In this presentation of basic guidelines for responding to student writing, the central thesis is that teachers' comments should reflect their instructional goals for individual students. Fewer, and more carefully designed, comments are likely to be more effective than a large number of unfocused responses.

When Less Is More: Principles for Responding in the Disciplines

Ronald F. Lunsford

If one wants to know how best to respond to student writing, it would seem good to ask experts on composition theory what they do. That is what my colleague Richard Straub and I did several years ago. Our recently published text, *12 Readers Reading: Responding to College Student Writing* (1995), reports our findings. We began our study by sending our twelve readers[1] fifteen samples of student writing, complete with background information on the courses in which the writing was produced and the writing abilities (and experiences) of the student writers.[2] We then asked the readers to respond to these writers as they would if they were members of classes the readers were teaching.[3] Once we collected these responses, we devised a rubric that allowed us to analyze the data we had collected.

Our first impulse was to determine the ways in which these readers' responses differed from one another. As we worked with our data, however, it became more and more clear that there were certain basic similarities in these readers' responses. In chapter five of our study, we listed and discussed the following seven principles for response that evolved from our study:

1. Our readers write well-developed and text-specific comments.
2. They focus their comments on global, not local, concerns.
3. They frame most of their comments in nonauthoritative modes of commentary.
4. Their responses are carefully thought out and purposeful.
5. They are designed to help students approach writing as a process.
6. They are mindful of the rhetorical situation for the writing.
7. They are adapted to the student writer behind the text.

We sorted the seven principles into four key categories of teacher responses: Development and Specificity, Purposeful Commenting, Correctness, and Extra-Textual Response. Within these categories I shall explain briefly what is meant by each principle and then discuss the ways in which all seven seem applicable to responding to writing in the disciplines.

Development and Specificity

Our first principle deals with the length and language of teacher comments (principle 1: our readers write well-developed and text-specific comments). Unlike the teachers in our study, many teachers write undeveloped, cryptic comments such as those in the following list. These comments appear in the margins of student texts, often without any clear indication as to what words, phrases, or sentences are being referred to.

> **Undeveloped Comments**
> *vague*
> *do we?*
> *tense!*
> *tone?*
> *all people?*
> *good use of quote*

Although the comments in the next list are certainly not long, they make specific references to elements in the texts, and they set up a conversational model for the interaction between teacher and student.

> **Developed Comments**
> *What's your main point here? If it's that you disagree, put that idea up front and explain.*
> *You have given us a summary of the article. Why? You can give your view.*
> *Are you implying here that time for prayer would give protection? If you're not saying that, then how is a reader intended to take this sentence?*

Of course, it takes time to write such conversational comments as these. If one has a large stack of papers before him, it is one thing to go through and write one-word responses (such as "good," "vague," "tone," "style") in the margins; it is quite another to talk with the students about what the reader sees (and doesn't see), understands (and doesn't understand), in the text. One might argue that there simply isn't enough time for these conversations. The teachers in our study were mindful of this problem, as illustrated in the subsequent discussion.

Purposeful Commenting

As I think about the principle represented in this section (principle 4: our readers' responses are carefully thought out and purposeful), I am reminded

of an anecdote told by a colleague of mine, Sam Watson. He often recounts the story of his first year or two of teaching, years in which he would approach each student text with the aim of pointing out every possible problem in the text. However, the long hours of marking and the comment-littered papers did not produce the results he was aiming for: in fact, they seemed to produce no change whatsoever in student writing. In reflecting on those days, Sam says, "I was trying so hard to be sure that the students would learn to write better, and they seemed to be trying equally hard not to." Fortunately for his students (and for his own sanity), Sam soon came to the conclusion that in some cases "less is more." The twelve readers in our study seem to agree. They average just over three issues per paper marked. That is not to say that they mark only three items in a paper, but that they arrive at a set of themes for their responses. If they have decided that a student needs to work on transitions, they may mark two or three examples of problems with transitions, and make one reasonably fully developed comment (either in the margin near one example of a poor transition or in the end note). This comment might be two or three sentences long, allowing the teacher to give the student a mini-lesson on the issue, rather than some vague notation (such as "transition") that merely serves to put the student on notice that he has a problem of some sort.

This principle is one of the most important in characterizing the twelve readers in our study. In looking at papers marked by many teachers (both writing teachers and teachers in other disciplines), I often get a picture of a marker-of-errors hovering over the text, looking for some trigger to set off an alarm and cause him to attack a passage in the paper. In contrast, when I think of the readers in our study, I have the image of relaxed and reflective readers, who sit back in their chairs to take in the whole of a student's paper before deciding on a strategy for teaching some important principles, and who then carefully construct a set of comments designed to carry out that instruction.

Correctness

The readers in our study attend to what the students are saying rather than to the way they are saying it (principle 2: our readers focus their comments on global, not local concerns). In our analysis, we placed responses into three large categories: matters of form (such as spelling and punctuation, word choice, and sentence structure), matters of content (such as organization and ideas), and matters that reach beyond the text itself (such as the student's personal experience and writing process). Only 21 percent of our teachers' comments dealt with formal issues; 55 percent of their responses concerned content. (The other 24 percent were dedicated to extra-textual matters, which I shall discuss later.)

Interestingly enough, given the reputations of writing teachers, only 6 percent of their comments dealt with issues of correctness (spelling, punctuation, and other mechanical matters). One might argue that these numbers would be partly controlled by the characteristics of the writing, that writing with few errors would allow teachers to attend to content. However, the fact that only

13 percent of the errors that could have been noted were actually referred to in these teachers' comments makes it clear that they were choosing, very consciously, not to devote a great deal of time to error.

When asked what they like about responses they receive from teachers in the disciplines, students often say that these teachers "don't care how you say it, they just want to be sure you know what you are talking about." Teachers of writing and teachers in the disciplines, themselves, have bristled at such comments as these and have argued that students will not value writing until everyone in the university takes writing seriously. Nothing in our study would undermine such a claim. However, it is clear that for our teachers, writing is much more than correctness. The same should be true for teachers in the disciplines. If we attend to errors or to the form of our students' writing, rather than responding to what they have to say, we may well cause students to want to write less. Because most of us get better at those things that we care enough about to practice, the result of such attention to issues of form and mechanics may well be the opposite of what we would want.

Extra-Textual Response

As noted earlier, 24 percent of the comments made to student writers in our study dealt with matters outside the narrow confines of the text (principle 5: our readers' responses are designed to help students approach writing as a process; principle 6: our readers are mindful of the rhetorical situation for the writing; principle 7: our readers' responses are adapted to the student writer behind the text). These comments may deal with such matters as the following:

Writing Process

Did you try any prewriting activities to help you develop your paper? I have the sense that you are limiting yourself to a narrow set of examples here.

Student's Personal Experiences

Do you wear seatbelts when you drive? Have you known someone who was injured as a result of wearing his or her belt?

Rhetorical Situation

What do you think your readers will know about this issue [of prayer in the schools]? What will be your major obstacle in getting them to see things from your point of view?

Classroom Situation

John made a comment about your paper the other day that I thought was very perceptive. He was troubled by the fact that he couldn't decide exactly what you saw as the climax to your story.

Writing Assignment

Your paper is certainly interesting, but I don't think it fits the requirement that you "explain" a concept to your readers.

What can we make of such responding practices? Simply put, they suggest that the teachers in our study believe that in order to achieve their ultimate goal of helping students become better writers, they must move beyond the confines of student texts. This is not to suggest that they do not attend to those texts; certainly, much can be learned by a careful examination of textual matters. But if students are to improve their overall writing abilities, they must reflect on the ways in which they produce texts, the various factors that help and hinder them in different writing situations.

Surely there are analogies in the other disciplines. Obviously, the primary goal of a science teacher will be to assist students in learning science. Because the processes by which students learn are inextricably bound to their personal backgrounds and knowledge, it seems logical that teachers' responses to scientific texts might profitably go beyond the actual information in the texts to deal with issues of process and student knowledge. A student who consistently misunderstands certain concepts in evolutionary theory may well be, consciously or unconsciously, fighting against scientific theories that do not fit into his worldview. Teachers who limit their commentary to what is in the text will lose the opportunity to elicit information that could prove helpful to both teacher and student. For example, how might one respond to a student who presents such misinformation as this:

> Although Darwin claims that humans came from monkeys (and our textbook agrees with him), this theory just won't wash. There are far too many missing links for this theory to be believed. And after all, it is really just a theory, not the truth.

The teacher can attend to the text in some of the following ways:

> This isn't what Darwin says.
> The textbook doesn't accept Darwin's original theories.
> No one thinks that Darwin's theory, in its original formulation, is still valid.
> The fact that there are missing links does not, in and of itself, invalidate a theory.
> Theories, by definition, are neither true or false. They are more, or less, valid, depending upon the evidence that can be offered in support of them.

But how could a teacher who wants to get beyond the impasse represented by the language in this text respond to this student? I suggest that such questions as the following offer a useful alternative:

> Where does Darwin make this claim? Could you find the exact passage and then critique it in light of modern evolutionary theory? Do you find these modern statements objectionable also?
> You are implying a kind of chain of being from monkeys (apes) to humans? Can you draw the chain as you think Darwin meant to represent it? What sources (Darwin's own writing or writing about him by others) has helped shape your picture?
> Can you give me an example of a theory that you accept as true? What convinces you of its truth?

> *What do those who take an evolutionary point of view have to say about these missing*
>   *links? Why do you find their position less than convincing?*

The first set of text-based responses to this student's assertions about Darwin and evolution point out the inaccuracies in the text. The second set ask the student to do some thinking that may, at least, give the teacher some insight into how the student has arrived at this inaccurate statement. With luck, the questions could help the student begin to do the kind of thinking that may result in his learning something about science in general and evolutionary theory in particular.

Issues of Control

Finally, the twelve teachers in our study can be characterized as nonauthoritarian in their approach to student texts (principle 3: our readers frame most of their comments in nonauthoritative modes of commentary). This is a rather complicated concept and would require considerable discussion were I to attempt to get at the subtle distinctions made in our book. For my purposes here, it is probably enough to say that these teachers do not take the steering wheel out of the students' hands. This is a metaphor that a good friend of mine uses when he teaches me principles of computing. In our sessions, he is generally patient, standing over my shoulder telling me what keys to strike, and when, and thereby helping me learn to do for myself. However, occasionally, I will get myself into a situation that is going to be very hard for him to get me out of from his guiding position, and he will say, "Here, move over, and let me drive a minute." A few quick strokes later, he will have things working and will return the keyboard (or steering wheel, in terms of his metaphor) to me.

I suspect most writing teachers find it very easy to identify with this metaphor. When the student writes a sentence such as "When I have pressure or a deadline, I know I have to do my paper right now, and I have to be concentrated," the natural response is to say move over, let me drive (see Exhibit 8.1). This is clearly the most economical response to such a sentence. The teacher knows how this sentence should be written, and any indirect comments that ask the student to cast about looking for the right answer only serve to draw attention to the artificiality of the writing situation. As a result, many writing teachers have moved further and further away from making comments on structuring issues such as this, except in what they call *editing sessions*—sessions in which they model how sentences may be revised. But in other situations, they accept the fact that learning writers will produce sentences that are not as elegant as those written by more polished writers. They reason that if writers produce more sentences, their sentences will get better. And they suspect that writers who have many of their sentences rewritten for them will feel less inclined to produce sentences.

As I have discussed, the teachers in our study devote less time to issues of correctness, wording, and sentence structure than to matters of content. In one sense, then, this tendency to focus on matters of content is a move away from control. Responses to content, however, can themselves vary significantly in the degree of control they exercise. Our twelve teachers strive not to be overly controlling in their responses to content issues. It is easy to fall victim to the temptation to take control of the student's ideas, with such controlling comments as the following:

> *Poor sentence structure.* [Negative evaluation.]
> *Put the conclusion in a separate paragraph.* [Imperative.]
> *What about starting with this point?* [Advice.]

There are other less controlling ways to comment, as the following examples illustrate:

> *This word seems just right.* [Praise.]
> *How old were you? Were you in the 7th grade? 10th?* [Closed heuristic question.[4]]
> *How do you distinguish between morals and prejudices?* [Open heuristic question.]
> *First, you say that the law is a violation of a person's freedom.* [Interpretive.[5]]
> *As I read your essay, Steve, I felt as if I were there with you, motoring along I-75, imagining Lake Ivanhoe in increasing detail as first one and then another fishing hole floated past my window.* [Reader experience.[6]]

One might ask whether, given the teacher's responsibility to guide student writing, she should avoid all controlling comments. Clearly, she should not. However, she should be careful not to couch too many of her comments in controlling modes. The teachers in our study used both controlling and noncontrolling comments, but they were careful not to be overly controlling, as shown by the fact that they framed only 29 percent of their comments in what we call authoritative comments with the rest in some form of less controlling commentary.

Again, there are similar strategies that teachers in the disciplines can use. Before moving to them, let me acknowledge that we all use writing for various purposes, among them, testing how much (or what) students have learned. In a writing assignment designed to test, response doesn't seem terribly complicated: the student determines how well she did on the basis of a grade. If there is a comment, it tends to be a justification for or an explanation of the marks given.

However, teachers in the disciplines often give writing assignments designed to encourage students to think and learn about a subject in the process of writing about that subject. In such a situation, it doesn't seem appropriate to limit ourselves to the same kind of "right" and "wrong" responses we might use in marking a writing test. The more the teacher can open up the process

by asking questions, telling the student how he is reading her work, or even giving personal reflections on what the student is saying, the more the student will be encouraged to think about what she has said.

In reflecting upon how our comments can open up, and shut down, student learning, it is important to differentiate between various types of questions we can ask. It makes a great deal of difference whether the teacher is asking a question that has a definite and clear-cut answer (closed heuristic question) or one that asks the student to reflect on a concept that doesn't lend itself to absolute answers (open heuristic question). It might be argued that it is the teacher's role to know the answers to the questions he asks, because he is, in fact, the teacher. Certainly, there is validity to this point of view. But to the degree that his goal is to interest the student in becoming a learner in a particular discipline (as opposed to a memorizer of certain facts about the discipline), the teacher must find ways to elicit the kind of writing that allows him to respond as a fellow inquirer, rather than the repository of all knowledge in this field. (For examples of controlling and noncontrolling responses to scientific writing, see the previous responses to the student writing about Darwin. On the one hand, those responses that are text based tend to be controlling, to close down discussion by making absolutist evaluations of texts—that is, they tell the student that what he has said is incorrect. The responses that go beyond the text, on the other hand, tend to be questions, many of which the teacher doesn't have answers for. They open up inquiry rather than closing it down. It is no coincidence, by the way, that these two phenomena—textual versus extra-textual and authoritative versus nonauthoritative responses— complement one another. As the teacher focuses on the text, he tends to narrow and confine the student. As he moves beyond the text, he opens up possibilities.)

Caveat

In beginning this essay, I noted that when Rick Straub and I began the study that led to the writing of *12 Readers Reading,* we first focused on differences among the teachers' responding styles. At the risk of seeming to undermine what I have said above, I would like to mention briefly some of the differences we found. There were dramatic and obvious ones. For example, we found, very much to our surprise, that six of the readers made few, or no, comments in the margins of student papers. The other six ranged up to a high of 66 percent marginal (as opposed to end) comments. We found that some of those who made marginal comments wrote very neatly in the margins of student texts, and others wrote within the student's text, or in some cases corrected the student's text. Some teachers used very dark ink and wrote in a bold hand; others wrote in light pencil marks and, in one case, wrote in such small print that one almost needs a magnifying glass to read what she is saying. (Interestingly enough, none of the teachers used red ink for writing on student texts.)

As I have said, on the whole, the teachers in our study avoided authoritarian responses. However, there is a wide range in the degree to which they guide (or control) student writing. That range is reflected in the responses two teachers made to a student text entitled "Street Gangs: One Point of View." (See Exhibits 8.1 and 8.2 for sample passages from the two teachers' responses.) Once one gets past the obvious differences in the way the comments look and the places in (and on) the text that the teachers choose to write, there are some very real differences in the control the two teachers wish to exert. Edward White, whom we label the most controlling reader in our group, makes several corrections on the student's text, rewriting the end of one sentence and telling the student how to begin another sentence. He implies a negative evaluation in one case ("This sentence makes us expect something else"), and he praises the student's detail in another—before implying a negative evaluation: "we need more even here." With the exception of an implied audience in his use of "we" and "us" (in some comments not shown in this sample), all of White's comments refer to issues in the student's text.

Anne Gere makes no corrections on the text; in fact all of her comments are written neatly in the margins of the student's paper. In the sample shown here, she writes six sentences, five of which are questions. Within these questions, she moves beyond the text to suggest that the student draw experiences from his life and consider the effect his writing will have on his reader. Although several of her questions imply there are ways to improve the text, she makes no evaluative statements.

The significant differences in the responding styles of these two teachers are captured in the summary comments we make in *12 Readers Reading*. In our overview of his style, we say of White: "Edward White is a close critical reader. It seems he goes to the text looking for, and in his comments is able to put his finger on, what he sees as the key problems that need to be worked out in the writing. He then instructs students about what to do by way of revision or poses questions that will lead them to make specific changes in the text. He does not shy away from telling students precisely what their writing needs or offering them specific directions for revision" (p. 204).

Here is a brief excerpt from our summary of Gere's style: "Gere's comments never risk taking center stage. If she controls the spotlight, she is intent on throwing the light on the student, not on her role as a responder. Although she determines through her very choice of comments what the student initially may attend to, she leaves it up to the student to decide how to use her suggestions and to find ways to address her concerns. She does not lay out a script to be followed or overtly guide the student about how he might take up the tasks" (p. 236).

We have purposefully made these summaries descriptive rather than evaluative. This is not a matter of right and wrong or good and bad; there is no debate as to whether a teacher will exercise control in responding to student writing; by being a teacher and by means of making marks on a student's

Exhibit 8.1. More Directive Response

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Writing 12
Chris B.
Second Rough Draft
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Street Gangs: One Point of View

I'm writing this paper on street gangs because I was once part
of one, and I feel that this gives me some authority to write a
legitimate opinion *about them from the inside.*

I never asked or set out to join a gang, it just happened by
association. I knew some guys who were members of the Cripps and by
hanging around them I was sort of "taken in" by the gang and generally
thought to be a part of them by everyone else.

Unlike some members I tried to maintain a low profile. I didn't
provoke fights or do destructive things on purpose, but we had a
strong bond. If one person was in trouble, no matter who or what kind
it was, everyone was there regardless, *of the course.* (?)

This sticking together almost always occurred in a physical sense.
If one of our guys were to be beaten up, the rest of us would take a
revenge of some sort, whether it be by beating someone up or
vandalizing someones property, we always got even. That was a basic
rule, nobody could "be one up on us", we always had to get even.

Except for this one occasion, I can't really remember us actually
going out and starting trouble for no "reason". We were at the pool,
and what we did was single out one person at a time. Once we had a
target, one of us would go up to that certain someone and "sucker
punch" him and before he could retaliate the rest of the gang would
break it up.

This sentence means in effect something else. Begin with "On one occasion..."

This is the kind of detail we need. But we need more, even here. ¹

Exhibit 8.2. Less Directive Response

Writing 12
Chris B.
Second Rough Draft

Street Gangs: One Point of View

I'm writing this paper on street gangs because I was once part
of one, and I feel that this gives me some authority to write a
legitimate opinion.

Can you start with one specific experience drawn from your life with street gangs?

I never asked or set out to join a gang, it just happened by
association. I knew some guys who were members of the Cripps and by
hanging around them I was sort of "taken in" by the gang and generally
thought to be a part of them by everyone else.

Unlike some members I tried to maintain a low profile. I didn't
provoke fights or do destructive things on purpose, but we had a
strong bond. If one person was in trouble, no matter who or what kind
it was, everyone was there regardless.

These ¶'s seem to deal with the issue of "membership." What else can you say about membership in the gang? Is there a way to make connections among these ¶'s?

This sticking together almost always occured in a physical sense.
If one of our guys were to be beaten up, the rest of us would take a
revenge of some sort, whether it be by beating someone up or
vandalizing someones property, we always got even. That was a basic
rule, nobody could "be one up on us", we always had to get even.

What does this "exception" show? What do you want your readers to draw from this?

Except for this one occasion, I can't really remember us actually
going out and starting trouble for no "reason". We were at the pool,
and what we did was single out one person at a time. Once we had a
target, one of us would go up to that certain someone and "sucker
punch" him and before he could retaliate the rest of the gang would
break it up.

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paper, he or she is controlling. The question, then, is not whether but to what degree the teacher will control. And it should be clear that too little control (that is, guidance) is not necessarily better than too much control. Our teachers strive for balance. But the teaching personas that they present us illustrate a very real range in terms of the control they exercise.

Conclusion: Implications

I will conclude by trying to answer the central question the editors of this collection asked in inviting me to write this chapter: What implications does *12 Readers Reading* have for the ways in which teachers in the disciplines should respond to student writing? I began by enunciating some pretty clear-cut principles for response, notable among them the principle that responses should not take control from the student. But then I complicated matters with the caveat that there is a real range in the control that teachers exercise when it comes to guiding/controlling students. (Were there time, I could complicate every other principle I have offered in a similar fashion.) As I reflect on this complexity, I am reminded of a comment Chris Anson (one of the twelve readers) made in talking about his philosophy of teaching writing:

> Early in my career in composition, . . . I began to listen carefully to the ways students talked about their writing. Those who made the most progress seemed, during the various processes of drafting and revising, very uncertain. They weighed alternatives. They wrestled with rhetorical choices. They shaped, embellished, and rejected directions for their texts. Yet at the same time they seemed to embrace this uncertainty, to relish it.

If we see responding to student writing as a rhetorical act, as it certainly is, it should not be surprising that we find the same kind of complexity and uncertainty that Anson alludes to in this process. We must struggle in every case to communicate as effectively as possible, within the constraints placed on us by that rhetorical situation. One of the most important of those constraints is the teacher's voice. It is obvious that a biology teacher responding to a paper about photosynthesis is not going to sound like an English teacher responding to a paper about a Shakespearean play. Less obvious, but equally important, is the fact that one English or biology teacher is not going to write (and sound) like another English or biology teacher. If there is one thing that *12 Readers Reading* makes clear, this is it.

Having introduced, and embraced, this complexity, I would like to conclude by moving, again, in the direction of simplicity. With apologies to Robert Fulghum,[7] with the understanding of the fact that there is a fine line between simplification and oversimplification, and without saying where exactly I learned them, I would like to enunciate four basic principles for responding to student writing:

Say enough for students to know what you mean. It doesn't do any good, and it can create a great deal of frustration for the student, if he doesn't really know what to make of the comments on his paper.

Don't say too much. Students (and teachers) have a limited amount of time to dedicate to any one paper. There is a point at which overload sets in, and no matter how instructive the comments may be, they do not prove useful to the student.

Don't spend very much time on matters of correctness. It is all right (even good) if teachers in the disciplines communicate to students that correctness matters—by telling them errors hurt the effectiveness of finished products, suggesting they get the necessary help on these matters, and ultimately, counting off if students do not produce edited work. However, teachers in the disciplines should not allow attention to these matters to distract them, or their students, from the role that writing can play in discovering and sharing knowledge in their disciplines.

Focus your attention on understanding what students mean to say. One of your strengths as a teacher in the disciplines is that you are able to understand what the student is saying and let her know when the ideas are good, even if the form and mechanics could be better. Don't lose that strength. A corollary to this principle, of course, is that you should be sure that students "mean" what they say. One of the dangers of knowing the material is that you can interpret what students meant (or what they should have meant) from sentences that don't show, at all, that the student has a grasp of the concept. If students' writing does not make it clear that they know what they are talking about, your comments should invite them to reexamine and rethink what they are saying. However, when it is clear that students have understood important concepts in your discipline, don't lose the opportunity to respond to *what* they are saying.

Notes

1. The twelve teachers in our study are Chris Anson, University of Minnesota; Peter Elbow, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Anne Ruggles Gere, University of Michigan; Glynda Hull, University of California, Berkeley; Richard L. Larson, Lehman College, City University of New York; Ben McClelland, University of Mississippi; Frank O'Hare, Ohio State University; Jane Peterson, Richland College; Patricia Lambert Stock, Michigan State University; Edward M. White, California State University, San Bernardino; Tilly Warnock, University of Arizona; and the late Donald C. Steward, Kansas State University.

2. Though the student papers were real, the students we presented our readers with were constructs. That is, we created courses for them to be in and personal histories between the teachers of those courses and these individual students. We also allowed our readers to add to this history so as to help us see how their responses were shaped by context.

3. Actually, we complicated this direction a bit further. Realizing that in a situation such as this one, these teachers could not possibly respond to these students as they would were the students in their classes, we settled for asking the teachers to treat the essays as models they might use in training new writing teachers.

4. We label as heuristic those questions that are designed to help the student generate information. A *closed heuristic question* is one that has a clear-cut answer that the teacher knows when he or she asks it. An *open heuristic question* is one that allows the student freedom to find an answer that the teacher does not already know.

5. As the name would suggest, an *interpretive* comment is one in which the teacher allows the student to see how he or she is understanding the text.

6. The *reader experience* comment, much like Peter Elbow's (1981) "movies of the mind," allows the student to know what the teacher is experiencing as a reader of his or her text.

7. I am, of course, referring to Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (New York: Villard Books, 1988).

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