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POLITICS, POWER, AGENCY AND THE END COMMENT GENRE

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

Cynthia Ann Ruthford

September 2011

POLITICS, POWER, AGENCY AND

THE END COMMENT GENRE

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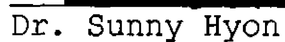
Cynthia Ann Ruthford

September 2011

Approved by:

Dr. Kimberly Costino, Chair, English — 7-23-11 Date



Dr. Sunny Hyon

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine a corpus of teacher end commentary written to first-year writing students' essays from *Twelve Readers Reading*. Instead of looking at this corpus as examples of how to compose end commentary, I look at it as a genre—the end comment genre—in order to perform a rhetorical genre analysis. More specifically, I use Bawarshi's guidelines to genre analysis to reveal the hierarchical structures inherent within the situation of the end comment regardless of how we write our responses to our students concerning their writing.

I set the context within the academy's political systems and power dynamics to discuss the consequences of how these forces may compel the first-year writing student to change his or her worldviews as I survey the end comment literature. Next I situate the end comment in the new rhetorical genre theory. After that, I perform genre analysis on teacher end commentary to reveal how the situation of this genre reinforces the academy's established hierarchy. At last, I offer pre and post end commentary activities that can disrupt the ways in which we approach the act of composing end comments—activities that can be incorporated right into the classroom pedagogy and enhance

student learning in the process. These activities may also enable us to write responses that best suit the needs of our students as well as help us to gain a greater understanding of why students pick and choose which of our comments they respond to when they revise.

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To Jim,

I couldn't have done this without you.

Wish you were here.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

CHAPTER ONE: AN OVERVIEW OF END COMMENT LITERATURE AND SETTING A CONTEXT 1

CHAPTER TWO: SITUATING THE END COMMENT IN GENRE THEORY 27

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYZING THE END COMMENT 42

Step 1: Collection of Samples 62

Step 2: The Situation 62

Step 3: Identifying and Describing Patterns . . . 64

Step 4: Revelations of the Situation of this Genre 74

CHAPTER FOUR: FINAL THOUGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS 76

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE STUDENT TEXT 86

APPENDIX B: SAMPLES OF TEACHER END COMMENTARY 91

REFERENCES CITED 100

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF END COMMENT LITERATURE AND SETTING A CONTEXT

> In the beginning of the process there was the writer, her words, and her desire to communicate her ideas. But after the comments of the teacher are imposed on the first or second draft, the student's attention dramatically shifts from "This is what **I** want to say," to "This is what **you** the teacher are asking me to do." (emphasis in original Sommers 150)

Although this astute observation on teacher commentary was written nearly thirty years ago, I believe that it still holds merit in the field of composition today. Not only has Nancy Sommers eloquently stated what can actually transpire between a teacher and a student concerning a student's text, she has implicitly underscored the power relationships within the classroom which can adversely affect student agency. When I use the term "student agency" I am referring to the manner in which students are empowered by taking ownership of their writing and the choices they make while composing texts. In Sommers's quote, student disempowerment

is happening in the form of teacher appropriation over student writing, causing the author to lose ownership and control over her writerly choices in order to meet the teacher's wants and needs. I am interested in finding ways to level the power dynamics between student and teacher through end commentary and promote student agency in the process. Therefore, I will be examining end comments as a genre. More specifically, I will analyze teacher end commentary found in *Twelve Readers Reading* using Anis Bawarshi's four steps to analyzing genre.

By using Bawarshi's "Guidelines for Analyzing Genres" (159) to examine the comments deemed "empowering" in *Twelve Readers Reading*, I reveal how because teacher end commentary is repeatedly perpetuated in the same manner, they actually hinder student agency by promoting assimilation. I do not advocate stopping this practice of commenting on student writing; in fact, I believe it is an important aspect of instruction. I do, however, see the need to disrupt it, to reinvent it, in order to better suit the needs of our students. I will argue for an alternative way to approach the task of composing end commentary that allows students a voice in the process, one that highlights the importance of

this type of individualized instruction, as well as provide ways in which to incorporate it into pedagogical practice.

The uneasiness I feel about the possible loss of student agency and forced assimilation from teacher appropriation of students' writing stems from my own experiences, as well as work in composition that has examined the power structures in the academy and students' places within them. The field of English composition has long been concerned about the power structures within the academy, particularly the academy's tendency to acculturate students into the white middle class values most closely aligned with it, or as Patricia Bizzell puts it: "the cultural preferences of the most powerful people in the community" ("Mixed" Forms 1). In other words, those students who come from a social background similar to the academy will have an easier time getting acculturated into the institution.

Scholars such as Barthalomae, Bizzell, Harris, and Lu suggest that cultural differences often make for a separation or hierarchy in writing courses between students' home and school discourses and worldviews. Starting from the top, in hierarchal order, is the teacher, then mainstream or conventional students, then others. However, Harris and Lu

also suggest that marginal or minority or nontraditional students, as well as mainstream students, need not give up their richly diverse and multicultural beliefs to be assimilated into the mainstream culture and conventions of the academy unless, of course, they want to be. For in being forced to give up one's own beliefs and values for the academy's beliefs and values, one often gives up one's own political and world views. Consequently, imposing the conflicting worldview of the instructor onto the student through the end comment can disempower students in ways that might ultimately lead to students having no agency over whether to take on the worldviews and discourses of the academy in place of their own.

I am deeply concerned with issues of student assimilation, acculturation, and/or accommodation because all of these actions directly affect student agency. While assimilation refers to students becoming one mind with the academy, acculturation and accommodation are defined slightly differently. Drawing on the works of Kenneth Bruffee and Thomas Farrell, Min-zhan Lu, in her article "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing," sums up their theories about acculturation:

> [B]oth Bruffee and Farrell explicitly look for teaching methods aimed at reducing the feelings of "anxiety" or "psychic strain" accompanying the process of acculturation. They thus present these feelings as signs of students' still being "on the way" from one community to another… the students are experiencing these trials only because they are still in "transition"…[which] will disappear once the students get comfortably settled in the new community and sever or diminish ties with the old. (142)

Therefore, Bruffee and Farrell view acculturation as the right way to get an education in the academy. Students must "sever or diminish ties" to their old life and begin a new life where they fully accept the culture of the institution. I whole-heartedly disagree, as does Lu and Harris. Students should be able to retain their previous identities while in college, adding, at their own will, the discourses of the academy. They should not have to leave behind their richly diverse backgrounds. Lu argues that in "seeking to make their classrooms more comfortable and less threatening, many…teachers end up disallowing the very expression of

conflict and difference that could lend real interest to the writings of their students" (Harris 164).

On the subject of accommodation, Lu examines how teachers commonly try to help "students to establish deep connections" to Western culture. She views this change in students' identification as turning education into accommodation—"or mere tolerance—of the students' choice or need to live with conflicts. This accommodation could hardly help students explore, formulate, reflect on, and enact strategies for coping actively with conflicts" (146). Lu promotes a teaching reform which would enable students to keep their home discourses and worldviews while in the writing classroom so that students can draw on their strengths rather than becoming assimilated into the institution. I would like to twist the meaning of accommodation to refer to accommodating the students' individual needs by helping them to understand and deal with the conflicting discourses they will encounter throughout their academic careers. And by stressing that it is their choice whether or not to replace their home discourses and worldviews for the discourses and worldviews of the academy. That is the power they have—that is their decision to make. This brand of accommodation I speak of can be addressed in

whole class discussions and, even more importantly for the purposes of this study, reinforced by meeting individual student needs through the dialogic relationship between student text and teacher end commentary. By accommodating students in such a way, teachers will contribute significantly toward the goal of student agency.

This project examines how teacher comments, particularly as they are realized in the end comment genre, can be written in ways that leave students with real choices about the extent to which they accept or resist what Lu refers to as the "various pressures academic discourse exercises on their existing points of view" (Redefining 64). Students should be able to retain their cultural and social identity while gaining an education. I believe we can work towards this goal by being careful to allow students agency over their writing, and letting them make decisions for themselves. Bizzell declares that

> we should be welcoming, not resisting, the advent of diverse forms of academic discourse, and encouraging our students to bring all their discursive resources to bear on the intellectual challenges of the academic disciplines. ("Mixed" Forms 9)

Therefore, what I am advocating here is students' rights to make decisions in their writing, and the only way that can be accomplished is by being honest about the power and agency they have to exercise. Composition teachers can promote student power and agency through this reinvention of the end comment genre that I am proposing.

To broach the topic of power, Bruce Horner writes about the power structure that is in place within the universities in "Rethinking the 'Sociality' of Error: Teaching Editing as Negotiations." Horner states that

> [t]eachers, the academy, larger social institutions wield far more power than do individual students. It would be misleading to pretend to ourselves or to our students that this is not the case .... [I]t is equally misleading and damaging to pretend to ourselves or our students that they lack any power. (Horner 189)

One way to show students they have power is to allow them agency over their own writing, letting them make decisions for themselves. When teachers write end comments on students' papers, these comments should not be the absolute law. Instead, students should be able to keep authority over their own writing by using those comments as a

reference and, in turn, deciding for themselves what changes need be made. I believe that students have a better chance to resist assimilation when given the opportunity to make their own choices in their writing. By disrupting the existing ways in which we compose comments and allowing student voices into the process will help to reinvent ways we approach this important phase of instruction.

A discussion of the politics of education can be seen in a detailed account by Joseph Harris where he calls attention to the democracy of education and to how the academy should be a place where students and teachers alike "create a public culture open to all individuals regardless of race, gender, or social rank. To invoke this type of democratic culture is *not* to call for a return to a set of shared communal values"—which is usually the values of the dominant culture that many individuals find quite oppressive. Instead, the classroom should be a "forum in which issues and concerns that go *beyond* the borders of particular communities or groups can be worked through collectively, debated, negotiated" (emphasis in original Harris 167) even if the topics under discussion are contradictory to the beliefs of the teacher or the academy. However, as Lu asserts, "[i]f mastery of academic discourse

is often accompanied by a change in one's point of view,…then it ought to be the teacher's task to acknowledge to the students this aspect of their learning" (Redefining 63).

For example, in "Negotiating the Contact Zone," Harris explains that

> the job of a student writer is not to leave one discourse in order to enter another, but to take things that are usually kept apart and bring them together, to negotiate the gaps and conflicts between several competing discourses. The goal of courses in writing would thus become less the nurturing of individual student voices, or the building of collaborative learning communities, but the creation of a space where conflicts between our own discourses, those of the university, and those which our students bring with them to class are made visible. (161-2)

Making visible the divergent discourses of our students and the university is both admirable and honest. Students need to be made conscious of these conflicting discourses. Once they recognize that they possess potentially different political, ethical, and social views than the teacher and/or

the academy, they can begin to negotiate their own worldviews into their writing. I am most interested in playing out the politics and power in which students gain agency in their own writing, especially as it pertains in the classroom and which concerns end commentary written by the teacher. I do not see a need to abandon nurturing the individuality of student voices, nor turn away from building collaborative learning communities in place of highlighting competing discourses. On the contrary, I think that all those things can and should be tackled within the writing classroom. However, I believe that honestly and openly discussing the students' home discourses in conjunction with the university's competing discourses can, in turn, alleviate some of the dissonance and betrayal the students may feel about their home discourses. By making visible these competing discourses, and listening to how students feel about it, teachers can then take students' accounts into consideration as a means to promote agency when composing end comments. In the writing classroom, teacher end commentary can enhance student self-discovery by enabling them to explore such feelings which, ultimately, will contribute to student agency.

The politics of power on both the macro and micro levels in the institution plays a major role in student agency, as Bruce Horner points out:

> Students do have the power to refuse to make changes, to insist on idiosyncratic spellings and nonstandard syntactic patterns. That they seldom choose to do so signals not their lack of power but their use of it in negotiating strategy by which they attempt as writers to communicate particular meanings to particular readers. (189)

I think that students should have the choice to use idiosyncratic spellings and nonstandard syntactic patterns, if they realize and can explain their reasoning for using nonstandard forms of English. I believe that teachers can foster this sense of independent thinking and writing by composing thought-provoking end commentary to their students by addressing both the student and the particular text in a manner that will promote student agency. This can be realized through the reinvention of the end comment genre that I am proposing. Teacher end commentary to student text can assist students in attaining agency over their own writing and that is, ultimately, what I am arguing for

through a disrupted notion of the end comment incorporated into the classroom pedagogy.

The end comment is commentary written by the instructor about a student's paper and can either be meaningful and helpful, or demeaning and debilitating to the student, depending on how those comments are written; this particular commentary can be written on the last page of a student's text or it can be attached to the text on a separate sheet of paper. Richard Straub explains that "[t]he extent to which a teacher assumes control over student writing is also determined to a great extent by the way in which he frames his comments" (234). Although there are many ways for a teacher to frame comments, recent research in composition studies seems to suggest a trend towards facilitative rather than directive responses. According to Connors and Lunsford, Carroll, Horvath, Smith, and Sommers, a directive response can alter the author's intended meaning by taking over the piece, by demanding certain changes to be made, and leaving the author with little or no choices. When the writer is left with no choices, that writer has lost agency. A facilitative response, on the other hand, will pose thoughtful questions that may suggest to the author different options for revising, praise strong or well-

written parts of the writing, and may remark on the piece as a whole. The scholarship suggests the impact of the directive approach appears to be much higher than the facilitative concerning teacher appropriation. However, every type of instructor commentary will have some degree of impact on student agency.

A case in point, Robert J. Connors and Andrea A. Lunsford conducted a massive study of marginal and terminal teacher commentary on 3,000 papers in their article, "Teachers' Rhetorical Comments on Student Papers." They examined teachers' general global comments, and comments evaluating specific rhetorical and formal elements. From their study, they inform us of the good and the bad news concerning end comments:

> The good news is that teachers are genuinely involved in trying to help their students with rhetorical issues in their writing.... The bad news is that many teachers seem still to be facing classroom situations, loads, and levels of training that keep them from communicating their evaluations effectively.... The emphasis still seems to be on finding and pointing out problems and deficits in the individual paper. (218)

What I find most disturbing in this article is what they encountered in the teachers' comments; almost everything they read was authoritative in nature by way of issuing commands to students and many of those comments were just mean spirited which they attributed to the teachers being overworked and having too many papers to grade (214). With comments composed as mentioned above, student agency is not encouraged through teacher end commentary. As Lu points out, student assimilation occurs when this type of academic pressure is exercised by the teacher over student writing (Redefining 64). Although there is some good news, the bad news seems to overshadow it because Connors and Lunsford come to the realization that there is still plenty of room for improvement where teacher commentary is concerned which, consequently, places me in the position to believe that teacher commentary can and should be composed in a manner that allows for student agency.

When Nancy Sommers did her groundbreaking work on teacher commentary in 1982, she drew similar conclusions. However, she gave us insightful messages to think about. For example, she points out that writers "need and want thoughtful commentary" (148). But, from her research on commenting styles, she found that "*teachers' comments can*

take students' attention away from their own purposes in writing a particular text and focus that attention on the teachers' purpose in commenting" (emphasis in original 149). In other words, the teacher appropriates the students' writing by demanding changes to be made from the comments. With this type of response, the students did not change what they thought needed changing; instead, they made the changes that the teacher asked for. This directly relates to the power issues that Horner cautions us about and recommends teachers should do--acknowledge to students the various power structures that are in place within the academy and inside the classroom (189). Students can only attain agency over their own writing when they are provided the opportunity and power to do so—that is, of course, only if teachers are willing to surrender some of the power they hold over their students' writing. One way to shift the power structure is to enable student agency through the end comment. The impetus behind this project is to find ways to compose teacher commentary that will remove control of student writing out of the teacher's hands and into the students.

Sommers speaks to this issue when she suggests that "[o]ur comments need to be suited to the draft we are

reading" (155). Although what follows can be construed as authoritative directive responses, they do follow a logical order. For that reason, I agree with Sommers that on early drafts we should keep our comments about the text on such things as subject matter, focus, organization, and development instead of asking them to edit. Students should attend to editing in the final stage of drafting. We should not ask our students to edit and rewrite at the same time; that will only confuse them. In her research, Sommers found that most of the comments were generic statements that could be "rubber-stamped" from text to text (152). The noticeable vagueness in the teachers' commentaries was contradictory to their demands for the students to be more specific (153). Sommers wraps up her discoveries, on teacher commentary, by revealing: "For the most part, teachers do not respond to student writing with the thoughtful commentary which will help them think about their purposes and goals in writing a specific text" (154). In her final thoughts she proposes that the "key to successful commenting is to have what is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and enrich each other" (155). I believe those are sage words to live by for student agency to flourish. Harris's views concerning the democracy of

education in regards to cultivating an environment of negotiation rather than supporting the notion of a set of shared communal worldviews and discourses coincide with what Sommers has laid out for us to consider. Her advice on writing teacher commentary fosters the idea that student agency can be realized if the commentary is consistent with classroom learning activities and maintains a focus on the students' purposes and goals for writing.

A related observation is made by Brooke K. Horvath, who originally published "The Components of Written Response: A Practical Synthesis of Current Views" in 1984, in which she promotes the formative rather than the summative type of responses. A summative response passes judgment and treats the text as a finished product while a "formative evaluation treats a text as part of an ongoing process of skills acquisition and improvement" (244). Notice that the formative is an evaluation of an ongoing text; whereas, the summative form of commentary assesses the text as a finished product. It is obvious that she views the process to be more important than the product which I tend to agree with. The process of composing a text is monumental to student learning and agency. When students get the chance to write multiple drafts of a composition that is returned with

teacher and/or peer feedback, they become empowered by the choices they have to make when they revise which contributes to student agency. Students produce improved prose when they write multiple drafts that the teacher comments on. However, Horvath cautions against writing "generic" responses and suggests "that positive reinforcement is more conducive to healthy attitudes toward writing" (248). It is always good for a writer to get some positive reinforcement while in the process of writing. Something good can be found in any piece of writing and should be pointed out to that student, no matter how confused, disorganized, or grammatically incorrect the writing may be. Positive reinforcement is conducive to student writing and consequential to student agency. When students are reinforced positively about their writing, and are subsequently given choices through teacher feedback, students will be inclined to continue writing with more effectiveness while negotiating with the teacher's end commentary. By doing so, students will be less susceptible to assimilation.

In another case study, Summer Smith reviewed 208 end comments which were written on first-year composition students' papers. In this study, Smith "identified sixteen primary genres" which she placed "into three groups:

judging genres, reader response genres, and coaching genres" (252). She doesn't specify what draft these comments were written on; she only says that the study "includes approximately the same number of end comments" from the whole range of grades, which leads me to believe that these papers were final drafts. If this is true, then these end comments would be less beneficial for the students. I will elaborate more on this subject later on; for now, though, I will continue with the three groups in which Smith has classified commentary into. I believe a discussion of Smith's taxonomy of end comments is worthwhile because it directly relates to issues of power and student agency.

The judging genre consists of ten types of evaluations which are: development, style, evaluation of entire paper, focus, effort, organization, rhetorical effectiveness, topic, correctness, and audience accommodation. In addition to these evaluations, she also includes justification for the grade (253). For this group of responses Smith notes,

> Teachers may be reluctant to write negative evaluations of an entire paper because they feel such statements would simply indicate global failure rather than pinpointing failings which can be corrected, or because they realize sweeping

> negativity could destroy a student's relatively fragile self-confidence. They may justify writing almost exclusively positive evaluations as a way to demonstrate fairness or sensitivity. Unfortunately, the positive-only convention in the evaluation of the paper genre is so strong that some teachers may write positive evaluations of the paper without actually believing them, simply to conform to the generic conventions. (253-4)

What she found in the judging genre does not sound very encouraging, nor does it appear to me that those comments were very helpful for revision. Instead, those types of comments lead more toward a justification for the grade so that the students would have a difficult time challenging that teacher's authority if they received a low grade. This definitely points back to how teachers will write positive feedback even if they do not believe it.

The two types of comments in the reader response genres are the reading experience and identification. The reading experience comments are "intended as representations the teacher had about the paper while reading it," whereas, "the identification genre expresses the teacher's response to the student's personal experience rather than to the student's

writing" (Smith 257). When the teacher uses the identification genre, that teacher is trying to make a connection with the student. On the other hand, when the teacher comments on the reading experience, that teacher is reminding the student that the writing has an audience and an effect on that particular reader. Although this type of response is relatively rare, Smith found that many of these comments were negative, and that they expressed to that writer what the reader felt was lacking in the paper. She concludes that the "reading experience genre often serves as evidence to support an evaluation." However, as rare as this type of commentary seems to be, Smith reasons that "[t]eachers may…be wary of using this genre to criticize a paper because it highlights the subjectivity of readers' response" (258).

The last group is the coaching genres. The three categories in this group consist of suggestions for both revision of the current paper as well as for future papers, and makes offers for additional assistance (Smith 253). These types of responses provide the students with individualized instruction. The instructor acts more like a coach in these instances. For example, the comments are likely to be phrased in open-ended questions, asking for

more information and details, or the instructor can invite the student to meet with them privately because that instructor feels the student needs further assistance in writing the paper. Power relationships are addressed with this type of end commentary, because "[t]he genres of suggestion and offer usually indicate an approach by the speaker/writer, placing the listener/reader in the powerful position of accepting or rejecting the proposition" (260). Students are left with ownership and agency over their writing with these types of comments. I agree with these scholars to an extent; however, through genre analysis the comments these scholars claim are empowering are actually not as empowering as they seem on the surface.

In her MA thesis, Evelyn Sternath proposes an alternative to responding to students' text. She suggests that the students should write in the margins "noting any concerns regarding the particular draft. Teachers then respond to these evaluations, including problem areas the students may have omitted" (20). Using this dialogic response approach is a nice way to ease students into their own self-evaluation techniques. Plus, it gives the teacher a place to start when commenting on that text. This also leaves the student with ownership of the piece which leads

to greater student agency. Another alternative is given by Pamela Gay, who takes dialogic responses a step further in "Dialogizing Response in the Writing Classroom: Students Answer Back," where she advocates dialogic responses between teacher and students in the form of having the students respond to the teacher's comments immediately after their papers are returned. This serves a two-fold purpose: a close reading of the teacher's responses and a purging of negative emotions so the students can use her comments in a productive manner while revising their drafts. During this "vent" time, as Gay terms it, she asks her students to write down what they hear her saying in those comments. Her opinion on this subject is that "[d]ialogizing response requires not just recognition of the interpretive differences but a more complex recognition and "admission" of multiple voices, the multiple voices of our many selves and the many "others" who are audience to our texts" (12).

On the same note, Peter Elbow also advocates dialogic responses between teacher and students in "High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing." He suggests refraining from writing comments on students' texts until they have turned in a draft of a high stakes assignment, but recommends having the students continually

write in low stakes forms, such as free writing, brainstorming, and journal entries, to get them prepared for a high stakes assignment which will be graded in a conventional manner. Elbow realizes the array of reactions that students have when reading teacher commentary:

> When students read what we write, they are usually reacting at the same time to all the past teacher comments they have received on their writing. The most obvious example of this is that students tend to take almost anything we write as criticism—even if we are just asking them a question or making an observation, or even making a low-key statement of mild praise. (293)

I agree with his assessment of student reactions, because I have been at the receiving end of those comments and know how it feels. Writing is such a personal activity that it is hard to separate myself from my writing; therefore, if it feels as though the teacher is attacking my writing, then it is a good possibility that I feel as I am being attacked. I want to alleviate some of the anxiety that students experience while reading teacher responses to their writing. To do this, I think it is important to closely examine different constructions of end commentary in order to see

the relationship between reader, writer, and text, as well as how teachers position students in terms of agency within this relationship.

While all of the scholars mentioned throughout this survey promote student agency and provide suggestions on how to compose commentary especially concerning commentary deemed empowering for students, these suggestions are not enough. By performing genre analysis on a variety of end comments, I will expose the disempowering features which are contained in the conventional methods in which we compose our end comments. This is not to say I want to be rid of them; rather, the end comment genre needs a disruption in a manner that will not perpetuate the same ways we approach responding to student text. In the following sections, I situate the end comment in genre theory, perform a genre analysis on end comments, and then propose a reinvention to this significant component of instruction.

CHAPTER TWO

SITUATING THE END COMMENT IN GENRE THEORY

In the previous chapter, I discussed teacher end commentary and how it is directly related to issues of politics, power, and student agency. In this chapter, I will situate the end comment within the new conceptions of rhetorical genre theory in order to examine the integral relationship between reader, writer, and text. These new concepts of genre theory are helpful in elucidating and analyzing power dynamics between teacher and student that are in place within the academy and which may possibly be transformed through the end comment.

While many recent scholars have much to say about genre theory, a review of the literature on genre would not be complete without citing the seminal work of Carolyn Miller who sparked a renewed interest in 1984 with her groundbreaking article "Genre as Social Action," an article that continues to have considerable influence in the field. In this text, Miller describes "genres as typified rhetorical actions based on recurrent situations" (159) where such actions and situations are socially constructed; as Miller puts it, "the new is made familiar through the

recognition of relevant similarities; those similarities become constituted as a type" (156-7). Here Miller is referring to our everyday experiences where exigence forms the basis of social knowledge. She uses exigence not necessarily to describe an urgent or dangerous condition; but instead, to describe the "objectified social need" (157) of the situation. In Miller's words, "[e]xigence is a set of particular social patterns and expectations that provides a socially objectified motive for addressing" (158) the rhetorical situation. Hence, when a situation recurs along with a typified rhetorical action a genre is formed.

Following in Miller's footsteps, Amy J. Devitt offers an understanding of these new concepts of genre theory in her article, "Generalizing about Genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept." She explains that "[g]enre and situation are so linked as to be inseparable, but it is genre that determines situation as well as situation that determines genre" (578). According to Devitt, situations are social constructs that "genre must respond dynamically to" (579). Therefore, genre is far from being static; it is dynamic social action that responds to a given social situation. Student writing and teacher commentary thus becomes the social actions in response to the social situation of a

classroom setting. Writing directly relates to the recurrent situation in such a manner that Devitt reveals:

> If each writing problem were to require a completely new assessment of how to respond, writing would be slowed considerably. But once we recognize a recurring situation…our response to that situation can be guided by past responses. (576)

Hence, a common recurrent situation found in the composition classroom is for the student to respond to a writing prompt, composed by the teacher (the problem), and then the teacher responds to the student text by way of the end comment.

Continuing her discussion of the dynamic and social nature of genres, Devitt finds that "genres are defined less by their formal conventions than by their purposes, participants, and subjects…. [It] is defined by its situation and function in a social context" (Integrating 698). In other words, genre becomes the functional action which addresses a socially constructed situation. In the classroom, "[w]riters and readers must enact many genres and must position themselves in multiple situations" (714). Herein lies the relationship between reader, writer, and text where the value placed on genre can "maintain or

reinforce power relationships … and shape world views" (707). Because the teacher/reader is in a higher position of power than the student/writer, the teacher/writer can either choose to maintain her position and push her worldviews through the end comment to the student/reader, or allow choice and promote agency depending on how the comments are presented and perceived. The genre of teacher end commentary responds to the rhetorical situations of student writing which, unto itself, is a recursive and dialogic process attended to by both teacher and student.

Expanding on this notion of genre, Anis Bawarshi, in "The Genre Function," defines genre as "the rhetorical environments within which we recognize, enact, and consequently reproduce various situations, practices, relations, and identities" (336). He looks at how all discourses function, not just the privileged discourses, and coins the term *genre function*. For Bawarshi, genre function "constitutes all discourses' and all writers' modes of existence, circulation, and functioning within a society" (338). For this project, I focus my attention on teacher end commentary concerning student writing and how it inhibits or enables student agency; thus, the genre function. Bawarshi explains that "[w]hen individuals

communicate, they do so within genres, and so the participants in any communicative act assume certain genre-constituted roles while interacting with one another" (348). For example, the students respond to a writing prompt, then the teacher responds to the student text, then the students make revisions to their texts, then the teacher responds again. Essentially, this process can recur several times. Consequently, the roles of reader and writer develop into an interactive exchange amongst the participants and the texts where identities transform to fit the genre. In sum, Bawarshi states that

> [t]he genre function is the social and rhetorical scene within which we enact various social practices, relations, and identities. We all, not just literary authors, become social actors within the genre function, endowed with certain social status and value" (357).

Along the same lines as Devitt and Bawarshi, Charles Bazerman explains that

> [g]enres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action.... They are locations within which meaning

is constructed. Genres shape the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact" (19).

Assuming that meaning is socially constructed and genres are communicative actions in response to social situations, then the end comment genre must involve the interaction between the reader, writer, and text. The composition classroom is teeming with life forms in a socially situated arena where knowledge is constructed by and through the participants' acts of communication and interactions. Bazerman notes the complexities within the classroom discourses and how student productivity can be affected when he states, "how fully alive any student's generic productions are depends on the life we invest in our comments and assignments that model and prompt students' utterances as well as on what the students bring to the task" (26). What Bazerman suggests is that teachers design assignments to engage student interest and compose comments in a manner that elicits further contemplation of the task. By doing so, teachers can position students as agents over their own writing or position them in ways that inhibit agency depending on how end comments are composed.

In a slightly different take on genre, Thomas P. Helscher connects identity to subject position where subject

position refers to the multiple identities the participants inhabit within a given discourse community. Helscher elaborates: "By linking identity to subject position … we necessarily shift from a unitary model of personal identity … to a sense of identity as shifting and fluid composite of the multiple subject positions we occupy" (29). Two of the identities that students and teachers alike assume in the composition classroom are readers and writers of subject positioned genres such as essays and end commentary. However, he cautions us about this subject position by implying that it can have a normalizing effect on the discursive community which can incur communal identity rather than fostering diversity—"[a]s social institutions that regulate the way we do business in the world, generic conventions carry the weight of tradition" which is "characterized by a kind of formal resistance built into the nature and function of genre" (35). In other words, teachers need to pay particular attention to the ideological impact of both writing prompt and end commentary in order to resist positioning students within the institutional tradition of assimilation; and, in its place, promote agency.

In an interesting twist, Brad Peters examines what he coins antigenre—a phenomenon that occurs occasionally in student writing. Peters elaborates on this notion of antigenre:

> An antigenre often reconstitutes the voice of the writer and reinvents grammar that functionally satisfies the social purpose of the genre it resists. Antigenres may appear in student writing when the student associates an assigned genre with a particular ideology or rhetorical technique that makes her uneasy. Or it may occur when the writer feels a need to conceptualize and articulate what she knows about a topic in a new way. (201)

If we accept this definition of antigenre, then we can recognize the foundation upon which student agency can be built. One way teachers can facilitate student agency is by composing end commentary that will support student resistance to conformity. The relationship of writer, reader, and text then becomes one of compatibility that propels student agency to the forefront rather than turning the genre situation into irreconcilable differences. The antigenre is an example of how student resistance can be performed and resolved. However, the goal of teaching

writing is to promote student agency and allow choices to be made. Agency enables students to choose whether to resist or conform as well as offers an awareness of the possibilities for and the consequences of such actions. This does not necessarily mean that teachers should be accepting in their end comments to students who write in an antigenre because that is entirely up to the teacher; the antigenre does, however, open an avenue in which to discuss matters of conformity and resistance along with the subsequent consequences or rewards that arise for those students who pursue that route.

Returning to Devitt's study of genre, in *Writing Genres*, she addresses the issue of identifying genre as a tool or an agent. For example, genre as a tool would mean that people use genres; genre as an agent means that genres perform the acts (48). There are problems with both:

> For genre to be a tool alone is to reduce its force … [turning genre into a] material object that people can pick up and use or just as easily set aside. For genre to act as agent independent of human operators is to magnify its force too much. It is instead the nature of genre both to be created by people and to influence people's

> actions.... Genres never operate independently of the actions of people, but the actions of some people influence the actions of others. (48)

The genre of the teacher end commentary can strongly influence student writing depending on how it is constructed. Here is an example to illustrate this point: If the teacher demands certain changes and those changes are not met by the student, the consequence can appear in the grade that student receives. Therefore, these two genres—student text and teacher end commentary—that the participants write in carry both choice and constraint.

Devitt expands on the generic phenomena of choice and constraint: "Both constraint and choice ... are necessary for utterance, for meaning. Too much or too little of either is linguistically and rhetorically paralyzing" (Writing 150). In other words, written genres are much like speech genres in the way that they must be coherent and understandable for the reader or listener. What this means is that there has to be a certain amount of constraint in any genre; it also means that there is an abundance of choice. Teachers can help students understand the relationship of these enabling and inhibiting functions of genre that are deeply embedded in culture and ideology where ideology is "the socially

constructed ways in which human beings understand the world" (157-8). Because genres are ideological, genres define our worldviews and enable us to perceive things as other people do (161). In the composition classroom, the teacher can impose their worldviews on students through the end comment or allow the students to project their own worldviews in their writing. That is an example of the use and/or abuse of the ideological powers that genres in a socially constructed situation hold for its members. As Devitt notes:

> [B]y the time one has learned to perform a genre, one is already inducted into its ideology. If teachers are to help minimize the potential ideological effects of genres, they must help students perceive the ideology while they are encountering the genre. Once they are full participants in the genre, resistance becomes more difficult (some say futile) and choices become less visible (some say invisible). (196)

Similar to Devitt's concerns about the ideological power of genre, Bawarshi examines the relationship between the writer, reader, and text. By doing so, he offers suggestions that can level the existing power structures

which are in place in the composition classroom. In *Genre and the Invention of the Writer,* Bawarshi asks "what happens *to* writers that motivates them to do what they do?" (emphasis in original 1). He defines the function of genres "as sites of action in which writers acquire, articulate, and potentially resist motives to act" (45). This premise relies on the notion that genres are recurring, socially constructed exigencies which call for actions. The actors define the genres they enact as much as they are defined by the genres they are enacting. In order to resist generic conventions without being misinterpreted or being labeled ignorant, one must have knowledge of the genre (92). Teachers can develop student understanding of genres by explicitly stating the conventions and providing examples of how other writers have resisted the norm. Bawarshi suggests that "because they are so entrenched in how we are socialized to respond to recurring situations, genre-constituted desires, subjectivities, and practices are difficult but not impossible to resist" (97). However, as Bawarshi points out, "all genres are coercive to some degree or another" (120). Take the syllabus for example, it contains a set of rules along with performance expectations

that the students and teacher will abide—it is a contract laced in ideology which calls for actions.

Other written, and coercive, components of the composition classroom consist of writing prompts, student essays, and teacher end commentary which are all interdependent genres that build off of one another. Each situation requires an action and a reaction. Bawarshi notes, "[t]o a great extent, students have to accept the position(s) made available to them in the prompt if they are to carry out the assignment successfully" (133). Although room for resistance does exist, a straight out refusal to accept the prompt may lead to a poor grade and affect how teacher commentary is composed as well as reduce student agency depending on how the teacher views deviations from the writing assignment.

In the following chapter, I use the four step guideline for genre analysis that Bawarshi provides in *Genre and the Invention of the Writer* in order to analyze teacher end commentary found in *Twelve Readers Reading*. The purpose of analyzing end comments using genre analysis is to underscore the generic conventions of how end commentary is commonly composed which will enable me to expose the ways in which these commentaries enhance and/or inhibit student agency and

reinforce hierarchical order that is inherent within the composition classroom. According to Bawarshi, the four-steps to genre analysis are as follows:

1. Collect Samples of the Genre

   Gather samples from more than one place to get an accurate picture of the complexity of the genre. The more samples of the genre collected, the more noticeable the patterns become.

2. Study the Situation of the Genre

   Answer questions concerning setting, subject, participants, and motives.

3. Identify and Describe Patterns in the Genre's Features

   Examine the recurrent features in the samples. For example: content, structure, rhetorical appeals, format, and sentences.

4. Analyze What These Patterns Reveal about the Situation

   Focus on the values, beliefs, goals, and assumptions which are revealed through the genre's patterns including how the subject of the genre is treated, and the roles for the readers and writers the genre encourages or discourages. (Genre 159-160)

For my genre analysis of the end comment, I start with the responses collected in Richard Straub and Ronald F.

Lunsford's *Twelve Readers Reading*. For this text, which is unique in that it was designed to teach teachers how to compose responses to student writing, Straub and Lunsford sent samples of student writing to twelve accomplished professors and asked them to respond to the student writing just as if the students were in their own classes. The professors responded to the student writing; however, these students never had a chance to attend to the end comments through revisions which means I will only be able to address the teachers' end commentary in my analysis. I find this text appropriate because it illustrates examples of teacher end commentary that range from extremely directive to exceptionally facilitative. I will use examples from the various groupings in this text to examine the features of these end comments that enhance and/or inhibit student agency by using Bawarshi's four-step "Guidelines for Analyzing Genres." As I do so, I will address ideological issues as well as the power dynamics embedded within the discourse.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYZING THE END COMMENT

Before I begin this chapter, I would like to acknowledge here that I do recognize it is the professor's job to help students meet the expectations of academic writing and develop more fully as writers in general; therefore, professors have to be able to say something to their students about revising their texts. This is not intended to slander the professors from *Twelve Readers Reading*, or to insult any professors who respond to student writing. Nor is my intention in performing this genre analysis, in any way, a move to get rid of this beneficial practice. My intended purpose is to bring an awareness of the unintended consequences that come with doing so, given the genre and the situation of the end comment.

In this chapter, I follow Bawarshi's four steps, which I outlined in chapter 2, to perform a genre analysis of the end comments contained in *Twelve Readers Reading*. I realize that using this as my corpus could be a bit problematic because of the artificial nature of how these end commentaries were collected, but according to Straub and Lunsford, the examples they collected for this corpus

conform to standard conventional ways of composing commentary because they had asked these professors to write responses to the sample student texts as authentically as possible, as examples of end comments that closely resemble how these professors normally would write for their own students (4). For this corpus, the student essays did not derive from students in the classrooms of any of the professors who responded to them. Instead, the professors were sent several essays to respond to, as well as provided with the writing prompt, where the assignment fell within the course, what draft of that particular assignment they were responding to, and, at times, a background of the student. Some of the information that was sent to the professors was true, some was not; this was to ensure a variety of scenarios for the respondents to consider while composing their commentary. All of the information sent was meant to provide a context for the student writing. The professors were then asked to keep each context in mind when making their comments. Because of these artificial circumstances, the professors were asked "to take more time than perhaps they normally would in an actual setting" in an attempt to provide "perhaps as examples they would use in training teachers" for composing end commentary to student

text (Straub & Lunsford 4). This information is pertinent based purely on the factors teachers face in an actual setting, i.e. time constraints, familiarity with the students and their writing abilities, as well as knowledge of the assignment and of the classroom instruction leading up that assignment.

As a result of following Barwarshi's process, I see that conforming to the generic conventions of the end comment the ways these professors do inevitably leads to loss of student agency and possibly forced assimilation. I will confirm this by examining several examples of comments—from an array of the directive (direct commands for change) to the facilitative (indirect commands in the form of suggestions, advice, and questions)—to show how end commentary reinforces the hierarchical order that is already in place between teacher and student regardless of how comments are composed. After that, I will provide a more in-depth genre analysis on a set of focus samples, written for the same student paper, in order to supply a comprehensive view of the teacher commentary that the student would receive if this were an actual setting.

Examining the end comment as a genre, identifying power dynamics through the situation, the participants involved,

and the purposes behind the practice shows that this hierarchy is firmly situated within the writing classroom. These three objectives—in genre analysis—refer to the where, when, and why the practice of writing end commentary occurs. For example, the teacher provides a writing prompt, the students respond to it, the teacher reads and responds to the student produced text as a means to provide individualized instruction concerning that particular assignment with expectations that students will take heed and, in turn, take some form of action with their writing. Nevertheless, because the teacher is in a higher position of power than students, and because by composing end commentary the teacher's expectations are exposed, student agency is diminished to addressing what the teacher deems necessary.

As others have pointed out, directive comments are problematic in terms of this issue and we see it in the samples collected in *Twelve Readers* Reading. For example, the directive to "Reread the section where he traces the history of drugs in this country, and look again at his distinction between drugs and alcohol" (Straub & Lunsford 28), which is written as an end comment to a student's essay that responds to an article about legalizing drugs, is a statement demanding the student take a specific action. The

interesting part of this demand is how the professor implicitly tells the student that she is wrong by using the words "reread" and "look again" which places the professor higher on the chain of hierarchical order for being the knowledgeable expert, as well as the person with the power to pass or fail, the power to open or close the gate out of first year composition.

A similar, yet more aggressive, example is, "You will have to show me a lot of statistical evidence to prove that wearing seat belts is dangerous. I simply don't believe you" (Straub & Lunsford 16). Here the professor is issuing a direct order to the student on how to proceed. The professor explicitly makes clear that without "statistical evidence" the writer's argument is invalid. And to solidify this point, the professor adds his disbelief and in effect calls this student a liar. The power dynamics are tremendously skewed in the professor's favor through these two sentences—showing the professor's superior intellect and calling attention to the student's inferior ability to not only compose a valid argument but questioning the student's honesty on top of that.

The next example shows a gentler version of a directive comment: "I'd like to know a bit more about gangs in

general than you tell me. Maybe you could use your experiences to illustrate more general observations…" (emphasis in original Straub & Lunsford 97). Although this professor uses words such as "maybe" and "could," indirect words in and of themselves, the call for a specific action on the part of the student is definitely there. The professor is expressing exactly what he wants the student to address by disguising it in a way that appears to leave the student with agency, but really does not. This final example is simple and direct with no confrontational phrases: "I want you to add some extended examples - not just one sentence or two, but whole paragraphs" (103). Here the professor clearly states his instructions for the student to follow. This example emphasizes the hierarchical structure inherent in directive comments. In all directives, the teacher exerts her authority by framing comments in such a manner that allows little or no agency while demonstrating various levels of concealment toward student compliance. Although students ultimately do have agency to either accept or reject the teacher's instructions, it is the teacher who assigns grades and it is that very act which places the teacher in a higher position over the student.

That directive comments reinforce hierarchy is not surprising, but this sort of hierarchy is also reinforced in the model facilitative comments. For example, "Your revision should keep the good organization and concept, but show careful attention to making the memories yours, by detail, rather than just anyone's" (Straub & Lunsford 51). Although this professor is commending the student on what is done well—organization and concept—and is not asking for change in that respect, he is also commanding the student to make revisions. While this command is couched in such a way to elicit student agency on the part of choosing which detailed memories to incorporate, the sheer mention of what to do ("show careful attention") and how to do it ("by detail") highlights the higher position this professor holds over the student.

A similar command is seen in this comment: "There must be specific moments you can call up when he acted with indifference, just shrugging off your affections" (Straub & Lunsford 87). Instead of the professor directly stating that the student needs to present "specific moments" within her writing, he words his demand of her to include these moments as a plea to the student. This professor is explicit in what he wants this student to do which

emphasizes the inequality of power, leaving little room for agency, where the status quo of hierarchical order remains intact.

This next example is transcribed from a tape recording and as such has a conversational feel to it. This professor says, "Um, for me, the most important direction I think you might consider here is with the level of detail and also, um, how you, how concerned you are about the way **you** come off here" (emphasis in original Straub & Lunsford 99). First and foremost, this professor comes right out and admits that for him there is a "most important direction" for the student to take. That initial statement places the professor in a position of power by relating to the student that the professor's needs are more important than the writer's, but in the very next move this professor allows some agency for the student to decide on how to approach revisions to "detail" in the writing. The professor indirectly states his own concerns about the writing through the use of hedging to get his point across. It is obvious that this professor wants the student to provide more detail, and equally as obvious that he sees something wrong in how the student has constructed himself.

Although this last example is a bit harder to decipher, it is a prime example of how the professor manipulates the language of her demands to appear as an invitation for the student to consider her own writerly moves. In all actuality, though, she imposes on the student to take specific action. The comment reads, "As you re-read your essay now, let me invite you to reflect on your use of specific and metaphoric language, on the work you ask each to do, on the balance you establish between them" (Straub & Lunsford 74). The initial order to the student is to re-read the essay paying particular attention to "specific and metaphoric language." Even though the professor does not say specifically how to address these uses of language, she implies a need for change by asking the student to figure out what work the metaphors are doing in her writing. And, by default, insisting the student take action upon those metaphors. The professor allows student agency over these concerns, but in the process underscores the hierarchy between the lesser knowing student and the knowledgeable professor proving that what appears as the most facilitative comments do indeed reinforce the hierarchical structure and maintain the status quo.

In the following section, I address questions concerning content, rhetorical appeals, format, sentences and diction, and how it regulates (possibly forced) assimilation and the effects these have on student agency, beginning with the content of end commentary within the corpus.

Content of the end comment genre focuses attention to both major and minor problematic areas with the student text. Very few respondents highlight mechanical faults with the writing; however, some do highlight faulty logic or failure to address the prompt. An example of both faulty logic and failure to address the prompt is seen in this excerpt: "First, you were supposed to tell readers why this subject was important to you. You don't do that. Second, the arguments you offer to support your position just will not hold up" (Straub & Lunsford 16). This same respondent also points out mechanical errors: "Editing is quite poor.... I've indicated changes that should be made" (17). Both excerpts show the sway of power away from the student and toward the professor who, in turn, forces the student to assimilate to his ways leaving little agency for the student to maneuver with.

Many of the commentators pose thoughtful questions about the student text, offer suggestions on how to revise, ask for more information, emphasize strengths in the writing, and give the student mild to moderate praise. Not to say that each of those single commentaries includes all of what can be considered facilitative remarks (albeit reinforcing power dynamics by nature) in every single response; but, some do and others exclude one or two from the list of facilitative moves I noted above. Here is an end note that includes them all:

> Louise, you've chosen a good topic for yourself—one you clearly have strong feelings about. The last P is what really helped me see why it's important to you and that's the point that needs much more detail. Do you know of other instances when seat belts were (or would have been) dangerous? Before you tackle the next draft, you might want to do some free writing or talking to friends to explore the questions I've raised… (Straub & Lunsford 18)

Some content remarks provide analogies to the students, whereas others shape remarks that are in the form of a personal or reader response to the piece, yet still maintain

hierarchal stances which favor the professors. A prime example of this is, "One of your arguments sounded like one my mother used to offer me.... Somehow I thought resistance was more characteristic of older people...than younger people. That is why I was surprised at your stand on seat belts" (20). Many of the comments contain the teacher's point of view such as, "Have you described the four seasons in Syracuse, or have you described the four idealized seasons? I think the latter, and I'll tell you why" (55). Very few responses are strictly directive and confrontational; although, I would argue that the last sentence, and particularly the last phrase, is quite confrontational. The teacher takes a stance and is ready to fight for his point of view. What I find interesting in the content is lack of grades given to final drafts, as well as omission of the teacher's signature at the end of their comments. Almost all do neither. Some teachers did not even address the student by name. I interpret such lack of personal touches as centered on contextual matters—these professors were reading and responding to pieces of writing, not to the writers—this all plays into the artificial aspects of the corpus.

Rhetorical appeals are utilized by every professor in their end comments which illustrate their position of power regardless of the type(s) they use. The three rhetorical appeals are logos, pathos, and ethos. Using logical reasoning to make a point is logos proving, perhaps inadvertently, that the professor is more logical than the student. Appealing to the reader's emotions is pathos demonstrating, perhaps unconsciously, the professor's grasp on manipulating the language in order to bend a student's will. Providing evidence that the professor is ethical and credible is ethos exemplifying the professor's professional standing. These three rhetorical appeals are not found in each and every one of the end comments in this corpus; however, one or two are found in all of them. The two most prominent are logos and pathos.

The most easily recognizable rhetorical pattern is the use of pathos to praise either the writing or the writer such as: "Overall, the work is a noteworthy accomplishment for you" (Straub & Lunsford 91). Pathos also illustrates the teacher's attempt at making a connection with the student through reader response or analogy. For example, "I like your paper a lot … it had an effect on me …" (87). Sometimes, however, pathos functions as a challenge to the

student in the way it is worded, such as mild praise coupled with make a believer out of me as in "Your use of second person (you) is also effective because it draws the reader into your account. The significance of the four seasons is somewhat vague" (62).

The most commonly used rhetorical appeal is logos which is in every one of the end comments in this corpus. These comments generally discuss content issues or are in the form of logical questions. The latter is seen in the comments a professor makes on a student paper that is against the seat belt law: "Were you ever hurt in an accident because you were wearing a seat belt?" (Straub & Lunsford 16). When analogies and explanations are used, it acts as a complement to teacher reasoning by way of making the teacher's point more understandable and bridging the gap between teacher commentary and student text. In the same commentary as above the professor uses an analogy to prove the logic of a valid argument: "Let me give you an example from my own experience. Everytime (sic) I read about the government granting oil drilling rights …" (16). This professor continues in his comments to explain the situation and how he would discourage readers away from his argument if he solely used his own personal attachments to this particular

situation to persuade his audience just as the student does in her writing. Examples of ethos comments are least common.

Ethos remarks, or the appeal that points to the ethical/professional standing of the teacher, can be straight forward or obscure; however, the authoritative tone comes through leaving little to the imagination on which appeal is being used. An example of this appeal is when the professor assumes the student will want to continue work on the essay and writes, "I have taken the liberty of copy editing it. Please take note of my editorial suggestions to you" (Straub & Lunsford 114). Analogies as ethical appeals function more as antithetical statements than as connecting purposes. In other words, when an analogy is used, the teacher is either pointing out the faulty logic or using it to highlight faulty reasoning in the student writing by showing his expertise. For example, "I was really surprised that you offered as support for the position you are taking about seat belts, the same kind of heard or overheard story my mother used to tell. Nameless people, an authority whose qualifications are questionable, insufficient details" (20). Another example of ethos is articulating to the student the teacher's needs as a reader. Sometimes the teacher provides

his or her own examples to prove they are credible; therefore, heed need be taken to their comments. Next I discuss the format in which teacher end commentary is constructed.

Almost every end comment is in letter format where the teacher addresses the student by name at the beginning of the letter or embeds the student's name within the letter. The most prevalent pattern of these letters is multiple paragraphs that are single-spaced with double-spacing between paragraphs. The length of these letters varies between three and ten paragraphs; one-half page to one and one-half pages long. Only two are handwritten. Three are transcriptions of taped commentary which come from the same professor. In these transcriptions, the teacher greets the student, tenders a farewell, and constructs a scenario with additional information which somewhat levels the power dynamics by speaking to the student in a conversational manner but not entirely. All but four of these end commentaries do not include the teacher's name, signature, or initial. I now turn to an examination on how sentences are constructed and what diction is used.

The sentences and diction vary widely among the professors who wrote the end commentaries in this corpus.

The prominent similarity appears to be the formality in which they are written. In other words, the majority of the composed sentences are complete containing very few fragments. There are many complex sentences which have embedded information and/or parenthetical statements within the sentences. Another shared similarity is the use of questions. Most are thoughtfully posed to elicit further examination of a topic and to enable student agency to an extent. Within the comments, most teachers make suggestions and give advice to students on how to improve or revise their writing. Some comments are constructed in a non-threatening manner that gets the point across to the student as this one: "As noted in the margins, there are several usage problems in this paper" (Straub & Lunsford 62). While other comments are demanding and directive, even a bit hostile, as in this example: "You are supposed to develop some criteria for judging rock concerts and then indicate the ways in which this particular concert met those criteria" (125). In the latter mentioned comments, the teacher is issuing a command by ordering the student to perform a specific task. The majority of these teacher responses have a formal yet friendly tone. However, every professor has inserted their authority somewhere within

their comments. This authority also varies from the very mild to the extreme; some have even managed to camouflage their authority with the language they use. Here is an example of a mild authoritative comment: "Your revision should keep the good organization and concept, but show careful attention to making memories yours, by detail, rather than just anyone's" (emphasis in original 51). Nevertheless, all show signs of the hierarchical structure to varying degrees. What this reveals about the generic conventions of the end comment are as follows.

The rhetorical patterns of the end comment genre reveal several things about the situation. First of all, the participants in the genre consist of readers and writers. Both participants must have an understanding of their own role which is that the teacher is the writer who represents the expert/facilitator/mentor in this situation and the student is the reader/ responder of the comments. For this particular genre, the teacher is the sole writer; however, student and teacher, ultimately, enact both roles at different times because the situation requires an ongoing dialog. The teacher response, which is in the form of the end comment, is in reply to a student produced text which, in turn, corresponds to the teacher generated writing

prompt. All three writing situations must coincide for the end comment genre to exist. Notice, however, the higher positioning of the teacher through the construction of assignment, and responding to the student produced text by means of individualized instruction. This individualized instruction always contains the teacher directing the student to perform specified tasks placing the student in a subordinate position which inhibits agency and promotes conformity and, at times, even forces assimilation.

Ideological values, goals, and assumptions of the teacher/writer are present throughout this corpus and are recognized by the ways in which they composed their comments. For example, some end comments are posed in such a way to allow greater student agency while others impose, on the student, their own views on how an assignment should be written—leaving little choices for the student to make in his/her own writing.

In this last step, I will reveal what the patterns suggest about the situation of the end comment genre. Through analysis of this corpus, it appears that the important issues addressed in the majority of comments concern highlighting what the student has done well, pointing out problem areas within the writing, and offering

suggestions and advice on how to make revisions. In other words, most commentators respond to the global issues rather than the mechanics of the writing regardless of what draft the teacher is commenting on. All end comments, however, request that the student take action on their writing. The action that the end comment helps make possible is that it creates a situation for the student to become aware of his/her writing as well as present the opportunity to write more under the supervision of the instructor.

In this next section, I analyze focus samples in their entirety to amplify the effect these end comments have on student agency, and to show the inherent hierarchy within the comments no matter how they are constructed. I will look at four teacher end commentaries written about the same student text which will enable me to provide a more comprehensive view of the whole picture that the previous analyses could not, and to offer readers sample end commentaries to refer back to in order to gain a greater understanding of what students would receive, as well as how students could perceive the meaning of these comments, in an actual classroom setting.

Step 1: Collection of Samples

For this study, I have collected four examples of teacher end commentary that were written about one student essay from *Twelve Readers Reading*. I chose these four because of the breadth of comments that span from facilitative to directive and exhibit language that enables or inhibits student agency to differing degrees. Appendix A contains the full text of the student essay that these professors wrote their comments on. Appendix B contains the full texts of the four examples of teacher end commentary.

Step 2: The Situation

Straub and Lunsford provide a background for this particular student's writing as well as where this assignment is placed within the course. Therefore, the responders know that this assignment is the second rough draft of the third essay of the course, but it is the first time the teachers have looked at the draft for this assignment. The student's writing has the same strengths and weaknesses as his previous texts. Straub and Lunsford also provide the writing prompt and the complete student text for the professors to consider while constructing their comments. This assignment is the first expository writing

that the student has done; the first two were personal experience pieces. The writing prompt asks students

> to select an idea, process, or activity that you know about but that many people are unfamiliar with. Assuming the stance of an expert writing a feature column for the school newspaper, write a 600-1000 word essay in which you explain this subject to readers. (Straub & Lunsford 35)

The prompt also calls for "concrete examples and details" (35) of their chosen topic.

As I had mentioned previously, the situation with the professors responding to this student text is artificial. These professors have never taught or even met the student who they are constructing end comments for. The reason the end comment genre exists is to facilitate student learning by creating a written dialog between student and teacher concerning the student's text. Because this student will not be able to read and respond to the comments, the exercise of creating end comments, that these professors wrote, will be used to educate other teachers on how to respond to student text. Therefore, the power dynamics that would be in play in an actual classroom setting still remains in these comments; however, these comments are

skewed towards helping other teachers learn how to compose end comments by example even though these professors were asked to replicate their commenting styles.

Step 3: Identifying and Describing Patterns

There are definite patterns in the content of all four examples of commentary such as giving the student some form of praise on the work, explaining to the student what he has done as well as the problems found within the writing, and suggestions or advice on how to revise.

The content in each of the examples varies, though. For instance, in Examples 1and 2 the teachers praise the student on his work such as "Your choice of topic is excellent because…" (ex. 1) and "this paper has real potential" (ex. 2); whereas, in Example 4, the teacher gives a different form of praise by way of reader response to the student about his writing style: "What I like is your voice and presence and the sense of immediacy through lots of detail." In Example 3, instead of praising the student's work, the teacher comments on the student's style of writing and what he finds "most effective." All examples place the professor as the expert reader, hence, highlighting that professor's superior position and knowledge over the student.

The next pattern in teacher end commentary is the rhetorical appeals. In all four examples, the teachers use logos and pathos in their comments; however, ethos is not incorporated in one of the end comments. I begin this discussion with logos.

In Example 1, logos, or the appeal to logical reasoning, is utilized when the professor explains how parts of the student's paper are turned into a narrative rather than expository writing by highlighting specific spots in the essay to prove her point. Logos is also used when the professor advices the student how to revise the paper to turn it into expository writing. Another professor, from Example 2, uses logos throughout the questions and in the paragraph where he explains to the student that his personal essays have influenced his expository writing which the professor assumed influenced the student to generate portions of the paper into a narrative. For example 3, the professor uses logos to explain the difference between "showing" a scene and "telling" how to execute a sport, and again when he appeals to the student's sensibilities by saying, "The more scientific info…and the more lore…you present, the better for us readers who are novices to the sport." And, in example 4, this professor uses logos to

appeal to the student about the title and how it could be restricting his audience to bass fishermen rather than to a wider audience. By using logic, these professors make visible their expertise and superior knowledge to the less knowledgeable student and, by doing so, amplify the power differences between the two.

In regards to pathos, or appealing to the student's emotions, the professor in Example 1 uses pathos to connect with the student when she commends him for concrete details in his writing: "Your description of Orlando lakes and Lake Ivanho in particular gives me a real feeling for the place…". The professor in Example 2 uses pathos to praise the student and to identify with the student's joy of bass fishing along with pointing out the strengths of the paper. In Example 3, a slight variation of pathos is incorporated into the text when the professor exclaims: "Get to work as my mentor, Steve, and show me how to pull a seven-pounder from the waters of Lake Ivanho" which, inadvertently, contradicts the previous comments the teacher made about "telling" rather than "showing." The professor in Example 4 uses pathos when he tells the student that he likes the narrative and wants him to keep it in but is "Not sure how to do it." While all of these comments appear innocuous on

the surface, with a closer examination these comments show the professors' abilities to manipulate the language in the form of a compliment or praise in order to get the student to perform a task. I am not saying anything is wrong with complimenting students; on the contrary, I believe it is a necessity to boost students' confidence in writing. However, as I have shown, the generic convention of praising also has a hidden agenda.

Concerning ethos, or pointing to ethical issues and the professor's professional expertise, this appeal is found in three of the four end commentary samples. Example 1 is the exception—there is no evidence of ethos in those comments. Example 2 shows slight evidence of ethos where the teacher points out problems related to "the PACES conceptual frame" which informs the student that the professor is the expert when it comes to practical issues in writing. In Example 3, the professor establishes ethos within the commentary when he uses such phrases as "As a reader" and "As far as relevance to my needs as a reader" which tells the student that the writing should be geared toward what the professor wants to hear rather than, perhaps, what the student wants to say. In Example 4, a strong sense of ethos is incorporated throughout the commentary from the way the

teacher wields his authority as the audience. In other words, if the text does not work for the teacher, than there is a problem. (A note about Example 4, all of the rhetorical appeals in this end comment are peculiar and tough to analyze because this professor's comments revolve around how the student's writing affects him, the reader, rather than offering suggestions or giving advice.) As far as hierarchical structures are concerned, all of these ethical appeals enhance the professor's professional standing, therefore, increasing the gap in power, decreasing student agency, and forcing student conformity to the professor's wishes.

I now turn the discussion to structure and format of these sample end comments. All four examples have similar patterns in the structure and the format. All four examples are in a type-written letter format. Three of the teachers address the student by name at the top of the letter, while one embeds the student's name throughout the comments. Only one of the teachers types his name at the end of his comments. The other three did not sign or type their names. For structure, in examples 1, 2, and 4 the first part of the comments are filled with mild praise of what the student has done well and/or emphasizes the strengths of the paper;

however, in Example 3, the professor describes the student's progress of moving away from the personal and the student's understanding of this assignment. In the second portion of comments, the professors discuss the problematic areas of the piece, particularly the shift from expository to narrative. The last part offers the student advice or suggestions on how to revise. This confirms that the end comment genre generally conforms to a formula that is identifiable to the participants which leads me to believe that students who are familiar with this formula will disregard the praise because students know that it is merely part of the convention.

Last of all are the patterns of sentences, words, and tones in the comments. This is where the greatest amount of variation comes into play. In Example 1, the professor writes in complete sentences with no embedded phrases; the sentences are explicit and to the point. The teacher peppers the pronouns "you" and "your" a lot throughout the commentary which gives the impression that she is speaking directly to the student rather than a written text. Diplomacy is exercised when she highlights a specific narrative event in the paper which she wishes him to correct, such as, "By concentrating on this event you

abandon your role as expert explaining bass fishing" and "You can certainly draw on your own experiences to illustrate points you make, but try to prevent the narrative from taking over." She is making her point without being harsh; although, she is covert in her directives by being diplomatic. The tone is formal, yet friendly.

When referring to the paper, in Example 2, the professor chooses "this paper" rather than directly addressing the writer, e.g. "The problem areas in this paper…" When praising the student, he uses the pronouns "you" and "your." The teacher also directly writes to the student when posing questions; such instances occur in these examples: "What is your…?, Is bass fishing more than just 'exciting' to you?, Is your audience…?" The first part of his comments sounds more personal than the last. In the last part of the comments, the professor asks the student analytical questions to ponder for later revisions to the paper. These comments are written in complete sentences or questions while the tone is friendly, yet persistent. The professor has given the student an opportunity to make a few decisions on his own; only, however, through the supervision and directions of the professor, though. It enhances

student agency by way of offering the student different directions to move in.

In Example 3, the teacher writes in complete sentences. Many sentences are complex and some carry embedded information. There are five parenthetical phrases. Instead of addressing the student by name at the top of the comments, the professor embeds the student's name three times within the text which gives the feeling that he is conversing directly with the student rather than the student's writing. This professor also utilizes the pronouns "you" and "I" which tells the student that he is the audience while the student is the writer; "must" or "need" is followed by most of these pronouns. The comments are straight forward and to the point. In order for the student to understand what the assignment calls for, the professor provides additional instruction and explanation. The wording to the comments are phrased in a manner that leaves the final editing decisions up to the student, but is specific in what the professor is looking for in the paper. The comments end in an upbeat tone, and the tone is formal and professional throughout the letter. Although the professor leaves the decisions up to the student, which enhances student agency, he also is very direct in his

expectations of the student which places a limiting factor on agency and, ultimately, asserts his authority by telling the student what must be done.

Example 4 poses a conundrum to analyzing the sentences, words, and tone because it is written as an expression of how the student text has affected the reader/professor rather than offering supplemental instruction, advice, suggestions, and/or posing thoughtful questions to the student on how to go about reworking the paper to fit the assignment. Comments are comprised of several fragments as well as short, complete sentences. There are eight parenthetical phrases which are mostly embedded and act as afterthoughts, five dashes, three slashed word pairs, and several contractions. It is very informal; yet, by the tone and by the many times the word "I" is peppered throughout the comments confirms that the professor is exercising his authority and places himself in the position of the most important player in this exchange, but leaving the student to guess at what to do.

Although I am supposed to be identifying and describing patterns in the genre here, I think that the differences in these commentaries need to be exposed. In all four examples of the end commentary, the professors

describe what the student has done, and in doing so reveal the problems within the student text which mainly refer to the student's gradual slip into narrative from expository writing, but there are different approaches of advice given to the student for revising the paper. The comment about revision made in Example 1 tells the student to "concentrate on explaining bass fishing rather than telling the story of one fishing trip." In Example 2, the teacher poses several thoughtful questions for the student to think about before revising, such as who is the intended audience and what is the purpose of the paper. The commentary of Example 3 suggests ways to make the shift from "showing" a scene (the narrative) to "telling" how to catch a bass. In Example 4, the teacher is puzzled because he likes the personal narrative and wants the student to keep it; however, it does not address the expository assignment as it stands. On this matter, the teacher exclaims: "Not sure how to do it. Break it up into bits to be scattered here and there? Or leave it a longer story but have material before and after to make it a means of explaining your subject? Not sure; tricky problem." Each of the four commentators shows similarities in the content of their responses; however, the differences are in the way that they present themselves to the student.

Yet all position themselves higher than the student, keeping the status quo of hierarchy firmly in place.

Step 4: Revelations of the Situation of this Genre

Patterns of the end comment genre reveal much about the situation. First of all, the writers of this genre do not seem to be concerned about the mechanics of the student writing; rather, their comments tend more toward global issues such as addressing the writing prompt as well as what type of composition the prompt calls for. In this particular case, the essay should be written in expository form not narrative. This is significant because these professors are helping the student understand the difference between the two forms of writing instead of getting the student hung up on grammar. It is also significant for ideological reasons. Three out of the four respondents phrase their comments to the student in an academically fashioned professional tone coaxing the student along with praise, showing him his slippage from expository to narrative, and giving him encouragement to revise so that the writing fits the prompt. In this way, the academy's ideological aspect of assimilating students into the academy's worldviews shines through here. However, in the

4th example, the teacher composes a reader response to the student text in which he interjects his own ideological beliefs along with a hint of academy values. The one thing that they all have in common is a call for action on the student's part. And no matter how facilitative of wording they use in their comments, they all demonstrate the power dynamics that are in play within this genre.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINAL THOUGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

In the previous chapters, I have surveyed the literature concerning the end comment, situated the end comment in genre theory, and analyzed samples of the end comment by using Bawarshi's four steps to analyzing genre. The analysis shows that all responses tend to reinforce the hierarchical structure to differing degrees; however, some of the examples analyzed from the corpus provide good suggestions for promoting student agency such as allowing students to choose which details to include into their writing, choice of figurative and specific language usage, and freedom to choose a topic that will address the specific assignment. Although analyzing end commentary as a genre enables us to see end comments differently—more specifically, directive and facilitative comments are common practice and teacher responses remain basically the same—by looking through Bawarshi's lens, we can see this. In this chapter, I propose strategies to incorporate into the classroom pedagogy that disrupts the traditional ways we respond to student texts and in the process helps to reposition students as agents of their own writing. Before

I do that, though, I will show two alternative ways that these other scholars have done to reinvent this genre and empower students.

For the first alternative, the idea of allowing students to write in the margins before turning their writing in for the teacher to consider while composing comments is addressed by Nancy Welch in "Sideshadowing Teacher Response." She refers to this strategy as sideshadowing. Welch claims that using the technique of sideshadowing to respond to student texts opens the possibility for more than just one reality; the one reality being that of the teacher reading and commenting on the text in a manner that will help students produce the "Ideal" text. Instead, sideshadowing entails students writing in the margins of their own texts that highlight the conflicts, confusion, and questioning of their own writing. This serves two purposes: to help students identify and work through their writing, and to help the teacher grasp what the student is trying to accomplish in order to respond accordingly to the student's needs and wants. In other words, the teacher reads both texts—the essay and the sideshadowing glosses—simultaneously to gain a better understanding of what the student is trying to say. Welch

defines sideshadowing as response that "redirects our attention to the present moment, its multiple conflicts, its multiple possibilities" (377). By having students sideshadow their own texts, teachers do not have to imagine one future for the text to take; rather, the teacher can take the student's glosses into account to imagine other directions for the text—ones that the student has in mind. I can envision the enabling effects to student agency this practice potentially has if it is used in the manner in which Welch describes. There is one caveat that I can imagine, though, with this practice: What if the student ignores the writing assignment completely and writes something entirely different than what the assignment calls for? Even with the most descriptive sideshadowing glosses, the teacher would have to intervene in some way unless the teacher advocates student agency by way of allowing students to write whatever they want regardless of what the assignment calls for.

For the second, Janet Auten and Melissa Pasterkiewicz consider the matter of students misunderstanding teacher responses in "The Third Voice in the Session." They assert that teachers' "comments easily become the sites of misunderstanding and miscommunication" for first-year

composition students (2). This article is based on the perspectives of writing center consultants—the issues arising in tutoring sessions about teacher commentary and advice on how to handle these issues. Although Auten and Pasterkiewicz are mediators between the teacher and student in writing center sessions, the purpose behind their research is noteworthy. Their purpose is to offer suggestions about what students need to understand about teacher comments. They conducted a survey on both teachers and students concerning teacher commentary and found four distinct areas that students have difficulty understanding. The first deals with "[d]irective comments on clarity, form, and style"; the second are with "[c]omments concerning discipline-specific terminology or methodology"; the third is about "[v]ague comments or cryptic/uncommon abbreviations"; and the fourth are "[c]omments that hurt" (5). Apparently, these issues of misunderstanding teacher commentary are common. Their advice to teachers and tutors is to help students "understand the reason for commenting and the ways writers can make good use of comments" (3). I think this is sound advice because in order for students to benefit from teacher responses, they have to understand them

first. Without this understanding, the comments are useless and cannot advance student power and/or agency.

Even with my limited experience in teaching Freshman Composition, I understand concerns about studying teacher commentary out of the classroom context. So much is missed when not considering the whole picture. Take, for instance, a writing prompt and a student essay that has addressed that prompt, all you have are artifacts. Now, take the lessons that lead up to the assignment as well as the dialogic interactions between the students and teacher over a period of time and you get a better idea of the teacher's expectations for that particular assignment and how the students perceive what the assignment calls for. To take it a step further, consider each student's individuality in writing along with their own special brand of writing issues. I take all of these matters under consideration when composing comments to my students' texts. Because I have this contextual background, I am better prepared to compose written comments that are suited towards the individual writer. I can also check on which of my comments were addressed and which were ignored to get a better understanding of how effective my comments were by comparing an earlier draft to a later one. Taking all of these things

into consideration allows for a better approach to writing end commentary that is specific to an individual writer. This approach permits a greater overall view of the entire picture which enables me to promote student agency in ways that Straub and Lunsford's study could not because of the artificial nature of how the comments were composed, even though the professors in the study were given contextual backgrounds to the student writing. I attempt to promote student agency through my written comments as well as through whole class and individual discussions.

First of all, for students to benefit from teacher responses, they have to understand them. Without this understanding, the comments are useless. Perhaps a sound practice is for teachers to explain the reasoning behind their comments as ways of reentering the text—a place for students to start their revisions. I truly believe teachers should always explain any cryptic markings that are unique to their commenting style and to keep hurtful comments to a minimum or, better yet, left entirely off. Now I do realize that students may not be familiar with this type of instruction, but that is exactly what teacher produced comments are—a form of instruction. This needs to be brought to the surface, unveiled and demystified for

students. How else can our comments even begin to help our students?

With that being said, I propose that students become active participants to this part of instruction. My vision is to discuss commenting throughout the course—make it a part of the classroom activities. For starters, before commenting on the first set of papers, allow students the opportunity to discuss their prior experiences with how teachers wrote comments about their writing and how they received those comments, as well as have students discuss the different types of comments they have seen, and what types they responded to best. I believe it is also important to discuss the reasoning behind commenting from a teacher's point of view so that students can understand why we, as teachers, engage in this time consuming activity. Perhaps it would be best to have students write for a few minutes about this topic before this preliminary discussion ensues to insure that they have ample time to think about it and have something to say—and then listen to what they are saying. Collect these student produced quickwrites and read them noting recurring themes. From there the teacher has something to work with and consider before composing comments on their essays. A shifting of power occurs by

giving students their say in how we can better serve their needs and wants concerning this matter. Now I am not suggesting that we bend to their every whim; what I am suggesting is that we view their conceptions as legitimate and keep an open mind to adjusting our commenting styles to suit our students.

When I compose comments, I keep in mind what students have said about previous comments they have received. I look for whether the student has addressed the prompt completely. If the student has not, then I point out the missing components. Addressing the prompt is my main concern. I give students latitude in how they arrange their essays, in what examples they use, and the stance they want to take. It does not matter to me as long as they use examples from the text(s) and interpret those examples to back up their arguments. I also ask students to write in first person and present tense whenever possible—this seems to give students trouble. I try not to address grammatical issues, but still do more than I would like to. I feel that I do promote agency by allowing choices in their writing, and the students appreciate this freedom, albeit limited freedom.

After students have made revisions to the text that was commented on, I have students reflect on which comments they responded to, which ones they ignored, and why they made those particular decisions (this can also be applied to peer reviewing activities). Although the choices to respond and ignore comments are ultimately left up to the writer, the only viable way I conceive of learning more about how students receive our comments is to get their feedback on what they did with our comments and why they did what they did. This type of metacognitive activity serves multiple purposes: students have the opportunity to reflect upon the decisions they made and the reasoning behind those choices which enables them to learn more about themselves and the world around them; they gain a greater understanding of the choices and restraints they have in writing and the subsequent rewards and consequences that go along with it; the knowledge they gain from these activities are transferable to other academic endeavors as well as to their public and private lives; as for teachers, we gain a greater understanding of how students approach our comments; we learn what types of comments students commonly address, which ones are frequently dismissed or ignored, and what types of comments students misinterpret or misconstrue as

something other than what the comment was intended for. These are merely a few of the benefits that I can think of. But I am sure the list will grow the more I use these activities.

This meta process of discussing and writing about teacher commentary and the decisions students make should continue throughout the course. Not only do these activities empower students resulting from their participation in helping me help them through the end comment, but it also enhances student agency by listening to and hearing what they have to say about the dialogic nature of responding to their texts.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE STUDENT TEXT

Appendix A is a student produced text recopied in its entirety from Straub and Lunsford's published text *Twelve Readers Reading*.

Writing 5
Steve L.
Second Rough Draft

ATTENTION BASS FISHERMEN

If the feeling of a monster large-mouth bass on the end of your line sends the same feeling of excitement through your body as it does mine, the lakes of central Orlando are for you. Orlando is blessed with an extraordinary number of lakes to fish in. Almost all of these were formed by sink holes thousands of years ago. The sink holes were eventually filled with run-off from rain storms and formed some of the greatest natural fishing holes ever. During my early childhood the first really fun thing I was taught to do by my grandfather was to fish for blue-gill. It wasn't until later that I acquired the skills to fish for large-mouth bass, but after I hooked my first bass I understood how exciting fishing really is. After spending the first ten years of my life on the bass infested lakes of Orlando, I took for granted the great fishing. Only after moving to Texas did I learn to appreciate the lakes of Orlando. I

remember looking forward to summer vacation because we would always go to Orlando to visit my grandmother and grandfather for a couple of days before we would go to New Smyrna Beach. The drive from Texas was torture, because Florida's I-75 is lined with thousands of potential fishing holes. The temptation to stop and try my luck was almost unbearable. Every time I saw a lake I would tell myself it would be better to hold out until I got to Orlando, where I knew the monster bass would be lurking.

There is a certain lake in Orlando called Lake Ivanho that is my favorite place to fish. Lake Ivanho is actually a chain of four lakes connected by links of water. I have an advantage over most people in fishing these lakes. I grew up on them and know most of the hidden underwater structures, like fallen trees and sand-bars that extend out into the lake. One of the things I love the most about this lake is that almost all the lake is fishable from the shoreline. This is a rare occurrence because on most lakes you can only fish in certain places unless you have a boat or waders. Lake Ivanho is unique because the only thing between you and the fish are the occasional patches of lillypads. The best solution to this problem is to work a top-water buzz bait in the early morning or late afternoon.

I have hooked some big bass using this technique, but if the bass is big enough to give a good long fight it can be very difficult to get it through the lillipads. After fishing the lillipads that morning my next move was to work a plastic worm under the giant oak trees that hang out over much of Lake Ivanho. Bass like to hang out in these shady areas during the heat of the day so they can better spot unsuspecting prey swimming by. This didn't produce the monster bass I was looking for so my next move was to work a spinner-bait along the southeast bank of the lake where there is a three foot drop off at the shore line. This is a especially good place to fish during a change in barometric pressure. The reason bass do this is because they loose their sense of equilibrium and must move in close to static underwater structures to help maintain their sense of balance. This forces you to place the lure directly in front of the fish or it won't strike. After fishing for about another hour and a half, hot, hungry and tired from a long day of fishing I decided to call it a day even though I had failed to catch the "Monster Bass" I was looking for. After dinner, still wanting to catch a monster I decided to try night fishing, which has been known to produce some big fish. After putting on a big black worm I started to fish

under a small bridge that went over the water that conncted two of the lakes. After fishing for about thirty minutes, I suddenly felt a tug at my line and because it was dark I couldn't tell if it had the worm in its mouth or not so I decided to wait for one more sign that it was still at the end of my line. A split second later I felt it and set the hook hard. It felt like I set the hook in a tree but the tree was fighting back. After fighting it in to the shoreline I reached down and pulled out my seven and a half pound monster. (Straub & Lunsford 36-8)

Straub, Richard, and Ronald F. Lunsford. *Twelve Readers Reading: Responding to College Student Writing.* Cresskill: Hampton, 1995. Print.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLES OF TEACHER END COMMENTARY

Appendix B contains four examples of teacher end commentary that have been recopied in their entirety from Straub and Lunsford's published text *Twelve Readers Reading.*

Example 1

Steve—

Your choice of topic is excellent because you clearly know a great deal about bass fishing. Your description of Orlando's lakes and of Lake Ivanho in particular gives me a real feeling for the place and for fishing there because you include so many concrete examples and details. Your accounts of your own fishing experiences provides further detail, but these accounts also raise some problems.

When you begin to recount specific experiences they tend to take over. Instead of explaining fishing you move into a narrative of one event. This is particularly true beginning in the middle of page 2 with the section that begins "After fishing the lillypads that morning…" This account leads into the narrative that closes the paper. By concentrating on this event you abandon your role as expert explaining bass fishing.

As you revise this draft try to concentrate on explaining bass fishing rather than telling the story of one

fishing trip. You can certainly draw on your own experiences to illustrate points you make, but try to prevent the narrative from taking over. (Straub & Lunsford 39)

Note: The original was single-spaced, type written with double spacing between each paragraph.

Example 2

Writing 5

Steve L.

Steve, this paper has real potential—you seem to know your subject well and you are a real fan of fishing. You obviously enjoy fishing and know enough to make it attractive for people who haven't experienced the Orlando bass-fishing experience.

The strengths of this paper are numbered in the left-hand margins.

1. Everything marked #1 is excellent introductory material connecting you to your forthcoming explanation of bass fishing.
2. The #2 sentences are interesting and informative and should prove useful in your final draft.

3. Again, useful information, especially about shore-line fishing.

In other words you have selected some first class informative material for explaining about Orlando bass fishing.

The problem areas in this paper relate directly to the PACES conceptual frame, especially with regard to purpose and audience. The last full page of your draft "After fishing" to the end is a narrative of one day you spent fishing. Your (sic) merely mention the fishing you did at the lilypads, the shady areas beneath the oaks, the southeast bank for 1 ½ hours, and then, too briefly, hooking the monster bass.

What is your overall purpose and who is your audience?

I think the two previous personal experience narratives you wrote have influenced you here. You need to step back from your bass fishing experiences and decide what makes the different aspects of bass fishing so exciting. Think of explaining rather than, as in the second half of your paper, simply narrating.

Is bass fishing more than just "exciting" to you?

You seem interested in the different kinds of techniques demanded by different locations in that one lake.

Should you focus on that lake exclusively or talk about Central Florida in general?

In other words, what is your overall purpose?

Is your audience people who have never fished before or people who have never fished for bass, especially in the Orlando area?

Just what <u>aspects</u> of bass fishing led you to the term "exciting"? Could this term be put into sub-categories? (Straub & Lunsford 43)

Note: The original was single-spaced, type-written with double spacing between each paragraph as well as between the numbered portion of the commentary. Concerning the numbered commentary, the professor had bracketed parts of the paper and numbered them.

<u>Example 3</u>

Steve L.'s Second Rough Draft: "Attention Bass Fishermen"

This text shows you moving away from recreating the personal experience of participating in an activity in and of itself (as you did in the first two assignments) and moving towards "presenting an understanding about" the activity. For you, Steve, this movement is from something

like "My Bass Fishing Experience with My Grandfather" to "How to Bass Fish in the Lakes of Orlando."

In a shift of this nature you must gauge how much "showing" and how much "telling" to do in the text. As a reader, I want to experience vicariously the primary sensations of the activity, while also needing your commentary to explain how to catch that wondrous large-mouth. What I find most effective in you (sic) draft, Steve, is the technical information: where to look for the fish during particular conditions of time and weather, what equipment (rods, lures etc.) to use. I need to know more about specific techniques: HOW to do it. For example, what techniques do you use to work a "top-water buzz bait," a "plastic worm," and a "spinner-bait"? The more specific information (like that about barometric pressure change) and the more lore (your particular tricks of the trade) you present, the better for us readers who are novices to this sport.

Of course, with such requirements for "telling" us such things you have to make some trade-offs, some reduction in the amount of "showing" us the scene. After all, you are shooting for a 600-1000 word essay and a rough estimate of your draft puts it already at approximately a 750-word

length. So you need to examine carefully what to include and what to let drop on the editor's floor. As far as relevance to my needs as a reader, I give a low priority to the reverie about your early childhood days (beginning with the 4th sentence and running to the end of p.1). There are more than two hundred words tied up [in] it.

Get to work as my mentor, Steve, and show me how to pull a seven-pounder from the waters of Lake Ivenho.
(Straub & Lunsford 44)

Example 4

WRITING 5, "ATTENTION BASS FISHERMAN"

Dear Steve,

I'm a total nonfisherman but (and?) I enjoyed reading your piece. Perhaps that makes me the wrong audience (particularly given your title). (What about that? Do you really want to restrict your audience? You might catch a few nonfisherman (sic) on your line with a different title.) I even enjoyed the metaphor of "setting a fish" on the hook—and then realized it's merely the conventional term.

What I like is your voice and presence and the sense of immediacy through lots of detail. I marked places I especially liked. (I marked your opening sentence—your

"lead"—but I have second thoughts: it's vivid and lively, but I'm bothered because it's used so much—feels like something borrowed from FIELD AND STREAM—I guess the title adds to this feeling—making me fear this will be a stale and "borrowed"-feeling piece of writing—which it didn't seem to me to be. But it'll probably work—especially on the school newspaper. Not on teachers, however.)

I felt something interesting going on here. Seemed as though you had the assignment in mind (don't talk just tell a story of your experiences but explain a subject)—for a while—but then gradually forgot about it as you got sucked into telling about your particular day of fishing. (You'll see my wiggly lines of slight bafflement as this story begins to creep in.)

The trouble is I like your stories/moments. My preference would be not to drop them ("Shame on you—telling stories for an expository essay") but to search around for some way to save it/them—but make it/them part of a piece that does what the assignment calls for. Not sure how to do it. Break it up into bits to be scattered here and there? Or leave it a longer story but have material before and after to make it a means of <u>explaining</u> your <u>subject</u>? Not sure; tricky problem. But worth trying to pull off. Good

writers often get lots of narrative and descriptive bits into expository writing.

Best,

Peter (Straub & Lunsford 45)

Note: This professor had underlined several passages that he found interesting and drew several squiggly lines under passages that bothered him.

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