." (139). But Young's claims and views are reminiscent of cognitive, epistemic, and other modern Composition theorists who claim to regard rational and irrational writing processes rather equally, or to have the perfect compromise--[see, for example, James Berlin's categorization of "objective, subjective, and transactional," which neatly portrays the epistemic (transactional) position as a perfect compromise between the rational (objective) and irrational (subjective) extremes]. Young, in fact, is probably more favorably inclined toward irrational processes than the majority of such theorists, but a close look at the foundations his theory is built on reveals some interesting assumptions and implications. Young says that he is concerned

not only with what we do when engaged in intellectual explorations but also with what we can do to increase our control over it to make it more effective. . . . The answer offered by tagmemic rhetoric is a heuristic based on principles of tagmemic linguistics, a linguistic theory developed primarily by Kenneth Pike. These principles, Pike maintains, are universal invariants that underlie all human experience

and are characteristic of rationality itself.

(emphasis added) (138)

There can be little doubt that the drive to control, and a belief in "invariants" which are common to all human experience, are elements of a thoroughly rational perspective, built on the assumption that human rationality can understand, classify, and even control virtually anything. The principles and techniques Young, and others like him, point out are aimed at developing a knowledge which "enables us to discuss roles; make definitions, predictions, and assumptions about appropriateness of occurrence; and in general perceive . . . systemic relationships . . ." (138). And, in a sense, these views are probably typical of most modern Composition theorists. Although they often seem to affirm the roles and function of the supra-rational in Composition (and even creativity), a close examination invariably reveals a rational worldview--with little room or tolerance for anything mysterious, magical, irrational, or beyond logical control.

There are, however, a significant number of modern Composition theorists (reminiscent of their ancient predecessors) who have unhesitatingly affirmed and validated the role of supra-rational influences in Composition, by admitting that there are processes, influences, and experiences in writing which are truly mysterious, and beyond understanding in terms of static, rational,

systematic, cause-effect relationships--and it is, more than anything else, this difference in world-views that separates the rationalists (including epistemic, cognitive, and tagmemic proponents) from the supra-rationalists. These supra-rational theorists have also, by and large, challenged the rationalist assumption that thinking precedes and directs writing--the notion, in other words, that writers must think about what to write and then write what they think [D. Gordon Rohman, for example, states that "in terms of cause and effect, thinking precedes writing" (106)]. And these supra-rationalists have also pointed to the importance of individuality--to the experience, knowledge, and uniqueness that each person brings to composing processes. Furthermore, many of them have made direct correlations between supra-rational processes and creativity.

Perhaps the most influential of modern Composition supra-rational advocates is Peter Elbow. Elbow has been a pioneer in techniques of "freewriting," and his methods have been widely adopted and implemented. Elbow claims that the most effective way he knows to improve one's writing "is to do freewriting exercises regularly. They are sometimes called 'automatic writing,' 'babbling,' or 'jabbering' exercises. The idea is simply to write for [a set length of time]. . . . The only requirement is that [the writer] never stop" ("Without Teachers" 3). Elbow sees freewriting as a "natural way of producing words," in which "there is a

sound, a texture, a rhythm--a voice--which is the main source of power in [one's] writing"; and while Elbow "doesn't know how it works," he says that "this voice is the force that will make a reader listen . . ." ("Without Teachers" 6).

But while Elbow sees freewriting as something mysterious, he (like most supra-rationalists) doesn't deny the importance of rational thinking when it comes to editing. "Editing, in itself, is not the problem," he says; "the problem is that editing goes on at the same time as producing" ("Without Teachers" 5). In fact, Elbow seems to value "producing" and "editing" rather equally. Implying a link between creativity and non-critical processes, Elbow sees "in good writers the ability somehow to be extremely creative and extremely critical, without letting one mentality prosper at the expense of the other or being half-hearted in both" ("Contraries" 219).

Yet, even though Elbow may hold the rational and supra-rational in somewhat equal esteem, the direction and focus of his work imply a perceived need to reveal and assert the value of supra-rational processes in writing, to help balance an apparently overrational tendency among Composition theorists and teachers. He says that freewriting can produce an "integration of meanings . . . at a finer level than [one] can achieve by conscious planning or arranging"; and that although "much or most" of one's

freewriting "will be far inferior to what [one] can produce through care and rewriting," "the good bits will be much better than anything else [one] can produce by any other method" ("Without Teachers" 8-9).

Elbow, also, doesn't really seem to put much stock in the notion that writers should think out and plan their writing in advance: "Instead of a two-step transaction of meaning into language, think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which [one] start[s] writing at the very beginning--before [knowing one's] meaning at all," and then encourages the "words gradually to change and evolve. Only at the end . . ." will the writer know what he or she wanted to say ("Without Teachers" 15).

Elbow, along the same lines, rejects the notion that writers should always keep their audience consciously in mind while writing. He says that "After we have figured out our thinking in copious exploratory or draft writing--perhaps finding the right voice or stance as well--then we can follow the traditional rhetorical advice: think about readers and revise carefully to adjust our words and thoughts to our intended audience" ("Ignoring Audience" 52).

And while Elbow (regarding contraries or paradoxes in teaching) says that teachers must sometimes "help students learn . . . to 'try harder,'" he also sees a need for teachers to sometimes help students learn "to 'just relax'"

("Ignoring Audience" 65). He claims that sometimes "by unclenching, [students] effortlessly call on social discourse skills of immense sophistication. . . . Sometimes . . . they need to learn . . . how to relax and let go--to unclench" ("Ignoring Audience" 65).

Yet, relaxation exercises are rarely considered or mentioned as viable techniques in Composition pedagogy and are perhaps even rarer in actual Composition classes. But if Elbow is correct here, it follows that teachers should be more aware of student anxiety and comfort levels, and make an effort to create a "relaxed" classroom atmosphere. A teacher might try being informal, humorous, or entertaining; she/he might lead the class in a meditation exercise, order pizza for everyone, tell a good (harmless) joke, show a humorous video, etc. It probably matters less what an individual teacher does to encourage student relaxation than that he/she makes some kind of an effort.

Another one of the more influential and prolific of these theorists is Donald Murray. While Murray doesn't totally deny the value of rationality, or thought prior to writing, he does indicate that the supra-rational points the way for the rational: "My students become writers at that moment when they first write what they do not expect to write. . . . Writers value the gun that does not hit the target at which it is aimed. . . . Writers are, like all artists, rationalizers of accident. They find out what they

are doing after they have done it" ("Surprise" 1). For Murray, surprise is "that moment when language leaves the mind and moves the hand" ("Surprise" 3). In this context, Murray links creativity with the supra-rational when he quotes E.M. Forster's words: "'Think before you speak is criticism's motto; speak before you think is creation's'" ("Surprise" 1). And Murray also says that "intention is the enemy and surprise the friend" ("Lightning" 220). Furthermore, Murray claims that the experience of "surprise" is what "motivates writers to haul themselves to their writing desks year after year" ("Surprise" 1).

Murray parallels Peter Elbow in his advice regarding how to bypass rational limitations: "I want to write what I do not know in ways I have not written. I need to speed ahead of the censor and write so fast that my velocity causes the accidents of insight and language that make good writing" ("Habits" 16). He even warns of the dangers of being "too well educated," and affirms the need to embrace mystery: "If you have the disadvantage of a fine and complete education, move out from that center of comfort to where you don't know everything, where there are dark forests, looming mountains, shadows that move, strange noises in the night" ("Lightning" 218). Further clarifying the limiting effects of overrationalization, he claims that "those who do not write wait until what they want to say is clear in their minds" (emphasis added) ("Habits" 16).

But while Murray downplays the role of expectation, in terms of what a writer thinks about writing and what is actually written, he nevertheless sees expectation as something of a prerequisite for surprise (making a distinction between "expectation" and "thought"), claiming that experienced writers have "the problem of the excess of surprise and must learn how to decide which mermaid is real. These are problems for experience and craft, but first there must be the possibility of surprise. That is the starting point for the effective writer and the effective teacher . . . " (emphasis added) ("Surprise" 3). And Murray's ideas have important ramifications for pedagogy, for if people "are much more likely to perceive surprise if [they] expect to see it" ("Surprise" 3), then it follows that part of a teacher's job would be to facilitate such an expectation or belief. Inherent in this "expectation" is a willingness to trust in something beyond rationality, beyond direct control--the supra-rational.

In fact, of "the conditions that allow [Murray] to receive writing" ("Lightning" 215), he finds "faith" to be "hardest of all. . . . Faith that [he] can write, that [he has] something to say, that [he] can find out what it is, that [he] can make it clear. . . . Faith enough to stand out there all alone and invite the lightning" ("Lightning" 222). And it seems rather likely that the reason Murray, and most people, find such "trust" difficult is because of a

collectively cultivated dependence on rationality, a prevailing world-view which disables people's ability to experience what John Keats called "negative capability": "that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats 1209). And a writing teacher should be aware of how the prevailing urge to rationalize during writing can actually shut off potential, and how difficult it is for most people to trust in unknown abilities, to be comfortable with a process which is indeed mysterious.

It is also worth noting that Murray, like most other supra-rational advocates, affirms the importance of individuality in the context of teaching writing: "the mature English teacher welcomes a diversity of contradictory voices, each student speaking of his own concerns in his own way. There is no one way to think or to write, and [teachers] must not give [their] students the illusion there is"; and a writing teacher should "above all, encourag[e] his students to be individuals" ("Voice" 118-19). To promote individuality, Murray also insists that a "teacher should show the student how writers find their subjects. But the student must find his own subject" ("Voice" 118).

A less influential but more outspoken and theoretically explicit modern Composition supra-rationalist is Barrett Mandell, who says that it is a "misconception" to assume that "writing is or should be the result of what we normally

call thinking. In this almost universally-accepted fiction, the story goes that first we think (logically, rationally, even 'imaginatively') and then write. . . . An elaborate pedagogy is built on this misconception" ("Losing" 362-63). Mandell makes an important distinction/assertion, claiming that "writing as an experience (as opposed to concepts about writing) is a mystery and . . . structures of logic and rationality pass the time in class but do not illuminate the mystery" ("Losing" 363).

So, Mandell sees no cause/effect relationship between thinking and writing, although he admits that thinking "precedes writing and establishes a frame of mind in which writing is likely to occur" ("Losing" 363). But he claims that he (and others) "always" write something different, sometimes "only subtly different," than what was thought. And the "illusion" that thinking causes writing is "a tale we have come to believe about the importance of rational thought prior to writing" ("Losing" 364). But, although Mandell claims that the act of writing involves "trusting the dictation which emanates from some point other than the conscious ego," and that "the true cause of the flow of language is a mystery to the conscious mind," he does say that "editing" "can, and ought to be, taught" ("Losing" 364-65).

Mandell (similar to Elbow and others) sees a distinct difference between writing and editing: "Editing, which is

thinking about writing, requires what we call the mind," and is directly related to rationality ("Not Home" 372). But, "as writing teachers we have been so concerned with editing (posing as writing) that we have overlooked the source of writing itself--that is, its still center of creativity" ("Not Home" 373). And this creative center is something beyond rationality.

Mandell also addresses the issue of what to do in order to teach writing: "What we must now begin to look at . . . is that the teaching of logic, comparison/contrast, argumentation . . . [etc.] may have little bearing on the writing process"; he claims that "it does not work to teach coherence, unity, and emphasis, since these follow insight. They do not precede it. What works is to stimulate insights by creating contexts in which they are likely to occur" ("Not Home" 375). In order to do this, teachers must (as Elbow and Murray indicate) "push students past their own ego-restrictions"; they must "drive the student out of the House of Self-consciousness" ("Not Home" 375).

Mandell suggests two ways to implement his theories. Firstly, he "would like to see teachers making full and imaginative use of the strategies worked out by such writers as Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, Gordon Rohman and Albert O. Welcke, and William Stafford ("Not Home" 375), most of whom rely heavily on some form(s) of freewriting. His second suggestion, however, seems somewhat unusual, considering

Mandell's penchant for freedom from restriction. He recommends "rote writing--the copying of well-written prose passages, selected by the student on the basis of taste and appreciation, and written into a copy book" ("Not Home" 376). But while this seems "so unlike free writing, rote copying allows the student's whole organism to have the experience of producing mature prose without conceptualizing consciously at all" ("Not Home" 376). And, therefore, "since experience, not conceptualizing, affects skills and abilities, copying on a regular basis actually improves writing. Like 'free' writing, it . . . bypasses the 'mind'" ("Not Home" 376). It is also worth noting that the student selects what to copy--which is a form of freedom within the "constraints."

And like most supra-rationalists, Mandell (after quoting William James) makes a direct connection between creativity and the realms of the supra-rational: "William James' best writing emerges from this unknowable source of creative insight. So does Henry James'. So do mine and yours" ("Not Home" 377).

While Elbow, Murray, and Mandell are three of the most significant supra-rationalist Composition theorists, there are numerous other contributors to the modern Composition "canon" who address supra-rational processes, creativity, and writing who could be discussed here. Perhaps the most noteworthy and identifiable sub-group of this bunch consists

of theorists who focus on the role of emotions or feelings (also called the "affective" domain) in writing.

Robert Baden, for one, claims that "before meaningful writing can occur the feelings of the writer must be stimulated to the extent that he is willing and able to make an emotional, sensuous commitment to his task" (368). These feelings, however, are not limited to "love, joy, peace, and brotherhood," but also include "hate, mistrust, anger, and disgust" (368). In other words, "it matters far less what the feeling is than that there is feeling. Once an emotional response occurs, thought has its place to explain, temper, and clarify . . ." (368).

Baden, affirming the need for individuality, also says that teachers should provide writing stimuli which are conducive to "multiple and varied responses" (369). He encourages having students write about their feelings toward particular objects, ideas, or situations, but he stresses that "a teacher who gives this kind of stimulation to his writing students ought not restrict the form of the response. . . . to dictate the 'appropriate' form can subtract from potential gains" (370). It's interesting to consider whether the "form" of freewriting is in some way "dictated" by the requirement of non-stop writing. While non-stop freewriting can produce benefits, it would also be beneficial (and perhaps less "dictating") to simply give a time limit and allow students to write at their own pace.

Perhaps the best approach for a writing teacher, then, would be to incorporate some of both types of freewriting.

And while "form" perhaps should not be entirely abandoned for all "formal" papers, focusing strongly on "description," "narration," "compare/contrast," etc. (as Mandell indicates) is probably more detrimental than helpful. At the very least, the "rigidity" of the forms should be relaxed. In doing a "controversial issue," "argumentative," or "comparison/contrast" paper, for example, students shouldn't be required to favor or support one side instead of another--doing an accurate portrayal of a complex issue, or even offering a solution ought to be viable possibilities as well.

In a similar vein to Baden's focus on emotion, Susan McLeod (after describing a class full of harried students during a written exam) points out that "one does not have to watch freshmen at work to know that writing is an emotional as well as a cognitive activity--we feel as well as think when we write" (426). But while she sees cognition and emotion to be inseparably intertwined, she claims that "we have tended to ignore the affective [emotion/feeling] domain in our research and speculation about the writing process. This is partly due to our deep Western suspicion of anything which cannot be observed and quantified . . .," and also because modern Composition theorists "lack a complete theoretical perspective and common vocabulary with which to

carry on a cogent academic discussion of affect" (426). And she sees a need for "researchers and teachers . . . to know more about this state of emotional engagement with a writing task, a state which elsewhere has been termed 'inspiration'" (428). Finally, she finds that "three broad areas--writing anxiety, motivation, beliefs--are ripe for study in terms of affect" (431).

Similarly, Reed Larson, after a clinical study, concludes that "emotional aspects of writing should not be ignored. There appears to be more to success in writing than cognitive ability or writing skills . . ." (39). Interestingly, Larson also found that "the ability to create enjoyment seemed to be related to more creative and efficient writing" (39). And if Larson's conclusions are correct (which "common sense" would seem to dictate) then "enjoyment" is a desirable element for a Composition class, one deserving of more attention than what is normally given. In fact, getting students, somehow, to actually enjoy themselves in class sometimes may be one of the most significant achievements possible for a writing teacher. Some students might even begin to occasionally enjoy writing, and to write for fun once in a while.

Another important "affective" theorist, Mary Jean Lederman, sees "teaching writing as an art, something approaching magic, very little like a science," and conveys some intriguing speculations, based on her "semi-clinical

investigation" (674). She concludes that "there seems to be a connection between writing and feelings about the self" (688-89). Specifically, she finds that students with high self-esteem tend to write better than those with low self-esteem. She feels that this might be a result of an educational system "which enables our 'best' students (who are almost always our best writers) to deal with the most interesting and imaginative curricula as well as the most interesting and imaginative teachers," while those who are perceived as less intelligent are, in elementary school, "saddled with Dick and Jane or the modern, interracial equivalent; [and] in high school . . . they are placed in Remedial English" (688). And what these "remedial" students end up learning is "to hate writing--and perhaps themselves--a little more" (688).

She concludes that teachers can begin to help low-self-esteem students by "giving them writing experiences which will encourage them to explore and discover themselves through writing," and by engaging "the students' dreams, wishes, and aspirations. These students need to discover themselves and the world around them" (688).

And if Lederman and other theorists are correct about a correlation between feelings/beliefs and the quality of student writing, then the role of writing teachers should include efforts to mold students' perceptions toward more beneficial outlooks--persuading students to believe they can

write, and encouraging them to do writing that is emotionally engaging to them.

As a footnote to Lederman's comments on students developing a "hatred" for writing, it does seem odd that so many elementary, and even secondary, teachers still use writing as punishment. It seems rather likely that forcing a student to write "I will not . . . [whatever]" five hundred times, or doing rote copying from a dictionary as punishment can only lead to negative feelings and inhibitions about writing (be they "sub," "un," "semi," or "fully" conscious).

Finally, Toby Fulwiler and Bruce Peterson also deserve mention for their article "Toward Irrational Heuristics: Freeing the Tacit Mode," which wins the "most humorous supra-rationalist article" award. They do a witty satire on the tendency of many theorists (even other supra-rationalists) to attempt systematic classification, division, and definition of irrational processes. With Aristotelian precision, they demonstrate the humorous absurdity of extreme rational reductionism being applied to supra-rational processes, by examining five heuristics which they claim have received "little or no recent attention," in spite of their "proven" usefulness: "1) mumbling, 2) staring, 3) moving, 4) doodling, 5) noise" (622).

For example, they divide "staring" into "objective" and "subjective" categories, further dividing "subjective

staring" into "ceiling stares" (which "are especially useful in a cluttered environment") and "inner staring" (which is further divided into "clenched, fluttered, [and] blurred" staring) (624-25).

To demonstrate the possible value of "moving," they refer to an incident involving a man who solved a complex physics problem while riding in a bus, not thinking about the problem. And they conclude, therefore, that "classes have to be more mobile to generate genuinely new solutions to certain problems," and that "motion-inducing machines, from jump ropes to jogging shoes, from roller and ice skates to Kawasaki 1000's" ought to be used (625). They also indicate that "there is no reason why mobile laboratories cannot be set up and put in motion for hours, days, or even whole terms; mobile trailers or boats would work fine" (626).

And regarding the value of "noise" as a writing heuristic, they conclude that "rather than insisting on silent libraries and study carrels, perhaps professors ought to recommend the TV lounge and snack bar," that "scientists ought to consider piping in high-decibel street noise," and that teachers should determine "which noise is best for solving which problems" (628).

Yet no matter how hilarious or outrageous their conclusions seem, they do include some inherent practical value as well--for while they are making fun of rational

reductionist tendencies, they are also pointing out a kind of loose "open-ness" that could pay dividends in the writing class. Why not try a class "mumbling," "staring," "moving," etc. exercise? Deliberately attempting something that is sure to seem irrational and absurd at first might actually help students get past inhibiting barriers; it might even lead to a more enjoyable, relaxed, and creative classroom environment.

So, overall, there are some interesting parallels and important common elements between the ancient and modern writers covered here. Firstly, both the ancient and the modern writers acknowledge the limitations of rationality in composing, pointing out that the writing experience cannot be fully contained or understood in rational terms, and furthermore, many point out that such an effort is likely not only to be futile, but detrimental as well. Secondly, both groups of writers embrace the mysteriousness of writing in a positive sense, approaching it in a spirit of somewhat humble reverence, rather than seeing writing as a process to be conquered and rationally controlled. Finally, both the ancient and modern supra-rationalists tend to show a high regard for the innate, experiential knowledge, and creative abilities that each individual person brings to the composing process, seeing them as treasures to be tapped into rather than something to be suppressed or altered.

Chapter 4: Conclusions/Pedagogical Implications

Before addressing conclusions, a brief re-cap is in order. This paper has focused on revealing, relating, and generalizing about the theories, ideas, assumptions, etc. of selected writers who have dealt with supra-rationality (beyond the strictly rational), creativity, and writing/composing processes, as well as contrasting (to some extent) these writers' worldviews with more rationally oriented ones. An attempt to reveal a probable link between creativity/originality and working with, using, and/or tapping into supra-rational abilities has also been made. This has all been done with the underlying assumption that "creativity/originality" is a desirable quality in Composition students' writing, and that an expanded awareness of rational limitations and the benefits of supra-rationality in Composition is worth developing.

But while pedagogical implications have been touched on, questions regarding how writing teachers might practically implement a supra-rationalist approach in actual Composition classes still need to be addressed further. So, in this context, what needs to be done and how can a teacher do it?

First of all, students should be made more aware of what they probably already know, but may not realize: The experience of writing is rather mysterious, and cannot be contained or understood by mathematical, purely rational

formulations. This ties in with the likely benefits of molding students' expectations/beliefs about writing, allowing students the opportunity to not shut off creative, supra-rational potentials because of a perceived need to rationally control and understand all aspects of their writing processes.

To accomplish this, a teacher can first of all simply explain to students that this is indeed the nature of the writing experience, and that it's perfectly fine not to understand or be able to rationally control writing, and yet to go ahead and write. Promoting the idea that repeated revision is an essential part of developing essays (that writing is not like chiseling stone, where each stroke is permanent and unalterable) should also be beneficial. This type of verbal reassurance can and should actually help students be more willing to let go of the perceived need to consciously understand and control writing--a misperception which has most likely been galvanized by years of "schooling," where grammatical correctness and form were emphasized.

Of course to truly convince students that they can let go of rational barriers and still write, they will need to actually experience it, repeatedly. So, the benevolent teacher of writing must (as Mandell, Elbow, Murray, and others indicate) force the students past their barriers, literally out of their minds. There are several ways to

accomplish this, including: writing, writing, and more writing. What is important here, though, is what the students are asked to write, when they are asked to write it, and how this written work is graded.

Since in-class writing is the only writing that a teacher can direct in-process, this is where she/he must facilitate (initially at least) supra-rational writing experiences. And if creative, original, quality writing can be encouraged by getting students past rational mindsets, then in-class writing should be aimed at doing just that. So, what is done (written) is not so important as that students have supra-rational writing experiences.

Therefore, any writing assignment that works is fine. What works? For one thing, questions or prompts that elicit subjective responses can take students beyond preconception and beyond habitual rational patterns. For example, "What is the meaning of the color green?" "Describe the color red"; "What is the sound of one brain thinking?" or "What does the wind feel like?" Writing stimuli such as these are very likely to drive students out of their minds, and should therefore be implemented freely. Having students respond in writing to assigned reading and in-class stimuli (videos, tapes, pictures, etc.) prior to any class discussion can also be effective in this context. Questions such as "What do you think about . . .?" or "How do you feel about . . .?" or "Describe a time when . . ." can work well because

students will not have the "form" of the response preconceived, but will produce writing with its own form--something individual, original, creative.

Of course grading/evaluation can be problematic if student writing is stifled by grade anxiety. On the other hand, human nature (and common sense) seems to indicate that unless some kind of evaluative feedback occurs, students are unlikely to be motivated enough to engage writing assignments at a level conducive to further growth and development. A workable compromise here is to "grade" in-class writing (which would count for a certain portion of the overall final grade) mainly in terms of effort. The main criterion then would be that some written response takes place. While evaluating written work always involves some subjectivity, writing teachers should be able to determine whether or not students have engaged a particular assignment sufficiently--that they have or have not tried. The in-class writing, then (unlike the formal papers requiring revisions), would be graded basically on a "credit/no credit" basis. This could be translated into a point and/or letter grade by using the percentage of adequate responses to assignments given. If, for example, a student satisfactorily completes 27 out of 30 in-class assignments, he/she will have achieved a 90%--which could be 90 points, an A-, or whatever. Since in-class writing takes place in class, and can count for a significant portion of

the grade (perhaps a third or so), it's also a great way to encourage attendance, as well as discourage plagiarism. Furthermore, in-class writing can be a valuable source for material which can be developed for other assignments

It's important to note that the writing prompts, questions, and activities proposed here are not meant to be inclusive or limiting. In fact, the possibilities seem limitless: Students can be asked to just sit and record their thoughts for a period of time (perhaps not even revealing how long the assignment will take--10 minutes? 30 minutes?). A teacher can have students listen to poetry (perhaps even in another language), view an abstract (or "concrete") picture, watch a video (perhaps without any introductory teacher comments), etc. and respond in writing somehow. Students could also be asked to print words instead of using cursive (or vice-versa), or to write the wrong way (right to left) on the page. What's important is that assignments like these have the potential to push students past preconception, habit, complacency, and rational familiarity. The students might even be asked to do subsequent writing assignments in which they respond (describe, analyze, or whatever) to their own experiences of doing these "strange" assignments. Because students are often so used to imitating, or trying to fulfill a teacher's expectations, rather than creating, the key thing is that the students have no formulas, no preconceived plans of

action to fall back on. And a writing teacher should feel free to experiment imaginatively in the creation of such in-class writing assignments.

By repeatedly doing this type of in-class writing, knowing that they will be graded mostly for effort, students will experience their own supra-rational writing capabilities (verifying the description of writing experiences given earlier by the writing instructor). And, embodying this kind of experiential knowledge in-class, the students will be better equipped to face writing tasks outside of the classroom. They will be less likely to vacillate, thinking (worrying) about what or how to write, and more likely to explore and create through writing.

To help facilitate and reinforce the in-class writing experience out of class, the teacher can also assign some type of out-of-class freewriting, which would be evaluated in a manner similar to in-class writing, although it probably shouldn't count for a large portion of the overall grade (perhaps 10% or so would be appropriate). One workable possibility here is to assign out-of-class journal writing with no set guidelines or grading criteria other than quantity. Students can be asked to do ten full pages, or a certain number of written words, of "anything goes" writing. The teacher can offer possibilities--such as poetry, dialogue, free writing, dialectical journal entries, grocery lists, etc.--as long as the students are clear that

they can write about anything in any way they choose. Filling eight out of ten pages within a certain time frame, for example, would be 80%--which can be assigned a letter-grade equivalent. This, again, will allow (force) students to get past inhibitions. Instead of trying to write what they think the teacher wants, for instance, they will have to write something of their own choosing. And, moreover, students should as much as possible be allowed to choose their own writing topics, especially ones they care about or are interested in finding out about, when it comes to out-of-class writing such as essays and research papers.

Naturally, students should be told that much of the "free" writing or early-draft material they produce will not be useable for any particular essay assignment, but that their exploratory writing is an essential element of their own composing process which will, indeed, produce some promising material for further development. This will allow them the freedom to produce without the nagging (inhibiting) need for precision and perfection which is so often perceived by students struggling to figure out the "right" way to do an essay.

Of course, Composition assignments such as extended essays and research papers usually require extensive revision and modification of early-draft material, which inherently involves more thinking and planning than initial drafting. But students should be ready to discover that

once they start writing, even if it's revision, their experience will be basically the same: Revising can still take them beyond their thoughts and/or in unexpected directions--and they should be ready, willing, and able to go with this writing, not knowing where it will lead them, and not being hindered by thoughts about this being a waste of time or "off track" somehow.

In fact, the kind of organizational patterns that traditional outlining is supposed to produce often occur quite spontaneously (and mysteriously) during revising. And students should, therefore, become aware that introductions and/or conclusions can be (and often are) written after the "body" or "content" of a paper. They should also know that "spontaneous" insight often occurs after extended, intensive writing and thinking, and that it can be productive sometimes to stop writing and do something else--keeping pen and paper accessible of course, and being willing to plunge back in should insight/inspiration dictate. Students, in other words, need to approach revising with the same trust in supra-rational abilities that they do with initial, exploratory drafting. To help facilitate this experience, a teacher can ask students (with no forewarning) to revise, in-class, an earlier in-class writing, or ask students to respond anew to a writing stimulus given earlier (picture, video, question, etc.).

So, by describing writing processes in terms of

supra-rational experiences, and facilitating such experiences through writing assignments, a writing teacher can help students develop writing skills that lead to creative, original, quality writing products, as well as making the students' Composition course experiences less painful, and perhaps even enjoyable.

All this is not to say that punctuation, grammar, spelling, etc. should not be addressed--they should [and there is no apparent shortage of written material on teaching editing (grammar)]. But writing/producing should be identified and seen as something different from editing. Editing is a rather rational activity involving identifiable rules and procedures (although the logic and consistency of English grammar might be questioned). Students should understand that a given written work can be a grammatically perfect piece of garbage, or a grammatically flawed masterpiece--but that either one is an inadequate final product.

It might also be pointed out that some students may actually be so rationally oriented that they will not seem able to produce a paper without preconceived, conscious plans for particular out-of-class assignments. While the writing teacher should stick largely with the "mind-blowing" in-class assignments (especially in the first half or so of the course), he/she should also make students aware of the fact that there are many published works on how to write

which offer step-by-step formulas. The teacher should also have such written material available, and/or a required text that includes a number of approaches to varying writing tasks for students to choose from. Furthermore, a teacher ought to share what works for him/her, provided that the students understand there is no one way to approach any particular assignment. And while a teacher should provide specific written guidelines for assignments, it should be made clear to students that these guidelines apply to the final product, and that the processes of getting there will vary.

Finally, while some useful classroom advice from the supra-rationalist writers is presented here (and hopefully from this author), a writing teacher attempting to implement it should not lose sight of one of the basic tenets presented: Affirming and cultivating individualism. This applies to the teacher no less than the students. Rather than simply attempting to find and implement a specific approach or teaching technique, a Composition instructor should also be willing to look beyond the known, to be his/her self, to trust in an ability (though it be beyond rational understanding) to develop something of her/his own making.

The future course of Composition instruction is still being determined, and individual instructors should believe that they can make a difference in the development of

teaching approaches (because they can!). Today, grade-school children are still being punished with writing; college students are still frustrated with trying to figure out the "right" way to write (while harboring dreadful feelings for the loathsome Composition course), and the overly rational legions of Cognitivists (and the like) press on in their attempts to map out and define (in terms of cause and effect) the process of writing and the intricacies of the brain's functions--eliminating any perceptions of mystery or wonder (or fun) in writing.

Supra-rationalists, however, believe that rationality has an essential place in Composition, but that there are magical dimensions to writing (just as there are to people and language) that go beyond rational understanding, dimensions where a rational attempt for control is like catching a butterfly with a chain-link net--the only possible "success" being a dead butterfly. And considering the results of the predominating rational strangle-hold on Composition teaching approaches, it is imperative that concerned instructors who value and implement supra-rational approaches continue to speak out and share their beliefs, ideas, and experiences, and continue to develop creative (even fun) ways to teach and inspire writing.

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