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Reading our responses: A new way of responding to student writing

Glau, Gregory Robert, Ph.D.
The University of Arizona, 1994

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READING OUR RESPONSES:  
A NEW WAY OF RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING 

by 
Gregory Robert Glau 

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the 
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In the Graduate College 
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA 

1994
As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Gregory Robert Glau entitled Reading Our Responses: A New Way of Responding to Student Writing and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Theresa Enos  
Tilly Warnock  
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Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Dissertation Director

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5-3-94

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my research project was to determine if a semester-long discussion about how teachers respond to and comment on student writing would change student conceptions of revision.

I ground my argument in reader-response theory, which helps us understand the connection between reading and writing not as one of mind fusion and of the clear transmission of ideas (the current-traditional model) but rather a transaction first between a writer and her text and then between a reader and that text.

My research is informed by reader-response theory as articulated by Louise Rosenblatt and how it relates to the way(s) we can best respond to our students' writing. I have expanded on Rosenblatt's ideas to focus my naturalistic research on the written and oral dialogue of the classroom; my results suggest the location of a new site at which to situate our responses to student writing, a site which facilitates true content-based revision.

For instructors, my transactional model of reading and responding to student writing suggests that when we read student papers we respond not to the texts
themselves, but to our evocations of those works and--at the same time--to discuss with our student writers their own evocations of their texts. In terms of revision and response, these evocations are the points at which we want to talk with the writer, the places at which our comments--both written and oral--do the most good.

I propose that we bring commenting to the forefront of our classroom conversations, to explain Rosenblatt's theories along with my own extensions of her ideas, so that students enter into the conversation about their own reading and our responses to it and their responses to our comments. The results from the participatory ethnography from my own classroom and which is reported here, in which commenting became part of the ongoing dialogue of that classroom, clearly argue for such a new way of responding to student writing. Such a pedagogy not only facilitated more complicated student conceptions of revision, it also enabled more effective revision strategies and practices.
Part of the difficulty composition teachers have in responding to and commenting about student writing comes from us, from our not being sure what questions to ask ourselves about what we want to do. Certainly we hope our remarks on student texts will both encourage and help our students to improve their work, but what is the most effective way to respond? Should we be kind and gentle or harsh and critical? Should we center on one main idea or touch on every weakness we spot in student papers? If we believe there is one good way to respond and comment, do our remarks then become ones that "could be interchanged, rubber-stamped, from text to text" (Sommers, "Responding" 152)? Or perhaps there are multiple ways to respond effectively--after all, each student
and every text is different. But do innumerable ways of commenting engender what Flower and Hayes describe as a shotgun approach: "punctuation here, incoherence there" ("Process-Based" 3) in which our students face the impossible task of figuring out what we mean, what is most important, and how it might be corrected? And as I will outline in chapter two, every possible approach to response and commenting seems to have its flock of adherents and at least some research to support each argument--so everyone is right at least some of the time.

Since all writing instructors spend so much time reading and commenting on student writing, we all have our own theories as to what works, notions often based on our own experience (what Stephen North calls lore), or perhaps ideas informed by an essay we read at one time or possibly an approach to commenting grounded in a research study--but as each semester goes by, we often find that what we do in response and commenting only works some of the time with some of our students and then only on some of their papers.
Reports of our own self-doubt are legendary: more than a century ago William Aytoun at Edinburgh University explained his concept of commenting in terms that will sound familiar to any writing teacher:

My method is to go over each exercise with my pen in hand, to mark the faults, alter the expression, and give a summary of the virtues of the whole. This entails an unusual amount of labour [but] I shall begrudge no labor for your benefit, but simply entreat that you will not force me to squander my time without the prospects of a useful result. (qtd. in Lunsford 440)

When our students' writing does not seem to improve, we try to justify the time we spend reading and responding to their papers by telling ourselves that our comments just did not affect this group of texts or that in-class essay examination. Our students will see and demonstrate the benefits of our hard work and astute commenting strategies later on, maybe next semester or perhaps when they are out of school. And all the while we continue to worry and wonder if we should comment a little or a lot?
write in the margins of the student’s paper, or at the end, or both?

tape our comments so students can hear our tone of voice (see Greenhalgh; Olson "Beyond Evaluation": Jeffrey Sommers)

comment both as a paper is being worked on, or after it is done, or both?

incorporate conferences, somehow, into the commenting process?

provide a lot of praise or a great deal of criticism, or some mixture of the two?

focus on one problem with a text or mention everything we see?

ask questions or be specifically directive or do both?

be explicit or implicit in the advice we provide?

mark all of the mechanical errors we spot as well as comment on content?

And no matter what we do, we wonder if our students will even read what we write, speculate that if they do read our comments whether or not they will understand what we meant, question if they do understand our remarks whether or not they will do anything in response, and usually just feel guilty that we have not said enough or the right things to make a real difference in their writing.
My argument is this: If we can adjust our focus from the text to the writer, we necessarily move from commenting about student texts on those texts to responding to writers about their texts. Instead of response taking place at a textual level (as it always has), such response moves to a personal location where both writer and reader enter into a conversation during which they negotiate how meaning is made. Our comments serve to begin such a dialogue and the immediate question then becomes where and how we can extend such discourse. If we do not move away from the text as the site for our response and commenting, then we are embedded in the New Critical way of thinking in which the text is all-important. When we comment about student texts on those texts, we send the (New Critical) message that the text is what matters; no wonder research confirms that our remarks only affect the specific text we comment on and rarely achieve what Richard Larson calls "transfer value," in which future writing performance is changed.

And is that not what we want to do? It does us little good as instructors to change one particular
text or another, for what we want to affect is not the product but the performance of the writer for all of his or her future work. My argument is that we must move away from the New Critical approach of response on a text about that text to a more postmodern view in which we see student writers as writers to whom we can respond about their work as actual readers and as a view in which meaning is negotiated through discourse.¹

My argument to respond to a writer about his or her text is informed by Nancy Sommers' notions that the current-traditional/New Critical view of text actually works to inhibit revision, for it implies a static, unchangeable, iconic text based on a thesis that comes before the language of the text is composed to (re)present it. Therefore, since the idea comes before the writing, any revision activities can only serve to clarify the obvious transmission of that idea—not to change or modify the concept itself.

In "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," Sommers compares writing with speaking and notes that what is impossible in
speaking is revision. She says the writing process was modeled after that of speech, which meant that revision got isolated as something "done at the end" of composing the text, as when a speaker might say, "Oh, but what I really meant was ..." Writing allows real, substantive change before the text leaves the writer's hands. Meaningful content-based modification of a text that takes into consideration that text's audience and its needs is what I mean here by revision. Sommers' three-year study demonstrated that revision is a recursive process, a "sequence of changes ... which are initiated by cues and occur continually throughout the writing of a work" ("Revision" 329; also see Perl 331; Graves 318). This finding was contrary to what had been and often still is the dominant paradigm, the linear or current-traditional model of composing where students are expected to start with an idea (developed before they began to write), compose a thesis statement that clearly states what they had in mind, and then proceed to prove their point. Sommers argues that the current-traditional model not only works against the recursiveness all good writers have when it comes
to revision, it (worse) also inhibits and restricts revision itself. She says

Since [inexperienced writers] write their introductions and their thesis statements even before they have really discovered what they really want to say . . . [they] restrict and circumscribe not only the development of their ideas, but also their ability to change the direction of these ideas. ("Revision" 332)³

A number of the concepts Sommers detailed reach not only back into the history of response but also look ahead at what other researchers, following her lead, will subsequently discover:

revision is an ongoing, recursive process;

a major difference between experienced and inexperienced writers is that the former attend to and use writing to create meaning, while inexperienced writers concentrate on the surface form of their work;

if we comment on surface features, students will think form is more important than content;⁵

comments are more effective if they come from a real reader, responding to a real writer (for more on both the historical nature and modern considerations of audience see Enos; Kirsch and Roen; Kroll; Robertson; Roen and Willey; Rubin; Selzer);
questions make more sense than prescriptive directions;

we want to guard against our students' texts being appropriated by the comments we make about them;

And finally the most important concept:

our object as a responder is to create dissonance for the writer, so she can see that real meaning changes are necessary as she revises her work.

Sommers notes that while most instructors have been trained to interpret literary texts for meaning, we don't view our student texts in the same manner; we do not think of student writers as authorities or as someone who might have something worthwhile to say. In essence, through the stance that drives our ways of reading and our well-intended comments, we often devalue student writing and take control of it ourselves.

Sommers' comment about the stance instructors take toward their student texts is telling; other researchers using a more postmodern view would later pursue her line of argument in that student writing, like all writing, ought to be perceived as work in
progress. Such a change in perception of student texts engenders a different perspective about the students themselves: Instead of seeing a not-so-perfect text as indicative of some deficiency in the writer, today we view such writing as a struggle to make meaning. This view allows us to consider all writing as Mariolina Salvatore sees it, "as the progressive perfecting of an intention, rather than as an intention perfected, realized, achieved," where neither our comments nor our students' texts are ever complete, done, finished ("Pedagogy" 28). My argument is that if we talk to writers about their work as it is in-progress, we can facilitate true content-based revision.

**Our Move to a Reader-Response Paradigm**

While the old linear model of writing has been supplanted with a more process-oriented way of conceiving how people write, the current-traditional/New Critical paradigm still appears to dominate when it comes to how instructors read and comment on student writing—we still seem to assume our students' ideas are in the texts we read, and
when we cannot clearly see what those student writers mean, we accuse them of ambiguity and tell them they lack detail. Moreover, the comments we make often serve to justify the grade we think the paper deserves rather than (as we would with a colleague’s paper, or any text we see as valuable) provide suggestions on how to improve the writing. Current research supports this allegation: in Connors and Lunsford’s recent study of some 3,000 commented-on student papers, most remarks on student writing (about three-quarters) served to explain or justify the text’s grade, rather than making an attempt to improve that paper. Only 11 percent of the papers Connors and Lunsford examined were works in progress—which means nearly 90 percent of the comments instructors were making were on final versions of texts.

A more postmodern perspective sees the reading/writing process not as one of mind fusion and the perfectly clear transmission of an idea that preexists the language that represents it, but rather a transaction first between a writer and her text and then between a reader and that text. We find such a
perception central in what we call reader-response theory, particularly as articulated by Louise Rosenblatt, and how it relates to the way(s) we might respond to and comment on our students' texts. As I will outline in chapter three, Rosenblatt sees the reading process as one in which the reader and text together create a new entity, what she calls the poem. What the reader understands a text to mean is not found either in the text (the words on paper) or in the reader, but rather in the transaction between the two--what the reader, guided by the text, evokes from that particular transaction. Such a transactional event creates a new object, the poem, and it is to this new object that the reader responds.

Rosenblatt in her more contemporary writing suggests that the writing process is similar to (but not a mirror of) the reading transaction. Writing is seen as an ongoing process in which the writer attempts to express her evolving ideas in the words she puts onto paper; as she writes what she has in mind to communicate changes as she constantly transacts with the text. Visually we can outline the
writer/text and the reader/text transactions

something like this:

```
writer's evocation--poem  poem--reader's evocation
```

```
  / \
writer  text  reader
```

Each side, therefore, works with ideas that come about through ongoing transactions with a text. I want to extend and expand Rosenblatt's original conceptions about reading and writing to one that sees both the reader's and the writer's evocations not as just text, but rather as part of a dialogue:

```
dialogue
```

```
  / \
writer's evocation  reader's evocation
```

```
  / \
writer  text  reader
```
For instructors, this transactional model of reading suggests that when we read student papers we ought not to respond to the texts themselves but to our evocations of those works; such a process necessarily is dialogic and cannot be accomplished just with comments on a text, about the text. As Rosenblatt puts it, our "starting point is no longer the physical text, the marks on the page, but the meaning, the state of mind felt to correspond to that text" ("Writing and Reading" 13-14). In effect, we need to talk to our student writers not about what they put on paper but what we think those ink spots mean to us as compared to what they think they mean. At the same time, our observations about our own evocation of a text must also be directed at and address the evocation each student writer has of her own work. Such an ongoing conversation, as I will later demonstrate, can lead to content-based revision on the part of our student writers.

Both the writer's and the reader's evocations are part of what will become a new transaction as each evocation is examined and considered and
discussed (see chapter three). In terms of the comments we make, such remarks about a student’s text are only the starting point of what leads to an ongoing discussion: Students can respond to our initial comments; we can discuss their comments about our remarks; the discourse moves to and continues to focus on talk about talk. Such an ongoing conversation designed to create a more metacognitive awareness of the commenting process is not new with me (although I will suggest some innovative strategies for implementing a pedagogy focusing on response and commenting—see chapters five, six, and seven). For example, Lunsford reports that William Spaulding (who held the chair at Edinburgh University from 1840-1845 and was Alexander Bain’s predecessor at St. Andrew’s) used both student peer review and talk about talk. "By essay six," Lunsford notes, Spaulding’s "students are commenting on each other’s papers [while] Spaulding comments only on the student critic’s work" (440). By the eighth essay of the term, Spaulding was commenting not on student papers but on their own "self-criticism" thus attempting to
create a dialogue about response and commenting (440).

Grounding What We Say

Perhaps the place to start outlining a more dialogic approach to response and commenting is at ground level, with the questions we might ask before we read our students' papers, as we attempt to pinpoint what we are trying to accomplish.

Connecting theory with practice, Louise Phelps suggests before we try to answer the questions outlined above and comment on student texts, that we step back and question ourselves about what we are trying to do. Phelps asks us to consider:

What am I doing when I read a student paper?

Why am I doing it? What are my goals?

How is my reading (and related actions) interconnected with the student's actions as a writer?

How do students learn to write, and what does my reading of student texts have to do with it? (qtd. in Anson 47)
Muriel Harris advises us to use the "same checklist that we suggest student writers consider as they compose their messages: find, clarify, and limit our message; consider our purpose and audience; sort out our points of view; and choose a manner or mode that effectively conveys what we want to say" (qtd. in Stanford 92-93). Or as W. U. McDonald, Jr. suggests, "we have to decide what is of first and of lesser importance [and] we have to keep these concerns in mind as we respond to these drafts" (160). It seems to me that these very rhetorical approaches to the reading of student texts, where we focus on what we as readers do, must ground how we respond to those texts, what we say and how we say it. Therefore, at the forefront of our reading and commenting has to be our purpose for reading: why are we doing it and what do we want to accomplish by reading and then commenting on our students' work? These questions drive the entire process of commenting, for they determine how we read our student writing, inform what we say and how it is said, and indicate when we ought to be speaking at all.
Elaine Lees also argues that we must start with what we do when we read and comment on student texts by first considering the ways in which we might comment. We have the option to correct errors in a text, emote or indicate our feelings about the writing, or describe/reflect the meaning we "get" from a text back to the author. We can also make suggestions about a text or remind students what has been said in class. However, Lees warns that each of these ways of responding relocates control of the text from the writer to the reader. So Lees suggests we might focus on questioning the writer as well as building assignments that call for revision into our syllabi.

Maxine Hairston extends the concepts detailed by Phelps, Harris, Lees, and McDonald by asking that we not only consider where we are situated in the writing/commenting process but also the position our students find themselves in. Hairston suggests we concentrate on showing our students how to revise so they see and understand how revision is an ongoing operation, "a practice that reflects the dynamic nature of composing [which] is at the heart of the
teaching of writing as process, not product" (9). (For examples of student essays during revision, see Wall; for an early discussion of terms used when we talk about revision, see Harris "Rewriting"; also see Murray, "Internal" and Emig, "Hand" 66).

The Connection between Revision and Response

With this rhetorical grounding from Hairston, Harris, Lees, McDonald, and Phelps that both focuses on revision and asks us to question our purposes and motives and ways of responding before we start to comment, it seems clear that we want two things here: First, we want to ourselves be aware of what we are doing as to our response and commenting, and, second, we hope those comments create a greater metalinguistic awareness in our student writers of an interested reader who responds to their work. The presence of someone outside the writer is, of course, what drives any changes that might be made to a text, for it is not until the writer imagines someone reading her work (even if that reader is the writer herself going back through the text) that she can position herself as a reader. Instead of asking (as
a writer does) "what message am I trying to get across through my selection of words, organization, format and so on," the writer changes places and reads her words as a reader, who now asks "what am I getting from these words, organization, format, and so on?" While some research indicates that comments made on one paper can improve the next (see Hillocks, "Interaction"; cf. Larson), there seems to be general agreement that commenting ought to take place as student papers are in-progress rather than after they are completed and being evaluated. My remarks here, therefore, concentrate on commenting after a draft has been written, as that is when our comments will do the most good. This site at which revision can best happen is also where we want our student writers to move into the position of reader.

It is interesting to note that when my English 100 students and I discussed how I might respond to their drafts, they listed the same things Connors and Lunsford report: In high school the comments they received most often served to justify a paper's grade, were usually negative, and were made on finished versions on papers rather than in an attempt
to change a paper as it is in process. As one of my students would write in a learning log, "In high school the teacher would give me comments after my final paper was due, which did nothing for me" (Anonymous). Connors and Lunsford add that "Most teachers," echoing what Emig wrote more than two decades ago, "continue to feel that a major task is to 'correct' and edit papers, primarily for formal errors" (217).

My argument is that we can change the site of the conversations in our classrooms from a New Critical concentration on text to a continual discussion about response and commenting by explaining and discussing Rosenblatt's theories, by examining what she has to say about reading and writing, by helping students enter into the conversation about their own reading and writing and our responses to their work and their responses to our comments. By moving to a model in which readers talk to writers about texts, real content-oriented revision will follow.
And—as I will later demonstrate—when students complicate and modify their definitions of revision, their own revision strategies and practices improve.

Here is an outline of the following sections:

In chapter two I review the literature on response and commenting from the standpoint of composition pedagogy;

In chapter three I consider how reader-response theory can inform and guide my new paradigm for reading and responding to student texts;

In chapter four I outline a participatory ethnography that allowed me to examine one way of bringing a conversation about response and commenting into my classroom, along with my students’ voices about what we did; I also start listing specific pedagogical suggestions on how other instructors can follow my model;

In chapter five I expand the details about my study by discussing the specific modifications I made to my syllabus, along with student reactions to that relate to such changes in terms of their own growing awareness of revision and their changing revision practices;

In chapter six I discuss the results of my research in terms of what my students said about their revision practices—and how their perceptions of what revision is was itself modified as they wrote their way through the semester;

I examine the results of such research in terms of specific advice from my students as well as how they revised their own revision practices (along with their assigned texts) in chapter seven;
In each of the four final chapters I discuss and elaborate specific pedagogical ideas developed during the research project, especially as to suggestions that the students indicated were valuable.
Certainly one of the more problematic aspects of any research study is to "review the literature," to outline what has been researched and written about in the particular area under consideration, to range widely yet categorize the heteroglossic dialogue of voices, all of whom want to speak simultaneously. What I will do below is to trace several of the strands of thinking that inform our response and commenting practices, for there is a clear movement in our perceptions about revision, from almost a total concentration on surface errors (which indicated a defective thinker) to one in which students are seen as writers who learn best through social interactions with teachers and with fellow writers. At the same time our perceptions of writers
and their revision strategies was evolving, many theorists were grounding their practices in reader-response concepts, notions that insist the process is what counts. That is, what happens while we read or while we write is what matters, so the process becomes the focus of our classroom activities. My contention is that in terms of response to and commenting about student writing, there has been a definite movement away from the centrality of text to a view in which errors or poor writing or meaning do not inhere in a text but are seen as negotiable between writer and reader. In terms of how we might respond to student writing, such transactions are necessarily ongoing and located in discourse as we extend our conversation from a (New Critical) view of comments about a text on a text to a discussion between teacher and student about the text. I will later show how such a shift in the site to which we focus our response assists in both more complex views of revision and also more effective revision strategies and practices.
Our Thirty-Year-Old *Shift* in Thinking

It is important to note that it was only half a century ago when Wimsatt and Beardsley cemented into our teaching the concept of a self-contained text, a whole and complete object that included everything one needed to make meaning. Theirs was a tremendously influential position, one that informed the pedagogy of an entire generation of literary scholars (some of whom are still with us today).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the paradigmatic approach was New Critical: The text was central and all else—the reader, the rhetorical situation, any context—was peripheral.

American literature professors who were asked to teach composition to a burgeoning (and widely variant) group of students necessarily drew on their graduate school training when it came to how they responded to their students' writing. Since their training and belief argued for the criticality of the text in literary works, student texts were viewed as objects that ought to be whole and complete and representative of authorial intention and ability. Responses to such texts, it seemed obvious, must be
made about the text and on the text, for where else could one comment? After all, when one studied or discussed or wrote about a literary work, the text stood at the center of attention and was seen as providing all answers, if only the reader was capable enough to understand the myriad of nuances inherent in the text. If student writing seemed somehow flawed (in organization, structure, logic, mechanics, or whatever), such deficiencies necessarily (and obviously) pointed to a defect in the writer—just as greatness in a literary work pointed to greatness in its author. The New Critical stance, originally intended to direct attention away from biographical and historical data in terms of texts perceived as literary, engendered a form of response to and comments on student writing that held the text as central. Thus, response was to the text about the text and on the text.

While I could start my own discussion about response and commenting on student texts in the distant past (for example, Alexander Bain complained about the "difficult" and tedious time instructors had when they marked papers), I want immediately to
follow Wimsatt and Beardsley and begin about thirty years ago, for it was during the 1960s that we first saw signs of a remarkable shift in researchers’ perceptions of how instructors relate to their students and student writing.

Early Pedagogical Struggles: Dusel’s Vision

Drawing on the only background and training they knew, composition instructors entered the second half of this century grounded in methods that concentrated on the text while at the same time they struggled to develop effective strategies with which to conduct research on writing pedagogy. In terms of response to and commenting about writing, since student texts were necessarily seen as flawed in some way, much early research indicated that instructor comments on those texts did little good. Student texts were still viewed as defective even after instructors made comments on them; after all, could any student write a perfect text? In the 1960s Burton and Arnold, Stiff, and Sutton and Allen all reported that teacher commentary did not seem to make any difference in student writing. Others like Paul Diederich argued
that positive remarks seemed to help but could provide no evidence to support such a claim. However, William Dusel suggested that rather than to mark errors we would be better off to "ask questions—questions which the pupil . . . raises in the mind of a friendly reader who wants to understand" (45). With Dusel we get a glimpse of how many others over the next thirty years would recommend a reading of student texts by readers who work with the writer to negotiate the making of meaning. With Dusel we see (in composition pedagogy) a shift away from a New Critical approach where the text is a self-contained icon to a view that presages the social-constructionist notion that meaning is made through language.

During the 1970s researchers like Bata still reported the futility of instructor commentary, especially in its constant focus on surface features. Others suggested the same: Janet Emig argued that "There is little evidence" that the marking of errors helps student writers, but teachers "expend much of their energy in this futile and unrewarding exercise" (99). The concentration on error (especially the
surface features of a text) is a thread that runs through much of the research, and probably has its roots in the Latin-inspired pedagogy of early English instruction (see Connors, "Grammar" and "Mechanical Correctness"; Glau; Hartwell). As Sharon Crowley reports, in this country Harvard's germinal effort at creating an introductory English composition course "was not intended to instruct students in writing at all, but in whatever was perceived as correct grammar and spelling at Harvard in those days" ("A Personal Essay" 160).

However, other investigators would follow more productive lines of thought, sometimes by examining writers' activities. Charles Stallard reports that "good writers" usually spend more time both planning and actually writing than did the members of his random sample of high school students; the better writers also reread what they wrote more frequently—which led to better revision. Following Stallard, Sharon Pianko observed traditional and remedial students; the better writers "rescanned their writing three times as often as the remedial students" ("Reflection" 276; also see "A Description" 20; Perl
330). Richard Beach found that nonrevisers saw revision as something of a "checklist" where the "goal for revision is to achieve a textbook model," while more extensive revisers viewed their modifications "as a process of making major alterations in the content or substance of their drafts" ("Self-Evaluation" 161). Beach would later argue that writers who got comments on their supporting details would in fact provide such details. While this research was directed at people rather than at texts, the text was still what mattered. In other words, the text remained in charge: A better text was seen to indicate a better writer.

Also during the 1970s, Diederich's commonsense notion that praise could engender more if not better writing became part of the academic conversation. Thomas Gee found that students who received generally negative comments wrote less but not necessarily any worse than those writers who received mostly positive comments. Mary Beaven wrote that affirmative comments like "no one else but you could have written it that way" and "your figure of speech is just
right, I think," show "effective elements of writing and help students develop critical abilities" (139) (also see England).

During this same time, other researchers would presage a more postmodern line of thinking where the notion of a dialogue between instructor and student would enhance the commenting process. In addition to her remarks on the value of praise, Beaven suggested that instructors question students about their texts. Beaven followed Dusel’s lead by suggesting that we (1) ask for more information; (2) mirror or paraphrase a student’s ideas or feelings; (3) or share the times when an instructor felt the same way or behaved in a similar fashion (139; also see Lauer, "Interpreting"; Kirby and Liner 127; Petrosky 208-14). Beaven writes that when instructors use these forms of feedback, "they have found that the dull, lifeless prose Ken Macrorie labels "Engfish" tends to decrease [and] students who are scared of writing begin to increase the length of their efforts" (139). Put another way, at least part of this early conversation about composition pedagogy suggested that teachers reading student writing ought to play
the role of an actual reader who responds to a real person about that writer's text.

Marie Kelley's 1973 dissertation outlined what I think is a touchstone for much of the current research and writing about how today's instructors might comment on student texts. In Kelley's study 28 twelfth-grade students were randomly divided into two groups. Kelly gave the writers in one group clarifying responses and the other directive responses to their essays. For Kelley a clarifying response was a question that led to alternative ideas while a directive response "told" the student what to do and thus is much more teacher-centered and explicit (6).

Kelley reports that holistic rating of her students' essays indicates that neither type of response--clarifying or directive--seemed to produce "growth in the writing performance of twelfth grade students over the period of one academic semester," although there were some slight indications that clarifying responses did lead to better essays (114). Kelley's refrain--that the comments we make do not seem to work, or if they do, our response (no matter
what we say) provides only marginal help to our students--is found in much of the literature. However, Kelley's finding about clarifying comments is noteworthy. Simply put, Kelley's clarifying comments were idea-driven and conceptual and dealt with what the writer was trying to get onto paper rather than what the teacher expected to see there. Put another way, Kelley's notions of some twenty years ago predated much of today's student-centered writing pedagogy in that clarifying comments insist that power and control over the text remain with the writer rather than the teacher; they are suggestive rather than prescriptive. Grounding this assumption is Kelley's notion that students can do what they need to without our direct prescriptive intervention (see, for instance, Bernhardt for a discussion of how basic writers can revise as well as any other student writers, if they are given enough time).

The Invasion of Science vs. the Real Reader: The Eighties

Before I outline the proliferation of research during the 1980s that grounds much of what we do
today in terms of response and commenting on student texts, I want to note several other threads that run through this decade's conversation.

The notion of praise continued to be studied: C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon (echoing Gee) noted that some studies indicate that praise seems to help writers more than criticism does, at least in the production of longer essays, but argued that the research did not confirm that praise produces better texts. George Hillocks cited several studies showing "that students receiving negative comments display less desirable attitudes toward some facet of writing than do those receiving positive comments. None however, has shown differences in the quality of writing" (262) (also see Dragga; Podis and Podis). I would argue that we can change student attitudes about revision through the dialogic approach I advocate here, in that such a conversation leads to a range of possible options the student might take with his or her writing.

Patrick Sullivan wonders that when we praise by writing "Your ideas are good but . . ." what do we really mean? Sullivan says students "tend to
interpret this phrase in this way: 'Clean up the superficial mistakes and mail your essay to Esquire'" (51). Sullivan posits that what we are really doing here is not offering praise but solace, and argues that we must change the concept of rewriting into one of real revision by using positive comments, as negative ones have "a debilitating effect on students" (52). Often the books we use in our classrooms do not match positive sentiments about the value of praise: Donald Daiker points out that the 1985 edition of the Harbrace College Handbook "provides seventy-one correction symbols" but not even one to indicate approval or praise (qtd. in Anson 105).

Perhaps searching for scientific ways to quantify the results of their students' writing, more researchers began to look at the surface features of student texts. Searle and Dillon reported that at the elementary level, teachers "tend to focus primarily on form rather than content and seem to separate the learning of language from the purposeful use of it" ("Responding" 775). Searle and Dillon noted that the limited number of instructor responses
to the substance of texts (in their study) "suggested that the participating teachers did not operate with the view that a focus on the meaning and purpose of language is basic to language development" ("Message" 239). Rather, the comments served to justify the grade and correct mechanical errors. They recommended that even at the lower grade levels, "teachers might respond more effectively if they responded to content" ("Responding" 776). Arthur Applebee found that secondary school instructors mimicked their elementary school colleagues by placing a high value on mechanics and form; only about "12 percent" of the students Applebee observed were asked to do any substantive revision (122). Applebee confirms what Emig warned of a decade earlier when she wrote that "revision is lost [as] no time is provided for any major reformulation or reconceptualization" because of the constant concentration on mechanics and surface features (99). Lillian Bridwell found that students who focused on surface features did get better in terms of the mechanics of their papers (which does not mean, of course, that those papers were better written)." All
of these kinds of activities lead not only to a focus on the surface details of a text when we comment on the writing, but also to an increasing tendency to grade based primarily on the mechanics of a text.

Other researchers compared groups of writers: Faigley and Witte focused on expert adult writers, advanced student writers, and inexperienced writers. They separated revised compositions into two categories: Texts that showed *Surface Changes*, in which new information is not added to a text, and texts exhibiting *Meaning Changes*, which involve the adding of new content or the deletion of existing content. (For a view of revision scales, see Sommers' "What I Really Meant.") Faigley and Witte note the most important differences they found were in the kinds of revisions made. They write (mirroring Applebee; Searle and Dillon; Sommers "Responding") that the inexperienced writers' changes were "overwhelmingly Surface Changes," while both the advanced students and expert writers showed revision in meaning more than twice as often as the inexperienced writers (407). They also note that "successful revision results not from the number of
changes a writer makes but from the degree to which revision changes bring a text closer to the demands of the situation," a rhetorical stance echoed by several researchers, including Baumlin and Baumlin, Bazerman, Harris, "Rewriting," and Horvath (411).

Instructors' own commenting practices were not immune to what seemed to be a growing focus on form. Muffy Siegel examined the commenting strategies of seven non-English Department teachers and eight teachers from the English Department, all of whom taught composition. Siegel writes that the most significant difference between the two groups occurred in the markings of content areas: experienced instructors corrected six content errors to every one about form (a 6-1 ratio); the ratio for inexperienced instructors was 3.4-1 (also see Miller, "Kaleidoscope"). Surface form seemed important perhaps because it appeared quantifiable and therefore scientific; and as Dusel wrote two decades earlier, it takes about three times "as long to analyze a theme for ideas and organization and signs of improvement, and to comment on these, as to check it for mechanics alone" (44).
In terms of my own argument for a reader who responds to students as actual writers about their texts, a significant body of research was published during the 1980s. An early guide to much of what was to come was provided by Nancy Sommers, who writes that we comment on our students' papers in order to "dramatize the presence of a reader [as] we believe that becoming [a questioning] reader will help them to evaluate what they have written and develop control over their writing" ("Responding" 148). Sommers contends that

we need to sabotage our students' conviction that the drafts they have written are complete and coherent [and we do this by] forcing students back into the chaos, back to the point where they were shaping and restructuring their meaning. ("Responding" 154)

Comments, Sommers suggests, should point at breaks in logic, reflect reader puzzlement when it exists, and (predicting many future researchers) question where meanings in the text are unclear or uncertain.

Brannon and Knoblauch mirror Sommers argument that we need to, in Sommers' words, force "students
back into the chaos, back to the point where they were shaping and restructuring their meaning" ("Responding" 154). Brannon and Knoblauch note the teacher's role "is to attract a writer's attention to the relationship between intention and effect, enabling a recognition of discrepancies between them ("Rights" 162). Nina Ziv says much the same thing when she tells how her comments are designed to establish a "dissonance in my students' minds between their perceptions of what they had written and my perceptions as a reader of these texts" ("What She Thought" 2). Sommers would agree with Brannon and Knoblauch's argument that such a dissonance-creating dialogue doesn't always generate a better text but "what it does do is to force the writer to reassert control and thereby gain experience in revising" ("Rights" 163). In terms of my own argument, how better can we "create dissonance" in our students' minds than by facilitating a conversation in which we together discuss and compare our own evocations of what we see on paper? (Also see Hagaman; Johnston; Thomas and Thomas.)
Such a reflecting back to student writers of what we think they are saying implicitly sends the message that we value their work; if we did not, why would we ask about it and want to discuss what it means to us? Along this same line, Brannon and Knoblauch argue that when we read most texts we see the writer of that work as an authority, someone from whom we can learn. But when we teach writing, Brannon and Knoblauch note, we often change the reader/writer relationship to one in which the student is not perceived as an authority (and in fact is often thought of as a nonauthority), which in effect means the reader then "assumes primary control of the choices that writers make" and feels perfectly free (and perhaps even pressured) to correct anything that doesn't fit what the reader has in mind (158). We (perhaps unconsciously) appropriate our students' texts with the best of motives, but with such a shift in control from writer to reader also comes another problem: Students work to fix only what we have told them is incorrect rather than working to improve the meaning of their text. (For more on the problems of
textual appropriation, see Freedman, *Response*; Hairston, "On Not Being"; Sommers, "Responding").

**A Contemporary Approach: Student Feedback**

Ziv took even further the idea that students should be seen as writers by asking them for feedback about her comments. The response she received indicated that the corrections Ziv made, particularly on the micro level, "reinforced the participants' perceptions" that the instructor was there to "fix up" their papers—to correct for grammar and spelling and other surface errors ("Effect" 375). Once Ziv just pointed out where something was incorrect but left it up to the student to decide how to "fix" it, she learned that her students were capable of doing the correcting themselves—which they did. Ziv argues that instructors might have to *begin* with explicit direction, but as students become more experienced revisers, the movement in commentary should be toward more implicit guidance; and her work suggests that we can ask our students what help they need from us. In such a manner, we trust them to handle their own work.
Others have solicited advice from students—a line of attack I propose to follow—and all found that students want reasons and clearly written comments from teachers as opposed to circles and abbreviations they cannot understand (Land and Evans; Mimi Schwartz; Ernest Smith).

In what many consider a landmark essay on responding to student writing, Richard Larson argues that we should always focus on revision and have three purposes: (1) to identify a paper’s strong points as well as those areas that could be improved; (2) to suggest how a student might change things next time to create a more effective paper; and (3) to explain why a particular evaluation was given (112–13). Note that each part of Larson’s model is nonprescriptive and speaks to the student about her text; each part could engender more discussion.

While Larson’s advice is general, there are also instances of specific recommendations. Marvin Diogenes et al. suggest ways instructors can turn evaluation into an open-ended transaction with the student writer rather than a final pronouncement about the student’s work, if they ask clarifying
questions about student texts, help the student evaluate the rhetorical situation and goal, and provide one piece of advice for each paper (for more on the value of questions see Lauer; Kirby and Liner; Petrosky). Sharon Crowley is up-front with her students when she suggests instructors use a personal/rhetorical approach when they comment by saying something like "I'm a pretty skilled reader, and here's how I interpret this text of yours" ("On Intention" 107). All of these researchers point toward a view in which students are seen as capable and in control of their own texts.

As one way to get the kind of student-teacher dialogue I advocate started, Patricia McAlexander recommends using a cumulative comment sheet which records thoughts and comments about an assignment as it progresses. This comment sheet (which grows by additional sheets as required) is attached to each current draft so both teacher and student can see and talk about what has been said so far. Such an approach also asks for student response to the teacher's remarks. Along the same line, Dana Heller suggests that students "submit, attached to the first
draft of a paper, a paragraph detailing the hoped-for effect and impact of the draft" to give instructors a place to start and guide their response, thus asking students to tell us what help they think they might need (211) (for other specific ideas on how to raise students' metalinguistic awareness, see Sweedler-Brown; Ward; Zak).

Continuing the shift toward a view of student writers as real people who are anything but deficient, David Bartholomae builds on the work of Mina Shaughnesssey when he writes that we should look at surface features as a way to discover why students do what they do. Bartholomae says, "A writer's activity is linguistic and rhetorical activity; it can be different but never random" ("Study" 255; also see Epes 6). As Barry Kroll and John Schafer put it, "Although errors may vary greatly in form, they may spring from a small set of common strategies" (244; also see Podis and Podis 91). More and more researchers see "errors" no longer as mistakes but rather as linguistic events that occur for a reason--students follow some rule, and while it may be the wrong rule, or may be incorrectly applied, or may be
misunderstood, student writers are not seen as
deficient just because there is an "error" somewhere
in their texts.

Where We Can Go with a New Model

During the 1980s there was a clear
transformation in what was being written about
response and commenting. The conversation moved away
from examining what the writer did to a concentration
on the reader and his or her response to student
writing.

At the same time, reader-response criticism
suggests that textual errors do not really exist in
the writer's text but rather in the mind of the
reader, in what the reader sees as the text. As
Elaine Lees wrote in 1987, predicting much of what
was to come, "When errors have physical
manifestations, they have them most often in readers"
("Proofreading" 219). Therefore, the correction of
such errors on the page doesn't accomplish anything,
as that is not where such errors occur; they are
simply recorded there. To relate my own argument to
this line of thinking, Onore notes that instructor
comments on students' texts "are limited in their potential to produce predictable results since their interpretation cannot be fully controlled; neither can the ways in which writers respond and react to them" ("The Student" 237). That is, as reader-response criticism holds, meaning comes from the reader in her transaction with a text; the meaning of our comments must then reside in such a transaction between our writing and our student reader. As reader and writer discuss such evocations, a real reenvisioning of the text can begin.

During this same period, Sarah Freedman drew on the work of Lev Vygotsky to note that theories of the acquisition of intellectual skills and of natural language learning suggest a model of response to student writing that considers response as both a social and as a cognitive process. Freedman argues that interactive social collaboration underlies the teaching-learning situation and that the process of commenting must be collaborative, always working to lead the learner, at some time, to be independent in her performance (Response 6). I would argue that if we reconceive how and where we enter into the
commenting dialogue with our students we can, as
Onore suggests, engender a "change in the
relationships . . . between students and teachers in
the classroom," a modification that in turn
positively affects the quality of their writing ("The
Student" 231). Onore notes that in traditional
classrooms the student-teacher relationship is one of
authority/subject, where the student thereby is
prevented from owning her own work. She argues that
if our composition classes are in fact to become
places for knowing and learning, we must share power
with our students, for "meanings cannot be given to
writers, but must be intended by them in response to
a personal need to express something" ("The Student"
232). Onore recommends that our classrooms become
places of mutual exchange and trust, with information
and understanding and respect running both
directions--which seems to me to be exactly what we
want to do with the comments we make on student
texts.

Onore's work is drawn from a class in which she
tried to be facilitative in her comments and in the
way she treated her students' papers. Onore's end
result is really a summary of where I plan to go, and I reproduce it here because it mirrors my own argument so closely:

Instead of a prescription for responding, what emerges [from Onore's studies] is a thoroughgoing reconceptualization of the roles of teacher-readers, student-writers, and their transactions. In order for them to share in cointentional education (Freire 1970), which is a prerequisite for learning in general and learning writing in particular, teachers must allow students' inquiries to empower them to learn. Empowerment, in other words, is caused by and realized by inquiry. Only within a context where an inquiring learner comes together with an inquiring teacher, where both persons negotiate, exchange meanings, and share and modify intentions, can empowerment occur. Without empowerment, there can be no significant purpose for responding to writing. ("The Student" 247)

It seems to me that only if we view and use the commenting process as a site where writer and reader "negotiate, exchange meanings, and share and modify intentions," can those comments have the effect that we want them to: To help students learn how to read their own work as an outside reader would, and revise accordingly.
Moving into Our Future: Today’s Conversation

The last decade of this century is witnessing an extension of the conversation that centers on a view of readers who respond to students writing about important ideas. The shift is toward an "I" response: as Kim Haines Korn writes, "Students prefer comments with extended explanations . . . written in the first person form [since] they come across as more involved" (2) (also see Robertson "Is Anybody Listening?"; Corder 96).’ In terms of my argument, what is more personal than talk about talk between reader and writer? Today’s thinking is closer to how Nancy Welch suggests we ought to read student writing, "as we would a novel, a short story, or a letter from a friend—negotiating and orchestrating, reflecting and revising," thus creating a dialogue through which meaning is negotiated (498).

Also in 1993, Robert Schwegler reports on his work on two groups of student writers, one that received what Schwegler called subjective comments and the other that received objective comments. "Subjective comments," Schwegler says, are those comments that are located in the reader: "I like
Objective comments are those that displace the real reader, and are remarks that seem to locate meaning in the text or in some nebulous "reader." These are comments such as "You might confuse your reader when you ____________" (or) "Would it help your reader if you gave more details about ____________?" Schwegler argues that subjective comments encourage students to revise, while objective, distant remarks do just the opposite (also see Baumlin and Baumlin 171; Bazerman; Kucer). Schwegler's work reflects my own contention, as continuous talk about talk is always, in his terms, subjective.

In their recent study, Connors and Lunsford report that "very few" instructors "allowed themselves the subjective stance implicit in telling students simply whether they liked or disliked a piece of writing" (214). Connors and Lunsford report on Schwegler's argument that "'the language of marginal and summative commentary . . . is predominantly formalist and implicitly authoritarian'
is one our study clearly supports" (215). (As noted above, while the conversation about composition pedagogy has moved to a reader who responds to a real writer, the New Critical belief about an iconic text still inhabits many classrooms.)

Schwegler reports that writers who received subjective comments did much more revision than those who got objective responses and some three-quarters of them thought they learned more about writing than the students whose work received objective comments. Perhaps more importantly, students responded to subjective comments as if the responder was present, often writing little notes responding to the comments on their text, and drawing arrows where they would move things and circles around other parts of their texts to indicate planned revisions (Schwegler, "Student Responses"). Put another way, students who received subjective comments responded to those comments as part of a dialogue the comments themselves generated. This, of course, is where I plan to go, to use comments-on-a-text to begin a move to written and oral discussions that examine and
compare and talk about both our own and our students' evocations of ink spots on paper.

To summarize: We find in today's conversation a five-decade-old grounding in New Critical thinking in which the text plays the central (if not the only) role in any interpretation. Growing out of that initial position we can also see a recent (and definite) movement away from the centrality of text to a postmodern view in which errors or poor writing or meaning do not inhere in a text but are seen as negotiable between writer and reader; both have a collaborative voice in the transaction through which understanding is agreed upon. In terms of our response to and commenting about student writing, such transactions are necessarily ongoing and located in discourse as we extend our conversation from a (New Critical) view of comments about a text on a text to a discussion between reader and writer about the text. In the next chapter, I will draw on a small slice of reader-response theory as conceived by Louise Rosenblatt to propose a different site of response to our student texts in which writer and reader collaboratively determine meaning.
If we see our students as writers, we necessarily take on the role of readers who work to create an ongoing dialogue in which our comments, and our students' responses to what we have to say, enable us to "negotiate, exchange meanings, and share and modify intentions," for only then will those comments have the effect we want them to (Onore, "The Student" 247). In this chapter I will illustrate how contemporary thinking in literary theory may inform our reading of student texts. I am using a slice of reader-response theory to ground what I will propose as a new site for our response as well as a new way of conceptualizing how we comment on what our students write.
The relationship between reader-response theory and the way(s) we respond to texts initially was offered by Louise Rosenblatt in her 1938 *Literature as Exploration*. In that text Rosenblatt argues that the reading process should be understood as an "interrelationship" between text and reader, in which the "poem or play exists ... only in interactions with specific minds" (32). In her reaction against the New Critical notion that a text contained all meaning in and of itself with a passive reader extracting that meaning, Rosenblatt insisted that the reader is directly and actively involved in the making of meaning by interacting with the text; therefore both reader and text are requirements for meaning to come about. As noted earlier, and as I will outline in detail below, writers go through a similar process as they work to make meaning through the creation of a text.

Thirty years after the first edition of *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt changed her wording from *interaction* to invoke the term *transaction* as she described how the reader and text collectively create a new entity, which Rosenblatt
termed the "poem" (26-27). With this move Rosenblatt's view of reading added something new—the poem—to the text/reader dichotomy, in which either the text was seen as containing all meaning, or the reader was seen as reading affectively to produce only solipsistic interpretations. Rosenblatt argued that both text and reader are involved in a mutual transaction, for there is "no sharp separation between perceiver and perception . . . since the observer is part of the observation" ("Transactional" 380). Rosenblatt's transactional approach to reading was further elaborated in her 1978 text, The Reader, the Text, the Poem.

My position extends Rosenblatt's original conception to one in which the reader/text transaction creates a dialogue, a discourse with the writer about the writer's own writer/text transaction and what he or she evokes from it. In terms of response and commenting, such dialogue moves initial written comments into a conversation between writer and reader about the text.

I now will outline some of the background of reader-response theory in order to situate
Rosenblatt's transactional paradigm in the contemporary conversation about the making of meaning. I also present an abbreviated discussion of why Rosenblatt's work has been shunted to the side in literary theory, even though her ideas and concepts at the same time predicted and predated the work others are doing today. Then I will demonstrate how we can link Rosenblatt's conceptualization of the reading process to the reading of, and responding to, student writing.

Wimsatt, Beardsley, and Fish: Locating Meaning

In what would be seen as one of New Criticism's major truths, Wimsatt and Beardsley warned in 1946 that the "affective" reading of a poem improperly judged a work by its effects (especially the emotional effects) on the reader. They argued that reading a poem for what it does to the reader must result in criticism that "ends in impressionism and relativism" for the "poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear" (21). As Stanley Fish would argue more than three decades later, the worry over what was seen as
rampant solipsism caused by concern about the affective fallacy was so influential [that] it constrained in advance the form any counterargument might take. In order to dislodge the affective fallacy, for example, one would have to show first that the text was not the self-sufficient repository of meaning and, second, that something else was, at the very least, contributory. (Text 2)

Most theorists did not even attempt to dislodge New Critical thinking until after midcentury, when reader-response critics (including Bleich, Fish, Holland, and Iser) began to concentrate on the reading process to show that what a reader does during reading did matter and that such a reader’s response was not necessarily relativistic. These theorists, however, still held a dyadic subject/object, reader/text view of the reading process as they concentrated attention on one spot (the text) or another (the reader). Rosenblatt denies the text/reader dichotomy by insisting both are required for the reading transaction as they together create the poem. Mallioux says that when she describes
the poem as a transactive event, Rosenblatt set aside beforehand the very question that fueled the next decade of reader-response critical theory: is it the reader or the text that determines interpretation? This question assumes that the reader and the text "are distinct and fixed entities" and that the job of reader-response theory is to figure out which is in control [but Rosenblatt's] pragmatism denies the subject-object split and rejects the notion that there needs to be a theory of knowledge that regulates the relationship between a knower and the object known. (41)

Rosenblatt, because she insisted text and reader together create meaning, eliminated concern caused by either the "affective" or the "intentional fallacy," as both reader and text enter into that creation of meaning. Since the text becomes part of the end result, it cannot disappear and since the reader is at the same time a critical component of an ongoing transaction with the text, he or she is nevertheless constrained by the text. In effect, by contending that both reader and text are dynamically involved in the act of reading, Rosenblatt changed the rules of the game: fallacies, whether affective or intentional, simply cannot exist.

A simple test of Rosenblatt's transactional notion asks any reader to consider how she reads any
text. As she reads, the reader creates a mental picture in her own mind of the meaning of the work—but that image may not exactly match either what the writer had in mind or what the reader thinks the writer means (there is no way for her to know if there is a perfect match, anyway). The meaning might not be either what the writer intended or what the reader thinks it is. As Peter Elbow argues:

The focus of contention is over who gets authority over the meaning of a text. Take my own text here. I get to decide what I intended to say. You get to decide what you understand me to say. But as for what I actually did say—what meanings are "in" my text—that is a site of contention between us. ("War" 6)

In effect, Rosenblatt eliminates the conflictual text/reader dichotomy and its fight over control of meaning by envisioning the reading process as a triadic event in which the reader "responds to the verbal signs and construes, or organizes his responses into an experienced meaning which is, for him, the work" (Reader 69). As a reader reads any text, the mental image she creates becomes for the reader the poem she evokes from the transaction
between a specific text and a specific reader at a specific time.

Rosenblatt grounds the dualistic approach of our concept of language to Saussure's "dyadic phrasing of the relation of word and object [which] gave rise to a view of language as a self-contained system" ("Transactional" 381). Her own argument relies on Pierce, whose "formulation is triadic" in which meaning depends on the "reverberations of (word, object, and interpretant) upon one another" ("Transactional" 381-82).

What is striking is that in one masterful rhetorical move, Rosenblatt effectively dismissed the profession's concern over the affective fallacy--and she delineated her theories eight years before Wimsatt and Beardsley's ideas were published.

**Rosenblatt, Richards, and Fish: Critical Context**

An early instance of Rosenblatt being ahead of her time responds to I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism*. Richards tells how he gave poems to students without listing titles or authors, only to find his students "bewildered," as they "had hardly
any reading . . . to serve them as a background and means of orientation" (293). Richards notes that his students quickly "proved the naivety of their outlook and the poverty of their literary experience by the comparisons and the identifications they made" (293). Richards reports that students had trouble "making out the plain sense of poetry," along with "difficulties [with] sensuous appreciation" (12, his emphasis). His readers, because of their backgrounds, were unable to create any meaning or real understanding because they did not start with an "affective" or real and personal response. Instead, they tried to figure out what the text meant by attempting to discern what meaning the writers had put into these texts. Without the name(s) of the poets, the titles of the works, and/or historical information, these students, who had never been encouraged (or allowed?) to express their own opinions, were lost as to what to do with the texts they confronted. Rosenblatt argues that Richards' students never had the opportunity to begin with affective responses, which would have avoided the
reactions Richards' students gave him—"stock responses" and "mnemonic irrelevances" (13-14).

What is perhaps most interesting, and more to my point, is the texts Richards provided were seen by his students as poems because of the forms of those works. Once the readers recognized rhyme schemes and/or the ways the words looked on the page, those student readers saw the texts as poems. In effect, readers had to first see the text in some predetermined form before they could even attempt to understand it. Some 35 years after Richards published *Practical Criticism*, Rosenblatt published "The Poem As Event" in which she describes giving the first four lines of a Robert Frost poem to students, sans title and author. Rosenblatt changed Richards' procedure: He gave his readers time to think about and compose responses while Rosenblatt asked for immediate feedback. Her approach is more in line with other reader-response theorists, especially Fish, who suggest that we consider the reading process line-by-line, as it "unfolds." Fish's work requires the reader to examine her reading process as she reads, for if "meaning is no longer a property of
the text but a product of a reader’s activity, the central question is not ‘what does the text mean?’ but ‘how does a reader make meaning?’" (Tompkins xvii).²

Rosenblatt found that her students, as they tried to make meaning, acted just as Richards’ students had by trying to impose some contextual scheme on the text in front of them. That is, her readers actively worked to apply some kind of context in which the text could be read and understood.³ Rosenblatt reports that her readers were "groping toward a framework into which to fit the meanings of the individual words and sentences" for as one student noted, "the rhymes show it is a poem" (Reader 7-8).

In perhaps his most famous essay, "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One," Fish also demonstrates how readers actively construct meaning. Fish tells of a series of names left on the chalkboard from an assignment for the previous class. He then surrounded the names with lines that appeared to make a cross and told his students (who were studying English Religious Poetry of the seventeenth
what appeared on the board was a poem. It looked something like this:

p. 46

Fish's students (he later relates how he has repeated this exercise in a number of other classes, with the same results) immediately perceived this image as a religious poem (which was, of course, just what they'd been told) and started trying to interpret it as a religious poem. Fish's conclusion is that the text did not determine meaning, but rather meaning grew out of the interpretive strategies readers brought to the text. Because Fish's readers saw the text as a religious poem, they interpreted it as such (as compared to, say, a grocery list or a classroom assignment). Fish in his later work went on to argue that such
interpretive strategies come from the "interpretive community" or "communities" the reader belongs to, thus asserting that readers are socially constructed. In terms of my argument, Fish is perhaps the most compelling contemporary theorist who moves away from the idea that meaning resides in an iconic text to a view that meaning is created because of and through the reader's active participation. In terms of my argument, the (teacher) reader is always active as he or she searches for a shared meaning, through dialogue, with the writer.

Fish takes his argument over the centrality of an active reader creating understanding even further, using E. D. Hirsch's sentence, "The air is crisp" as a phrase Hirsch claims is "accessible to all speakers of the language" (Text 309). Fish says that without any context, the phrase is unintelligible (it could, after all, refer not to the air we breathe but to a discussion of music, or any number of other things), and if there is no context supplied by the text, the reader will provide such a context so as to render the phrase understandable (Text 309-11, passim).

Kenneth Burke provides a similar example with the
sentence, "The man walks down the street," which we all can understand yet cannot really see unless some context is supplied. Burke says:

To realize this is more like the "title" of a situation than like the description of an act, we need to but realize that the sentence, as stated, could not be illustrated. For you'd have to picture a tall man, or a short man, a dark man or a light man, etc. He'd have to be pictured as walking upright or bent over, with or without a hat, or a cane, etc. (qtd. in Quandahl 117)

Burke could, of course, say the same things about Hirsch's "The air is crisp."

A common connection over a fifty-year period that links Richards, Rosenblatt, Burke, and Fish is the notion that readers try to make meaning by providing a context for the words on the page, thus marking those readers not only as active participants in the reading event but also as a requirement if meaning and understanding are to occur. By the early 1990s, researchers such as Bogdan and Straw recognized a shift of thinking wherein the reader was seen as actively involved with the text to produce a transaction, thus crediting Rosenblatt's original
(and revised) concepts dating from some half century earlier in Literature as Exploration.

Ignored and Shunted Aside

Even though Rosenblatt's concepts seem commonsensical and while theorists built on bits and pieces of her work, Rosenblatt has never gained the prominence she deserves as a theorist. There are several notions as to why her work has been ignored by theorists for so many years (but not by classroom teachers) and only today is being recognized. Carolyn Allen argues that Rosenblatt's ideas have been shuffled aside because she writes as a woman, primarily about what's been seen as woman's work: teaching. Allen also suggests that Rosenblatt writes too clearly, for she doesn't use the complex "literary theory" words that we've come to expect from theorists, and notes her work is informed by Dewey and Pierce—American, rather than continental scholars and philosophers—and so is seen as somehow not as deep or as thoughtful (18). John Clifford argues that Rosenblatt writes as "Fish and Iser would" if they were being clear (1). Fish might say
our interpretive community of English teachers expects to see long and difficult words and sentences from a theorist, as we are not able to see Rosenblatt’s text as "theory." (By that reasoning, Gayatri Spivak would be the best theorist we currently have.)

Rosenblatt has been marginalized in texts, too: Jonathan Culler’s chapter on "Readers and Reading" ignores her. Fish mentions Rosenblatt only once in *Is There a Text in This Class?*, where he lumps her with Iser as those who see the text as "constrain[ing]" interpretation (349); in *Doing What Comes Naturally*, Fish doesn’t mention Rosenblatt at all. She’s relegated to a footnote in Tompkins’ 1980 text *Reader-response Criticism from Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (xxvi) as she had been in Suleiman’s 1980 *The Reader in the Text*; her work doesn’t appear in anthologies like *Critical Theory Since Plato* (Adams) or *Critical Theory Since 1965* (Adams and Searle), although Iser and Fish are both represented. Rosenblatt’s ideas are relegated to a half-page in *The Critical Tradition* (Richter), and even Mina Shaughnessy seems to ignore Rosenblatt when
she wrote in 1977 that we ought to consider a "writing approach to reading," which in essence described Rosenblatt's transactional paradigm. Shaughnessy suggests the reader, to aid understanding, put herself in the writer's place, for then the "student begins to sense that the meaning of what he reads or writes resides not in the page nor in the teacher, but in the encounter between the two" (223). Rosenblatt, of course, calls this encounter a transaction and makes the concept a central part of her theoretical position.

To make things even more difficult for the literary establishment to accept Rosenblatt's work, what reader-response criticism says in general is that readers must respond to texts and that their responses are to be valued. Rosenblatt (and others, including Fish) go so far as to say that the reader's response is central and such response is what we ought to be studying and discussing and thinking about and writing on. But such reader-response concepts suggest a displacement of the traditional professor/student role, where the instructor carries all authority. As Paulo Freire describes such a
place, the teacher-centered classroom is one in which "(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught; (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about; (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly [and] (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it" (59).

Rosenblatt’s classroom is antithetical to that of Freire’s banking teacher, but instructors trained in New Critical theory do not subscribe to student-centered classrooms and apparently cannot give up their authority, which reader-response theories necessarily maintain they do. 9

Rosenblatt’s work has also been seen as too elementary or dismissed because it appears to leave out the cognitive aspect of reading while concentrating on the affective. 9 Rosenblatt herself is catholic in her inclusion, writing that "the reader evoking a work of art is not focused only on the affective impact of verbal symbols, but he must also attend to their cognitive effect"; for the "mark of the reader’s aesthetic activity is precisely that
he . . . fuses the cognitive and the emotive, or perhaps more accurately, apprehends them as facts of the same lived-through experience" (Reader 45-46).

In effect, the reader attends to both the affective and cognitive aspects of what she is reading as part of her ongoing transaction with the text. How much attention one aspect or the other receives is determined by what Rosenblatt calls the stance the reader takes. Rosenblatt's explicitly rhetorical theory argues that the purpose of the reader determines how any text is read; as she notes, the stance the reader selects "reflects the reader's purpose" ("Writing and Reading" 5). Current theorists agree; Stanley Straw, for instance, argues that "this basic underlying driver--purpose or intent--is the same for both reading and writing" (81).10

I suspect that Rosenblatt also has been ignored because her work deals with reading--and we teach little children how to read, so it is something done in grammar schools and not at the university (in fact, journals like Language Arts have presented a much wider conversation about reader-response
approaches than have journals such as College Composition and Communication). With Rosenblatt’s recent work focusing on text-creation (see "Writing and Reading"), perhaps more theorists will start to value her work. In any case I will now move from the past to the future in terms of how Rosenblatt’s work both grounds and predicts where reader-response approaches are heading and at the same time informs my own argument for a new site of response to student texts.

Writing and Social Dialogue

Running continuously through Rosenblatt’s work (and also grounding my own argument that we want to talk to students about their compositions) is the concept of students as writers who create texts that instructors read and respond to as they would any other. Heretofore, as Daniel Sheridan argues, student texts have "been seen as having less value than teacher knowledge; that student readings are naïve, teacher readings interpretive; that the teacher’s proper role is that of the authority, the expert" (806). Mariolina Salvatore suggests such a
view works against valuing and validating the texts our students create, for we see those works as filled with errors we must mark and correct. Salvatore argues that we can and should read student writing as "real texts" just as we read so-called "literary" texts ("On Behalf of Pedagogy"; "Pedagogy"). Elbow suggests we recognize that in literary study "there is no single correct interpretation of a text, that even the best critics cannot agree, and that it would be laughable to assign a quantitative grade to a text," while at the same time we think we can easily discern meaning in student work and, of course, often grade their writing after "one quick reading late at night" ("War" 21). Keith Grant-Davie and Nancy Shapiro argue the only way instructors can teach students "to become their own best readers" is to "respond to student drafts in the way they respond to their colleagues' drafts--few judgments and directives, more questions and suggestions." Robert Probst proposes we treat our students as we would a colleague, as we are "a participating member of a society and a discipline, and responding to the writer accordingly" (qtd. in Anson 70) (for a
discussion on how error in student writing is socially determined, see Horner).

What is interesting is if we do not see student writing as real writing, then we necessarily view it as writing that is inherently defective. Such a view, as Clem Young says, sees "the relationship between reader and text [as] ultimately a theory of deficits. Once the possibility of perfect response has been postulated [as with the New Critics' view of a text with one correct and self-contained meaning], we are left with the certainty of failure [for] all response is by definition inadequate" (11). We therefore see our student texts as student texts, filled with errors and mistakes, waiting for us to somehow "doctor them up." (Joseph Williams demonstrated quite clearly in "The Phenomenology of Error" that we see what we expect to in a text.) No wonder our students view their own writing as Shaughnessy describes it, as "a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all the writer doesn’t know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who reads it with a lawyer’s eyes, searching for flaws" (7). Or as my student Joe
Gachiri reflected in a journal entry, "I am glad the instructor does not use the dreaded red ink to correct our essays. . . . I have always associated red ink with bad and terrible essays and to me a teacher used red ink to remind you of how bad your essay was."

Rosenblatt's approach is one that insists we do not picture our student's work as just a final product but, as Salvatore puts it, helps us view their "work as the progressive perfecting of an intention, rather than as an intention perfected, realized, achieved" ("Pedagogy" 28; also see White 289-90). Salvatore argues that the use of Rosenblatt's reader-response approach lets us:

- read a text in order to examine, to reconstruct the process [which then] calls attention to the experienced writer's successive phases of evolution and discovery, and makes it possible for a teacher to read an inexperienced writer's writing, and to teach him or her how to read it, as a manifestation of similar struggles with language. Student writing can then be seen as an instantiation of creativity, and as a subject worthy of study and research. (28)

Salvatore also suggests that such a way of reading student texts insists we ask those works the
same "challenging questionings [usually] reserved for the reading of those texts that the politics of our profession anoints as status-granting" (28).

Rosenblatt’s own concentration on this social aspect of reading is grounded in mutual respect between reader and writer and begins in Literature as Exploration: As early as page 12, Rosenblatt suggests an "interchange" among students as leading to understanding, and she extends this notion through all of her writing. The continual, social "dialogue" between reader and writer is part of what grounds why we bother to comment on student writing at all; as Rosenblatt argues, "Interchange, dialogue between teacher and students . . . can foster growth and cross-fertilization in both the reading and writing processes" ("Writing and Reading" 16). How better to do so than through a constant teacher-student conversation about the student’s writing?

Others are beginning to see the social impact of Rosenblatt’s work as central to what happens in their classrooms. For instance, Hanssen, Harste, and Short call on Mikhail Bakhtin’s argument that learning has its roots in social interaction or dialogue as
meaning is created in interactions and then internalized in the form of thought. In effect, learning is a "response to signs with signs" created through social interaction. They note that "if we sit down with colleagues to talk about the thinking concerning Bakhtin, we will create meaning in our conversation. We will make connections that we would not have otherwise made" (261). Knowledge, therefore, is created from social interactions through the sign system of language. Our comments, especially if we ask our students to respond to what we say as part of a continual conversation, can help create a more metacognitive awareness of how language works (also see Gold 12-13; Moffett 46).

Even Wolfgang Iser, whose more foundationalist view insists on a determinate text that exists prior to and so can "act" on the reader appropriates Rosenblatt’s concerns for the social nature of reading. Iser seems to agree with Rosenblatt when he suggests, "The convergence of the reader and the text [is what] brings the literary work into existence," so the literary work actually "must lie halfway between" the text and the reader (Implied 274). Iser
then goes on to embrace the social nature of the reading process, arguing that "when we have been particularly impressed by a book, we feel the need to talk about it"—exactly what Rosenblatt recommends (Implied 288).

Others, who do not always credit Rosenblatt, have built on her ideas. In addition to those noted above, Georges Poulet hinted at how a new object is created through the process of reading. Poulet argued that "through the act of reading," the book and other physical things around him disappear, only to be replaced with a collection "of mental objects in close rapport with my own consciousness" (43). As does Rosenblatt, Poulet claims that a new creation arises from the reading process. David Bleich agrees with Rosenblatt in that the reader's response can be discussed and evaluated, suggesting that "response, like a text, is a symbolic object and may be understood to be the text as immediately and evaluatively perceived" (125). Straw calls the entity that the reading transaction creates a "mental text," which is then "open to all the hermeneutic
procedures or explications that were carried out on printed texts in earlier eras" (74).

Perhaps the closest theorists to Rosenblatt’s concepts come from schools of reading and education. Such a connection is perhaps symbolic of how Rosenblatt’s work has been seen and used: Devalued by literary theorists who write to each other while at the same time embraced by classroom instructors who teach writing. Kenneth Goodman, for instance, argues for "dual texts," and holds that readers create a "parallel" text as they read. Goodman’s transactional view of what happens during reading sounds just like Rosenblatt, for Goodman suggests:

The reader is constructing a text parallel and closely related to the published text. It becomes a different text for each reader. . . . It is this reader’s text which the reader comprehends and on which any reader’s later account of what was read is based. (827)

Rosenblatt predated and informed Goodman’s notion of what the reader responds to:

The poem--the term I used to stand for "literary work"--"exists," "happens," I maintained, in the transaction between particular readers and the
text (the signs on the page). We might refer to reader, text, and poem, but each was an aspect of a relationship occurring at a particular time under particular circumstances. ("Transactional" 380)

Both Goodman and Rosenblatt subscribe to a transactional picture of the reading process.

Finally, Jerome Bruner maintains that readers create what he calls a "virtual text," noting when the reader asks what a text is all about, she does not refer to the actual text but the "text that the reader has constructed under its sway" (37). Bruner, like so many others, reiterates Rosenblatt's ideas, and that really is my argument here: While Louise Rosenblatt has been to a great extent ignored, more and more theorists ground their work in her ideas—just as many classroom teachers do.12

Moving to a New Paradigm

The prevalent (and static) view has been that a writer has an idea that is embodied clearly and perfectly within the text. That work is then read by a reader who completely understands what the writer has in mind:
This one-dimensional and linear image of the writing process comes from a conceptualized current-traditional paradigm in which the writer is assumed to know what she wants to say and also is assumed to be able to inscribe those intentions into words that clearly portray her ideas (see Crowley). It represents something of an exact transfer of a preexisting idea from the writer's to the reader's mind.

While this model of the writing process has been displaced with a more process-oriented way of viewing writing, the older paradigm still exists in how instructors read and comment on their student texts. We still seem to assume our students' ideas are in the texts we read and comment on, and if we cannot clearly see what those student writers mean, we accuse them of being ambiguous or of not providing enough information or examples. Current research supports this: In a recent study of some 3,000 commented-on student papers, Connors and Lunsford noted the majority of instructor remarks dealt with
the organization of a paper and/or its lack of details, that is, about the information that was not in the paper in a way the teacher could understand it, could see what the writer meant ("Teacher’s Rhetorical Strategies"). Certainly we can expect that the student writers thought they had written sufficient information into their texts, for after all, they could read them and "see what they meant."

Let me digress for a moment. It’s quite popular these days to use a psychological model that asks a respondent to repeat what she heard, so the speaker can determine if she is being clear. In marriage counseling one spouse is asked to repeat what he or she thinks the other spouse says, to ensure that the "message" is clearly transmitted.

In my own classes, I use the example of a note to my son to illustrate that no matter how clear we might think we are being when we write something down, we never are as clear as we think we are. We still create writer-based texts and when they are repeated to us by our readers, they are not exactly what we had in mind.
In my classroom example, I discuss a simple note to my 16-year-old son, Kohl, to "Please take out the garbage." When I come home from school, the garbage is not out, so I ask Kohl about it. He repeats my message: "I thought you meant later on," he tells me, "like after dinner or after I finished playing my video game."

With such feedback, I revise. The next time, then, my note reads, "Kohl, please take out the garbage as soon as you come home from school." Now, the garbage ends up out on the back porch, but not in the can in the alley. "I thought you meant 'just outside'," Kohl tells me, "on the porch. Your note didn't say anything about taking the garbage all the way out to the alley." Indeed, it did not.

With Kohl's response in mind, I again revise; the next time I specifically ask that the garbage be taken out as soon as Kohl gets home from school and all the way to the alley. But this time I find that the garbage can in the kitchen has been emptied, but the garbage from the rest of the house is, well, still in the house. "Your note didn't say all the garbage," Kohl tells me.
And on and on: as with all fathers and sons (or husbands and wives, or teachers and students), no matter what I write and how explicit and clear I think I am, Kohl finds a way to defeat me, to not do the chore as I would like it done. My language, as Sharon Crowley would say, has failed me.

This same failure happens, of course, in our classrooms. Students think they are being clear and explicit and detailed in what they write, but we just do not see what they mean. They produce, as Linda Flower describes it, writer-based prose, for they can see and understand perfectly what they write about, but as readers, we cannot. And if our focus for commenting is on texts, we might be able to get a student to add to her text the examples and details and illustrations and quotations that do let us see what she means—-but on her next piece of writing, the kind of examples that would make her work reader-based are not present, for we have only affected a single piece of writing, the one we commented on. My own revisions of the garbage note (based on my son’s comments on each specific piece of writing) simply did not transfer to the next piece of writing, my
next note, for I worked to revise a specific text, a particular note to my son. His comments did not lead me to put myself into his place, to inhabit a different role, to become an innocent reader of my own text. And isn’t that what we are trying to help our students learn to do, to move from writer to reader as they write and then read and evaluate their own texts?

What seems to be the best and most consistent advice from a wide range of researchers (see chapter two) seems to be to ask questions of student texts (Brannon and Knoblauch, Diogenes, Dusel, Hairston, Lees, Kelley, Phelps, Sommers, Thomas and Thomas all argue for the value of comments as questions), and I would suggest that many people advocate the use of (and so many instructors rely on) questions as they attempt to move the writer to the reader’s position. We write questions to the writer as we try to describe and explain what we, real readers, think and see and do not understand about her text. We try to tell the writer how her text affects and informs and confuses us. Our questions in effect mimic and model what we would like the writer herself to do: Put
herself into our position as an innocent reader coming to her text, and we hope that through our modeling and questions the writer will see what we mean. My argument is that we can help student writers become effective and responsive readers (and the revisers) of their own texts through Rosenblatt’s transactional theory.

We no longer view the reading/writing process as one of mind fusion and of the clear transmission of ideas but rather a transaction first between a writer and her text and then between a reader and that text. I want now to make the connection between this slice of reader-response theory and how it relates to the way(s) we might respond to our students’ texts. As noted, Rosenblatt sees the reading process as one in which the reader and text together create a new entity, the poem. We might visualize reading like this:

```
poem--reader’s evocation
   /
  / \                          \_________________________
reader text
```
The reader and text "conjoin" to create a new entity, what Rosenblatt calls the "poem." What the reader understands a text to mean is not found either in the text (the words on paper) or in the reader but rather in the transaction between the two. Such a transactional event creates a new object: The poem and it is to this new object that the reader responds. For instructors this transactional model of reading suggests that when we read student papers we respond not to the texts themselves but to our evocations of those works. Our comments must be directed toward and be about our personal evocation(s) of that piece of writing. For as Rosenblatt puts it, we do not respond to "the physical text, the marks on the page, but the meaning, the state of mind felt to correspond to that text" ("Writing and Reading" 13-14).

As the writer creates her text, she continuously checks her evocation of that text—what she thinks she wants to say—against the words on the page in front of her. If the words in the text seem to create the mental image the writer is trying to portray, she does not revise them. If the words do
not create that image, however, the writer works to revise, to come up with words that function as she wishes them too. The writer continuously moves from the position of writer to the position of reader and back again, as she writes.

*Both* evocations are part of what will become a new transaction as those evocations are examined and considered and discussed. We might visualize Rosenblatt’s transactional notion of reading and writing in this manner:

```
  writer's evocation       reader's evocation  
  \               /         \               /         
   \         /           \         /           
     writer     text     reader
```

On both sides of the reading/writing transaction are evocations of what the text represents and signals to its reader and to its writer.¹³ Meaning occurs when a poem is evoked; meaning exists only in the transaction, rather than totally in the reader (the affective fallacy) or all in the text (New Critical approach). Rosenblatt suggests the writer’s
continuing and changing evocation of her text as she writes it, through her constant comparison of the words on the paper to what she is working to get across, is evidence of the ongoing "transactions [that] explain why, as Emig (1983) has demonstrated, writing can become a learning process, a process of discovery" ("Reading and Writing" 11). During every reading and writing transaction, writers and readers try to match or test their evocations against the words on the page. My argument is that by bringing a conversation about response and commenting into our classrooms, we come closer to addressing the evocations that occur between writer and text, and between reader and text.

Rosenblatt theorizes that writers write and then read their work first in what she calls an "Authorial Reading I" position, where writers try to read what they have written for a sense of whether the words convey their evocation, the growing and changing notion writers have in mind as they write. A writer's words are tested to see if their "emerging meaning serves or hinders the intention, or purpose" of the writer as they arise through the act of
writing, for this testing is a "circular, transactional relationship with the very text being written" in which "the writer tries to satisfy, while refining, a personal conception" ("Writing and Reading" 11-12). The first part of revision, then, is one in which the writer examines her own text and compares its words to her "personal conception" of what she is trying to get across.

Our students are pretty good at "Authorial I" kinds of reading, as they can fill in any blanks in the text with their own personal knowledge--they can read and clearly understand their own texts. In terms of our commenting, we do not deal with how a text compares to the writer's evocation of it, as (with any writing) we do not have access to the writer's intentions. Perhaps this is why no theorist currently suggests that we ask a writer, "Is this what you really meant?" as we point at her text, as it is obvious that--in the writer's own evocation of the work--the words will always match her meaning.

As the writer reads her own work and tests the words against her growing evocation of that text, we hope she moves outward to consider her readers, her
audience (also see Brannon and Knoblauch; Sommers; Wallace and Hayes). Rosenblatt argues that the more expert writers make this move earlier in the writing process than do inexperienced writers, but all writers begin to consider possible readers when they see their writing as "part of a potential transaction with other readers." In doing so they attempt Rosenblatt’s "Authorial Reading II." Here (and this is the kind of reading we hope our comments engender) "the writer disassociates from the text and reads it with the eyes of potential readers (i.e., tries to judge the meaning they would make)" ("Writing and Reading" 12). The writer positions herself as a potential reader and tries to read her own work with a reader’s eyes. Rosenblatt maintains that writers "may alternate the two kinds of inner criteria, or, if sufficiently expert, may merge them" and the first kind of reading, that is "stance-and-purpose-oriented" is a "criterion for the second" kind of reading ("Reading and Writing" 12). Once the writer is at least partly satisfied that her words agree with her own evocation of the text, she moves to consider how an outside reader would evoke those same
words. We can now expand our earlier model to include Rosenblatt's ideas about writing:

If Rosenblatt's view is correct, then doesn't it make sense for us to talk about and model both modes of reading? Shouldn't we also take her concepts a step farther and consider how our comments might address and lead a writer to become her own self-reader? If we want to help our students understand and move themselves into the "Authorial Reading II" mode, to learn to examine their own work through an outsider's eyes, then our remarks must address our own evocation of the text (rather than the text itself) as that represents the position we want the writer to be in. We want our student writers to move from writer to reader, to see the text as a new reader would as they create a reader's evocation of
that work, and finally to respond to that evocation. Put another way, we as commenters and our students as writers must learn to deal with and discuss and consider and comment on our personal evocations of texts rather than the texts themselves.

In terms of revision and response, these dual evocations are the points where we want to talk with the writer, the places at which our comments might do the most good. I see the transaction between writer and text moving (as with efferent and aesthetic reading) between one place and the other, between reading as "authorial reading I" and as "authorial reading II" and if we can talk to our student writers when they are in the "authorial reading II" mode, we will be able to do the most good. Doesn’t it make sense then to ask our students to think and talk about what they are doing as they write, to make them aware of the different ways of reading their own writing during the process? What we are trying to accomplish, of course, is to engender a more metacognitive awareness in our students of how they compose, for once they understand how they create effective texts, they can do it again and again (see
Bizzell, "Literature" 135). And how do we start and continue this conversation about ways of reading and how can we make our commenting really work?

Earlier, I pictured Rosenblatt’s transactional notion like this:

```
poem--reader's evocation
     \
    /\ 
   /  \
/    \
reader text
```

I am now changing Rosenblatt's (basically textual) image of what is evoked to one of dialogue:

```
dialogue
     \
    /\ 
   /  \
/    \
reader text
```

The term at the top of our picture could as well be conversation or discourse or discussion; the important point here is that my argument is one of broadening and deepening what we see the reader/text
transaction as capable of producing. Rather than "I’ve read your text and here are some comments on it," my new model serves in a more catholic sense. Therefore, I told my students: "I’ve read your text. Here are some comments we can start with, but then I want to talk about your thoughts on my response, and my response to your remarks, and so on--and I want to keep our conversation going all the way from the start of your paper to when you have to turn it in."

I propose that we change what we do in our classrooms to bring commenting to the forefront of that conversation, to explain Rosenblatt’s theory, to discuss and examine what she has to say about reading, to help students enter into the conversation about their own reading and writing and our responses to it and their responses to our comments. In the following chapter, I will outline the design of a participatory ethnography from my own classrooms in which commenting became part of the ongoing dialogue of that classroom, all with an eye to finding out what answers my students had as to how I could improve what I said about my evocations of their texts.
CHAPTER FOUR
CREATING A PARTICIPATORY DIALOGUE:
DESIGNING THE STUDY

What is important in terms of my proposed new site of response and commenting—to the writer about his or her work rather than responding on a text, about that text—is a broader perspective on the entity Rosenblatt sees as derived from the reader/text transaction. Rosenblatt argues that reader and text together create a new object, which (if reading for literary purposes) she calls a poem. I am expanding Rosenblatt’s conception in this way: Rather than the creation of another textual object (the poem), we can equally argue that the reader/text transaction creates a dialogue, a conversation, a discussion. If Vygotsky is right in that humans best learn by interacting with more experienced people as they together communicate through the sign system of
language, then an examination of such language must be central to any pedagogical inquiry. Therefore, our focus for classroom research necessarily must concentrate on the oral and written conversations that take place between the people involved.

In my own classrooms, there has always been a blending of voices through dialogue, both written and verbal, between myself and my students. From the first day of class, all of my students are expected to talk and to be involved; as I state in my syllabi, "I call on everyone equally, whether or not you raise your hand, so know that you will be expected to talk in class." At the same time, I work hard to create a safe environment where students and teacher alike feel they can say what they wish without fear of embarrassment.

In designing my own research project, I wanted to extend my classrooms' normal dialogue to include a great deal of conversation on the notion of response. My argument is that we can improve the response and commenting process—and thus the revision practices of our students—by concentrating on being readers who speak directly to writers about their texts.
rather than subscribing to the older model of commenting about student texts on those texts.

Evocation, Response, and Ethnography

For several reasons, I have chosen to call my approach to research a participatory ethnography in which my students and I would together participate not only in data collection but also in data analysis: we would try to learn together by creating knowledge in an environment in which we each were both teacher and learner (see Glesne and Peshkin xiv).¹

First, we would all be together for an extended period of time (45 class periods) as we tried to discover what happens when response and commenting are brought into the classroom conversation. We would listen as well as ask questions about what we learned (Hammersley and Atkinson 2). Therefore, both my students and I initially would participate at various levels: we would comment on texts, react to each others' remarks, reflect on and discuss the comments that were made, search for more effective ways to respond and comment, compare and discuss our
personal evocations of each others' texts, and so on. Such comprehensive involvement would, I hoped, lead to a realization of the "ways in which individuals connect personal knowledge to their social awareness through language" within the overall ethnographic rubric in which we would operate (Kantor, Kirby, and Goetz 298).²

Second, the written and oral artifacts my students and I would both create and examine would come from our particular classrooms. We would be active ethnographic participants in an attempt to "understand what is happening in this new context in terms of the rules for meaning making that operate there" (North 285; his emphasis). That is, we would together determine and clarify the "rules for meaning" that operated in our classes in terms of response and commenting as we worked to create better revision practices. What I envisioned this project to create was the kind of dialogue Jeffrey Schwartz encourages when he views students as research partners, who I expected to discuss and write about their practices and ideas on commenting all through the semester (40). I believe Schwartz's argument
that when "teachers share their research with their students, they will find that they will learn in new ways together," and I wanted my students to be involved in all aspects of my study (40; also see Baker 81). My students and I would construct at least some of the class as we wrote our way through the semester, as we worked to address "a variety of questions regarding what is being studied, and proposing possible answers, even alternative explanations as the study proceeds" (Glesne and Peshkin 295). I intended to collect both written and verbal comments about response and revision in line with what I see as educational ethnography, as a study that

seeks to understand the culture of the educational or learning process: (1) what is occurring, (2) how it is occurring, (3) how the participants perceive the event, (4) what is required to participate as a member of the educational group . . . and (5) what social and academic learning takes place. (Kamil, Langer, and Shanahan 73)

In accordance with this model, I would design writing assignments and create classroom dialogue that addressed each area--what happens in class and
how it happens, how students perceive what goes on, in what ways they participate (or refuse to), and what they might learn about commenting and revision from the activities we would do and write on and talk about. I wanted to ground my work in Sondra Perl’s notion that a

feature common both to writing and ethnography is that we learn by doing. . . . We’ve come in writing research to believe that writing leads to discovery. . . . So in ethnography, we don’t enter into a study by deciding ahead of time what events will mean, but we allow the meaning to emerge from our observations and reflections. (11)

Grounding My Research with Questions

To expand on these initial concepts, I would work inside the paradigm suggested by Judith Goetz and Margaret LeCompte by testing my ethnographic model against a series of questions that try to answer "What do ethnographers watch for and listen to, and how do they organize their watching and listening?" (112). First, Goetz and LeCompte ask:
1. Who is in the group or scene? How many people are there and what are their kinds, identities, and relevant characteristics? How is membership in the group or scene acquired?

2. What is happening here? What are the people in the group or scene doing and saying to one another? (112)

Some answers to these early questions: The University of Arizona is a research-one, land-grant state institution. During the fall of 1993, there were a total of 3894 students enrolled in first-semester composition, of which about one-quarter (958) were in English 100, the university’s class for students who are seen as having insufficient experience in the kinds of writing expected at the university level. English 100 students work with reading and writing assignments and read complete texts similar to but generally fewer in number to the next class they will take in their composition sequence, English 101. Therefore, there is more time allowed for each part of the class as well as more time for individual attention. Students placed into English 100 are required to take three semesters of first-year composition (English 100, 101, and 102) instead of two (English 101 and 102).
In my own English 100 classes, I ask for three major assignments: (1) a narrative about a person significant to the writer (worth 10 percent of the student’s grade), (2) an examination of a subculture (15 percent), and (3) an argumentative paper grounded in the writer’s own educational experiences (25 percent). In addition, my students write three in-class examinations: two one-hour essays (15 percent) and a final two-hour examination (15 percent). Each student also writes 15 journal entries (I call them learning logs). These learning log entries each count as one percent of the student’s grade, and are marked with a √ (acceptable), a √+ (excellent), or a √− (not acceptable). Logs are intended to encourage fluency in writing. The total assigned reading amounts to about 600 pages. The out-of-class formal writing assignments ask for some 3,000 words or so, revised at least three times each, or about 10,000 words in all. Learning logs and in-class writing add perhaps another 3,000 words, so I ask my students to write, at a minimum, about 13,000 words during the semester.
The outline for the course is shown below
(learning logs are shown as "LL"):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>weeks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNIT ONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LL #1</td>
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<td>LL #2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>(holiday)</td>
<td>LL #3</td>
<td>LL #4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in-class #1</td>
<td>vers 1 pap 1</td>
<td>conferences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vers 2 pap 1</td>
<td>conferences</td>
<td>conferences</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LL #5</td>
<td>LL #6</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final pap 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT TWO</td>
<td></td>
<td>LL #7</td>
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<td>LL #8</td>
<td></td>
<td>LL #9</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>LL #9</td>
<td>oral repts</td>
<td>oral repts</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>in-class #2</td>
<td>conferences</td>
<td>conferences</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vers 1 pap 2</td>
<td>conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LL #11</td>
<td>vers 2 pap 2</td>
<td>LL #12</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>final pap 2</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The learning logs made sure my students wrote every week, usually at least twice. Revision of major paper assignments is required: As outlined above, students had to revise each of their formal paper assignments at least three times.

Goetz and LeCompte also suggest that a researcher ask:

3. *Where is the group or scene located?* What physical settings and environments form their contexts? What natural resources are evident, and what technologies are created and used?

4. *When does the group meet and interact?* How often are the meetings and how lengthy are they? How does the group conceptualize, use, and distribute time? (113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT THREE</th>
<th>LL #13</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LL #14</td>
<td>prospectus</td>
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<tr>
<td>vers 1 pap 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>vers 2 pap 3</td>
<td>conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LL #15</td>
<td>vers 3 pap 3 exam prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final pap 3</td>
<td>final exam prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To provide these kinds of details, here are diagrams of my two classrooms and their seating arrangements:

English 100, section 22, fall 1993
Physical and Atmospheric Science 404
21 students 11:00 - 11:50 AM M-W-F

(not to scale)

--- = chalkboard  t = tape recorder
M = male student  F = female student
While the teacher’s desk in both classrooms is moveable, all student desks are bolted down; section 40’s room was freezing for the first half of the semester. I have also noted where I located my tape recorders and where male and female students were sitting.
Finally, Goetz and LeCompte ask:

5. How are the identified elements connected or interrelated—either from the participants' point of view or from the researcher's perspective? How is stability maintained? How does change originate, and how is it managed?

6. Why does the group operate as it does? What meanings do participants attribute to what they do? What is the group's history? What symbols, traditions, values, and world views can be found in the group? (113)

Addressing these last questions would be at the heart of my research, so I planned to draw on our written and verbal discourse in an effort to understand what was happening in terms of response and commentary. Since much of our classroom focus would be on written objects (I would read and comment on student texts; they would respond to what I had to say, and so on), I hoped for a double reward from both our reading and the writing about responding to student texts. Since, as Frank Smith suggests, no one can produce enough writing to really learn how to write, "one learns to write by reading [so] the writing that anyone does must be vastly complemented from reading if it is to achieve anything like the creative and communicative power that written
language offers" (84). Much of what my students and I read in my class centered on talk about talk, what our comments meant to each other, so I hoped (and expected) we would learn much from not just writing on and discussing the commenting process but also by reading what each of us had to say about our own notions of response. All of us—student and teacher alike—would be "engaged in similar tasks" throughout the semester as they worked to write and revise their papers and as I worked to compose and revise my dissertation (Doheny-Farina and Odell 507).

Perhaps over the 45 class periods we might modify our view of how commenting and response engenders revision; therefore, I hoped for what Glesne and Peshkin describe as an "ideal" researcher-researched relationship in which "there is negotiation, reciprocity, and willingness on the part of all participants to change and be changed" (11). Naturally, new concepts that we might learn will not necessarily extrapolate to other classrooms, to other instructors and students--but I hope my research will point the way for others.
I also hope the design itself of my naturalistic research project illustrates my ideas about response. and commenting: We necessarily begin with our written comments on student texts but then broaden our conversation to include a myriad of reactions to our initial responses as we center on talk about talk all through the semester.

As noted earlier, I am expanding Rosenblatt’s conception in that rather than the creation of another textual object (what she called the poem), we can equally argue that the reader/text transaction creates a dialogue, a conversation, a discussion.” Certainly such a dialogue can be read as a text (as can anything else), but I see this new entity as much wider and broader and more inclusive than Rosenblatt’s original conception of the poem (a mental object generally viewed in the same way as anything textual). Such a new dialogical object necessarily includes the multiple voices I hope my writing and revision assignments lead to, voices that play off one another, voices that dispute each others’ notions and ideas, voices that work to create new rules about the making of knowledge.
Response and Revision: Our Conversation

I started our talk about talk early in the semester: Our third day of class, Wednesday 9/1/93, began with us going over several handouts outlining how and where to get tutoring help, permission slips to use student writing for the Student’s Guide or my dissertation, and a discussion about student placement into English 100. To prepare for this class I had asked my students to read two essays about the English 100 placement process from our Student’s Guide to First-Year Composition, English 100 Edition. We then had a discussion about English 100 and why and how students were placed into this class as well as what they might expect from it. We also talked about the difference between reading and writing, especially as to context—how getting enough information into a text is critical if the reader is to understand it. As a way to get started on the reading/writing relationship, I put Myron Tuman’s quotation on the board: "Meet me here tomorrow at the same time with a stick this long" (15-16). Everyone can read the words, but without some context no one
can understand them; that is why, I told my students, "for you to really understand any kind of writing, all the details have to be there in the text because you have nothing else to go on. The author's not there for you to ask. That's one difference between writing and speaking: The presence of the person who wrote the thing." I also connected this notion to the reading students had done prior to class by mentioning some of the Guide writers and what they had to say. I then went on to ask students to write a brief response to these questions:

List your writing strengths
List your writing weaknesses--where I might be able to help
Discuss what you hope to get out of this class

This brief exercise, three days into the semester, was my initial attempt at asking students to step back from their writing to reflect on who they are and/or how they write. I told my students their comments would not be graded nor returned--I was just trying to get an idea of how they "saw themselves as writers." My purpose was to begin helping my students learn the process of thinking
reflectively in a safe environment, through non-graded writing assignments. I believe that part of being able to write is to step back and reflect on how something is written; I think part of turning first-year writers into effective readers and revisers of their own work requires a similar reflective stance. And as Scardamalia, Bereiter, and Steinbach put it, "Not only is reflection valued as an aid to writing, but writing is valued as an aid to reflection" (173).

In this early assignment and perhaps not surprisingly, my students listed as their weaknesses all the usual suspects: grammar, punctuation, and other mechanical concerns, organization and vocabulary problems, as well as procrastinating when they had a writing assignment due.

For example, reflecting our discussion about English 100 placement, Liz Esqueda wrote that she was "not sure if I have any writing strengths after being placed in English 100." Another student complained that "I really don’t have any writing strength. I don’t develop my ideas enough to be able to write
stories, even short ones" (Rodriguez). Another described himself as having:

lousy spelling, very poor organization, and I tend to write very sloppy. What I mean by that is I have a tendency to leave out words or sentences because it is as if my mind works 1000 times faster than my hand can write.

(Anonymous)

Paul Marceau echoed many of his classmates by listing several problems and concluding "I am just a crappy writer."

Several of my students worried about test-taking, including Bob Halter, who reported that "When I took the English placement test at orientation I freaked out. I opened up the blue book, wrote the first two sentences and then went blank. I started getting hot and dizzy and nearly fainted." Then, perhaps in a typical student manner, Halter went on to explain why he felt faint: "I think it was due to the stress I was putting on myself to do good on the test and also because I went to bed at five and woke up at seven."

Extending what seemed a typical worry over surface form, Joe Gachiri was very specific about
what he viewed as his weaknesses: "I tend to write run-on sentences, not sure where to put my periods, or commas, and so on." Lara Rosanaur noted she does not have "a very strong vocabulary" so she does not "use important words. The reason I do this is I have very poor spelling." Liz Esqueda wrote "I worry about spelling and punctuational mistakes which get me off track and I can't get back on track." My students often mentioned a concern over form and mechanics, worries that got in the way of and/or stopped their writing.

In addition to concerns about surface error problems, many of my 44 first-year composition students appeared to have a current-traditional view of writing, seeing writing not only as product-oriented but also as linear: Writers first have an idea, then translate that notion into words that clearly represent it, then put the words down on paper where they will be decoded--clearly--by a reader. One of my students noted that she "can get good ideas but when it comes to putting them down on paper, I sometimes get 'mumbo-jumbo' phrases and
sentences" (Anonymous). Others report feeling the same way:

I have good ideas (in my head). (Lounsbury)

My main writing weakness is not being able to say something on paper as I would be saying to another person. (Maizner)

Sometimes I have trouble expressing my ideas completely. (Smith)

I come up with some good ideas, but being unable to put them on paper the way I want to is a big problem. (Halter)

Sometimes I get frustrated when I think about the topic and know what to write about, but cannot get it on paper. (Amador)

The ideas come to me so fast, that I can't write fast enough to complete my sentences clearly. (Rosenaur)  

Perhaps more interesting than their perceived weaknesses is that about a third of my students viewed themselves as good creative writers. And not all seemed to see composition as current-traditional; Jennifer Croushore noted that "When I write I generally tend to write down everything I'm feeling or thinking without organizing my thoughts first. Usually this works out pretty well, but lately this has become a mess." However, Jennifer was the only
student who made any reference to just getting ideas onto paper and then working to edit them. In terms of pedagogical suggestions that I can draw from this early-semester survey, it seems useful to me to ask our students how they see themselves as writers, along with their views about writing itself. To me, it is critical to discover where our students are and to directly confront and discuss their perceptions of themselves as writers. We can pursue this same line of research all through the semester by continually asking our students to detach from their work and to reflect on their composing processes. This not only starts a dialogue that focuses on reflectivity, it leads naturally to a continual conversation in which teacher and student together reflect on not only the students' writing but also the instructor's writing (in the form of comments).

Discussing Rosenblatt, Response, and Commenting

While I have always asked my students to consider and write about their writing processes, this semester was the first time I tried to connect their views on writing with Rosenblatt’s
transactional theories, as well as my expansion of them, and to explicitly discuss those theories during class. So on day four my lesson plan called for a brief discussion about Rosenblatt’s ideas on how reader and text transact to create a new entity, the poem, which is what the reader responds to. I drew an outline of her triangular image on the board (see chapter three) and we briefly discussed Rosenblatt’s theories. My main objective was to tie this discussion into how my students view the commenting process—what their past experience had been in terms of commenting and response from their instructors and whether those comments aided revision. So I outlined Rosenblatt’s transactional ideas and then asked my students to write down the kinds and types of comments they had received on their papers in past classes. I told them I did not want to lead them too much, but I was curious about several things, so I listed these questions on the board:

What kinds of comments did you get on your papers?

What was the purpose of those comments?
When did you get comments (did you get comments as your papers were being revised? just to justify the grade?)

Did you get comments you didn’t understand?

Were there comments in the margin that you couldn’t read?

I told my classes: "I’m just trying to get a sense of what kind of background [you have] in terms of comments--did you get a little or a lot? I’d like you to take ten minutes to put down as much stuff as you can and then I just want to talk about them. I’m trying to get a sense of what kinds of comments you’re used to; as the semester goes on I’m going to try to elicit information as to what kinds of comments would help." Once my students wrote down some of their experiences, we talked about their responses to commenting and listed the highlights on the board. Here are some examples of comments on English papers my students were used to receiving:

too vague; expand on it
too short
[needs] more description
unclear
strayed from the topic
paragraphs were too long
good start but lousy paper
Perhaps not surprisingly, mechanics received the most response from my 44 students, with 23 mentions. Needs more detail was the second most listed response, with 15 students noting they often received it as a comment in their work (see Applebee for older research and Connors and Lunsford "Rhetorical" for recent research that reports much the same thing). Here is a visual representation of what my students' early comments indicated—a close image to what the literature suggests:

My purpose in this initial discussion of commenting was to get some idea of what my students had been reading on their papers, some sense of what teachers had been writing to these students,
especially in their high school English classes. I also wanted my students to articulate and reflect on the responses their past papers had received. In our classroom discussion most of my students indicated that the majority (if not all) of the comments they received came on final versions of papers, evidently with the hope that these remarks would somehow have what Larson calls "transfer value" and so would impact the next paper. As one student would later put it in a learning log entry (completed as she was writing paper one):

I am spending a lot more time on my papers than before (like in high school) so my writing is improving. Also I like getting your comments before the final paper--it does help to improve and correct my paper. In high school the teacher would give me comments after my final paper was due, which did nothing for me. (Anonymous)

Here is a bit of my morning class's conversation about commenting, from the tape recording of this class period (I list it here as an example of the kinds of discussions about response and revision we had--and to demonstrate how students see our responses to their texts):
Glau: "Think about your past English classes. I don't want to lead you too much, but what I'm looking for is what kinds of comments did you get on your papers? Tell me about the comments you got."

Student: "You want to know about the comments we got or the comments we like?"

Glau: "We will get to the 'like' at a later time. I'm interested in knowing what your background is, what kind of comments you're used to ... you're experienced in getting."

[silence as students write about their past experience with commenting; after 10 minutes or so I asked a student to volunteer to put "comments about commenting" on the board]

Glau: "We're going to start with you. Tell us what kind of comments you got."

Student: "Okay. I've gotten a lot of positive comments. I thought they encouraged me."

Glau: "Paul, how about you?"

Paul Marceau: "I had a lot of trouble on conclusions."

Student: " Doesn't make sense" [others indicate they'd received the same kind of comment; we discussed sentence outlining as a way to make sure ideas connect to the topics they are about]

Student: "Good openings, good conclusions."

Julie Barnett: "Sometimes I don't state my purpose . . . ."

Glau: "That's a real common thing, because we know what we want to argue . . . ."

Julie: "Right, and on the paper . . . ."

Student: "Don't stay on the point."
Glau: "I suggest that people visualize their papers like this . . ." [I drew a diagram with point at the top of the board and connecting lines to "points" to ensure the supporting ideas support the main idea]

Glau: "Those of you who've spoken so far, raise your hands. Did you get comments as your papers were in process, so you'd get the chance to revise those papers?"

[mostly "No" responses]

Glau: "Anybody else? So generally they were like and you get the comments and they hope the comments--"

Student: [unintelligible]

Glau: "One of the things that's great about the composition and theory that we're using now, about how we think composition really works is that we try to help you in process--that's why when you bring your papers in on the seventeenth a lot of people will comment on them. Then you'll come and see me and I'll comment on them. Rather than wait until the very end. So you're not going to just turn them in and get a grade."

Student: "Vague."

Glau: "That's what we were talking about. Okay. Anybody else?"

Student: "He was always saying I got off the track."

Glau: "Off the track? Did you?"

Student: [no answer]

Glau: "Didn't seem like that when you were writing it, did it? It seemed to make sense to you, right? Sometimes we just don't make those connections, they're in our head--"
Student: "Punctuation symbols."

Glau: "Did she make any comments?"

Student: "Sometimes I'd get a little question mark."

[the discussion continued]

Our afternoon class discussion was similar. Following our conversations about commenting, I talked more about theory, especially what we term the current-traditional way of writing and its linearity. I also alluded again to Rosenblatt's triangular conception of the reading process and connected it to how we write, in that there are evocations on both sides of an ongoing transaction. I drew this model on the board:

```
  evocation
 /     \
reader  text       evocation
      /     \
    writer text
```
"The problem with commenting, and some of the problems I've seen over here [indicating on the chalkboard the student comments about past commenting] with what you've been told," I said to my students, "all those comments of course come down to the text--the comments are made on the text to that text. The problem is that the comments don't transfer to the next text. What we need to be talking about are probably up here" [indicating the evocation part of the transaction diagram] "at a little different level":

```
   dialogue
  /     \
/       \
|        |
|        |

  evocation   evocation
/     \
/       \
|        |
|        |

reader    text    writer
```

I continued: "And that's what I want to try to do this semester with you, to have you react to my comments and comment back to me on those comments. I
want to talk about the commenting process, like we've started here. I want you to comment on each others' comments. We're really going to foreground this whole idea of that kind of dialogue, to see if we can make a difference. And we're not going to do it on the finished product; we're going to do it as papers are in process. Does that make sense?"

Many students nodded, and when no one responded out loud I continued: "The problem is with the way we've been commenting in the past is that comments don't transfer from one paper to the next. They change the product--they might get you to proofread more, Matt, so you might go through and proofread better, but they don't help your performance because they don't transfer to the next paper." These early-semester discussions about response and commenting are illustrative of how other instructors might bring talk about talk into their own classrooms. We first need to find out what types of responses our student writers are used to receiving, which then easily leads to a discussion of how we might comment more effectively on the papers they will write for us.
My notes for this class indicate that while I also had planned to talk about the reading and writing process in more detail and to connect it to the book we were reading, we did not have time to do so; I would go over some more drawings during the next class period that compared the current-traditional view of writing to Rosenblatt’s transactional approach. I used models that related to what my students were reading:

reading theory:
(the ideas in) Black Ice---------reader (you) (or)

```
idea/conception/poem
 /\  
\/ / \ reader (you)
```

I wanted to compare the current-traditional view (the first image) to how Rosenblatt would picture what happens as my students read through the first assigned text for the class (the second drawing). I also wanted to connect these concepts to reading/writing theory:
writing theory; do you write like this:

your paper---------writer (you) or like this:

\</ idea/conception/poem

\<\ your paper \< \ writer (you)

My thinking was that such a comparison--of how Lorene Cary wrote Black Ice as essentially the same process through which my students would write for my class--would be useful to my student writers.

During this class period we also did the revision-as-(re)seeing exercise Ann Berthoff advocates as she argues that cognition is really recognition and revision is truly re-envisioning (548). I ask my students to close their eyes for a few moments. "When you open your eyes," I tell them, "you will have all the faculties you have now--you'll be able to see as well as you can now, feel as you can, touch, smell, hear, and so on just as you can now. The only difference is that you will have lost your memory. When I ask you to open your eyes you will have no memory."
When I ask my students to open their eyes, I hold up a chair (or a paper cup, or a soda can) and ask "What's this?" of a student in the first row. Usually he or she will answer, "A chair," or "a cup," and my response always is, "How do you know? You don't have any memory, so how can you recognize it?"

We then have a discussion that focuses on my main point: We often think of revision as editing, when we ought to see revision as re-seeing, as a real re-envisioning of our text. I listed a number of words on the board, including Re-cognize, Re-think, and Re-see as we discussed how revision works if it is to be real re-vision.  

**Composition and Student Feedback**

I want now to connect what I did in class in terms of discussions about response and commenting (as outlined above), to what others have reported doing. Other researchers have asked their students for feedback on instructor commenting, but generally such talk about talk has been very brief both in focus and in duration. As noted earlier, Nina Ziv worked with four college freshmen who "exhibited
problems of organization, focus, and logic in their writing"; she asked them to tape record their thoughts about her comments on their texts ("What She Thought" 7). The feedback Ziv received suggested that many students did not understand why she recommended certain changes; later, even after conferencing with her, they still made the same errors in subsequent papers. Ziv's corrections, particularly those on the micro level, seemed to reinforce the students' feelings that the instructor was simply there to "fix up" their texts--to correct for grammar and spelling and other surface errors. Ziv suggests that the focus on mechanics was probably what those students had been accustomed to.

When we consider Ziv's results in terms of my new paradigm for commenting, it seems clear that there needs to be more conversation between teacher and student for each to understand the other and his or her writing. What is most interesting about these findings are not just Ziv's conclusions, but that Ziv asked her students to suggest what was effective (or not) about the commentary she made on their papers.
Put another way, Ziv trusted her students to be capable readers of her own on-text remarks.

Other parts of this conversation: Melanie Sperling and Sarah Warshauer Freedman tried to create more of a dialogue by attempting to find a good example of a dialogic conversation about student papers, a discussion that would help compare what the instructor recommended and what the student thought she meant." Burkland and Grimm also asked for student feedback by questioning 197 students about their instructor’s comments on the final drafts of their papers. Their survey results indicated that students often found teacher comments unclear and sometimes unreadable, and also saw them as containing the same type of writing errors for which the students were penalized." Grace Clarke attempted to discover student attitudes about written remarks by concentrating on how students perceived and reacted to teacher responses. Her students suggested that if comments are formed as questions, they help students see their own texts as outside readers would (see Diogenes et. al; Welch). Finally, Freedman did a survey of 560 K-12 teachers and 715 of their
secondary school students; they asked students how they perceived the comments they had received from these instructors. Freedman's survey indicated that instead of using writing as a way to test students or so they could review mechanics, the better teachers used writing to help students learn to think for themselves and to connect what they have learned to their own experience (Response).

In terms of my own work, what is perhaps most enlightening about these other studies is that none attempted to create an ongoing semester-long dialogue about the effectiveness of commenting, a dialogue that would include both written and verbal feedback from everyone in class, a "multimodal enterprise which [would be] a dialogic, if not polyphonic" undertaking (Baker 264). Nor did any of these studies report student feedback about commentary back to their classes in order to observe not only the students' reactions but also to try to change methods or approaches to commenting as the class was in progress, to build on such a conceptual base in order to aid revision.
As I considered how to design my own research study, while I intended to raise the level of talk about talk in terms of response to student papers, I did not want to create an artificial environment by focusing all that we did in class on simply an extended classroom conversation about responding. In addition to our talk about talk as noted above, I decided to work with the same assignments and assign the same readings I had in past English 100 classes. I would then superimpose on my original model other assignments and questions and strategies I hoped would lead to more of a conversation about response and at the same time facilitate more effective revision practices. In this way I would not take the chance of constructing assignment sequences and a syllabus so different that my basic goals and purposes would be lost. In the following chapter, I will outline the modifications I made to my syllabus and illustrate how my students responded to these changes. As we will see, a continuing conversation about response helped many of my students change their own perceptions about revision—and at the same time, led to more effective revision practices.
In an effort to create more of a conversation about response to student writing, during the fall semester of 1993 I modified about half of my assignments. I did not want to adjust the major writing prompts, since they are the texts on which we would begin our commenting activities; therefore the learning log assignments (others call them journals), because they lend themselves to an ongoing conversation, seemed the logical place to start. Logs, after all, engender free expression (and I wanted and hoped for honest and direct talk about talk). As Moore and Reynolds argue, students who are "too shy to share their experiences in class often write about them in interesting, even dynamic [journal] entries" (qtd. in Stanford 7). What
students wrote in these logs also could be read and/or discussed in class, for I intended my students to see their learning log entries as only part of our ongoing dialogue. The view of such writing as "dialogue journals" is based loosely on Toby Fulwiler's argument that such writing can "promote an ongoing course-long conversation between the students and their ideas and between me and the students," expanded by my argument, of course, to focus on response and revision (qtd. in Anson 151).

So in addition to adding in-class discussions on response and commenting, the first assignment I modified was learning log #5, written as my students were in the process of composing their first paper—after their texts had gone through one peer review session and immediately before our first individual conference. Learning log #5 asked students to:

write of your experiences with the first version of paper 1—good and bad. How did you accomplish what you did? How do you feel about this paper? If you could spend more time on one specific area, what would it be? Why? Did you learn anything about your own writing process from writing this paper? What, specifically? Will you write your next paper the same way?
I hoped my students would (perhaps for the first time) step back from their work and reflect on it, and I also hoped they might stand back from their own composing processes and consider how they had gone about writing their first class paper. In addition, I wanted them to think about their next writing assignment and how they thought they might approach writing it.

I was trying to create through the modifications I made in my learning logs what Jeffrey Sommers would call a "memo assignment." Sommers argues that such an assignment "includes a series of questions that deal with the process of writing the assigned paper and with the students' feelings about the finished draft" (qtd. in Anson 175). Such reflection helps our students think about their writing from the standpoint of composing itself rather than focusing on the content of a particular text. Sommers notes that "Requiring students to write a memorandum to their teacher-reader, answering specific questions about how they composed a written draft, can produce the written response of the 'other self'" (qtd. in Anson 175). This helps the student-writer
conceptualize different strategies that might be worth trying. And by asking our students to write about how they write, we as instructors can move from the position of judgment to one of real respondent, as we are considering the process rather than the product—a site central to my own argument here.

Since paper one was still being written, it perhaps is not surprising that students made remarks in this learning log such as:

In my next paper I think I will go about it the same way I did this one. Write down ideas I'm going to write about. Then brainstorm and write my first draft. (Anonymous)

Another student indicated "I will try to write my paper next time the same way. I just have to form ideas and then from there if the subject matter appeals to me, then I should be able to write efficiently" (Anonymous).

Other students indicated they would take at least some of the comments they had received from their classmates into consideration:
My next paper will be written with more focus on the descriptiveness of what I am writing. The next time I will do this by taking more of a reader’s perspective so that I can see whether or not I can get a good understanding.

(Anonymous)

Kathy Lounsbury could see some advantage in changing her writing process to help her see her own work from more of a reader’s viewpoint:

I need to elaborate more. . . . [but] the problem is that I’m not very clear with the points I want to make. Even though I tried brainstorming before writing this paper I still need more organization. . . . I think I’ll try writing my next paper the same way but, keeping in my mind that I need to point, illustrate, and explain my ideas. If I do this the reader should clearly understand what I’m trying to say.

The shift toward a reader’s perspective is what I was trying to foster, of course, and some of these early remarks served as a precursor of what was to come (see chapters six and seven).

Individual (but Ineffective) Conferences

I want now to append what my students had initially written about response and commenting to
the conversations we had in conferences. Days 11 and 12 were spent in individual conferences; no class those days (conferences were scheduled over three days, but one was not a regular class day). I held conferences in my office, located in the basement and a shared office for some 30 graduate assistants. Any conversations, therefore, were subject to other noise and distractions, subject not only to interruptions but also to the voices of other instructors who might be talking to one another or to their students (sometimes in group conferences), on the phone, and so on. My desk location (see below) is particularly susceptible to noise problems, as it not only is right by the phone but also where a doorway leads from one part of the office into another.
In our conferences we would focus on the two parts to the first class writing project: To illustrate and explain a dominant impression about a person important to the writer, and to show how the writer has changed because that person was involved in a significant way in the writer's life. Our student-teacher conferences came after my students had written (at least) two versions of paper one.
After we talked about their texts, students had several days to revise their work before the final version of the paper was due.

However, while I was hoping for content-based revision, many students arrived in my classes with abbreviated perceptions of what revision should be. The following comments are from learning log #6, which students brought to their first conferences. This learning log was changed this semester to ask my students to:

Define "revision," and briefly discuss how you've revised papers in the past. How are you planning to revise paper 1? List several of your goals for this paper, and be specific on how you plan to accomplish them.

Many of my students (as we might expect from the research outlined in chapter two) seemed to picture revision as either the final editing of surface features or just to follow the teacher's instructions on how to "fix" what was wrong. I was amazed at how often the notion of correcting something seen as wrong or incorrect (probably by teachers) came up in
what my students had to say about how they revised. A number of students also looked up the dictionary definition of *revision* and listed it (they probably did so because in the learning log assignment I asked them to define the word).

One of my students argued that:

> Revision is where . . . you cross things out that you don’t like, add different ideas into your paper, check the mechanics of your paper, and see if it is an organized fashion and in your own ideas. (Anonymous).

Another said "Revision: re-examining or re-reading for correctional purposes and improvement" (Anonymous). Eric Berrang defined revision as a hunt for mistakes, "to look over a paper after it’s been written to detect any errors that you might have committed." Another student slightly broadened the definition of revision, noting it:

> means to look at your paper and see if you can make it better. You might have spelling errors, grammar, sentence structure or it might not make sense, all of these things you can look for in a paper and try to revise it for a better paper. (Anonymous)
Many of my students brought such an abbreviated editing-oriented focus on revision with them as they came to see me. I taped all of the conferences; many went something like this abbreviated transcript of my conference with Jennifer Wells. Such conferences are, of course, a natural continuation of on-text responses to our student writing. (In accordance with my hoped-for heteroglossic mixture of student voices throughout this dissertation, I randomly selected the conferences I report here.) Here, Jennifer and I concentrated on my questions concerning an overall lack of supporting details that might show what Jennifer meant about the significance of her aunt Suad:

Glau: "Let’s read through this and see what we’ve got. [Comment on the origin of the name of the focus of the paper—Jennifer’s aunt Suad.] This is a good introduction—-that’s very nice. You’re the oldest?"

Jennifer: "[I] meant, I’m the oldest and she’s the youngest . . . is that confusing?"

Glau: "Yeh, I’m not sure . . . "

Jennifer: "I’m the oldest in my . . . Okay. I’m the oldest . . . "

Glau: "Oldest what?"
Jennifer: "child in my family and she's the youngest child in hers [She does more to clarify the text]."

[reading]

Glau: "Why does this make you sick when she wouldn't say goodbye?"

Jennifer: "Just the feeling I got like when I woke up and she wouldn't be there. Should I explain that more?"

Glau: "Maybe."

[we finish reading through Jennifer's text]

After asking several questions intended to help clarify my reading of her text, I gave Jennifer what now seems to be perhaps too long and prescriptive of a speech. However, my advice was more conceptual than specific:

Glau: "Lots of good stuff here, a lot of good stuff. I think this is fine. You've got a lot of detail here, really setting the stage. Where it starts to . . . where we want to start working on it, I think is where you start talking about more generalities: her strength, understanding, openness, generosity, easy-going nature, honesty [and several more qualities] . . . some of which you've supported with evidence. You might be trying to do too much. You . . ."

Jennifer: "Right."
Glau: "may want to pick out the most important ones."

Jennifer: "Right."

[I noted other places where generalizations were not supported and suggested Jennifer do a complete sentence outline so she could easily see if she had examples for each of her Aunt Suad's qualities]

While Jennifer appeared to have a good handle on the first part of paper one's assignment--creating a dominant impression of someone important to her life--she appeared to have less control over the second part of the assignment (and in fact students often have difficulty showing how someone was significant to the person they are today). We had discussed in class how one way to show significance is to demonstrate change in some manner--without some modification in what a person does in life because of someone's influence, there is no way to show that the writer in fact did change. My conference with Jennifer continued:

Glau: "You've done a great job of describing [Jennifer's aunt Suad], and you've got a skeleton of a dominant impression, but it needs to be filled-in."
Jennifer: "Okay."

[We worked together on the main points; I connected the paper to a research paper and how a writer would support her generalizations in a research paper with details and examples.]

Glau: "I'm going to push you a little more . . . where you start talking about you . . . you've learned a lot from her [listed several details.] this is a start at showing what you're doing with this information . . . give me examples from your life to show what you're doing with what you've learned." [We discuss how.]

My written remarks on the final version of Jennifer's text indicated how effectively she portrayed her aunt:

You've painted a pretty picture of your aunt. More specifics would help, as the more examples you have the better I can see what you mean. But so far, you've done a decent job; I can see your aunt (I'd like to meet her).

The first portion of our conference did seem to help Jennifer show her aunt Suad; not so for the last part of our conversation, though. Even with my seemingly prescriptive advice, in the final version of Jennifer's paper she was not able to demonstrate significance in a meaningful way by showing what she is now doing because of her aunt's influence. The
comments I made during our conference about the importance of showing significance did not seem to aid Jennifer in revising her paper effectively. Here are the rest of my written comments that outline Jennifer’s inability to show the significance of her aunt Suad on who Jennifer is today:

okay [on details] for your aunt, but weak for you. That is, you have several pages about her (creating a dominant impression) but only one paragraph about you (to try to show how significant she was to who you are). Is that enough? Well, you say that you are stronger because of her (but give no examples)

that you should be happy for what you have (but give no examples)

ought to look at the positive side of things (but give no examples)

are encouraged to finish school (but give no examples about what you’re doing or planning to do so)

know to do what’s best for you (but give no examples)

Hmm. See what I mean? I guess my point is that you show your aunt and her life and what she’s done, but kind of slip a little here at the end, showing what you’re doing with what you learned from her.
Immediately following Jennifer's conference, I spoke with Julie Barnett; the conferences were very similar. However, while in her final paper Julie did add to her original examples of what her brother meant to her, the only reference to why her brother had been significant to who Julie was today came in a brief paragraph at the end of her text:

I have now learned from what we went through that holding a grudge against someone is not worth it. One example is how my best friend told my friends at home that I got together with my roommate's best friend at orientation. This made me feel extremely unhappy and betrayed by her. Instead of holding a grudge I was able to forgive her.

My written comments on Julie's final version of this paper reflected the fact (as with Jennifer) that what we talked about in conference was effective for the first part of her text but not for the last section:
Julie, this is a good effort, but it falls down at the end when you try to show significance. There's only one paragraph and it's vague and general. You were able to "forgive her" (whoever she was), but there aren't enough details here for me to really see what you mean. I really like the rest of your paper--that, I can see. Keep working hard, okay?

These two students (selected at random) wrote papers that were effective at demonstrating the writer's dominant impression of someone important to their lives, but did not deal with any changes they might have made in their own lives because of that person's influence. That is, they did not show how the subject of their paper had been significant to the person they were now.

Why not? Why, even with (very) prescriptive advice from me, were these two students unable to show the significance the assignment called for? After all, if a writer can show something like a dominant impression, he or she ought to be able to also show significance. Obviously, there could be any number of reasons why Jennifer and Julie had difficulty with the second part of this initial assignment for my class, but one reason that seems
obvious is that both students had a very truncated perception of revision. Even with my (pretty specific) advice, along with comments from their classmates and with plenty of time to revise, neither of these students did so effectively—they just did not seem to know how to go about revising their work. My argument is, of course, that without the words to conceptualize revision, students are not able to create appropriate strategies and activities so they can consciously produce content-based revision of their texts. An ongoing classroom conversation that centers on response and revision can provide those words, which allows the practice of revision to follow.

Jennifer and Julie’s initial definitions of revision were clearly abbreviated. In her early comments on what the term meant, Jennifer first listed the dictionary definition and then wrote "in my own words [revision] is to look over something, finding its mistakes." Put another way, Jennifer’s notion of revision was to "find and fix" the surface errors a text might display. Julie argued for a slightly wider and deeper view of revision, but still
contended that mechanical correctness was what mattered; she said revision was:

a long and lengthy process. It involves not only grammar and construction of sentences but also other things such as organization and developing supporting details.

In both of these examples, Jennifer and Julie did not have the words to effectively describe revision, and at the same time they were unable to accomplish much in the way of content-based modifications of their texts—even after receiving very specific prescriptive advice on what they might do. My argument is that the words create the actions, and without the words, nothing exists. Without an effective definition of revision, these two writers were ineffective revisers.

Conferences that Worked: Aiding Revision

On the other hand, following their conferences some students were able to improve not just the first part of paper one but also the second section, in which they illustrated how they had changed because of the influence of the person they wrote about. For
example, in several places in her paper Rebecca Freidenthal touched on her grandfather’s influence on the person she is today:

I believe it was then on in my life everything I started had to be finished. If it was cleaning my room before I went to bed or organizing my stuff before school the next day, it was going to be finished and done. (page 2)

It was only a few months ago that I took up going to an actual golf course to play. I remembered the lessons [from her grandfather] of what number irons to use and when. The lessons I had received gave me the confidence to play the sport of golf. (page 3)

I remember how my grandpa showed me by this that you always needs to always have the kid in you. I try to remember always to laugh at my mistakes and to have the kid in me. (page 4)

By watching my grandpa I realized I wanted to be successful in life. I began to realize that going to college was important to getting ahead ... I realized that I could be anything I wanted to be or do anything I wanted to do ... I try and mold myself after my grandpa because he holds special confidence which I observed people look up to. (page 5)

When I am nice to someone I always hope that they are nice back. One way I am generous [as was her grandfather] is to share everything I have with others. (page 6)

Perhaps Rebecca was better able to articulate the significance her grandfather had on her life than
other students were simply because she is a better writer, better able to handle a two-part assignment. Perhaps Anna Tang was a better writer, too, as she—like Rebecca—also peppered her essay with specific examples of what she had learned and how she had changed because of the person she wrote about. Briefly, Anna wrote about her boyfriend’s influence on who she was by noting that:

Tom made me open my eyes wider . . . (page 1)

While I was becoming a stronger Christian, I was also getting some insight . . . (page 2)

I think my English improved a lot [and] my confidence increased. (page 3)

I adapted to this. (page 4)

I had a bigger view of what has happened around me . . . I now think self-defense is very important for me . . . I learned a great lesson from this . . . (page 5)

The greatest lesson I learned from him . . . (page 6)

I realized I learned a valuable lesson . . . I learned many good things from Tom. (page 7)

Of the four students whose papers and conferences I have briefly outlined here, two wrote average (graded C) essays and did a generally
ineffective job of showing significance, while the other two wrote stronger papers (graded B) that included many references detailing how their lives were affected by the people they wrote about. An interesting aside: three of the four earned an A as a final grade for the class, while the other received a B. Thus, in the end they all improved, but what was different in those early conferences and in the comments I made that might account for the difference in how these students revised their texts?

As noted above, in both Jennifer's and in Julie's conferences we discussed significance and how their early versions did not really show it. Rebecca's conference was very similar, and I repeated many of the same statements I made to my other students; I told Rebecca:

Very interesting story about your grandfather. You've told me a lot about him to help picture him, how he acts, the love and the caring he has--now you've got to relate it to you... how are you different, what have you learned? You started it here, touching on how he gave you a sense of self-worth and confidence. Now if that's what you want to talk about, then you're going to want to elaborate on that through the use of examples.
Rebecca followed through by asking very specific questions on how she might use my advice, always focusing on showing significance.

Perhaps the most important question, since I am maintaining that talk about talk and especially how I enlarged Rosenblatt's ideas facilitates conceptions of revision that in turn aid revision practices, is what did these latter two students have to say about revision? Rebecca Freidenthal's first definition of revision was pretty simplistic:

In the dictionary 'revision' is defined as 1. the act or work of revising. 2. a process of revising. I personally define 'revision' as changing or working on a paper to improve it.

She described her own process of revision as one that centered on form:

To make papers better I start by making sure it is grammatically correct. I read over my papers several times and look for different things each time. For example, I look over commas, then I look for spelling, etc. Another thing I do is read my papers backwards.
But Rebecca also concentrated on the connections between the various parts of her paper, noting that she tries to make all the sections "fit together." She goes on to mention her rewriting activities by noting that, by "revising I take a paper and improve it every time I rewrite it." Rebecca's conception of what revision is not wonderful, but she at least is looking in the right direction.

The other student noted above who did well on this first assignment, Anna Tang, initially wrote that "Revision in my definition is to correct again and again until you think it is perfect." While Anna appeared to think of revision as a process ("to correct again and again"), she still had the "find-and-fix" notion that there is one correct way of composing a paper—to make it "perfect."

Anna goes on to suggest that a significant change in content is vital for real revision. In the learning log she completed after paper one had been turned in, Anna connects correctness with changes in content and writes that "Revision is when I do something over and over again (in writing a paper) until I think it is perfect. I can add or delete
anything that does not seem appropriate in my paper."

It is important to note that Anna's first paper was one of the better ones (as noted above), a paper composed while her definition of revision was expanding and becoming more complicated: She at least is focusing on content ("add or delete anything that does not seem appropriate in my paper"). Anna also added information about how she revised by considering her readers and in giving herself time to let her text rest; she revises by taking

> everybody's comments plus my own corrections and comments and changing it to make the paper better. I do this several times, about every other day, in order for me to have a better view of minor and major mistakes.

While Anna's perception of revision still has an air of surface correctness ("minor and major mistakes"), her comments indicate that she also works for real change in her work over a period of time. (I outline more of Anna's specific revision process in the following chapter.)

One difference--at least as I see it now--is that both Rebecca and Anna had a broader conception
of revision than Jennifer and Julie did. Rebecca also talked about the papers from our class that she had read, and she also made very reflective comments about her classmates' writing. Anna Tang did much the same in terms of reflectivity about her own writing, starting with her worksheet (Anna was one of about half my students who brought a filled-in worksheet to his or her conference). Anna was also able to state her main point in a clear single sentence: "The main point in my story is not to be easily conned by a man that tries to manipulate you in any way." She explained how she had shown what she meant: "In the last paragraph of my paper, I stated the greatest lesson I learned from Tom because of his lies, etc." Anna added: "I stated how much more careful I am now, what Tom has done to open my eyes" and "how even when Tom lied to me and hurt me so much, he made me learn such a great lesson in my life."

Anna also was able to step back and explain what she saw as the most effective section of her text: "The best part of my paper that I think is the example I give about the word I learned from Tom,
'fard,' because it was a funny part." She also could indicate the weakest section as well as why she sees it as such: "The weakest part is where I try to differentiate the American household and the Chinese household. Since I live in America, all the examples I can get from [a] Chinese household is from my mom's mouth."

At least for some of my students, then, making an effort to step back and reflect on an in-progress paper appeared to make a difference in the quality of the student's final paper. Later, I will try to complicate my own response by asking, how did these students see revision and how was it related to their own reflectiveness? For that--effective revision--is after all what I was trying to generate.

Moving to Unit Two

For the second section of the course, I added more in-class conversations on reader-response theory (detailed in chapter four), discussions on commenting, and as with unit one, I changed several of the learning log assignments. In learning log #7, which was due as the second class paper was being
started, I asked my students to again define revision:

Write about what "revision" means to you. You just finished revising paper # 1; how did you go about it? What value were the comments you received from your classmates? From the instructor? How would you improve the peer review process (where other students read and comment on your papers)? How can I make my comments better for you?

My purpose here was to try to get my students to again step back from their writing in order to reflect on their own revision processes, as well as to consider how effectively we both--teacher and students--had gone about responding to their writing. I hoped to get some reactions on what aided revision (and what did not) as well as perhaps some specific advice on what we might do differently for paper two. As I would soon discover, what we had been doing in class was beginning to significantly change my students’ views about what revision was and how it was supposed to work. That is (as I outlined above), most students arrived in my class with a narrow view of revision--as editing to make their papers perfectly correct. After going through the peer-
review process, conferences, several revisions of paper one, and a great deal of talk about talk, many of my students had a much more complex view of revision and how to go about it. More importantly, many modified their own revision practices and thus also created better texts.

As in unit one, in the second part of our semester I asked for another learning log (modified for this research project) to be written as my students brought the first version of paper two into class for peer review. Learning log #11 asked students to respond to the commenting we had done so far. I particularly like the last part of this assignment, as it asked my students to move from their position as writer to my location as instructor/reader, and then to read their work and respond to it from my perspective:

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comment on the commenting we've done so far this semester--what techniques have worked for you? Which ones have not? If you could decide how I would comment on your papers, what would you tell me?
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Here, a bit more than halfway through the semester and after writing specifically on response and commenting at least four times, my students began to talk about commenting and response in what seems to me a very useful manner, with many indicating that our conversations were a key part of the writing process. Here are several instances of what my students reported:

The techniques that have helped me is when someone writes down a comment on the side of the paper and explains what needs to be fixed and does not just underline it or circles it—that does not help me very much. I like to read about what the problem is—that helps me. What I would tell you is that little small details that are written out are what helps me the most and not just little comments like one or two word comments. . . . I like how you highlight where the problem is—that helps me locate the problem and makes it easier for me to find the problem and correct it. (John Bianes)

I have never had commenting before like I have in this class. The only comments I ever received in high school were ones that had to do with mechanical errors. . . . The comments I receive now practically force me to completely rewrite my paper entirely and this time I have a chance to because we have so many drafts. (Ann Alexander)

If I could decide how you should comment on my papers, I would tell you to do the same thing. The highlighting is great but I need more descriptive comments. I really understand how I could improve my paper. For example, give me a
little hint on how I could change it to improve it. (Anna Tang)

After we got our first paper back with comments that were typed and stapled to the back of our papers, I did have a little trouble understanding parts. Some statements seemed fragmented and I didn’t see what point you were trying to make. But then I had a post-paper conference with you and we talked about [the] issues [that you had] highlighted and it became quite clear. (Jason Thompson)

I think that when you sentence outlined my paper in our conference it was most effective. I could then see how to organize my paper so it would seem more convincing to the reader. For the paper we’re working on now, I tried to sentence outline my first draft, but found it is difficult to do so. If I were to decide how you would comment on my papers I would first want you to tell me what needs the most work. Then comment or make suggestions on how I should go about it to improve my paper. Also, I would like personal suggestions from what you might do with my paper. I like the fact that you are very positive about my writing. It helps motivate me to write without feeling hopeless. With your positive attitude it helps me have a positive outlook on writing in the future. (Kathy Lounsbury)

It is important to note that while their focus is often on correctness in some form, my students’ talk about talk is getting longer and more complicated as they extend their thinking. My suggestion to other instructors of composition is that they ask their students to write about the
feedback they are receiving on their writing, and to respond to such comments. If instructors elicit this information, they will find their students will become more reflective in how they conceptualize their writing, and their writing processes will in turn become more complex and effective.

Later-Semester Changes

As with the earlier paper assignment, I also asked for another learning log just as my students were right in the middle of their final revisions of their second paper. As before, I hoped my students would move away from their writing and consider what they were doing with the feedback they had received. I hoped in this next learning log they would outline specific passages from their texts and indicate how each had been changed because of a comment they had received on their work.

I modified learning log #12 to focus on response and commenting by asking my students to:
Respond to the comments you received on paper #2--both the comments from your classmates and the comments I made.

Discuss how you reacted to and used (or ignored) specific comments people gave you as you revised your paper. That is, detail specific comments that people made and tell what you did with those comments--how you incorporated what people had to say about your paper, as you worked to revise it. Give examples both of the comments you received and how you changed your text to reflect how you reacted to and thought about the remarks on your text.

You received comments in class on this paper on Monday 10/25 from your classmates Wednesday 10/27 from your classmates in conference and on your paper from me

My intention here was to elicit specific instances of changes made in student texts, but by this time of the semester my focus on talk about talk and my expanded conversational approach was perhaps getting annoying; one student noted that "There are too many learning logs on comments!" (Rodriguez).

Other students, sometimes without giving the specific details I had hoped for, did indicate a growing awareness of a reader; Lara Rosenaur wrote:
Several students as well as Mr. Glau told me I needed to elaborate more on "rush." I assumed that everyone knew what "rush" was and what the process of "rush" consisted of. I now realize that one must never assume a person knows all the facts you want them to know prior to reading your paper.

Others were also specific and detailed:

I used [Glau’s] comments especially and I was able to extend my paper to describe more, to improve my intro[duction], my conclusion, and my sentence structure. The body of my essay contained the most comments. I used them to change around some sentences and to use more descriptive words. Then I went to my conclusion. Most of the comments there I ignored. I thought that I did not need to change anything at all in the conclusion. Then when it came time to revise our papers for a third time, I got one comment that widened my eyes. I was commented to extend my conclusion a little more to describe a few things that I had left out. I think that was the most helpful comment that I have received. I extended my conclusion and now I am more happy with it. I hope we can keep doing these commenting procedures for our last and final paper due next month. The conferences are a big help and does the job. They really make me look at my paper and say that I can improve it that much more. (Maercovich)

Kathy Lounsbury also went into some detail about my comments and how she dealt with them:

You told me that I needed to organize my paragraphs. You thought it would make more sense to have the impression of other people
toward the beginning of the paper. Then go into my argument against the stereotype. In addition, you told me that I need to add "for instances" or giving examples proving my points stated. Also to elaborate more on some of the tennis tactics to help the reader who does not know anything about tennis to understand it. Furthermore, I needed to be more specific about "people," "some," "friends." Trying not a generalize them. Then on the third version of the paper, I rearranged and organized my paragraphs. Also I took [your] advice of adding more "for instances" and "for examples."

Several students reflected a more metacognitive awareness of how they were writing, including some thoughts on their own reactions and response to my comments. For instance, Leo Maercovich wrote, "When I revised my paper and was considering all the comments that I got, I made sure I agreed with the comments, so I can be happy with what I am writing." Greg Smith responded to my remarks in this way: "In my conference you asked for more quotes from people around the basketball courts and in the game. However, I decided to ignore those comments for a couple of reasons." Greg went on to explain why he did not use my ideas; my point is not that he disagreed with my suggestions but that he retained control of his own writing by doing so.
So now, about two-thirds of our way through the semester, it seems to me that my students generally:

arrived with an abbreviated picture of what revision was as well as how to do it;
originally centered what revision they did on form rather than on content;
came in seeing themselves as weak writers with lots of problems in their writing; and
were growing in reflectivity about how they composed, as well as becoming more complex in their thinking on how revision worked and how they might go about it.

The final unit of my English 100 class asked students to write an argumentative essay, drawing evidence to prove their case from their own educational experiences. During this last unit, I insisted on at least three versions of paper three, and requested specific advice on response and commenting from my students in the form of a letter to their classmates. I then read many of their "comments about commenting" to my classes. Students wrote this learning log as they were getting started on their third class paper; my intention was to help them keep thinking about how we could all respond and comment more effectively, what we could say that would really aid revision, even as they were starting
to write their final class paper. Learning log #14, modified for this semester's research, asked students to:

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Write a letter to your classmates about (1) their responses to your papers, and (2) your responses to their papers. For (1), discuss what kinds/styles/types of responses have helped you the most on your papers this semester. How would you like your classmates to comment on your papers in the future? What "advice" would you give them as to how they can improve their commenting? For (2), discuss how you've tried to respond to their papers, and how you plan to do so on paper #3.
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I hoped for a lot of specificity from this assignment; as I will outline in the next chapter, I received some interesting notes of complaint about how some students thought their peers needed to work harder in the commenting they did. I also hoped this learning log would get my students thinking about how they planned to revise their final class paper, just as they were beginning to write it. That is, as with paper two, I wanted them to already be considering revision even as they worked to create their first version of paper three.

I read to each class from log #14, in order to give my students a sense of what their classmates were saying about the peer review process. I wanted to provide feedback to
the class on their commenting, just as I received feedback from my students on the commenting I did on their work. Even though this assignment specifically asked students to focus on the comments they had received from their classmates, we as instructors can learn from their responses about what worked for them and what did not in terms of our own responses. (If I could do this research again, I would ask students in this learning log to relate more directly to my comments.) One student reported:

The comments that helped out greatly were comments about sentence structure and grammar errors. I don’t feel it’s very useful when you write "I don’t understand" at the end of my paper. You don’t understand what? Also comments like "needs more examples" for a certain topic or statement [do not help] . . . I like when people give me feedback or comments on my sentence structure if it doesn’t make sense or give me ideas about their experience or how I could elaborate on my topic. (Anonymous)

Another student gave good advice when she noted:

The more detailed the description on how I can change my paper the more it helps me. I like the actual comments you have by the paragraph that needs to be revised. . . . Good, detailed comments help the most. (Croushore)
And Joe Allen indicated that "The most helpful comments were the ones having to do with the rearrangement of ideas and paragraphs." When I read these and other comments to the class (see chapter six for more), along with suggestions on how we could all be better responders, there was not much discussion—perhaps students felt their classmates were too blunt with their responses about the commenting they were doing.

Finally, I modified learning log #15 to request very specific comments from my students about their peers’ papers. I asked students to bring in five copies of their second version of paper three. One copy was peer reviewed in class, with students put into groups where they would read and discuss each others’ texts. I took another copy of each paper to read and comment on—we would use that to start their final conference. The final three copies were randomly distributed to others in the class, who would be asked to comment on them, based on the instructions for learning log #15.³

**What My New Model Means**

In my effort to engender a more metacognitive and therefore more effective conception of the commenting process, over the semester I changed seven of the 15
learning-log exercises so those assignments would concentrate on response and commenting. I hoped these written responses would lead to better classroom discussions about why we comment at all and how we might do so more effectively. At the same time, I added talk about talk to our classroom conversations to the extent that about 60 percent of the time we either discussed or worked with response to and commenting about student texts and how such response might aid revision.

I copied each of the learning log assignments that dealt with commenting and revision, as they would provide me with a written record of what students had to say during the semester. Both the isolated remarks (comments from each log taken individually) and a synchronic comparison (what students wrote about commenting early in the semester compared to what they wrote in the middle compared to what they wrote toward the end) might also prove useful, and I deploy both lenses in the following chapters. Would students change their perceptions about commenting? Revision? How I ought to comment on their texts? How peers ought to comment? With what kinds of advice helped them to revise?
I also copied my students' final papers, as well as some of their in-progress texts to see if the comments I made (and remarks made by in-class peer-reviewers) were affecting either how the texts were revised or the final product of each major assignment.

I also recorded each class during the semester, using two tape recorders—one located on the desk in the front of the room, and another on a student's desk in the center of the room (see classroom diagrams above). Each day I wrote a description of what happened in class that day, especially as it related to commenting and response.

I also tape recorded each individual conference during the semester. I talked individually with every student about each of his or her papers, after those texts had been peer reviewed and before a final version was turned in for a grade. I originally did not expect that conferences would be a major part of this project, but I quickly learned that the oral dialogue is where much of the talk about talk really takes place.

In the end, with my 44 English 100 students, I ended up with roughly:
460 pages of learning logs. I estimated an average of 1.5 pages each;

700 pages of final papers. I estimated papers would be an average of 5 pages each, plus associated "versions" of these papers;

70 hours of in-class recordings. I estimated that we would spend 35 of the 45 class periods doing things I would want to record. I would not record classes when students would do in-class writings, or when we watched a video, of course. These tape recordings, since I used two recorders, would actually come to about 140 hours; and

about 45 hours of recorded conferences. At 15 minutes each, 44 students require about 11 hours of conference time. As noted above, about half asked for 30-minute conferences for papers two and three, so those required about 17 hours each of conference time per paper: 11+17+17=45 total hours.
Here is a picture of when we worked with "response and commenting":

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= response/commenting activity or assignment, fall 1993 semester English 100, sections 22 and 40
In the last chapter, I outlined the activities of my two English 100 classes as we wrote our way through the fall 1993 semester, specifically in terms of the new assignments I asked them to complete, along with a bit of my elaboration of Rosenblatt’s transactional ideas and some of their reactions to those tasks. I want now to reproduce in some detail my students’ voices--what they had to say about commenting and response and especially revision, for while we talked about ways of responding as well as ways to comment, my goal was always to improve how my students went about revising their papers. In the following chapter, I will outline what my students did in terms of their changing revision practices, as here I focus on their changed perceptions of what
revision is and how they might go about it. My argument is that we can engender modifications in how our students see revision and also enable changes in their revision practices by bringing Louise Rosenblatt's transactional concepts into our classroom conversations. I maintain that through a pedagogy that focuses on talk about talk we not only affect in a positive way the words our students use when they define revision, we also aid them in learning how to perform content-based revision of their texts.

Rather than simply taking a linear look at my students' thoughts (what they said first, then later, then even later) I want to first combine their reflections and ideas and suggestions into a topical format and then see if their reactions to and thoughts about response and commenting were themselves revised over the semester. I think through such a lens we might best gain insight as to what my students believe are the most effective kinds of response and commenting we can provide, the kinds of things we might say and do to engender real revision. Therefore, I first want to touch on a few
more of my students' initial perceptions about themselves as writers and especially how they perceived revision, and then move to their modified concepts of revision strategies.

Second, I will outline what my students said about the peer review process, for even though such remarks are addressed to commenting done by their classmates, those reactions to what their fellow students had to say also can inform instructors on how we might best respond to and comment on our students' writing. Student observations directed toward peer reviewers will often provide more insight about how we might comment than responses directed to us (perhaps students are more honest with each other than when they discuss their instructor's comments).

Third, I will touch on what my students reported about our one-to-one conferences and how those discussions entered into our conversations on revision.

Fourth, I want to outline how my students seemed to grow over the semester in self-reflectivity about their writing, how they were better able to step back from their own work and consider their composing
processes. These remarks, I hope, will illustrate my students' own growing metacognitive awareness of the writing/revising strategies that they themselves utilize, modifications that occurred within my new framework that centers on talk about talk.

In chapter seven I will elaborate on the specific advice about commenting my students provided throughout the fall semester of 1993. I also especially will draw on what my students did in terms of their new notions about revision: How they used the responses they got, how they expect to employ such advice in the future, and how their reflections on such commentary inform their own revision activities. These two areas—students' purposeful advice to us about our own response and commenting along with what student writers do with our suggestions—are the most rhetorical sites of my own investigation.

**Original Views: Poor Writers, Lots of Dreams**

As I briefly outlined in chapter four, many of my students saw themselves as weak writers (their placement into English 100 initially confirmed such a
view), who tended to focus only on the mechanics and surface form of their texts when they revised. Before going into more detail about my students’ perceptions about revision and response, I want to take a moment to touch on a few more of my students’ beliefs of themselves as writers and their hopes for the class, as I continue to paint a picture of who these people are.

Even though many of my students expressed concern with their ability to deal with the mechanical aspects of their texts, few of my students saw themselves as good at doing so. Jennifer Croushore in her first class writing noted that "I have never had a strong English teacher when it came to grammar... This is my main weakness," while another student mentioned "my greatest area of weakness is in punctuation and poor mechanics" (Gachiri). Liz Esquida worried "about spelling and punctuation mistakes," and Paul Marceau mirrored Liz’s concern: "I hope my spelling and punctuation get better." Another student reported that "Grammar and run-on, fragmented sentences has always been a problem of mine," while a classmate, repeating what
some of her fellow students indicated in their own writing, felt "I don't have a very good vocabulary" (Anonymous). And as many first-year college students do (along with their instructors, for that matter), my students also expressed concern about their ability to just write.¹ My students' comments:

I have sat in my cold, dark room for hours thinking what should I write about? It's like a brain shut-off and my brain is trying to say go play Nintendo, take a walk, smoke a cigarette, do something easy. . . . I feel like a car needing an oil change (mine does). My writing has always been a sort of free-for-all and it is always informal. (Anonymous)

I don't like to write. I am a procrastinator. I am not a good speller. I tend to ramble on in my thoughts when I write. (Paul Marceau)

My thoughts and ideas don't seem to make sense. I may have a good point but I find it hard to put it on paper. (Eric Berrang)

My main problem . . . is writing ideas down. I will start writing and then another idea will come to mind. I quickly drop the old idea and go straight to the next one. Like the Student's Guide said, I have poor organization of ideas. (Bill McKillop)

And what did this group of students hope to gain from our English 100 classes? Julie Barnett wished "to become a much better writer and to be able to
organize an essay with no problem. One of my goals is to be able to just sit down and write an essay on just about any topic." Frank Maizner noted that he "can not organize my thoughts under pressure. This is what I want to practice, writing under pressure." Lara Rossenaur hoped she could learn to "write many pages on a topic without repeating myself." Anna Tang noted that "Whenever I look back at what I wrote, I wish I could just find some words to make my paper seem more interesting or detailed," while Ann Alexander hoped to "really improve my structure and strategies, and to increase my knowledge of writing. . . . [to] just be able to write what I know is the right thing."

To summarize: my students, in their initial comments on how they perceived themselves as writers, appeared to be the normal class mixture. They had many perceived weaknesses and worries along with some writing strengths and a view that there is some correct way to write no matter what the circumstances; my task would be to somehow incorporate what my students saw as their strengths into what we did in class and at the same time to
come to terms in some way with their (multiple) perceived writing problems. In terms of pedagogical advice, it seems vital to me to elicit information on students' perceptions of themselves as writers, and to do so early each semester.²

Revision as Editing

Following that brief sketch of where my students started from, I want now to move to the heart of response and commenting: Revision. Many of my students initially reported that they generally did little when it came to revision, as they saw the process as editing. One indicated she "usually just[s] make minor changes and turn[s] in a paper that is very much similar to my original paper" (Heather Unfug). Or students simply followed their instructor's lead; as Joe Gachiri put it, "The way I revised my papers in the past was just to jot down every mistake or correction the teacher had marked on my paper and not to repeat the same mistakes again."

For the most part, my students came to my classes with (as research suggests) a very form-oriented view of revision.³ Here are several of my
students’ early-semester views on revision; note the common theme of correctness:

Revision is the process of looking over your finished work and making corrections where they are needed. (Leo Maercovich)

Revision is when you read over what you have done and pick out things you see are wrong. And the correct punctuation and also to see if it makes sense. (Pete Herrera)

In my high school experience of revising, I have probably covered every grammatical error possible. (Anonymous)

In the past the way I revised papers was to write them and then read it over to see if there was anything that needed to be changed, looked for grammatical errors and spelling errors. (Anonymous)

In the past I have revised papers by making corrections on what I knew was wrong and what people advised changing. (Anonymous)

In the past I haven’t gotten any farther than the first version and "revised" the mechanical errors. After that I would turn the paper in and get low grades. (Tamara Press)

Such correctness-focused comments remind us of how Mina Shaughnessy says so many students picture their own writing—a perception many of my students appeared to share as we began our class—as "a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it
goes all the writer doesn't know . . . " (7). My students seemed to think if they could only eliminate the mistakes in their work, their writing would be perfect.

Some of my students also indicated they had never been told much about revision; Kathy Lounsbury complained:

To be honest, I was never really taught to revise a paper. All I remember is being told to just read it over and fix any sentence that did not make sense. To me I think that it's insane to expect someone to revise or look over their paper and expect they'll know what needs to be done without teaching.

Or as Ann Alexander reported, "I have not had much experience with revision. The only revision I have gotten from teachers is after I have already turned in the paper which doesn't do much good because there is no rewriting the paper." In Vivian Rodriguez's view, unless they were forced to revise, students simply did little to change of their past writing assignments: "In the past I have written one copy of a paper, unless I had to turn in both rough and final draft. Isn't that terrible?"
As the Semester Progressed, Changing Views about Revision

A few students began with and maintained a truncated view of revision, and through the semester did little in the way of real modifications of their texts. Jennifer Wells, who wrote an ineffective first paper, was one student who brought an abbreviated meaning of revision to our class. In her early learning log in which she defined revision, Jennifer first listed the dictionary definition and then wrote "in my own words [revision] is to look over something, finding its mistakes." Julie Barnett, the other student I outlined earlier who wrote an ineffective first paper, appeared to feel that revision was somewhat more complex, but still centered on form. Julie suggested revision was "a long and lengthy process [that] involves not only grammar and construction of sentences but also other things such as organization and developing supporting detail." Other than Julie's note about "supporting detail," one similarity of these two students was that both had a somewhat truncated picture of revision, a perspective that focused strictly on form.
Later in the semester, Jennifer Wells appeared to retain her original simplistic conceptions about revision (Julie's ideas did change; see chapter seven). Jennifer, as she wrote a learning log late in the semester, did not repeat the dictionary definition she originally used, but only wrote that "Revision means to me, to look over something and change what is necessary to change, in order to then look upon the final product, finding it satisfactory." Other students mirrored her perceptions:

Revision is the process of proof reading your paper, having someone else look it over, and then correcting and changing what needs to be worked on. (Ben Schmitt)

I feel that revision is perfecting a paper. It is taking the time to go over things and make them the best that they can possibly be. (Dana Wirth)

Revision means to change or modify, make better. (Anonymous)

Revision is when you look over something, figure out their faults and change them for the better. (Tamara Press)

My point here is that these (randomly selected) student views of revision centered almost completely
on editing. Students whose definitions of revision were not modified and remained form-oriented over the semester seemed unable to complicate their own revision practices, as such strategies continued to center on form and their papers, in terms of content, exhibited little change.

Even though many of my students initially said the revision they did concentrated on mechanics with the notion that if they could only "find and fix" their mistakes their writing would be wonderful, as the semester went along and as we talked about response and commenting and revision, some students were able to change these early views from a concentration on mechanical correctness to one of an ongoing process of real revision. I am arguing that our continual talk about talk first aided my students to accept a new perception of revision and then helped them modify their own revision strategies (for more on the latter, see chapter seven).

I can demonstrate this useful transformation in student viewpoints by juxtaposing their definitions of revision outlined in the learning logs written as paper one was in-process with the definition of
revision my students outlined after their first papers were completed. While I cannot claim our classroom discussions about reading theory or Louise Rosenblatt’s concepts caused such a shift in perception (students may have been equally influenced by the peer review they went through, or by our conferences, or because I insisted on several drafts of each of their papers, and so on), the differences in student definitions of revision are worth noting in detail. The fact is that for whatever reason, many students complicated and revised in major ways what they thought of revision and how they went about modifying their own work as their definitions of revision changed. Those students who retained an early notion of revision as "finding and fixing mistakes" never appeared to do real content-based revision.

One striking piece of data about my students’ early ideas on revision indicates that those students with an abbreviated, editing-based concept of what revision was did worse in their early grades than those students whose definition of revision was a little wider. Grades are, of course, subjective, so
I present these data only as suggestive that better revisers get better grades for their papers (an obviously intuitive notion).

I was able to identify (from what they wrote on their early learning logs) 27 students who were very specific in what they thought revision meant.

Those who had a brief, truncated view of the revision process appeared to write less effective papers; their grades for the first paper were:

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</table>

All of the students, in other words, who saw revision as a cleaning-up, editing process, ended up with Cs on their first formal writing assignment.

On the other hand, students who had a broader view of what revision meant seemed to be able to deploy more effective revision practices, and they ended up with better papers, with higher grades:
grades | C- | C | C+ | B- | B | B+
# receiving | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 4

Of these 13 students, more than half were in the B range of grades. It is important to note that these findings are only suggestive, of course, but point to a possible correlation between conceptions and ideas about revision and revision practices.

Timing Their Shift in Perception

The initial shift that enabled some of my students to decenter from their own work seemed to come after they had considered and written about their personal writing practices several times. This, of course, suggests that we ought to be assigning such reflective kinds of writing tasks.

For many of my students, I expect mine was the first class in which they were asked to revise their work several times and as they did so, to stand back and think and write about how they had gone about modifying their writing. As Frank Maizner put it, "This paper that I am writing in English 100 now is the first one where I have had the chance to revise
it 3 times." Scott Nordstrom said much the same thing, noting:

In the past the only revision work I ever did was to correct grammatical errors and maybe change some wording. With this paper I have tried to reconstruct sections of my paper with the same ideas but more detail and examples.

Scott went on to reflect on moving from what Rosenblatt calls the "Authorial I" position to the "Authorial II" position: "The hard part was taking a step 'back' from my paper and act as though it was someone else's paper," Scott reported.

As my students began to consider and articulate both in writing and in class discussions their thoughts on their own composing and revision strategies and activities, the concept of a reader started to appear in what they had to say. As Greg Smith put it, "I have revised papers by reading them over again from a reader's, not author's, viewpoint." Pedagogically, such information suggests that we ought to be discussing audience in order to help foster a real understanding of who is reading any text (and also talking about Rosenblatt's "Authorial
I" and "Authorial II" positions). Greg reports that he revised paper one "by taking advice from my classmates, my roommate, and my teacher. After I got comments from these people, I would rewrite my paper to change what was confusing or unclear to the readers." Greg went on to admit that "Sometimes when I write about personal incidents, I forget that the readers may not know who I am talking about or how I felt toward something. This is where the comments helped to clear things up in my paper." Anna Tang was just as direct: "If a classmate does not understand something in my paper, then I would try to explain and give more details." And as Jason Thompson explained:

I did realize one particular thing and that was at times I wrote to where only I understand and others don't. . . . I need to meet satisfaction between myself and the reader.

Another student echoed Jason's remarks as he considered how his readers asked him to be more specific about some of the terms he used in his paper:
I described gay people as a "race" or people as "normal." It's made me realize that people have various meanings for these words that are so broad. . . . I focused upon the things you and the students said needed more explanation or my own/other's thoughts. I explained more about how/why people believe it is to bad to share an "intimate kiss in public." In other areas I reworded some sentences and moved them to other areas in a paragraph to make them sound and follow the order of descent better. (Anonymous)

The important thing to note is that this student writer is aware of a number of areas of his writing process that he attended to as he revised his work, parts of his text that he could envision someone reading but not understanding what he meant. He mentions that he (1) sees how readers might interpret the words he used differently than he intended (he does not say how he changed them, however); (2) worked to correct surface features; (3) added to his text so his readers would understand it more clearly; (4) increased his explanations about part of his message; and (5) modified the structure of his text.

What this student did is not as important as the fact that he made changes in his writing based on what his readers told him about the text and was equally able to reflect on and articulate the
adjustments he made to his work. Such comments indicate an awareness of a reader's presence along with an understanding of specific revision activities that address that reader's concerns.

To summarize: It seems clear that while many of my students came to their first English 100 class with a truncated perception of revision as editing for surface form, as the semester went on, many students were able to expand their conception and practice of revision. Student definitions of revision written late in the semester were invariably more complicated and centered on content rather than form; those students whose definitions changed also modified their revision activities. Whether such a change in perception was engendered by our classroom discussions about response and commenting is, of course, problematic—we also did many other activities that could have contributed to my students' shifting views on revision. Perhaps I will be able to make stronger cause-and-effect generalizations after I expand student comments on revision by taking a more linear view of their
A Wider Picture of Revision

I want now to see if there is any connection between my students' definitions of revision early in the semester before they started writing paper one (9/22/93), their ideas about revision as they were in the process of writing their first paper (10/1/93), and what they did to revise an altogether different paper a month later (11/5/93).

As did many of my students, Ann Alexander began our class with a definition of revision that was vague and general:

When I hear revision I think of having a paper and making it better in whatever way. . . . The most I have ever done is grammatical errors and little stuff like that.

By the time she was in the middle of writing the first paper for the class, Ann's ideas about revision had changed slightly but still were very nonspecific. That is, she was unable (or simply did not) identify specific areas in her paper she might revise:
I basically paid more attention towards making my points a little bit clearer which I thought was giving details and examples. My thought about details was just to write a little something more about my point to make it, what seemed to me to be much clearer.

Later in the semester, Ann’s ideas about revision had not become complicated--she was allowing those who responded to her text to control it completely: She told me that "I just did exactly what they said. And through the verbal commenting I would see what they meant by those comments."

Ann’s grades over the course of the class averaged in the "C" range; at the same time, her concept of revision remained pretty static.

Tamara Press’s final grade ended up the same--average--although she demonstrated some thought and reflectivity when it came to how she revised her work. She indicated, early in the semester, that

For paper #1 I’m going to try and add a lot of sentences to make my paper more complete and accurate. With the help of the class’s opinions I now know what to look for and write about.
While this comment does consider her outside readers, it still lacks *specifics* about exactly how she might revise her text. Tamara's second definition of revision was equally vague and ambiguous; while she obviously had good intentions, she did not state precisely *what* she planned to do:

Between suggestions from both my classmates and my instructor, I was able to see my faults and strengths. Even though I had some conflicting suggestions, I believe I made some good choices in what, and what not, to put in my essay.

Finally, Tamara's final comments about her conception of revision appeared to consider what her readers had to say about her writing as well as my comments; as with her earlier work, though, Tamara is still vague as to exactly what she will do with the suggestions she received:

When revising my essay I considered all the comments and understood the reasons for them. In the first revision I took all of the comments and added and deleted as necessary. Then when I went to you I also took all your comments and also added those. Then the very last revision I found most of the comments not useful... It seemed after our conference I had all the information I needed and the essay is exactly how I wanted my subculture portrayed.
None of my remarks here should in any way seem to denigrate how these students worked to revise their texts. I am convinced they tried to improve their writing. What is missing, to my mind, are the specific details that might indicate where such changes in their texts were made. In terms of my argument, these students (selected at random) were unable to change their views about revision (or at least they could not articulate a more complicated perspective of revision), and at the same time were also unable to modify their revision practices.

Other students were able to step back from their texts and explain in more specific detail how they went about revising their work. For example, Leo Maercovich’s grade for his papers and for the course reflected a higher level of achievement than the students outlined above; possibly that is because Leo appeared to have more of a metacognitive awareness of his revising process. For instance, while his early-semester comments about revision are pretty general, Leo does focus on his introduction:
The way I am planning to revise paper #1 is to take advice from my classmates on what I need to improve in my essay. I have gotten many different comments which I have used to revise my paper. At first, I was missing an introduction. At least three of my classmates wrote on my paper that I needed to add an intro.

And consider how Leo at least touches on his revision efforts as he was in the process of writing his first class paper:

To me revision means to look over something to make it the best it can be. . . . When I revised paper #1 I took the advice my classmates gave me to improve my essay. First I added an introduction . . . Then I revised the body of the essay to get rid of unnecessary sentences and words. Then I combined some sentences together so I wouldn't have short sentences.

Leo's ability to stand back from his text and consider what he was doing with it is not greatly detailed, but at least he is on the right track and working with content changes instead of just surface problems. At the same time, Leo's final comments about how he revised are not quite wonderful but still demonstrate an awareness of real modifications to his work:
First, I changed some things in my introductory paragraph. I changed words around and took and added some more words to fit the sentence better. Some words were spelled wrong so I fixed them also. I took out a sentence that was not necessary and that did not make sense.

Another student also wrote at a more effective level (and received better grades for her work) while at the same time she exhibited and articulated a wider view of her own revision process. She suggested:

I plan to revise my paper by looking at my fellow classmates' comments and after I do, I shall look to see where their comments are and I shall fix my errors and make them right. Or I shall make more sense of my paper or maybe give more supporting details to the paper.
(Anonymous)

At least early in the semester, this student was considering adding or changing the content of her work. Note how she talks to herself as she works on paper one as it is in progress:

Revision to me means correcting your errors or making more sense out of a paper. Or maybe giving more details or more specific examples to an idea. To "revise" my paper was helpful. I felt that each time someone had given me a
critical comment, I would then look at my paper and say to myself, "Yeh, I guess this does need details," or "yeh, this looks like an error. Let me fix it."

As with Leo, this student is not quite there yet, but at least she is revising at a level that removes herself from her text, as she moves between Rosenblatt’s "Authorial I" and "Authorial II" positions. By the time she was working on the final version of paper two, this student was able to get very specific about how she was changing her writing:

Even if somebody did not make a comment on my paper, each revision we did I would go through my paper and maybe make a change. An example of me adding or embellishing a noun was when I received a comment to be more specific on "cover." I had written "cover varies." I then decided to write "The cover charge." . . . One time I received a comment that something didn’t sound right, so, I looked at it and decided that was right. . . . At times when I received a comment from my peers and looked over it I had decided to leave it as is.

It is important to consider that this particular student was able to negate a comment she received--to decide not to use a suggestion someone (either a
classmate or me) had made on her paper, thus maintaining control of her own writing.

Anna Tang, another student who received excellent grades for each of her papers and for the class, also started out with a so-so concept of revision that grew and expanded as she wrote through the semester. Anna’s first definition stated:

I plan to revise paper 1 . . . by what I did in the past. Take the other students’ comments and putting some thought into expanding the paper by stating more examples and shortening the paper by eliminating what is not needed.

While Anna was considering her readers, she was still ambiguous in terms of her specific plans for revision. However, Anna is very clear in her second set of comments on revision, written only a week later:

Most of the comments I received were acknowledgeable. For example, one student thought I should write more about Christ and give examples. I also listened to the comments where a student wanted me to explain more about the difference (in my eyes) about the American and Chinese household.
Here, Anna discusses specific instances of what her reviewers mentioned and what she planned to do about their comments. And as with the (anonymous) student outlined above, Anna by the end of the semester was able to articulate her consideration of and a negative response to a suggestion she had received—thus affirming her own ownership of what she wrote:

"If you put a little more input of other people into the paper. I couldn't see any problem with the paper as a whole." This comment I used. . . . "I could visualize myself in the store perfectly," "I can feel myself be in the store," are two comments I received from each person that read my paper. "You need more description in certain areas. Some sentences are hard to understand." I gave a deeper description of my store. Another gave me a comment (the latest comment) that contradicted to the comment where he said I needed more description. I am going to ignore the comment.

Note that Anna lists the specific advice she received: If you put a little more input of other people into the paper. I couldn't see any problem with the paper as a whole, and I could visualize myself in the store perfectly, and I can feel myself be in the store, and You need more description in
certain areas. Some sentences are hard to understand. Anna also indicates precisely what she did with such information.

My point here is that a more complicated and detailed notion of revision appears to lead to better actual revision—as if the words themselves can engender the actions.

Peer Comments That Aid Revision

I want now to change my lens slightly to expand my discussion by considering what my students had to say about the comments they received from their classmates. As my students told me, they needed a dialogue with their readers about their texts. Through their comments and altered revision practices, my students validate my argument that revision practices are improved through the social interaction between writer and reader as they discuss a text.

We did peer review in several ways; at the end of each, I asked my students for feedback about what was useful and what was not. And as I noted earlier, students may be more open and honest in their
response to peer reviewers than to their instructors. Since both of my classes worked on each of their papers twice and then had individual conferences with me, what my students had to say about response and commenting directly connects peer review to my own comments. That is, I asked for responses and advice about commenting, whether those remarks came from their classmates or from me, and whether they were written or oral.

The following comments came as my students' final version of paper one was turned in. Here, one-third of the way through the semester, several students indicated they (for the first time) paid attention to and changed their work based on what others said about their texts (Fish; Lounsbury; Press; Schmitt; Tang). Ann Alexander was typical:

The comments I received from my classmates were, to my surprise, very helpful. All or at least most of these comments I used in my paper and they made it much easier to revise my paper. There are some, or I should say a lot, of things you just do not see in your own paper when you are revising it.
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Others did not initially agree with their classmates but, after I had written or said something similar to what their peer reviewers noted, changed their minds: as one student explained,

As for the value of the comments I received from my classmates—I didn’t much care for until I had my conference with my teacher and he had made the same remark about a section of my paper which I felt didn’t need to be changed. After that I decided to pay more attention to what some of my classmates were writing. (Anonymous)

Others were very clear in their advice for future peer commenting:

I feel that the peer-review process would improve if we worked in groups of three. We could all sit there, each with each other’s paper and constructively criticize. I personally get a better understanding when it is explained to me, rather than writing on a piece of paper. (Anonymous)

We followed this student’s advice for future peer review sessions, and always made sure that at least once when students read each others’ papers they spoke to and asked questions of one another. I see this student’s suggestion as connected to
conferencing, where the writer and reader actively discuss the writer's text, as well as in support of my argument for the usefulness of a conversation about texts between all readers and the writer. It is interesting, after experiencing response and commenting in written form along with a discussion about the text, this student could see that the dialogic nature of a one-to-one conference expands the possibility of communicating with a person about a text (rather than the older model of writing on a text about the text). In effect, such response confirms my argument that for any kind of comments to be effective, they must be part of an ongoing conversation about the text.

Following paper two, where students in peer review sessions discussed each others' work, one student noted:

The most important difference in the revision of this paper as compared to the first is that we were allowed to talk to the person commenting. This works best for me because you can communicate with the commentator and explain your point. With the first paper many times things were misunderstood. (Anonymous).
It seems clear that this particular group of students, at least, wanted conversation in addition to any written response they received on their texts.

To summarize: when my students and I discussed my own commenting practices, there was general agreement that in addition to my written remarks we needed to talk about my responses to their texts. Likewise, when my students discussed the peer review process, they also wanted some dialogic contact with their classmates. Put another way, in both instances my student writers wanted to move away from the New Critical notion of response to a text on that text, to the approach I am advocating here, of a reader talking to the writer about the text; they felt that such conversations aided their revisions.

To continue briefly, several students agreed with Radi Horton's comment about the value of getting together (both with their teacher and their peer reviewers) to talk about their papers. Radi wrote that it is useful to work
one on one talking on a more personal level with one person, instead of just reading small comments one writes. Conferences are the best way for me to hear your comments, because we have time to discuss them. Personal works better for me. One on one.

Others, in the anonymous midterm evaluations or later learning logs, echoed Radi's sentiments:

I prefer the discussion we have about the paper. I can use and agree with or refute verbal comments much better. (Anonymous)

I like the comments you give in conference because you can explain why you said what. (Anonymous)

When you are in a conference . . . you can explain all the marks made. (Anonymous)

Since you go over them with us, the comments are fine. (Anonymous)

And of course, there are what might be called mixed compliments, such as the comment I received from Leo Maercovich, who noted the conferences "the teacher has established are a great help. They are private and it lets me get closer with my teacher, one on one." Then Leo added a remark about all the revision I asked my students to do: "The only technique that has not worked for me so much is the
amount of times we have to revise our papers. Three times is enough to get it right." Enough said.

Reflections on Revision: Stepping Back

All of what I have outlined above--our in-class discussions, student comments about peer review and my commenting practices, and their thoughts on conferencing--were intended to help foster a more reflective attitude toward response and conferencing generally and student revision specifically. It seems to me that one way to test if the whole writing-peer review-commenting-conferencing process is any help to students is to try to discover if they are learning to step back and reflect on their own work. Reflectivity is the first step of moving from writer to reader (or as Rosenblatt put it, from the "Authorial I" position to the "Authorial II" position); does the process I incorporated into my classrooms help students see their texts as an outside reader would?

Late in the semester, many of my students did appear to grow in terms of how they could step back
and reflect on their work. For instance, Frank Maizner explained:

The way I went about revising my paper helped me learn a lot about revision. For example, normally I just read what I wrote and then rewrite it without really paying attention to comments written on my paper by either the teacher or my fellow classmates. This time though I really paid attention to what people wrote and tried to follow their suggestions.

Liz Esquida said much the same when she noted:

Some of the comments that I received from my peers were very good. They understood and supported my good points of the paper, which made me feel confident about them, but also advised me of the weak points. . . . I think students should be asked to write in detail about what is weak. . . . I know we can’t be expected to be teachers but I know that the next paper I revise for a peer, I will make sure to let them know what I truly feel is not strong enough.

Liz, in other words, could see what she wanted in terms of response and commenting and intended herself to be a reader who explained in enough detail how a paper could be improved. Others made similar kinds of reflective remarks, including one student
who claimed he "learned a new concept of revision. I realized that the second version of the paper was still very unorganized" (Anonymous).

Early in the semester, Bill McKillop indicated that "Overall, this paper has taught me a lot about writing, probably because I am paying attention more than I ever did in high school classes. I am developing my ideas better and organizing them."

Later, Bill maintained:

This learning log has helped me in revising (even though it's hard to write about) because I started thinking about what can be done to my paper. I also wrote what I need to accomplish in order to achieve my goal of getting a good grade on the paper. With all these ideas in mind, maybe I should start revising right now.

Note that Bill was able to stand back from his paper and consciously list what he planned to do to improve it.

The above students do not represent isolated instances. Jackie Fish, late in the semester was able to step away from her text and reflect:
Some of the time I did not feel your response was correct and decided to leave it as it was. . . . But the good thing was that you did not correct my error and you let me correct the error for myself. It was a learning process.

Later still, Jackie noted:

When my teacher told me to put two paragraphs near each other I did. . . . At first, I described a general overview on what the girls or guys might wear. The revision copy had specific names and what I wore.

Jackie was able to move away from her work and think about and articulate what she had done as she revised her text.

Collectively, such comments begin to illustrate a growing reflectivity about writing and revision. My argument is that such growth is aided by continual talk about talk to student writers about their texts. Brook Sims provides another example:
You also pointed out to me a few areas [which were] unclear and out of place and so I either rewrote them or I just deleted them altogether. I also had a few areas where I didn’t make my subjects clear, when I was describing them. So I went back and made them clear by either putting their exact name or freewriting the rest of the sentence so it was clear who was the subject.

As does Eric Berrang:

You Mr. G. gave me some good ideas to add to my paper. As I read the final version I could see a great deal of difference from my first version. . . . You gave me examples, like instances "what do you mean--describe it." So while I rewrote my paper I gave much more detail in certain parts where I thought someone wouldn’t understand what I was saying. I also give some examples to prove what I was saying.

And Jennifer Wells adds her voice to the chorus; note how she (late in the semester) is able to consider and explain several content-area changes she made in her text (I also want to note how lengthy and detailed some of these student comments are becoming):

You said that I had too many commas, which I did, so I used your pause method and it really helped me out a lot. Now that we’ve hit [on] the good commenting, believe it or not I did
receive some negative comments as well. The majority of these comments I received from you, but they helped me out tremendously. You mentioned that many of the examples I gave were too general and that I needed to be more specific to who was saying what. You also recommended that I give more specific examples on things like the [gym exercise] bar and say describing the width, and describing some of the many dance moves that I made. You also stressed that I begin my paper with my ending argument, and I did. I also followed your advice on giving more specific examples by changing my final draft completely.

These last few comments came from learning log #12, which was completed as we worked our way through the final section of the course. After nearly a semester of discussing commenting and response, continual revision, participating in a great deal of peer review, holding conferences, etc., my students appeared to be getting better at reflecting on how they wrote. Their comments—as illustrated by these statements by Brook, Eric, and Jennifer—were also becoming longer and more detailed.

To conclude, I want to expand on my own perceptions detailed in chapter five by noting that it seems to me the rich mosaic of student voices outlined above indicate that our students generally:
arrive at our classrooms thinking they are weak in grammar and other surface features;

think there is one right way to write (see Sullivan);

have done little revision as revision; rather, they have edited their papers only, for revision is seen as centering on form and mechanics (see Applebee; Bata; Beach; Emig; Faigley and Witte; Pianko; Searle and Dillon; Siegel; Sullivan; Ziv);

perceive themselves as good creative writers but as poor school writers--and as anything but deficient (see Bartholomae; Daiker; Epes; Kroll and Schafer; Podis and Podis);

often have a current-traditional view of the writing process (see Crowley; Lees; Onore; Ziv);

like to write about topics that interest them;

have many hopes for themselves and their college careers;

can and do change their perceptions about revision and how they revise as they write their way through a semester (see Brannon and Knoblauch; Ziv);

like and will use peer comments on their text (see Freedman, Response; Korn; Onore; Salvatore);

can visualize and appreciate a real reader (see Baumlín and Baumlín; Bazerman; Corder; Harris, "Rewriting"; Horvath; Korn; Robertson; Schwegler; Sommers; Welch);

feel that conferences are vital to response from person-to-person (as opposed to a New Critical notion that insists on remarks about a text on a text); my students wanted not only to talk to me but to everyone else who read their work (see Diogenes et al.; Freedman; Hagaman; Heller;
can get better at reflecting on their writing over a semester that incorporates a discussion on the theory and practices of response and commenting.

I realize that I cannot (and do not intend to) argue for a cause-effect relationship between what happened in my classrooms and the changes in my students' views on response and revision. What I can say, however, is that a major shift did take place over the semester in how my students saw their writing and revision processes and that some of such an adjustment in their perspectives may have been engendered by our ongoing discussions about response and commenting. Perhaps this notion will become clearer when I ask my students to articulate not only how they grew to be able to decenter and view their work from an outside reader's perspective (Rosenblatt's "Authorial II" position), but also to show what they did with the comments they received as they gave specific advice on how we might improve our response to and comments about their texts--which I will do next.
CHAPTER SEVEN
PUTTING WORDS INTO ACTION:
CHANGING REVISION PRACTICES

In this final chapter, I first will elaborate on the specific advice about commenting my students provided throughout the fall semester of 1993, for they were quite active in telling me precisely what in my response and commenting strategies aided their revision practices, and what did not. It seems to me that when we solicit such advice from our student writers on how we might respond more effectively to their work, we give them practice at stepping away from their writing and also at reflecting on their texts as an outside reader would. As I quickly learned, my students seemed to almost hunger for what I have been arguing throughout: They wanted, needed, and utilized a continuing dialogue between reader and writer about the text that only began with a reader’s
written remarks—exactly what my expansion of Rosenblatt’s ideas suggests. Further, they turned such advice and suggestions and conversations into real revisions of their texts.

Since conferences are obviously dialogic in nature, I will center on how my students wanted to extend the dialogue inherent in conferences to include individual one-to-one communication with whoever had read their work, including their classmates.

Second, I will then concentrate on my student’s reflections and awareness about their writing practices in terms of what they did to revise their work. I hope that some of what my students have to tell and show us leads to a change in our pedagogy, a modification in the ways we talk about response and commenting that brings students into and makes them part of a continuing conversation—a dialogue that in turn engenders real content-based revision.

So, Here’s What You Need To Do . . .

In line with much of what the literature tells us, my student writers told me to be specific in what
I had to say about their texts. In fact, much of what they told me mirrors other research so closely that such comments substantiate my own argument: If all of those other studies are right, so is this one.

As I detail some of their comments, I want to note that none of my students asked for advice such as "Just tell me exactly what to do and then I'll do it." Instead, my students suggested they wanted me to be exact and clear in my remarks and that they also needed a dialogue that would lead to understanding, as only then could they determine exactly what I was saying about their writing. My students also indicated that they would not necessarily do what I recommended, but at least they would consider what I had to say to them. In the following remarks, note how even when my students appeared to ask for detailed help, they most often requested examples or models they could follow or imitate, rather than precise advice on the words or structure to use:

When you think I need to add something in my paper, you should at least write down a hint so that I can start from there. (Anna Tang)
When making comments try not to use one word comments. These are really hard to understand. I also really like the idea of having the computer printout on the back of the paper [I often type my responses to student texts]. (Anonymous)

Write all comments you have down. Don’t be so general. (Anonymous)

I also think that you should try to tell us certain ideas or examples that you would have for us and our papers for what needed to be changed. (Brook Sims)

I would have you write up the major things that need to be fixed (write it on like a worksheet type of thing). I would have you tell me specific details that needed to be improved and outline a short sketch as to what exactly I should do to make my paper the best that it could be. (Heather Unfug)

When you comment on our papers, I think you should give us a sheet of your ideas on what we should change and improve on. I think this technique would be very helpful along with the conferences and your ideas. (Anonymous)

The idea of highlighting [with a yellow marker] is good for many reasons. One, it stayed as a reminder for what parts to work on. Two, it was a positive non-aggressive color. . . . Third, the highlights showed directly where we talked about, instead of in the column or underneath. (Rebecca Friedenthal)

One of the students I outlined in detail earlier in this project, Anna Tang, was very specific on the kind of response and commenting that was most beneficial for her. Anna wrote:
The descriptive and more exact responses have helped me the most on my papers this semester. The way that the responses should be are right next to where the problem is so I can find the problem much quicker than [if] it were at the end of the paper. When the problem is highlighted, circled, or underlined, and the comment is written down with an arrow pointing to the section that needs the comment, that is a great way to help me find the mistake.

It is important to note that Anna did not ask readers to correct her text or make specific suggestions on what she should do with her work, but rather she wanted us just to indicate where we thought her writing could be improved; she would take the paper from there. As others have discovered, students are able to revise and modify their texts on their own: For example, Richard Haswell reported that his students were able to correct more than 60 percent of their mechanical errors when he just indicated a problem with a check mark in the margin. And as Anna Tang went on to tell me, even in terms of mechanics I could make:

comments better for me by (maybe) correcting the grammar that is extremely indecent or just put a big * where you think the grammar is incorrect so I can look it over carefully.
Lara Rosenaur said the same thing: "In the future I would like my classmates to circle my misspelled words. This way when I go to make my corrections I have a lesser time checking my papers." Neither student asked that their readers correct the errors, but rather just point them out and thus leave them up to the writer to deal with.

Other students suggested that question-type responses were valuable to them (for research that confirms this approach, see Beaven; Diogenes et al.; Dusel; Kirby and Liner; Lauer; Petrosky; Sommers; Thomas and Thomas; Welch). For example, my student Heather Unfug argued:

The comments I got were useful because they asked specific questions. . . . These responses were good because I could put the answers in my paper and make it better in specific parts. The comments would help me to make my paper clearer to the reader. . . . Specifics are the best. I don't like it when [someone] writes "good" or "needs improvement" or just simply puts a question mark by a paragraph. Those kinds of comments don't really help the writer in any real big way. They are vague and don't let the writer know exactly what should be fixed.

Likewise, Liz Esquida was very specific:
The responses I enjoy and appreciate best are comments such as:

"What do you mean by this?"
"This sentence is unclear!"
"Explain in detail?"

Comments like this help me get new ideas or change and rephrase new sentences. . . . I would like for people to concentrate more on the content of my paper rather than spelling mistakes.

My students also indicated (as Burkland and Grimm maintained) that criticism is useful and valuable for their revisions. Anna Tang told me that my "responses should be very critical and personal" and that readers must be "truthful" for "the only way you can state a true comment is if you really understand what I am writing, and if not, then state that you need more details/information." Jennifer Wells admonished me by noting that "there is room for being a tad more on the harsher side. By this I mean, look harder for mistakes and don’t be afraid to say if something’s wrong." Another student did not like the check marks I put in the margins of her papers as I read her work. She told me that the "checks at the side of the page are nice but they
have no real significance. If you do not like something or something seems unique then you should tell me." She went on to let me know that "I can take criticism. I think criticism helps a paper" (Anonymous). Another student echoed his classmates: "Don't be afraid to say anything to me, the more someone tells me about my paper then the more my paper improves" (Anonymous).

In addition to wanting clear as well as critical responses to their work, several of my students also indicated that praise encourages them to write (see Beaven; Daiker; Gee; Hillocks; Knoblauch and Brannon; Sullivan). Jennifer Wells wrote that she "appreciated when specific comments were given, on exactly what needed improvement, as well as what areas didn't need improvement." Another student suggested, "It would be nice to receive comments on how our writing has progressed throughout the semester" (Anonymous). Bill McKillop told me:

You always showed me where the paper could be improved. You also were positive about revising. You didn't just write, "Hey, add details here," but you would say, "Your paper is good, but it would be better if . . . "
My students, it seems to me, by echoing what other researchers discovered and reported, lend credence to my own argument here, as they appear to think and write just as thousands of other students have done (and are still doing).

What all of our commenting activities should lead to is, of course, a better understanding of revision that facilitates more effective revision strategies and practices. I would hope that my students would come out of my classes with something along the lines of what Liz Esquida had to say:

In completing this paper I also realized that the more you spend writing a paper and revising it, the better it gets. The paper becomes stronger and is more detailed. I would read my paper over and over, and every time would find something wrong with it, I would improve it and would make it have more sense. This process has made me realize that a good paper can not only be done with work of one day. . . . A GOOD paper takes time and is not something that can be done the night before it is due. The process may be tiresome but the results will be even better.

It seems to me that the comments I have reproduced throughout this dissertation do much to validate what the literature tells us: Our comments
to student writing (or on any text, for that matter) are most useful if they are thoughtful, thorough, and clear. Praise encourages writers. Student papers can be read just as we would read the writing of a colleague. And students, like our colleagues, appreciate our questions and our criticism.

At the same time, my students were active in advocating my expanded pedagogy that insists the reader speak to the writer about his or her text, rather than to respond to the text, on the text. At all levels, my students insisted that original, written responses were only the starting point and that a real dialogue about the text would help them as they went on to revise their work. As I have been arguing all along, the most intriguing student remarks—at least in my mind—were those that confirmed the fact that our dialogic commenting practices engendered an image of a reader who is interested in what he or she is reading, of a reader who wants to help the writer create meaning through that reader’s transaction with the text. As the semester went along and as my students became more adept at peer response (always extended to include
talk about talk), many of them began to see how their active consideration of a reader could lead to true revision.

I want now not only to elaborate on how my students changed how they conceptualized the process of revision and how that shift in their thinking engendered a modification of their revision activities, but also to let them speak to how they planned to revise future assignments.

Doing Revision

While we discussed revision, incorporated peer review and conferences into the process of writing and revision, and insisted on several versions of each paper, early in the semester many of my students were generally ineffective at producing well-written texts. Later, after writing through a semester of talk about talk, many were much more active in their revision activities as well as more vocal about how they went about taking their readers into consideration as they changed their texts. I want to illustrate this movement in several ways. I also want to note that such shifts in perception about
revision and any apparent modifications in how these student writers went about revising their work are only suggestive. That is, while I would like to attribute my students' changes in views and actions about their revision activities to the pedagogy I have outlined, I cannot demonstrate a direct cause-effect relationship. I only report that such adjustments did take place concurrently with our constant focus on response, commenting, and revision. In effect, many of my students were able to modify their perceptions of what revision was, and when they were better able to articulate their (revised) definitions, their revision strategies and activities became more effective.

As one example of early work that was not developed effectively and in enough detail even through she had written several drafts, consider Jennifer Croushore's final version of paper one. Here is a paragraph taken at random from page two of her text:

My mother is one of eight children, three girls and four boys. Her childhood days were very limited. From a very young age she felt as though it was her duty to help raise the
children who were born after her. She played more of a maternal role in their lives rather than a sisterly one. This is still true today. Her life was far from easy but she has the strength to move on.

While Jennifer makes an attempt at showing detail ("one of eight children, three girls and four boys"), she is still vague and general in many places:

childhood days were very limited
young age
a maternal role . . . rather than a sisterly one
life was far from easy
strength to move on

My written comments on this paragraph indicated that I could not see what Jennifer meant:

Okay, but pretty general. That is, what did your mother do for her siblings? What does she do today that makes you call her role a "maternal" one?

Jennifer’s next paragraph was written along the same lines:
Few marriages survive in similar circumstances, but my mother fought to keep the marriage alive. Luckily she was born with a[n] independent nature that allowed her to survive the long periods of time she went without a husband.

My comments were also similar for this paragraph:

Okay, and I’m sure you’re right, but what did she do? How did her "independent nature" help her being "alone"?

Jennifer’s text is only one example that illustrates the perceptions and practices about revision my students held as they arrived in my classrooms--truncated views and strategies about revision that I would work to modify. As I noted earlier and in accordance with her early-semester lack of effective revision practices, in her early comments on what revision meant, Jennifer first listed the dictionary definition and then wrote "in my own words [revision] is to look over something, finding its mistakes." In effect, Jennifer’s notion of revision was to "find and fix" the surface errors a text might display.

Here is another paragraph from a student’s text:
I remember one time I wrote a paper for science class and I had received an A for the paper from the teacher. When I saw my mother later that night and showed her the paper [she] was happy that I had received an A but did not feel I had put out my best effort. She made me feel so guilty about it that I wrote another paper. (Anonymous)

I responded in this way:

Okay, but more details would help me understand why she felt as she did, as here it makes it look like she didn’t "get" that you’d received the highest grade. That is, why did she feel that you had not "put out my best effort"?

As with Jennifer, this student, even with peer review along with comments from and conferencing with me was unable to develop a reader-oriented paragraph.

One final example from another student’s first paper, again selected at random:

About a year and a half ago I was involved in something called M.A.N. (Michigan Anarchist Network), which was a bunch of people all through Michigan who had weekly meetings where we discussed things that we wanted to do and change. They were generally about the way things were in our society, and how it affected us and our scene. (Radi Horton)
Radi's text is a good example of writer-best prose; after all, she knew who the "people" were, when and where the "weekly meetings" were held, and so on. But her generally ineffective development led to my response:

Okay, but awfully general and ambiguous. That is, what "things" did you discuss? What "things" in society did you want to change, and how did you want to change them? How did those "things" affect you and your "scene" and what was your "scene" anyway? Inquiring minds want to know!

From such a beginning in which my students early in the semester were not revising particularly well nor writing wonderful papers, I want to move to a detailed example from unit two, for (as noted earlier) many of my students demonstrated a definite shift in their attitudes about and conception of revision as well as changes in their revision practices as they moved from the first to the second part of the course. Such a shift may indicate that our ongoing classroom conversation centering on response and commenting was having an effect on how my students saw and revised their writing.
By the time the final version of their second paper was due and handed in, my students and I had gone through about two-thirds of the semester. Put another way: when paper two was complete, my students would have already revised paper one and then paper two several times, conferenced with me twice, had both assignments peer-reviewed, and spent roughly half of their in-class time focusing in some manner on response and commenting (see the chart at the end of chapter five). We had, by this point, gone through a lot of talk about talk.

The period following when paper one was turned in to when paper two was created and revised is also the time during which my students generally appeared to make the greatest upward shift in their grades. While I do not represent grading information as statistically accurate (after all, what is more subjective than the grades we have to assign?), such data may be indicative that what we are doing in class is working in some way.

For paper one, about one-quarter of my class received a final grade in the A/B range, while the other three-quarters of the class were at the C
level. For paper two, however, this percentage was reversed: more than 80 percent of their grades were in the A/B range.

To exemplify their shift in revision practices, I want to focus now on a brief section of one student's paper, to illustrate her writing process as she went from her initial drafting through revision to her final paper for the second assignment of the course. While, as noted above, most of my students' first papers were less than wonderful, during the shift from unit one to unit two many students began to elaborate and explain and--in effect--to create reader-based texts.

I selected Julie Barnett's second paper here because she was a student who arrived in our class with an abbreviated view of revision along with truncated revision practices to match (see chapter five). As detailed earlier, Julie wrote a mostly ineffective first paper.

Julie's second paper focused on the people she saw at her Jewish temple, and in this paragraph she is working to describe part of it. Here is the first version of the paragraph:
Starting to walk over to my seat, I noticed the seats are facing toward the magnificent bema in which two podiums stand in between the ark. The torah is placed inside the ark covered with a decorative covering.

Julie's paragraph, 38 words in length, is a start but leaves a lot unexplained. In fact, this paragraph is very similar to what Julie had written for the first assignment in my class: Brief, without enough information for a reader to see what she meant. As Julie participated in our ongoing conversation on response and commenting and as she went through our detailed peer-review process, Julie certainly got the idea that she needed to provide more information if her readers were to see what she meant. Here is Julie's next effort:

Starting to walk over to my seat, I noticed the seats were facing toward the magnificent bema which is a platform on which two podiums stand in between the ark. The torah is placed inside the ark covered with a decorative covering. The ark is decorated with gorgeous spread-out plants on the top and has the Hebrew alphabet carved down the front of the ark. Half of the alphabet is written on the left side and the other is written down the right. The eternal flame sits at the top of the ark and reflects down upon the bema. The eternal flame is an oil lamp that symbolizes the everlasting light that looks over the Jewish people.
Julie is still vague in spots, of course: "decorative covering" is a phrase I would ask about. But consider how much more descriptive Julie is as she works to explain the objects in the temple a reader may be unfamiliar with:

The bema "is a platform on which two podiums stand in between the ark."

"Half" of the "Hebrew" alphabet "is written on the left side and the other is written down the right."

The eternal flame "symbolizes the everlasting light that looks over the Jewish people."

As she works to explain and elaborate, Julie's word count--reflecting the comments she received from her classmates as well as her own rereading of her text--has almost tripled, from 38 to 108 words. I also want to note that at this point Julie made no mechanical modifications to her composition--everything she added was content related and appears to reflect a true consideration of her reader(s).

My conference with Julie also seemed to influence her writing. Here is the final version of this section of her paper, with the changes from
version two to version three highlighted so they are easier to see:

Starting to walk over to my seat, I noticed the seats were facing toward the magnificent bema, which is a platform on which two podiums stand in between the ark. The Torah is placed inside the ark covered with a decorative covering. The ark is decorated with gorgeous spread-out plants on the top and has the Hebrew alphabet carved down the front of it. Half of the alphabet is written on the left side and the other is written down the right, reminding me that Hebrew is read from right to left. The eternal flame sits at the top of the ark and reflects down upon the bema, which is the podium on which the rabbi stands. The eternal flame is an oil lamp that symbolizes the everlasting light.

Julie's changes are not major ones, but other than an early comma after "bema" and capitalizing "Torah," they all are alterations in content as she continued to strive to explain clearly what she meant. Julie's word count increased about 20 percent, from 108 to 129 (she started at 38 words). My point is that at least for this student, what we had been doing and discussing in class coincided with a real difference in her text (other of Julie’s paragraphs show similar modifications). This shift in Julie’s revision activities is especially worth
 noting, as she was getting better as the semester went along.

Later in the semester, Julie was able to reflect on her writing and revising practices, noting that she found the comments she received "extremely helpful although I may disagree about some of them [but] at least he gave me a suggestion and that made me think over his comment." I would argue that such an ability to negate a comment is a truly reflective practice.

Other students, as they reflected on their writing and explained what they had in mind for their next paper, indicated similar notions about how they composed; Julie is not an isolated instance. Brook Sims claims to have "learned that my writing process is really quite simple. I don't write outlines--I just think of what the subject of my paper is going to be and I go from there." Kathy Lounsbury considered her own work and decided to revise "by reorganizing my ideas. I have ideas scattered all over the paper from beginning to end." Kathy went on to mention a reader: "I need to group the same ideas together making it easier for the reader to
understand." Kathy also is able to step away from her text and consider her writing process; she indicates that she "was really surprised how well sentence outlining helps make your thoughts clear and understandable." Frank Maizner also was very specific in how he reacted to and worked with the comments he received. Frank reports that those remarks provided me with the insight and perspective of what I am writing about from an outside point of view. . . . Finally the most helpful comment I have received on my paper is a recommendation stating that I was totally off topic in my 3rd paragraph. The reason why this was so important was because he saved me from getting a bad grade. Also it let me know what I wouldn't have found out because the paragraph seemed all right to me. What really helped was that the comment encouraged me to re-write the paragraph and just by chance it turned out to be 50 times better than the original one.

Along this same line, Tamara Press noted that she realized and would take the presence of outside readers into account as she worked to revise her work. Tamara wrote that the
next time I write my paper I'm going to list what I want to say, do some freewriting and ask myself the same questions that I asked the papers I critiqued.

Jennifer Wells also reflected on her writing and reported that she grouped all of my ideas into certain categories which really helped me out a lot. The brainstorming we did in class gave me the ideas that I put into the categories and they helped me think of other ideas as well.

And Radi Horton also was able to stand back and write about her writing process. Radi maintains:

The way I wrote this paper was not in an outline type sense. But on each topic I was writing about I wrote on separate pieces of paper and when I was ready to write the first draft I put them together according to what sounded best.

As illustrated by the these quotations, as we moved into the final unit for the class, my students' awareness of their own writing and revising concepts and activities appeared to be growing and becoming more complex. My contention is that our continuing talk about talk both in writing and in class
discussions had to some degree enabled a greater realization of and comprehension about how my students perceived themselves as writers, how they wrote, and how they revised their work. Such comments as I have outlined here suggest (and recommend) that instructors talk about talk in their classrooms, as the words appear to facilitate the practice: The more revision is discussed and contemplated and understood, the better revisers our students will become.

More Awareness, More Changes

As they wrote their way into the third and final unit of the class, many of my English 100 students continued to exhibit a growing and developing awareness of a reader as they worked to revise their texts. Briefly, some examples: Kathy Lounsbury’s second version of her final paper included this final sentence of a page one paragraph (selected at random):
It is not right for parking and transportation at the University of Arizona to charge students for a parking permit when they are not always guaranteed a space to park.

Kathy’s final version expanded her argument, as she obviously worked to include words that a reader might relate to (her changes are highlighted):

It is not right for [the] parking and transportation department at the University of Arizona to charge students for a parking permit when they are not always guaranteed a space to park, and to make matters worse, they oversell the parking lots. Also they inconvenience the students by requiring them to move their cars for football and basketball games.

In this instance, Kathy’s argument is not only longer and more detailed but also is more effective, as a reader may be able to identify personally with the problems she describes. And how better to consider a reader than to somehow draw that reader into a text? Kathy’s notions about revision also indicate that she understands what to do. She wrote that revision is
going back and analyzing each sentence. Asking myself, does this have a significance to my paper? Then looking at the paper as a whole, are all my supporting ideas of the same point together? I think that going through your paper in this manner will make the paper more effective for the reader.

Kathy is not an isolated occurrence of what seems to be a real (and new?) capability on my students' part to expand their ideas to help their readers understand. Here, Kathy is not only working at a sentence level ("going back and analyzing each sentence. Asking myself, does this have a significance to my paper?") , but she then moves to consider her entire text ("looking at the paper as a whole, are all my supporting ideas of the same point together?"). Kathy also states her purpose in doing what revision activities she has outlined: to "make the paper more effective for the reader." Another student's first version of paper three included this paragraph:
Regular high school history books have been written from a predominantly male perspective. From the start these books weren't going to mention anything about the diversity of America's history. I remember sitting in class and thinking, "Now what's this got to do with me?" The United States history may have something to do with me, but American History has nothing to do with me. (Anonymous)

Following two peer review sessions in which she received written comments and oral explanations, a conference with me, and three of her classmate's written, detailed responses to her paper (learning log #15; see chapter four), this student's paragraph had changed to read (her changes are highlighted):

High school history books have been and continue to be written from a predominately white anglo-saxon protestant male perspective. The United States history may have something to do with me, but American History has nothing to do with me. How can someone write about another culture's history if they are not a part of it or fully acquainted with that culture. What's important to the authors of these history books are not necessarily important to the diversity within America.

[deleted: From the start these books weren't going to mention anything about the diversity of America's history. I remember sitting in class and thinking, "Now what's this got to do with me?"] (Anonymous)
This new paragraph is slightly longer (by 16 words) than the earlier version, and I think most readers would agree that the new version is also more effective. The writer is more specific: white anglo-saxon protestant was added to male perspective. She also is clearer in her argument. In her early version, the argument seems to be that The United States history may have something to do with me, but American History has nothing to do with me. However, as the paper was revised, that sentence becomes a supporting detail for what is implicit: One cannot write about a culture's history unless that writer is a part of that culture.

While the personal parts of the earlier paragraph could have led somewhere (although they do not in that first version), their elimination has not detracted from the new text.

Later, this same student writer will incorporate a quotation from a current American history book "chosen to prove my point." Her paper will also grow from one and one-half typewritten pages to four.

Another example: By the end of the term even Jennifer Wells had become a much better reviser than
she was early in the year. Jennifer is, of course, one of the students I detailed earlier who not only had a dictionary definition concept of revision, she was also a student who believed the purpose of revision was to find and fix surface errors. Early in the semester she wrote that "in my own words [revision] is to look over something, finding its mistakes." Jennifer also wrote an ineffective first paper (see chapter five).

Even for Jennifer, however, by the end of the semester our constant talk about talk seemed to be taking hold, as both her definition of revision and her revision activities became more complex. In contrast to her earlier "find and fix" concept of revision, Jennifer (late in the term) was able to reflect on both her revising process and her evolving text to note that it "helped doing more drafts" for then, "as you can see in my paper, there is a tremendous difference in the final version compared to the first versions." Jennifer argued that perhaps she needed to hear the same response more than once, for she used "those [comments] that were constant" as she revised her work.
Late in the year Jennifer's second version of her final class paper had a pretty detailed and lengthy paragraph:

Wearing uniforms is extremely convenient. Have you ever woken up a half an hour late, only to find that you have nothing to wear and you've already worn the same outfit twice this week? If everyone had uniforms we wouldn't have this problem, all you'd have to do is wake up, throw your uniform on, and go. There would be no fuss about what you were going to wear today, tomorrow, or the next day. I can recall in high school a friend of mine named Shelly, who would go home from school and change at least twice a day. If she had to wear a uniform she would've never had done this. It was a disturbance to her education, and caused her to be late and miss classes.

As with the other examples I have outlined here, this one is selected at random, and while Jennifer's text is not wonderful, at least she does provide some details and a specific example to support her argument.

One comment I made about this part of her text when she came to talk with me was "better," as she was starting to use real examples that helped readers see what she meant. Jennifer, to her credit, continued to revise and add to her paragraph (and to
Wearing uniforms is an incredible convenience, especially for those who are extremely indecisive. It's just one thing less that you have to worry about. No more changing five times before leaving for school. The decision is already made for you. There would be no fuss about what you were going to wear today, tomorrow, or the next day. A friend of mine named Blaise did the same thing I did. She attended both a private and public school, and she experienced having to wear a uniform and not having to wear a uniform. When I asked her opinion of uniforms she stated, "they were ugly and at the same time I was embarrassed to wear them, but looking back I've wasted so much time trying to find something to wear!" I can recall a friend of mine in high school named Shelly, who would go home from school and change at least twice a day. [changed slightly: It was a disturbance to her education, and caused her to be late and miss classes.]

[deleted: Have you ever woken up a half an hour late, only to find that you have nothing to wear and you've already worn the same outfit twice this week? If everyone had uniforms we wouldn't have this problem, all you'd have to do is wake up, throw your uniform on, and go] [also deleted: If she had to wear a uniform she would've never had done this.]

Jennifer's text has increased in length from 129 to 171 words and more important, her argument is more...
compelling because she uses more specific examples to show what she means. This is not to say that her text is yet perfect; there are any number of areas where we might like to see improvement. But at least Jennifer, as she revised her writing, considered her reader and then tried to bring that reader into her argument by using "you" in her text. Jennifer tells her reader, "It's just one thing less that you have to worry about," so there "would be no fuss about what you were going to wear today, tomorrow, or the next day." Like Kathy Lounsbury (outlined above) who tried to get her reader to identify with part of her argument, here Jennifer's rhetorical strategy serves to draw the reader into the text.

Not to belabor the point, but I want to touch on another brief section of a student's text to show how she worked to change it as we talked about response and commenting during class, and while her peers and I responded to her paper. Liz Esquida originally wrote:

What is the purpose of a high school, I have asked myself repeatedly since October 7, 1993. Why were these "children" out fighting and not at home doing homework or at school
participating in school events? A simple question with a simple answer: There is no one there to provide the support and motivation that these young minds need. Would these youngsters have had the motivation and support from the faculty members of Kofa High School, maybe the death of this fifteen year old could have been prevented. Motivation and support from faculty members should be provided in every school.

The incident Liz wrote about touched her deeply; the student who had been killed was her cousin.

From a writing standpoint. Liz is all over the place in this early version of her text. Her argument is finally stated at the end of this paragraph: *Motivation and support from faculty members should be provided in every school.* As she received feedback, Liz worked to clarify and to consider her reader (her changes are highlighted):

[deleted: What is the purpose of a high school, I have asked myself repeatedly since October 7, 1993.]

Why were these teenagers out fighting and not at home doing homework or at school participating in school events, on a school night? A simple question with a simple answer: There was and is no one there to provide the support and motivation that these Kofa High School teenagers need. Would these youngsters have had the motivation and support from the faculty members of Kofa High School, maybe the death of this fifteen year old could have been prevented.
The faculty members of Kofa High School should have a better sense of responsibility toward the welfare of their students. Every school should have faculty members which participate in school activities for their students to get involved with.

Liz has worked hard to elaborate and expand her text. Her word count is up by about 30 percent and more important, she seems to have a stronger and more clearly-stated argument. Instead of the original somewhat vague notion that Motivation and support from faculty members should be provided in every school, Liz has sharpened her argument to be very specific as to what the faculty members ought to be doing: Every school should have faculty members which participate in school activities for their students to get involved with. Certainly Liz could have been more expressive and specific, but she at least is on the right track.

Here is the final version of this part of Liz’s paper, with her changes highlighted:
Why were these teenagers out fighting and not at home doing homework or at school participating in school events, on a (Thursday) school night? A simple question with a simple answer: There was and is no one there to provide the support and motivation that these Kofa High School teenagers need. Would these youngsters have had the motivation and support from the faculty members of Kofa High School, [deleted: maybe] the death of this fifteen year old could have been prevented. The faculty members of Kofa High School should have a better sense of responsibility toward the welfare of their students. [deleted: Every school should have]

Kofa High School should consist of faculty members which participate in school activities [deleted: for their students to get involved with] and who care enough for their students by motivating and inspiring them in doing good deeds, rather than giving them spare time to do anything but cause trouble.

Liz is still working to add details and to be more specific in her argument. For example, toward the end "Every school" has been replaced by "Kofa High School." Liz gets a little twisted as she finishes, but it seems to me that she is moving in the right direction.

My point through all of these examples is to illustrate that while my students came to our classes with a perception that revision was editing for mechanical errors, most changed their ideas about
revision as we talked about talk in many ways over the 15 weeks of the semester. And more importantly, while they altered their views of what revision was they also modified their revision practices to include a reader of their work; in effect, many learned to move from Rosenblatt's "Authorial I" to her "Authorial II" position in regard to their own texts. And most critical for my own argument, my students were clear in articulating that they embraced (and needed) my expanded pedagogy in which conversation about texts is central to the classroom. They affirmed that the old model of responding to the text about the text should be replaced by my newer idea of reader and writer together discussing the text—and that such a dialogue would lead to more effective content-based revision.

Suggestions for Further Research

One thing I would change if I had this project to do over again would be to solicit more definitions of revision from my students—probably both before and after each writing assignment. I asked for definitions three times, and many students wrote
about revision in more detail in several other learning logs, but I would like to have gotten a precise definition as each formal assignment was being written. That way I could compare exactly their definitions of revision with their revision practices all through the semester.

The shift in many of my students' views about revision, along with the modifications in their revision practices, seemed to take place as they moved (in my syllabus) from unit one to unit two. At that point, my students had written about their definitions of revision twice, had participated in several class discussions on response and commenting, and had made a number of attempts to step away from their own writing and to examine their compositions from the perspective of an outside reader. I would be curious to try to identify more exactly when such changes in definitions of revision and/or revision practices and strategies developed—and to try to link such modifications to precise classroom activities. That kind of a study could have profound implications for our pedagogy.
While I have tried to use an ethnographic approach all through this project for descriptions and details, such a method also insists on numerous voices speaking . . . often at the same time. If I could change my practice, I would do this project as a case study to focus on just a few individuals and their writing and revising thoughts and practices.

I also would like to see the same kind of examination done with a class other than English 100. While I suspect that any composition class could benefit from increased (and constant) talk about talk, it would be interesting and useful to see if my notion could be demonstrated.

One way to continue my line of thinking would be to just bring a focus on response, commenting, and revision into classroom conversations, but leave out the reflective writing I had my students do and also to eliminate the articulation of what revision means to student writers. Or, to ask students to define revision but not to reflect on their writing. Or, not to mention reader-response theories at all, but still try to get students to decenter from their texts by writing about them. The idea would be to
identify and concentrate on only one of the things I did in my classrooms, to see if that one variable caused a significant change. I did a lot--I added classroom dialogue about reader-response theories and Louise Rosenblatt, I modified seven of my 15 learning log assignments, and I provided semester-long feedback to my classes about what we were doing. Perhaps I did too much and so cannot isolate precisely what we did that made a difference in how my students revised.

Twice I have alluded to how grades might be an indicator of students' growth in revision practices. It would be interesting to have outside graders (or holistic evaluators) examine classroom assignments in an effort to determine if student writing did actually improve as my ideas were incorporated into a classroom.

The same could be done by counting--T-units, or words, or subordination, or added details--any number of parts of student writing, to further demonstrate how the classroom talk about talk I am advocating engenders revised content.
During the semester following the one I have described throughout this project, I returned to my original syllabus in which we did not discuss commenting and response and revision in as much detail as we had during the fall, 1993 semester. I do not know, at this point, how my classes' grades will compare, but I do know that both of my current classes have not asked to talk to their responders. Without our dialogue on talk about talk, my current students are not as interested in extending the conversation. That, to me, would be an interesting way to follow-up my research project, as I have been suggesting here that when we do bring response to the forefront of our class discussions students want to extend that conversation to all aspects of their writing.

I would also like to interview my students from the semester I have outlined here, to see what they are doing now in terms of revision with the papers they are currently composing, and also to elicit definitions of what revision means to them, today. Has their concept of revision changed? How? Do they still insist on a continuing dialogue with whoever
reads their work? In what way(s) are they able to implement such a notion? How do their revision practices compare to what I asked them to do? How do they think our approach to response and commenting helped them as writers, in what they are writing today?

Finally, I think it would be useful to compare what students said about revision and response from semester-to-semester as they wrote their way through a university’s writing program, to see if as their concepts of revision changed, their practices also changed.

So What Have We Learned, Anyway?

Throughout the entire semester, my students echoed the literature in suggesting that our comments to their writing are most beneficial if they are thoughtful, thorough, and clear. They were encouraged by my praise. Student writers, like our colleagues, appreciate our questions and our criticism.

At the same time, my students were clear that they wanted and needed my pedagogy that insists on
all readers speaking to the writer about his or her composition, rather than just responding to the text, on the text. From a backdrop in which New Criticism still controls how instructors read their students' writing, I am contending that we need to move to a more modern paradigm in which we respond to the writer about his or her text, rather than to the text, on the text. Such text-based comments necessarily will serve as the starting point for our response, but then we will want to carry our conversation with the writer about his or her work all the way from its beginning to when the text is turned in for a grade. (There is, of course, no reason why such a dialogue cannot continue as the writer seeks to continue to revise the essay, perhaps for publication.)

I am also advocating that we discuss Louise Rosenblatt's transactional concepts of reading, along with my own expansion and extension of her ideas, where reader and text together create the meaning of any work. At the same time, we can apply her transactional notion to how writers compose their texts; Rosenblatt's "Authorial I" and "Authorial II"
positions are easy for students to understand and to situate themselves in. Much of Rosenblatt’s contemporary work deals with the writing process and perhaps with some encouragement she will do more. I am also arguing that we will want to expand Rosenblatt’s idea of what is evoked through the reading transaction from her notion of poem to the idea of dialogue (or conversation, or discourse, or talk about talk). Put another way, I contend that what we evoke when we read a student’s writing is only the start of a dialogue with that writer.

Students also can grasp and accept the very rhetorical notion that we read different texts for different purposes (Rosenblatt’s concept of stance), and if our purpose for reading their work is not to evaluate but to facilitate revision, our comments will ring true to and be accepted by our student writers.

In the end, it seems clear to me that if we talk about response and revision in some way in our classrooms, we can aid not only how our students see revision but also how they go about it. That is, once our students have the words through which they
can articulate a conception of real revision, their revision practices will change. Many of us have modified how we teach composition to concentrate on the process of writing. Such practice is critical, of course, and I suggest that equally vital is to help our students gain the words with which they can envision and articulate their views on what they are doing. Such language, I am arguing, will influence their strategies as well as their practices. In paper after paper (especially late in the semester), my students demonstrated that our talk about talk not only made them more aware of their readers but also enabled/facilitated/engendered more effective revision practices. The words create the action, thus affirming what I have argued from the beginning: We necessarily must concentrate on the oral and written conversations that take place about student texts, for they are central to our understanding. We can best focus on these conversations by bringing response and commenting to the forefront of all that we do in our classrooms.
Notes to chapter one:

1. An ongoing conversation with a writer about his or her text also validates the grading that we are required to do. That is, the more effectively such a discussion aids a writer in moving from a position as writer to one of an outside reader, the easier it is for the student writer to decenter from the text and make a more accurate assessment of how well his or her writing achieves its rhetorical purpose. For an excellent discussion on the relationship between response and evaluation, an area I am bracketing off as it is not my focus, see Peter Elbow's "Ranking."

2. For more on how current-traditional thinking is still embodied in many textbooks and inhabits many classrooms, see Crowley's The Methodical Memory and "On Intention."

3. Sommers provides a good example of the recursive nature of experienced writers with a comment drawn from the 1977 power failure in New York. One of Sommers' experienced writing students writes:

I feel like Con Edison cutting off certain states to keep the generators going. In first and second drafts, I try to cut off as much as I can of my editing generators, and in a third draft, I try to cut off some of my idea generators, so that I can make sure I will actually finish the essay. ("Revision" 336)

Sommers' student's idea here may be informed by Peter Elbow's writings about freewriting ("first-order thinking"). Elbow suggests to just get it down on paper, with no editing, and then once the writer has something down, she can edit it.
4. The debate about surface features connects to the continuing conversation over direct grammar instruction, where one school of thought argues that such instruction is necessary and valuable (see Kolln; Neuleib and Brosnahan). Others argue that direct grammar instruction, removed from the context of a student's real writing, does more harm than good (see Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer 37 and 70-83; Connors; Glau; Hartwell).

While direct grammar instruction is tangential to the discussion about commenting on surface errors, I see the two areas as connected in that both suggest a deficient writer who makes mistakes because she is in some way defective and the teacher's job is to diagnose what problems the student has. Such deficiencies, the logic goes, are best cured through direct, prescriptive instruction.

Notes to chapter two:

1. With numerous apologies to Joyce Carol Oates.

2. For a contemporary way of reading the mixture of student "voices" in a text, see Recchio; also see Brodkey and Henry.

3. This concentration on the notion of deficiency was not new, but rather a continuation of how children (students) (and many would say, women, minorities, non-academics) were viewed generally by society or by teachers.

4. Linda Barnes goes into more depth when she warns that often students see instructor comments as commands or directives (and repeats the warning that instructors' comments may appropriate those texts). Barnes breaks down comments into (1) verdictives, which praise or criticize, and directives. Barnes then divides directives into editives, which focus on surface features, and revisionals, which attempt to aid real revision. Barnes says that beginning writers receive more directives than verdictives and also notes, echoing others, that students often cannot determine which comments are the most
important. Barnes continues and extends her argument in "Gender Bias in Teachers' Written Comments."

5. Extending the conversation on surface features, Beaven echoes Emig and Ziv when she writes that if teachers concentrate on surface mechanical errors, students "may begin to believe that they have nothing acceptable to communicate" (136). Knoblauch and Brannon discuss research that indicates instructor comments on student papers don't mean much, and argue that students often don't understand our comments, usually don't pay any attention to them, and if they do, it's only to correct surface errors ("Teacher Commentary").

6. In line with Faigley and Witte, a 1991 report by David Wallace and John Hayes reflects the earlier research by suggesting that inexperienced writers most often see revision "as a local task . . . of changing words and sentences rather than of modifying the goals or organization of the text to meet criteria of the rhetorical situation" (55).

7. Much of this was predicted, of course, by Peter Elbow.

8. Continuing our seeming fascination of whether or not praise aids writing, Connors and Lunsford also report that today's instructors are not able to "keep themselves to completely positive commentary" and that they found the most common method of response "began positively . . . and then turned negative toward the end," as we try to have the best of both worlds, juggling both praise and criticism ("Teachers' Rhetorical Comments" 210).

Notes to chapter three:

1. Wimsatt and Beardsley also warned of the "intentional fallacy," arguing that the intentions of the author were not recoverable from secondary information and should not be confused with the meaning of a work. Rather, the work itself was to be seen as containing all meaning.
2. It is especially interesting that Fish, whom Rosenblatt calls the most widely read contemporary reader-response critic, creates in his own work a paradigm that effectively demonstrates his argument that the reading of a text is the meaning of that text (see especially "Change").

3. An interesting example of how we must have some contextual framework before we can understand anything is Myron Tuman's illustrative quotation about the importance of context. Tuman suggests using (and I've used his quotation in my own classes) the phrase, "Meet me here at this time tomorrow with a stick this long" (15-16). I ask if anyone cannot read this passage; obviously, everyone can. But then I ask if there is anyone who can understand it; obviously, no one can. Without some context, whether imposed by the reader or not, texts cannot be understood. Or, as Fish argues, "sentences emerge only in situations, (and) within those situations the normative meaning of an utterance will always be obvious or at least accessible, although within another situation that same utterance, no longer the same, will have another normative meaning that will be no less obvious and accessible" (Text 307-08).

4. Seeing a text as either a grocery list or a classroom assignment, Fish reminds us, takes the same kind of active interpretive activity on the part of a reader as seeing a text as a poem.

An interesting aside to this conversation: this semester on the first day of class, a student asked me, "Are you a fair teacher?" I answered by saying that I was a lot better than fair, and in fact I was probably the best teacher she ever will have. I don't think that is the answer she expected.

5. Fish appears to argue that these interpretive communities can change as their situations adjust to different circumstances, but that readers cannot "move" from one to another, as a result of the free will of the person herself (see "Change" in Doing What Comes Naturally). Fish sees people as so socially constructed that free will cannot exist; everything a reader does is a result of her
background. Rosenblatt rejects this line of thinking and notes that readers always have some individual freedom. If they did not, she asks, how can some individuals not only act as a part of but also act on the communities they belong to? Rosenblatt does connect Fish’s idea of "interpretive communities" to her own social view of the reading transaction; see "Viewpoints" 104.

6. Some of my classmates in a graduate seminar were upset at Rosenblatt for consistently using the masculine pronoun in her writing, even after she’d revised Literature as Exploration in 1968. In an interesting note to Flynn’s essay in The Experience of Reading, Rosenblatt notes that "My use of the generic 'he' was a feminist gesture, to counteract the notion that teaching was a feminine, and hence rightfully lower-paid, occupation!" (174n). Allen also notes that there are a lot of politics at work here—Rosenblatt is a woman writing about what a male-dominated academy (university professors) ought to be doing in their classrooms (18).

7. Elbow suggests that perhaps reader-response approaches are "out of fashion in literary criticism [because] critics began to stumble onto a critical method that required giving naked accounts of what was actually happening inside them as they read—and decided to back away from the process" ("War" 15). That is, the exposure such readings might exhibit was too frightening to allow.

8. For more on Freire and his liberatory philosophy, along with comments about Henry Giroux and Donaldo Macedo, see Willinsky’s "The Lost Reader of Democracy." For how Rosenblatt is thought about in Britain, see Evans’ "Transactions Overseas"; for the connection between feminist theory and Rosenblatt, see Flynn’s "Rosenblatt and Feminism."

9. This charge is not true, and David Bleich, for one, suggests that the cognitive builds on the affective. Rosenblatt says that each is required; we must consider all aspects of the reading transaction. More and more, researchers are coming to believe and
argue that the cognitive and affective are part and parcel of one another (as Rosenblatt has always suggested; see "The Transactional Theory"); for a useful view on the denotation of some of the terms used in discussing affective versus cognitive readings, see McLeod.

10. Rosenblatt breaks down the purposes for reading into what she terms efferent reading—reading for information, for the "residue" left when the reading is complete—and aesthetic reading, which is reading for the feelings the text creates in the reader as the reading takes place. Rosenblatt asserts that "the mark of the reader's aesthetic activity is precisely that he does not respond to either of these elements separately, but rather fuses the cognitive and the emotive, or apprehends them as facets of the same lived-through experience" (Reader 46). We move between these two "poles" depending on our purpose in reading. We would "efferently" read the directions on a fire extinguisher we were trying to use to put out a fire, while a novel or poem might be read more aesthetically. But Rosenblatt argues that we most often read with something of both stances, letting our purpose determine how much of either an efferent or an aesthetic reading we concentrate on (for a visual representation of the reader's stance see "Writing and Reading" 7).

11. Straw worries that if the "mental text" can be viewed and examined in the same way(s) that physical texts had been, the same foundational problems arise as when the text is privileged. If the "mental text" becomes the object to be studied, rather than the reader's transaction, that "mental text" could be seen as a complete entity in which only one meaning could reside. However, Rosenblatt's model suggests that when readers consider the text they have created through the reading process, they create a new transaction, a new evocation—and such transactions continue over and over continuously through the reading of a work.

12. For more on how different theorists (Bleich, Culler, Fish, Holland, Iser, Poulet) suggest readers make meaning, see Bogdan and Straw 214, passim.
13. For a summary of research on the reading/writing relationship, see Tierney and Shanahan; Kucer "The Making of Meaning."

14. As David Bartholomae notes, students are even capable of correcting their errors as they read their own work aloud, for they know what they mean even if those meanings did not develop from the words on their paper ("The Study of Error").

Notes to chapter four:

1. For helpful discussions on how ethnography is a textual practice in which the writing itself creates what is reported, see Bishop; Herndl.

2. For an extended discussion of the definition of ethnography, see Hammersley and Atkinson ch. 1. Also see Heath 34; Kamil, Langer, and Shanahan 71.

3. For useful discussions on some of the difficulties that arise through the use of ethnographic practices in educational research, see Bishop; Brodky; Fetterman; Kantor, Kirby, and Goetz.

   Bishop is especially helpful as she provides field-dependent definitions of ethnography and how such definitions connect to those who write them. As she writes, all definitions are "shaded by the originating discipline (like sociology, anthropology, education, psychology) and the needs of the witness, his or her current project and situation within the humanities and/or social science professions" (155n). Here are the definitions of ethnography Bishop supplies:

   **Anthropology based:** "An ethnography is a written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)" (Van Maanan 1);

   **Educational based:** "Ethnographers attempt to record, in an orderly manner, how natives behave and how they explain their behavior. And"
ethnography, strictly speaking, is an orderly report of this recording. Natives are people who in situations anywhere—including children and youth in schools—and not just people who live in remote jungles or cozy peasant villages" (Spindler and Spindler 17);

*Psychology based:* "The self as we experience it, understand it, and act it out is a function of the dynamic interaction between individual and social groups, so to describe the self usefully we must investigate those interactions" (Brooke 16-17) (155n).

4. I want to note that even the terms used to describe inexperienced college writers (*basic; developmental; remedial*) are problematic. However, such a discussion is tangential to my argument here (for a bit of the current conversation on basic writing, see Bartholomae "The Tidy House"; Greenburg; Hindman).

5. During the semester in which I did classroom research, my English 100 students read *Black Ice* (by Lorene Cary), about one-fourth of *Working* (Studs Terkel), the first half of *Developing Writers* (Pamela Gay), and all of the University of Arizona’s *Student’s Guide to First-Year Composition. English 100 Edition* (Barva, Ekstrom, and Glau), in addition to a packet of photocopied essays.

The packet for the particular classes I discuss included the following:


6. As a point of comparison, *Harper's Magazine* reports that the average student in a Florida college or university will write about 18,000 words during his or her four-year education.

7. My own thinking is that Rosenblatt would agree with my extending of her argument to focus on dialogue and not simply on text. It is important to note that Rosenblatt taught and wrote during the heyday of the New Criticism; just as when we publish in academic journals today we must acknowledge the influence of poststructural (some call it postmodern) thinking, Rosenblatt in her time was forced by the context she wrote in to pay homage to New Critical thought and ways of seeing and working with texts.

8. The fall of 1993 was the first time the University of Arizona had a Student's Guide for English 100 classes; the Guide for English 101 and 102 had been in use for 13 years. *A Student's Guide to First-Year Composition. English 100 edition. 1993-94* is a 110-page perfect-bound text that contains sample assignments and student writing, administrative rules, essays by instructors on various aspects of the course and on composition, and advice by previous English 100 students to newer students.

9. Unless quotations in my chapters are specifically attributed to students, they are my words taken from the tape recordings made during class. Student comments, taken either from their writing or what they had to say during class or
conferences, have been regularized as to spelling and punctuation. My feeling is that surface errors in the student voices within the context of this dissertation would detract from what they have to say. Also, while most students gave me permission to use their names, some did not; when I quote the latter, they are cited as Anonymous.

10. I am writing this chapter early in 1994, at the beginning of the semester immediately following the one from which these students are quoted. It is fascinating to read many of the same kinds of remarks from another group--my current English 100 students. Since I do not have permission to cite my 1994 students, I am not individually attributing their quotations, but consider how their comments mirror their fellow students one semester earlier; here is some of what they wrote about themselves as writers:

I have a hard time writing what I’m thinking. Most of my thoughts are very difficult to write down.

I really have the problem of expressing my thoughts on paper. I always know what I want to portray or the point I want to make, but when I put it down on paper, it’s not what I was trying to say.

My largest weakness . . . is my inability to spell well.

I have trouble expressing myself and in putting it into the right form.

What quotations such as these--which echo their classmates’ comments from a semester earlier--suggest to me is that it would be an interesting research project to follow the students from two classes through their respective semesters, soliciting their feelings about various aspects of their writing every week or so, just to compare what they had to say about themselves as growing, changing writers.
11. More recently I have expanded this exercise to ask my students to come up in something of a brainstorming session other Re- words that mean to do something again. They are always amazed at how many of these words they know, and I think this idea helps, er, reinforce the concept of revision as (re)seeing, as (re)envisioning.

12. Ziv developed a taxonomy of commentary that focused on three levels: macro (structural), conceptual (ideological content), and micro (lexical). She then coded her responses and how her students reacted to her comments, based on explicit clues (telling students exactly how revision should occur) or implicit clues (calling attention to a problem and suggesting possible alternatives, but allowing the student to choose how and what to do). Finally, Ziv developed a taxonomy of what her students did about her comments and their reaction to them.

13. If such an instance could be found, Sperling and Freedman argued, we could all learn what might work with other students. They decided to examine Lisa, an "A" student who was expressive in class.

Sperling and Freedman’s study centered on "response rounds," each consisting of a segment of text, the teacher’s written response to that writing, the student’s response to those comments, and "sometimes the student’s subsequent redrafting of the text" (4). Sperling and Freedman tried to categorize the instructor’s comments "according to whether or not he [the instructor] had been explicit in his classroom talk about the kind of problem or issue the comment referred to" (5).
14. Burkland and Grimm considered four areas:

- the clarity of teacher comments;
- if students felt the comments could be transferred to future papers;
- whether students were motivated or encouraged by the comments;
- how students judged the efficiency of time spent by teachers in responding.

Notes to chapter five:

1. Most of my early comments to Julie were actually questions:

Glau: "Did the worksheet help or was it a waste of time? I'm hearing both from people today."

Julie: "Um, it was kind of a waste 'cause I already knew from the beginning where my weak spots were."

[we discussed more about the worksheet and went over Julie’s paper, highlighting the main points with a yellow marker; I asked several clarifying questions]

Glau: "The only problem--this is really a good story and it’s really interesting--is that I’m not sure the story has enough evidence to show you can always count on your brother . . . you need more examples."

[together we did a quick sentence outline to illustrate the lack of examples; we discussed some possible examples of how Julie might count on her brother at school even today when she is attending college while he was still in high school]
Julie: "Oh, my God, I do that all the time. I call him for everything. Like I didn’t know how to drop a class, I asked him to come over and do it."

Glau: "That’s cool. Give me a few examples like that."

[we discussed other examples; we also talked about how Julie could best use her tutor. We discussed several changes Julie had made in her text from the version I had read to a new version of the paper she brought in]

Glau: "But there’s nothing here about [the second part of the assignment] except at the end . . . the way you [show significance] is by providing examples of what you’re doing, what you’re using that information for . . . like, do you try to ‘be there’ for other people?"

[we went through several examples of how Julie might be there for her friends, as Julie’s brother is for her]

2. My records indicate that Anna was the only student of these four who brought in a completed worksheet. Here is her completed Evaluation Worksheet; her answers to the prompts are in italics:

The purpose of this section is to identify the major elements of your paper. Answer each question in the space provided:

What is your purpose in this paper? How Tom made me much more careful and skeptical.

How does the title reflect your purpose? The title is about my ex-boyfriend, a reverend’s son, and how he changed the way I am, how he affected me.

What is your main point or claim? The main point in my story is not to be easily conned by a man that tries to manipulate you in any way.
What line of reasoning have you developed to support your claim or main point? In the last paragraph of my paper, I stated the greatest lesson I learned from Tom because of his lies, etc.

In this part, circle the response that most accurately reflects your assessment of your work, then give your reasons for that assessment:

How good of a job have you done in achieving your purpose? Anna circled (good) and added I stated how much more careful I am now, what Tom has done to open my eyes. (Last paragraph)

How good of a job have you done in supporting your main point or argument? Anna circled (excellent) and added I stated how even when Tom lied to me and hurt me so much, he made me learn such a great lesson in my life.

How good a job have you done meeting the needs of your audience? Anna circled (OK) and added as many examples as I could think of whenever Mr. Glau asked for examples.

How effective is the overall organization? Anna circled (excellent) and added Everything seemed to fit together and there were also no complaints about my organization from other students.

How good is the continuity from sentence to sentence? Anna circled (excellent) and added Excellent because there were not any run-on sentences, and the sentences were complete.

What's the best part of your paper? Why? The best part of my paper that I think is the example I give about the word I learned from Tom, "fard," because it was a funny part.

What do you see as the weakest part? Why? The weakest part is where I try to differentiate the American household and the Chinese household. Since I live in America, all the examples I can get from [a] Chinese household is from my mom's mouth.
What would you spend more time on, if you had it? Where I try to compare the Chinese and American household.

What sentence, paragraph, or idea would you give the "right on!" award to? Where I made up the rule for myself to abide to.

What comments would you put on your paper, if you were the instructor? The example in the "I can" paragraph and the paragraph where my vocabulary increased are similar. I should have thought up another example in the "I can" paragraph. [I] should have given more in depth about the time I was in the woods shooting.

3. Learning log # 15:

The purpose of this learning log is to comment in detail on one of your classmates' papers. At the same time, I hope it will give you some ideas of your own, both for revising your own paper and for how the argumentative essay can best be organized so it's convincing.

Please comment on each of the areas below, in at least one paragraph each, for the papers you are reviewing. Write in the form of a letter--Dear __________; and be honest and clear in what you want to say to your classmate.

Is the paper argumentative? How could it be more persuasive?

Is the main idea clear? Is there enough supporting evidence so the paper is convincing? How might outside research help the content of the paper?

Can you see the details of what the author is describing? What could be added to improve how events and people and ideas are described?
What do you think about the paper’s organization? How could it be improved? Do you see any paragraphs and/or ideas that would be better at a different place in the paper? If so, please indicate where and why.

Does the paper do an adequate job of listing the other side of the argument? Does the paper do a good job of refuting the other side’s arguments? How might the refutation part of the paper be more effective?

Comment on the surface features—the mechanics of the paper. Do errors get in the way of getting the point across? Do you see any patterns to any errors the author makes?

How do you like the conclusion of this paper? Is it effective at connecting the main arguments and in asking for the reader to do something? How could the conclusion be improved? Do you like the introduction of this paper? How could the introduction be improved?

Describe in good detail your overall reaction to the main argument of the paper: are you convinced? Why or why not? What would it take to convince you (more facts, statements, surveys, testimony, etc.)?

4. I hoped these conferences would be a place where students and I could together clarify what each of us meant, that together we could work toward understanding. I pictured myself acting as one of the teachers Freedman reports on in Response to Student Writing, when she notes that instructor Peterson plays the role of "master" to his "apprentice" writers, so he coaches students with both individual conferences and written comments on their drafts.

Others have argued that even one-to-one conferences do not guarantee that our comments will be clearly understood and that many instructors don’t have a good sense of what types of comments might be productive unless they’re discussed in conferences.
See, for instance, Sperling and Freedman, "A Good Girl" and Freedman, *Response* 56. For a useful discussion of who controls what happens during a conference, see Freedman, "Teaching and Learning."

Notes to chapter six:

1. Here are some more of their comments about writing:

   When I finally get started writing, my main problem is I'm not descriptive which in turn makes my paper shorter. (Rob Halter)

   I don't always use paragraphs as I need to. A major problem of mine I've noticed in high school is that I tend to get off the topic I'm writing about. (Jackie Fish)

   I am also the type of person that can have great ideas all at once and then I can't remember any of them. It is really hard for me to concentrate and write down what I want to say. (Liz Esquida)

   Sometimes it's hard for me to do an investigation paper, because I tend to copy from the books exactly what they say. I can also use some grammar, spelling, and vocabulary help. (Gwen Jaime)

2. Louise Rosenblatt argues that we need to do the same for the reading and teaching of "literature" texts; see *Literature as Exploration* 26; 82-83.

3. Several of my students did see more than a mechanical focus when they thought and wrote about revision, but almost always connected their wider view of the process to surface correctness (see Connors and Lunsford "Teachers' Rhetorical Comments" for current research that confirms these student statements). For example, one of my students suggested that revision meant "You cross out things that you don't like, add different ideas into your
paper, check the mechanics of your paper, and see if it is an organized fashion and in your own ideas" (Anonymous). Liz Esquida claims to incorporate the teacher or peer comments she receives on her work into how she revises, but still centered on form and correctness. Liz says that:

I revise a paper by reading it myself and then asking someone else to read them as well. . . . I try to revise it until my paper makes complete sense and all grammatical errors are correct. . . . I plan to review paper #1 in the same way that I have revised other papers in the past. I will read through it and try to find as many mistakes as possible.

4. Even early in the semester a few of my students did have a more comprehensive view of revision: for instance, Liz Esquida elaborated on the need for continual revision when she wrote that "Revision means the practice of rechecking a document to improve it. It means reading through the paper and correcting it every time, to make it even better. Revision to me seems like a never ending process." "Revision," Vivian Rodriguez argued, "means to change what is not written to its full potential. Meaning that part of a written piece could be written better." And Brook Sims repeats what other students reported: "Revision is to go back over something to check to see if it's in the need of an alteration. Most of the time revision is a nightmare to a student or it's another word for rewriting."

5. The final version of paper one was due on day 13, so I collected them and then continued our discussion of revision by bringing in four versions of the first twenty pages of my first dissertation chapter--I taped one end of the computer printout to the top of the chalkboard and stretched the rest out over the class (I keep the pages connected). "I want to give you some idea of what I go through," I told my students, "I'm going through the same thing you are. Now in addition to these four drafts, I've probably read this thing I don't know how many times on the computer--fix this, add this, change that, this just happens to be four versions of it." While
my students cannot really read much of my corrections on these texts as they are draped over and through the class, they can see all of the places I worked to revise, where I marked sections to be moved and where I moved them to, the paragraphs I partly crossed out, and so on. I think it is a good visual aid.

"They get cleaner as they go along," I said; the tape records a couple of "Oh, My God," from my students as my texts unfold through the class. I expect they had never seen a paper twenty pages long. "See how messy this one was," I note, (evidently) pointing to version one. "This was the bad one--I made a lot of changes in this one." I also explained how each chapter goes to my dissertation committee for comments and suggestions, which leads to even more revision. "My whole point here," I said, "is not to talk too much about revision other than we all do the process of peer review and that's how stuff gets good."

I then outlined on the board the process my students had gone through so far in writing paper one. First, they brought in their first version, to which we attached and then filled-in a worksheet based on the commenting criteria they designed. Two days later my students brought in version two, and commented on each others' texts based on four questions I listed on the board. Each student then came to see me in conference, where we talked about the comments I had made on their papers. "Good, bad, what?" I asked, "what can we do to make it [the commenting/revision process] better next time?" Here is a partial transcript of one class's conversation:

Student: "It was helpful, but longer conferences would help."

Glau: "How much longer? Those were 15-minute conferences."

Student: "Maybe like five minutes."

[About half of my class indicated they would like half-hour conferences. We agreed for the
next conference, for paper two, they could sign up for one or two (consecutive) 15-minute conferences]

Glau: "What else?"

Student: "More detailed. If you wrote something down, though, that we might want to discuss in a conference and that we can [unintelligible] look at."

Glau: "Jennifer, how about you? Good, bad, useful?"

Jennifer: "Helpful." [Others indicate the conferences were useful]

Glau: "How can I make them better? How can I help you more?"

[No response]

Glau: "Was I being too prescriptive? How about sentence outlining?" [No response; I must not have allowed enough time for them to answer]

Glau: "How about highlighting stuff in yellow? Was that okay?"

[Several students say "Yeh"]

Student: "'Cause it was like if you highlight it, when I took my paper home and started writing again I could remember what you said."

Student: "Yeh."

[I switched the conversation to the worksheets I asked my students to complete and bring with them to their conferences]

Glau: "What about the little worksheets that you all filled in? Some of you didn’t like those but . . . Remember the worksheets? How many people found that useful? Nobody found that useful?" [I counted hands: five]
[Several students said that I had asked them to do too much—the worksheets were too long. Other students made comments on the worksheets; I mentioned what several students (from both classes) wrote in their logs about revision]

Glau: "How about forcing you to do revisions like this—is that good?"

[General agreement that it was useful]

Even though our in-class discussion about revision was not particularly enlightening, much of what my students wrote about the response/commenting/revision process they had been through is helpful. I think this is true for two reasons: first, many of my students appeared to gain reflectiveness in their writing through the commenting process and by writing about it they were able to articulate their thoughts, and second, several made good suggestions on how to make things better in the future.

6. Perhaps indicating the importance of obtaining feedback from each specific group of students we teach, when I asked both of my English 100 classes in the spring semester 1994, the same question, they both indicated that one-to-one conversations they had were not particularly effective and did not want to do peer review in that manner again.

I want to note that during the spring, 1994 semester I did not bring "talk about talk" into my classrooms, and that is perhaps why the latter group of students had a different view of dialogue than their peers from a semester earlier.

7. A sidelight: also late in the semester, some of my students appeared to have incorporated, to some degree, Peter Elbow’s approach to writing. One wrote she "learned that you should be more free when writing papers. Always make sure you write down whatever comes to your head even if you might not use it" (Anonymous). And another indicated that when he "write[s] my first draft, I try to keep my train of
thought chugging along; therefore, I do not use any punctuation. After completion, I look through my paper and add commas, semicolons, periods, etc." (Anonymous).


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