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THE SELF-HELP OF COMPOSITION: PETER ELBOW'S *WRITING WITHOUT TEACHERS*,
COMPOSITION STUDIES, AND THE EXTRACURRICULUM

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

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This project is dedicated to those three individuals

who have been closest to it all along:

Michael, Sophia, and Simone Miller.

Two of you were born

during these years of study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	xii

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION, OR ASSIGNING THE KOAN.....	1
Methodology: Subject Selection.....	10
Scope of Project.....	14
Use of Interviews.....	19
Overview of Project.....	21
II: THE CURRICULUM OF THE “EXTRA”.....	25
The Tradition of Self-Education in the United States.....	26
One Branch of Self-Education: Self-Culture.....	28
The Extracurriculum of Composition Studies.....	31
Self-Help as Crucial Part of Extracurriculum in the United States.....	37
Stepping Outside of Academia to Publish Self-Help.....	42
The Self-Help Audience of Peter Elbow’s <i>Writing without Teachers</i>	44
The Rhetoric of Self-Help in Elbow’s <i>Writing without Teachers</i>	49
III. PRECURSORS.....	57

The Nineteenth-Century Writing Environment for Women.....	61
Eliza Leslie as Successful Nineteenth-Century Woman Writer.....	73
Eliza Leslie's Behaviour Book as Early Writing Self-Help.....	78
IV: WHAT A DIFFERENCE EIGHTY-FOUR YEARS MAKE	99
Changing Perceptions in Creativity and Ability.....	103
De-Centering Teacher Expertise.....	109
Valuing the Unschooled.....	125
Can Writing Be Taught?.....	132
V: ELBOW'S <i>WRITING WITHOUT TEACHERS</i> AND THE ADVICE OF SELF-HELP.....	139
Writing as Turning Inward.....	143
Teachers as Obstacles to Writing.....	145
Writing As Natural.....	157
Writing as Using the Unconscious.....	168
Issues of Control in Writing.....	171
Writing As Holistic.....	175
Writing Ability as Developmental over the Long Term.....	179
Elbow: Self-Help with a Difference.....	186
VI: PETER ELBOW AND THE ETHOS OF SELF-HELP.....	191
Elbow's Audience in Writing without Teachers.....	194
Ethos in General / Ethos of Self-Help.....	197
The Process Ethos and the Extracurriculum of Composition.....	212
Ken Macrorie the Iconoclast.....	215
Don Murray the Coach.....	222
VII: PROCESS = POWER EQUALS?: <i>WRITING WITH POWER</i> AND THE CONTINUANCE OF THE SELF-HELP TRADITION.....	234
Elbow's Ongoing Scholarship as Self-Help.....	235
Elbow's Audience in <i>Writing with Power</i>	236

Extracurricular Critique of the Curricular.....	241
Freewriting.....	251
Voice.....	255
Evidence of Self-Help in Elbow's Composing Strategies.....	263
Mystery and the Teachability of Writing Argument in <i>Writing with Power</i>	269
 VIII: IMPLICATIONS, OR WHAT IS THE SOUND OF TEACHING WITHOUT A TEACHER?.....	 277
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 302
 APPENDIX A IRB APPROVAL.....	 312

ABSTRACT

THE SELF-HELP OF COMPOSITION: PETER ELBOW'S *WRITING WITHOUT TEACHERS*, COMPOSITION STUDIES, AND THE EXTRACURRICULUM

by

Alexandria Peary

University of New Hampshire, December, 2010

The influence of Peter Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* on Composition Studies and classroom-based writing instruction is indisputable, yet the central message of the book has been continually sidestepped. At the heart of Elbow's book is an inherent contradiction to classroom instruction: the original impetus for the book was based on self-instruction, or learning about writing outside of any course. For Composition Studies, *Writing without Teachers*, starting with its title, is a riddle or a Zen koan the discipline has delayed answering for over thirty-five years. This project examines *Writing without Teachers* as a self-help book on writing and thus as part of what scholars have called the "extracurriculum of composition": the powerful nonacademic tradition of learning about writing that has always existed alongside classroom writing education in the United States. As sparse attention has been given to writing self-help literature, this project situates Elbow's book in a continuum of such literature, beginning with Eliza

Leslie's 1854 *The Behaviour Book* and continuing with twentieth-century self-help texts by Brenda Ueland, Dorothea Brande, Anne Lamott, and Natalie Goldberg. Through close textual and rhetorical analysis, connections in content and form are drawn between *Writing without Teachers* and these other self-help texts on writing. Elbow's subsequent 1981 publication, *Writing with Power*, continues to build off the self-help elements found in the earlier book chiefly in its discussion of freewriting, voice, and process. This analysis of Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* demonstrates the way in which Elbow brought the extracurricular approach to writing into formal classroom-based instruction, and it indicates the shaping influence of the self-help approach on process pedagogy.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION, OR ASSIGNING THE KOAN

The influence of Peter Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* on Composition Studies and classroom-based writing instruction is indisputable, yet the central message of the book has been continually sidestepped. At the heart of Elbow's book is an inherent contradiction to classroom instruction: the original impetus for the book was based on self-instruction, or learning about writing outside of any course. Elbow originally titled *Writing without Teachers* after a series of self-help books popular in Britain at the time with titles such as *Swahili Without Tears* (Elbow, *Writing without* xvii). Not only was a self-help (and therefore distinctly non-academic) book a model for *Writing without Teachers*, there is the matter of its title: writing *without teachers*. The essential proposition made by self-help literature is that it can help a reader learn or change a particular circumstance and do so independent of conventional channels of expertise. The trained expert—a psychiatrist, a medical doctor, and in this case, a writing professor—are not required. As Richard Haswell has remarked: "Tacitly we may be avoiding the topic of self-help or self-instructional books because, as writing teachers, we sense a kind of rivalry and challenge. Without teachers! Without us! Anathema" (personal communication). It's as though *Writing without Teachers*, starting with its title,

is a riddle we've heard or a Zen koan we've been assigned, one which, as a discipline, Composition Studies has put off answering for over thirty-five years.

This project takes as its central contention that Peter Elbow's *Writing without Teachers*, a book that unquestionably influenced Composition Studies, has unexamined connections to a self-help tradition. As self-help, *Writing without Teachers* is part of a powerful nonacademic tradition of learning about writing that has existed alongside formal writing education since the beginning of formalized writing education at colleges in the United States in the late nineteenth century. This nonacademic tradition has been labeled the "extracurriculum of composition" by scholars including Anne Ruggles Gere: a means of learning how to write separate from the types of learning occurring in the classroom. Much as the formal curriculum of the university sets about to provide instruction for enrolled students, the curriculum of the "extra," of that which is outside the university, strives to provide a path for people to improve their writing. The two chief delivery systems of this curriculum outside the university are writing self-help books and the writing group. Although this extracurriculum is categorized as "self-education" in contradistinction to the degree-granting education provided by universities and colleges, the individual engaged in the extracurriculum arguably finds a teacher in either the self-help book author or in the other members of a writing group. In this project, I focus on the curriculum provided by self-help books on writing and posit *Writing without Teachers* as a text that has grafted academic instruction to the extracurriculum.

Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* is the first self-help book on writing to thoroughly permeate Composition Studies and therefore presents a remarkable instance in

the interface between the nonacademic tradition of writing and the discipline of Composition Studies. Many writing self-help books preceded *Writing without Teachers*, but none of them gained such a solid standing with many writing scholars and instructors as did Elbow's book starting in the mid- to late 1970's. Despite the importance of self-help to Elbow's *Writing without Teachers*, to date, Composition Studies has neglected self-help literature on writing. This omission is problematic given the significant purchase self-help literature on writing has had with large populations of writers outside of schools.

Moreover, the lack of attention paid by Composition scholars to self-help is imprudent given the way in which much of the discipline of Composition Studies has been so dramatically shaped by one text with clear ties to self-help: Elbow's *Writing without Teachers*. While scholars including Katherine H. Adams and Anne Ruggles Gere have investigated writing groups operating outside of academia, the second half of the nonacademic tradition of learning to write, namely writing self-help literature, has received scant attention. The purpose of this project is to compensate for this oversight by showing the ways in which *Writing without Teachers* is grounded in an established tradition of writing self-help in the United States and, in turn, how the discipline of Composition Studies was partially constructed on the nonacademic tradition of learning writing. Elbow's book appeared during formative years for the discipline of Composition Studies and at a time when far fewer scholarly books focusing on writing were being published. For some individuals involved in writing instruction in the 1970's, *Writing without Teachers* transformed their praxis: the accounts provided by Theresa Enos and Duane Roen point to Elbow's early impact. When those involved in the

burgeoning field of Composition Studies decided to adopt Elbow's ideas, they also took on ideas inherently based in self-help.

A secondary argument in this project is that self-help literature and the nonacademic traditions of writing are as foundational to the disciplinarity of Composition Studies as classical rhetoric and therefore warrant study. This penchant for the Greco-Roman in the field's accounts of its history has been criticized: namely, the way in which scholars have attempted to bolster the field of Composition Studies as a legitimate academic discipline by forging alliances with more recognized traditions in rhetoric. According to Anne Ruggles Gere, these professionalization narratives attempt to "establish our right place in the academy by recounting our past," usually relying on either nineteenth-century rhetorical instruction or on classical rhetoric ("Kitchen Tables" 78). In *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America*, Nan Johnson has labeled this second tendency the "classicist approach" whereby writing instruction of the nineteenth century is fused to Greco-Roman rhetoric with the older rhetoric serving as the norm (12-13). In *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*, Susan Miller has proposed that the nonacademic tradition of learning to write is so important to Composition Studies that it should in fact replace Greco-Roman rhetoric as the "'prehistory' of composition" (34). Miller calls this nonacademic tradition the "populist participation in public writing," in which writing functioned as a form of empowerment for citizens in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century United States outside of schools (32-34). According to Miller, historical accounts of writing instruction have erroneously overlooked this nonacademic tradition and instead placed their stock with the classical rhetorical tradition. For Miller, such an alliance with classical rhetoric is ill-advised because it "enacts the hegemonic

practice of highlighting, on the ground of “importance” and continuity, a past that would reproduce the repressive structures that the present pretends to replace” (*Textual* 44).

As I will discuss in Chapter 7: Process + Power Equals?, the self-help elements contained both in Elbow’s *Writing without Teachers* and his subsequent *Writing with Power* are foundational to the process movement and to the building of the discipline of Composition Studies. Just as scholars including Robert Connors and, more recently, Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M. Schultz have turned to composition-rhetoric textbooks and grammar books to understand the history of writing instruction, the texts of writing self-help and of the nonacademic tradition can reveal much about how individuals have learned to write in and outside of school. Barring any transcripts of meetings of writing groups (writing groups constituting the other strand of the extracurriculum), self-help on writing presents a unique opportunity for rhetorical analysis.

Writing without Teachers contains rhetorical elements and content which are identifiable in writing self-help literature: the most telling of these elements is the book’s intended audience. On the first page of the preface to *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow states that his main audience consists of “young people and adults not in school” and that he “particularly wants this book to help students not enrolled in a writing class and people out of school altogether” (v; vii). One implication of these “young people” not in school is that they are individuals whose access to higher education is constrained by socio-economic reasons. Since colonial times in the United States, an ongoing reason for the use of self-help literature or for the pursuit of learning outside of formal curricula is a lack of access to formal education. As such, the audience designated in *Writing without*

Teachers suggests that the book operates from within the long tradition of self-education in the United States. Another implication of Elbow's audience—these individuals “not in school”—is that they are people for whom the system of school did not work out: people who struggle with or have been disenfranchised by conventional instruction.

Additionally, this audience of “adults not in school” could designate people who are disenfranchised specifically *by* writing instruction. These individuals would be people not in school but who still feel the pull of writing teachers or the negative impact of former teaching on their current writing projects, a contention in Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* and in his subsequent *Writing with Power*. Another possibility is that these disenfranchised individuals not only feel the influence of their former teachers, but they may also not be enrolled in school specifically *because* of teachers.

While *Writing without Teachers* has connections to writing self-help, connections which will be examined in this project, what is arguably more striking is the way in which many members of Composition Studies have accepted the book. That is, it's one thing that a text like *Writing without Teachers* was written in a way resembling self-help literature, the paradigm of all that is non-academic; it's another matter when such a text is readily absorbed by its antithesis—academia. As Richard Boyd has contended, Elbow's announcement that his book is intended for people outside of school contains “the most important, yet enigmatic, words in the entire text, given the institutionalizing of Elbow's pedagogy in textbooks and writing programs” (19). The significant influence *Writing without Teachers* has had on Composition Studies indicates the field's attraction to Elbow's contentions about teacher authority and the value of writing done outside of the university.

It seems that *Writing without Teachers* has functioned as Composition Studies' self-help reading, much like a person with relationship woes might pick up *Men are From Mars, Women from Venus*. The discipline of Composition Studies needs "help," wants to "fix itself," so it reads *Writing without Teachers* as a self-help book. Despite discussions of discipline-building and the status of Composition Studies within English Studies, Composition Studies contains a dimension that is ambivalent about the traditional values of academia and that looks to differentiate itself from academia. When the reader of *Writing without Teachers* is a writing instructor, that reader is absorbing material not intended for them as well as absorbing a critique of their own profession. Like someone embarrassed to be seen in the self-help aisle of Barnes & Noble, many in the field have a complex relationship to *Writing without Teachers* and to Elbow's work because of its sympathies to the extracurriculum of composition. As Thomas Newkirk has suggested, "some of Elbow's books take on the flavor of self-help—and may seem academically suspect for that reason" ("Sentimental" 30). While I propose that the self-help components of Elbow's work have attracted some academics, I would suggest that the book has also faced opposition because of academic discomfort with both that self-help dimension as well as with the field's involuntary attraction to that dimension. It is no coincidence that self-help discussions, such as that in *Writing without Teachers*, would draw academics because the overall genre of self-help has held significant sway over many types of individuals.

Indeed, Elbow has posed a bit of a conundrum for many specialists in Composition Studies over the past thirty-five years. *Writing without Teachers* has been an unwelcome reminder of how the field turned toward the nonacademic at the moment

in which it really began to define itself in relation to the academic. As Robert Connors pointed out in “Composition History and Disciplinarity,” the field that became known as “Composition Studies” underwent several failed attempts at legitimizing itself as an academic discipline. These attempts show some writing specialists relying other more established fields such as psychology and linguistics in the 1950’s or to the classical rhetoric of the New Rhetoric in the 1960’s (Connors 408-409). Disciplinarity thus contains an inherent tension: it shows an academic field trying to define its perimeters in contrast to other specialties in order ultimately to differentiate itself from nonacademic bodies of knowledge and practice. What Elbow’s early work ultimately highlights is the way in which the field that became known as Composition Studies depended on the extracurriculum and on self-help, the very antithesis of the academic. In this regard, Elbow can be understood as fueling the inherent tension of disciplinarity, but he has also suffered a certain backlash in the field for early endeavors.

Composition Studies has not rested easily with the enigmas presented by Elbow’s early work, and this disquiet is evident in the ways in which Elbow’s influence has been denied and diverted. Attempts to diffuse the ambiguity of Elbow’s work have ranged from failing to engage Elbow in academic debate, using skewed rhetoric for the few-and-far-between engagements of Elbow’s ideas, or the repackaging of Elbow as a symbol rather than a theorist. In his introduction to the 1998 edition of *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow remarked on this failure of theorists to engage him in authentic debate:

I am looking for people to engage me at the theoretical level too. In twenty-five years, I don’t know anyone who has ever really done so—despite an incredible flowering of theory, much of it epistemological, and despite plenty of criticism of me. I don’t know anyone who has actually engaged the substance of my argument about the epistemological strengths of the doubting and believing game. (xxvi)

Feminist and post-process critiques of Elbow (as well as of other process proponents) have notoriously declined to engage Elbow in a rhetorically sound fashion. In Thomas Kent's *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm*, for example, George Pullman argues that process theory is a slipshod rhetorical ploy, yet his primary criticism of process (that it advocates a single codified way of writing) is never substantiated by textual evidence from Elbow or other process proponents. In another chapter in this edited collection, Nancy C. DeJoy denounces the entirety of process pedagogy because she was unfortunate enough to have had a writing teacher who encouraged students to write personal texts in order to obtain sexual information about female students. Although DeJoy's experience is certainly regrettable, she fallaciously conflates one bad process proponent with an entire pedagogy. Part of the jarring effect of the sexually charged quotes Susan Jarrett identifies in *Writing without Teachers* comes from the fact that it is unusual to encounter actual language from Elbow in a critique of his ideas (Jarrett 268).

In addition to diverting scholarly engagement of Elbow into these polemical and at times illogical critiques, theorists have overtly denied Elbow's influence. One form of this denial is the way in which Elbow has been cast into more of a symbolic than debatable member in the field. Elbow has been described as a straw man and as "the poster professor for expressivism for more than twenty years, sometimes to his satisfaction and at other times to his bewilderment" (Fraiberg 172). A 2009 WPA Listserv interchange focused on the question, "When did Peter Elbow suddenly become cool again?," with reminiscences of Elbow-spottings and portrayals of him as apparitional, demonstrates a conflation of person with symbol. In "Elbow as Icon,"

Edward M. White and Shane Borrowman recount ways in which Elbow has been converted into an icon for graduate students in the field rather than a source of theory that needs to be engaged directly. White even describes how one graduate student comes to completely doubt the literal existence of a scholar named Peter Elbow (48-49):

Fred was a big blustery graduate student, without wisdom or knowledge, but knowing in all the wrong ways. For instance, he knew the names of professional books and regularly brought them up in class discussion but had never read any of them “personally.”... So I was not surprised when Fred burst into my office late one afternoon with astonishing news. “Did you know,” he said breathlessly, “there is no Peter Elbow?... [W]henver someone wants to write about expressive writing, they just use that name. It’s just a convenience, not a person.” (48)

The avoidance of Elbow’s arguments takes its most pronounced form in the way in which some members of the field have worked to erase Elbow’s influence from the academic public record. Elbow’s exclusion, for instance, from the second edition of *Cross-Talk*, the anthology frequently assigned to new graduate students, is astounding.

Methodology: Subject Selection

In this project, I examine self-help literature on writing to be defined as book-length treatments of writing intended for readers who are not students enrolled in a class and for use outside of a conventional classroom. I have selected texts which are fully based in self-education and have by-passed texts with hybrid origins and usages; I have excluded texts which resemble textbooks and handbooks in their original rhetorical context. A text such as Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style* therefore does not fall within the scope of this project because, while undoubtedly used by innumerable individuals as self-instruction, it began as William Strunk’s system for responding to

undergraduate papers at Cornell (Garvey). While all of the self-help authors examined in this project have taught writing and reference their teaching experience as examples of composing, the type of teaching is important to note. Specifically, the settings for that instruction have been extracurricular—non-credit bearing writing workshops in various community settings. Eliza Leslie represents the one self-help author examined in this project with no teaching experience; as such, her *The Behaviour Book* is the most autonomous from the classroom in any form as it is authored by a professional writer rather than teacher.

The unadulterated extracurricular standing of the books examined in this project is important in order to establish the autonomy of nonacademic instruction but, more centrally, to set the stage for Elbow's borrowing of self-education. In other words, in *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow not only resorts to the self-help tradition, but he calls full-heartedly for learning to write separate from teachers. What happens when people actually *do* try to learn separately from teachers? As will be discussed, part of the enigma and complexity of Elbow's career-long project is that he does continue to work as a classroom teacher. The three precursor books examined in this project as well as books by Anne Lamott and Natalie Goldberg which follow *Writing without Teachers* offer insight into what happens when that exact attempt is actually made.

Since my chief subject is Elbow's *Writing without Teachers*, a text which itself does not specify the genre ambitions of its intended reader, I chose not to examine genre-specific self-help. Eliza Leslie's *The Behaviour Book* (1854); Deborah Brande's *Becoming a Writer* (1934); Brenda Ueland's *If You Want to Write* (1938); Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* (1986); and Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* (1995) are

not limited to a particular genre (say, fiction) or purpose (say, more effective business communications) or device (say, grammar). The self-help books examined in this project focus on overarching acts of invention (getting started, confidence, voice, freewriting) that are common to writing in general. The sense in this type of writing self-help is that matters such as genre and the eventual purpose of a text is the self-help consumer's business, not the self-help author's. That said, future research into the extracurriculum should study the decisions and motivations of such genre-specific self-help consumers. How does knowing you want to write a screen play or a romance novel, for instance, shape the way in which you use self-help literature on writing? Such a focus would constitute a particular rhetorical situation (not to mention the one of the self-help book author who necessarily hones his or her advice to that genre) that is worth a separate examination.

The strand of self-help in this project, free of genre constraints, is able to hone in on more "inward" matters of the novice writer, including the causes of that writer's struggles to compose. Although the term "writer's block" isn't used as such in these books, this inability to write or write fluently is the bear in the room for all of the self-help writers I examine. For some readers of writing self-help, a lingering concern that they will not be able to sustain their writing projects and dreams in the face of the loneliness of writing all by themselves, without teachers or peers, is part of their encounter with self-help. For these readers, the self-help book must somehow serve as a supportive guide and compensate for their literal isolation. Other consumers of self-help on writing may have found conventional education to be unhelpful; conventional education has either not assisted them with their composing problems or has actually

fueled problems. Such is the case with Elbow in *Writing without Teachers* in which he looks at what has made writing for instructors an impediment to his readers.

In a similar vein, Eliza Leslie, the focus of Chapter 3: Precursors, is able to address and attempt to lessen the particular obstacles her readership faces by providing advice not constrained to a particular genre. Similar to Elbow, Leslie, by not devoting page time to a specific genre, is able to focus on dealing with blocks to writing. Leslie's blocks, however, are not Elbow's blocks. For Leslie's readership, nineteenth-century middle class Caucasian women, impediments are societal, not teacherly per se. In part, *The Behaviour Book* functions in this project as a model of the extracurriculum in which the motivation of its participants comes from widespread societal discrimination, not poor teaching. Leslie's negotiation of the impediments to writing faced by her readership makes Elbow and other twentieth-century self-help authors' jobs look like a rhetorical cake walk. Differences both in the nature of these impediments and in how Leslie and Elbow address the impediments ultimately speak to the changes in the rhetorical situation of novice writers between 1854 and 1973. For Leslie's readers, it is a fight to have the right to write and publish in society; for Elbow's readers, it is a fight with one's inner composing demons by developing a writing process.

Another aspect of the strand of writing self-help examined in this project is its emphasis on belletristic genres or what would be seen now as creative writing. It seems only logical that nonacademic forums for learning how to write would tend to produce texts in nonacademic forms—those which hint at genres associated with creative writing. While I am chary of the facile binary of “creative” and “academic,” it is certain that when individuals outside of school settings want to write, they necessarily write without a

teacher's assignment. Furthermore, the likelihood that such an individual will write in genres typically considered creative is higher when there isn't a research paper, expository essay, or lab report involved in the rhetorical situation.

As a result, creative writing possesses a stronger connection to the nonacademic tradition than the texts produced in a first-year composition course or for that matter in most classes across the curriculum. When a student in an intermediate poetry workshop writes a poem, he or she seeks to create a text that resembles one seen outside the classroom: something publishable and read by an audience greater than the instructor or peers in the room. Otherwise, what the student has produced risks the derogatory label of "workshop poem," or the type of creative writing that is said to exist only in the rarified atmosphere of academic creative writing and MFA programs. Tellingly, an equivalent term for "workshop poem" is not in use for texts written in composition courses. As Susan Miller puts the situation with first-year composition: "Most of what students of composition have been instructed to write since the late nineteenth century cannot be found 'in nature.' It stays on the margins of textual worlds in which knowledge and politics interact" (*Textual* 80). While this innate connection between creative writing, self-help, and the nonacademic tradition carries implications for the direction of Composition Studies, it is beyond the scope of this current project. However, one immediate consequence for this discussion is a higher likelihood that the self-help consumer is engaging in belletristic writing even in the relatively genre-free rhetorical environment of self-help literature on writing.

Scope of Project

In order to locate Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* in a tradition of writing self-help in the United States, I start my historical account at a time in which formal classroom instruction was not readily accessible to significant portions of the population. I begin in the middle of the nineteenth-century, with Eliza Leslie's 1854 *The Behaviour Book*, in order to highlight the ways in which nonacademic ways of writing are connected to a dynamic engagement by the broader public in composing. In part, to begin at this juncture is to argue against the "extra" in "extracurriculum," to contest the decentralized role that the nonacademic tradition occupies in scholarly perspectives on writing activity. In 1854, the "extracurricular" was actually the central curriculum because for certain populations (such as middle class Caucasian women) there was little occurring in a classroom to which to compare the nonacademic. In selecting a mid-nineteenth century text for this study, I seek to shed further light on how the nonacademic can function as the "pre-history" of composition, as Susan Miller has suggested. In addition to not expecting the extracurriculum to fully resemble the formal curriculum, historical accounts of writing self-help also should not be bound to the time frame of traditional classroom instruction; to so constrain the range of the extracurriculum is to perpetuate the misuse that Ann Ruggles Gere, Arthur Applebee, and Frederick Ruldolf have suggested has occurred by English Studies in their professional narratives.

In a sense, the precursor authors in this study are the forerunners of Elbow's *Writing without Teachers*: Leslie, Ueland, and Brande each carved out a space for discussions about how to write outside of school settings. The work of these precursors sets up the rhetorical space for Elbow to discuss alternative ways of composing; if Elbow

had been the first to publish a book on writing for individuals who want to write outside of schools, he would have had to address a whole different set of issues and engage in a different set of rhetorical responsibilities in his own writing. Instead, *Writing without Teachers* can build on an established tradition of talking about how to write separate from teachers and schools.

What is unique about Eliza Leslie's 1854 *The Behaviour Book* is the way in which Leslie, in her position as a successful women writer, helps other women navigate external obstacles by placing her advice inside the rhetorical context of an etiquette book. In her self-help endeavor, Leslie doesn't simply provide information about writing to women deprived of formal instruction: she has to negotiate societal perceptions of women and of women who want to publish. Whereas Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* offers insight into the concerns and strategies of individuals who struggle with teachers and formal education, Leslie's *The Behaviour Book* has to address issues of both writing process and the right to write. In this way, Leslie's book is the buried predecessor of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Discussions of the limitations imposed on female writers also occur in Brenda Ueland's 1938 *If You Want to Write*, but they are less substantive than Leslie's, suggestive of the changes in the extracurriculum and in formal education. Forced by her circumstances, Leslie's work contains a more ingenious, more aggressive negotiating of writing obstacles than what is apparent in later self-help books on writing. Leslie's self-help work represents a certain phase in writing self-education that allowed ensuing self-help authors to focus on internal writing processes rather than societal road blocks. Thus, not only is it important to consider the historical moments in which the nonacademic

tradition predates academic instruction, it is also important to note how the concerns and approaches of writing self-help change through time. The concerns of Eliza Leslie are not identical to those of Brenda Ueland or Dorothea Brande, publishing their self-help in the 1930's. Presently unidentified disenfranchised groups of nonacademic writers struggling to compose in 2010 possibly need their own particular book of writing self-help literature, much as Leslie's book serves disenfranchised Caucasian middle-class women writers. *The Behaviour Book* is a case study of what is amiss in a literate culture that would compel individuals to seek self-education.

In essence, *The Behaviour Book* is a shaping and moderating of the dynamic between women, writing, and publishing that was distinctly occurring in the extracurriculum in the mid-nineteenth century in the United States. Leslie is in part responding to the rise in interest and activity concerning writing on the part of women in the nineteenth century. What is evident in *The Behaviour Book*, a text which couches advice about writing and the writing profession inside a manual on etiquette for females, is the type of negotiation of subject positions of writers that often arises when the formal curriculum is brought into contact with the extracurriculum. Specifically, it often seems that considerations of the nonacademic by Composition Studies have caused writing scholars to rethink the subject positions of various individuals engaged in composing. The recasting of student, teacher, author, as well as discussions of "high" and "low" status of certain texts and of who can claim expertise to talk about writing are all ways writing scholars have tried to negotiate (and sometimes alter) the subject positions of writing. When toward the end of *Textual Carnivals*, Susan Miller cites as a goal for her theory as "construct[ing] an alternative subjectivity for the student" (197), when Donald

Murray and Janet Emig turn to the work practices of professional writers, and indeed when Peter Elbow chooses to address “people outside of schools,” the field of Composition Studies has been making a similar attempt to shape novice writers’ subjectivities that Eliza Leslie does in 1854.

In developing this historical scope, however, I am not suggesting that a historical understanding of writing self-help ends with *Writing without Teachers*. Quite the contrary: the writing self-help tradition originates centuries before Elbow’s book, and it flows well past 1973, with such commercially successful books as Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird* and Natalie Goldberg’s *Writing Down the Bones*. To suggest otherwise—to close this study with Elbow’s first composition book—is to perpetuate the mishandling of the extracurriculum that has been decried by scholars. To suggest that Elbow’s achievement in *Writing without Teachers* represents a capstone on the extracurriculum is to suggest that academia has the capacity to successfully conclude the work of self-help. Rather, the work of self-help literature on writing continues well past 1973, indicating the ongoing interest in the general public for advice about writing and creativity.

At the same time as I allow the stream of self-help to continue past *Writing without Teachers*, I also seek to show how Elbow’s early work represents an intriguing divergence in that flow of self-help. Specifically, in *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow adopted strategies from the established tradition of writing self-help to criticize conventional writing instruction and to propose an alternative. *Writing without Teachers* subsequently influenced many practitioners and scholars in the nascent field of Composition Studies in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. Elbow’s ensuing book in 1981, *Writing with Power*, built as I will show in Chapter 7: Process + Power Equals? on the

self-help elements of *Writing without Teachers*, continued that nonacademic conversation about writing. Consequently, the effect of Elbow's early mingling with self-help is that it began a new stream of conversation about writing, one housed inside an academic field rather than in self-education. *Writing with Power* can be viewed as an even more potent infusion of self-help inside the formal curriculum and Composition Studies than the preceding book; for it is the ideas about a writing process, feedback, and voice in *Writing with Power* that have become foundational to many in the field.

That said, although many of Elbow's seminal ideas about composing in *Writing with Power* contain traces of self-help (sometimes identifiable because skeptics have labeled them "sentimental"), Elbow's work has never been as close to the project of self-help as it was in 1973, with the publication of *Writing without Teachers*. Self-education and self-help are the raw materials of *Writing without Teachers*, materials then modified and refined in *Writing with Power* for the purposes of higher education. Perhaps in the future the paths of Composition Studies and writing self-help can once again cross—with unanticipated, productive results. A central contention of Chapter 7: Power + Process Equals? is that it a more complete understanding of both *Writing with Power* and process pedagogy necessarily includes their self-help elements.

Use of Interviews

To complement the historical research and textual analysis at the center of this project, I interviewed individuals still active in Composition Studies who recall receiving one of the thousand free copies of *Writing without Teachers* distributed to instructors by

Oxford University Press representatives. I selected individuals who were present at the formative years of the discipline, who recalled first encountering *Writing without Teachers*, and who have had long and significant careers inside Composition Studies. To obtain these participants, I posted an inquiry in the summer of 2010 on the WPA list-serv, a site which gathers individuals in positions of academic and curricular responsibility in the field.

Those who responded and volunteered their time during the summer (when I posted my question) would be individuals with a strong reaction to Elbow's work—positive or negative. Of the three individuals who agreed to be interviewed, only one, Edward White, held a critical opinion of Elbow's early work. White's initial impression of his publisher-provided free copy of *Writing without Teachers* was largely unfavorable and that it appeared to be "Romantic clap-trap" at a time in which the increasing number of underprepared students entering his university could not afford such an unconventional approach to instruction (interview with White). (Unfortunately, the tape recording equipment for this interview malfunctioned that day, and I was only able to retain parts of White's answers.) Two other participants, Theresa Enos and Duane Roen, were able to provide information about the formative impact of *Writing without Teachers* or *Writing with Power* on their training and early careers. In discussing Elbow's early publications, Enos and Roen situated Elbow's early works in the theoretical and practical working conditions of Composition Studies in the late 1970's and early 1980's.

Interview participants were asked to recall the circumstances around and their reactions to receiving the free copy. In particular, I asked them about their first impressions of the book's title and whether they perceive Elbow's book as having a

connection to self-help. The relevancy of *Writing without Teachers* to their pedagogy at the time of their introduction to it was also one of my interests, and I asked participants to describe both how and when they began to implement Elbow's ideas about composing with their own students. Additionally, I asked participants to compare *Writing with Power* in terms of its impact on their praxis to Elbow's preceding book. In discussing the 1981 book, participants described changes in the field between 1973 and 1981, and thus contextualized Elbow's work in the state of the discipline during that time period. Roen and Enos, both CS people who embraced Elbow's ideas, described problems in writing pedagogy in the 1970's. In a sense, they are able to elaborate on the working, learning, and teaching conditions to which *Writing without Teachers* reacts.

Overview of Project

What follows is a discussion of *Writing without Teachers* as a text shaped by self-help. It attempts to examine what can be better understood about writing instruction and Composition Studies when Elbow's first Composition book is studied as a part of the extracurriculum of composition. In Chapter 2: Literature Review, I provide an overview of the theoretical conversations around self-education, self-help, and the extracurriculum. In Chapter 3: Precursors, I establish a historical tradition of self-help literature on writing by starting with a moment in the pre-history of composition and a text, Eliza Leslie's 1854 *The Behaviour Book*, that exemplifies the work of the extracurriculum. Leslie's book serves as a rhetorically potent starting point in a continuum of writing self-education that includes Brenda Ueland's *If You Want to Write*, a text focused on in

conjunction with Hughes Mearns in Chapter 4: What a Difference Eighty-Four Years Make. Evident in Brenda Ueland's 1938 work is the way in which the interests and approaches of self-help can co-exist with those of classroom educators such as Hughes Mearns. Indeed, what is apparent from looking at the overlap between Ueland and Mearns' work is the way in which the desire to offer an alternative writing education is what unites—not separates—the extracurriculum and the formal curriculum. Educational reform is not distinct from what happens outside of school settings. In Chapter 5: Peter Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* and the Advice of Self-Help, I turn to the body of writing advice offered in *Writing without Teachers* and examine it in relation to the content of four other popular self-help books on writing of the twentieth century. Elbow's work shares numerous content overlaps with writing self-help literature and is further evidence of Elbow's attempt to go extracurricular in *Writing without Teachers*. In Chapter 6: Peter Elbow and the Ethos of Self-Help, I examine the ethos utilized by Elbow in *Writing without Teachers* in relation to the ethos of two other key process theorists, Ken Macrorie and Donald Murray, to highlight the differences made possible by Elbow's self-help stance. Chapter 7: Process + Power Equals? examines Elbow's subsequent book, *Writing with Power*, and specifically its seminal notions about voice, audience, and feedback as progressing from the extracurricular outlook Elbow began in *Writing without Teachers*. Elbow's self-help notions did not vanish with the publication of *Writing without Teachers* but instead are manifest in this second book and in the process approach in Composition Studies. Lastly, Chapter 8: Implications, or What is the Sound of Teaching without a Teacher? examines the implications of *Writing without Teachers*

as Composition Studies' self-help reading, how it has functioned to address certain concerns and tensions within the field and what that suggests about the future of the field.

Elbow has continued throughout his long career to present Composition Studies with the enigmas of writing instruction he first handed to writing specialists with *Writing without Teachers*. Elbow is still engaged in that tension of disciplinarity: he fed this tension through the ambiguities of his 1973 book, but he continues to provoke scholars with ambiguities of the profession. He evokes this tension; his scholarly standing is soaked in the field's various reactions to that tension. Perhaps the central paradox of Peter Elbow is how he explores contentious issues of power in the writing classroom, the extracurriculum, and transactionality, all the while devoting his professional life to higher education. Thus, of all the disparate reactions to Elbow's work, one in particular, that which Robert Brooke has called the "underlife of composition," is the most compelling for this project. Underlife—or the ways in which instructors attempt to construct alternative identities for their writing students and themselves to counter the identities provided by the institution of education—shows writing specialists engaging in a more nuanced fashion the paradox posed by Elbow. That is, underlife rather than other reactions of denial or fallacious retort, shows the field taking on Elbow's ambiguities in the most productive way. Ultimately, *Writing without Teachers* is a constant reminder of another paradox: how in a defining moment in the history of the discipline, scholars and writing teachers did not just turn to classical or nineteenth-century rhetoric to define what would become known as "Composition Studies"; they also turned to the nonacademic. This move took courage: in the face of skepticism from other academic disciplines, it

takes courage to rely (albeit without acknowledgement) on what occurs outside the ivory tower, in self-education.

Chapter II

The Curriculum of the “Extra”

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the theoretical and historical conversations around self-education, self-help, and the extracurriculum of composition in the United States in order to better situate Peter Elbow’s *Writing without Teachers* in these important traditions.

Self-help literature on writing is an outcome of the self-education movement in the United States which has existed since the country’s inception but intensified in the nineteenth century. Scholarly conversations about self-help literature, the extracurriculum, and differences between nonacademic and scholarly publication have largely remained discrete conversations—each in its theoretical or historical silo, as it were. Discussions of the extracurriculum, for instance, have tended to focus on writing groups and have given scant coverage to the texts of the extracurriculum—to self-help literature on composing. Thus, Elbow’s *Writing without Teacher* is not an isolated occurrence but rather in line with a tradition, albeit a tradition that many scholars in Composition Studies have failed to perceive. In essence, much “writing without teachers” has been occurring in the United States before Elbow encapsulated the term in his 1973 book, but to date Elbow’s connection to this way of learning has not been

adequately explained. As I will suggest at the end of this chapter, indicators of Elbow's self-help stance are contained in the rhetoric of *Writing without Teachers*, beginning most importantly with the type of readership Elbow announces as his designated audience. A closer inspection of self-education and self-help shows that the two have not been foreign to Composition Studies, but instead the nonacademic and academic approaches to writing have enjoyed a parallel relationship. That is, until 1973. Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* is an instance in which the academic and the nonacademic are brought into striking proximity.

The Tradition of Self-Education in the United States

Whether used by writing groups or by individuals, self-help books on writing such as Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* are part of a long-standing tradition of self-education in the United States. As Anne Ruggles Gere and John G. Cawelti have argued, self-education in the United States has witnessed mass popularity since colonial times. This self-education movement has throughout the years been variously called "*self-teaching*," "*self-instruction*" "*self-improvement*," "*self-culture*," or "*self-cultivation*." The term "self-help" was used interchangeably in the nineteenth-century with the other terms, and "self-help" did not carry the negative association it may have in the twenty-first century of dealing with purely emotional, relational, or personal matters.

Self-teaching is part of a longstanding entrepreneurial spirit in the United States through which individuals obtain educational experiences when formal classroom training is not available to them for geographical, gendered, or socio-economic reasons.

In some cases, as in Joseph Kett's study, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self-Improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750-1990*, self-teaching includes classroom settings such as adult education courses; the implication is that such teaching is self-instruction because it is separate from a four-year university education. In eighteenth-century United States, self-instruction for males was an accepted accompaniment to formal education: Collegiate- and self-education were complementary ideals rather than competing alternatives... The collegiate curriculum left a great deal to self-instruction, for no college even pretended to cover the range of topics that students might seek to learn" (Kett 15). By the nineteenth century, opportunities for self-instruction had increased beyond private self-study and literary societies. Nineteenth-century educators became increasingly interested in "accord[ing] much greater scope to informal influences in education" (Kett 77). Self-instruction broadened to include the groups, societies, clubs, adult education courses, correspondence courses, texts, and lecture series such as the Lyceum and the Chautauqua through which individuals educated themselves outside of formal classrooms.

Self-education is in line with the distinctly entrepreneurial vision of the United States and its belief in the capacity to change. According to Gere: "the egalitarian view of knowledge that characterized European settlers who arrived on this continent led them to organize for self-improvement. Cotton Mather started a self-help group in Boston during the colonial period and in 1728, Ben Franklin joined with several friends to form a mutual improvement group" ("Kitchen Tables" 82). A strong belief in self-education is evident, for instance, in an 1846 publication by Nathan S. Beman, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in which Beman celebrates the democracy of the United States by

celebrating the ready availability of learning (Welter 141-51). In contrast with the “tyranny of caste” of other nations, in the United States:

While the education and discipline of mind—the acquirement and the uses of knowledge, are among the great objects of our being, no people are more abundantly furnished with the necessary means, than ourselves. The comparative ease with which the necessaries and conveniences of life may be obtained,—and indeed many of its delicacies, too—leaves almost every one in possession of time for reading and study. Not only the professional man, but the merchant, the clerk, the mechanic, the apprentice, the farmer, the day laborer, may all find abundant leisure for training their higher powers. (144)

Self-help literature arose from the self-education movement as a natural part of its entrepreneurial spirit. The first book to use the term “self-help,” Samuel Smiles’ 1859 *Self-Help: Character and Conduct*, was based on a series of lectures Smiles gave at a self-improvement society for young men. The original setting for Smiles’ ideas is indicative of the increasing presence of informal educational opportunities by the nineteenth century and as well of the natural cross-over of self-help books with self-education movements. Likewise, Elbow’s *Writing without Teachers* was based on Elbow’s teachings in a non-traditional learning environment. Elbow first experimented with the methods proposed in *Writing without Teachers* while volunteering in the Roxbury community in Boston. After the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, Elbow volunteered to teach writing in the African-American community of Roxbury. It was in this teaching environment, separate from his official post at M.I.T., that Elbow “first began to play with teacherless feedback and leaving [students] alone” (interview with Elbow).

One Branch of Self-Education: Self-Culture

Of the different forms of historical self-instruction, self-culture seems most aligned with twentieth-century writing self-help books in its emphasis on creative potential. Overall, self-instruction varied in its purpose or motives throughout the history of the United States, ranging from teaching values that would reinforce an established social hierarchy to helping individuals improve their financial and societal positions to fulfilling more intrinsic and personal goals (Cawelti). Self-culture, as espoused by antebellum civic and religious leaders including the Unitarian proponent William Ellery Channing, was focused on fostering the populace's innate creative potential rather than helping individuals obtain materialistic goals (Cawelti 84-85). George Herbert Palmer's 1908 *Self-Cultivation in English* champions this view of a shared, popular creative ability, one that is also evident in writing self-help books starting in the early twentieth century, as well as in Elbow's work.

In *Self-Cultivation in English*, Palmer, a Harvard professor of philosophy, offers advice about writing in an extracurricular—or outside-the-university—fashion. For one, Palmer critiques conventional education, discussing changes in writing and literary instruction occurring by the end of the nineteenth century. He suggests that education at his time is improving, moving away from memorization and by trying to help students discover their own interests in writing and that “the transmission of the power to write is very different from the transmission of grammatical or rhetorical facts” (viii). Of course, the phrase “the power of to write” sounds similar to Elbow's work in his second composition theory book, *Writing with Power*. Palmer's attempt to alter instruction from a matter of drill and discipline to a student-centered approach is also aligned with the work of Brenda Ueland and Hughes Mearns, discussed in Chapter 4 of this project.

Additionally, Palmer questions whether writing ability can be fully taught since it is ultimately a matter of self-cultivation and only partially lies within the teacher's scope. Sounding a bit extracurricular both in his critique of the methodology and efficacy of formal classroom instruction, Palmer posits that a teacher's true role resides in acting as a supervisor to "the process of self-development" and by providing technical training (viii-ix). Palmer's audience for *Self-Cultivation in English* is intriguing. He claims that his book has a "double worth" in that it is intended for upper-level students, but that its primary audience consists of the teachers and parents of those students (ix). Palmer's message to this audience is that they self-cultivate their English through his book's advice so they can act as linguistic and creative role models for students. Thus, teachers and parents are advised to update their writing education through self-study in order to impact students: self-help becomes the teacher's teacher, arguably in a way not altogether different from how Elbow will eliminate the teacher in *Writing Without Teachers*.

Representative of the spirit of self-culture, Palmer's book is supportive of everyone's verbal ability. For one, the study of English language which Palmer prescribes does not consist of arcane, time-consuming literary or etymologic history that can only be useful to students or scholars in academic settings; instead, the study of language occurs in everyday instances of communication between everyday individuals. In Palmer's rendition, moreover, not only is this study of language situated in readily accessible, everyday speech and writing, it can also lead to authorship. Palmer doesn't subscribe to the view that artistic production is an ability of the few: "[L]iterary endowment...is supposed to be something mysterious, innate in him who possesses it, and quite out of the reach of him who has it not. The very contrary is the fact. No human

enjoyment is more free and calculable than the winning of language” (6). All in all, Palmer’s 1908 book is a mixture of self-culture and of a focus on writing that is emblematic of writing self-help literature of later in the twentieth century.

The Extracurriculum of Composition Studies

Self-education is in fact not all that alien to the discipline of Composition Studies and instead has always had a relationship—albeit a parallel one—to what occurs inside Composition Studies. When writing self-education occurs independent of academia, it is part of what scholars have called the “extracurriculum of composition,” to be understood as the “nonacademic tradition that contributed to the development of English studies” (Gere, “Kitchen Tables” 79). The extracurriculum of composition has been active in the United States—whether it’s Ben Franklin’s writing group, the secret schools of enslaved African-Americans in the south, Margaret Fuller’s promotion of writing by women, or nineteenth-century working class women’s self-improvement clubs in Lowell, Massachusetts (Gere “Kitchen Tables”). In essence, the extracurriculum is the part of self-education that focuses on learning how to write.

The extracurriculum, according to Gere, is comprised of two strands, that of writing groups and that of self-help books on writing. In her 1994 article in *College Composition and Communication*, “Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition,” Gere describes two contemporary examples of individuals meeting in writing groups in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco and in a farming community in Lansing, Iowa, and she suggests that these two groups “represent a

tiny portion of the enormous number of individuals who meet in living rooms, nursing homes, community centers, churches, shelters for the homeless, around kitchen tables, and in rented rooms to write down their worlds” (76). She also suggests that these writing groups, which she calls “self-help groups” engaged in “self-sponsored pedagogically oriented writing,” afford participants the opportunity to change both their personal lives and their communities, as well as giving participants a sense of confidence in themselves as writers (83; 80). While the outcome of these writing groups parallels the outcomes of confidence and community engagement that compositionists often seek from their classroom writing instruction, Gere argues that these writing groups attract and succeed with participants who would not be successful students in traditional composition courses (78). Thus, writing groups, like self-help books, present a critique of the efficacy of school-bound instruction for many of these participants “had negative experiences with schooling. They did not think of themselves as writers because teachers had taught them they could not write” (78). While writing groups constitute important organizations inside the extracurriculum of composition, writing self-help books are equally significant.

In a quest to “uncouple composition and schooling,” Gere asks us to rethink the location, individuals, and materials involved in composing, and the chief material is the text. That is, Gere asks us to reconsider where composing happens and to notice its occurrence outside of the university. Gere also calls for a different conceptualization of the participants, of the identity of a learner of writing, such that we note that a writer may not resemble the traditional student of a certain age and socio-economic status. However, Gere also proposes that a third dimension of writing instruction be reconsidered in light

of the power of the extracurriculum: the teacher. For Gere, texts can serve as surrogate writing instructors: “the extracurriculum of composition separates pedagogy from the traditional pedagogue. Composition’s extracurriculum acknowledges a wide range of teachers, including texts published for aspiring writers” (80). Gere cites several eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writing self-help publications as part of the extracurriculum (81). In addition to writing self-help books, Gere mentions other types of publications that are writing self-help, including nineteenth-century articles in *Godey’s Ladies Magazine* which offered advice on writing to contemporary trade magazines such as *The Writer’s Market* (85). That a writing book can carry as much impact as a flesh-and-blood teacher is evident in an instance Gere discusses in *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications* in which one nineteenth-century woman seeks out a writing group *because* of her dissatisfaction with a popular grammar book used in classrooms (40-41). Although many individuals may decide to participate in the extracurriculum of composition because of a negative experience with a teacher, the woman in Gere’s example decides to participate because of a negative experience with a text book. Gere suggests that one characteristic of writing self-help publications is their critique of classroom instruction in composition (81). Accordingly, these writing self-help books serve the extracurriculum not just by offering an alternative to formal education (as was the case with women in the nineteenth-century when access to higher education in composition was more circumscribed): these writing self-help books also critique academia.

Despite its influence, the extracurriculum of composition has largely been bypassed in accounts of the discipline. As Gere proposes in “Kitchen Tables,” Composition

Studies has routinely omitted the ways in which individuals have pursued opportunities to learn how to write outside of composition curricula. Gere suggests that Composition Studies has overlooked this extracurriculum of composition, despite its ongoing contributions to English studies, because in its push to professionalize itself as a legitimate academic discipline, Composition Studies has focused on what occurred only inside of academia (78-9). That is, Composition Studies may have ignored the learning and composing that occurs in writing groups such as the one in the Tenderloin District because it would seem to lack academic legitimacy to others in the university. To counter the skepticism of faculty in the Engineering department, for instance, about the academic rigor of first-year composition as a discipline, not simply as a service curriculum, it may not seem prudent to discuss writing which occurs in homeless shelters or at poetry groups at the local Barnes and Noble.

According to Gere, the few historical accounts of the extracurriculum that do exist all agree that significant development has occurred in the curriculum whenever it is in close proximity to the extracurriculum. Since most historical accounts of the extracurriculum focus on literary or writing groups rather than writing self-help literature, it is the writing group which has often been credited with changing the direction of composition. For instance, in Arthur Applebee's account, the teaching of vernacular literature became acceptable after English studies absorbed the nonacademic. In work done by Frederick Rudolph, in the nineteenth century, student intellectual engagement was higher in students' extracurricular activities—debating clubs, literary societies, fraternities, and even athletics—than in the classroom. Nineteenth-century white male students changed the English curriculum by insisting on greater incorporation of elements

of their extracurricular activities. Then, according to Gerald Graff, nineteenth-century collegiate literary societies, through their events, magazines, and libraries, fostered the acceptance of creative writing and contemporary literature in American universities. While each of these accounts highlights the influence of the extracurriculum on historic English studies, these accounts are faulty for their rendition of the extracurriculum as solely a white, male enterprise, thereby omitting the extracurricular activity of women and African-Americans in the United States (Gere “Kitchen Tables”). Secondly, accounts by previous historians suggest that the extracurriculum is temporary, merely a means to an end, a “way-station on the route toward a fully professionalized academic department, thereby implying that the extracurriculum withered away after helping to institutionalize English studies” (79).

Another important discussion of the hidden power of the extracurriculum is Susan Miller’s *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*. According to Miller, as part of the development of English departments, the production of texts by students and by individuals writing outside of school settings has been devalued. Emphasis has been placed on literary study in which canonical authors are foregrounded over the production of arguably more chaotic, less polished, less contained—more “carnavalesque”—writing of students and people in the extracurriculum. According to Miller, histories of composition have overlooked the “ways that emerging, nationally dominant vernacular literary education pulled public writing into its agendas” (46). Previously in the twentieth century, a plethora of beginning and advanced writing courses had been offered, courses including advanced expository and creative writing (a point also raised by Katherine H. Adams in *A History of Professional Writing Instruction in American College*). Miller

suggests that writing instruction in higher education has mistakenly let go of these rich and varied offerings, allowing literary studies to alter the way in which these types of texts were handled such that the curriculum became more about reading than writing (*Textual* 68-69). According to Miller, “as the professoriat grew in these schools, the writing curriculum generally became less diverse and more focused on literary texts, while the literature curriculum, particularly at the graduate level, became larger and more indicative of individual faculty interests” (69). Texts produced by authors studied in literature courses are deemed “high,” whereas those produced by anyone else, any Non-canonical Everyman (students or people writing outside the university) are deemed “low.”

For Miller, the negative consequences of ignoring the extracurriculum or abandoning it to the purposes of English studies are two-fold. First, Composition Studies allows a hegemonic academic discourse to sort, monitor, and repackage a diverse entering student body of writers into a “cooperative body politic” (28). This social agenda of Composition “actually stripped new students and a nation of unschooled potential writers their needs and desires to create significant pieces of writing” (Miller 55). Secondly, in forfeiting the richness of the extracurriculum and the writing of the “unschooled” to the adulterations and labeling by literary studies, Composition Studies can only self-define itself as either part of the classical rhetorical tradition or the first-year composition course. The former, as was mentioned in Chapter 1 of this project, is problematic because of the way in which socio-cultural forces on writing instruction are overlooked when the gaze is turned to Plato’s *Dialogs* or to Gorgias. To be primarily associated with first-year composition makes Composition Studies weaker, according to

Miller, because of the way in which first-year composition, on the one hand, carries questionable pecuniary and political import for the university, on the one hand, and a low “service” status for writing faculty, on the other hand.

While I agree with much in these critiques by Gere and Miller of the other historical accounts of the extracurriculum, I propose that many in Composition Studies may have overlooked the extracurriculum not only as a matter of expediency, but also in order to avoid the implicit critique of itself—of how writing is “officially” taught—contained in the extracurriculum. This avoidance of an implied critique is then similar to the avoidance by Composition scholars of that central message in Elbow’s book: go ahead, write without teachers.

Self-Help as Crucial Part of Extracurriculum in the United States

Self-help books have historically always addressed broader populations than students enrolled in schools and constitute an important part of the extracurriculum. For one, the sales figures indicate that self-help books have successfully engaged that larger audience. As Sandra Dolby describes it in *Self-Help Books: Why Americans Keep Reading Them*, purchasing a self-help book has constituted an “exercise in self-education” (8). The tradition of writing self-help extends back to the colonial period of the United States, evinced in widely used writing self-help books as early as George Fischer’s 1748 *The American Instructor: Or, Young Man’s Best Companion*, and John Ripplingham’s 1812 *Rules for English Composition, and Particularly for Themes: Designed for the Use of Schools, and in Aid of Self-Instruction* (Gere “Kitchen Tables”;

Haswell Comp Panel). In the past, self-help books were often bestsellers before “bestseller” was coined, with Samuel Smiles’ book selling 250,000 copies in England in the nineteenth century (“On the origin” 1). Early American self-help books include Ben Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack* (1732); the Reverend William Channing’s *Self-Culture* (1838); Samuel Smiles’ *Self-Help* (1859) (“On the Origin”; McGinn). Charles Darwin owned a copy of Samuel Smiles’ bestselling *Self-Help* (“On the origin” 1), and Samuel Smiles coined the term “self-help.” By 1988, the number of Americans who had bought a self-help book was as high as fifty percent of the population (McGee 11). Self-help books dominate the twenty-first century publishing market, with a \$563 million profit for self-help books in 2003 and \$2.48 billion annual profit in 2003, if off-shoot media of the self-help books (such as books on tape and videos) are factored (McGinn 1). A 1990’s book on codependency, Melody Beattie’s *Codependent No More*, sold over two million copies and perched on the *New York Times* bestseller list for more than one hundred weeks (11). Kaminer points out that while Beattie’s book was produced by a major publishing house, Harpers, smaller presses can also turn out self-help bestsellers with copies in the millions (11).

In addition to audience, the utility of self-help defines it as a genre that offers advice from an alternative source of expertise—a characteristic of the extracurriculum. As a genre, self-help books allow a reader to operate independent from conventional channels of expertise. As Victoria Leto DeFrancisco describes self-help, it is “do it yourself” repair for the mind, body, and soul” (107). Self-help books offer practical advice which the reader can apply to his or her lived experience (Dolby 39). According to Steven Starker in *Oracle at the Supermarket*, the self-help genre “purports to be of

immediate and practical use to the reader, offering instruction in some aspect of living”

(9). The spectrum of self-help is expansive and includes spiritual self-help, mind-body-spirit advice, intellectual self-improvement, success literature, and relationship or marital advice. Intellectual self-help carries popular appeal because it represents “just the kind of learning Americans adore: instant, painless and cheaper than going back to college” (Dokoupil 2). A successful example of intellectual self-help is the “For Dummies” series (as in *Public Speaking for Dummies*) produced by Wiley, John & Sons. When a self-help book addresses matters such as dieting, spirituality, relationships, the conventional authority it displaces is a dietician, physician, minister, psychiatrist, counselor, and so forth. When a self-help book is about an intellectual matter, such as writing, the conventional channel of expertise it displaces is that of the teacher in the classroom, and thus its readers are positioned as individuals outside of school. Intellectual self-help, or books that teach the reader a skill, stand in juxtaposition to formal education or training. Writing self-help books fall into the category of intellectual or how-to self-help that offer advice on dimensions of composing including invention, writer’s blocks, feedback, editing, and publication. When the self-help book addresses the act of writing, as is the case with *Writing without Teachers*, the obvious parallel is the composition-rhetoric text book which in its essence offers advice about writing to people (students) positioned inside a classroom.

Writing self-help books, not text books, are often cited as influential texts for learning how to write. For instance, in an article for the trade journal, *Writer*, “The 10 Best Writing Books Ever,” Jim Broderick suggests that writers since Aristotle have looked to texts which can provide advice about the power of writing to engage an

audience. Broderick establishes an “unofficial roster” of ten books that “offer an initiation into the ritual of writerly magic” (1). His list includes E. M. Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel*; Dorothea Brande’s *Becoming a Writer*; Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird*; H. W. Fowler’s *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*; Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*; John Gardner’s *On Becoming a Novelist*; Stephen King’s *On Writing*; William Zinsser’s *On Writing Well*; Patricia O’Conner’s *Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe’s Guide to Better English in Plain English*; and Ray Bradbury’s *Zen and the Art of Writing*. Note the absence of any composition and rhetoric text book in this list of influential books on writing; while *On Writing Well* and *The Elements of Style* certainly appear regularly in formal instruction, they more resemble handbooks than textbooks. The majority of this list of writing self-help books are written by professional authors and creative writers, and most of them, unlike *Writing without Teachers*, disassociate themselves from any classroom context. The influence of these writing self-help books is again indicated in the fact that they occasionally reach best-seller status (as is the case with Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird*) and that they are still perceived as applicable many decades after their initial publication: Brenda Ueland’s 1938 *If You Want to Write* and Dorothea Brande’s 1934 *Becoming a Writer* are still taught in courses and also regularly appear on web sites discussing writing self-help.

As with extracurricular opportunities in general, readers of writing self-help have used the genre because their access to formal writing instruction was limited or impossible. This type of usage was more evident in the nineteenth century because of constraints on access to higher education for women and individuals of races other than Caucasian. Moreover, early writing self-help was frequently used to compensate simply

for the absence of what are now known as creative writing courses: the curriculum had yet to be developed, but individuals were still curious about how to become a professional writer, as will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of this project. Both of these circumstances are evident in the popular reception of Eliza Leslie's 1854 *The Behaviour Manual*, a book geared for women readers which to the contemporary reader might seem a curious amalgamation of etiquette book with publication manual.

Self-help literature often provides readers with an alternative authority to the traditional teacher-expert to compensate for some sort of perceived ineffectiveness in formal education. Self-help literature represents a positive alternative to the troubles experienced by some of its readers in writing for teachers. This implied critique of formal writing instruction is one attribute of self-help books on writing since the beginning of the twentieth century, and, as will be discussed, the critique is frequently explicit in writing self-help books. This problematization of writing instruction is evident in writing self-help books at the start of the twentieth century, such as in Brenda Ueland's 1938 *If You Want to Write* and Dorothea Brande's 1934 *Becoming a Writer*, discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this project. Such critique is also apparent in *Writing without Teachers*, which Richard Haswell has described as a "self-teaching course in rhetoric" and also an example of "self-instruction" and a "self-instructional writing textbook" (CompPanel). As the availability of formal education in composition as well as creative writing increased (both because more people had access to schooling and because more courses were being offered), writing self-help books begin to be more critical of formal writing education. In addition, writing self-help books start to mention their authors' involvement with the types of community workshops or self-improvement courses that is

part of the extracurriculum, not the official curriculum. Writing self-help authors, starting in the early part of the twentieth century, begin to incorporate their own teaching experience in workshops—rather than in a traditional, credit-bearing course in a university—in their advice on writing. Such is the case with both Brande and Ueland whose own backgrounds as writing teachers in non-traditional settings shape the type of advice they provide, establishing precedent for the work done by Elbow in *Writing without Teachers* nearly four decades later.

Stepping Outside of Academia to Publish Self-Help

Scholars in many disciplines have on occasion stepped outside of the academic conventions of their discipline by addressing their content to a mainstream audience. In formulating what would become *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow by-passed academics and teachers, looking instead toward a broader popular audience. Elbow conceived of his book as a trade book for non-academics: “I didn’t think of *Writing without Teachers* as scholarly. I thought of it as ‘I have the truth to tell everyone’... Somehow, I just felt the authority. I wanted to stand on a mountain top and tell people how they can [write]” (“Personal interview”). Undoubtedly, many Composition scholars have purchased copies of *Writing without Teachers* over the years and also implemented its ideas into their classrooms, so it’s clear that Elbow’s readership includes teachers, although teachers were not his primary audience. However, the significant sales figures for *Writing without Teachers* can’t be attributed to course adoptions since the book has not generally been used as a class textbook (Gere *Writing Groups* 48). The influence of

Elbow's book has generally acted upon individuals more outside the classroom than inside. According to Sandra Dolby, "in every discipline there is at least one ancestor, one figure of some stature, who broke away from the confines of scholarly writing and presented the discipline in a way that was both interesting and useful to readers outside the field" (50). Dolby cites scholars from a range of disciplines who made significant contributions by publishing in the mainstream, including Benjamin Franklin, Emerson, Thoreau, Freud, Jung, William James, C.S. Lewis, Abraham Maslow, Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, Ruth Benedict, Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, and Thomas Merton.

Such "rogue" academics, those who have "gone popular," can generate tremendously receptive responses from the mainstream and equally negative responses from fellow scholars. At best, popularized scholarship may seem confusing. Academics who write about their disciplines for a popular audience are "only grudgingly tolerated within their academic disciplines" because their colleagues distrust the self-help book not for its writing quality but instead for the way in which it transforms their scholarship into applied research (Dolby 38). Dolby describes the complex negotiation scholars in a range of fields have performed to maintain their scholarly standing as well as to publish self-help. This balancing act can entail publishing a self-help book only after the authors "paid their dues to their discipline" or, like Deborah Tannen, by publishing books continually in both the scholarly and mainstream market. Tannen's ability to convert research into suitable books and articles for a range of audiences is striking; for instance, she has published a book on gender and communication with Oxford University Press and also articles on gendered communication for *Good Housekeeping*.

For many in Composition Studies, writing self-help along with the popularized writing instruction of the extracurriculum are embarrassments, much as the Sophists, those professional, for-hire instructors, were discomfiting to Socrates. Writing self-help implies an inherent critique of Composition Studies for self-help seems to suggest a deficiency in formal writing instruction, as well as proposing that it can compensate for this deficiency. Thus, writing self-help may differ from popular nonfiction renderings of scholarship in other fields in that it not only teaches the general public material from a particular discipline but it also critiques that discipline—in public. Elbow's book as self-help is performing this gadfly function, both in positing that it can offer applicable instruction on writing outside of a class and in its explicit critique of teachers. *Writing without Teachers* occurred early in Elbow's career and constituted one of two books he published in 1973: the other, *Oppositions in Chaucer*, based on his dissertation, was published by Wesleyan University Press. For our purposes, however, *Writing without Teachers* represents Elbow's first publication in the discipline that eventually became Composition Studies, and part of the uneasy response to Elbow may originate in the fact that he did not have other scholarly books on composition to counterbalance any self-help induced unease from academia.

The Self-Help Audience of Peter Elbow's *Writing without Teachers*

Similar to writing self-help books, Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* has successfully appealed to significant numbers of people who want to improve their writing independent of the classroom. According to Anne Ruggles Gere, *Writing without*

Teachers has been widely used by people who want to self-educate, purchasing the book “for their own use rather than because a class requires them to” (*Writing Groups* 49-50). Gere has also suggested that the sales figures and marketing of *Writing without Teachers* are indicative of the position of Elbow’s book—like a writing self-help book—outside of the university and outside of Composition Studies. Writing in 1987, Gere says:

In recognition of Elbow’s audience, the publisher of *Writing without Teachers* has marketed it as a trade book, not a text. As the proprietor of one bookstore explained, “It may be used as a text, but we sell it as a trade book.” Purchasers, then, tend to be individuals who buy the book for their own use rather than because a class requires them to. When the book appeared in 1973 sales climbed to 10,000 a year, and they have remained steady at that level since. Because there have been only a handful of large adoptions over the years, and because the book is not marketed as a text, we can assume that a high percentage of the more than 100,000 owners of *Writing without Teachers* purchase the book “to become less helpless” about their own writing, and a great many of them have established their own writing groups. (*Writing Groups* 49-50)

The readership for *Writing without Teachers*, as indicated by its marketing, appears to have been largely individuals trying to write outside of school.

John Wright, Elbow’s representative from Oxford University Press for *Writing without Teachers*, posits a slightly different scenario for the book’s marketing as relates to course adoption. According to Wright, the press, only twenty years old at the time, recognized that it could not compete with more established ones such as Houghton or Prentice Hall. In an attempt to develop a niche market for itself, Oxford sought book concepts that would distinguish itself from the big players. Elbow’s book struck Wright as being distinctive: “We were about twenty years old, and Peter’s idea was so different, that I don’t think anyone else would have published it then” (interview with Wright). Oxford treated *Writing without Teachers* first as a paperback college book—a text available only through college book stores after a professor had requested it as required

reading for a course. *Writing without Teachers* thus “started as a book that we wanted teachers to assign to students, but I also maintained that wouldn’t work. Teachers would just use the methods. From being a college traveler, I knew how teachers work—they wanted a free book for their teaching” (interview with Wright). The press decided then to make *Writing without Teachers* a trade book and fifteen or so Oxford representatives distributed close to a thousand free copies to professors at large universities. In Wright’s account, what is evident is the complex audience for Elbow’s book: the author may have wanted to write to “everyone,” but his press sent it off into an academic direction—to teachers possibly curious about alternative approaches to instruction.

That the primary audience—and therefore the extracurricular location—of *Writing without Teachers* have largely been overlooked is captured in an early review of the book. Elbow’s book initially received a slim critical reception (interview with Elbow). In a 1975 review published in *The Peabody Journal of Education*, however, James Coomber’s view of the book is favorable, praising the ambition of its scope despite its brevity and suggesting that it will be handy to teachers. Coomber notes that *Writing without Teachers* presents an “alternative to the traditional approach of composing,” one needed in an era in which the efficacy of writing instruction was being challenged (166-7). What is interesting about Coomber’s vantage on *Writing without Teachers* is how he locates Elbow’s unconventionality inside school settings, all the while ignoring Elbow’s stated audience, those individuals outside of school. For Coomber, Elbow’s ideas are alternative ones because they propose a different way of composing “an essay” to the traditional educational model which emphasized planning before writing. Elbow offers a “developmental model of the writing process” in which ideas are obtained only through

“a considerable amount of writing” of drafts (166). In Elbow’s schema, according to Coomber, grammatical concerns are set aside in the early stages of composing and “[n]or is there much attention paid to formulating and developing a thesis; rather, as the writer produces drafts, a center of gravity emerges and provides the focus for the final drafts” (166). In the review, Coomber sees merit in Elbow’s separation of the writing from editing process but in the end stands by pre-thinking for what he perceives as its time-saving possibilities. Coomber maintains the importance of planning because writing is usually an act of communication, and the sense is that any private writing is an exception (167).

What is most intriguing about this early review is the way in which Coomber omits the fact that Elbow is locating composition outside of the university, in the extracurriculum. Coomber vaguely suggests that something is a bit different about “the type of audience to whom *Writing without Teachers* is directed” (167). He doesn’t specify who this audience is except to say that “Elbow has not directed his attention in this book to the problems of teaching writing in the public schools or colleges and universities” (167). Coomber finds Elbow’s concept of the workshop to be useful “at all educational levels” and personally vouches for its efficacy in “conducting a class for the academically disadvantaged” (167). In voicing such approval of Elbow’s project, however, Coomber has not seen its extracurricular nature; this is apparent in how Coomber depicts the end result of Elbow’s alternative education as the production of “an essay” (166). Notably, Elbow does not specify genre in *Writing without Teachers*, and in a sense this absence of genre makes the task of writing for the book’s reader even more “assignment-free” and, by implication, more “teacher-free.” Such is the case with most

of the writing self-help books, both historic and contemporary, which will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of this project. The genre in which the self-help reader writes is unspecified, a result of the reader's eventual choosing. Often, too, the reader's selection of genre in writing self-help will be suspended, occurring after a period of freewriting-like activity—much like the moment of invention is separated from the work of editing in *Writing without Teachers*. The reader selects the genre he or she wants to write in, with possibilities that include the “essay” as well as creative writing. That extended range of genre possibilities is inherent in the extracurriculum where the essay, arguably a school-based genre, does not reign supreme. Coomber's dodging of the extracurricular nature of Elbow's ideas is particularly striking in his discussion of the second half of *Writing without Teachers*, the part dedicated to the teacherless writing class. He manages to discuss the “procedural matters” of the teacherless writing class without mentioning the oddity of conducting such a thing inside an academic setting. Lastly, when Coomber talks about the first half of *Writing without Teachers*, he focuses on Elbow's extension of early drafts without noticing the various self-help elements, such as Elbow's explicit critique of teachers and his discussion of the frustrations and desires of the book's reader: again, someone who is not a teacher, not a student, but a person outside of any course.

Even more recent retrospective reviews of *Writing without Teachers* demonstrate an omission of Elbow's extracurriculum. In responding to the question “What Recent or Remembered Book or Article Has Been most Influential on Your Teaching?,” Gregory Shafer's 2003 essay in *English Journal* praises Elbow's book for offering an alternative pedagogy. However, the alternative that Shafer has in mind is one which responds to attacks from the popular press on American literacy, the why-Johnny-can't-write call to

arms generated by a 1975 *Newsweek* article (23). In Shafer's account, Elbow is offering a holistic approach to writing that counters the "Back to Basics movement" of the time, as well as to the current national trend toward assessment: "For those who wonder about the theoretical functions of testing—which seem to reduce composition to a docile horse of one color—*Writing without Teachers* still offers much" (24). As with Coomber's earlier review, Shafer likewise situates the ideas of Elbow's book inside the classroom—not with readers who are "not in schools." In another brief retrospective of *Writing without Teachers* in 1994, Hanna Fingeret discusses the influence of Elbow on her work in adult education. Adult education has historically constituted one form of the extracurriculum of composition, and thus Fingeret's response to Elbow's book is more aligned with the book's intended audience and purpose. Her description of Elbow's impact, however, could just as easily describe a conventional university classroom: "*Writing without Teachers* showed me how students can stay in control of their own learning, can maintain ownership of their work, and, at the same time, can learn and change" (8). Fingeret does not draw attention to Elbow's unusual audience or to its kinship in particular to her own classroom members in adult education.

The Rhetoric of Self-Help in Elbow's *Writing without Teachers*

Writing without Teachers is similar to other writing self-help literature in both the advice it offers on writing and its rhetorical strategies. As will be discussed at length in Chapter 5 of this project, Elbow's book contains content which overlaps with that

provided in other writing self-help books of significance in the twentieth-century, including Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* (1934); Brenda Ueland's *If You Want to Write* (1938); Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* (1986); and Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* (1995). These writing self-help books generally propose that writing is holistic, involving and affecting the entire person, and constitutes a "writing life." As part of this holistic stance, self-help authors maintain that writing affords intrinsic benefits beyond publication. While the self-help writers differ in the amount of emphasis placed on attempting publication, all of them view writing as a social matter, not just of individual expression, involving an interaction at some point with an audience. The authors exude a positive belief in their readership's universal ability to write as well as naturalizing the desire to write. Writing is depicted as a matter of human nature rather than specialization, and that readers may experience writing blocks is suggestive that something unnatural and unnecessarily prohibitive has happened in conventional ways of learning to write. The authors also discuss and then critique, to varying degrees, the merits of classroom-based instruction in writing. That is, to some extent, writing self-help authors all explain why they advocate writing without teachers. Lastly, all writing self-help authors examined in this project suggest, like Elbow, that composing is a matter of turning inward and utilizing the unconscious, either by listening to or expressing a "voice" or through a version of freewriting.

The rhetorical conventions of writing self-help differentiate it from academic discourse in general and from Composition Studies scholarship in particular and are indicative of the genre's wider audience. The writing self-help author needs to engage the reader in a different fashion than he or she would a scholarly audience. According to

Dolby, “It is one thing to write informatively about one’s discipline for a lay audience and yet another thing to write with the clear intention of offering guidance to each individual reader—to suggest ways that one’s discipline or research might directly affect a reader’s personal philosophy and day-to-day behavior” (38). Whereas the purpose of scholarly writing is to contribute to one’s field, with self-help, the focus in self-help is on the reader as an individual with the intent to aid that individual in his or her daily life (Dolby 20; McGee 195; Starker 9). In order to engage this audience, self-help literature needs to convey concepts from a particular discipline in an easily understandable way, free of jargon and scholarly internecine agonism. The advice offered by self-help books falls somewhere on a continuum of prescriptive to descriptive and anecdotal to informational (Starker 9). The style then of writing self-help books tends to be one in which the paraphernalia of academia are largely absent—footnotes, citing of outside sources, terminology. Of its reader, self-help will make “few demands upon prior knowledge or scholarship” (Starker 9). Instead of academic paraphernalia to develop credibility, self-help authors tends to place themselves in the foreground, showing why their experience allows them to give advice as well as portraying themselves as counselors with the reader’s best interests at heart. Jean Marie Stine, editor of bestselling self-help books including *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, has actually published a self-help book on how to write self-help. Stine advises beginning self-help authors to adopt a conversational tone and a stance supportive of readers. According to Stine, the title of a self-help book should “Identify a Problem or Lack,” “Make a Promise,” and “Offer Hope” (22-23).

Of course, in the case of writing self-help, credibility is almost tautologically established by the very book the readers hold in their hands. Most self-help books on writing are about overcoming blocks and developing some sort of fluency, and the fact that the writing self-help author *has managed to become an author* says volumes in itself toward the author's credibility. This type of evidence is the epitome of practical because it's tangible—literal evidence of efficacy in the reader's hands—versus the more arcane credibility of expertise, including its degrees, titles, and scholarly acclamations. In the case of writing self-help, if certain teachers were previously obstructions, causing the reader anxiety, doubt, and inability as concerns composition, then the writing self-help author promises to be a different kind of authority on writing.

The primary strategy for establishing this alternative authority is the use of personal examples of the author's own prior difficulties with writing and the realizations that lead the writer to be able to produce the self-help book in the reader's hands. The genre is largely constructed on authors' personal accounts of struggle, thereby tacitly suggesting that the reader adopt the ways of the author/authority in the absence of empirical evidence (Lee; Woodstock). In fact, one quality of writing self-help which may make it appear dubious to some scholars in Composition Studies is its evangelical or conversion dimensions. These dimensions derive from the fact that the author is enabled by the self-help genre to discuss their own experience with a writing-related challenge. As Dolby says, "One latent function of self-help books is that they provide their authors with an opportunity to bear witness to their own transformation or conversion... permit[ing] the unabashed enthusiasm and sense of epiphany the writer is often required to keep subdued in more scholarly writing" (48). As will be discussed in Chapter 5 of

this project, writing self-help authors including Elbow routinely incorporate their own experiences as writers and routinely work to establish like-mindedness and trust in their audience through voice, examples, and anecdote. All in all, writing self-help book authors establish themselves as a different type of authority with their readers.

This ethos of writing self-help, perhaps more than the content of any of its advice about writing, is what has attracted scholars inside Composition to Elbow's *Writing without Teachers*. Composition Studies wants to be "that kind of teacher," the teacher who is "different than the rest," the one embodied in Elbow's ethos—one less rooted in the scholarly world and one more sympathetic to students. The ethos of Elbow in *Writing without Teachers* is one of self-help and of the extracurriculum: it is one that takes stepping outside the conventions of academia. By secretly admiring this ethos over the past thirty-five years, Composition Studies has engaged in what Robert Brooke has called the "underlife of writing instruction" or the ways in which teachers and students alike try to posit alternative identities for themselves in the classroom other than the ones provided to them by the academic institution. Some experts within Composition Studies have tried to set themselves up as different from the rest of academia—as a different type of authority, much as average and even strong students will try to develop an identity autonomous from their roles as students by engaging in side activities during class.

Although numerous self-help books on writing preceded *Writing without Teachers*, *Writing without Teachers* is unique because it is the first book with writing self-help roots to be so thoroughly absorbed into the field now known as Composition Studies and, secondly, because it bridges both parts of the extracurriculum of composition. The bridging of the two halves of the extracurriculum is reflected in the

organization of the book chapters. The first three chapters of the book (“Freewriting Exercises,” “The Process of Writing—Growing,” “The Process of Writing—Cooking”) address individual writing problems and solutions, and the next two chapters (“The Teacherless Writing Class” and “Thoughts on the Teacherless Writing Class”) address how to establish a writing group. While many instructors probably make handouts for their students of excerpts from Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird*, Natalie Goldberg’s *Writing Down the Bones*, or any other writing self-help or non-text book/ non-handbook, no other writing self-help book has so fully entered the composition classroom as has Elbow’s.

Indeed, *Writing without Teachers* has not only entered composition classrooms but shaped classrooms and done so through its bridging of the two parts of the extracurriculum. Along with seminal texts by Donald Murray, Ken Macrorie and others, it has shaped the entire discipline by helping shape what has come to be known as process pedagogy. Elbow’s text differs from those of other process proponents, however, in its insertion of both writing groups and self-help. Gere has suggested that *Writing without Teachers* is a “manifestation of the connection between nonacademic writing groups and those in classrooms” and that the number of copies sold is an accurate indicator of the presence of writing groups in society (*Writing Groups* 47). To this idea I would add that *Writing without Teachers* may have had the impact it has had on Composition Studies because of its bridging not just the classroom with one part of the extracurriculum (the writing group), but because of its bridging of both halves of the extracurriculum (the writing group and writing self-help books). As a result, *Writing without Teachers* draws together a trinity of writing educational opportunities: formal course work, writing groups, and writing self-help literature.

Elbow's bridging of writing self-help and writing groups in *Writing without Teachers* allows him to provide a comprehensive self-education to the reader. As Gere has pointed out, one of the attractions of the book is the way in which Elbow provides a sort of "starter kit" to people who want to initiate their own writing group (49). James Coomber's early review of *Writing without Teachers* also casts Elbow's book in the pragmatic, do-it-yourself way characteristic of self-help. According to Coomber, Elbow is occupied in the second half of *Writing without Teachers* with "procedural matters, suggestions for presenting one's writing and means of reacting most helpfully to the writings of one's colleagues" (166). In providing steps toward a teacherless writing group, Elbow is in line with self-help literature which, as Dolby describes it, uses a "problem/solution" structure, first demonstrating a particular problem and then presents a feasible solution (39-40). Thus, the entirety of *Writing without Teachers* can be attributed to writing self-help since it follows the conventions of the genre. This significant influence on Composition Studies from self-help, as embodied in one of the field's seminal texts, has largely been overlooked.

From the opening words of the preface to the first edition of *Writing without Teachers*, Peter Elbow announced that he was stepping outside of academic conventions, that he was—to use my term for it—"going extracurricular." Elbow broke away from the discipline which would be later known as Composition Studies by publishing a book that purported to give advice about writing in a context outside of the classroom and separate from teachers and scholars. He proposed that an individual reader could self-help and improve his or her own writing without—and perhaps even despite—a writing teacher. What then ensued was a bit paradoxical: *Writing without Teachers*, written as self-help

and critiquing academic writing instruction, became readily absorbed by many scholars in Composition Studies, arguably helping to shape the entire movement that would be called the process movement, a movement in turn which helped establish the field as an academic discipline.

Chapter III

Precursors

Peter Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* joins a long lineage of self-help books on writing published in the United States. The tradition of writing self-help literature includes such well-known late twentieth-century books as Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* and Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, books recognizable if not read by anyone engaged in the teaching of composition. The tradition of writing self-help, however, extends farther back, even as far back as the eighteenth century, many decades of writing practice prior to *Writing without Teachers*. Self-instruction in writing, whether through self-help books or writing groups, has played a part in individuals' experience of composition before the development of writing courses at institutions like Harvard and Michigan in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Thus, looking at writing self-help texts prior to the 1870's can provide insight into writing activity occurring in the United States in a way that examining composition and rhetoric text books cannot. Precursor self-help books on writing are inherently extracurricular, since formal instruction in composition and especially in creative writing was virtually if not totally non-existent. Moreover, for certain populations, such as women, formal instruction was not possible due to socio-economic conditions, and the extracurriculum functioned as an alternative

means for a writing education. As one might expect, some of these early extracurricular conversations about writing bear little apparent resemblance to the types of theory, pedagogy, and practice apparent in *Writing Without Teachers*. Discussions about a writing process, revision, or audience are glaringly absent or at most only partially present in precursor self-help books on writing, and certainly those particular twentieth-century terms will not be found in early writing self-help literature. Nevertheless, an examination of early writing self-help literature shows the type of conversations about writing which occur outside a classroom, as well as the interests and concerns of individuals who want to write but who are not necessarily students.

For this chapter, I have selected one pioneer writing self-help book, Eliza Leslie's 1854 *The Behaviour Book: A Manual for Ladies*, an immensely popular book in its own time that underwent multiple editions, in order to investigate the extracurriculum which occurred prior to Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers*. I have selected Leslie's book for its unusual rhetorical circumstance (its situation inside an etiquette book) and for its unusual thorough treatment of women's composing and publishing lives. *The Behaviour Book* is a writing self-help book not for its critique of formal education (which wasn't established) but instead for its validation of the reader's writing ability in the face of challenge. Embedding her advice on writing inside an etiquette book addressed to a female readership, Leslie engages in a complicated rhetorical act which simultaneously regulates, normalizes and validates women writers in nineteenth-century society at a time in which women's desire to write was not supported.

How could Elbow's quintessentially anti-authoritarian text on writing be compatible with an etiquette book that unrolls one hidebound rule after the next? Given

even Leslie's attempts to normalize and validate women writers, what we see in *The Behaviour Book* is rules-based instruction par excellence—rules that is for conduct and for writing—and thus may initially appear dissimilar from Elbow's project in *Writing Without Teachers*. Leslie's text is aligned with Elbow for the way in which it validates the reader's writing ability in the face of challenge: a signature component of writing self-help literature, including *Writing Without Teachers*. In the case of *The Behaviour Book*, the challenge the writing individual faces is initially societal rather than psychological or cognitive.

In both books, the reader faces external censure from difficult external obstacles; both Leslie and Elbow strive to remove those obstacles. . For Elbow's 1973 reader, censure takes the form of a past critic (typically a teacher); for Leslie's 1854 reader, censure was societal and more comprehensive. While later writing self-help books in the twentieth century are protective and affirmative of the reader's ability to write and be creative as an individual, Leslie's book defends a whole group's ability to write—women. Instead of advocating for latent human capacity for self-expression as Brenda Ueland's *If You Want to Write* or Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* will begin to do in the early twentieth century, Leslie advocates for a whole demographic's right to enter a profession, that of writing. For Leslie, writing ability is not a matter of entering an internal composing space, a cognitive room-of-her-own-to-write, and writing ability is not a matter of separating the self from a problematic internalized other, as it is in Elbow's account. For Leslie, writing ability is more a matter of how to inhabit a social arena as a woman who places herself under public scrutiny through her writing.

Leslie's educational history and her reliance on literature to serve as a surrogate writing instructor parallels the experiences of most nineteenth-century women writers. Literature and self-help books on writing acted as writing instructors and as role models for women at a time when female writing education was curtailed by sexism and by the limits of writing education at the time. As Ann Ruggles Gere has said of the extracurriculum, writing self-help texts as well as magazine articles on writing and publishing have routinely served as surrogate teachers and substitutes for formal classroom instruction ("Kitchen Tables" 80-85). Until her father's early death, Leslie was raised in an environment of privilege in which she was given fiction and nonfiction books, trips to museums, travel, and encounters with the famous men her father brought home, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Ben Franklin—the latter a proponent, not coincidentally, of self-instruction (Hart 30). Her own father was largely self-taught, and Leslie admiringly described her father as "a man of considerable natural genius, and much self-taught knowledge" (Hart 27). Leslie praised her father's diverse abilities in writing, science, watch-making, and music—"without any regular instruction" (Hart 27). Leslie's actual formal education, however, consisted of three months to learn needle work and then a longer stint at a Philadelphia cooking school (her first book was a book of recipes). Leslie's two brothers received a different education: one brother attended West Point Academy and became an engineer, and a second brother receiving artistic training in London to become an acclaimed painter (Hart 29-30). As Leslie describes her education: "I was never in childhood much troubled with long lessons to learn, or long exercises to write" (Hart 29). Leslie's childhood education consisted more of reading than of formal instruction in composition.

The Nineteenth-Century Writing Environment for Women

Nineteenth-century writing self-help specifically by women serves as a useful lens for this exploration because nineteenth-century women were inherently more extracurricular than men. That is, although educational opportunities for women were limited—combined with the fact that a formal education in creative writing at the time was virtually non-existent for men and women—nineteenth-century women were paradoxically more active than males in creative writing and its publication. As Katherine H. Adams has discussed, by the last quarter of the nineteenth-century, some colleges, such as Harvard, began experimenting with advanced composition courses in which creative writing genres were encouraged or assigned. Discrete creative writing courses were instituted by colleges around 1900 (Adams 73). College attendance among nineteenth-century authors of both genders was an exception rather than a rule. In William Ellsworth's 1928 informal survey, only about half of well-known male authors had attended college and none of the successful female nineteenth-century authors graduated from a college (28-29). In order to point out a difference in educational opportunities for nineteenth-century male and female writers, Ellsworth distinguishes here between attendance and graduation. He allows that a few women were able to take a course or two but did not have access to a sustained education. In *A Group of Their Own: College Writing Courses and American Women Writers, 1880-1940*, Katherine Adams suggests that 12% of professional women writers listed in the 1899 *Who's Who* having some college training (156). Because nineteenth-century women writers were not

obtaining formal training in creative writing, the question arises as to where they were learning about writing and the profession of writers. The answer lies partially in writing self-help publications. If nineteenth-century women were producing that much writing (and their output was substantial) and doing so without formal writing education, these women writers must have relied on writing self-help more than their male counterparts. As Gere has pointed out, nineteenth-century restrictions on middle-class Caucasian women prevented women from not only attending higher education but from participating in or forming writing groups (*Writing Groups* 38-39). Thus, of the components of the extracurriculum, self-help literature on writing served as the permissible way for women to learn about writing.

Eliza Leslie's *The Behaviour Book* reflects a mid-nineteenth century culture deeply interested in writers and authorship and, in particular, an interest on the part of middle-class, white females in the nineteenth century. The publications of novels by women writers increased significantly during the nineteenth century: between 1830 and 1872, the percentage of fiction published by women increased from 30 to 75 percent (Coultrap-McQuin 3). In magazine publishing, women were a dominant force to such a degree that their threat to start a new magazine, one which would only publish women, was a source of worry for Henry Houghton, publisher of the *Atlantic Monthly* (Coultrap-McQuin 3-6). By the 1850's, women writers generated fifty percent of the bestsellers in the United States (Coultrap-McQuin 47). Of its thirteen top-selling American authors between 1840-1859, Ticknor and Fields, a prominent firm located in Boston that published writers including Longfellow and Hawthorne, published three women writers (Winship 56). Although Longfellow, at the top of the bestseller list, sold 165,736 copies,

the highest ranking female writer in sales for this period and publisher, Sara J. Lippincott, sold 56,123 copies, just 20,000 fewer than Hawthorne (Winship 56). In 1846, women authors, including non-American writers, made up 25.9% of Ticknor and Fields' production, whereas only four years earlier, no women were published with this firm; by 1854, that number had peaked at 48.8% (Winship 68). In the genre of poetry, Paula Bennett has pointed out that the amount of poetry by women published in the second half of the nineteenth century was so significant that any magazine with poetry included a poem by a woman, sometimes more poems by women than men: "hundreds of women's poems were published each month in the United States during this time" (203). Bennett has suggested that nineteenth-century women poets had a clear line of publication success, often publishing in regional magazines, women's magazines, and newspapers but then moving on to "mainstream publications" such as *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, and then to the publishing of book-length collections (206). There seems to have been plenty of opportunity for women to publish: around a hundred women's magazines appeared between 1784 and 1860, including the influential *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1830 (Degler 377 Cited in Bennett "Not Just Filler"). In addition to nineteenth-century publishing records, there is much evidence to suggest that interest in writing and publication was strong among women and that women were aspiring writers.

Accounts by individuals involved with nineteenth-century publishing depict women writers as participating in publishing. An unidentified writer of an 1864 article in *Godey's Lady's Book*, perhaps the magazine's editor, claims to be "constantly receiving [letters] from young aspirants for literary fame" ("A Literary Life" 268). A few paragraphs later, the author praises the increased activity of women in writing: "We

would not underrate the great work which the pen of woman is accomplishing in this age—God forbid!” (269). Likewise, D. G. Holland, the influential editor of *Scribner’s Magazine*, reported to have received a hundred letters by women expressing a desire to become writers (Titcomb 215). The acceptance of writing as a profession for women is apparent in Jesse Haney’s 1867 writing self-help book, *Haney’s Guide to Authorship*, in which Haney specifically points out that both genders are capable of becoming writers: “men, or women, may remain for years ignorant of their possession of certain powers, to have them developed at last” (6). In a similar vein, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, famed correspondent of Emily Dickinson, addresses his 1887 writing book to both genders, since both genders have sought his influential advice: “My dear young gentleman or young lady,—for many are the Cecil Dreemes of literature who superscribe their offered manuscripts with very masculine names in very feminine handwriting” (9). Carl Degler calls writing “the most visible female profession in the 19th century”; writing “lent itself to women because it permitted rather flexible hours, or at least the chance to be at home, important if the writer was a married woman, like Harriet Beecher Stowe, with several children” (377-379). Like Degler, Ellsworth also cites authorship as one of the few professions acceptable for women, in addition to teaching (85). The increasing presence of women in print is demonstrated by several books focusing on women writers which appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century.

One such book, John S. Hart’s *The Female Prose Writers of America*, describes how there would have been no necessity for a book on women writers earlier in the century: “Those who have not been led professionally, or otherwise, to examine the subject particularly, will probably be surprised at the evidences of the rapid growth of

literature, among American women, during the present generation” (vi). Hart provides an example of a Hannah Adams who was an anomaly, “so rare was the example of a woman who could write a book, that she was looked upon as one of the wonders of the Western world” and became a subject of curiosity for “learned men” (vi). Even one generation after Hannah Adams, the number of successful women writers had so expanded that Hart felt that his five-hundred page book could not quite cover nineteenth-century female authors.

In 1898, Francis Whiting Halsey published a similar book, *Women Authors of Our Day in Their Homes: Personal Descriptions and Interviews*, which would see several reprints and which was preceded by *American Authors & Their Homes* and *Authors of Our Day in Their Homes* and which “dealt exclusively with the homes of men” (vii). By the end of the nineteenth century, women had “invaded the ranks of successful authorship” and warranted a book focusing on their pecuniary accomplishments. In one chapter in *Women Authors of Our Day in Their Homes*, a Brooklyn-based female writer is described as discovering that she is surrounded in her neighborhood by fellow woman writers: “The story goes that when one has gathered a four-leaved clover, if he will remain upon the lucky spot and look about him, others of this small herald of good fortune will soon be found... Mrs. Margaret Elizabeth Sangster...was surrounded by a peculiarly literary atmosphere” (Halsey 189). Although Halsey does not describe Sangster’s interaction with this community, he emphasizes the high number of female writers and presents it as laudable.

Godey’s Lady’s Book, the preeminent women’s magazine of its day, frequently published articles on women writers and the process of publication. Writing-related

topics in *Godey's* included the early struggles and career mistakes of well-known female writers and reminiscences of female writers (including Eliza Leslie). Other articles describe what an author, previously unpublished, could write about or the writer they could possibly become if circumstances (including the editor's good will) allowed them. In essence, *Godey's* published hypothetical texts about writing which resemble what twentieth-century composition instructors would see as process notes. For instance, a December 1864 article, "My First Attempt," shows its anonymous author talking about her unfulfilled desire to publish, the reasons why she has not published at this point (discouraging teachers), and her fear of rejection by editors. The anonymous author acknowledges this text that she has published in *Godey's* is almost tautological—it's about her desire to publish—and that she does has "decided not to have any subject this time" and that if she is "allowed to come upon the stage again, [she] will begin with my subject at once" (502). That her article is almost meta-writing, taking as its subject the topic of publishing, is evident in how she concludes with a request directly to the editor that he "will react [to her piece] after dinner, when he is in a good humor" (502). Godey's publication of hypothetical process notes and its interest in the experiences of novice writers (suggested by the number of discussions of first-time publications) points to a different relation to women and writing. What it suggests is that the professionalization of women as writers is as much a topic for this magazine—or at least this column in the magazine—as actual literary productions by women. *Godey's* readers are interested in both the writing done by women as well as how those women became writers—these readers are not reading the magazine passively but as a way to invent themselves into the position of published "authoress." Testimony from novices—even

individuals who simply long to write and publish—are valued as much as advice from seasoned authors such as Leslie, who also appeared in the pages of *Godey's*.

In *Godey's Lady's Book*, articles addressing societal constraints on women writers appear along with articles on the process of becoming an author. Frequently, articles attempt to place women writers within the social constraints of their time by reminding readers of the ongoing need for moral purity, for not seeking fame and for avoiding vanity. An 1858 article argues that two criticisms are commonly leveled at women writers, “untidiness” and “vanity” (381). The anonymous author quickly discounts the charge of untidiness: “Womanly instinct revolts at lack of buttons and side combs, and will not endure the annoyance of crumpled muslins and frayed flounces” (381). Vanity due to literary accomplishment, however, is a problem that “renders [women] unlovely,” and female writers are vulnerable to “an unhealthy atmosphere of adulation” which begins when she is praised by friends for her juvenile compositions and culminates when her work becomes regularly featured in a magazine or newspaper that’s “on the lookout for a star” (381). While many articles celebrate the pleasures of becoming a published “authoress,” other articles suggest that the writing career is not as important as maintaining one’s domestic roles. One article published in February 1867, titled “Woman’s Fame,” advised:

We would, therefore, impress on all our intelligent and gifted country women, more particularly on the young, that there is a field, and a wide one, too, open for their genius, beside that which afforded by the present facility of feminine authorship; it is that of carrying out, in actual life, the beautiful ideas they would depict, and thus showing that cultivation of mind and refinement of taste are true sources of happiness in the domestic circle, and not merely requisites to shine in the world. (1)

“My First Venture,” an article published in 1864 in *Godey’s*, features a writer’s testimony of her first publication, describing how she was supported by her young female friends but crushed by a critique of her domestic ability by a bitter aunt. The writer listens from another room to her aunt’s reaction to her publication:

“Well, what of it?” was the reply, in a voice so cold and chilling, that it jarred like the crushing down of some great lifetime hope. “I guess there is something else to do in this world besides writing poetry. A wife and mother, too; what folly!” and I could hear the excited thrumming of her fingers on the table, and the angry clash of the door as she passed out to attend to some household duties. “What have I neglected? Do tell me!” was my beseeching question, as the door was unfastened, and cousin threw her arm around my waist that trembled like the aspen. “Nothing, Carrie. You do work enough for two any day! I thought she would be pleased!”... out of the door with a great sorrow that loomed like a death-pall o’er the brightness, and joy that for a few hours had beautified my life. (2)

Repeatedly, *Godey’s* articles redefine literary “reputation” for women as a matter of the author’s personal character as well as her ability with words. Great works of imagination necessitate great works of personal character and domesticity. A September 1864 article from someone who claims to be a constant recipient of letters from people who want to write, states that “if a woman enter the field of authorship, let her do it always in that spirit which seeks for other rewards than the world can give; let her feel that the mission of her pen is to elevate and bless humanity” (268). Lasting literary success is described in *Godey’s* articles as a matter of the female author’s personal qualities: if a woman is remembered for her writing, it’s because her writing embodies her personal character. Accordingly, the editor of *Godey’s* in 1859 warns that a woman’s writing will “usually sink into oblivion...where the moral power does not uplift woman’s genius” (176). Another article from the Editor’s Table in 1869 suggests that a Mrs. Barbauld meets such standards for literary longevity: “Time has consecrated her as a classic; for her themes

are of everlasting interest, and her morality sound and elevated” (2). These articles provided support for nineteenth-century women writers—but a support with the caveat that women remain in their prescribed roles.

In *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties*, Kett describes a difference in the way in which antebellum men and women went about with their self-education and involvement with self-help or advice books. According to Kett, advice to women was typically aimed at the development of their character as a way to compensate for the lack of career opportunities for women on which to apply their burgeoning self-education (74-75). Whereas nineteenth-century men could dabble at various subjects in self-education, women “stress[ed] systematic study and they condemned themselves for the self-indulgent literary pursuits that had proven so advantageous to men” (Kett 75). It is this emphasis on writing as both the development and proof of female moral character that Eliza Leslie will in part be responding to in her rhetorical work of advice-giving in *The Behaviour Book*.

That women were perceived as making regular forays into publication is evident in Thomas Carmichaell’s humorous *Autobiography of a Rejected M.S.* from 1870 in which a manuscript (by a female writer) is personified and is seen undergoing the submission process. The main character, a manuscript, is tossed by an editor into the waste bin where it meets two other manuscripts both penned by women. One of these other manuscripts, “The Countess’s Secret,” is reputedly by a woman of no talent, and the second, “Violet, or, The Ball-room Belle,” wears too much perfume, lisps, and is by an upper-class woman writer who expects to publish because of her social standing rather than her ability.

Although nineteenth-century women in the United States were regularly attempting publication, they faced a censure that is evident in Carmichaell's portrayal of female authorship. Not only are manuscripts by women rejected by a male editor (three for three in his waste basket), but the secondary character, Lucille, who is the twenty-two year old author of the manuscript personified in this book, is belittled by Carmichaell for her sentimentalism and naiveté both in her life style and in her approach to authorship. For one, Lucille wrote the manuscript, a romance, in one night's sitting and heads to an editor's office the following morning. As with many women writers in the nineteenth-century, publication became a source of income when husbands and fathers were no longer part of a family. Similarly, Lucille seeks to support herself and her mother through her writing in order to avoid relying on an uncle's financial support. The personified manuscript daydreams of "fellowship" with other texts when printed in a publication and of bringing financial relief to his beleaguered Lucille (30-31). However, the manuscript is rejected by a series of editors, and an interaction with a final editor is particularly dispiriting not only as a negative evaluation of the single manuscript but rejecting of Lucille's attempt to enter the writing profession as a woman. The editor, described as self-confident and unaffected by life, assumes that Lucille has written a sentimental novel simply because of her gender, and he informs Lucille that he rejects women's submissions without reading them. The editor tries to further discourage Lucille by citing Samuel Johnson:

A certain lady once went to Dr. Johnson with a manuscript, and said that if it would not do for publication, she had other irons in the fire. "Take my advice, madam," answered the doctor, "and put it along with the other irons." The anecdote might serve as a text to many a sermon, with female writers making up the congregation. (27)

Lucille is advised by the editor to avoid writing sentimental writing if she wants to succeed in publishing and then returns home. The trajectory of Lucille's life seems to parallel, however, the genre in which she unsuccessfully composed, since she shortly afterwards contracts a terminal illness, has three months to live, and the manuscript is confined to a locked box containing a dried rose from Lucille's lost love. Rather than receiving a public readership, the manuscript is read only by Lucille's grieving mother. The manuscript finds purpose, then, in "sooth[ing] a mother's sorrow," rather than in actual publication (105). Carmichaell's advice book on publication and rejection is highly gendered and is as much a perspective on the writing life as it is an admonishment of female authorship. Likewise, the advice about writing in Leslie's *Behaviour Book*, couched as it is in an etiquette book to women, is equally gendered and regulatory, only it is clever validation of female authorship.

At the time of or shortly after Leslie's *Behaviour Book*, there was a backlash by men in positions of literary power to the increase in women writing for publication and for profit. For instance, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote to his publisher "complaining about the 'damned mob of scribbling women' that was outpacing him in sales" (Williams 101). In the same letter, Hawthorne calls the writing of these women "trash": "I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash" (Degler 377). A more startling example of backlash is evident in the writings of J.G. Holland, founding editor of *Scribner's Monthly Magazine*. J.G. Holland was "arguably the most successful American writer in the 1860s and '70s. So perfectly at one with his readers was he that the postwar years became known as the 'Holland age of letters'" (Scholnick 172).

Holland was a friend of Emily Dickinson whose work he had solicited for publication. However, Holland was also the pseudonymous author of the three-volume advice book, *Letters to the Joneses*, published in 1863 (Scholnick 177). In a chapter titled “The Fifteenth Letter. To Miss Felicia Semans Jones. Concerning Her Strong Desire to Become an Authoress,” Holland makes an aggressive case for why women should desist from becoming an “authoress.” First, Holland tries to deflate the supposed young lady’s belief in her uniqueness and simultaneously suggests that the female desire toward creativity comes from a deficiency: “the world is full of women whose unsatisfied lives and whose overflowing natures fill them with suggestions of ideal good, to be won in some field of art. If these women could use the pencil or the chisel, many of them would be artists, or would try to be artists; but the pen is the only instrument of expression with which their fingers are familiar, and they come to regard it as their only resort” (215-16). Holland attacks the desire a woman may have for writing by emphasizing the strong possibility of failure and the commonness of the desire, conveying the tacit message that the young woman who wants to write is nothing special *and* especially nothing (personally limited). He suggests that women who want to write are influenced by books by men and want “[h]is position of power... You long to do for others what he has done for you. You long to be regarded with love and admiration as an inspirer” (217-18). Perhaps most damningly, Holland suggests that women writers have deficient personal lives and that writing for publication is merely an act of compensation:

It is not unfrequently true that those whose affections have been unsatisfied at home—whose plans of domestic life have miscarried—or who are immediately surrounded by those who will not, or who cannot sympathize with them—who are every day associated with those by whom they are undervalued—turn to the public for that which has been denied them at home. I do not know whether I hit your case in these remarks or not, but I

should think it strange if I did not. It is not common for a woman who is satisfied in her affections, who is surrounded by sympathetic friends, and who holds a good position securely, to care for, or even to think of recognition beyond. On the other hand, it is very common for women whose domestic surroundings and society are not satisfying to look to other fields for recognition, and to none so commonly as to that of authorship. (218-19)

Holland separates the desire to write from the ability to write; this schism is very discouraging and unnatural. Holland also links certain genres (poetry, essays) to women. He says that these shorter genres can be fit into a woman's busy domestic work schedule. However, these genres are only "playing at authorship" because an authentic writer must devote larger periods of time to work (222). Holland repeatedly talks about the "labor" of writing, suggesting that book production takes far more than the temporary moment of inspiration felt by women from the books they read. The overall sense of his advice is that writing is a form of work for which women are ill-equipped by nature of their social obligations; these obligations actually oppress women and that oppression is the source of the attraction to writing (writing is an illusionary attempt at freedom). It is interesting to think of Eliza Leslie's confident proclamations to and about women writers in the face of such inspiration-crimping attitudes.

Eliza Leslie as Successful Nineteenth-Century Woman Writer

Eliza Leslie exemplified the type of authoress a nineteenth-century woman sought to become, as she was widely published and a prolific writer in several genres. A few of her works include fiction such as *Pencil Sketches* (1852); *Short Stories for Summer Days and Winter Nights* (1853); *Mrs. Washington Potts: and Mr. Smith, Tales* (1843), as well as juvenile fiction: *Atlantic Tales: or, Pictures of Youth* (1833); *Stories for Helen* (1845)

The American Girl's Book (1857), and an annual collection, *The Gift*, which she edited. Leslie is cited in *Godey's Lady's Book* as one of the first to write juvenile literature (Haven page). Leslie is perhaps most known for her recipe books, which have been reprinted as recently as 2007, including *Directions for Cookery, in its Various Branches* (1844); *Miss Leslie's Lady's House-Book: A Manual of Domestic Economy* (1850); *New Receipts for Cooking* (1854); and *Miss Leslie's New Cookery Book* (1857). Leslie wrote the most popular cookbook in nineteenth-century America, *Directions for Cookery: Being a System of the Art*, which went through fifty editions (<http://www.answers.com/topic/eliza-leslie>).

Leslie herself was the type of writer she would call a literary "lion." In an elegiac article in 1858 *Godey's Lady's Book*, Leslie is remembered as "was one of the oldest as well as the most prominent among our female writers" (1). In Hart's 1866 *The Female Prose Writers of America*, the influence of Leslie's writing was said to be unsurpassed, notably without qualification of her gender and only of her nationality: "No writer of fiction in our country has ever had a wider, or more interested circle of readers: and this is clearly proved by the increased circulation of all those publications in which her name has appeared as a regular contributor" (26). Included in *The Female Prose Writers of America* are sixty other women writers, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose best-selling status is routinely touted in nineteenth-century accounts of literary publishing, so Leslie was among good company. Leslie's popularity during her own lifetime is also evident in the fact that *Godey's Lady's Book*, which prided itself on publishing only original material and not reprints, took exception when it reprinted one of Leslie's short

stories from its 1832 issue eighteen years later, after receiving numerous requests from readers for the reprint (Okker 90-91).

Books were women writers' primary education to the writing profession, and this was the case with Leslie. For Leslie, books allowed her a self-education to replace formal education. In her autobiographical account for Hart's *Female Prose Writers of America*, Leslie spends more time detailing the various books she read as a girl and her particular passion for Shakespeare and historical accounts of Greece and Rome than her classroom education. Of reading, she said "There was no restriction on my reading except to prevent me from 'reading my eyes out'" (Hart 29). However, nineteenth-century women writers had to deal with the male perception that they were inadequately trained—and thus amateur—for the writing profession. A reliance on books as teachers did not suffice for some male critics such as Jesse Haney who, in his 1867 guide to authorship, suggests that women were unnecessarily weaker writers because "their apprenticeship to letters less vigorous" (12). According to Haney, nineteenth-century females suffered from a foreshortened path of professionalism: their unschooled habits became encapsulated too early in the amber of publication. In this account of female career development, young female writers had only shown their writings to school-yard friends and then to a local editor. Lacking vigorous training or exposure to a critical audience, the woman writer fails to develop and her "innocuous style, becomes as firmly fixed as some unpleasant trick in a badly-bred horse (Haney 12). Extensive and wide-ranging reading seemed to provide Leslie with a sense of engagement with the world and with an indirect training in creative writing and authorship, but societal underestimation

of this self-education could have been a factor in Leslie's emphasis on respecting female authors.

Leslie's reliance on other women authors as inspiration for her own writing is typical of many of the female writers who discussed their beginnings as writers in *Godey's Lady's Book*. That is, Leslie was not alone in discovering a possible writer's life not through a formal classroom education in writing but instead through encounters with women's published texts. In an 1864 article in *Godey's*, "My First Attempt," the anonymous female author describes how reading other people in print encourages her to think about publishing her own work: "The other day, after reading the newspaper, I fell into a reverie, and began to imagine myself a modern Joan of Arc, and to build castles in the air" (502). In a 1858 article in *Godey's*, Alice B. Haven similarly recounts the importance of books in her childhood, her "devotion being equally divided between stories and sweets" such that "[a]nything in the shape of a new book was sure to pass through my hands" (2). Haven in fact cites Leslie's books as one of her most significant influences, as well as that of her peers: "Miss Leslie became the chief magician in my fair land...Miss Leslie's stories were the first to be devoured, not only by myself, but by all the school" (1-2). Haven proceeds as a young adult to seek Leslie out in person in Philadelphia and become her friend. This emphatic consumption of books by young women—indeed "devoured" like "sweets"—speaks to the power of women writers for each other and, by extension, of the influence of writing self-help books, written by women, on other women.

Despite their critique of women's lack of formal education, nineteenth-century writing self-help manuals and magazine articles on the writing life, whether written by

males or females, tended to be critical of formal writing instruction. Thus, one avenue for censure of women writers was to disparage them for not having the same formal education as men, but at the same time, that formal education was also the subject of criticism. So while women were criticized for not having the substantial formal education that society in fact denied them, , In his 1887 *Hints on Writing and Speech-Making*, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, influential editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and correspondent with Emily Dickinson, discounted the potential of classroom-based text books on writing to prepare for literary authorship. Higginson retained from text books only one piece of advice about using unusual diction: “The only thing I remember in our college text-book of Rhetoric is one admirable verse of caution” (31). Many discussions by novice female writers at the time include the negative influence of teachers, presumably grade-school composition teachers, such as in “My First Attempt,” published in 1864 in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*:

Notwithstanding all my devotion to the art of composition, I have never before summoned courage enough to attempt an entrance into the arena of literary fame; indeed, to tell the truth, I have had very little encouragement. I don’t think people have appreciated me sufficiently. At School, though my compositions were undoubtedly remarkable, my teacher never took any particular notice of them, and made no attempt to accelerate the growth of my budding genius, and so, through her neglect, my ideas upon “Friendship,” “Spring,” and various other subjects, are lost forever to the world. (9)

Instead of classroom instruction, individuals sought other types of experience in order to become professional authors. One way was to purchase a printing press and start one’s own publishing house, a method popular with youth in the 1870s and 1880s, allowing them to assume the writing, editing, and publishing roles of professionals (Fabian 412). Starting one’s own small press replaced formal writing instruction: “There is, undoubtedly, no occupation which would be of more profit to a boy (or girl) than editing

an amateur paper,' one enthusiast wrote in 1872. 'Actual business, instruction and amusement are combined. Although it may be said to divert the mind from the ordinary school duties, yet it is thought that what is gained through journalistic experience amply makes up for what is lost at school" (qtd in Fabian 414). Working as a journalist was frequently touted as the best means of learning how to become a writer. Such opportunities in journalism were less available, however, to females in the nineteenth-century, increasing their reliance on other extracurricular methods of learning to write, such as self-help books on writing.

Eliza Leslie's Behaviour Book as Early Writing Self-Help

Leslie's book seems to be distinct from other female conduct books in its emphasis on writing, suggesting that it is acting as one of the earliest writing self-help books. For instance, a contemporaneous etiquette book, Emily Thornwell's *The Lady's Guide to Perfect Gentility* first published in 1856 but which underwent numerous editions like Leslie's book, does not advise women readers how to become published writers. Thornwell's chapters concern hygiene, dress, travel, parties, and conversation; one chapter addresses letter writing, but the discussion of writing for women does not go beyond that. However, in her lengthy subtitle, Thornwell calls her book a "useful instructor" of matters (including epistolary), suggesting that the advice books could fulfill the role of teachers in the extracurriculum. Eliza Farrar's 1849 *The Young Lady's Friend* also discusses the importance of reading to women, suggesting that reading is connected to a mental culture which was not frivolous but tied to female responsibilities to men and

households. Farrar advocates reading as a cure for female gossip or cattiness. In her final chapter, "Mental Culture," she proposes that females engage in writing, specifically that they form abstracts of their readings in order to be analytical readers rather than passive consumers and to also aid memory. In addition to these abstracts, Farrar suggests that women write compositions. Under a sub-chapter called "grammar and rhetoric," Farrar says that women should continue to use composition as a means toward mental culture, though not the same type of composition one finds in school: these she finds "irksome" (379). However, Farrar strongly discourages women from publishing their compositions: "It should be remembered that, however valuable these compositions are, as exercises of the young mind, they seldom have any intrinsic merit, and should, therefore, be kept to yourself, and destroyed when they have answered their purpose" (379-80). Farrar, unlike Leslie and many other writing self-help authors, limits female writing to what latter day twentieth-century theorists would call "private writing." Interestingly, Farrar appears to have been a published author, since the title page of the book lists several previous titles, suggestive of the sexism Rose describes of nineteenth-century female conduct book writers: they limited other women to the household while themselves gaining success through publication. Another nineteenth-century conduct book, L. G. Abell's 1855 *Woman in Her Various Relations: Containing Practical Rules for American Females*, does not even mention female writing beyond brief discussion of letter-writing.

Overall, the conflation of self-help and writing was not a given in the nineteenth century. In Samuel Smiles' 1859 American edition of his immensely popular *Self-Help: Character and Conduct*, writing is not validated in the way it is in Leslie's self-help book

for women. (Smiles book coined “self-help” and was immensely influential.) Even as Smiles discusses the inspiration for his book in its introduction—the book is based on a series of lectures he gave at a self-improvement society for young men—math rather than writing appears center-stage in self-education. In this account, the young male learners of a less privileged class were so dedicated to self-learning that they would study together rain or shine, inside or outside, and “sometimes a sudden show of rain would dash the sums from their slates” (Smiles iii-iv). In Smiles’ book, reading, especially of fiction, is criticized for its passive acceptance of others’ ideas, with preference given to knowledge obtained first-hand through physical work: “The Novel is the most favorite refuge of the frivolous and the idle” (Smiles 288). Smiles laments the greater availability of books caused by improvements in publication technology. Greater availability of reading materials leads, in his opinion, to superficial reading which he in turn equates with the mechanization of individuals by the industrial revolution: “With all the facilities which exist for independent self-culture, it is even suspected that our life, like our literature, is becoming more mechanical” (285). Notably, his book is geared toward male readers and the male self-taught. *Self-Help* is peppered examples of men from various classes and professions who represent dimensions of the self-culture advocated by Smiles. Famous authors are included in those examples, but for a different purpose than Leslie—namely, to contrast those with self-discipline from those whose potentials were never fully realized due to lack of self-discipline. Smiles admires a British male writer, Samuel Drew, who put his family first in his priorities and pursued a career in manual labor as a shoemaker, rather than pursuing literary fame or a writer’s life: “His study was the kitchen, where his wife’s bellows served him for a desk; and he wrote amid the cries and

cradlings of his children... His first care was to secure an honest livelihood by his business and to put into the 'lottery of literary success,' as he termed it, only the surplus of his time" (Smiles 80-81). Leslie's *Behaviour Book* was remarkable then for the way in which it incorporates writing into self-help: this speaks to the way in which nineteenth-century women relied on the extracurriculum to obtain insight into writing and publication.

At first glance, Leslie's inclusion of writers and writing in an etiquette book may seem incongruous. *The Behaviour Book*, at 336 pages, contains twenty-five chapters which give advice on issues ranging from dress and physical appearance, visits to other households, entertaining guests, raising children, attending church, shopping, receiving and giving presents, traveling by ship, conversing, and dining at hotels. At times, it can be difficult to balance Leslie's censorious advice—made both ridiculous and more confining because of its particularity—with her discussion of composing and authorship. Leslie advises on how to eat a lobster and remonstrates the reader to never discuss sea sickness with men. Leslie issues supremely confident statements such as: "Ladies no longer eat salt-fish at a public-table" (103). A few pages later (sometimes in the same paragraph), Leslie discusses the composing process or the solitude and space requirements needed by a woman to write—issues which would win the interest of a twentieth-first century composition scholar. However, five of the twenty-five chapters concern language, including letter writing, two chapters titled "Conduct to Literary Women" and "Suggestions to Inexperienced Authors" (sandwiched between "Obligations to Gentlemen" and "Children") directly address female authorship. In fact, female literacy is a thread throughout *The Behaviour Book*. For instance, in a chapter on

extended visits, Leslie tells hostesses not to put guests out by asking them to help out with sewing if they've brought no sewing work of their own for the trip because "When alone in her own room, she, of course, would much rather read, write, or occupy herself in some way for her own benefit, or amusement" (28). A hostess should supply the materials for writing including a writing case, ink, and quality paper (25). Letter writing and sewing appear in the same paragraph when she advises in a chapter *to* guests what to bring during their visit (21). Writing cases are discussed in chapter on "Department at a Hotel" (112). In a chapter called "Borrowing," the loaning of books between women figures prominently—besides umbrellas, the item most mentioned for borrowing is a book, magazine, or newspaper. Furthermore, Leslie provides advice on how to make a protective cover for borrowed book and remonstrates against marginalia—including in one's own books. In contrast to Samuel Smiles in *Self-Help* who is skeptical about reading, Leslie campaigns for the buying books because "In America, books are so cheap (not to mention the numerous public libraries)" (238). Female literacy and authorship were core values in Leslie's estimation, and her *Behaviour Book* attempts to promote those core values as a type of etiquette.

In embedding her advice on writing inside an etiquette book addressed to a female readership, Leslie is performing a complex rhetorical act to simultaneously regulate, normalize and validate nineteenth-century women writer. The forum of an etiquette book in general offers prescriptions for other's behaviors, lifestyles, and social interaction and so attempts to regulate other people's social performances. Announcing her regulatory mission in the preface to *The Behaviour Book*, Leslie says that her goal is to "improve her young country-women" based on her observation of their problems. In the

same approach and tone as she dictates dress style, Leslie regulates how a reader might go about composing and attempting publication. Thus, in *The Behaviour Book*, advice about writing and advice about interacting with professional writers blends into general etiquette principles. For instance, many of the behaviors Leslie advocates that are not about writing (such as the borrowing of items from others) reoccur in discussions of female authors. Differentiating between nineteenth-century conduct and etiquette books, Jane E. Rose classified Leslie's *Behaviour Book* as a conduct book, or a book that "prescribes a certain way of life for women to follow" in order to advance the fledgling Republic of the United States. While an etiquette book is focused on individual self-promotion in society, conduct books "redefine the nature of women and their vocations...by restricting women to the domestic sphere" (39). According to Rose, the careers of female writers of antebellum conduct books were hypercritically built on their written edicts limiting other women to the domestic sphere. Rose includes Leslie in this category, and in her discussion of Leslie's *Behaviour Book* quotes one passage from Leslie on the mental inferiority of women while altogether overlooking Leslie's two chapters on women as writers or Leslie's significant effort to help women develop a writing career outside of the home.

Leslie instates the woman writer as a normal, acceptable identity in a society which mainly sanctioned private and domestic roles for women. Because nineteenth-century women writers needed to show themselves fulfilling certain ideals society held for womanhood, publicity surrounding the woman writer tried to establish her as a "'normal' woman working quietly at home" (Williams 113). Attempts to create an image of the woman writer as also successfully domestic led to collections such as Francis

Whiting's *Women Authors of Our Day in Their Homes*—and also, I would suggest, to Leslie's insistence that women writers are domestic individuals as well as talented authors. As Katherine Adams has described this effort, Leslie tried to make "her subject seem like a normal member of the community... to protect her colleagues from censure: writers are kind and generous—'normal'—women who should be welcomed in society; they should not be stereotyped or abused because of their occupation" (*A Group* 8). She accomplishes this image of woman writer as normal *by* including her in everyday etiquette discussions. The inclusion of the two chapters focusing on women writers, "Conduct to Literary Women" and "Suggestions to Inexperienced Authors," suggests that contact with women writers was part of regular social interaction and not an atypical event. In contrast to Rose's rendering of Leslie and also in contrast to many of articles in *Godey's Lady's Book*, Leslie emphasizes the value of women's writing work over domestic, and Leslie suggests that writing can in some cases replace domestic work (though she says that many women writers are also excellent housewives):

When in company with literary women, make no allusions to "learned ladies," or "blue stockings," or express surprise that they should have any knowledge of housewifery, or needle-work, or dress; or that they are able to talk on "common things." It is rude and foolish, and shows that you really know nothing about them, either as a class or as individuals... If you chance to find an authoress occupied with her needle, express no astonishment, and refrain from exclaiming, "What! can *you* sew?" or, "I never supposed a literary lady could even hem a handkerchief!" This is a false, and if expressed in words, an insulting idea. A large number of literary females are excellent needle-women, and good housewives; and there is no reason why they should not be. The same vigour of character and activity of intellect which renders a woman a *good* writer, will also enable her to acquire with a quickness, almost intuitive, a competent knowledge of household affairs. (259-262)

In addition to validating women writers' domestic ability, Leslie posits women writers as professionals, making money through writing, with a career and endeavor worth

protecting and valuing (and the message is protecting from other women—not necessarily men—who do not write, women who Leslie describes as “idle” and “flat”). Patricia Okker points to Leslie’s fiction as an example of writing published in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* under the editorial tenure of Sarah J. Hale which “challenged the idea of any essential difference between men and women and any corresponding belief in separate spheres” (35-6). In this complicated rhetorical work, Leslie along with providing regulations also normalizes and lionizes the woman writer in her culture (at a time in which women’s work outside the home faced serious scrutiny): all in the atmosphere of the etiquette book, a place which promises to confine the young woman reader through rules.

Given even Leslie’s attempts to normalize and validate women writers, what we see in *The Behaviour Book* is rules-based instruction par excellence—rules that is for conduct and for writing—and thus may initially appear dissimilar from Elbow’s project in *Writing Without Teachers*. How could Elbow’s quintessentially anti-authoritarian text on writing be compatible with an etiquette book that unrolls one hidebound rule after the next? However, Leslie’s text is aligned with Elbow for the way in which it validates the reader’s writing ability in the face of challenge: a signature component of writing self-help literature, including *Writing Without Teachers*. In the case of *The Behaviour Book*, the challenge the writing individual faces is societal rather than psychological or cognitive.

In Leslie’s rendering, becoming a published woman writer has everything to do with one’s interactions with other women in intimate social settings and far less to do with engaging a readership or attracting an editor. Leslie cautions the reader of her

etiquette book to not unwittingly or wittingly become an obstacle to another woman's writing life through her conversation or actions. In Leslie's rendering, women can become obstacles to other women's writing by their actions, such as appearing at the writer's house during the hour of her daily writing practice:

An authoress has seldom leisure to entertain morning visitors; so much of her time being professionally occupied either in writing, or in reading what will prepare her for writing. She should apprise all her friends of the hours in which she is usually engaged; and then none who are really her friends and well-wishers, will encroach upon her convenience for any purpose of their own; unless under extraordinary circumstances. To tell her that you were "just passing by," or "just in the neighbourhood," and "just thought you would stop in," is a very selfish, or at least a very inconsiderate excuse. (260)

In addition to her actions, a non-writer can become an obstacle through her verbal interactions with women writers. Consequentially, *The Behaviour Book* is sprinkled with examples of what not to say to women writers the reader is either meeting or knows well.

On meeting a women writer:

it is rude to say that "you have long had a great *curiosity* to see her." Curiosity is not the right word. It is polite to imply that, "knowing her well by reputation, you are glad to have an opportunity of making her personal acquaintance." Say nothing concerning her writings, unless you chance to be alone with her. Take care not to speak of her first work as being her best; for if it is really so, she must have been retrograding from that time; a falling off that she will not like to hear of. Perhaps the truth may be, that you yourself have read only her *first* work; and if you tell her this, she will not be much flattered in supposing that you, in reality, cared so little for her first book, as to feel no desire to try a second. (256)

In Leslie's scenario in 1854, what the female reader needed to break free from was the limitations imposed by people who were not teachers or past critics but instead mainly other women.

These admonishments occur in the rhetorical set-up of the etiquette book, such that how a reader behaves toward women writers is prescribed as much as how a reader

behaves toward an unknown man on a train or ship. According to Leslie, a woman writer deserves special esteem and therefore particular types of social interaction; encounters with a published female author are events in which proper etiquette must be especially practiced. At times, the famous female author is a sort of social commodity which must be preserved through the ritualized actions of etiquette. The inclusion of two chapters focusing on women writers, “Conduct to Literary Women” and “Suggestions to Inexperienced Authors,” implies that contact with women writers was a regular part of female social interaction, not an atypical event. Even the sequence of these chapters suggest that the reader is lower in societal esteem—either a non-writer or a novice—than the lionized authoresses. At these social occasions, a woman writer deserves particular types of social interaction, and etiquette must be followed.

Throughout *The Behaviour Book*, female authors are used as examples in social settings and figure prominently in etiquette. The importance of female authors is evident, then, in the way in which they serve as examples in chapters pertaining to non-writing topics. For instance, in a chapter on proper introductions (a routine topic in nineteenth-century conduct books), Leslie writes: “One of our most distinguished literary Americans was seated at a dinner-party next to an European lady equally distinguished in literature; but as there were no introductions, he was not aware of her presence till the party was over and the lady was gone” (53). In the same chapter, Leslie mentions what to do when introducing a “member of Congress” and foreign nobilities—thereby suggesting the social importance of the writer simply through her “seating” of the writer at the same table of example as Congressmen. (In a similar way, William Webster Ellsworth in an early twentieth-century creative writing book will elevate the status of writers. In his

preface, Ellsworth claims that writers are the most interesting people to know, calling a writer a “personality”—and that writers are more fascinating to know than Senators: only the President could supersede them w/ being interesting. (6-7)). In Leslie’s case, this suggests that the reader seeks to emulate the women writers in Leslie’s examples—or at the very least that Leslie anticipates that desire to emulate women writers. In other words, Leslie is positioning the reader as a woman who wants to be like a writer. Moreover, Leslie’s examples of authors are predominantly female, and the number of references to women writers increases with Leslie’s discussion of writing in general, such as letter writing. In contrast to Smiles’, Leslie’s references to males and male writers are infrequent such as her mention of Charles Dickens as an example of the poor taste of asking an author for an autograph in her chapter on introductions.

In describing proper behavior around women writers, Leslie emphasizes the value of women writers and implies that they are somehow more special than non-writers. That Leslie holds women who write in greater esteem than those who do not attempt publication is evident in her terms for writers—“literary lady,” “literary females,” and “talented woman”—in juxtaposition to how she describes non-writers—as the “silliest and flattest people in the room” (265); as having “obtuse or shallow, common-place capacity” (257); and for acting like an “idle and thoughtless friend” (for a non-writer who interrupts her writer friend at work). As Adams describes Leslie’s efforts on behalf of women writers, Leslie “emphasizes the writer’s dedication and asks readers to treat this hard worker with respect” (8). These castings of non-writers and the anecdotes they’re encapsulated in seem to act as warnings for the reader, who may be a non-writer or writer-want-to-be: a message saying, “You may not become a published writer, but at the

very least, aspire to avoid becoming one of these hindrances to women writers.”

Moreover, the order of those two chapters focusing on women writers reinforces this message of the superiority of female authors. That the chapter called “Conduct to Literary Women” appears *before* “Suggestions to Inexperienced Authors” suggests the first task of a reader is to develop a proper social attitude to published women before even contemplating how to become an author herself. In other words, one’s behavior around women writers is more important in terms of proper etiquette than whether one becomes a writer.

Despite the hierarchy of non-writer, novice, and experienced writer which Leslie establishes, general female literacy is essential etiquette in Leslie’s rendering. One purpose of the extracurriculum of composition in the nineteenth century, then, was to increase female literacy practices. For Leslie, a woman may not become a published writer, but she certainly needs to be an engaged reader to properly conduct herself as much as she needs to dress or conduct herself with men appropriately: “between a woman of highly cultivated mind, and one who is grossly ignorant of every thing [sic] connected with books, and who boasts of that ignorance. We have heard a lady of fashion say, ‘Thank God, I never read.’ The answer might well have been, ‘You need not tell us that’” (*Behaviour Book* 58). For Leslie, reading thwarts female idleness: “I have often wondered to see a fair young stranger sitting day after day, idle and listless in the drawing room of a hotel, when she might have known that there were bookstores in the immediate neighbourhood.” (238). Literacy rates among females in the nineteenth-century United States improved even over a short period of time. Between the decade of 1850 and 1860, the literacy rate among women moved from 50 to 75 percent, and in New England, the

rate was almost 100 percent (Coultrap-McQuin 22). Leslie, in proffering her etiquette toward women writers, is suggesting that the work of literacy is every woman's responsibility.

That Leslie is attempting to protect women writers through her rules of conduct is also evident in her figurative language for the situation between non-writers and women writers. Leslie calls people of public notoriety, including literary fame, "lions"—suggesting a certain strength and nobility in the person—and also notably not "lionesses" which would differentiate male and female authors. Leslie suggests the social elevation or isolation of women writers when she admonishes the reader "Never tell an authoress that 'you are afraid of her'—or entreat her 'not to put you into a book'" (260). However, the strength of these "lions" is hampered when the general public pursues them for their autographs and attention. A later writing self-help book, one published in the late twentieth- or early twenty-first century, would not bring up how to act around writers of greater repute. Leslie compares children being cruel to animals (frogs) to women being interrupted by their friends (261): "The children of the pen and the pencil might say to these intruders, like the frogs in the pond when the boys were pelting them with stones—'This may be sport to you, but it is death to me'" (261). Here, "children of the pen and the pencil" suggests a vulnerability and innocence in the woman writer—increasing Leslie's need to protect them (different than lion comparison)—and interestingly to protect them from being stoned by males. Comparisons to animals—frogs in a pond, lions implicitly in enclosed space of a party a.k.a. zoo cage posits them as "other"—as neither male nor female—and also as worthy of protection, supplied by etiquette. The barbarous individuals are the humans (non-writers) who hunt down and therefore wound women

writers in social settings. It also suggests that the “animals” (frogs or lions) are just trying to go about their lives (writing)—that writing is a woman writer’s livelihood and natural environment—more so than the dinner parties and engagements discussed in *The Behaviour Book*. Leslie tells the reader never to seat two famous women writers next to each other at a dinner party in order to arouse the spectacle of them in argument: “It is not treating a talented woman with due consideration, to be active in introducing to her the silliest and flattest people in the room, because the said flats have been worked up into a desire of seeing, face to face, ‘a live authoress’” (265). This suggests too that the woman writer would be a person of outspoken opinions that lead to such dining table scenes—suggestive of professional investment and identity. Leslie cites an example of a “notorious lion-hunter” who “was so candid as to say to certain celebrated writers, ‘I’ll sit by *you* because you are famous’” and to call other women writers her “decoy-duck” (265).

In discussing the writing process, Leslie positions it as well as a matter of social decorum. For Leslie, the writing process includes the amount of time it takes to write, and the need to protect women writers’ time by giving them a room of their own in which to compose (258). When addressing women writers about process, she suggests that they write every morning in solitude, free of time-consuming distractions from female visitors (260). She advocates keeping a notebook—a “memorandum-book”—for recording material for writing as well as keeping track of submissions and income from publications (283). Leslie meshes the writing process with domestic expectations, positing that the successful woman writer have “a study” which shouldn’t be judged for its apparent disorder by a non-writer because the “arrangement may be quite

unintelligible to the uninitiated” (261). Thus, a woman writer’s messy study is transformed into a symbol of her membership in a sort of secret society; it also symbolizes the fact that a woman writer has a special ability and more important matters than cleanliness. That said, Leslie also emphasizes the material elements of writing more than would be found in twentieth-century writing self-help or text books. For instance, Leslie spends several opening pages of the chapter “Suggestions to Inexperienced Authors” giving advice on paper, paper cutters, ink, and penmanship (274-278). Leslie’s emphasis is more on publication than process—something which will shift in twentieth-century writing self-help—and this is perhaps most shown by her end of the second chapter on writing. Leslie ends with the woman writer submitting a piece for local publication, advising “If the printer’s boy can wait, you had best correct proofs while he stays” (284). Notably, some of Leslie’s discussion of the writing process is being provided to readers who are presumably not writing. For instance, Leslie makes the writing process a topic which should not be addressed when conversing with a woman writer. According to Leslie, non-writers have no right to ask about a woman writer’s process which she calls “the machinery of her work, and the hidden springs which set it in motion [that] she naturally wishes to keep to herself; and she cannot be expected to lay them bare for the gratification of impertinent curiosity, letting them become subjects of idle gossip” (257). In Leslie’s case, however, her situating the writing process within the rules of etiquette allows Leslie to further reinforce women’s right to write.

Leslie’s views on process might seem primitive with the hindsight of the process movement of the twentieth century, but her views are actually more nuanced than those in contemporaneous self-help books on writing. In the 1857 *How to Publish: A Manual*

for Authors, the anonymous author provides a single chapter of one page toward “Writing a Manuscript” and then twenty other chapters on matters ranging from title and paper selection, locating a publisher, and advertising one’s publication. Even in this chapter, “writing” is construed as the author’s handwriting, not quality of content or process of composing. “Take care that your Manuscript be written legibly” is the brunt of the chapter’s advice, and even revision is described as making legible “corrections” (7). Haney’s 1867 *Guide to Authorship* contains a smidgeon more advice on a writing process under the chapter heading “Of the General Principles of Composition,” including that the novice maintain a regular practice and approach writing with a clear and healthy mind (13). These passages occupy half a page, and Haney proceeds to stylistic matters of clarity and diction. Writing thirty years after Leslie, Thomas Wentworth Higginson in *Hints on Writing and Speech-Making* more extensively covers a writing process, mainly advocating a slow process of gathering observations, drafting, and rewriting. Higginson describes his own arduous process, noting “how many new outfits a single sentence sometimes costs before it is presentable,” and comforts the reader that such labor is part of the process of even great authors (20).

Leslie spends little time discussing revision in *The Behaviour Book*, but this omission is characteristic of writing self-help books of the time which put more weight on publication than invention or composing. One of Leslie’s remarks about drafts is highly gendered—whether that is due to sexism or to the fact that *Behaviour Book* spoke to women readers: “Few women can write well enough for publication, without going twice over the subject” (*Behaviour* 280). In another passage, Leslie connects a daily writing practice with regular revision:

Every morning, previous to commencing your task, revise carefully all that you have written on the preceding day, and correct and alter whatever you may deem susceptible of improvement. Some authors revise every page as soon as they have written it. But, unless you are much pressed for time, it is best to do this next morning, when your perceptions are fresh and clear. (278-279)

Leslie continues this discussion of daily revision (which may ring more of editing than revising) by offering ways to signal the introduction of edits and organizational strategies such as numbering every page. Overall, Leslie provides more information on the act of submitting for publication than for revision or editing, including discussing publishers' schedules for "annuals" (books) and the editors' time tables at magazines and weekly newspapers. In *How to Publish: A Manual for Authors*, the author lists off reasons for failure at publication, including the author who "impatiently hurries with his scarcely dry MS. to the nearest printer" and that he "utterly failed in producing a sightly book" (Partridge 5). In Carmichaell's 1870 *Autobiography of a Rejected M.S.*, the manuscript is a romance short story composed in a single all-nighter and brought the next day by its novice female writer to a magazine editor's office (3-4). Leslie's scant discussion of process and revision (to twenty-first century eyes) may be attributed to an overall silence on such topics among writing professionals and teachers in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Her minimal presentation on process may also stem from the way in which Leslie seeks to overcome external and societal road blocks to female authorship rather than internal or cognitive ones.

In *The Behaviour Book*, Leslie defends the right of women writers to make a living from writing and sets up expectations for both female non-writers and writers concerning this income. Leslie is setting up expectations for women's professional lives—a rhetorical activity which is not that dissimilar from setting up rules of conduct. In both

giving advice about conduct and the writing profession, Leslie is attempting to shape individuals' outward actions or how individuals participate in society. Leslie's urges women writers to treat themselves as professionals in a time in which women, according to Ann Fabian, were frequently pigeon-holed as amateurs—as were any individuals who were not male, middle-aged, and Caucasian (408). Concerning writing as an income source for women, Leslie is protective of the space and time requirements of women writers, warning non-writers to not burden women writers with requests: “Artists, authors, and all other persons to whom ‘time is money,’ and whose income stops whenever their hands and eyes are unemployed, are peculiarly annoyed by the frequency of introductory letters, brought by people with whom they can feel no congeniality” (171). Leslie defends the need for a woman writer to have solitude and that her non-writer friends should know her writing schedule and avoid interrupting it: “Recollect that to a woman who gets her living by her pen, ‘time is money,’ as it is to an artist. Therefore, encroaching on her time is lessening her income” (260). Women's publications are to be treated as merchandise having a monetary value, and people should not request free copies from women writers with whom they are acquainted (*Behaviour* 267). Leslie argues that excepting the genre of poetry (which due to its volume is more likely to be published gratis), all other writing done by women should receive payment: “No *good* author has any occasion to write gratuitously” (281). Leslie strives to fuel women's pecuniary success in publishing through her advice in *The Behaviour Book*.

This validation of female ability to earn money is also evident in other books on authorship published in the mid- to late nineteenth-century. In Haney's *Guide to Authorship* in which both genders are attributed with the ability and need to be paid for

their writing: “For in this work-day age, and in a country where the ‘almighty dollar’ is a power, men and women do not write altogether for the honor and glory of the thing, but because they receive money in hand” (9). While J.G. Holland in his 1863 *Letters to the Joneses* tries to discourage women from writing by emphasizing the unlikelihood of making a living from writing (224), what is evident is that women writers were financially successful. In 1854, Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* earned the significant sum of \$1,259.49, but that amount was only one-twentieth of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s income that year from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Williams 95). Leslie herself out-earned Hawthorne; in 1837, Hawthorne earned \$108 for eight stories published in a literary journal, whereas Leslie’s annual income from her writing was \$350 (Williams 96). One of the ways in which Leslie most advocates for other women’s ability to earn money through their writing careers is her use of herself as an example.

Scholarship of nineteenth-century women writers has suggested that women writers tried to deflect public disapproval of their writing activities. Accordingly, women deflected censure by adopting the guise of the amateur, explaining that they published only out of financial necessity, or identifying themselves as a “True Woman writer,” someone whose content promoted the ideals of the separate gender spheres (Fabian 410; Adams *A Group* 8; Coultrap-McQuin 10-17). And so, according to Fabian, “A veneer of amateurism thus permitted female professionalism” (410). However, a close examination of Leslie shows her engaged in less of this deflection and more of a blunt validation of women writers’ potential for success. For one, unlike other nineteenth-century women writers, Leslie did not claim to begin publishing out of a last resort, as a way to support herself when a father or husband was unable or unwilling to do so. Like other

nineteenth-century women writers, Leslie's childhood was one of privilege interrupted by poverty brought on with the untimely death of her father in 1803. As historians have detailed, the writing profession allowed nineteenth-century women to support themselves when they could no longer rely on conventional family and marital structures. The profession of writing did not require extensive training—suggestive of women's situation in the extracurriculum of composition. The writing career suited widows because it did not require training, just that the woman have talent (Degler 379). As was the case with other households in which women through circumstance became the heads, Leslie and her mother stepped out of the gendered separate sphere to earn income:

My mother and her five children (of whom I was the eldest) were left in circumstances which rendered it necessary that she and myself should make immediate exertions for the support of those who were yet too young to assist themselves... Our difficulties we kept uncomplainingly to ourselves. We asked no assistance of our friends, we incurred no debts, and we lived on cheerfully, and with such moderate enjoyments as our means afforded." (28)

Despite her early experience of family hardship, Leslie did not begin her publishing career as part of this endeavor to support her destitute mother and siblings.

In Leslie's account, she did not publish until 1827 and only did so because it was more expedient to publish a book of her recipes than to keep responding to requests for them (30-31). While this explanation may seem to be one of modesty, Leslie is a few paragraphs later unflinching in her discussion of her financial success from publication. She discloses which of her books have paid the most and does so with confidence:

The works from which I have, as yet, derived the greatest pecuniary advantage, are my three books on domestic economy. The "Domestic Cooker Book," published in 1837, is now in the forty-first edition, no edition having been less than a thousand copies; and the sales increases every year. "The House Book" came out in 1840, and the "Lady's Receipt Book" in 1846. All have been successful, and profitable. (32)

In *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century*, Susan Coultrap-McQuin has suggested that for women writers in the nineteenth century what determined the amount of payment they received for their writing was less a matter of gender and more of inside knowledge. That is, both male and female writers could bargain with editors for adequate and even extraordinary compensation, if they were aware of the going rates (Coultrap-McQuin 40). The stakes for women in the profession of writing seem high. Ellsworth cites authorship as one of the few acceptable professions, in addition to teaching (85). Williams points out that Hawthorne, as a white male, was able to supplement his income by working at the Boston Custom House, whereas Leslie's employment, circumscribed due to her gender, would have caused her to negotiate pay more fiercely with editors and publishers (96), suggestive of Ellsworth's theory about female authorship.

In issuing these bold statements about her own success and in insisting that women's writing receive compensation, Leslie modeled a stance of empowerment to other women and providing that inside knowledge for them to succeed. Writing was one avenue of professionalism for nineteenth-century women, and Leslie fiercely protected that opportunity through her numerous rules and significant remonstrance in *The Behaviour Book*. It is possible that Leslie's *Behaviour Book*, written in the middle of the nineteenth-century, helped encourage younger women to pursue writing as a paid career and shed the self-protective stance of amateurism.

Chapter IV

What a Difference Eighty-Four Years Make

“Blessed are the poor in English for they shall see with their own eyes.”
—Hughes Mearns, *Creative Power*, 1929

If a nineteenth-century female reader could have set down Leslie's 1854 *The Behaviour Book* on the reading table to her left and from her lap magically pick up Ueland's twentieth-century *If You Want to Write*, this reader would have been surprised by much of Ueland's advice. Primarily, this nineteenth-century reader would have been struck by Ueland's positive stance toward the reader and by the absence of many of the constraints on women writers which Leslie both helped her contemporaries negotiate as well as obey. Ueland positions the reader's desire to write differently than nineteenth-century writing self-help authors and certainly differently than Eliza Leslie. Leslie's writing advice puts the reader in training for the social mores of authorship: the do's and don'ts that pertain not to grammar or publication, but to the reader's interactions with women writers. Leslie's warns off the paparazzi of poetesses: the sense in *The Behaviour Book* is “if you want to be like them” and “if you want to publish,” not “if you want to write.” From the tone Leslie sets, the reader must earn the right to be a woman writer, not entirely through her verbal accomplishments, but to no small extent through her behavior. Ueland's book eighty-four years later takes no actions to constrain the female

reader who seeks to write; instead, Ueland provides a morale boost and is highly supportive of her female reader. In a sense, Ueland's book would have possibly reminded this hypothetical nineteenth-century reader of those articles on the writing process and career she had likely encountered in *Godey's Lady's Book*. Although *Godey's* published articles constraining female writers, it also printed many personal accounts of writing struggle and success, and those briefer, first-person accounts introduced more vulnerability as well as supportiveness for other women writers than Leslie's book, housed as it was inside an etiquette book with so many rafters of rules. This nineteenth-century reader would have noticed Ueland's de-emphasis of publication and the extent to which publication is replaced by a focus on the interior experiences of the individual writer. Ueland is less fame-driven than Leslie: Ueland urges readers to go inside, to leave society and its expectations and in fact criticizes the act of publishing. The nineteenth-century female reader would also have been surprised by Ueland's ethos: how Ueland doesn't develop an authority based on her extensive professional writing and publishing experience. In *If You Want to Write* there is a marked absence of a self-proclaimed author-expert, whereas Leslie positions herself and other famous women writers of her time as experts. This reader, in short, would notice how little presence writerly notoriety had in Ueland's self-instruction—whether the fame of Ueland or the desired fame of the novice reader. In fact, Ueland would appear to be de-centering her own authority in ways which would strike this fictional nineteenth-century reader as extraordinary but would sound familiar to a reader of Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* by the last quarter of this new twentieth century.

Ueland's *If You Want to Write: A Book about Art, Independence, and Spirit*, first published in 1938, encapsulates the amount of change which occurred in the extracurriculum and in the perceptions about writing in the United States since Eliza Leslie's book. *If You Want to Write* shows significant alteration in what it means to write outside of a formal curriculum since the middle of the previous century. The identities of participants in the extracurriculum of composition, in its writing groups and through its self-help books on writing, were changing at the beginning of the twentieth century due to increased access for middle-class Caucasian women to higher education and thus to college-level writing courses. Moreover, socio-cultural notions of creativity and written self-expression were rapidly transforming in the first three decades of the twentieth century, such that the privilege of genius was in the ascendancy and notions of widespread writing ability in the ascendancy. Ueland's book shares a similar perspective on creativity and composing to that evident in Progressive education of the 1930's and in particular to the work of Hughes Mearns. In addition to serving as a counterpoint to nineteenth-century extracurriculum, *If You Want to Write* speaks of the future of Composition Studies and foreshadows the pedagogy of Elbow in *Writing Without Teachers*. That is, Ueland's book is distinctly self-help in its audience: Ueland addresses people who want to write outside of any classroom. However, while Ueland's book, as self-help, differs from Mearns' work, *If You Want to Write* demonstrates the intermeshing of the extracurriculum with certain types of pedagogies like Mearns'. Ultimately, self-help works like *If You Want to Write* help set up a time in which a book like Elbow's 1973 *Writing Without Teachers* can possess strong ties to self-help and still be readily absorbed by the discipline of Composition Studies. At the same time, *If You Want to*

Write continues to enjoy its own substantial twenty-first century following, attracting readers seventy-two years after its publication—self-help readers who pick the book up independent of a course—a popularity and relevancy evident in the numerous editions by reputable publishers such as Greywolf as well as off-prints as recent as 2010.

Structurally, *If You Want to Write* contains eighteen chapters, each fairly short (around eight to ten pages a piece) that appear designed to energize the reader's desire to write. The chapters are not particularly organized around a chronological writing process or set of experiences, although the chapter on dealing with publication rejection appears closer to the end of the book, and the front of the book mostly concerns itself with persuading the reader that they have ability that is worth pursuing. Instead of organizing around a writing process (say, from invention to publication), Ueland presents a parade of positive views on writing and on the reader that seem designed to stimulate a continual state of inspiration. Specifically, the chapters are organized to cause an affective response (one of inspiration, encouragement) in the reader rather than provide a logically-organized series of information. To that end, even the chapter titles are slogan-like, starting with the first chapter title "Everybody is Talented, Original, and Has Something to Say," which encapsulates the message of the entire book. Four of the eighteen chapter titles are taken from William Blake whom Northrop Frye describes as frequently writing aphorisms and epigrams, possessing a "genius for crystallization" (5). Blake-based chapter titles in *If You Want to Write* include "Imagination is the Divine Body in Every Man;" "Sooner Strangle an Infant in Its Cradle Than Nurse Unacted Desires"; "The Tigers of Wrath are Wiser than the Horses of Instruction;" and a final chapter, "He Whose Face Gives No Light Shall Never Become a Star." By quoting Blake in her

chapter titles, Ueland not only infuses her own book with Blake's approach to creativity, but she crystallizes her own advice for the reader into memorable sound bites. Another chapter title is taken from Alfred de Musset, a French Romantic poet from first half of the nineteenth century, "Know that There is Often Hidden in Us a Dormant Poet, Always Young and Alive." Ueland's showcasing of these two Romantic poets corresponds with her use of Romantic artists in the body of the book, such that, as I will discuss, Blake and Vincent Van Gogh are used as frequent examples of an ideal approach to creativity. One chapter in the title is directed toward female readers, "Why Women Who Do Too Much Housework Should Neglect It For Their Writing," reminiscent of Eliza Leslie's advice that writing take precedent over domestic order.

Lastly, *If You Want to Write* is peppered with footnotes, a conventionally academic feature which Ueland deploys for a non-academic purpose. While some of her footnotes provide additional information, typically on Blake, the majority relay content and with a personable voice that is really a continuation of the body of the chapter. The content of these footnotes does not differ from the chapter body, and the effect of the footnotes is of a continuing conversation, of someone making an aside in a one-on-one chat. Ueland's footnote style contributes to her self-presentation because it makes her appear enthusiastic about giving advice to the reader—her need to help exceeds the confines of a chapter body and spills over into footnotes.

Changing Perceptions in Creativity and Ability

Perceptions of creativity in Western culture have changed during the course of civilization and often mirror socio-economic conditions. This history of change is important for understanding writing self-help literature since the extracurriculum of composition has persistently compensated for problems caused by those conditions. As Robert S. Albert and Mark A. Runco have pointed out, early Western views of creativity limited both who could participate in it as well the extent of participants' influence. Classical Roman views of creativity cast it as purely a male attribute to be passed to other male offspring, and in the Middle Ages, creative ability was attributed to spiritual visitation (18). In the Renaissance, creative ability began to be attributed less to divine intervention and more to the individual artist, a move which would be enhanced in the 1700's in discussions which would further break down ability into issues of "genius, originality, talent, and formal education" (Albert and Runco 18-21). For the purposes of my project, these divisions, in highlighting the impact of formal education, set the stage for the extracurriculum of composition that really begins to grow in the nineteenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century, formal education could nurture the inherent and everyday talent in nearly everyone but was not required in the case of individual genius (Albert and Runco 22). This transition between what could be said to be an elitist view of specialized (even divine) ability and a more democratic or broad ability was not precisely rendered, and proponents for a broader ability often at least partially clung to attributions of divinity or genius. Divine presence is evident in Blake's notions of individual ability, despite Blake's support for an everyone's ability to be creative (Pope 38-9). During the nineteenth century, notions of creativity responded to problems caused by the Industrial Revolution and to the "unpredicted widespread

dislocations resulting from natural science,” increasingly confronting the alienation of individuals by endowing them with creative freedom (Albert and Runco 23). Research in IQ beginning with Francis Galton in the mid-nineteenth century and continued by Catherine Cox in the 1920’s proposed that creativity was a common ability (Albert and Runco 26-28).

By the early part of the twentieth century, views on creativity and composing reflect a democratization of society at large. According to Myers in *The Elephants Teach*, creativity as a social value was cast in progressive terms and added to nineteenth-century cultural nationalism. This new creativity involved “democratic participation,” and it could transform problematic institutions and, in the case of Hughes Mearns and Progressive educators, fostered a more democratic, free-thinking society (Myers 120; Cavanaugh 51-52). A 1940 *New York Times* book review of Mearns’ *The Creative Adult: Self-Education in the Art of Living*, for instance, highlights the political ideals of Mearns’ approach to creativity:

“The Creative Adult,” if every one on earth read it, agreed with it, and acted upon it, would stop the war, democratize Germany and Russia, knock a rib or two out of Mr. Chamberlain’s umbrella, and make an extremely pleasant new kind of world... Who knows that the “dumb classes” of the world—by which is not meant those defined by Karl Marx or any economic group—would not strike off their chains if they had so good a teacher? Let them come to believe that “life is essentially good, that its sincerest self-expression is worthy”... let them believe that, and the world might really be free. (3)

This interest in creativity as a positive social force is also evident in a popular text on creativity, Brewster Ghiselin’s 1952 *The Creative Process* that is still in use and has several reprints.

In this collection of accounts by specialists in a variety of fields including verbal and visual arts as well as psychology and biology, Picasso to Nietzsche and Jung,

Ghiselin argues for several purposes for studying creativity. These purposes are practical, suggesting overlap between the creative process and other human endeavors because “insight into the processes of invention can increase the efficiency of almost any developed and active intelligence” (11). In addition to proposing benefits to cognition, Ghiselin suggests larger humanitarian reasons for a better understanding of creativity similar to Mearns’ reviewer a decade earlier, with an atomic twist. The global condition of the mid-twentieth century was dominated, according to Ghiselin, by bewildering change, not the least of which was the potential for catastrophic change with the threat of nuclear annihilation: “The human mind is prepared to wrap the whole planet in a shroud” (12). The creative process, with its inherent ability to negotiate change and uncertainty, is perceived by Ghiselin as the only viable approach to the global situation since conventional ways of thinking have failed. Accordingly, “The only reasonable step, at this point, then, is to act upon the supposition that our problems in world crisis, as at other times, may be soluble only creatively—that is, by a profound and thorough alteration of our inner life and of the outer forms in which life finds expression and support” (12). Ghiselin identifies attributes of the creative process, including automatism, self-surrender, and a tolerance for chaos, that are applicable to the global situation.

In emphasizing democratic participation or activity, attention was shifted from the products to the processes of creativity. This democratic emphasis in turn caused a de-emphasizing of canonical art and elevation of individual creative attempts (Myers 120). As such, this new construct of creativity alters the product emphasis that is inherent even in the etymology of “create.” The word “create” stems from the past participle in Latin

(“was produced”) and therefore suggests something both made in the past, as well as passivity (Pope 38). This leveling of creativity and writing ability is also evident in the etymology of “creative.” As Raymond Williams explains in *Key Words*, “creative” was originally used only for discussing divine creation, such as God’s design of human and other life forms. It wasn’t until the early part of the nineteenth century that “creative” became secularized to discuss individual rather than divine inventive ability. By the twentieth century, “creativity” had transmogrified into a mental faculty associated with artistic production (page). In Williams’ opinion, notions of creativity had so departed from their original connotation that by the twentieth century, “creative” was a term for any act of composing, no matter how derivative rather than truly inventive the product.

This democratization manifests itself not only in an emphasis on activity—just try something creative—but also in what type of activity qualifies as creative—almost anything. Thus, the democratization of creativity modified the product emphasis, suggesting that the learning involved in trying was valuable to human development, but it also expanded the range of products to be considered creative. Creativity, as Ghiselin had positioned it, “is as wide as life... invention in the arts and in thought is a part of the invention of life, and that this invention is essentially a single process” (23-24). Indeed, by the 1920’s and 1930’s in the United States, “creativity” becomes ubiquitously associated with all sorts of activities not belletristic, including endeavors in industry, advertisement, electrical engineering (Myers 119). These changes in creativity are apparent in word usage. In the 1933 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* lacked an entry for “creativity,” but by the 1930’s, entries as disparate as “creative salesman” and “creative adduction” were apparent (Pope 40). In certain ways, this extended range of

creative products makes sense. If people are being praised for just trying oil painting, for instance, with no expectation that they need produce a museum-quality still-life, that nurturing perspective of others' ability could turn to seemingly non-artistic, ordinary activities and also apply praise. However, some view the attribution of creative potential to more people, actions, and products as a ploy by consumerist forces—and not used for the fostering of human potential. The democratization of creativity spread to such a point throughout the twentieth century that it resulted in what Pope has called “massively extended applications” of ideas of creativity (39). Pope takes a less optimistic view of the broadening sense of what qualifies as creative work, claiming that “under the banner of democracy or that of consumerism, ‘creativity’ was something that everybody could aspire to and either claim by right or buy at a price” (39-40). Writing self-help literature assists in that extension of creativity, whether for good or ill, by providing a means for individuals to learn how to succeed with writing. Overall, the extracurriculum of composition takes creativity out of the classroom and proposes that most people, not just specialists or geniuses, could engage in creative production.

In *If You Want to Write*, Ueland adopts this idea of a broadly defined, widespread creativity that is characteristic of the 1930's in the United States both in terms of who can write and what can be written. The inclusivity of Ueland's idea of creativity is evident throughout *If You Want to Write*, beginning with the first chapter title, “Everybody is Talented, Original and Has Something Important to Say,” a line which she repeats in the second paragraph of that initial chapter. She supports this common ability later with examples, but for the most part, it is a premise in her argument which she does not take measures to logically or empirically substantiate. Adopting a broad notion, too, of the

types of work which can be called creative, Ueland declares that her purpose is to “prove to you the importance of your working at writing, at some creative thing you care about. Because only if I can make you feel *that*, will you do it and persist in it” (12). Note the absence of genre specifications of the creative activity—as well as whether the “creative thing” even entails writing.

In fact, Ueland’s definition of creativity includes visual, verbal, and musical acts as well as activities not typically considered artful. These stipulative definitions of creativity occur in footnotes, such as: “Whenever I say ‘writing’ in this book I also mean anything that you love and want to do or make. It may be a six-act tragedy in blank verse, it may be dressmaking or acrobatics, or inventing a new system of double-entry bookkeeping. But you must be *sure* that your imagination and love are behind it” (12). Creativity is more powerful because it seems omnipresent, without disciplinary, genre, or professional borders. A later footnote posits the potential for creativity in business fields (22). This gesture makes Ueland appear interested in the well-being (spiritual and creative) of the reader and differentiates her from a stereotypical teacher fixated on improving other people’s writing, typically through grammatical rules. In other words, her attention is on the reader’s self and what will help the reader lead a happy life rather than on something abstract as writing quality.

De-Centering Teacher Expertise

The view of a more widespread writing ability inevitably leads to a problem for its proponents: why wasn’t the world overflowing with artistic productions if everyone

possessed creative ability? This rhetorical problem arose for classroom educators such as Hughes Mearns as well as for writing self-help authors such as Brenda Ueland. They were not unique in taking on this rhetorical problem.

Both Mearns and Ueland were engaged in a critique of conventional education with roots in the romantic tradition of nineteenth-century Western Europe. As Myers points out in *The Elephants Teach*, Dewey (arguably Mearns' most significant influence) was rooted in this history of ideas about education and children that had begun one or more centuries earlier (104-5). According to Myers, at the start of the twentieth century, educators were divided into two factions: a humanism which favored mental discipline and rationality and a developmentalism which focused on learners' interests rather than a cultural heritage (104). Dewey was deeply influenced by Rousseau's ideas in the eighteenth century about the value of childhood and the need for a developmental model for education (Myers 104). Mearns and Ueland are connected to romantic thinkers such as Wordsworth and Rousseau for their value of the creativity of youth and for their call that education not be a matter of rote and analytical thinking but instead incorporate creativity and experiential knowledge. As Sherrie Gradin explains in *Romancing Rhetorics: Social Expressivist Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*, Wordsworth's long poem *The Prelude* is an examination of the educational system of Wordsworth's day (23). *The Prelude* can be seen as a poetic counterpart to the self-help of Ueland or the educational treatises of Mearns. In fact, the critique of conventional teaching in Wordsworth's long poem is strikingly similar to that in the self-help and treatise, as well as in Elbow's later *Writing without Teachers*: "the older educationalists had made everything, or most things, hard, distasteful. They even seemed to act on the principle

that the educational value of things in a course of training turned on their hardness, their unpleasantness” (Fotheringham qtd in Gradin 23). As will be discussed in Chapter 7, Elbow’s work has been frequently labeled “romantic” by scholars, most notably James Berlin, as a form of criticism of Elbow’s theories. When Elbow has been associated with romantic thinkers, however, his work has been miscast as celebrating the lone and possibly self-indulgent writer. Overlooked are the similarities in Elbow’s attempt at radical educational reform to those of the romantics (Fishman and McCarthy; Flynn; Gradin). In turn, Elbow’s critique of conventional writing instruction has historical roots to earlier in the twentieth-century and the work of Ueland and Mearns to de-center the teacher.

As one way of sidestepping the rhetorical problem of the writing teacher, certain proponents of mass-scale creative ability claimed that the shift from the products to the process of creativity at least helped the masses have a better appreciation of art. The general population may not be the next Picasso or Edith Wharton—or even achieve publication—but this gap in the claim for general creative ability was addressed by the argument that everyone was capable of trying out the creative process. This principle of creativity, or what Myers calls “creativism,” was held by influential writers on the imagination such as Adele Bildersee, whose 1927 *Imaginative Writing: An Illustrated Course for Students* is said by James Berlin to be “one of the most popular expressionist textbooks of the twenties and thirties” (Myers 120; Berlin 77). Bildersee maintained that the purpose of creative writing instruction was to stretch students’ capabilities as a writer and reader by making students more observant of everyday life, helping students to become better readers of literature, as well as helping students gain self-motivation to

compose and invent (225). Others including Ueland and Mearns argued for intrinsic benefits to experiencing creativity first-hand. Both Ueland and Mearns did not strive to professionalize their readers or young students—to “make writers” out of them—through external mechanisms such as writing contests and publication. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Mearns emphasized that his students were “not primarily interested in fame” (*Creative Youth* 33-4). In contrast to Eliza Leslie’s work in the mid-nineteenth century, Ueland frequently questioned the benefits of publication and even the quality of the writing produced by published authors. Overall, Ueland’s de-emphasis on external reasons and rewards for writing connects with the Progressivist approach to writing education: that writing was to help communication, not just learn culture or grammar rules, that writing was to foster self-expression. And as such “the teaching of writing out to be governed not by external, cultural standards but intrinsic, expressive ones” (Myers 107-8). Thus, in the search for an explanation as to why widespread ability and verbal prolificacy were not evident, proponents of creativity looked to the writing education that was rapidly developing since the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Exposure to a writing instructor was quickly becoming a common denominator in novice writers’ experiences by the 1930’s. As Katherine H. Adams has described in *A Group of Their Own*, the period between 1880 and 1940 saw rapid expansion both in the number and types of writing courses offered at the college level as well as in the number of female students, a population which in the nineteenth century had been largely relegated to the extracurriculum. By World War I, women made up almost 50% of the students enrolled in journalism and creative writing courses, a number which could be as high as 60% by 1925 in journalism courses (Adams 38-9). In both writing self-help

books and in educational theory of the 1920's and 1930's, proponents of widespread creative ability point to teachers as an obstacle to most people's ability. This source for writing blocks is evident, for instance, in Bildersee's *Imaginative Writing*: "What is in the mind of the college student as he faces his instructor in a class in English composition? What especially is his attitude toward his task of writing? The teacher's desk is usually a barrier past which few candid expressions travel from students to faculty" (1). Repeatedly in publications during this time, traditional classroom teachers were cited as the main impediment to natural writing ability.

In *If You Want to Write*, Ueland identifies several types of people who prevent the manifestation of widespread creative ability, with teachers receiving the brunt of her critique. In Ueland's account, family members have the potential to obstruct the imagination, especially male members: "Critics kill it, your family. Families are great murderers of the creative impulse, particularly husbands. Older brothers sneer at younger brothers and kill it" (6). It seems that relationships from conventional social structures like marriage, however, in general carry the potential to thwart creativity, as on the same page, Ueland gives an example of a wife whose criticism curtailed a man's publications (6). According to Ueland, certain negative parties, which she lists as "teachers, critics, parents, and other know-it-alls" seem preoccupied with maintaining the status quo of grammatical rules in the face of the "freedom" of the imagination (6). Ueland's use of words like "kill" and "murderer" suggest that creativity is an animate force—as well as being as much a victim as the overly-criticized writer who makes the mistake of sharing her writing with said husband, brother, or teacher. In her indictment of critics, however, Ueland is most heavily reproofing of teachers. For instance, she explicitly raises the

question of what is obstructing creativity when she inquires: “This creative power and imagination is in everyone, and so is the need to express it, i.e., to share it with others. But what happens to it?” (*If* 5). Her answer, provided in the next paragraph, is that creativity is “usually drummed out of people early in life by criticism” from “prissy teachers” (5). Ueland attacks the tendency toward correctness in teacher, saying “[a]s though spelling, grammar and what you learn in a book about rhetoric has anything to do with freedom and the imagination!” (6). In advocating for the imagination, Ueland resists the status quo as manifested in its spokespeople, teachers, parents, and spouses, those individuals who foster the status quo through their “orthodox criticism” (7).

More than an easy attack of writing teachers, Ueland’s critique here is connected to her larger attempt to set up an alternative ethos for a writing expert. As such, she offers a new definition of an effective writing teacher as someone not necessarily a conventionally credentialed teacher but instead someone who listens to and believes in the writer: “The only good teachers for you are those friends who love you, who think you are interesting, or very important, or wonderfully funny; whose attitude is: ‘Tell me more. Tell me all you can’” (*If* 7). Ueland’s stipulative definition of a “writing teacher” resembles Elbow’s description in *Writing with Power* of the impact of a positive audience or someone who draws material out of the writer. As Elbow describes the positive audience: “The safe reader gave us a kind of attention that somehow made us feel respected, taken seriously, and supported, and, as a result, we usually ended up having more and better things to say than we had expected” (*Power* 185). For both Ueland and Elbow, the preferred ethos of a writing expert entails qualities found in solid friendship:

support balanced with high expectations, as well as attentiveness that leads to verbal productivity.

A similar critique of teachers as impediments to creativity occurs in the work of Hughes Mearns who was both a major innovator of Progressivist education as well the reputed founder of academic creative writing. In historical accounts, creative writing, Progressivist classroom education, and the extracurriculum are intertwined. This interrelationship is important—because as will be later discussed the extracurriculum of composition is inherently concerned with types of writing typically identified as “creative writing.” Self-help literature that gives advice on writing will inevitably give advice about creative writing genres since its readers are not enrolled in school and therefore do not write school genres. In his historical account of the split of English studies into the triad of composition, creative writing, and literature, Myers credits Hughes Mearns with the invention of classroom creative writing instruction. Although high schools were teaching creative writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mearns’ 1925 *Creative Youth* changed college writing instruction which had been “restricted either to practical, how-to courses in the short story and drama or to courses in versification” such that creative writing became taught at the college level as a means for personal development (101). According to Myers, creative writing was intricately connected to Progressive education as it was both initiated by Mearns, an outspoken educator with Progressive affiliations, and sustained by Progressive curricula: “Creative writing was perhaps the most widely adopted of the curricular reforms instituted by progressive education; in many ways it was the model progressive subject” (101). Mearns dedicated his 1928 *Creative Youth: How a School Environment Set Free the Creative Spirit* to John

Dewey; Dewey saw creative writing as a way to foster active learning and then citizenship (Adams, *A Group* 47). Mearns wrote a succession of books detailing his progressive curriculum—*Creative Youth* (1928); *Creative Power* (date); and *The Creative Adult* (1941)—in which the traditional teacher is cast as an obstacle to the imagination.

Creative Power is peppered with negative depictions of teachers at all stages of professional development who squelch creativity. Mearns' line-up includes a teacher who becomes suspicious because she heard laughter in Mearns' classroom, a seasoned teacher who undergoes a conversion through Mearns' methods and is described by students as having "changed from something admirable but forbidding into a Joyous Light in the Darkness," and a physically attractive young teacher who lures students into an unimaginative education in part through her charms (*Creative Power* 263, 156, 215). All in all, Mearns portrays teachers portrayed as "hav[ing] often this stiffening and denaturing effect, and I am not even thinking of the arrogant ones, but of those bright, tolerant, and able persons who perform successfully, and often with student approval, the prescribed schoolroom and textbook routine" (*Creative Power* 218). This critique is perhaps most striking in the full chapter Mearns devotes to in *Creative Power* to describing his own first day of classroom teaching in a public grammar school. Mearns swoops in on a demoralized group of students and immediately changes students' dispositions such that by the end of the first class, they are lingering after class to tell Mearns "their real interests" (265). Mearns opens his first day by poking fun of his own subject matter expertise, arousing students' mirth: "Their suppressed souls burst forth in hilarious glee" (263). Mearns casts himself as somehow more humane than other

teachers because the students say “We never saw a teacher laugh before” (264). On his first day, Mearns tells students, in response to their expressed anxieties, that he will alter their customary assessment of a monthly Conduct grade and final examinations:

Some spoke of unbelievably harsh treatment at home when the conduct mark was less than “Good”. I was indignant; immediately, I assured them that in my class there would not be any conduct mark less than “Good.” It worked! A load had been lifted from their little lives and they repaid by being always really “Good.” (264)

In general, Mearns believed that the development of self-confidence needed to precede any criticism from teachers (Cavanaugh 44). Mearns believed that the work of the teacher was to uncover students’ creative ability by listening and withholding criticism. In *The Creative Adult*, Mearns calls this listening “right communication,” and explains that it can be done “with any age group: silence and listening, mainly; a total absence of cross-examination, accusation or belittling; a ready welcome for anything however trivial, absurd or even gross” (2). This view that listening is a positive force for writing and criticism a negative force was evident in Ueland’s *If You Want to Write*, and it also will appear in Elbow’s ideas about safe and dangerous audiences in *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power*. In *Creative Youth*, this view is captured in the sequence he proposes for this alternative education: acceptance, approval, criticism (245-7). During one five-year period, Mearns claimed to have never assigned a topic or “theme” (Cavanaugh 35). Mearns’ view coincides with that of Elinor Bartlett Watson Carroll, in her 1931 Masters thesis project determining whether teacher assignments affected the quality and quantity of student creative writing. Carroll found that the quantity and quality of writing produced by students of similar I.Q. not given assignments was higher than that of those with assignments (43).

Notably, in Mearns' account of his first day of classroom teaching, his Progressivist approach to creative education appears already fully manifested; Mearns' start seems free of the blunders of a beginning teacher. Expand this snapshot of Mearns' first day of classroom and its depiction of Mearns' interactions with students such that it is larger than a single day or chapter and you have Ueland's *If You Want to Write*. Even with the significant overlap between Progressivist pedagogy such as Mearns' and writing self-help literature such as Ueland's, there is a fundamental difference of audience in alternative educators like Mearns and Ueland. Mearns is writing primarily to other educators, whereas Ueland addresses her advice, as Elbow will in *Writing without Teachers*, to individuals who want to write and are not students. Ueland gives advice to readers about how to proceed with their writing; Mearns gives advice to teachers and adults as to how to nurture writing in others. In other words, in this window onto Mearns' teaching, we indirectly see his interactions with people who want or have to write, whereas Ueland directly addresses those individuals. In *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow's intended audience, like Ueland's, consists of people outside of academia, but Elbow's actual readers have become like Mearns: other educators. Elbow's actual readers, academics mostly from the field of Composition Studies, have turned to essentially writing self-help literature to find strategies for teaching—and possibly to find strategies for their own stuck writing. Mearns' work demonstrates an interest in educators to be a different kind of teacher—which is the same inclination which continues to attract readers with expertise in Composition Studies to Elbow.

One way in which Ueland differentiates herself from this contentious figure of the classroom instructor is through the establishment of an exuberant ethos that at times

borders on the rapturous. In *Creative Power*, Mearns too had worked to redefine an effective teacher, suggesting that “vibrations of friendliness or unfriendliness go forth constantly from eyes, voice tone, body, and spirit” of the ideal teacher (266). Much as Quintilian had located a rhetor’s ability in his ethos of personal goodness, Mearns suggests that good teaching is not correlated to the teacher’s learning but to “his ability to transform others by the contagion of his own peculiar creative powers” and to “what sort of person one really is” (267). In *If You Want to Write*, Ueland ratchets up this positive stance toward the learner and adopts an ethos resembling a motivational speaker—someone who believes deeply in the abilities and potential greatness of others (specifically the reader).

Ueland seems compassionately involved with the reader and creates a dynamic with the reader that is nurturing and affirmative. Ueland’s ethos corresponds with the ethos found in self-help: one which shows “unabashed enthusiasm” through a “recurring tone of earnestness and zeal that conveys the authenticity of their emotional involvement with the topic at hand (Dolby 48). At times, the effect of Ueland’s ethos is a sort of grandiose generosity, possibly an overcompensation for the negative effects of certain teachers, or a tendency toward the hyperbolic such that the motivational borders on the prophetic. Ueland feels that artists such as William Blake were prophetic, but she also endows everyone else with the same status: “in our own tiny way we are all prophets and poets and minstrels like Isaiah and Homer and Bach” (*Me* 346-7). These rhetorical effects are also evident in the last words of *If You Want to Write*: “And so I really believe this book will hasten the Millennium by two or three hundred years. And if it has given you the impulse to write one small story, then I am pleased” (163). This inclination on

Ueland's part resembles Peter Elbow's description of his own rhetorical motivation for *Writing Without Teachers*: "I didn't think of *Writing Without Teachers* as scholarly. I thought of it as 'I have the truth to tell everyone'... Somehow, I just felt the authority. I wanted to stand on a mountain top and tell people how they can [write]" (Personal interview). In her 1939 memoir, *Me*, Ueland addresses this link between helping others and the supernatural: "I have an incorrigible wish that there are Presences in the world, archangels, beings, saints that we cannot see, and they sometimes pull us by the sleeve, saying, 'Come; you can really do this,' or put a kind of hand on us to help us" (298). Similar to Elbow, Ueland's impulse to encourage others seem to derive from impulses within her to write and be creative: "I have some pedagogue in me that wants to encourage other people, to make them work. Part of this was that bad thing that is characteristically feminine and maternal, i.e., I really wanted to paint *myself*, so I projected this wish on others, without doing it *myself*" (*Me* 284). In his introduction to Mearns' 1928 *Creative Youth*, Otis W. Caldwell suggests that Mearns' approach positions students as "prophetic doers," a perception of the divinity of learners which Mearns continues in his 1929 *Creative Power*, in which he calls creative production "the miracle" (247).

The prophetic is a far cry from the teacherly. James Berlin may be responding to this notion of divinity when he describes Progressive writing education as having "ties to a Brahminical romanticism" in which writing ability is cast as a spiritual rather than teachable matter (*Rhetoric* 73). Progressive educators and more recent process theorists advocated for writing teachers to be themselves professional writers, thus positioning someone from outside academia at the center of the classroom. In this way alone, this

type of pedagogy introduces the external or the extracurriculum into the academic. By casting a prophet or guiding angel in the role of a writing teacher, Ueland is adding an even more “foreign” element to composing than the professional writer. Overall, this impulse toward the divinization of novice writers works to insert more distance between Ueland or Mearns’ practices and that of the traditional, stolid classroom, populating the act of writing or the classroom with saints and angels rather than bossy teachers and suppressed students.

Part of Ueland’s ethos entails the de-centering of herself as an authority on writing to counterbalance the deleterious effects of traditional teaching. Ueland’s ethos construction in this regard resembles the way Elbow will establish a new type of authority for himself by displacing teachers—including, at times, by displacing himself. In line with the Progressivist attempt to make the classroom more student-centered with a focus on student ability and experiential activity, Mearns suggested that teacher displacement happen largely through listening of “self-effacement” (*Creative Power* 27). A second way in which a progressive educator could alter traditional teacher authority is by changing the evaluation of writing to prompt “student writers to think and write for themselves, rather than what they thought others (particularly the teacher and evaluator) wanted to hear” (Cavanaugh 141). Ueland accomplishes this de-centering through several strategies, including a frequent tempering of her own advice.

Ueland frequently moderates her own advice. For instance, a warning to the reader that they not seek external praise for their writing is followed by a footnote: “any motive that makes you feel like writing is fine. Use it. Start...if egotism and exhibitionism started you working I am grateful” (*If* 21). Ueland thus displaces her role

as an advice giver to give unqualified advice and thus puts additional distance between her approach and that of the proverbial rules-bound writing teacher. Ueland presents herself as flexible even with what seems like fundamental components of the writing process she strives to establish. This sort of ethos-construction is a far cry from Eliza Leslie's mid-nineteenth century etiquette for writing, and it's in the same spirit as Elbow's "writing-without-teachers." Even the act of writing itself, the very topic of her book, is up for grabs with Ueland and is not a premise or even a prescript for life: "That is why I hope I have not said in this book anywhere: 'You *must* let it out... You *must* write.' There is too much pressure of duty and fear on you already, on everybody—too many 'musts' for the talent in you to begin to shine in a free and jolly way" (*If* 34-5).

Another way in which Ueland redefines a positive teacher is as someone who learns from his or her students, further displacing the teacher's traditional authority as pre-set expert. Although *If You Want to Write* operates within the self-help tradition, it does include passages in which Ueland describes her own classroom teaching. Ueland taught in the early 1930's in a Y.W.C.A. in New York City—a non-credit bearing of the ilk of the community workshops that Gere locates in the extracurriculum of composition. It seems that Ueland first practiced many of her radical ideas about teaching in a non-conventional setting, much as Elbow experimented with the ideas later found in *Writing Without Teachers* in workshops he facilitated in Roxbury, Massachusetts and by helping conscientious objectors compose letters for the Draft Board during the Vietnam War. Ueland describes herself as learning both how to do her own writing and learning how to teach from interactions with her students. She claims to have suffered from writer's blocks:

I used to have to drive myself to work. You cannot imagine what an uncomfortable, effortful thing it was to be supposed to be a writer. To work at all I had to be a jump ahead of the spears—to need money very badly.

After three hours of work I would be pithed and exhausted. (*If* 42)

She starts one chapter with the announcement, “Now I want to tell some things I have learned about writing from my class” (*If* 54). However, another admission earlier in the book, “It was my class who showed me that I was working in the wrong way” shows how students arguably more deeply shaped her, by helping her own stuck writing (42). She describes her earlier process in writing for an audience as “[f]or years afterwards continu[ing] to be hard, mind-wounding work,” though she private writing such as diaries and letters “could be poured out at the rate of three or four thousand words a day” (*Me* 346-7). It is through interactions with her students that Ueland discovers her own exit from struggle:

these inexperienced people—stenographers, housewives, and even a few very simple and ignorant people—taught me more about writing than I had ever known. For from their scratched diaries and letters I saw this: that all writing (and I mean *all*) is alive and interesting if it comes out freely and truly. What makes it dead and tiresome is the so-called “literary effort,” a kind of striving to be effective instead of just opening your mouth and telling what you have to say. I saw that if a person does that, speaks from himself *like a prophet*, the words will not make any difference, or the spelling, or the arrangement, or the style. The life in the words lies in the truth and freedom with which they are spoken. *Well, this changed my whole life*, and I got to love and respect writing. And even if I never make any money at it, and have to go to work in a ten-cent-store basement, I will continue to write what is within me” (emphasis added) (*Me* 347-8).

Ueland’s remark that her students “changed my whole life” is representative of the sweeping, life-changing effect she seems to seek on the reader from *If You Want to Write*.

Whereas Ueland finds her pedagogy through her students, Mearns, at least in his self-representation, casts himself as coming to his first day of teaching fully formed. It seems that Mearns had already built his alternative pedagogy in response to his own

previous educational (positive and negative) experience. In his books, Mearns recounts his own education based on rote memorization and punishment, and his praise for a few of his more unconventional teachers at Harvard, including William James and Barrett Wendell. Mearns described his own childhood teachers as “Routinists, persons with no thought of using initiative in large matters, heard lessons, kept order, followed the curriculum without question, watched by rule, rewarded by rule, punished by rule” (*Creative Adult* 198). On the other hand, James and Wendell seemed to exert an extracurricular influence on Mearns. Mearns positions James’ influence as occurring outside of the traditional learning environment: “Outside of the classroom, the mind of William James, even in a casualist chat, was electric and soul changing” (*Creative Adult* 208). A powerful encounter with James notably occurred outside the classroom, in “an accidental meeting, which developed into an aimless night walk about the streets of Cambridge” (208). Wendell, shaped Mearns’ approach to education by supporting Mearns’ creative writing and advising him to never obtain a PhD, thus positioning Mearns as a writer-in-the-classroom (Mearns *Creative Adult* 208; Myers 102). Ueland, on the other hand, appears to learn her pedagogy from her students, as well as discovering her own writing ability from these students.

Ueland’s approach parallels the way in which self-help expertise and ethos are frequently constructed on the author having a personal experience with a particular topic, struggling through it and coming out the other end to report. As Dolby has suggested, one characteristic of self-help authors is that they “experience their own enlightenment as motivation, a force compelling them to educate others about the good effects their new understanding can produce if given a chance” (49). In this regard, Ueland’s ethos does

double rhetorical duty as self-help because not only does she suggest her own release from writer's block, but she implies that ordinary novices like the reader of her book have the power to teach her. This leveled playing field is also established through the types of individuals Ueland uses to exemplify the challenges and joys of the writing experience. Three types of writers appear as examples in *If You Want to Write*: Ueland herself, Ueland's students, and various Romantic visual and literary artists. All but one of the students Ueland uses to illustrate the writing process are female, and the tenth chapter is devoted to telling women to commit more to their writing than housework. The gender of her examples is indicative of the extracurricular and thus, as Gere has suggested, gendered (W.Y.M.C.A.) setting of her teaching. Moreover, these female writers are not kept in a hierarchy in which novices sit at the feet of the artists like Blake or van Gogh whom Ueland honors. Instead, students and novices are endowed with the potential to affect Ueland herself.

Valuing the Unschooled

A further displacement of expertise is evident in Ueland's appreciation of the creative endeavors of children. In valuing the imagination of young children, Ueland sets up a contrast between the unfettered abilities of children and the limited imagination of those who have experienced school instruction. As Rob Pope has suggested, much twentieth-century research on creativity has attempted to discern whether creativity is an ordinary or unique capacity, and this research has often selected young children for its subject. Young children are deemed suitable test cases for creativity research because of

children's motivation to create, "more therapeutic rather than assessment-driven," and because of children's level of exposure to teachers' criticism (54). In other words, children are seen as test cases for whether there is an innate creative ability in humans and, secondly, formal education is seen as either an influence on or an inhibition of that innate ability. Thus, in this view, true unbounded creativity is inherently extracurricular and occurs outside the purview of teachers—it's *writing without teachers*. In *If You Want to Write*, Ueland references the types of writing and art done by children, casting it as a form of play. In one instance, Ueland agrees to pose for a portrait for three days for children who had no training. Ueland finds the children's creative process and the results of their work to be "remarkable—all different, astonishing in their own way because the creative impulse was working innocently, not egotistically or to please someone, an instructor, say, who three in the anxious questions: is it art? has it balance? design?" (*If* 44). She calls on her reader to think about the children's play they have witnessed in their lives, suggesting that creativity is really an ordinary rather than specialized event. She proposes that children's deep engagement in imaginative products, what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi would call "flow," comes from inner rather than extrinsic motivation: "You know how all children have this creative power. You have all seen things like this: the little girls in our family used to give play after play. They wrote the plays themselves (they were very good plays too, interesting, exciting, and funny.)" (*If* 5). Ueland describes the work involved in these two-day productions, including how the children took on every aspect of putting on a play, from making the costumes and designing the set to advertising and drumming up an audience. After asking the reader to marvel at the amount of effort the children invested, Ueland argues that the children operated out of

intrinsic, non-school motivations: “If they had worked that hard for school it probably would have killed them. They were working for nothing but fun, for that glorious inner excitement. It was the creative power working in them” (5).

Of course, Mearns’ entire pedagogy is constructed on a belief in the creative ability of youth, and Mearns strives to both undo the school-inflicted obstacles to that youthful creativity in students and in his later work, adults. Mearns, like Ueland, valued the creative ability of children over that of adults; “in many ways he gave more credit to children than to adults” (Cavanaugh 43-44). In essence, children are the role models for adults in Mearns’ *The Creative Adult*; Mearns tries to show adults how to regain their childhood creativity, a pedagogy which he labels “the direct teaching of individuality” (19). According to Myers, Mearns’ ideas about children’s creativity was connected to the distrust of traditional education felt by Progressive educators as well as those educators’ appreciation for primitive art (113-114). Mearns stated this connection between primitivism and children in *Creative Power* as “the modern discovery of the child as artist—a very ancient bit of knowledge, of course—is coincident with the realization of the beauty of primitive art generally. The child is a genuine primitive. He needs little or no instruction” (qtd in Myers 113). For Mearns and Ueland, the inherent creativity of young children represents an indictment of conventional classroom teaching and is connected to discussions, both in the 1930’s and currently, of the teachability of writing and the imagination.

In addition to valuing the creativity of children, Ueland’s appreciation for the unschooled is evident in her esteem for amateurs and for what could be labeled “outsider” or “naïve” art. A frequent point of praise for her students is that their work is precisely

that it is unschooled. Her appreciation for the untrained is evident in the students Ueland uses as examples of writing ability. Ueland employs one student, Sarah McShane, in a chapter on dealing with publishers' rejection, because "she had almost not a trace of literary sophistication. She had had no courses in Browning and Tennyson, no talk at home about Dickens and Louisa M. Alcott" (*If* 62). Ueland finds the quality of this student's writing to be high, equivalent to a successful published author of the day (*If* 63). When Ueland uses her students as examples, she devotes as many pages to the students and to providing excerpts from their work as she does for van Gogh's letters; the example of Sarah McShane extends through multiple chapters in *If You Want to Write*. McShane is described as "Irish and unmarried and perhaps thirty," shy, a stenographer for a department store, and a "simple and good person" (56-58). Ueland says she uses McShane as an example because it proves that "the longing to write must be in thousands of the most unobtrusive people who have not the least hope of making money or cutting a literary figure" (64). Not only does Ueland compare McShane's writing to that of Faith Baldwin, a highly paid magazine writer in the 1930's, to say that McShane's writing exceeds that of Baldwin, but Ueland also compares her student's writing favorably to John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, also published at that time to acclaim, and then to the current First Lady's, Eleanor Roosevelt, article published in *McCall's*: "No," Ueland proclaims, "Sarah McShane writes better than Mrs. Roosevelt" (*If* 70). A second example of one of her students entails another lengthy comparison to a successful magazine writer, to the student's favor. In this case, the student goes on to become Ueland's "star pupil so far," publishing a successful book and sustaining a livelihood as a professional writer (74-77). This student is also described as initially timid about her

desire to write. For Ueland, timid students (people naturally disinclined to communicate yet they freely enroll in a writing class) are the ones with talent. Conversely, Ueland discusses a third student, “Mrs. B.,” who came to the class with significant experience writing, and describes her as “the only untalented one” whose writing had a “gloze of the commonplace, a kind of gray, dull conventionality” (92). Ueland helps Mrs. B. to a breakthrough by asking her to write about the particulars of her experience (94-95). Overall, Ueland portrays students as exemplars of not just the creative experience but also of writing quality: amateurs are able to produce work of higher quality than commercially or canonically successful authors or even the First Lady. This appreciation for the amateur is related to the extracurriculum of composition because it points to creativity and literacy being sought and accomplished in places other than the traditional classroom.

Ueland’s views on amateur writing are indicative of her belief that writing ability as well as motivation to write are inner, personal matters. Accordingly, Ueland disconnects meaningful learning from any reliance on others. Emphasizing inner or personal truth over the instruction of others, Ueland says that she learned much from Blake and van Gogh but also “from myself—from the truth that is in me... as I am trying to persuade you to stand up for *your* inner truth” (*If* 21). Valuing inner truth over outer instruction parallels the spirit of the extracurriculum, in which the conventional authority of the teacher is displaced or altogether replaced. In contrast to Eliza Leslie in *The Behaviour Book*, Ueland downplays and at times even disapproves of attempts at publication—although it could be said on Leslie’s behalf that this is because Ueland could afford to de-emphasize publication. The socio-economic status of women writers

had improved by the 1930's, and as Katherine Adams has proposed, this included far more opportunities for both formal writing education and for extracurricular education.

That said, for Ueland, creativity can function as a positive social force when it is not tied to publication or extrinsic reward:

It is our nasty twentieth-century materialism that makes us feel: what is the use of writing, painting, etc., unless one has an audience or gets cash for it? Socrates and the men of the Renaissance did so much because the rewards were intrinsic, i.e., the enlargement of the soul... I think it is all right to work for money, to work to have things enjoyed by people, even very limited ones; but the mistake is to feel that the work, the effort, the search is not important and the exciting thing. (*If* 23)

Vincent van Gogh is a frequent example in this book (she cites from his letters to his brother) in part because he began painting not because he was enrolled in a class but instead from what Ueland deems the pure desire to show his brother, in a letter, what the nighttime view from his window looked like. Ueland says she took comfort in this detail about van Gogh because it allowed her to shed her notion that art was produced after much analysis and planning and “*academical* tendency,” whereas van Gogh allows her to see the “creative impulse” as a “feeling of love and enthusiasm for something” (*If* 16-17).

Mearns also professed to be disinterested in the publication of his students' work. In *Creative Youth*, Mearns claimed to that effect: “[w]e are not primarily interested in making poets or even in making writers; our purpose has been simply to set up such an environment as might extend further the possibilities in creative writing of pupils of high-school age” (2). However, Mearns starts *Creative Youth* with an extensive list of his students' publications and writing prizes, and, as Myers has recounted, the discipline of creative writing as well as Mearns' pedagogy first gained recognition because a poem by one of Mearns' junior high school students was included in an anthology (103). This

notion that creativity was an inner matter based on an inner truth not to be altered by others' judgment is reflected in the terms Ueland and Mearns use for creativity: "creative power," "Creative Spirit, "the instinctive self" are but a few that appear in their books. This construct will also appear in *Writing with Power* when Elbow equates real voice with universal writing ability and power: "everyone, however inexperienced or unskilled, has real voice available; everyone can write with power" (304).

An interesting twist on the role of publication for writers appears in a contemporaneous writing self-help book, Esther L. Schwartz's 1936 *So You Want to Write!: How to Make Money by Writing*. As made clear in the book's subtitle, Schwartz is entirely focused on helping readers achieve the publishing and monetary successes she has obtained. Schwartz strives to present explicit steps for publication in order to diffuse the "mystery about the writing game," including explaining how she published both of her first two stories, pieces which she composed without any apparent blocks. Although later chapters attempt to describe her invention process and her own blocks, Schwartz's description of her first compositions—speedy, efficient—recalls the nineteenth-century description in *Autobiography of a Rejected M.S.*: "I dashed it off as quickly as I could write, finished it that evening after I had put the children to bed, and the following day I went to my husband's office and typed it" (3). Schwartz's accounts of writing do not include details about an inner process, and when she speaks of her formal training (albeit a correspondence course), she views the teacher as a highly positive influence:

The most unexpected and delightful thing about the course was that I immediately had the ear of a most sympathetic instructor. One is so *alone* at the beginning! Though others may laugh, I don't see how else a writing mother and housewife could have learned the ropes. (5)

The correspondence course, titled “The Simplified Training Course,” focused purely on the mechanics of publication which Schwartz equates with “learn[ing] how to write” (5). A student needed natural talent, according to Schwartz, to make use of a writing course; the implication is that “natural talent” referred to the dimension of creativity and the parts of invention that Ueland, Mearns and certainly the writing self-help authors discussed in Chapter 4 of this project will describe.

Can Writing Be Taught?

Another component of this changed role of the writing teacher is evidence for the view that issues of teachability have more to do with the teacher’s abilities than a sorting of students by talent: the preference for a professional writer as a classroom instructor. Mearns was an active writer who initially did not intend to be a teacher; he began his teaching career in order to support himself as a playwright (Cavanaugh 23). Mearns maintained that the best way to teach writing was to be a writer oneself, and he found it problematic how few writers opted to become classroom teachers (Cavanaugh 125). Addressing teachers in *Creative Youth*, Mearns connects student engagement with whether teachers are visible as writers to their students:

If we are not pedants there is some hope for us with children; if we can write a pictured bit of moving English ourselves, we can fix them rigid with desire, especially if we can do it right before them on the blackboard; but if we have luckily published anything, outside of pedagogical treatises, we can have them dancing after us like a pageant of charmed vipers. (121)

Mearns felt that when teachers are not writers themselves, they resort to teaching grammar and rules, and he regularly invited or hired authors, including Willa Cather and

Robert Frost (*Creative Youth* 10-11). As much as he wanted students to have a first-hand experience of writing, Mearns wanted their teachers to also have that experience, as part of teacher efficacy. In essence, this emphasis on professional writers as writing teachers helps bridge the extracurriculum to the curriculum of composition. Ueland perfectly fit the bill. Ueland's extensive professional experience situated her outside of academia. She was both a staff writer and a freelance writer for several major popular magazines, including *Vanity Fair* and *Ladies Home Journal*. Seeing only two book publications during her long lifetime, Ueland is nevertheless portrayed as "one of the most prolific writers of the twentieth century (six million published words)" due to her work for mainstream publications and as a columnist for *The Minneapolis Times* (*Tell Me More* back page). Even with her extensive publication experience, Ueland does not utilize it in order to develop her authority in *If You Want to Write* but instead continues to position herself as a fellow learner with her students.

Lastly, the de-centering of traditional writing expertise manifested in Ueland's work is connected to issues of the "teachability" of writing that are still being debated today. Whether writing can be taught becomes a recurring topic in publications during the 1920's and 1930's. Mearns, for instance, even begins *Creative Youth* with an epigram showing a dialog between two people, the first recalling how the other person had once said "We never learn anything that we did not know before," and the respondent replying, "Meaning thereby that a man cannot be taught. But though he cannot be taught, he can learn, meaning thereby that he may discover a self within himself" (v). In a similar vein, Ueland provides an extensive passage from Plato's dialog, "Meno," in which Socrates demonstrates how an uneducated child slave provides intelligent answers

to Socrates' questions (*If* 133-135). The point Ueland hopes to make with this example is similar to that in Mearns' epigraph: creative ability already resides inside individuals. Throughout *If You Want to Write*, if a student is writing poorly, Ueland's diagnosis is that the student is writing for the teacher rather than writing truthfully: "This sentence is dead. You were thinking of teacher" (104). This irreconcilability of honest student writing and teachers-as-audience will be a central contention in Elbow's work in *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power*, as well as in the work of other process theorists such as Don Murray and Ken Macrorie.

The issue of teachability appears in other writing books, both self-help and text book, during the 1920's and 1930's. In William Webster Ellsworth's 1928 *Creative Writing*, the first book according to Myers to use "creative writing" in its title, the efficacy of classroom instruction is up for question (*The Elephants* 108). While young people were obtaining "technical training" and had a stronger sense of their professional development as writers, school would have killed the writing of many famous authors, including Whitman and Twain:

The studies in English, the class-room work, are all for the average student, and if one wants to be a real writer then he must do more original work than the average student; he must rise above the average in order to be a writer; he must live with words as Stevenson did, writing 'consciously for practise'; he must keep in mind Barrett Wendell's "the only way to learn to write is TO WRITE." (Ellsworth 22-25)

He praises the example of Robert Louis Stevenson, who taught himself how to write (16-17). In a chapter entitled, "Does College Teach One to Write?" he says that even Wendell became skeptical of the teachability of writing and thought that writing was instead a matter of *nulla dies sine line*, Don Murray's oft-cited advice. It must be pretty serious when a reputed founder of academic writing instruction ends up questioning

whether writing can be taught. Likewise, Bildersee began her creative writing text book with this seeming disclaimer: “the art of writing cannot be taught; it can only be learned. The part the teacher can play in this process is that of guide and adviser—collaborator, if need be” (ix). Alice Ross Colver’s 1939 *If You Should Want to Write: A Handbook for Beginning Authors*, written for an adolescent audience, also differentiates her advice from that of a classroom:

I have not tried to be pedagogical. There are other books written for that purpose and I am not a teacher. I am simply a writer. And as a writer I am friendly to other writers—particularly *young* writers whose burning zeal is often blocked by doubt, whose desire it continually meeting with discouragement, whose impatience chafes against the constraint of their limitations. I believe that IF YOU WANT TO WRITE, you can write. (viii)

The extracurricular position of her book is also evident in how Colver self-identifies as a writer rather than a teacher. In *The Elephants Teach*, Myers extensively argues that Mearns was conflicted about the exact role of the teacher since the need for teachers wasn’t apparent in a Deweyan pedagogy emphasizing student-centered learning. In fact, “[t]he theory was rapidly becoming creative writing’s stutter of self-doubt” (Myers 112). More recently, historians and theorists in Composition Studies including James Berlin, Sharon Crowley, Katharine Haake, David Russell, and Kelly Ritter have attributed the notion that creative writing is unteachable to either the elitism of creative writing specialists or, at best, a deficit in pedagogy and training. While these claims may carry some validity, the lingering questions over whether writing is teachable may also be attributed not to an elitism, a sorting of people by talent, but instead to all the maneuvers Ueland, Mearns, and others make to change the role of the teacher. Questions of teachability may in fact stem from faith in students’ ability to write—albeit free of teachers—a faith in the extracurriculum, not the curriculum, of composition.

While the overlap between Progressivist educators such as Mearns and writing self-help authors such as Ueland show a complex relationship between the extracurriculum, classroom instruction, and creative writing, this was not always a stable or easy mix. That Ueland succeeds at establishing herself as a non-conventional expert on writing becomes clear when looking at Alma Paschall's 1933 *Creative Expression* and an earlier pamphlet from 1928, *A Beginning Course in Creative Writing*. An uneasiness in the arrangement between creative writing, Progressivism, and the traditional curriculum is evident in books which designate teachers as their intended audience. Paschall's tone is harsher and less inspirational than Ueland. In the pamphlet, Paschall offers a series of exercises and prompts to lead the reader into successful creative writing. The first prompt she offers is accompanied by the admonition that the reader needs to "overcome all defects which stand in your way," (pamphlet 5) and by defects, Paschall means personal ones like laziness, not grammatical ones. In her book, the first chapter is similarly devoted to self-scrutiny because the first task of an aspiring writer is to develop self-confidence and courage. Paschall has an idealized notion of writers that they're "purer" people somehow and, much like Eliza Leslie, writers represent a character—not just professional or creative—model to strive toward. Her prompts are heavily prescriptive, using imperative verbs, and Paschall resembles a sort of drill sergeant for the interior, for the imagination. When discussing invention, for instance, Paschall commands: "examine yourself for poetical inspiration" (pamphlet 21): more sterilizing than stimulating of the imagination. The last chapter in her book, "Talk with Teachers," suggests how to use the book as a textbook. Her advice to teachers is a mix of Ueland-like support for the individuality of the student creative writing, differentiation of creative

writing instruction from that of grammar/mechanics, plus advice on the teacher's role (of a moral disciplinarian). So while Paschall says "[m]ost students have a secret self, never revealed to others" (272), she also revealingly ends the book on the word "discipline" (274). In her final example, she talks about a student who clearly is trying to position her writing in the extracurriculum. The student "wrote pleasant, but slight, little fancies in verse" protests that she doesn't want teachers' criticism and then revision on demand (274). The answer Paschall supplies to creative writing teachers who frequently find themselves in this situation is "*because the first evidence of creative ability along any line is a willingness to submit yourself to discipline*" (274). It would seem, too, that one negative consequence for a writing self-help author of a style and ethos such as Paschall's is that the writer would seem too aligned with the authority figure lurking behind any advice about writing (i.e.: the classroom instructor). Secondly, such an ethos with its forceful incentives would make it hard to access the interior or intrapersonal dialog that Ueland identifies as central to releasing one's creativity. What kind of dormant poet, to adopt Ueland's image, would come forth at such a command? How would such a command affect those students of timidity and latent artistry?

Ueland's 1938 *If You Want to Write* embodies the amount of change which occurred in the extracurriculum and in the perceptions about writing in the United States between Eliza Leslie's writing self-help book and the beginning of the new century. At the same time, *If You Want to Write* is intermeshed with ongoing conversations about writing and writing education in the opening decades of the twentieth-century. Her book demonstrates the degree to which the extracurriculum and self-help overlap with occurrences inside academia in terms of concerns and solutions. Of all the self-help

books on writing examined in this study, moreover, *If You Want to Write* bears the most kinship to Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* in its generosity toward other's verbal ability and sympathy for other's verbal plight. That is, Ueland's 1938 ethos of concern is similar in many regards to the one which Elbow develops several decades later. Other self-help books on writing share content with Elbow in terms of the types of advice they provide to readers—a matter to be picked up on in the next chapter. Ueland's relation to *Writing without Teachers* is unique, however, in the extent to which Ueland, like Elbow, desire to help others write without teachers.

Chapter V

Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* and the Advice of Self-Help

An examination of popular twentieth-century self-help books on writing shows six areas of overlapping content or advice about writing with Elbow's *Writing without Teachers*. First, criticism of classroom-bound writing instruction surfaces in these books in a way that it did not in the nineteenth century. The number of blocked writers portrayed in writing self-help literature is suggestive that something—or more likely someone—is viewed as impeding this inherently human ability with writing. The inevitable culprit for writing blocks becomes teachers, possibly since instruction in writing is more available by the early part of the twentieth century. Secondly, in these books, writing is naturalized such that the desire or ability to write is inherent to human nature rather than a special ability possessed by few people. All writing self-help books offer a system, theory, or exercises to help the average reader either access or regain access to that latent ability. Thirdly, discussion of the role of the unconscious in writing is prevalent in self-help books, as writing self-help authors portray writing as a matter of turning inward, sometimes described as an attempt to listen to an inner voice. The site of invention becomes deeply personal and private. Freewriting, whether called such or not, is the primary strategy advocated to foster the unconscious and allow a more contained site of invention. Fourth, all self-help authors address in some fashion issues of control: where writers struggle with control in composing, as well as offering new ways for

individuals to perceive themselves as in control. Fifth, writing self-help authors propose that writing is holistic, involving and affecting the entire person, rather than a discrete cognitive skill. As part of that holistic outlook, writing is said to carry intrinsic benefits beyond publication or other types of external success. Lastly, writing self-help books adopt a long-term or developmental view toward individual writing ability in which writing is done for personal rather than external reasons. A daily or regular writing practice is advocated as a way to develop a long-standing relation to the act of composing. These content areas establish the extracurricular space in which individuals can learn to write independent of courses and instructors.

Overall, writing self-books foster conversations about the experience of writing which dismantle blocks and posit an interior, personal site of invention. The content of writing self-help advice is distinctly extracurricular and would not suit writing textbooks. When have we encountered a first-year composition textbook, for instance, that asks students how they feel about writing for their teacher? *Is your teacher supportive? Does your teacher draw writing out of you, or does he or she feel like an impediment to your self-expression or academic discourse?* Since writing self-help books have been demonstrably successful in the non-academic publishing marketplace, these books clearly have appealed to a wide readership interested in writing either outside of or after formal classroom instruction. Each of the books placed beside *Writing without Teachers* in this chapter—Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* (1934); Brenda Ueland's *If You Want to Write* (1938); Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* (1986); and Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* (1995)—gained significant reception from audiences outside of the classroom. Sales of Elbow's book, as Gere has pointed out, are always high (higher than

a typical academic book) and suggestive of the bridging of the classroom to extracurricular writing groups that meet at coffee shops, people's houses, and other non-academic venue.

I would propose that the sales of *Writing without Teachers* are in large part triggered by Elbow's content—a content which is that of self-help. Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* overlaps with these self-help books on writing in the six above-mentioned content areas. When speaking to an audience of people who are interested in working on their writing but who are not enrolled in school, as Elbow does in *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow discusses composing in a way similar to writing self-help authors. While writing experts would agree that the main ideas in Elbow's first book-length treatment of composition concern freewriting, the invention and editing strategies of “growing” and “cooking”, and peer feedback, many of his ideas are the same as writing self-help literature. The ideas about composing in self-help and in *Writing without Teachers* essentially establish an interiorized invention. Namely, the strategies or how-to-steps proposed by these writing self-help authors lead a want-to-be-writer down one path: to the inside, to the self.

The advice on writing that Elbow offers in *Writing without Teachers* seems consistent with the advice in successful writing self-help. While Elbow's relationship to his audience shows all signs of being one of self-help, the overlap in his content with that of self-help demonstrates the book's connections to the extracurriculum. These content overlaps are useful because it is easy to conceive of Elbow's influential constructs of freewriting or peer feedback and fail to notice the ways in which Elbow tried to broaden the conversation away from the classroom. However, while the similarities in content

demonstrate Elbow's self-help lineage, what those similarities do not speak to is how *Writing without Teachers*, if we accept it as partially a self-help book, as clearly I think we ought, managed to enter and influence Composition Studies. For Elbow's 1973 book has affected the academic instruction of writing in a way that none of its predecessors or even successive widely popular ones such as Ann Lamott's *Bird by Bird* or Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* have managed to do. In a nutshell, many people employed inside of higher education have been able to imagine using *Writing without Teachers* in their teaching—regardless of the inherent contradiction, imbedded in the book's title, of doing so. On the other hand, readers have not likewise imagined using Brande's *Becoming a Writer* or Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones*: a few Xeroxes here, a few hand-outs there, sure, but these books have not altered the landscape of teaching.

One reason has to be as prosaic as the marketing of *Writing without Teachers*. Oxford University Press made the decision in the mid-1970's to widely distribute free copies of the book to teachers (personal interview with Peter Elbow). According to Elbow, "As a book, it sort of snuck around and became established" (interview). While Elbow intended the book to gain the bestselling readership of a straight-forward self-help book, wanting it to "sell 10 million copies," Oxford University Press marketed the book as an educational book, thinking it would not see such broad sales (interview). Consequentially, this book, imbedded as it is with extensive self-help attributes, was directed by its publisher toward a non-self-help and academic audience. Other writing self-help books have not been provided such extensive access by such a formable academic press to teacher readers. Even given this exposure to audience of writing instructors, there had to be other additional elements to *Writing without Teachers* which

would compel those instructors to first read the free copy and secondly to employ its practices.

How does Elbow manage to proverbially have it both ways? How does he manage to be relevant to the classroom while building off of extracurricular elements? What I propose is that Elbow has created a unique mix of the extracurricular and the curricular: he successfully bridges both sides of the writing experience in an unprecedented fashion. What differentiates *Writing without Teachers* from other self-help books on writing is precisely its *curricular* components. Specifically, while Elbow's book shares a significant amount of content with writing self-help literature, it differs in the amount of attention it gives to composing strategies. Evident in *Writing without Teachers* is a natural progression of composing processes that can be engaged by academic readers as praxis in their teaching. Such is not the case with *Bird by Bird* or *If You Want to Write*, self-help books which offer glimpses of their authors' composing practices but no heuristics. Conversely, what differentiates Elbow from other radical writing theorists such as Ken Macrorie and Donald Murray is his use of a more comprehensive set of *extracurricular* components: something to be discussed in the next chapter. Although he may not have intended such an effect, in *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow's achievement is how he found a meeting area between those who teach writing inside schools and those who practice writing outside of schools.

Writing as Turning Inward

Perhaps the most interesting commonality between writing self-help books and Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* is the way in which writing is portrayed as a matter of turning inward, to the interior of the self. The trajectory of advice in writing self-help books and in *Writing without Teachers* can be summarized as having three stages which in some cases are recursively developed. First, the reader, presumably someone who seeks to improve their writing ability, is guided through an investigation of their writing blocks. The self-help author suggests reasons for the reader's block while at the same time arguing that the reader's experience of blockage—and of wanting to self-express—are natural to human beings. The psychological effect of this move is to provide comfort to the skeptical and possibly anxious reader, a move Jean Marie Stine and Sandra K. Dolby have described as characteristic of the overall genre of self-help, no matter the topic of the advice. Secondly, the self-help author assures the reader that he or she possesses an innate ability to write, and that successful composing is a matter of access. This access happens when the block is both identified and removed, as well as from the reader's trust in his or her ability. Thirdly, the self-help writer tells readers that they can produce writing by exploring themselves, cast as an inner space or mind. The message at this point is essentially, "Go inward, writer." As such, composing becomes a matter of discovery, typically of material already present, albeit unconsciously, in the novice writer. These three stages may not be presented in discrete, linear fashion in the writing self-help book, but they are evident in the total package of the author's counsel. Because the books are self-help, they offer a procedure and sometimes exercises to reach verbal fluency, and the three stages may be dispersed throughout the steps and exercises.

In essence, writing self-help books and *Writing without Teachers* recast the classical rhetorical canon of invention as a matter of discovery and self-engagement. This turning inward is described by writing self-help as a matter of the unconscious, as a listening to an inner voice, as discovery, and as a matter of developing a trusting relationship with the self (in contrast to the distrustful relationship the reader may have with writing experts). Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* operates in a similar fashion. Although Elbow identifies the main contentions of his book as the teacherless writing class and the epistemology of the believing game, what is equally present in *Writing without Teachers* is this inward-turning type of invention. That is, going "teacherless" has much to do with being able to turn inward to compose as it does developing a writing group separate from an instructor. That this is the case is evident in how the first three chapters of *Writing without Teachers* focus on this type of invention, this turning inside.

Teachers as Obstacles to Writing

Critique of classroom writing instruction appears in twentieth-century writing self-help books as much as it appears in *Writing without Teachers*. A central idea in *Writing without Teachers* is that people want to write and write better, but they are frequently stymied by criticism—and in particular previous criticism from teachers that they have internalized. A similar problematization of writing instruction is evident in self-help books on writing even at the start of the twentieth century, such as in Brenda Ueland's 1938 *If You Want to Write* and Dorothea Brande's 1934 *Becoming a Writer*. During the course of the twentieth century, the availability for formal education in

composition and creative writing rose: individuals from a broader demographic benefited from increased access to higher education, and at the same time, more types of composition and creative writing courses were developed. For writing self-help books in the twentieth century, the ever-evolving formal curriculum became present as a counterpoint. When Eliza Leslie published *The Behaviour Book* in 1854, she simply had no classroom counterpart to the type of advice she provided women writers.

As Katherine Adams has documented, the number of creative writing courses inside universities dramatically increased during the early part of the twentieth century. Before World War I, only 10-15% of colleges in the United States included one creative writing course in the curriculum; by 1930, the number of colleges offering creative writing increased to 45% (Adams 74-95). Not only had writing self-help authors in the twentieth century more personal experience with university writing instruction, increasingly, these authors were teachers themselves—typically in extracurricular settings such as non-credit bearing courses or community classes. These non-traditional settings appeared to have promoted experimentation in writing instruction, as it did with Hughes Mearns (setting up a typewriter on the lawn and taking young children’s requests for writing) and later for Peter Elbow (helping conscientious objectors write to the Draft Board or volunteering in the Roxbury community). Possibly writing self-help authors’ critiques of formal instruction gains substantiation from the authors’ first-hand work as teachers. Gere has suggested that writing self-help books even as early as the eighteenth century actively critiqued formal writing instruction and “frequently criticized the way composition was taught in schools” (“Kitchen Tables” 81). It seems, however, that twentieth-century self-help books on writing offer a more complicated portrayal of

formal instruction, a portrayal nuanced by the self-help authors' own experience as teachers, typically in extracurricular forums such as community workshops or non-credit courses.

Of the writing self-help authors examined in this study, Lamott is the most munificent toward formal classroom instruction. Lamott largely casts teachers and her experiences with writing for teachers as an audience in a positive light—much more positive than the other writing self-help authors. Her primary role model as a writer, her father, taught writing and Lamott suggests that his teaching had a positive impact on his students. Her notion of teaching is, however, fairly fluid, in that it includes the informal instruction he provided his children at home in literacy matters. Notably, too, her father teaches writing in a prison—an extracurricular rather than traditional school setting:

Writing taught my father to pay attention; my father in turn taught other people to pay attention and then to write down their thoughts and observations. His students were the prisoners at San Quentin who took part in the creative-writing program. But he taught me, too, mostly by example. He taught the prisoners and me to put a little bit down on paper every day... He taught us to be bold and original and to let ourselves make mistakes. (xii-xiii)

For Lamott as a girl, grade school teachers served as a supportive audience for her jejune productions, and her teachers praised Lamott's early publications and also promoted Lamott's writing, encouraging her to enter a writing contest and including her writing in a text book (xiv-xvi). In a similar way, Lamott's experience with teachers in college was positive: "In college the whole world opened up, and the books and poets being taught in my English and philosophy classes gave me the feeling for the first time in my life that

there was hope, hope that I might find my place in a community” (xx). In Lamott’s rendering, her childhood enthusiasm for creative writing flowed fairly seamlessly into her college years, then into her decision to drop out of college to become a writer, and then into her later haphazard decision to become a writing teacher.

Much of the introduction to *Bird by Bird* features scenes from Lamott’s courses in which she shows herself offering advice to students. Lamott describes her teaching philosophy as essentially sharing what she has gained from her own writing practice, a casual approach not based on a theoretical framework: “So I tell them everything I’ve been thinking or talking about lately that has helped me get my work done” (xxxi). Lamott positions the reader of *Bird by Bird* as one of her students by suggesting that she will use a similar strategy for advice-giving as she does in her classroom: “This is not like other writing books, some of which are terrific. It’s more personal, like my classes. As of today, here is almost every single thing I know about writing” (xxxi). Since people purchase self-help books on writing presumably because they are experiencing a block or seek strategies to become a fluent writer, Lamott, like self-help authors, needs to identify an impediment to writing. For Lamott, it’s the worth of writing that causes it to be an anxiety-producer, not a particular audience, such as a teacher: “Writing can be a pretty desperate endeavor, because it is about some of our deepest needs: our need to be visible, to be heard, our need to make sense of our lives, to wake up and grown and belong” (Lamott 19). Lamott would not have titled her self-help book *Writing Without Teachers* because teachers are a positive force, not an impediment, to writing ability. In the case of the other writing self-help authors, a critique of traditional classroom instruction figures more predominantly in their advice on composing.

In *Becoming a Writer*, Brande's critique of formal writing instruction figures prominently in her book's opening and is an important part of its rhetorical set-up. Brande's assessment of the efficacy of traditional writing instruction includes several lines of criticism. First, she suggests that writing instructors typically discourage novice writers by claiming that writing or "genius" can't be taught, thus calling into question the whole project of teaching:

the disclaimer that genius cannot be taught, which most teachers and authors seem to feel must be stated as early and as abruptly as possible, is the death knell of [a writer's] real hope. He had longed to hear that there *was* some magic about writing, and to be initiated into the brotherhood of authors. (22)

In addition to discouraging novices, most creative writing courses fail to address the "root problems" of quality writing and instead provide only technical or structural information. According to Brande, "a great deal of instruction on plot making is a waste of time" since the development of stories arises from each individual's unconscious (47). The provision of "formulas" for plot development in either creative writing courses or books is ineffectual unless those formulas correspond with the internal, psychological, and experiential structures already brewing within the writer. Brande tells readers that they are ready for books on technique only after they have developed the ability with the unconscious as she details it in her book: "By these exercises you have made yourself into a good instrument for the use of your own genius. You are flexible and sturdy, like a good tool. You know what it feels like to work as an artist. Now read all the technical books on writing of fiction that you can find. You are at last in a position to have them do you some good" (171). Formal classroom instruction becomes a catch-22 situation

because such courses help the “hack writer” who is oblivious to the real problems of writing and at the same time just frustrate individuals with genuine talent: “instruction in writing is oftenest aimed at the oblivious tradesman of fiction, and the troubles of the artist are dismissed or overlooked” (28). Moreover, writing teachers are unable to help the genuinely struggling student because the teacher is “seldom a practicing author” (28). Overall, however, Brande’s discussion of the impact of teachers appears at the beginning of her book, rather than occupying a central place as it does in Elbow’s *Writing without Teachers*.

The exception is a section in the middle of *Becoming a Writer* called “A Footnote to Teachers,” in which Brande criticizes teachers for the practice of showing student writing to other students and allowing them to critique it. Novice writers are too sensitive for peer feedback, even positive types, and workshop (though she does not call it as such) should only occur upon the student’s eventual request (86-7). In *A Group of Their Own: College Writing Courses and American Women Writers, 1880-1940*, Katherine H. Adams points out a similar problem for women students in the new workshop settings of early twentieth-century pedagogy (61-66). According to Adams, “teachers did have a new power when they commented in class daily on student efforts instead of delivering lectures and grading papers. Whether these teachers intended to be cruel or not, many students interpreted their negative verdicts as an artistic death penalty” (63). Female students were vulnerable to group workshop critique in extracurricular settings as well as to faculty who sorted students by ability or who tried to shape students’ writing to their own stylistic views (Adams 61-66). In addressing the problem with peer feedback,

Brande is criticizing formal writing instruction in a way which is consistent with the stance of self-help and the extracurriculum.

In *Writing Down the Bones*, Goldberg is also skeptical of the benefits of formal schooling on writing ability. In the preface to the 2004 edition, Goldberg claims that formal education failed to help her understand how to become a writer, in contrast to the positive assessment Lamott took of her education: “I had a sincere and earnest desire to figure out this writing life. I very badly wanted to do it and I didn’t know how, and I hadn’t learned how in all my public school education. By college, I think I gave up” (xiii). This critique of formal instruction figures so prominently in Goldberg’s approach that she also opens her introduction with a similar-spirited discussion of the deleterious impact on originality of conventional education:

I was a Goody Two-Shoes all through school. I wanted my teachers to like me. I learned commas, colons, semicolons. I wrote compositions with clear sentences that were dull and boring. Nowhere was there an original thought or genuine feeling. I was eager to give the teachers what I thought they wanted. (1)

When discussing her education in literature at the college level, Goldberg claims that the canonical literature she was exposed to was foreign to her own life experience and imposed a disjunction between her love of reading and her own view of her writing: “I must have subconsciously surmised that writing was not within my ken” (1). Goldberg later experiences an awakening to her own writing possibilities after encountering a poem written by a woman on an ordinary domestic topic—cooking eggplant. She regrets the stereotypical “what I did this summer” paper of her youth—the epitome of school-based composition—for its missed opportunity to explore the detail of her actual experience,

detail as concrete as eggplants or one's everyday lived experience. Instead, as a young writer in schools, she was stifled by the assignment and the looming endgame of a grade (xiii).

Goldberg proposes that many people who struggle with writing fail to complete the first step of writing—namely, to learn how to believe in their own inherent ability—and instead seek advice on technique. In emphasizing that something more internal is the groundwork of successful writing than technique, Goldberg echoes Brande, who also proposes that her readers do some self-examination before learning the techniques of fiction writing. According to Goldberg, formal instruction is not as rich a source of creativity as every individual's natural ability and the investigation of that ability through first-hand practice: “[p]eople often begin writing from a poverty mentality. They are empty and they run to teachers and classes to learn about writing. We learn by doing it. That simple. We don't learn by going outside ourselves to authorities we think know about it” (32). Goldberg's critique of formal schooling even extends to ways in which school-based instruction teaches individuals how to organize texts. In her estimation, verbal detail and the parts of the world are interconnected, and that interconnection provides a more natural organization for texts than the paragraph structures taught in school (83). Perhaps most significantly, Goldberg ends her preface by addressing her writing self-help book to “all of us,” a populace she defines as students: “the old students, and the young” (xiv), suggestive that the desire to learn how to write resides in everyone—and suggestive of the lingering role of student in everyone. Goldberg explicitly states her desire that *Writing Down the Bones* be taught in public and private school settings (xiv). In this regard, Goldberg is different than the other writing self-help

authors examined in this study in that she is calling for the adoption of her self-help book as a classroom text book.

Of the writing self-help authors examined in this study, Ueland is the most similar to Elbow in her criticism of the impact of teachers on writing. For Ueland, the main issue with formal instruction is the corrective mindset employed by teachers which squelches creativity. Overall, Ueland links school-based writing with poor writing, calling writing done by participants in her workshops “composition-writing, theme-writing” if it lacked creativity and vitality (55). Ueland gathers an assembly of negative influences on writing, authority figures who include teachers:

You have all noticed how teachers, critics, parents, and other know-it-alls, when they see you have written something, become at once long-nosed and finicking and go through it gingerly sniffing out the flaws. AHA! a misspelled word! As though Shakespeare could spell! As though spelling, grammar and what you learn in a book about rhetoric has anything to do with freedom and the imagination! (6)

In her view, significant writing is something that necessarily occurs outside of school settings.

In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow also lays significant blame on teachers who he says “seem to play a big role in making it harder for people to write” (xii). For Elbow, the tendency in teachers toward a corrective, constantly evaluative mindset is one factor in writing blocks, as it is in Ueland’s view. However, Elbow concentrates more than Ueland on the side effect of teacher evaluation: namely, the struggling writer’s attempt to deal with past and present teacher correction by trying to control and perfect writing.

Thus, for Elbow, his book is a “declaration of independence in writing,” a rallying cry against “care, control, planning, order, steering, trying to get it right, trying to get it good” (xvii). Elbow’s book is also a declaration of independence from teachers operating under the conviction that “learning is independent of teaching” (xviii). That is, not only can struggling writers benefit from separation from traditional teachers, from thinking of teachers as their (ever-critical) audience, struggling writers can actually teach themselves better than a formal teacher could. Thus, it’s not just a matter of changing audience to avoid a censorious influence; for Elbow, this independence also means that teachers are not the best—and certainly not the sole—purveyors of an education in writing. Such a rallying cry puts Elbow squarely in the strand of the extracurriculum of composition in which individuals prefer non-traditional over traditional writing instruction.

All in all, Elbow of the self-help authors examined in this study makes a critique of traditional writing instruction the most central to his advice-giving project. The predominance of his critique of teachers is evident in the book’s title: none of the other writing self-help authors here could have titled their book *Writing Without Teachers* and still stayed on track with the direction of their self-help project. In point of fact, Elbow’s self-help project expands upon that dimension of the extracurriculum, the dimension that has set itself in contrast to formal education. This situation is interesting in light of the fact that Elbow is arguably the most traditional teacher of the authors examined. While Elbow tested his early ideas on writing by helping conscientious objectors write to draft boards and from teaching in Boston’s African-American community, he was also an instructor at M.I.T. (xix). Brande, Ueland, Goldberg, and Lamott have taught but have done so in more extracurricular, non-traditional settings. Whether extracurricular or

traditional, however, all the writing self-help authors examined in this study attempt in some way to reconceptualize what is meant by a “writing teacher” and, by extension, a “writing class.”

In discussing their own traditional or extracurricular teaching experience, self-help authors frequently offer new definitions of “writing teacher,” and in doing so, are building their critique of formal instruction. That is, these writing self-help authors identify problems in conventional writing courses but then attempt to ameliorate the situation, in part by developing new definitions, identities, and versions of authority. Ueland redefines “teacher” as a close acquaintance outside the classroom who is responding to writing: “the only good teachers for you are those friends who love you, who think you are interesting, or very important, or wonderfully funny; whose attitude is: ‘Tell me more’” (7). This description of a positive audience sounds similar to one Elbow develops in *Writing with Power*, namely that of the “safe audience,” a sometimes demanding but always supportive individual or group of readers who seem to invite new writing from us (185). Unlike Brande, Ueland values peer feedback, and like Elbow, she redefines a positive audience as a peer audience, saying that fellow students can act as just a good a responder to writing as a trained teacher (96). Another instance of redefinition occurs when Brande refers to teachers as a “teacher-consultant,” a hyphenated phrase encapsulating the type of writing instruction Brande hopes to replace traditional writing instruction: one more about the psychology of a novice writer rather than about craft technique. The “consultant” part of this nomenclature does much to remove writing instruction from the classroom, placing it in the extracurriculum. Another way in which writing self-help authors recast “writing teacher” is by taking

measures to de-center their own classroom authority in addition to the authority of others who formally teach.

Ueland, Brande, and Elbow discuss how they learned about writing from their students or how they learned about writing only after they began teaching. Brande, for instance, first perceives the problem with conventional instruction and sees the importance of the writer's psychology only after she begins teaching her own course (21). She also de-centers herself from the traditional role of a teacher by not setting up deadlines for assignments:

I recommend an almost inhuman taciturnity to my students, at least about work that is being done at the moment... Beyond stipulating that each pupil must follow the exercises as they are given out, whether or not I see the material which is written from day to day, I assign no tasks. (87)

In her memoir, Ueland says her students “taught me more about writing than I had ever known” and altered not only the way in which she taught, but also the way in which she wrote (*Me* 347-8). In *If You Want to Write*, Ueland enacts again this de-centering of her authority as a teacher, saying “[i]t was my class who showed me that I was working in the wrong way” (42). Likewise, Elbow claims to have solved his own writing problems only after he was no longer a student and was instead a colleague of other professors and a teacher of writing students: “[M]y inability to write had come as I worked with teachers, and I didn’t solve it till I worked without teachers—writing to colleagues and students at Franconia” (xix). Of all the writing self-help authors, Elbow takes this re-definition work the farthest by proposing a “teacherless” writing class. While the other self-help authors suggest that readers can liberate themselves from a traditional classroom

simply by following the steps advocated in their self-help book, Elbow actually proposes how to construct one's own writing group inside the university—perhaps the ultimate paradox of this type of advice literature and perhaps also one cause of the turbulence inside Composition Studies all these years concerning Elbow.

Writing As Natural

With minor exception, self-help books on writing exude confidence concerning the reader's ability to write in a way reflected in the title of Elbow's later book of selected articles, *Everyone Can Write: Essays toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing and Teaching Writing*. Self-help readers do not need to be experts in writing (published authors) to succeed *and* self-help readers do not need to be in the proximity of writing experts (teachers). Thus, Brande early in *Becoming a Writer* disputes the view that writing is a matter of genius which can't be taught and counters, "there is no field where one who is in earnest about learning to do good work can make such enormous strides in so short a time" (27). In the books examined in this chapter, only one author, Brande, becomes testy with the reader on matters of ability, switching from a supportive to stern stance. Despite her earlier support for the reader's potential, Brande tells readers that they should give up trying to become a novelist if they can't follow her steps for a daily practice of writing upon awakening and freewriting for a short period each day (79). To such a reader Brande advises, "*If you fail repeatedly at this exercise, give up writing. Your resistance is actually greater than your desire to write, and you may as well find some other outlet for your energy early as late*" (79). That Brande is emphatic about this

point is indicated in the way in which she places the advice in italics—one of the handful of times she uses italics in the book—and under a blunt sub-section title of “Succeed, or Stop Writing” (79). In contrast to Brande, Natalie Goldberg in *Writing Down the Bones* gently broaches a reader’s possible self-doubt: if a reader is wondering if she should quit, Goldberg advises to just do the writing fully, “with tenderness and determination,” and the reader will know the right moment (if there is one) to stop (118). Of course, readers of writing self-help typically come to such a book because they are hoping for relief from a block and perhaps for publication success. Lingering at the back of a self-help reader’s mind will be the fear of failure, that ultimately they are ill-equipped, just not meant to be a writer, and one rhetorical task of the self-help author is to address those concerns.

Writing self-help authors operate out of the assumption that readers have plenty of experience with criticism, both inwardly and outwardly generated, and that part of the author’s role is to be a supportive coach to the reader. Jean Marie Stine, in her self-help book on how to write and publish a self-help book, describes the style of successful self-help as nurturing:

People with a serious personal crisis or those set on acquiring new abilities often worry that they are not good learners—or that change and growth are beyond them. They need a warm, comforting arm around their shoulders. They want reassurance, a sense of hope, and the knowledge that you understand and sympathize with their plight. (95)

Stine advises the want-to-be self-help author to utilize a style that builds this nurturing stance by using “nonjudgmental” language to counter pre-existing negative thought in the reader and by remaining “reassuring and optimistic,” suggesting that readers will learn at different rates but that they are capable of learning the material (95-96). Careful attention to diction can foster that supportive stance; even switching the word “patient” to “client”

in structuring a self-help book can foster the reader's trust of the self-help author. Writing self-help authors also need to tackle the nature of a self-help reader's anxiety about writing—an anxiety which is different than the type experienced by students. Whereas students may feel unsure about completing a particular assignment for a particular teacher, self-help readers likely question whether they have writing ability or creativity, whether they can generate interesting ideas, and whether they can start and sustain a task. Likewise, in *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow creates a sense that people suffer from a lifelong apprehension about writing, no matter the genre, but certainly writing done outside school settings. In developing a positive stance to soothe the reader's anxieties, Elbow and the writing self-help authors examined in this chapter contend that writing ability is universal and fundamental to being human.

As part of that confidence-building strategy, self-help depicts writing as a matter of human nature rather than of specialization. Both the desire to write and the subsequent follow-through on desire, the ability to write, are cast to varying extents as natural. When the act of composing is naturalized, the implication is that writing inhabits a larger environment than only school settings or the charmed realm of published authors. The self-help stance about writing ability is inherently extracurricular—it takes writing outside the school context. Writing self-help literature also seems to argue against a hierarchy in creative writing instruction. Academic-based creative writing instruction has been criticized by James Berlin for its elitism early in the twentieth century whereby at Yale and Princeton, only so-called gifted students were allowed entrance into creative writing courses (*Rhetoric and Reality* 39-40). More recently, scholars including Kelly Ritter and Katharine Haake have criticized undergraduate and graduate creative writing

programs for privileging certain creative writing students on the basis of perceived ability or gender. Certainly, a sorting of individuals based on perceived notions of ability is evident in nineteenth-century self-education: nineteenth-century writing self-help books did not offer the glowingly positive support of readers' abilities that manifests in twentieth-century books. Although increasingly larger numbers of people tried to write for the rising number of publication venues in the nineteenth century, most self-help books on writing at the time seem, at best, reserved in their estimation of others' writing ability. At times, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the stance taken by nineteenth-century writing self-help authors was more of a gatekeeper than a cheerleader, especially pertaining to female writing ability. In this censorious stance, the writing self-help author in the nineteenth century spent page time highlighting the foibles done by the amateur, and not the amateur's inherent gifts. What is evident in writing self-help literature throughout the twentieth century, however, is the view that anyone can write creatively chiefly because creative expression is a natural human interest and capacity.

Examples of this naturalization of writing desire and ability abound in writing self-help. For instance, Elbow begins his introduction to the second edition of *Writing without Teachers* by declaring "everyone in the world wants to write" (xi). He then adds that writing is not an obligation for students or the unique passion of successful authors but instead a "wish" which occurs outside of schools and beyond extraordinary cases (successful authors). Brenda Ueland in *If You Want to Write* is arguably the most obvious in her support of the reader's ability to write, evinced in the title of her first chapter: "Everybody is Talented, Original, and Has Something Important to Say," a sentence she then immediately repeats in the second paragraph of this chapter. Ueland

defines “everyone” as “all kinds of people... prosperous and poor, stenographers, housewives, salesmen, cultivated people and littler servant girls who had never been to high school, timid people and bold ones, slow and quick ones” (3). While some self-help authors more or less imply universal ability, Ueland explicitly states her belief in the reader: “all people who try to write (and all people long to, which is natural and right)” (7). For Goldberg in *Writing Down the Bones*, writing ability and talent are resources that are present in her readers and which can be enhanced through a writing practice; she cites a Zen teacher, calling that ability a “water table” (32). Goldberg also compares writing to breathing—an involuntary bodily activity and thus the implication is that writing is natural and unavoidable (21).

This view that creative writing was a possible and even worthy pursuit for everyone, no matter their purported ability, is evident in less well-known writing self-help literature other than the texts considered in this chapter. For instance, in his 1952 *Your Key to Successful Writing*, a book on playwrighting for the general public, Lajos Egri begins with a chapter, dramatically titled “I Accuse!,” that directly confronts the view that creative writing is unteachable or a matter for a select few: “Must one be born a genius in order to become a writer? Not necessarily. The fact is, no one who claims that writing can’t be taught is a genius. Far from it!” Egri identifies such skeptics of writing ability as academics holding “important positions” in the university and in theater as well as “scholars” (3-4), suggesting that the elitist view is rooted in academia and not in the extracurriculum. Other books such as Walter S. Campbell’s 1950 *Writing: Advice and Devices* take a more moderate view, claiming that writing can be learned if the novice is willing to practice and, citing Ben Jonson, that writers are “made as well as born” (x, 4).

Campbell's approach is distinct, however, in his attack of Progressive education which he sees as perpetuating a view of self-expression separate from a study of craft: "We may all thank heaven that Shakespeare never attended a progressive school" (x). While writing self-help authors may differ on the degree to which they emphasize craft, technique, or self-discipline, they all support a lay public's ability to succeed at composing.

Frequently, the argument that everyone has natural writing ability is tacit. In *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott never explicitly says that everyone reading her book can write; rather, Lamott highlights the mundane and profane sides of writing and writers, including herself. For Lamott, in contrast with Ueland, writing is not a matter of Blake-like rapture but a combination of maintaining a daily practice and of lowering one's standards. With Lamott, the implication about writing ability is that writing is really nothing special and therefore that it is obtainable. Famously, Lamott advocates "shitty first drafts," a markedly irreverent way of discussing the draft process. Throughout *Bird by Bird*, Lamott discusses her own foibles (her previous drinking problem, relationship problems, hypochondria) and as a writer (her messy encounters with editors, negative reviews of her books, and her own blocks) in a light, comedic way that is different from the straightforward self-portrayals of struggle presented by Elbow in *Writing Without Teachers*. Whereas Elbow will talk of hours of private agony leaning over his manual typewriter or of "trying to keep a stream of consciousness diary whenever life in general got to be too much" (17), Lamott talks about leaning over a line of cocaine. Even Lamott, however, has her moments of cleaned-up encouragement, and at one point Lamott adds that writing is a natural desire, that it "is about some of our deepest needs: our need to be visible, to be heard, our need to make sense of our lives, to wake up and grow and belong" (19).

Another way in which these writing self-help authors support a view of writing ability as universal is by downplaying notions of genius. Genius is rarely mentioned, and if it does appear, it becomes a source of energy and celebration, something that can be emulated rather than passively admired. Such is the case with Ueland's high regard for Romantic artists including William Blake and Vincent van Gogh. Notably, in *Becoming a Writer*, Brande withholds a discussion of genius until the end of her book, and most of that discussion concerns ways of making the unconscious and conscious self interact. However, when discussing what she calls the third component of writing, what she calls "one's individual endowment of genius," she says that it too is a matter of access. All individuals have an innate capacity for genius, and they simply need to learn how to access it without a lot of struggle (156). Those ways of accessing genius will vary between individuals, and it's this variance and not the actual access that can perplex novices (158). In *If You Want to Write*, Ueland's marked esteem for amateur writers, as discussed in the preceding chapter in this project, is another manifestation of self-help's view of writing as a universal, egalitarian ability. Ueland takes her support so far as to suggest that naïve artists and writers are superior both to successfully published authors and individuals with formal training. Whether discounting genius or lauding the unschooled, writing self-help authors suggest that writing ability exists in the general populace outside of school settings. In part, writing self-help authors were responding to the popularization of creativity that began in the twentieth century, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this project. Another force, however, was at play shaping the writing self-help perspective on ability: Freud and his theories on creativity and the unconscious.

Freud's views on creativity suggested that the cause of imaginative production was not something indecipherable or elusive, but rather a response that could be stirred inside anyone. Creative writing wasn't a specialized matter of genius, in this depiction, but instead based on something as prosaic as an individual's fantasy life and desire for play. Since all individuals have fantasies, by extension, all individuals are capable of writing creatively. Freud first presented these ideas on creativity in a 1907 lecture to a packed audience of intellectuals (including the noted German author Hermann Hesse) in Vienna (Aguinis 17). In "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," Freud tries to explain the origins of artistic creativity, to demystify creativity to self-declared non-artists who may stand in awe of it. Moreover, in the lecture, Freud connects psychology and writing in a way which set the stage for the applied psychology of self-help manifested in the writing self-help literature of the twentieth century.

According to Freud, the creative act is present, albeit in differing forms, throughout human life. Creativity is evident in the play of children, and this creativity doesn't dissipate in adulthood but is instead replaced by daydreaming: "[W]e can never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another. What appears to be a renunciation is really the formation of a substitute or surrogate" (145). Freud continues, saying that adult daydreaming takes two forms: for men, it concerns fantasies about power, and for women, it expresses eroticism. Both types of adult daydreaming, however, are kept concealed, unlike the play of children, unless the individual is a patient undergoing psychoanalysis. The play of children involves a temporal mentation in which the child wishes to be an adult; the daydreams of adults involve threading a wish through a past memory, a present circumstance, and a future hope (Freud 146-8). Freud suggests

that an adult creative writer “does the same as the child at play,” developing a fantasy world that the writer “takes very seriously” (144). Simultaneously, the adult creative writer is a “daydreamer in broad daylight,” showcasing by publication rather than concealing the writer’s fantasies (149). According to Freud, the novelist distracts readers from any disagreeable egotism behind his or her fictional characters by luring readers with formal writing strategies. Readers will agree to pay attention to a novelist’s fantasies because the novelist has given readers a spoonful of what Freud calls “fore-pleasure.” As such, readers enjoy the formal structure of a novel, and this then allows them access to deeper psychological pleasures of their own (153). Thus, “It may even be that not a little of this effect is due to the writer’s enabling us thenceforward to enjoy our own day-dreams without self-reproach or shame” (153).

Evident in early writing self-help literature and in discussions of creativity are cognitive metaphors of “castles” and “games” which suggest a playful and non-hierarchical relation to composing. Freud describes adult fantasy as “castles in the air,” (147) and, interestingly, the identical image was used by earlier authors to describe the writing life. In an 1864 article on writing in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, an anonymous female describes how reading other people in print encouraged her to contemplate publishing her own work: “The other day, after reading the newspaper, I fell into a reverie, and began to imagine myself a modern Joan of Arc, and to build castles in the air” (page). In another 1864 article in *Godey’s*, Harriet B. Francis’ account of her first experience with publishing her own poetry in a newspaper, the metaphor of a castle is deployed for Francis’ dreams of publication. When Francis receives the next day’s newspaper sans her poem and mistakenly believes her writing to have been rejected, her “beautiful castle, the

work of long years, its brave turrets glistening in the sun, its broad arched windows blazing in all the hues of the opal and amethyst” fell into a heap of rubble (2). Her sister alerts her to the fact that her poem has indeed been published in the next day’s edition, and Francis’ “castle rose again, fairer and more beautiful, elegant in proportions, its foundations of marble, and my eye took in its completeness, and was satisfied” (2). In 1933, Alma Paschall in *Creative Expression* uses the image of a castle in conjunction with creative writing, except that here the image serves to explain the rigor by which the reader may become a creative writer and not to describe the adult fantasy that can be writing. In Paschall’s “Castle of Creative Expression,” the novice writer needs to develop or possess the gallantry of a knight in order to enter deeper into the secret architecture of composition (203).

Another way in which the Freudian depiction of creativity as a form of adult play is evident in early twentieth-century discussions of composition is the comparison of writing to a game. Freud suggests that the German language “preserved this relationship between children’s play and poetic creation,” since the word for “play” or “game,” specifically “Spiel,” is embedded in the words for humor, tragedy, and acting (144). Likewise, William Webster Ellsworth in his 1928 *Creative Writing: A Guide for Those Who Aspire to Authorship* calls composing the “writing game,” similar to Paschall: “The writing game is justified if for no other reason than that it develops character. It does this by strengthening one’s ability to be vicarious...and thus destroying tendencies toward selfishness” (pamphlet). The connotation of writing as a “game”—predating Elbow’s Believing Game—is that writing is a form of non-elitist adult play with ancillary benefits when publication isn’t an outcome.

Frequently, writing self-help authors attempt to define what constitutes a writer and in twentieth-century self-help notions of play and of the unconscious factor prominently in that definition. Self-help authors perform this work of definition to enable readers to determine which writerly characteristics they already possess and which characteristics they still need to develop (by following the self-help author's advice). Earlier writing self-help, lacking Freudian notions of the unconscious and play, seem concerned with external matters and societal expectations. For instance, the tone of Eliza Leslie's 1854 definition of a writer seems more judgmental than that of later writing self-help. With Leslie, the question is whether the female reader possesses certain virtues and strengths needed in a successful woman author, and she seems to challenge the reader to prove her possession of them. With later writing self-help, the qualities that define a writer are not moral or even ones of technique and instead seem to pertain to matters of the unconscious. For instance, the first chapter of Brande's *Becoming a Writer*, "What Writers are Like," differentiates writers from non-writers but again does so by suggesting that the difference is a matter of degree rather than absolutes. Specifically, according to Brande, writers are different because they consciously integrate the conscious and unconscious sides of their selves. Everybody experiences moments of engagement between their conscious and unconscious selves, so the implication is that everybody resembles a writer (40-41). As Freud suggested in "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," what distinguishes a writer from a supposed non-writer is not the writer's structural performance, not his or her "choice of material" or "art of creating imaginative form" (3). Instead, what defines a creative writer is his or her willingness to engage in serious play—something which all of us surely experience at some time.

Writing as Using the Unconscious

The focus on the unconscious or the interior knowledge of writers does much to naturalize writing ability and build self-esteem. In emphasizing the unconscious, the self-help author really anticipates the likely doubt of a reader who picks up a writing self-help book—do I really have anything in me worth writing? By suggesting that the reader already has material for writing and that successful composing means accessing this presently concealed material, the self-help author has already alleviated the sense that writing is an impossibility for the reader. The reader is already empowered. And so Lamott in *Bird by Bird* pronounces:

everything we need in order to tell our stories in a reasonable and exciting way already exists in each of us. Everything you need is in your head and memories, in all that your senses provide, in all that you've seen and thought and absorbed. There in your unconscious, where the real creation goes on.
(181)

In several cases, the ability to write is construed as an expansively collective ability, stretching out between individuals in a way reminiscent of Jung's collective unconscious. Goldberg, citing Zen master Katagiri Roshi, says that writing "[c]apability is like a water table below the surface of earth' ... No one owns it, but you can tap it" (32). So to when Brande mulls over genius—a topic writhe with potential elitism—she posits genius as a collective and unconscious ability. Creative genius is an endowment that every human being possesses and is at the same time never fully managed by any single person, no matter how great: "No human being is so poor as to have no trace of genius; none so great that he comes within infinity of using his own inheritance to the full" (157). Our

inheritance of genius is not only beyond the manipulation of any single person's will, according to Brande, it also can't be altered or consciously taught: "You cannot add one grain to this faculty by all your conscious efforts, but there is no reason you should desire to. Its resources at the feeblest are fuller than you can ever exhaust" (156). In this regard, the unconscious as it occurs in writing self-help literature is extracurricular: it is not something impacted or regulated by formal classroom instruction. As Goldberg proposes in *Writing Down the Bones*, a writer needs to write from her original mind, a capacity which can be inhibited by analysis as well as by typical instruction. According to Goldberg, "Stay with your original mind and write from it" (33). School conversely teaches people to not be attentive to their first thoughts and therefore depletes creativity.

That the unconscious is not within the typical purview of classroom instruction is something that has been discussed by theorists inside Composition Studies. For instance, both Donald Murray and Janet Emig have pointed out the way in which English departments fail to foster the unconscious in student writing. For Murray, writing pedagogy and theory are limited to the "exterior view of writing," overlooking the "interior view of composing seen by the practicing writer" ("The Interior View" 21). Adopting this interior view entails an individual exploring her own mind and discovering new material and meaning—a description akin to the unconscious. For Emig in her 1964 article, "The Uses of the Unconscious in Composing," poor student writing, or "surface scrapings," results from teaching students only to write consciously or "from one layer of the self" (6). The sense is that standard writing instruction either is unwilling or unable to help students utilize their unconscious in composing. According to Emig, the very task environment of writing instruction, including the use of weekly themes and in-class

writing, is not conducive to “encounters with any but the conscious self” (6). Clearly, the task environment set up by writing self-help fosters the unconscious in composing in a way which could be of use to writing experts.

Engagement with the unconscious in writing is most displayed in Brande’s approach in *If You Want to Write*. For one, Brande claims that instead of a lack of technique, struggling writers really have personality or “root” problems which are each caused by an inability to access the unconscious (33). These root psychological problems are manifested in the four difficulties commonly displayed by struggling writers: in getting started, in writing again after a previous success, in having too long empty periods between writing, and in producing texts of inconsistent quality (25-34). At first, the causes of these four root problems are identified as a lack of confidence, an excess of self-consciousness, impatience, and expectations for perfection. However, each of these psychological problems pertains to how the writer deals with her unconscious and whether she is able to access and trust it. What Brande proposes is that the novice writer develop a dual nature in which the conscious and unconscious mind are put in dialog: “The writer’s first task is to get these two elements of his nature into balance, to combine their aspects into one integrated character. And the first step toward that happy result is to split them apart for consideration and training!” (39) In Brande’s depiction, one which correlates with a Freudian perspective, the conscious and unconscious work as a team, but the work dynamic is also one in which the two parts regulate each other. So while Brande’s first task for the novice writer is that he work on connecting the conscious and unconscious through writing at the moment of waking, the conscious mind also serves as the practical partner and creates “suitable conditions” for the “artistic-self” (49). As

discussed earlier, one of those suitable conditions is imposing a set time for daily practice upon the unconscious to prevent the natural inclination of the unconscious to idle in daydream. The conscious side must also be monitored since she attributes to it the “editor” functions. For Brande, much like the writing self-help authors and certainly like Elbow, the first draft stage (though she does not use the term “draft”) should be a time in which the unconscious is ascendant and the conscious mind, and especially its editor characteristics, on mute. At the time of composing, quality was not the correct concern for the writer: the correct goal is to connect the two parts of the mind.

Issues of Control in Writing

Both Brande and Lamott speak of writing as entering a state of self-hypnosis, suggestive of a loosening of control. According to Brande, her third category of writing ability, that of genius, is accessed by a state of light hypnosis in which “the attention is held, but *just* held” (160). While mindless or repetitive activities like cleaning floors can help some individuals reach genius, Brande says the more efficient method is to quiet the mind through meditation on an object. After quieting the endless discursive thinking, the writer should introduce an idea from their writing and see what arises (164). Of course, there is an element of the paradoxical in self-help’s prompting of readers to renounce control—because people who read self-help books are arguably trying to take charge of a certain problematic area of their lives, to make change. For Lamott, “Writing is about hypnotizing yourself into believing in yourself, getting some work done, then unhypnotizing yourself and going over the material coldly” (114). In Lamott’s case, the

mindfulness and Buddhist philosophies which pervade *Writing Down the Bones* preclude the need for discussion of self-hypnosis. Mindfulness is similar to self-hypnosis in its calming of the self and watchfulness of mental phenomena. Brande offers a marvelously simple demonstration of the conscious and unconscious tango. This demonstration entails drawing a circle on a piece of paper and places a cross through the circle. The reader is then to hold a ring on a string about four inches above the intersection of the cross. Keeping the hand still and trying to ignore the key, the reader is to follow the shape of the circle only with the mind. Soon, the key will be involuntarily making circles in the same direction as the mind had previously gone. Brande suggests then stilling the key and attempting the exercise again, this time moving the mind in the opposite direction in the circle to see if the key will again follow (64-5).

For Elbow, issues of control represent the role of the unconscious in composing. Throughout *Writing without Teachers*, the issue of control serves as a way of talking about the differences between the unconscious and conscious parts of the writing mind. While Elbow praises freewriting for its correlation to the unconscious, he does so because freewriting can release the writer from planning, and in this uncontrolled mindset, arrive better ideas (8). Freewriting is the primary strategy for abandoning control and obtaining those ideas during invention; in freewriting, “the integration of meanings is at a finer level than you can achieve by conscious planning or arranging” (8). For Elbow, people who want to write need to gain their “independence from care, control, planning, order, steering, trying to get it right, trying to get it good” (xvii). In his experience at Oxford and Harvard, much of school instruction in writing tried to establish control and thus lead to problems in writing. In Elbow’s book, “control” is the larger umbrella for the other

issues pertaining to blocked writing—self-editing, planning, concern for quality, all of which originate in the conscious mind.

Elbow seems to be redefining the canon of invention such that it chiefly entails the relinquishment of control. For Elbow, the absence of control not only leads to new ideas during invention, but it also improves the quality of invention (8). Elbow relocates control, transporting it from the invention stage to the editing stage. As such, control comes after-the-fact of writing, and the text is heavily planned out only after an initial wandering (15). Not only does organization occur in this post-invention, more controlled zone, but knowing one's own ideas—knowing what one wrote, in essence—also ideally occurs after-the-fact: “Control, coherence, and knowing your mind are not what you start out with but what you end up with” (15). That is, meaning-making is unconscious in that the individual may not have been aware of this content present in his thoughts before writing—and may not be aware of this content even while writing or dredging them up. Another aspect of this abandonment of control is allowing the words to guide one's meaning, rather than thinking that oneself—whether the unconscious or conscious self—are the leader through the act of composition. Accordingly, “You're trying to get your material to do some of the steering instead of doing it all yourself... The words are not going through stages you planned or that you control” (32). Elbow says that, paradoxically, when a writer tries to be in charge, she frequently ends up stuck, helpless and feeling that writing is beyond her (32). Thus, for Elbow, the site of invention is not just about making an inward turn: it's also about monitoring how the self responds to control and discouraging the self from falsely seeking control.

The frequent argument in writing self-help book that composing is a matter of turning inward is also cast as a matter of listening to and trusting an inner voice. Composing becomes a relationship the self-help reader develops with him- or herself, which is again an extracurricular notion for the way in which it posits the novice writer as not in relation to an instructor. One manifestation of the importance of the unconscious on writing self-help is the frequent discussion of a “voice” to which the writer listens in order to compose. The terms for this speaking part of the unconscious differ between self-help books. Lamott, for instance, calls it alternatively a “voice” and the “intuition.” Lamott portrays this voice entity also in terms of a split, much like Brande says that there are two sides to a writer’s personality. She advocates creating a metaphor for this voice or intuition: “A friend says that his intuition is his animal: ‘My animal thinks this,’ he says, or ‘My animal hates that.’ But whatever you come up with needs to suggest a voice that you are not trying to control” (114). Voice, of course, has been a central concept in Elbow’s work. More recently, at a presentation at the 2010 *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, Elbow has moved away from voice, which he now sees as overly metaphoric, to the more embodied notion of intonation. In *Writing without Teachers*, however, Elbow suggests that the early stages of invention are a writer’s transaction with herself, “a transaction with yourself and with your words” (42). For Elbow, it is crucial that writers separate composing from editing, because when writers edit prematurely, they are anticipating a critical audience and harming their voice:

The habit of compulsive, premature editing doesn’t just make writing hard. It also makes writing dead. Your voice is damped out by all the interruptions, changes, and hesitations between the consciousness and the page. In your natural way of producing words there is a sound, a texture, a rhythm—a voice—which is the main source of power in your writing. (6)

In this approach, anybody, including an imaginary audience, that is allowed to step between the writer and her consciousness will obstruct voice. For Lamott in *Bird by Bird*, writing is also about hearing an inner voice: “you get quiet and try to hear that still small voice inside” (110). Lamott emphasizes the importance of trusting that voice, especially on the first draft:

You get your confidence and intuition back by trusting yourself, by being militantly on your own side. You need to trust yourself, especially on the first draft, where amid the anxiety and self-doubt, there should be a real sense of your imagination and your memories walking and woolgathering, tramping the hills, romping all over the place. Trust them. (112)

For Goldberg in *Writing Down the Bones*, writing is equated with listening to the self—a listening which is broadly accepting and operates without evaluation (58). Goldberg, like Elbow, feels that everyone possesses a genuine, interesting voice: “Everything I say as a teacher is ultimately aimed at people trusting their own voice and writing from it” (165). For Ueland in *If You Want to Write*, creativity happens from introspection, from intrapersonal dialog, and “complete self-trust” (27, 45).

Writing As Holistic

A third notion that writing self-help books in general propose is that writing is holistic, involving and affecting the entire person, rather than a discrete cognitive skill. The “writing life” outlined by writing self-help is more than a profession—it’s an avocation, a passion. In general, we speak of things as “life” when an individual is wholeheartedly committed to something such that the activity becomes that person’s “life”: the activity functions as a metonym for the person. The “writing life” is also

aligned with a holistic view of composing because it suggests that writing can't be encompassed, that writing filters into a person's whole life, and vice versa, the person's life influences the writing. In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow links composing with "any learning that involves the whole person rather than some discrete cognitive skill" (141). Due to its engagement of the whole person rather than some isolable part or assignment, the holistic nature of the writing process can cause frustration because it seems lengthy and uncontrollable (Elbow 141). For Brande, the central task of learning to write is to synchronize the unconscious and conscious sides of the self, a task which she calls holistic: it takes the whole person to let the two parts of the self make good writing decisions (45). She also suggests that the reader be gentle on themselves while trying to make the changes advocated in her book. While completing the exercises in the book, the reader should not do it willfully but rather with a relaxed mind. The reader should keep in mind the benefit of trying her exercises which have as their "end of making a full and effective life for yourself" (66). In other words, what she proposes for the writing process will carry over into the reader's non-writing life. For Goldberg, writing is a practice equivalent to a meditation discipline in that writing can extensively impact one's non-writing life: "To do writing practice means to deal ultimately with your whole life" (3).

This holistic outlook sees writing as offering intrinsic benefits beyond publication or other types of external success. Perhaps intrinsic rewards are needed because of the way in which self-help literature necessarily positions the act of writing. That is, any writing completed through the steps or advice of a writing self-help book is writing that has been done outside of academia. In school settings, there is a supposedly clear

outcome—grade, passing course, graduation, degree, employment—whereas in the extracurriculum, excepting publication, goals may be less clear cut.

In *Bird by Bird*, Lamott perceives writing as providing tremendous “gifts” which exceed any development of a discrete skill. These benefits to the novice writer are specifically the ability to explore and pay attention (xii). It can occasionally lead to personal fulfillment when a writer feels that “true words” have moved from inside them to the external world (xxxxi). Lamott is more reserved in her regard of the benefits of writing, for as soon as she talks about the possible merits, she also gestures to its fiscal and psychological impositions on writers. In fact, it’s the very worth of writing that can cause it to become a source of anxiety: “Writing can be a pretty desperate endeavor, because it is about some of our deepest needs: our need to be visible, to be heard, our need to make sense of our lives, to wake up and grown and belong” (Lamott 19). More skeptical than Ueland, Lamott nevertheless also attributes writing to helping ameliorate the problems of the modern world, suggesting that writing can be a cure for narcissism by providing states of ecstasy and self-respect (99-100). Lamott ends *Bird by Bird* on a further description of the benefits of writing, concluding that writers belong to a noble tradition in an imperfect world; writing deepens the soul and helps counter the absurdity of contemporary life (234-7). On a different note, Brande in *Becoming a Writer* simply believes that writing provides individuals with a much needed “creative outlet” (28). The overall sense in *Becoming a Writer* is that its readers are more interested in the profession of novel writing, and because Brande is speaking to those interests, she gives scant discussion of any intrinsic benefits to writing.

For some writing self-help authors, the intrinsic benefits of writing are more encompassing. For Goldberg in *Writing Down the Bones*, the writing practice carries spiritual benefits, allowing a person to “become larger” than herself by following her instinctive thoughts and be “breathing in God” (10). Furthermore, the process of writing can actually formulate one’s own identity (Goldberg 19). Thus, writing provides satisfaction because it indicates that the individual is “fulfilling your function” by “knowing who you are, what you are supposed to be doing on this earth, and then simply doing it” (44). Writing leads to a greater awareness which Goldberg calls “living twice” (53), and literacy in general is a “constant source of life and vitality,” exemplified in the Jewish tradition of giving a boy a spoon of honey after he reads his first word from the Torah (119). Goldberg finally sums up her esteem for the benefits of writing when she tells the reader not to worry about the quality of created texts but instead to know that the very attempt to write is “heaven” (119). In a similar emphatic vein, Ueland in *If You Want to Write* touts the health benefits of creativity in a way which would likely not be found in a composition-rhetoric text book, no matter the time period:

Writing, the creative effort, the use of the imagination, should come first—at least for some part of every day of your life. It is a wonderful blessing if you will use it. You will become happier, more enlightened, alive, impassioned, lighthearted, and generous to everybody else. Even your health will improve. Colds will disappear and all the other ailments of discouragement and boredom. (13)

For Ueland, writing is never a waste of time, and even on the sentence level, the act of composition will benefit the individual (14). Lastly, she feels that the benefits to writing extend outward, helping the writer accept other people because the writer has accepted his or her own thoughts (27). The benefits of writing as espoused in self-help literature

are more substantive than external rewards, and thus the self-help reader is provided multiple motivations for the hard work of writing self-education.

Writing Ability as Developmental over the Long Term

Writing self-help authors vary in how much emphasis they place on helping the reader “become a writer” or professionalizing the reader. That self-help books on writing examined in this chapter do not promise readers publication success contradicts the view of self-help authors, as expressed by Tom Tiede and Wendy Kaminer, as snake oil salespeople who promise easy fixes and immediate gratification and cause conformity. Tiede depicts self-help authors as “thuds” who “make money from fools” with their “spineless publications,” as individuals engaged in a chicanery which threatens to deplete Americans’ self-reliance (9-10). For Kaminer, self-help books deaden reader’s critical thinking capacity by providing “simple, step-by-step solutions to whatever crisis they discuss” (8). Of the books examined in this study, Brande’s *Becoming a Writer* seems the most invested in professionalizing the reader, as evinced even in its title. Brande organizes her book in a conventional self-help fashion, with that above-mentioned early chapter, “What Writers are Like,” in which Brande provides the reader with writerly characteristics to emulate, as though this imitation would be the first information sought by a self-help reader. This provision of a generic writer’s qualities is standard in writing self-help literature. Some self-help books disperse this discussion—typically of discipline, attentiveness, curiosity—throughout their texts; others such as Walter S. Campbell utilize a chapter for this topic, such as his “The Qualifications of a Writer.” In

Writing Without Teachers, Elbow, on the other hand, tellingly never refers to the reader as a “writer” and instead proposes that there is a significant population comprised of individuals who just want to write. Elbow’s emphasis is on the activity of composing rather than on a professional identity that could result from his advice. While Elbow never discusses publication, some of the other self-help authors mention publication fairly regularly.

Publication becomes subject to criticism in Lamott, Goldberg, and Ueland as a way for these authors to instead emphasize more interior invention and motivation for writing. For instance, Lamott in *Bird by Bird* spends a good deal of page time using examples from her workshops and courses in which students’ main priority is publication, even despite her advice:

I try to make sure they understand that writing, and even getting good at it, and having books and stories and articles published, will not open the doors that most of them hope for. It will not make them well. It will not give them the feeling that the world has validated their parking tickets, that they have in fact finally arrived... My students do not want to hear this. Nor do they want to hear that it wasn’t until my fourth book came out that I stopped being a starving artist. They do not want to hear that most of them probably won’t get published and that even fewer will make enough to live. But their fantasy of what it means to be published has very little to do with reality. (xxx)

In one humorous scene, after Lamott has taken pains to explain the emotional rollercoaster of the writing process and the need to be patient, her students can only repeatedly ask about how to find an agent (10-13). Lamott sends mixed messages, however, about one’s priorities as a writer because she speaks in several passages of her own early publications in grade school and high school and how much encouragement they afforded her.

For Ueland in *If You Want to Write*, publication is often a sign of poor writing: her published students are often the least interesting to her, and she frequently points out the superiority of unschooled student writing to that receiving acclaim in the literary and mainstream magazines of the day. Ueland describes publication as one of the impediments to her own writing: “One great inhibition and obstacle to me was the thought: will it make money? But you find that if you are thinking of that all the time, either you don’t make money because the work is so empty, dry, calculated, and without life in it. Or you do make money, and you are ashamed of your work” (21). Ueland, however, reassures the reader that publication is likely if the reader writes out of the right (more spiritual) reasons (23). In *Writing Down the Bones*, Goldberg recounts her own positive experiences with writing but spends just as much if not more page time on writing which was not published or received by society in the conventional way than on her publication successes. Donating her writing in a writing booth, discovering that a stranger kept the spontaneous poem she wrote in his wallet, or meeting with her friends for an all-day writing session: these writing acts seem just as valuable to Goldberg as her significant book successes.

Even with her emphasis on making novelists of readers, for Brande, pupils can be sorted into two types based on their attitude about publication. The student who focuses on achieving publication tends to be less gifted, whereas the student with genuine ability is the one who suffers from various writing difficulties. These difficulties, which Brande sees as involving more substantial issues than just succeeding at publication, are the issues she covers in *Becoming A Writer*—issues of the unconscious and self-training (28). Another point is the way in which Elbow and most of these writing self-help authors do

not discuss genre. That writing self-help authors by and large do not specify the genre a reader should engage in is further indicative of a tendency to not professionalize readers into published authors. Instead of training readers to become, say, novelists, writing self-help books try to enlarge and personalize the reader's experience of invention. The interiorized site of invention fostered by writing self-help books is not conducive to outcomes like publication and genre.

In Elbow's treatment of composing, writing is about self-improvement and not about satisfying the expectations of others. Part of this view entails taking a long-term view of writing improvement which Elbow calls a "developmental model" (18) in which working on writing is not about an assignment immediately at hand but about improving writing for and in the future. Concerning this long-term view, Elbow says: "But you must develop a feel for the larger growth cycles too. Certain kinds of growth take longer. One has to be open and accept bad writing now—meaning this year, this decade—in order to get to good writing" (47). In a similar vein, Anne Lamott suggests that one solution for a writer's block is to take a long-term view of writing by relinquishing control and patiently waiting for one's intuitive inner voice to kick in again (112-113). In this sense, Elbow's advice on writing is extracurricular because it is more expansive than the academic structures of assignment, course, or semester: its time frame can't be encapsulated in the fifteen weeks of a course. The expansive, future-spanning time frame of Elbow's proposed approach to writing is by implication not linked to a teacher; instead, this writing must be personally motivated, part of an ongoing self-education and self-help. That Elbow uses "grow" and "growth" in relation to writing further suggests that writing can't be limited by artificial or temporary structures such as classrooms.

When he provides procedural and set-up details for the teacherless class later in the book, he specifically advises that participants not constrain their successful group with a traditional academic time frame:

any class which really achieves this take-off level should see in themselves a precious culture to be preserved. Yogurt. Not a class with an end, a 'term.' They should think of themselves as having created a living culture than can continue even when the membership has changed. (139)

The connotation of growth is that it is relatively unstoppable: that is, not only can this writing-growth not be contained, but it will most likely inevitably happen (despite, going around, those obstacles). Telling someone that writing without teachers is impossible would thus be as absurd as telling an adolescent boy that he can't physically get taller over the summer when his teacher isn't present. Growth is as involuntary as breathing (and Natalie Goldberg did compare writing to breathing).

There's something tacitly reassuring to the writing self-help reader because growth—and therefore your writing—will happen. One's writing becomes a sort of unstoppable and natural force. The reader can and will have the experience of their writing growing. Elbow's depiction of writing as an organic process—one of growth or a culture—is also connected to the relinquishment of control which Elbow sees as inherent in fluent writing. After all, unless we are taking steroids, we did not ultimately control how we physically grew up.

In a similar vein, writing self-help authors frequently recommend a daily practice for writing. The notion of a daily practice is extracurricular in that it is more expansive and more self-motivated than school-based writing instruction. A good way to establish the "teacherless" writing environment is to establish a daily writing practice because in all likelihood the same teacher will not be a part of an individual's lifespan. A daily

writing practice is also extracurricular in that it will lead to a large quantity of writing—more than could be shown to a single teacher. In this way, a daily practice speaks to Elbow’s recommendation later in *Writing with Power* that students write frequently outside of class such that when they show a teacher their writing, it is only a portion of their writing. It’s almost as though self-help books on writing have a different relation to the time of composition than school-based instruction: in their long-term view of the writing process and in their advocacy of a daily writing practice. For instance, in *Bird by Bird*, Lamott speaks admiringly of her father’s own daily writing practice: “Every morning, no matter how late he had been up, my father rose at 5:30, went to his study, wrote for a couple of hours, made us all breakfast, read the paper with my mother, and then went back to work for the rest of the morning” (xii). Lamott also suggests that the solution to writing is two-fold: develop a daily practice and lower standards (22).

In *Becoming a Writer*, Brande’s suggestions rely heavily on daily practice, and she divides that daily practice into several stages which constitute the procedural set-up of her self-help advice. First, Brande advocates early morning freewriting as a way to tap into the unconscious, with the goal of developing fluency at a time of day in which the “unconscious is in the ascendant”: “The best way to do this is to rise half an hour, or a full hour, earlier than you customarily rise. Just as soon as you can—and without talking, without reading the morning’s paper, without picking up the book you laid aside the night before—begin to write” (72). The next step is “writing on schedule,” which entails setting aside a certain time each day to again free write and fully committing oneself to doing so (75-79). After one has developed the ability to write at a designated time, Brande says that the next step is to vary that designated daily time—all with the intention

of “teach[ing] yourself to write at a given moment” (76). For Brande, the two parts of this daily practice represent “strange and arbitrary performances,” a phrase which at first may seem paradoxical given how scheduled and thus how seemingly non-arbitrary this practice is. However, Brande points out that the unconscious will resist this scheduling, not liking to break its natural state of reverie to perform on command, but eventually the unconscious will “suddenly give in charmingly, and begin to write gracefully as well” (78-9). Unlike the other writing self-help authors, Brande actually tells the reader that they may not be qualified to become a writer if the reader can’t commit to the daily practices (79). Daily practice is crucial to the advice in *Becoming a Writer* for, as was previously discussed in this chapter, it is the litmus test of whether someone should continue to pursue a writing path.

Goldberg’s approach to daily practice in *Writing Down the Bones* is different than Brande’s in that Goldberg is not as stringent. According to Goldberg, no one should write every day if they’re not fully committed to writing and are instead simply going through the motions, fulfilling a duty (145). Goldberg’s stance is one of equanimity, of taking the seemingly good writing day with the seemingly bad writing day:

See the big picture. You are committed to writing or finding out about it. Continue under all circumstances. Don’t be rigid, though. If one day you have to take your kids to the dentist when it is your time to write, write in the dentist’s office or don’t write. Just stay in touch underneath with your commitment for this wild, silly, and wonderful practice. Always stay friend toward it. It’s easier to come back to a good friend than an enemy. (145)

Her ability to not judge a particular day’s writing performance is a result of her particular approach to writing as a practice. For Goldberg, writing practice, much like a meditation practice, is something so intrinsic to and interconnected with existence that there is no question that a single day of not writing will harm the practice as a whole: it won’t. In *If*

You Want to Write, Ueland recommends starting with a daily practice in which purposeful idleness is a priority (35). For Ueland, invention can occur in a state of daydreaming reminiscent of Freud, and the benefits of having this type of practice include the comfort in knowing that setting aside this type of time will inevitably produce new ideas (35). This type of practice also helps the reader learn to detect how creativity functions in them (*If* 35-6).

Elbow: Self-Help with a Difference

What distinguishes Elbow's advice from the other self-help authors is that—despite advocating writing without teachers—Elbow is in fact a higher education member. Although he seeks an alternative type of education, Elbow is invested in college pedagogy both in practice and theory in a way not evident in other writing self-help authors. By the time he organized the original scraps and notes for their book-length treatment in *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow had completed a PhD from Brandeis, had taught at M.I.T., and had helped start a whole college—Franconia College. Elbow describes *Writing without Teachers* as “not a young man's book,” since he was thirty-seven years old when he finished it (interview). He did not identify with conventional academia: “I was a well-educated man, but I didn't think of myself as a scholar” (interview). Elbow's disagreements with traditional academia did not mean that his identity was completely separate from it; as Elbow describes his involvement with higher education at the time of the book, “I can't pretend that I was totally a non-scholarly person” (interview). Although he did not identify with traditional academia, Elbow

acknowledges that he is still a While he didn't construe *Writing without Teachers* as a Composition book per se, he had published in *College English* and was thus engaged in disciplinary conversations. All of this academic experience sets Elbow apart from the self-help authors discussed in this chapter—several of whom had taught but in extracurricular settings. Thus, Elbow's position in academia—however troubled to him—allows him to critique academic writing instruction not from a former student's perspective (like the other self-help authors) but from a current teacher's perspective.

One consequence of that insider's perspective is that Elbow is able to provide a much more comprehensive view of the extracurriculum to both self-help and academic readers. As mentioned earlier, Ann Ruggles Gere has suggested that Elbow's book is unique for its bridging of writing groups occurring both inside and outside of classrooms. According to Gere, the "implementation of Elbow's ideas in classrooms signals the connection between academic and non-academic writing groups" (*Writing Groups* 48). To this I have added that part of the unique effect of Elbow's first Composition book can be attributed to its bridging of the two halves of the extracurriculum: self-help and writing groups. Therefore, while Gere suggests that people outside of school have been drawn to *Writing without Teachers* for its information on writing groups, such self-help readers may also like the move Elbow makes from solo composing acts to group feedback. Writing, as many have pointed out, is a solitary and isolated activity, whereas self-education has historically embraced group work and collaboration. Indeed, as Elbow says at the start of his chapter on the teacherless writing class:

I have been speaking till now as though writing were a transaction entirely with yourself. It *is* a transaction with yourself—lonely and frustrating—and I have wanted, in fact, to increase that transaction: help you do *more* business with yourself. But writing is also a transaction with other people. Writing is

not just getting things down on paper, it is getting things inside someone else's head. If you wish to improve your writing you must also learn to do more business with other people. That is the goal of the teacherless writing class. (*Without* 76)

This bridging of composing and feedback, of solo and group effort, is not apparent in other writing self-help books. Community and occasionally university classes are mentioned as a backdrop to some self-help advice, but group feedback is not a primary feature as it is in Elbow's book. This bridging of self-help and writing groups may also have appealed to academic readers because of the resemblance of those groups to classrooms. In fact, when Elbow began discussing the ideas behind what would become *Writing without Teachers*, the representative from Oxford University Press expressed more interest in his teacherless writing class than the composing strategies (interview). In addition to these factors, there's the matter of Elbow's thoroughness—the way in which he provides a systematic praxis for self-education as well as for higher education.

A second upshot of that insider's perspective is that Elbow is able to provide a much more comprehensive set of composing and feedback strategies than the self-help authors covered in this chapter. After initially vocalizing his grievance with traditional writing instruction, Elbow sets right in to providing substantial composing strategies—freewriting, then the Growing Process, followed by the Cooking Process. While these strategies are largely genre-free and applicable to a wide range of writing tasks in and out of classroom settings, they are as thorough as a lesson. In addition to the composing strategies, Elbow provides advice on revision and then obtaining feedback (through a teacherless group). In *Writing Groups*, Gere also comments upon the remarkable information Elbow provides to extracurricular readers on how to create a teacherless writing group:

Elbow includes suggestions on qualities to seek in group members, procedures for running the “class,” and difficulties to avoid. He also explains how he arrived at this approach and offers a rationale for its success. In other words, Elbow provides a “kit” for persons wishing to establish their own writing groups. (49)

As a result, Elbow provides his teacher readers—at least, those looking for ways to change their teaching—with a means from the ground-up, from invention all the way to getting feedback.

This systematic presentation is what arguably most of all differentiates Elbow’s advice from those of other self-help books on writing. Ueland, Lamott, and Goldberg all provide glimpses of their own composing and revising strategies as a sort of model for the novice reader: none of these views, however, is a systematic treatment from inception to final draft of their own writing. Brande does not disclose her own writing struggles but does provide a few exercises as advice—again, not a systematic approach to composing. On occasion writing self-help books have the feel of a commonplace book, peppered with short chapters of advice on an array of topics about writing, such as with Goldberg’s *Writing Down the Bones*. A novice who wanted to parse out a thorough composing practice for herself from these other books would have to do a great deal of work to fill in gaps; she’d practically be writing her own syllabus. Elbow, on the other hand, is, one could say, just “teacherly enough,” just enough of a positive leader to take his teacherless approach and infuse it with an organization. At the same time, Elbow is just “self-help enough” in many regards, none the least of which is his disclosure of his own challenges with writing. Elbow’s *Writing without Teachers* has just the right amount of “curriculum” in order to make his extracurriculum convincing.

The overlapping content of writing self-help literature and its overarching idea of an interiorized stage of invention is fundamental to the extracurriculum of composition. The ability to write becomes part of every individual's endowment, an always-present capacity that doesn't require a classroom or a teacher. Instead, writing ability is extremely portable, part of the self that the writer invariably and easily brings to each new context. Whether that context happens to be part of a classroom or course work—or whether the teacher's chair is literally vacant—is merely happenstance. And this gesture is one which is fundamentally non-elitist. In freeing the novice writer from the classroom—whether by proposing that we “write without teachers” or simply by offering solutions for writing that do not come from the reader's teacher—self-help books and Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* allow composition to be an activity done by all sorts of individuals, not just by students or by professional writers. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, when Composition Studies embraced *Writing without Teachers*, it took on this notion of interiorized, teacher-free invention along with pedagogy such as free writing, conferencing, and peer feedback. When Composition Studies absorbed the self-help affiliated advice inside *Writing without Teachers*, the field was engaged in a fundamental act of “underlife”—seeking new identities to students and teachers.

Chapter VI

Peter Elbow and the Ethos of Self-Help

“Most students have had only the dying part of the school experience.”
—Ken Macrorie, “The Freewriting Relationship”

“The writing teacher cannot afford to hide behind the myth of his own good writing.”
—Donald Murray, *A Writer Teaches Writing*

“I still don’t trust teachers.”
—Peter Elbow, interview, 2009

In trying to better understand the impact of *Writing without Teachers* on the field of Composition Studies, it is important to see the sheer potency of the extracurriculum. When carefully deployed inside academia, the extracurriculum is heady stuff. Elbow, for one, is not alone in deploying the extracurriculum to offer a new perspective on writing instruction. In fact, it is precisely the extracurricular element in the early publications of fellow process theorists Ken Macrorie and Donald Murray that becomes signature to their whole body of work. When we think of Macrorie, we think of a teacher rebel, saying the unsayable about education; when we think of Murray, the first thing to come to mind is probably his identity as a professional author working in academia. Whether through a critique of traditional instruction, a discussion of teachers as impediments to writing, or an offering of a professional writer’s craft, process theory overall distinguishes itself from other writing theory by its application of the extracurriculum. In fact, as will be discussed in this chapter, Elbow, Macrorie, and Murray are household names inside Composition Studies because of their extracurricular identities. In order to give a new

type of advice on writing, these theorists positioned themselves as alternative authorities—as people outside of official academia. What distinguishes Elbow’s work, however, from these other writing theorists is that he provides a more comprehensive set of extracurricular components.

Elbow’s application of the extracurriculum in *Writing without Teachers* is not partial: it doesn’t flit in-out of the extracurriculum. Whereas Macrorie and Murray utilize parts of the extracurriculum, Elbow allows the extracurricular to become fundamental to *Writing without Teachers*. Namely, Elbow is distinct inside academia and in self-education for his extensive exploration of both the self-help and writing group sides of learning to write in the extracurriculum. The two parts of the extracurriculum, as identified by Gere, can be reconceived in this way: self-help complains about formal writing education, perhaps talking about blocks (caused by former training) and offers alternative approaches or ways of thinking about writing. Writing groups, on the other hand, offer people outside of school a way to act, to work collectively, to improve writing. As a result, self-help fleshes out the problems people experience with writing and writing groups offer a more concrete and implementable solution.

Ultimately, there appear to be two factors contributing to Elbow’s achievement in *Writing without Teachers*. The first is the book’s broader range of the extracurricular that has allowed Elbow to essentially “have it both ways”: to be relevant to the classroom while building off of non-classroom or extracurricular elements. The move between self-help and writing groups is akin to the dual focus on individual student learning and the class as a whole, a focus that is on the minds of writing educators in general.

The second factor contributing to Elbow's distinct achievement is the ethos he develops in *Writing without Teachers*. It is who Elbow chooses to speak to—and how he then frames his rhetoric—that mark him as a full-blown participant in the extracurriculum. In order to give radically original advice about writing in the late 1960's and early 1970's, Elbow, Macrorie and Murray certainly all crafted an alternative ethos. Instead of speaking as a straight-forward classroom instructor or textbook author, they spoke respectively as an altruist, iconoclast, and coach. Elbow's ethos, however, is grounded in the self-help approach and is thus the most thoroughly extracurricular. Ethos is crucial to extracurricular texts since an alternative authority (other than a classroom teacher) is inherent to the extracurriculum (or learning outside of school settings). Undoubtedly, the most telling sign of this unusual ethos is the complex rhetorical situation in *Writing without Teachers*: Elbow's addressing of both academic and non-academic readers, with priority given to the latter.

Certainly, Elbow's work parallels and collaborates with much in other process movement texts. At memorial held for Macrorie at the 2010 *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, Elbow spoke of his debt to Macrorie, saying that Macrorie's bravery in challenging traditional academia allowed him to do his own work with less trepidation. Macrorie's notion of freewriting, of course, is seminal to Elbow's work, both in *Writing without Teachers* and elsewhere. Additionally, both Macrorie and Elbow propose that the writing situations between teachers and students is often problematic; both argue for a temporary suspension of the student's obligations to the teacher-reader. That said, Elbow's use of an outsider ethos is sustained. Elbow is distinct from other writing theorists, including Macrorie, for the way in which he has always kept

one foot inside and outside academia, for saying we should literally and metaphorically write-without-teachers.

Elbow's Audience in Writing without Teachers

The audience addressed in *Writing without Teachers* is the most striking aspect of the book's rhetorical situation: rather than teachers or students, Elbow speaks to readers located outside of schools. In the preface of *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow states that his main audience consists of "young people and adults not in school" and that he "particularly wants this book to help students not enrolled in a writing class and people out of school altogether" (v; vii). Gere suggests that the book's title gestures to the extracurriculum but that the opening lines hone in on the "self-improvement constituency" (*Writing Groups* 48). Gere also suggests that more than the book's opening, the remainder of *Writing without Teachers* addresses self-help readers since "Elbow talks directly to writers, making few references to schools and teachers" (49). Evidence suggests that Elbow's book, like writing self-help literature, has maintained a continuous audience of readers outside of academia. At the time of Gere's *Writing Groups*, Elbow's book had been purchased by approximately 100,000 readers who, because *Writing without Teachers* has not been widely adopted as a course text book, were necessarily non-students (Gere *Writing Groups* 49-50). Elbow conceived of the book as a trade book for non-academics: "I didn't think of *Writing without Teachers* as scholarly. I thought of it as 'I have the truth to tell everyone'... Somehow, I just felt the authority. I wanted to stand on a mountain top and tell people how they can [write]"

(Personal interview). For the most part, *Writing without Teachers* is directed to individuals who wish to write for reasons independent of any course.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the implication of Elbow's designated main audience is that they are individuals not enrolled in writing courses either for socio-economic reasons or because they have found past writing courses and writing instructors to be hindrances to their writing. Both reasons are inherently extracurricular: people have historically found alternative ways to improve their writing either because their access to education was limited or as a form of critique of formal instruction. By selecting non-students as his primary audience, Elbow is radically altering writing expertise, suggesting that effective learning about writing can happen outside of classrooms and beyond the influence of teachers. As Richard Boyd has argued, Elbow's announcement that his book is chiefly for people outside of school constitutes "the most important, yet enigmatic, words in the entire text, given the institutionalizing of Elbow's pedagogy in textbooks and writing programs" (19).

On the other hand, Elbow's audience, while chiefly self-help readers, includes individuals from traditional academia. In the 1973 preface, Elbow turns directly to his teacher-readers in a "note to teachers" in which he allows for the application of his approach as pedagogy with a caveat: "[t]hough I particularly want this book to help students not enrolled in a writing class and people out of school altogether, nevertheless I think that most of the book will also be useful to students in a writing course" (vi). In a retrospective glance in the introduction to the second edition, Elbow evaluates his approach as classroom pedagogy, saying that it has been "widely assumed as standard practice in the teaching of writing," but in a parenthetical he quickly says that

“teacherless groups lose some of their essence” when students are required by a teacher to engage in them (xxvi). Another way in which Elbow bridges both the non-academic and academic audience is in uniting them together in the common struggle to write. He says that individuals without formal education as well as those with education (a category which includes teachers of writing) universally suffer when writing:

People without education say, “If only I had education I could write.” People with education say, “If only I had talent I could write.” People with education and talent say, “If only I had self-discipline I could write.” People with education, talent, and self-discipline—and there are plenty of them who can’t write—say, “If only...” and don’t know what to say next. (12)

It is as Elbow contended in an interview in the journal *Writing on the Edge*, “Scratch an academic and you’ll find someone who’s in trouble with writing” (cited in Hjortshoj 5). Overall, the audience in the preface and introduction switches between non-academics and academics, at times from paragraph to paragraph. This switch is particularly apparent in Elbow’s rebuttals, as will be shortly discussed. This ability to meld the different interests of the extracurriculum and the curriculum has allowed Elbow’s book to have significant purchase inside Composition Studies, as well as stirring up the controversy around Elbow that has been evident for decades. Writing self-help and writing groups have separately contained great interest for large populations of writers outside of school settings in the United States. The inclusion of this popularized interest in writing would invariably be highly charged if brought inside academia, as it was with *Writing without Teachers*. Moreover, Elbow’s address of academics, especially his inclusion of them in the challenges of composing, is an emotionally-charged development that would likely set off reactions from scholars.

Ethos in General / Ethos of Self-Help

Ethos is a key factor in any rhetorical situation, allowing the writer through self-representation to persuasively represent a problem to a particular audience. Aristotle thought ethos the most influential of rhetorical appeals, and recent theorists equate ethos with character which “in many instances, *is* the force of an argument” (Kinneavy and Warshauer 172; Alcorn 4). Whether one believes that rhetorical situations exist prior to language or that rhetorical situations are formed by language, ethos is a powerful force in discourse. To what extent Elbow created through his discourse the rhetorical situation he describes in *Writing without Teachers*—the rhetorical situation of blocked writers who struggle because of teachers—may be worth investigating. As Richard Vatz sees the rhetorical situation, salience of a problem is created by rhetoric rather than by an objective, freestanding situation. While there certainly may be some truth to the idea that Elbow exacerbated our awareness of the challenges of writing-for-teachers simply through his presentation, Elbow was not the first to describe that particular rhetorical situation. Elbow may have caused greater awareness of the problematic of writing for teachers, but the issue had been discussed by many others, both inside and outside academia, prior to *Writing without Teachers*. In “The Rhetorical Situation,” Lloyd Bitzer identifies the shaping influence of people as a constraint upon the rhetorical situation. In addition to audience, the rhetor him- or herself is a person who enters a text and shapes it through his or her beliefs, experience, expertise, and motivation: “When the orator enters the situation, his discourse not only harnesses constraints given by situation but provides additional important constraints—for example his personal character, his logical proofs,

and his style” (8). According to Bitzer, the constraints of ethos are something the rhetor is in control of and can manipulate—what Aristotle named “artistic proofs”—to be differentiated from the constraints upon a text brought about by outside people in the audience (8).

In general, the sway of ethos is worth close examination, although the scholarly preference is to think of academic discourse as based on objectivity rather than character. Likewise, S. Michael Halloran ribbed of Aristotle: “Of the three modes of appeal, Aristotle acknowledges *ethos* to be probably the most important, though he seems to wish that *logos* were” (60). A rhetor’s construction of a particular ethos—and not his or her actual character or the logical quality of the argument—is often for good or ill the critical suasive factor (Corder 104-6). If the subjective force of ethos in general seems suspect to academic readers, the ethos of self-help will be more provocative since it is an ethos that often tries to supersede academia in expertise.

The rhetorical stance of self-help authors contains particular ethical appeals because of its goal of conveying information outside of conventional channels of expertise. Moreover, the rhetoric of self-help has had powerful sway over a wide readership inside the United States. As Steven Starker describes this power, one Starker casts as prophetic:

The oracle at Delphi, whose wisdom, we are assured by legend, came directly from the gods, spoke with relatively few privileged pilgrims and never offered clearcut directions or solutions; ambiguous prophesies were the order of the day. The new oracle, on the other hand, regularly addresses a mass audience, offers exact directions for solving problems, claims competence in virtually all aspects of human concern, and is relatively free of external evaluation and regulation. It does not seem wise to ignore an agency with characteristics such as these. (5)

One of the forces of the self-help ethos is its self-differentiation from academic expertise. Separating itself from scholarly ethos, the self-help ethos frequently establishes its authority to speak by highlighting the author's first-hand experience with a given topic or struggle. Self-help advice is pragmatic. Its chief goal is to imply that change, improvement, or edification is possible for the lay reader by following the path the author him- or herself utilized to get through a problem.

Thus, the self-help author needs to connect with the reader in a different fashion than he or she would a scholarly audience. The ethical appeals of self-help authors in general include the use of autobiographical examples and a jargon-reduced discourse (Dolby 38). Depending on the socio-economic and gendered status of the self-help author, additional complexities may arise in their formation of ethical appeals. For instance, in a recent article in *Rhetoric Review*, Carolyn Skinner shows how nineteenth-century women physicians had to develop complex rhetorical appeals in order to write self-help literature on sexuality and reproduction without losing respectability. Skinner demonstrates how women physicians used connotative language, metaphor, and stipulative definition to construct their ethos of good Victorian women while at the same time shaping women's involvement in medicine. Likewise, writing self-help authors have frequently had to engage in fancy rhetorical footwork to win over their extracurricular audiences.

Writing self-help authors in particular need to differentiate themselves from the conventional authority on composition—the teacher or professor. For most readers, writing self-help literature constitutes a supportive alternative to the writing teacher, a figure of red-pen criticism and a suppressor of ability and creativity. When constructing

ethical appeals, writing self-help authors typically adopt an altruistic stance: they purport to have knowledge about the writing process that can alleviate the reader's writing block—knowledge which they are willing to share. In investigating the self-help ethos of *Writing without Teachers*, I will turn to the canon of style or *elocutio* to determine how specific word choices establish an alternative, teacher-displacing ethos, including figuration and connotative language. *Eunoia*, the component of ethical appeals which entails an emotional establishment of goodwill, also figures prominently in writing self-help and in Elbow through homonia (like-mindedness) and through details about the emotional aspects of writing for teachers. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, writing self-help author Brenda Ueland represented herself as someone driven to help the reader access his or her creativity. Similar to Elbow, Ueland developed her stance by displacing her authority, attributing power to students and showing her own past vulnerability to writing difficulties. Additionally, Ueland adopted an evangelical tone, one of at times hyperbolic support for the reader's ability, that seems similar to Elbow's degree of concern for struggling writers. Natalie Goldberg and Ann Lamott also offer their support to struggling writers by including their own challenges as writers.

These ethical appeals are intricately connected to the rhetorical situation of the writing self-help texts; as with *Writing without Teachers*, books by Ueland, Goldberg, and Lamott address an audience located outside of school. When the rhetorical situation changes such that the audience is a writing instructor, different ethical appeals will be evident. This change is precisely what happens with key texts from the early process movement. Early tracts by Donald Murray and Ken Macrorie show a great deal of overlap with Elbow's approach. In fact, in writing self-help literature what is evident is a

displacement of the conventional writing teacher that can also be found in the process movement with its focus on creating a more student-centered, less mechanistic classroom. As I will discuss in this chapter, Macrorie and Murray, in giving their advice on composing, both construct an ethos which is an alternative to the traditional writing teacher. However, the audience of Murray's *A Writer Teaches Writing* and Macrorie's *Telling Writing* is comprised of writing instructors, and the books are rooted in the classroom—and not fully rooted in the extracurriculum. The ethical appeals established by Macrorie and Murray are geared for their audience of writing teachers.

Elbow's Ethos

In *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow develops a set of ethical appeals that establish him as a fellow struggler in an act of writing that is more expansive than classroom-based writing. What differentiates Elbow's ethos from process theorists such as Macrorie and Murray, both of whom showed an interest in displacing conventional teacher authority, is the degree to which Elbow takes writing problems and possibilities outside the classroom. In Elbow's rendering, writing becomes a personal and political power with implications beyond whether a student feels inhibited by a teacher's expectations during any given assignment. This enlarged scope of writing is captured in the opening of the 1973 preface to *Writing without Teachers*: "Many people are now trying to become less helpless, both personally and politically: trying to claim more control over their own lives. One of the ways people most lack control over their own lives is through lacking control over words" (v). Although Elbow also attributes

inability to write to problems with teachers, this inability becomes primarily a human problem rather than a student-teacher problem: oppression rather than English. The change in scope of the problem is evident in Elbow's purported audience for *Writing without Teachers*: people who are not enrolled in school. In order to differentiate his advice from that of a conventional teacher, Elbow establishes an altruistic ethos which sees people as genuinely suffering from their writing education—there's the sense of a lasting, life-long damage to their ability to self-express. Elbow's well-known solution to the conundrum of writing-for-teachers, namely a student-centered course, displaces conventional teacher authority. However, the other way in which his book advocates "writing without teachers" is through the rhetorical situation set up between Elbow's ethos and his audience.

Elbow builds an ethos of altruism that includes the possibility of failure in the preface of the first edition through stylistic choices. This ethical appeal of altruism is evident in the number of times "help" appears in the opening of the preface of the first edition, especially in his overview of the book's goals. He thus controls the connotation of his endeavor since "help" is different than "teach" or even "advise." "Help" suggests a struggling party and a certain emotional urgency, in addition to implying a collaborative effort. Through repetition of "I am trying" and "I try" in these passages, Elbow also portrays himself as vulnerable to verbal failure, a fellow struggler in the act of writing. As with his readers, Elbow cannot guarantee that his own words in *Writing without Teachers* will be a success. In subsequent editions, Elbow continues to foster *eunoia* through controlled connotation between the words "wish," "dream," and "desire." The first paragraph of the new edition ends, "How amazing to learn that everyone seems to

harbor the wish” (xi). “Wish” carries the connotation is that it’s a secret, wistful, maybe unspoken, shy fact about us: “when I talked about my approach, [people] would tell me these feelings—sometimes almost sheepishly. Some people scarcely even admit to themselves that they want to write, but at certain unguarded moments talking to certain people, the desire pops into mind” (xi). Wanting to write is not just an individualized wish because everyone has this wish; it’s so universal because it can be unconscious.

Elbow’s message unfolds through these word choice, implying first that it’s okay to wish, then that he knows the reader because he knows their secret wishes, and lastly that he can be trusted. By the second paragraph, “wish” becomes “dream”: “Of course most people have had bad experiences in writing, so they seldom talk about their dream” (xi). By next page, the word becomes “desire.” The connotation of “dream” is something experienced and unfolded, a movie before the mind, not just a statement as a wish is. Then the connotation of “desire” is more impassioned. This culminates in this passage about teachers: “And yet a desire to write still lurks in almost everyone. I guess I got my title right: ‘Writing *Without* Teachers.’ Teachers seem to play a big role in making it harder for people to write. Yet they can’t quite stamp out the desire” (xii). “Stamp out” is physical and aggressive, putting out an energy or light source (as in a fire). Similarly, in the 1998 introduction to the second edition of *Writing with Power*, he says his book contains “messages” (note, not a thesis)—again, the connotation is that it is a secret, personal (not academic, not an assignment or lecture) communication with the reader.

The expertise Elbow creates in *Writing without Teachers* is founded on admissions of personal struggle with writing rather than obtained mastery. According to Boyd, “Elbow’s refusal of the mantle of expertise stands at the very center of his project,

for he begins *Writing without Teachers* with the claim that the text's authority resides solely in its author's struggles as a writer" (15). In *Writing without Teachers*, the authority to talk about how to write is based on subjective experience—and specifically an experience of personal struggle with course material (in this case, with writing). Elbow evokes the affective side of composing in disclosures of his own difficulties with writing and by calling attention to the reader's longstanding emotional relationship with writing. Elbow explains that his awareness of the writing process came from trying to deal with his own writing blocks:

My difficulties in writing, my years as an illiterate English teacher, and a recent habit of trying to keep a stream of consciousness diary whenever life in general got to be too much for me—all combined to make me notice what was happening as I tried to write. I kept a kind of almost-diary. There were two main themes—what I called “stuckpoints” and “breakthroughs.” Stuckpoints were when I couldn't get anything written at all no matter how hard I tried: out of pure desperation and rage I would finally stop trying to write the thing and take a fresh sheet of paper and simply try to collect evidence: babble everything I felt, when it started, and what kind of writing and mood and weather had been going on. Breakthroughs were when the log-jam broke and something good happened: I would often stop and try to say afterwards what I thought happened. I recommend this practice. (*Without* 17-18)

By displaying his own reactions to writing challenges, Elbow is inviting the reader to consider his or her own emotions about their own writing. Employing pathos, Elbow tries to engage the reader's senses of pleasure, pain, dignity, shame, pride. He suggests that they are entitled to pleasure in writing (xxi), that they have the same skill as esteemed academics.

It's important to note that *Writing without Teachers* started as private writing, as notes Elbow wrote to himself to guide himself out of his own writer's blocks in graduate school (personal interview). Therefore, *Writing without Teachers* was really Elbow's

private self-help book for himself: teachers had not helped him out of his bind with writing, so he taught himself different strategies. Included in these jottings was a drawing Elbow had done of the phrase “writing without tears” in which “che,” making it “writing without teachers” appears between the “r” and “s” in “tears” in the form of a tear-drop apostrophe (personal interview). In playing with the phrase “writing without tears,” Elbow was thinking of the popular self-education series in Britain in the 1960’s with titles like *Latin without Tears*. That the book began first as Elbow’s self-advice and became his advice to others coincides with what Dolby has described as the tendency in self-help authors to “bear witness to their own transformation or conversion” in relation to a personal challenge (48). The book is interlarded with Elbow’s sense of struggle and achievement and is a highly affective text. Such is not the case with another immensely popular writing book, Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*. As Mark Garvey describes the origins of this book, it began in far more intra-curricular and school-bound circumstances. For instance, E.B. White was a former student of William Strunk, an English professor at Cornell. The original text of *Elements of Style* was essentially Strunk’s handbook with abbreviations for responding to student texts and purchased by Cornell students. White was asked to revise the original handbook decades after graduating from Strunk’s classes and well into his own successful career as a creative writer. While White brings a bit of the extracurriculum to the famous tract by incorporating his professional writer’s perspective, much like Don Murray would two decades later, the origins of *Elements of Style* reside in the classroom and the teacher’s view of writing, unlike Elbow’s emotional advice to himself, written on tiny pieces of paper.

Elbow's focus and even invocation of emotions concerning the writing experience runs counter to the dispassionate academic exploration of the topic. His subjective treatment of writing has possibly unsettled composition specialists (Papoulis; Richmond). As Kia Richmond and Irene Papoulis have suggested, opposition to Elbow's work can be attributed to latent unease with Elbow's emphasis on the affective dimensions of learning and of the discipline's scholarly production. According to Papoulis, the personal component of all writing spotlighted by Elbow's work arouses in composition specialists "unexamined fears" that in doing their own scholarship they are "not being rigorous enough or not playing by the rules" (171). Furthermore, Elbow likely raises academic discomfort with his intimation that academics are not always successful writers themselves. For instance, Elbow describes his struggle as "my years as an illiterate English teacher" or points out that he became an instructor at M.I.T in the early 1960's because he felt like a failure as a writer and academic, he is pointing out academia's Achilles heel (17; xiv).

Emotion therefore has everything to do with the ethos in *Writing without Teachers* because of the nature of writing expertise Elbow posits. The authority to talk about how to write is based on subjective experience—and specifically an experience of personal struggle with course material (in this case, with writing). As Jakob Wisse has commented, a strictly Aristotelian sense of ethos would emphasize rationality over emotion, although the later Ciceronian approach allowed for "an ethos of sympathy" (234-6). As such, a light emotion such as sympathy would build the character of a rhetor, while more violent emotions such as anger and jealousy would be classified as the appeal of pathos since their application was meant to persuade in ways distinct from

ethos (237). Elbow's application of emotion for the most part is distinctly linked to his self-representation. Overall, his use of emotion contributes to like-mindedness as he interplays his own difficulties and the reader's difficulties, such that the reader joins him in agreeing that writing (and writing for teachers) is at times unnecessarily hard.

Elbow further formulates a like-mindedness through the use of autobiographical examples—largely personal put-downs about himself as an academic and athlete. He focuses on his school experiences to obtain these self-effacements because school is the Goliath behind this book and because the reader who associates nearly every act of writing with school settings will expect school to become a major topic of Elbow's conversation. And so in his introduction, Elbow provides an autobiographical account of his path from high school to author of *Writing without Teachers*. In one of those autobiographical moments, Elbow reveals:

(1960-3) I felt a total failure. I was having trouble functioning. I never wanted to have anything to do with books or the academy again. But after knocking around with short-term jobs, I was offered (through an old teacher) a chance to be a last-minute instructor at M.I.T. I discovered that even though I hated being a student, I liked teaching; and that even though the inability to write prevented me from being a student, it was no hindrance to teaching. (*Without* xiv)

Criticism of himself as a student tacitly implies criticism of the school system for making it so hard for him (and by implication others like him). So Elbow tells the reader that he went to an "unimpressive boarding school" because it allowed him to focus on his real passion, skiing. In doing so, he is casting himself as more like the proverbial "jock" than hardcore intellectual. Even in discussing his skiing, Elbow continues to be a bit self-effacing, explaining that his subsequent choice of college was based on the fact that its ski team, while Division I, was "bad enough that I could probably get on it" (xiii). At the

same time, he repeats the names of the Ivy League schools he attended—Harvard, Oxford—which does quite a bit of rhetorical footwork—in this parenthetical “(Harvard on top of Oxford on top of Williams!)” (xxiv). It subtly reestablishes Elbow as a well-schooled academic and distances him from his readers, many of whom did not go to Harvard and probably share society’s awe for the institution. Amy Spangler Gerald has also drawn attention to Elbow’s institutional name-dropping and has argued that it indicates Elbow’s appropriation of the experience of marginalized individuals despite his background of privilege (76). Another way of understanding this Ivy-“bling” is that it contributes to Elbow’s compassionate ethos by implying how daunting his experience must have been as a struggling student. His readers are invited to imagine how the struggle to write for teachers must be amplified in such imposing settings, and so Elbow’s advice on writing is more worthwhile.

Part of Elbow’s attempt to replace the seamless authority of the nineteenth-century school “master” with an ethos of vulnerability and shared experience with the reader is also established through Elbow’s inclusion of his own writing and teaching process. Perhaps most significantly, Elbow suggests—in a way reminiscent to Ueland—that he finds an exit to his writing block only through his students. Elbow learns the process described in *Writing without Teachers* from *not* being a student but instead from working with faculty and with students: “I didn’t solve it till I worked without teachers—writing to colleagues and students at Franconia” (xix). Similarly, Ueland discovers her way out of block by watching her students: “It was my class who showed me that I was working in the wrong way” (*If* 42). It’s one thing for a self-help author to reach his or her ideas from students or novices; it’s altogether another rhetorical matter when that self-

help author divulges where they obtained their ideas about writing. That Elbow makes this move, tipping his hat to students, is connected to his displacement of teacher authority and his instatement of students as authorities. In this schema, teachers and not students are the dependents: “students can learn without teachers even though teachers cannot teach without students. The deepest dependency is not of students upon teachers, but of teachers upon students” (xviii). In addition to casting himself as vulnerable and reliant on students, Elbow develops vulnerability in the way he discloses his rougher writings.

Instead of presenting only a polished final article or chapter with no traces of its construction, Elbow both in his early and later work includes types of discourse usually relegated to drafts, to be hidden from readers. He has shown readers his freewriting, encapsulating them in the amber of publication. Elbow has also shown the moments of discovery—and highlighted them as such—from his writing, rather than walking them back into a draft and reorganizing such as to appear that he knew the discovered idea all along, as most authors do. For example, in discussing his Growing Process for writing and the need to accept its subsequent discomfort, Elbow provides a freewrite which reveals his own unease:

I just realized why I'm going crazy. Why I'm starting and stopping in despair. Over and over again. It's so terrible. Finally realize what I'm feeling. *I can't stand writing when I don't know what I'm writing about!* It feels so insecure. Such a mess. Don't know where it's going or coming from. Just writing off into the blue. I'm wanting a center of gravity. But I'm just starting. Can't know what the center of gravity is yet. Got to put up with it. It won't come till the end. (*Without* 31)

These freewrites function to show Elbow as vulnerable to the same problems as his reader; they also build his ethos by lending the sensation of unfiltered honesty from an

expert. Elbow is, of course, selecting which freewrites or meta notes to include and is thus in control of his vulnerable self-representation. Notably, too, the actual manuscript of *Writing without Teachers* originated from Elbow's writing comforting notes to himself on scraps of paper to help himself exit writing blocks. *Writing without Teachers* is self-help in the sense that its author first helped himself out of a problem—and then was able to throw the ladder to others in the water. The inclusion of seemingly rougher (note the sentence fragments in the quoted freewrite) passages of his own writing is another way Elbow appears to be throwing a life-line out to readers.

This display of vulnerability (that expertise doesn't necessarily mean knowing everything ahead of time) baldly occurs in the first sentence of the introduction to the second edition of *Writing without Teachers*: "It wasn't until after I wrote *Writing without Teachers* that I discovered something remarkable: everyone in the world wants to write" (xi). Here, Elbow is revealing that he discovered a central idea for an entire book only after he had written the book: quite different from maintaining a predetermined thesis typical of the academic defense. Additionally, Elbow virtually ends *Writing without Teachers* with such rough freewriting: right after his more theoretical appendix essay, "The Doubting Game and the Believing Game—An Analysis of the Intellectual Enterprise," Elbow offers a second appendix. The second appendix, casually titled, "A Couple of Early Notes to Myself about My Writing," shares his beginning ideas toward the book. Tellingly, it is sandwiched between the more theoretical discussion of doubt and belief and the Works Cited. This disclosure of his after-the-fact discoveries is also evident in his 1971 article, "Exploring My Teaching," in which Elbow shows himself figuring out and confessing his own motivation for teaching—to be authentically heard

by students (753). In these meta-linguistic moments, Elbow is inviting criticism because he shows his flaws and the paths of his thinking. He reveals where he has doubts and thus makes openings for his opposition. This ethos established in Elbow's first book—with its penchant for showing its rougher writing moments—is ultimately suggestive of the type of in-classroom teacherly ethos Elbow advocates: namely, a teacher who writes with students.

The rebuttals in *Writing without Teachers* are also indicative of Elbow's complex relationship to audience and of his attempt to establish like-mindedness. Typically, rebuttals occur between scholars; rebuttals don't typically discredit academics to lay audiences. The audience in Elbow's preface and introduction, however, switches between non-academics and academics, at times from paragraph to paragraph, with preferential treatment handed to the non-academic reader. When addressing non-academic readers, he is protective of their exposure to theoretical debate: this is apparent by his decision to isolate the theory of the Doubting and Believing Game in an appendix: "I didn't want my theoretical analysis to get in the way of practical people using the book in practical ways" (xx). Elbow introduces the non-academic reader to prominent scholars who have criticized his work by first emphasizing their high status inside the field of Composition Studies—"the editor of the leading journal in composition studies" and "A highly respected scholar and historian of composition." Elbow somewhat off-handedly dismisses scholars' critiques of his work, further displacing the expertise of academia. For instance, he attributes James Berlin's critique to a lack of reading comprehension or studiousness: "[Berlin] does write briefly of my epistemology, but it's hard to believe that he looked carefully at what I wrote" (xxvi-xxvii). Furthermore, when addressing

teachers, Elbow's paragraphs are largely admonitions, established in part by an increase in the number of italicized words and the subsequent emphatic voice. When he admonishes writing teachers, everyone else reads those parts, too, and so Elbow is monitoring the teacher, setting up certain expectations for the teacher, not the student. He's describing the type of teacher behavior he expects and the type he wants his readers to advocate for themselves. Elbow partially builds homonia through this unusual method of rebuttal.

The Process Ethos and the Extracurriculum of Composition

Elbow's ethical appeals in *Writing without Teachers* establish him as an alternative authority to the conventional writing instructor and position him to give advice about writing to a self-help audience. A similar attempt to displace conventional teacher authority is evident in other seminal early texts of the process movement. Altered ethos goes hand-in-hand with the pedagogical innovation of this movement. The process movement changed how we think about students and student writing, and that change required a new way of thinking about writing expertise. Essentially, the process movement affected how we position ourselves and students in relation to the writing experience, creating a more student-centered, less mechanistic classroom. Early process theory is associated with this authority displacement—epitomized in Peter Elbow's "writing without teachers"—a displacement necessitated because of the perception that teachers often hindered rather than fostered student writing—epitomized by Ken Macrorie's "Engfish."

This change of position was in part orchestrated by the ethos of Ken Macrorie and Donald Murray, along with Peter Elbow, in their earliest book-length publications. While Elbow's ethos could be described as that of an altruist, Macrorie's ethos in *Telling Writing* (1970) can be described as that of an iconoclast and Murray's in *A Writer Teaches Writing* (1968) that of a coach. The ethos of each of these theorists draws on the extracurriculum of composition; each of these theorists points to a learning of writing *and* a teaching of writing that occur *outside* a classroom. The process movement seems to have been attracted to perspectives critical of traditional academia and so resembles self-help: "those of us who read and talk and write and teach about the writing process...have consistently and insistently represented ourselves as outsiders who doubt the validity, the truth, the value of what has traditionally gone on in writing classrooms" (Marshall 46). This critical stance toward classroom instruction and appreciation for outliers was not a brand-new phenomena in academia: it was evident in Progressive education early in the twentieth century and in a tradition of writing self-help literature in the United States.

Despite variation in their rhetorical personality, these ethos each differentiate Macrorie, Elbow and Murray from the conventional expertise of a teacher and help establish a strong outsider tradition within the process movement: with one fundamental difference. While Macrorie, Murray and Elbow each to some extent craft an outsider's stance in order to give advice about writing, Elbow is unique in that his outsider's ethos is based on self-help. On the other hand, Macrorie and Murray, while strenuously critiquing academia, are writing to an audience of educators. The rhetorical situation of these three process texts is therefore different—with subtle consequences. As will be

discussed, this self-help component of *Writing without Teachers* has resulted in a variety of responses from writing specialists to Elbow and his text over the years.

In fact, the ethos displayed on the pages of *Telling Writing, A Writer Teaches Writing* and *Writing Without Teachers* is a type of archeological evidence for the process movement and for how that authority displacement occurred and demonstrates important ties to the extracurriculum. No one even remotely associated with twenty-first century composition instruction would question the pedagogical contributions of Macrorie, Elbow and Murray to the process movement: freewriting, one-on-one conferences, and pre-writing are foundational to the movement and ubiquitous in current first-year composition courses. While their influence is certainly connected to these pedagogies, the impact of their alternative ethos has been overlooked, despite the rhetorical clout attributed to ethical appeals.

What made *Writing without Teachers* influential was its addressing of a lay audience largely skeptical of formal education. In publications prior to *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow had already upset several fundamental assumptions about the sanctity of teaching and the status of professors and did so within a rhetorical context that featured academics as his audience. In these articles, Elbow's audience, readers of *College English*, is much similar to Macrorie and Murray's audience. Like Macrorie and Murray, Elbow in his early scholarly publication in what Boyd described as an attempt to purge twentieth-century writing instruction of the nineteenth-century concept of the "masterful teacher," worked to de-center teacher expertise (14-15). This deconstruction is evident in Elbow's early articles published in *College English* between 1968 and 1971, prior to *Writing Without Teachers*: "A Method for Teaching Writing" (1968); "The Definition of

Teaching” (1968); and “Exploring My Teaching” (1971). Elbow attributes the classroom ethos of writing instructors, which he says is largely ineffective and causes student disinterest and writing blocks, to something as subjective as the instructor’s need for control after a loss of control during doctoral training (“The Definition of Teaching”). In these articles, Elbow suggests that the conventional authority of the teacher may be a hindrance to student writing: “I find an inescapable power relationship in any institutionalized teaching. I feel this power relationship hinders the sort of learning situation I seek—one in which the student comes to act on his own motivation and comes to evaluate his ideas and perceptions on their own merits” (“Exploring My Teaching” 750). In a similar attempt to increase the vulnerability of teachers, Elbow proposes that faculty occasionally teach courses outside their discipline in order to “share a spirit of questioning, wondering, and doubting” with their students (“The Definition” 191). These articles, however, were written for an audience of academics (hence their publication venue). In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow’s audience is attuned to individuals outside of academia. Elbow conceived of the book as a trade book for non-academics: “I didn’t think of *Writing Without Teachers* as scholarly. I thought of it as ‘I have the truth to tell everyone’ ... Somehow, I just felt the authority. I wanted to stand on a mountain top and tell people how they can [write]” (Personal interview). In this rhetorical situation, Elbow positions both himself (as advice-giver) and his reader (as individual who wants to improve as a writer) essentially as outsiders to the classroom.

Ken Macrorie the Iconoclast

The outsider tradition is strongly present in Ken Macrorie's 1970 *Telling Writing* in which an alternative ethos is immediately established in the first pages and serves as the foundation for Macrorie's pedagogy in the rest of the book. This outsider tradition is indicative of the way in which the process movement was drawn to certain aspects of the extracurriculum, though none as comprehensive as self-help. Of the ethos developed by the three process theorists, Macrorie's ethos is arguably the most patent in its nonconformity. In *Telling Writing*, Macrorie positions himself as a Jeremiah of composition, decrying how writing instruction is carried on all the while seeming immune to the problems he's identifying in other teachers. Macrorie does not detail his own struggle with writing (unlike Elbow) or teaching (though Macrorie does provide his journey to alternative teaching in his 1974 teaching memoir *A Vulnerable Teacher*). His position as outsider is amplified in his self-appointment as critic of Composition: unlike Murray, Macrorie does not provide his views on writing instruction at the invite of academia. Macrorie's audience in *Telling Writing* is both the writing instructor and the writing student; his approach to composing is geared toward the student writer, unlike Elbow. His stance partakes of the extracurriculum in its critique of traditional instruction. More importantly, Macrorie's approach is extracurricular in its positing of a composing "space"—albeit temporary—in which the student works free of the constraints of writing for teachers. In essence, Macrorie's approach is "writing-without-teachers" but only for the time in which it takes to use free writing to break free of English. Accordingly, Macrorie's ethical appeals are connected to that critique and alternative to traditional writing instruction.

Macrorie frontloads his ethical appeals such that by the fourth chapter of *Telling Writing* both his critique of classroom writing instruction and his main strategy for fixing that instruction have been announced. Macrorie's chief criticism of writing education is that it causes an unhealthy dynamic between students and teachers, resulting in flaccid compositions. In essence, Macrorie's proposal—though he does not use these terms as such—is a reconfiguration of *inventio* and the rhetorical situation of writing for teachers. Macrorie alters invention such that students can delay thinking about teachers' expectations: thus, the teacher's traditional authority as evaluator is displaced, at least when the student starts to compose. Free writing is the mechanism by which students can enter this altered space of invention; the speed and openness of topic allow students to transcend the rhetorical situation of writing for teachers and compose in a natural voice. The organization of *Telling Writing* is built on Macrorie's ethical appeals, frontloaded at the start of the book. In Chapter 1: Poison Fish, Macrorie delineates the problem with classroom instruction and establishes himself as an independent critic; in Chapter 2: Free Writing, he describes the principal solution to the problem (free writing); and in Chapter 3 he defines "good" student writing. Similar to Elbow, Macrorie's definition of student writing emphasizes student experience and voice in order for meaningful writing to arise (24). However, in the assuredness of his approach—encapsulated in this quick criticism, diagnosis, and treatment plan—Macrorie differs from Elbow. For the most part, subsequent chapters discuss various stylistic and feedback strategies which are recognizable in older, more traditional writing handbooks.

This iconoclastic ethos is evident in Macrorie's use of student testimony as his opening to the book. This testimony is indicative of the rhetorical situation of *Telling*

Writing—an exposé of poor teacher-student writing relations. Macrorie’s preface begins with an epigraph containing an anonymous student’s testimony of conventional writing education: “I wrote to fit a mold and my style was cramped. If footnotes were supposed to have been written in mirror-reversed Sanskrit, I would have complied. I was no fool. I wanted to get into college” (i). In starting with student criticism about writing for teachers, Macrorie is different than Elbow and Murray. It’s a strategy he repeats two pages later in the opening of Chapter 1 in which he recounts an incident in which another anonymous student approaches an equally anonymous teacher (though one gets the sense that this teacher could be Macrorie) with a complaint about his English teacher. In his 1970 castigation of the American university, *Uptaught*, Macrorie begins with an even more derogatory student testimony: “I know a professor at Western who was talking to a class of 250 students on ‘Openness’ with his fly unzipped” (1). Macrorie employs students’ criticism of teachers to cut to the chase, to illuminate the essential problem, as he sees it, with writing instruction—to alarm or even shame the reader who happens to be a teacher.

This use of critical student testimony feels like the 1970 equivalent of telling a colleague, “Check out what students have said about you on ‘Ratemyteacher.com.’” If this student is complaining about his teacher, presumably the same things are being said of readers of *Telling Writing* who are also writing teachers. This testimony is indicative of the rhetorical situation of *Telling Writing*—an exposé of poor teacher-student writing relations. While writing self-help literature is frequently critical of formal instruction, such harsh testimony from students or novices is not evident. For instance, although Ueland certainly criticizes teachers in *If You Want to Write*, her reproaches are limited to

an adjective (like “prissy”) or a phrase—not an entire scenario or testimony. This makes sense since writing self-help, unlike *Telling Writing*, is not rooted in the classroom. Therefore, in writing self-help, interactions between teachers and students are less evident, if detailed at all. Macrorie’s ethotic power in these testimonies is also enhanced by the sense that students have confided in Macrorie, and the fact that he preserves students’ anonymity suggests that Macrorie, screening the reader, has judged the reader not entirely trustworthy. Macrorie thus at least initially aligns himself with student perceptions, an ethical appeal that is bolstered when he uses student terminology: Engfish.

The centerpiece of Macrorie’s pedagogy in *Telling Writing* is the distinction between truthful and phony student writing, encapsulated in the neologism “Engfish.” Engfish is students’ response to teachers’ reading habits: the way teachers overly focus on correcting surface issues rather than genuinely responding to student ideas. When students suspect that their ideas are not valued, they hand teachers a discourse which is artificial in style and content. Engfish is the insipid (and smelly) discourse which students have developed in response to teachers’ expectations. Engfish, defined as “the official language of the school,” became seminal to both *Telling Writing* (basically an extended argument about how to avoid Engfish) and to process movement’s critique of writing instruction (*Telling* 4). In addition to being an unconventional bit of language, the term “Engfish” builds an outsider stance because it validates writing done outside of school settings. This unpleasant Engfish is portrayed as both unnatural and as “a tongue never spoken outside the walls” of the classroom (3). The implication is that school-based assignments are what Joseph Petraglia calls “pseudotransactional,” that they do not

correspond with writing tasks from outside academia. The students who confide in Macrorie, such as the one who claimed he would learn Sanskrit to pass, see assigned writing as a matter of hoop-jumping, what Ann Blakeslee describes as student perceptions about the authenticity of writing tasks.

Two things to note about Macrorie's employment of English are that it is first a neologism and, second, that it is a student-created word: both point to Macrorie's alternative authority. Neologisms are a radical act of redefinition, indicating that conventional, dictionary-preapproved language would not suffice to capture problems in writing education. Macrorie uses neologisms (in itself a challenge to authority) whose content is anti-authoritarian. Secondly, this neologism of vital importance to Macrorie's argument was made by a student, not a teacher or theorist, suggestive of a displacement of conventional authority about writing. Macrorie creates his own neologism in the final chapter in *Telling Writing*, "Suggestions for Teachers." "Youschool" is explained as the ideal learning "relationship, in which the students' experience counts as much as the experience of the authorities, or school" (267). In addition to defining a problem in writing instruction, the quirkiness of English also adds levity to the seriousness of Macrorie's critique.

Another way in which Macrorie represents himself as a critic and emphasizes the seriousness of the problem with writing instruction is through metaphors for Hell and the afterlife. *Telling Writing* isn't a total recrimination of teachers; in the opening chapter, Macrorie's ethical appeal includes *eunoia* or the establishment of goodwill for all parties. Although he starts *Telling Writing* off with the student perspective, Macrorie moves quickly in the first chapter to the teacher perspective, suggesting that conventional

instruction is also an obstacle for the teacher: “The teacher does not want English, but gets it. Discouraged, he often tries a different tack” (2). Thus, Macrorie speaks to the frustrations of students and then to teachers, saying it’s an all-around unhappy situation. However, this goodwill is countered by other connotations of Hell in descriptions of students and teachers involved in this problematic of the classroom. Students and teachers are described as trapped in a Dante-like underworld: “In this empty circle teacher and student wander around boring each other. But there is a way out” (4). The student in the preface is described as a sort of living dead who is brought back to life through Macrorie’s techniques: “He had learned to write alive before he could know he had been writing dead” (i). Macrorie empowers the teacher with the ability to reincarnate the blocked student: “Many teachers around the country have broken loose and found a way of enabling their students to write alive” (261).

More important to the approach in *Telling Writing* is Macrorie’s emphasis on truth-telling in student writing. This English of which students are culpable is not simply a matter of weak or even wishy-washy writing: it is a matter of lying, evoked in the use of “lies” and “honest” to describe student efforts. For instance, Macrorie says the student “learns a language that prevents him from working toward truths, and then he tells lies,” and Macrorie describes another student as “writing morally, because he was staying true to the feel of his experience” (4, 8). Such a serious reproach of students is not evident in *Writing without Teachers* nor in writing self-help: none of these authors accuses the struggling writer or student-writer of mendaciousness. In fact, in *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow perceives something suspect—“something fishy”—in his ways of responding to student writing. Dishonesty lies with the teacher’s communication, not the

student's. Elbow develops a different response strategy, one which allows him to disclose his subjectivity (*Without* 120). On the other hand, the nature of Macrorie's ethical appeal (as judge of others) reinforces his expertise; it may not be the expertise of a teacher (at least not a conventional teacher, not one of the people he criticizes), but it does establish Macrorie as a sort of Jeremiah or higher authority.

In a way, Macrorie's emphasis on truthfulness calls upon the ethos of students as writers. Truth-telling was of highest importance to ethos in the Aristotelian approach (Miller 205). By emphasizing truthful writing, Macrorie is setting up students to rhetors with ethos similar to his own: for, by implication, if you hold others up to such high truth standards, those standards are likely evident in your own work. This stance of judgment is not so much the case with Elbow's ethos; Elbow's ethical appeal of like-mindedness entails de-centering himself as an authority, causing greater equivalency between his ethos and students and readers of *Writing without Teachers*. If the novice is composing texts that fail to reach authentic meaning, for Elbow this is because the poor writer is struggling, and sympathy rather than judgment is called for. Elbow, unlike Macrorie, casts himself as a co-struggler in the composing process.

Don Murray the Coach

Like Macrorie and Elbow, Don Murray in *A Writer Teaches Writing* is arguing that formal writing instruction hasn't done a sufficient job of teaching people how to write. In essence, all three theorists are redefining what it means to write and teach well, and the central activity in their redefinition is the positing of a different type of teacherly

ethos or writing expert. Murray's ethos is similar to Elbow's in its deconstruction of the figure of the writing teacher as master of correction, but Murray replaces conventional teacher authority with someone from outside academia—the professional, creative writer. In this regard, Murray's work contains extracurricular traces because professional writers are situated outside of academia. Like Dorothea Brande in *Becoming a Writer*, Murray emphasizes his experience as a professional writer. However, what distinguishes Murray from Brande is that Murray's book is not writing self-help: its audience, even more so than Macrorie's *Telling Writing* and certainly more so than *Writing without Teachers*, is primarily writing instructors.

Consequently, Murray's ethical appeal is built more on expertise rather than good will. That is, what Carolyn R. Miller has called “the relational components of ethos,” *arete* and *eunoia* (values and emotions) are backstage to Murray's rhetoric establishing professional writers as the parties best suited to helping students learn how to write. This ethical appeal in turn establishes Murray, a self-identified professional writer, as an expert. Murray's references to the working habits of authors do double-duty in *A Writer Teaches Writing* in that these references supply the praxis for Murray's teacher-reader and they establish Murray's qualification to give advice. As will be discussed, Murray does speak to the difficulties of composing and also adopts a protective stance for the student-writer—both relating to *eunoia*. However, Murray's intended audience in *A Writer Teaches Writing* is other writing teachers and not students or former students, as is the case with Elbow. As Miller has shown of the ethos of Cold War computer culture, “character matters only if it matters to an audience,” and some communities will value components of ethos more tied to rationality and coming from the Aristotelian tradition

than those components more aligned with good will, coming from the Ciceronian tradition (211). One consequence of Murray's rhetorical situation is his emphasis on expertise and professional identity in order to speak to his teacher-audience. Murray's ethical appeal as an outsider suggests that it is more one's professional identity—rather than one's character—that gives one authority to speak about writing.

While criticism of traditional writing education and educators is clearly evident in all three theorists, Murray is distinct in his displacement of the conventional teacher by a professional writer. In this set-up, teachers seem to be mainly conduits for the professional writer's expertise; the teacher's function is to create a learning environment that conveys to students the practices and dispositions of a professional writer. Murray's critical stance toward conventional instruction is evident in the fundamental assumption that *A Writer Teaches Writing* is built around: namely, that everyone agrees that current writing education is unsuccessful. While Murray expounds upon the ineffectiveness of classroom education in a later chapter, "Why Writing Isn't Taught Effectively," this chapter occurs halfway into the book. Instead, this criticism is briefly stated in the preface when he describes himself as a "writer who was brought into the classroom *after the need for a new approach to the teaching of composition* was given priority by the Executive Board of the New England School Development Council in 1965" (emphasis added) (xi). Murray subsequently casts himself as an outsider to academia brought in to clean up its act which makes *A Writer Teaches Writing* different than *Writing without Teachers*.

Murray represents himself as an outside consultant—a sort of life coach for teachers. Contrast Murray's account of how his book came into being (by invitation and

then seriously vetted by eighteen “experienced secondary school teachers”) with Elbow’s account of happenstance. In Elbow’s account, an Oxford University Press representative peddling books happens to ask if Elbow had any projects of his own, and Elbow mentions his interest in teacherless writing groups which was still at the conceptual stage (*Writing Without* xvii). Murray’s disapproval of academia also signals that Murray not only has questions about its efficacy but that he has actively rejected the academic approach. Whereas Elbow struggled as a student and felt rejected by academia, Murray rejects academia—at least at first. (As Bruce Ballenger has described in his elegiac article, by the end of Murray’s career, Murray’s scholarly writings were regularly rejected by leading journals in Composition Studies, and he subsequently sought refuge in his younger identity of journalism and creative writer.) Elbow’s account shows him to be in a committed albeit troubled relationship with the academic, although by the time he’d published *Writing Without Teachers*, he had succeeded in not only obtaining his PhD at Brandeis University but also in winning awards for his literary criticism and publishing his dissertation on Chaucer as a book. That Murray rejected traditional instruction, both its personnel and its materials, is apparent in his 2001 memoir, *My Twice-Lived Life*. When offered a teaching position at the University of New Hampshire in the 1950’s, Murray saw teaching as an “opportunity for revenge. I would not teach as my teachers taught but...teach what I knew as a professional” (137). To prepare for teaching, Murray studies multiple rhetoric handbooks and finds them inadequate: “I was a professional writer, but some of what they said I couldn’t understand, and most of what I did understand I thought was wrong. The books’ instructions, if followed, would produce bad writing” (138). Probably bolstered by his extensive professional experience and

early Pulitzer Prize in journalism, Murray stoutly self-identified as a “professional writer” and repulsed the first teaching position offered to him: “I was humiliated. Me teach? It was an insult. I was a writer in my mind, not a teacher” (*Twice* 136). Murray works to keep the status of the professional writer intact inside academia—to point out why the advice, based on professional every-day-at-the-desk of *Nulla dies sine linea* is more effective than advice given by teachers who don’t write or publish.

Murray develops an alternative ethos in part by establishing roles for individuals involved in writing education and specifically differentiates the professional writer from the writing professor. This fixation on professional identities is related to Murray’s audience selection: he needs to build a case for that other professional, the writer, inside the domain of professional academics. Throughout the opening of *A Writer Teaches Writing*, roles are consistently prefaced by the article “the” rather than “a,” and the roles for two types of individuals (teachers and writers) also change during the course of the introduction. Excepting the book title, Murray says “the writer,” “the student,” not “a writer” or “a student”; this article is universalizing, as well as suggesting a solid, defensible entity—not relative or context-driven as “a writer” would be. Roles are signaled in the titles of the first two chapters (emphasis added), “*The Writer’s Seven Skills*” and “*The Writing Teacher’s Seven Skills*.” Interestingly, the student doesn’t get her own chapter title but is instead contained under the broader category of “The Experience of Writing,” which is the title of the third chapter. That the student appears last on the catwalk of roles suggests that the student is more an indirect recipient of Murray’s writing advice—that the actions of the professional writer and teacher warrant closer attention. Whereas Elbow uses the second-person pronoun, a “you” who is not

described as a formal student, Murray consistently categorizes novice writers as students in *A Writer Teaches Writing*.

Furthermore, in the body of these opening chapters, the teacher and professional writer take on additional roles, suggestive of their significant interaction on behalf of the student. The writer becomes “the editor” and “the craftsman” at various points; and teachers’ roles transmogrify from listener to coach to diagnostician, suggesting that the teacher and the writer are huddled together, intensely working on the student like a pack of surgeons in an emergency room. In the later editions of *A Writer Teaches Writing*, this hierarchy is less evident. While in later editions Murray says “inexperienced writers” and continues to use the article “the” in front of “writer,” Murray also uses the pronoun “we,” thereby positioning himself closer and more sympathetically to readers and to students.

For all of his discussion of the teacher’s role, ultimately the teacher is overshadowed by the professional writer. Murray states in the opening sentence that his book “gives English teachers an effective method of teaching composition based on the experience of professional writers” (xi). Note how in Murray’s rendering the teacher herself does not act like a professional writer—there’s only a brief passage encouraging teachers to write with their students, and in the section “Why Writing Isn’t Taught Effectively,” Murray details a lack of training in teachers: “In the first place there are few writing teachers prepared to teach writing. English teachers are trained to be teachers of grammar or educated to be teachers of literature—if indeed they are prepared at all” (103). The teacher, by not performing the disciplined act of writing which Murray values, is both displaced and made a vehicle for the transmission of writerly practices to

students. Additionally, since Murray doesn't afford much writing experience to teachers, the book title seems to gesture to Murray: the article "A" points to one writer, Murray.

Murray further replaces teacher authority with that of real-world or professional writers through the types of writers as well as texts he mentions in *A Writer Teaches Writing*. For one, Murray's substantial use of examples of published and canonical writers helps make writing the purview of professional writers. Sprinkled throughout *A Writer Teaches Writing* are quotes from canonical authors, as well as images of draft pages from writers including Shelley, Theodore Roosevelt, Shaw, Sinclair Lewis, and Frost, not to mention a whole section at the end of the book called "What the Masters Know" full of quotes from famous writers. Such referencing of canonical writers does not appear in *Writing without Teachers* or the other writing self-help authors examined in Chapter 4. While Ueland in *If You Want to Write* does hold up the now-recognized great artists van Gogh and Blake, she counterbalances any intimidation factor for the reader by equally praising the abilities of children and novices. Tellingly, "What the Masters Know" appears after a section on resources for the teacher of writing—suggesting that the best writing practices lie in the hands of authors and that there is such a thing as mastery of writing. Both the second and the revised second edition of the book eliminate the images of drafts and include female writers such as Toni Morrison. Concerning Janet Emig's use of literary authors as models, Schreiner argues that this comparison holds novices to impossible literary standards and is thus incompatible with the everyone-can-write inclusivity of Composition Studies. Certainly, the use of esteemed literary models in any writing how-to book would indicate that some sort of writing standards are being upheld by the author. Such a move is evident in *Telling Writing*; Macrorie heads all

twenty-two chapters with a quote from a male field expert (Fromm, Francis) or nineteenth-century male literary author (Thoreau, Butler, Hazlitt, Wordsworth). The exceptions include the last section addressed to teachers (devoid of any epigraph) and two chapters which start with word play, one notably on irony from another standard authority: the dictionary. Most of Macrorie's epigraphs seem to address issues of style and honesty, thus reinforcing Macrorie's warning to students about English. However, in Murray's case, he actually validated many types of writing and writing occasions, equalizing the artful with the more prosaic, and this is shown in his embrace of transactional genres that is similar to Macrorie's.

According to Murray, his book can develop student writing ability in genres found both inside and outside the university, including "an essay test, a term paper, an examination, a book report; *beyond school* in a business letter, a scholarly paper, an engineering report, a news release, a corporate memo, a poem—whatever is appropriate to the student's individual ability and need" (emphasis added) (xi). Murray also redefines a successful writer as someone not necessarily in academia, including "a salesman, a lawyer, a historian, a member of the League of Women Voters" and that "[t]he man who creates an effective memo is as much a writer as the man who produces an effective sonnet" (1). In his use of authors as examples and in his esteem for transactional writing, Murray draws the student nearer to his own ethos as a published author and away from the classroom instructor.

In establishing an alternative ethos, Murray tries to define "teaching" and "writing" in early chapters in *A Writer Teaches Writing*, using a variety of comparisons that stress professional identity. At different points, writers and teachers are compared to

a construction contractor, parents, a soldier, an athlete, a coach, and a prison guard, and the act of composing is compared to marriage and giving birth. Excepting one incongruous reference to a sea gull, the comparisons are all to human activities—many of them professions outside of academia. Concerning teachers, Murray splits their role between that of a coach and of a physician in sections in Chapter 2: The Writing Teacher's Seven Skills. While the physician metaphor is important for its call for teachers to alter their corrective mindset, the coach figuration most coincides with the comparative work in the book. Although the coach figuration suggests a focus on individual student potential, one consequence is a certain aggressiveness to his coach stance and a sorting quality to his attention. While Elbow had worked to establish commonality with readers, Murray maps out a regiment of improvement for the struggling student, employing sports (especially football) and battle metaphors: "The writer does not try to write too soon; he does not go into battle until his troops are trained, in position, given ammunition, and provided with tactics to carry out that strategy. The writer does not write until he has a good idea of what he has to say and how he can say it" (8). At times, his tough-love ethos would run into problems with twenty-first century readers, such as this sentence, bordering on the homophobic: "The writer is sensitive, but not in any dainty, limp-wristed sort of way" (2). Murray's more assertive, coach-like approach in *A Writer Teaches Writing* can be attributed to his desire to both expose and prepares students for the inherent challenge of the writing process.

Through figuration, Murray also redefines the teaching of writing as the teacher's attempt to reduce the vulnerability of the student. In Murray's portrayal, vulnerability stems from the student's character weaknesses as well as from the inherent nature of the

writing process as one, a “hard, lonely job” (170). Murray wants to expose students to what he sees as genuine writing experience—one based on real inquiry and ongoing invention—but he simultaneously knows that experience isn’t easy. The presumption too is that Murray, as an active writer who also teaches, would be a coach “still in the game.” Overall, by developing these comparisons of teaching to professions outside of academia, Murray is gesturing toward the extracurriculum—though not at self-help. This difference necessarily arises because self-help, not rooted in the classroom dynamic, does not have to expend word count on redefining conventional teaching and teachers.

Murray’s conceptual metaphors for composing are significantly altered in the later and heavily revised editions of *A Writer Teaches Writing* (1984 and 2004). That Murray was conscious of his earlier aggressive stance is evident in his memoir in which he acknowledges how he learned from feminism:

The women’s movement made me realize how much I had been shaped by a male world in which conflict was glorified and helped me admit to myself, then others, how much I hated conflict. I boxed, I argued, I played football, I shot at the enemy, I asked hostile questions as a reporter, I dueled my way through courtyards and back alleys of campus politics, I learned to puff up and confront, threaten, and, yes, probably bully—we often become those we fear—but I did not like conflict in any form. And the better I was at conflict, the more I was aware that this was not me, not the me with whom I could be comfortable. (*My Twice-Lived* 26-7)

In those more recent editions of *A Writer Teaches Writing*, the sports and battle metaphors are replaced with spatial ones for composing—writing occurs in new “territory,” an “attic,” on a “stage” and happens as “naturally as a river flows to the ocean” (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 9; 14; 4; 23). The caricatured cast that previously appeared in Murray’s discussion of writing—the prodding coach, the poor athlete, the effeminate guy—are replaced with unpopulated spaces, causing a less controlled, less

ego-driven and more venerable sense of composing. One possible reason for this change in figuration is that Murray felt less need to differentiate professional writers from professional academics, since by then that notion from the extracurriculum had been absorbed by Composition Studies in the form of process theory.

While it is correct to say, as Gere does, that Elbow's references to teachers and classes are few and far between in *Writing without Teachers*, those rhetorical turns toward teachers are significant. Elbow does change audiences, albeit infrequently, such that he speaks directly to teachers among his readers. For instance, he issues a "note to teachers" in the preface of the first edition, suggesting that teachers were part of this pedagogy from the start and that the mixing of teaching and teacherlessness is not something that happened over time, not another instance of the cooption of the extracurriculum by academia. What to do, however, with the central contention of the book—namely the disposability of teachers and the possibility of learning happening without them?

The interest in Composition Studies in Elbow's first composition book reflects the field's ongoing scrutiny of the power dynamics of writing education, including the role of a writing teacher. For instance, Richard Miller has suggested that the so-called expressionist/social debate in Composition Studies indicates that theorists are wrestling with power issues and "master roles" in the classroom (25). To this I would add that responses by composition scholars to Elbow are responses to his views on writing teachers and who should best be teaching writing. An unavoidable part of what Elbow—along with Macrorie and Murray—is saying about teacher expertise involves the incorporation of non-academic, extra-disciplinary expertise. What Elbow says about

teacherly authority is inseparable from how he says it—specifically, through an ethos that makes *Writing without Teachers* part of the writing self-help tradition. When writing specialists positively engage with the ideas in *Writing without Teachers*, they are reading the book much as a self-help reader would—and not necessarily as a writing teacher. In other words, teachers reading *Writing without Teachers* may relate to it because they are stuck writers themselves, feel powerless, and long to change how they write. The very act of reading *Writing without Teachers* positions an academic outside of the university; such a reader has engaged in underlife by turning to self-help rather than theory or a text book. Scratch any teacher of writing, and you'll *also* find a former writing student inside and, if Elbow is even partially correct in his rendering of the problems caused by traditional education, the reader who is a teacher is also oppressed. Indeed, Elbow's call to "go teacherless" is just the sort of gesture Robert Brooke discusses as part of the underlife of writing instruction. The persuasive character of Elbow's ethos encourages readers who are rooted in academia to reinvent themselves—both as writers and as writing teachers—in roles different than the ones given by the university.

Chapter VII

Process + Power Equals?: *Writing with Power* and the Continuance of the Self-Help Tradition

Peter Elbow's engagement with self-help and the extracurriculum—and by extension the engagement of discipline of Composition Studies with the extracurriculum—did not begin and end with *Writing without Teachers*. Instead, elements of self-help and the extracurriculum are evident in Elbow's signature ideas about the writing process contained in his subsequent book in 1981, *Writing with Power*. Specifically, self-help elements are apparent in Elbow's ideas about freewriting, drafting, voice, and feedback, as well as in the rhetorical situation of *Writing with Power*. Namely, Elbow continues in 1981 to address an audience located outside of academia, and he professes an intention for his book to help empower struggling writers by providing various composing and revising strategies. (As I will discuss, even the act of empowering others or the notion of self-empowerment, of course, show self-help tendencies.) Since *Writing with Power* was a tremendously influential book for many writing scholars and instructors in the 1980's, what is apparent is the field's ongoing attraction to and reliance on the extracurriculum. That is, *Writing without Teachers* is not an anomaly—not a one-time and possibly reactionary early publication by a young scholar. Moreover, the interest demonstrated by many writing specialists in the self-help space of *Writing without Teachers* is also not uncharacteristic of Composition Studies. Part of the enigma of Elbow's work in the field continues to be how writing scholars have adopted his self-help based ideas as classroom praxis. A closer inspection of *Writing*

with Power verifies how foundational the extracurriculum has been to the discipline of Composition Studies.

In *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow was occupied with making a most significant radical gesture—situating of the act of composing outside the curriculum. So in 1973, Elbow identifies the main problem with most people’s writing experience and then provides several radical solutions—namely, get rid of teachers, use writing groups, go deeper into the extracurriculum. No other self-help book on writing and certainly no other composition book has exerted as much rhetorical horse power to prompting the reader to dump the teacher: that’s the brunt of the work in *Writing without Teachers*. On the other hand, *Writing with Power*, not having to establish this extracurricular space for composing, can rely on the previous book for the eviction of teacher authority. The self-help stance serves as a platform for Elbow to advance a composing process for struggling writers inside or outside academia.

Elbow’s Ongoing Scholarship as Self-Help

As previously mentioned, Elbow’s early work has been linked by scholars to self-help, but lingering self-help tendencies have been identified by scholars as existing in the books Elbow published after *Writing without Teachers*. For example, in *Rhetoric as Social Imagination: Explorations in the Interpersonal Function of Language*, George L. Dillon situates *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power* alongside Dale Carnegie; Dr. Spock; Frances Moore Lappé (author of *Diet for a Small Planet*); and

Richard Bolles (of *What Color Is Your Parachute?* fame) in his survey of the rhetoric of self-help. Ken Macrorie also identified a self-help dimension in Elbow's subsequent work in his review of *Embracing Contraries*, a book Elbow published in 1986, five years after *Writing with Power* and one containing articles Elbow published in the intervening years between *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power*. In Macrorie's view, *Embracing Contraries* is:

Ostensibly a collection of articles on teaching and learning, this book is actually a manual on how to be wise. It's the darnedest thing—a self-help book whose central model for thinking requires you to keep turning ideas over and over until they often look good standing on their heads. (xiv in *Writing with Elbow*)

In fact, John Wright, Elbow's first editor at Oxford University Press, believes that *Writing with Power* is "more germane to the idea of self-help" than the 1973 book. Wright feels that *Writing without Teachers* was self-help since it attracted many writers who were "alone and had to fend for themselves," and hence needed self-education. *Writing with Power*, however, has ties to the numerous self-help bestsellers published in the early 1980's with "power" in its titles. Wright has said that he tried to discourage Elbow from including "power" in the book title because of its connotation with self-help. Wright clearly had some sway in titling major composition texts at the time for he also (this time successfully) persuaded Mina Shaughnessy to use *Errors and Expectations* rather than a long academic sounding title, cum sub-title, that had been her preference (interview with John Wright).

Elbow's Audience in *Writing with Power*

As discussed extensively in this dissertation, a key to understanding *Writing without Teachers* is its unconventional audience—one outside of and possibly disenfranchised by academia. Early in *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow makes it abundantly clear that he is chiefly addressing individuals who are not writing experts, not writing students but rather people struggling with writing outside of academia. As he did in 1973, Elbow designates a primary audience near the beginning of *Writing with Power*. The chief difference in audience from 1973 is that Elbow addresses anyone engaged in writing rather than to people who are not students. As he describes his audience selection in *Writing with Power*, Elbow claims that it is “very broad”: “I’m not trying to tailor my words to beginning or advanced writers in particular, or to students, novelists, professional people, pleasure writers, or poets. Perhaps I shouldn’t try to talk to so many different kinds of people, yet in truth I feel my audience is very specific” (6).

This specific characteristic of his audience turns out to actually be a common denominator amongst large numbers of people: “I am talking to that person inside everyone who has ever written or tried to write: that someone who has wrestled with words, who seeks power in words, who has often gotten discouraged, but who also senses the possibility of achieving real writing power” (6). Since nearly everyone—no matter his or her expertise or profession—has struggled with writing at some point, Elbow’s audience selection indicates the sizeable scope of his argument. Moreover, the phrase “that person inside everyone”—much like the phrase “inner child”—suggests that his audience of verbal strugglers yearn to be free of writing obstacles. As a result, Elbow’s audience in *Writing with Power* is a large population not determined by school identities

such as “professor,” “student” or “former student.” The identity of Elbow’s audience has been sanded down to this essence—one of frustration with writing as well as hope for writing.

Another way in which it is apparent that Elbow’s intended audience in *Writing with Power* resembles more a self-help than a strictly academic reader is Elbow’s organization of the text. *Writing with Power* is explicitly organized as a self-help book: Elbow informs readers that they can tackle his book as a traditional reader (reading from start to finish, following the lay-out he has designed). He also tells readers that he’s structured *Writing with Power* in a way which suits a more self-directed reading strategy—like that of a self-help reader: “I have also made each section and chapter fairly complete in itself so you can thread your own path and find the chapters you need for your particular writing tasks or for your own particular temperament or skills” (3). In addition to allowing self-directed reading, Elbow’s 1981 text purports to offer advice, not solely instruction: Elbow tells the reader that his book is “full of analysis and advice,” suggesting a balance of academic and self-help approach (*Power* 3). Throughout the text, section headers also incorporate the word “advice,” often at the conclusion of chapters where Elbow is suggesting the application of his theory. For instance, “Advice” appears at the end of “The Dangerous Method” chapter as well as at the end of the “Writing for Teachers” chapter, which also contains “Advice If You are Currently Writing for Teachers.” Advice differs from teaching and certainly from analysis in the way it connotes a particular dynamic between reader and author. The reader is struggling or unsure or at a crossroads and is considering the author’s ideas on how to change his or her plight.

Elbow's purpose in *Writing with Power* also resembles that of self-help literature in that he seeks to help readers out of a particular problem. *Writing with Power* appears to be the logical next step in the self-help conversation that Elbow initiated in 1973. A two-part message seems to unfold with Elbow's 1973 and 1981 book titles: first you learn to write apart from teachers, then you are able to be successful with your writing by using certain composing strategies. Upon inspection, the "helplessness" of the 1973 preface is the antonym to the "power" of the 1981 book. The well-known salvo of *Writing without Teachers* addresses the helplessness experienced by people who want to write: "Many people are now trying to become less helpless, both personally and politically: trying to claim more control over their own lives. One of the ways people most lack control over their own lives is through lacking control over words" (*Writing without v*). The "power" of the 1981 book title is indicative of the way in which Elbow develops a whole praxis to alleviate the problem of verbal helplessness that can occur for students and people outside of school alike.

In *Writing with Power*, Elbow links personal verbal power with a writing process. In the first chapter, "An Approach to Writing," Elbow tells the reader that he or she can gain "great choice and control as you work on any particular writing task" by following his recommendations (*Power* 8). He tells the reader to "take complete charge of yourself as you write (and not accept any of the helpless feelings that writing so often arouses" by following his composing methods (*Power* 8). When we keep in mind the type of person Elbow identified as his primary audience for this second book—anyone who struggles with writing, a broad category that uncomfortably includes fellow academics—the complexity then of the field's usage of process theory becomes apparent. The writing

process Elbow outlines in *Writing with Power* was not geared toward the classroom context, but this writing process has in fact been adopted in a process theory for the classroom. It is important to note that the process Elbow develops is to empower *any* writer, not just our students. When the self-help dimension of *Writing with Power*, a dimension nearly shouted out starting with the word “power,” is not perceived, Elbow’s suggestions for writing can be misconstrued as hegemonic or patriarchal. One has to wonder if the post-process critique of Elbow’s “mastery” motif (in which it is claimed that Elbow and other process proponents seem to suggest there is only one writing process) isn’t the result of a failure to “hear” the self-help intonation of both this book’s title and subtitle.

In elaborating on his “how-to” steps to get out of writing difficulties, in this second book, Elbow has created a process that sufficiently resembles a methodology for teaching writing in the classroom to attract teachers. Whereas in *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow is preoccupied with recognizing the negative experiences of individuals writing for teachers, in *Writing with Power*, he is able to work closer on the solution to the problem. Elbow’s 1973 discussion of the teacherless writing class was transformed by some writing instructors into a de-centered, workshop-based writing course. Elbow’s 1981 discussion of matters including the Direct Method, the Open-Ended Method and voice seems to have been perceived by some writing instructors as meaningful praxis for that de-centered workshop-style course. What is apparent then is the way in which the extracurriculum and self-help on writing can provide a procedure for composing that is applicable both in- and outside the traditional classroom.

In this regard, Elbow's *Writing with Power* serves as a bridge between the extracurriculum and Composition Studies. The self-help books on writing examined in Chapter 5 of this project largely did not provide a substantial procedure for composing. This absence is particularly true of the more recent books by Anne Lamott and Natalie Goldberg: books which can read more as scattered yet pleasurable commonplaces about writing than any systematized procedure for getting out of blocks. Elbow's book differs from fully nonacademic books on writing in that way. While *Writing without Teachers* introduced the rhetorical stance of self-help to writing instructors, *Writing with Power* advanced self-help even deeper into the field by extending a possible useable praxis. As Patricia Sullivan noted in her review of Elbow's 2000 *Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing*, Elbow's overarching message seems to be "Everyone can write; the job of writing teachers is to make sure every writer knows it" (90).

Extracurricular Critique of the Curricular

The critique of traditional instruction, one of the key elements of self-help according to Anne Ruggles Gere, is more subtle in *Writing with Power* than in *Writing without Teachers*. At first glance, teachers seem to receive less of the brunt of criticism in *Writing with Power*. The one exception occurs at the start of Chapter 11: Poetry as No Big Deal, in which Elbow starts with an anecdote reminiscent of Brenda Ueland's criticism of teachers: "I remember Jeremy, a little English boy whose mother had to tell

him that his music lessons were ending. His music teacher had decided he wasn't musical. He looked crestfallen and said to his mother, 'But I *feel* musical'" (*Power* 101). Elbow then draws a comparison between Jeremy's premature closure of musical creativity to other people's foreshortened experience with poetry, a genre that seems laden with high expectations and limitations.

Excepting this harsh example of teachers' negative impact on creativity, teachers appear to be a relatively benign presence in the 1981 book. For one, teachers appear less frequently as the hypothetical readers for compositions in the numerous chapters that provide alternative composing and revising strategies such as the Loop Writing Process and Quick Revising. In Chapter 16, revealingly titled "Nausea," and one that appears right before the section in the book dealing with audience, Elbow talks about the discouragement writers frequently face: "Revulsion. The feeling that all this stuff you have written is stupid, ugly, worthless—and cannot be fixed. Disgust" (*Power* 173). What's striking about this briefest chapter in the book is that turmoil experienced by the writer is entirely self-generated: not a red-pen-holding teacher in sight. This pattern continues in Chapter 17: Other People in which Elbow describes the impact of various audience types on a text, separating them into safe and dangerous audience and non-audience types. Despite the excoriation instructors received in *Writing without Teachers*, they do not appear by and large in his discussion of these audience types.

In addition to less overt criticism of teachers, Elbow seems to adopt a more even-handed approach to writing for teachers in *Writing with Power*, highlighting the merits of formal instruction. The chief display of this even-handedness occurs in Chapter 20: Writing for Teachers. According to George Dillon, Elbow's advice in this chapter is that

students take greater responsibility for their relationships with their teachers (100-101). Instead of denouncing conventional teaching, in this chapter Elbow investigates why teaching goes awry by looking at the rhetorical situation of writing for teachers. He looks at the working conditions (specifically how teachers respond to student writing), and attributes some of the problems with academia to those conditions. As he makes clear early in the chapter, his point is not to make a laundry list of qualities that lead to effective or ineffective teaching (*Power* 217). Rather, Elbow is “interested in the problematic relationship that exists between the student writer and the teacher reader—even when the teacher is a decent person doing a conscientious job” (*Power* 217-218). He expresses admiration for some teachers’ ability (in particular primary and secondary school teachers) to be good readers for students in spite of significant workloads—“those special people [who] were able to be as good as they were” (*Power* 217). Elbow also assumes greater responsibility for some of his feelings about his writing education in a footnote:

I don’t mean to put all responsibility on my teachers for my feelings and actions. Long before I ever met Bob Fisher I already had a deep love of words and ideas. And long before I ever met those other teachers I already had a deeply insecure tendency to depend almost entirely upon the judgment of others for my opinion of myself. (*Power* 217)

This more judicial view of the impact of writing teachers is perhaps particularly evident in how Elbow chooses to end Chapter 20, the one focused on exploring the rhetorical situation of writing for a teacher. His final note for this complex chapter praises teachers for what they can offer: in Elbow’s view, teachers can offer unique feedback that is valuable when properly understood by students. According to Elbow, teachers are inimitable responders because their experience of reading in bulk allows them a unique

perspective and because they can establish a task environment that forces people to write even when uninspired. Thus, while Elbow reiterates the deficits of teachers which he had covered in the chapter, he ends by advising: “Get these things [areas in which teachers are deficient as responders] elsewhere. They are easier to find than what a teacher has to offer” (*Power* 234-5). That said, writing teachers certainly don’t pass through the scrutiny in *Writing with Power* unscathed.

In *Writing with Power*, Elbow continues to apply the notion of write-without-teachers from 1973, in which he problematizes the rhetorical situation of writing for a teacher in a classroom. Elbow mainly accomplishes this critique by offering alternative definitions of writing expertise and as well of audience. As will be discussed, Elbow’s continued prodding of the rhetorical situation of writing for teachers allows him to instill his discussion of the writing process with notions from the extracurriculum and self-help. Additionally, behind Elbow’s exploration of this rhetorical situation is a powerful sense of distrust of formal schooling. For even in as recently as 2009, Elbow has said, “I still don’t trust teachers. I don’t like it when teachers say ‘this is no good’ or ‘change that.’ The fact that teachers can stop you: I don’t like that” (interview). Such a distrust of teachers connects even Elbow’s second book with the self-help tradition in its uneasy (at best) relationship with formal education.

In *Writing with Power*, Elbow doesn’t attribute writing expertise to writing teachers, and on occasion he outright denies that expertise to them. For instance, in his discussion of the “dangerous method” of composing, Elbow warns the reader to not rely on this method because “only experienced pros can use this approach reliably. Only pros can count on getting life and creativity into those outlines or naps or sleepy walks”

(*Power* 46). These pros are not identified as writing teachers. A more overt denial of teachers' expertise on writing is apparent when Elbow points out that English teachers don't typically write themselves. Most unflattering is Elbow's explanation for why writing teachers don't generally write: they suffer from writer's blocks because of *their own* misperceptions about composing and feedback:

English teachers, on the other hand, usually can't think of anything to do with a set of words except to formulate criticism of one sort or another—high criticism for works of great literature, low criticism for works of student writing. I suspect this is why English teachers so seldom write. (21)

Essentially, teachers' perceptions of the writing process are fundamentally flawed, a situation which in turn can prevent students from succeeding with writing. Elbow's ongoing challenge of the exclusive expertise of classroom writing instructors in his 1981 book is an extension of the self-help proposition made in *Writing without Teachers*.

In his investigation of how to write sans teacher in *Writing with Power*, Elbow pays greater attention to the responding or working conditions of the writing instructor than he did in 1973. He mostly does this work in a single compressed chapter, Chapter 20: Writing for Teachers. Elbow's inspection of the working conditions of teachers includes such pragmatic matters as paper load, but more significantly, he closely examines how those conditions affect teachers' responses to student writing. The responding conditions are cast as unnatural or not representative of communication occurring outside school settings. An overriding part of those working conditions is that teachers function primarily as involuntary readers: hypothetically, they are compelled to read every word because that is the practice of their profession. The consequence of that forced reading is that teachers are unwilling and unable to provide an authentic response.

Elbow devotes three fairly lengthy paragraphs to portraying a teacher late at night, grading a stack of student papers, a scene which surely is meant to elicit empathy from fellow instructors and sympathy perhaps from student-readers of *Writing with Power* (Power 218). In Elbow's scenario, the act of writing for teachers is also unnatural because of an absence of rhetorical exigency for the student. All in all, Elbow says it's an artificial rhetorical situation can be encapsulated as a difference between writing *to* and writing *for* teachers (Power 220). Typically, the student is not persuading or informing the teacher reader because the teacher presumably already knows the content of the student's text:

When you write for a teacher you are usually swimming against the stream of natural communication. The natural direction of communication is to explain what you understand to someone who doesn't understand it. But in writing an essay for a teacher your task is usually to explain what you are still engaged in trying to understand to someone who understands it better. (Power 219)

Another reason for the inauthenticity of teachers' response is that the responding conditions mean that teachers each year or semester encounter a new wave of students with the same problems as the prior term. The teacher evolves as a responder, but the students stay at the same level, generating frustration in the teacher which can't be revealed, thus furthering the artificiality of the teacher's response (Power 224-225).

According to Elbow, additional negative consequences result from teachers' responding condition conditions. One problem is instructors' penchant for grammatical correctness since teachers' working conditions leave them unable to engage student texts on more substantial matters (Power 226). This unnatural classroom communication situation has life-long consequences for many writers, causing an English-like situation:

“The result of this wrong-way communication is a pervasive weakness that infects much student writing—and persists in many people’s writing for the rest of their lives: a faint aura of questioning which lurks behind assertions” (*Power* 219). The term “weakness” in association with student writing is interesting given the opposing emphasis on “power” in the book. Weakened writing means that the composer is unable to engage in a natural relationship with a reader, one defined as providing “pleasure or enlightenment” (219).

Through metaphors in Chapter 20, Elbow problematizes and alters and problematizes the roles of teacher-readers. First, to describe this involuntary status of teacher readers, at one point Elbow actually uses the word “slave”: “It is no bed of roses for teachers either. As a teacher I am a slave reader. I must read every piece to the end” (*Power* 224). In describing teacher-readers in this fashion to non-academic readers, Elbow is reversing the tables such that teacher, a slave, is necessarily powerless. Then to more accurately depict the reading roles of teachers, Elbow utilizes the metaphors of a music teacher or an athletic coach—the latter a recurrent one in process theory. Both of these metaphoric roles suggest how pointless it would be to write for a student to write only for the teacher and thus reinforce the artificiality of the rhetorical context of the classroom. Most people would agree that it would be odd to only play your violin to your music teacher, since one naturally seeks other audiences for one’s musical ability:

Writing for a teacher is like hitting the ball to your tennis coach. It should teach you a lot and it may be great fun, but it is practice or exercise rather than the real thing. It’s a means toward improving your performance at the real thing—whether the real thing is success in professional competition or fun in casual tennis. (*Power* 223)

In *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Murray’s coach figuration reinforced his tacit argument that a professional writer—an outsider to academia—can teach writing better than some

academic instructors. In *Telling Writing*, Macrorie configured the student as coach to him- or herself to emphasize freewriting for the sake of honest, English-free compositions: “Remember you are hitting practice shots. If what you write is bad or dull, no one will object” (*Telling* 8). Elbow seems to be making a different argument through metaphor: that what is not teachable is authentic audience experience. While Elbow includes the merit of these practice sessions (a writer can mess up with fewer consequences than with a genuinely transactional audience), for the most part this coaching dynamic isn’t productive. It’s not productive because students are generally not aware of the limitations of only writing for teachers, and they do not seek transactional writing experiences:

But whereas very few play their musical instrument only for their teacher or hit balls only to their coach—or at least if they do they usually realize they are leaving out the goal for which the teaching is designed—most students in school and college write only for teachers and take the situation for granted. (*Power* 223)

According to Elbow, much is at stake because of the rhetorical situation of writing for teachers: most people have only or mainly written for teacher-readers, that inauthentic audience, and without experience with an actual audience, people cannot improve as writers (225).

One implication of the complex argument Elbow makes about the blessings and problems of writing for teachers is that components of formal writing curriculum need to be perceived as but one part of a larger, life-long and extracurricular writing experience. As long as the constraints of writing for teachers and of writing education are accurately perceived, the benefits of teachers can be properly used by people wanting to improve their writing. Conversely, when the rhetorical situation of writing for teachers is

overlooked, problems will arise in the act of composing. Thus, what is evident in *Writing with Power* is the way in which Elbow extends his discussion beyond a criticism of teachers to a new emphasis on placing writing and writing practices outside the classroom: in the extracurriculum. As mentioned, Elbow redefines who is an expert on writing to various “pros” and not teachers or scholars: these “pros” are not situated necessarily in academia. In this regard, Elbow’s exploration of the unnaturalness of writing for teachers serves to highlight a lack of transactionality or authenticity of task in classroom-based writing. In other words, writing for teachers is posited as unnatural because not representative of what occurs in the extracurriculum.

Even more subtly, Elbow redefines the classical notion of audience such that it becomes a matter of proximity rather than a set responsibility toward a particular individual (i.e.: teacher). That is, in *Writing with Power*, Elbow argues that writers can reduce their struggle with words when they take charge of the mental distance between themselves and their intended audience. Through private writing and by prolonging invention, the writer can “choose *when*, during the writing process, to enter into the magnetic field exerted by the audience” (*Power* 195). At times, in Elbow’s view, the audience (including the teacher if applicable) can be altogether absent from the composer’s mind. In a similar vein, he advises students seeking to reduce writing blocks and to better utilize their formal education to paradoxically write more text than what they disclose to a teacher:

But the most powerful thing you can do to increase what you get from teachers is to write *more*. Not just because quantity helps—though that is probably the main fact about writing—but because you learn most from teachers if your writing for them is a *supplement* to other writing you are doing. (*Power* 234)

What is especially evident in *Writing with Power* and thus constitutes new material since 1973 is thus the way in which Elbow places writing in a new “space”: one which is more extracurricular than inside the curriculum. In my view, one of Elbow’s main accomplishments in this second book is the way in which he adds a spatial dimension to rhetorical considerations of invention and audience. This spatial dimension takes into consideration the life-long compositions of a writer and does not presume a classroom context. In essence, in *Writing with Power*, Elbow trains those readers who are students to think like self-help readers: to think in the long-term and of the bigger rhetorical picture.

All in all, Elbow’s attentiveness to the rhetorical situation of writing for teachers is one of the key components of both the 1973 and 1981 books. The self-help stance in *Writing without Teachers* seems to have helped foster within Elbow an early awareness of the power dynamics of schools as noted by George Dillon: “Despite his inveterate tendency to view writing as a personal, private activity, Elbow discusses in ‘Writing for Teachers’ the specific institutional setting of the college composition class” (100). Such an awareness of the rhetorical situation of school writing has been cited by past and more recent scholarship as an important project for writing scholars. For instance, in her 1971 *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders*, Janet Emig cited as a deficiency in composing research, the absence of attention to the rhetorical situation of writing in schools: “If the context of student writing—that is, community milieu, school, family—affects the composing process, in what ways does it do so, and why?” (1). In their 2009 retrospective of their seminal 1984 article, “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy,” Lisa Ede and Andrea A.

Lunsford note their own failure to consider the rhetorical situation of the classroom in their earlier article (“Representing Audience” 30). Ede and Lunsford describe themselves as having been unconscious of their own relationship to schooling: “Our desire to invoke such students and to (re)write experience in such a way as to highlight success not failure, consensus not conflict, progress not struggle, is, we have realized, deeply imbedded in our relationship to schooling” (30). On the other hand, Elbow has shown a marked amount of self-reflection reflected on his education and his responses to that training from his earliest publications. For Elbow has throughout his publishing career since *Writing without Teachers* returned to his own literacy narrative, elaborating on it in a Montaigne-fashion, adding more details and dialectical dimension.

Freewriting

John Wright, the representative from Oxford University Press who ushered *Writing without Teachers* into print, describes the reaction of the staff to Elbow’s 1973 ideas about freewriting. In a scene reminiscent of the television series *Mad Men*, filled with cigarette smoke and sexism, Wright describes the editorial office at Oxford as one in which the editors were all men and the secretaries and copy editing department were women. The copy-editor assigned to *Writing without Teachers*, a woman who was working on her PhD in French literature, stepped into Wright’s office, raving, “This is the most amazing book!” She had been distributing pages of Elbow’s manuscript to other copyists, all moonlighting novelists, and these women who wanted to be authors were

practicing freewriting because of Elbow. Wright also speaks of how the book and the device of freewriting changed his own writing. He believes that other people embraced *Writing without Teachers* and specifically the practice of freewriting because “once they start it, they see how immediately how it affects their productivity in writing” (interview).

In both *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power*, freewriting is at the center of Elbow’s approach to composing, and it is also the writing device that is most clearly connected to self-help. Freewriting is the composing strategy that most affected Elbow and allowed him to speak of his transformation from a blocked to more satisfied writer, and this personal testimony is characteristic of self-help. When he struggled during graduate school, Elbow relied on a version of freewriting to help him through his block. The role of freewriting in Elbow’s self-disclosure is so important to Elbow that he repeatedly mentions it—not just in his early books *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power* but also in journal articles as late as his 1989 “Toward a Phenomenology of Freewriting” or his 1992 book chapter, “Freewriting and the Problem of Wheat and Tares.” Elbow describes the centrality of freewriting as affecting his own writing and his teaching:

I must admit to myself and to others that freewriting may be what I care most about in writing and teaching writing. I learn most from it. I get my best ideas and writing from it. I get my best group and community work done that way. I feel most myself when I freewrite. I think freewriting helps my students more than anything else I show them, and they usually agree with me over the years. (“Toward a Phenomenology” 113)

The opening sentences of his chapters on freewriting in both *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power* both contain a superlative which suggests the highest efficacy of freewriting as a writing practice: it’s the “most effective” and then “easiest” (*Without* 3;

Power 13). Additionally, Elbow uses examples of his own freewriting—and not of his other composing methods. His freewriting is on display in *Writing with Power*. In fact, he cites testimony from his readers or students to support this other composing methods instead of discussing his own use of the composing methods, barring a paraphrase of his use of the Direct Writing Process (*Power* 27-28).

What has changed between the 1973 and the 1981 chapters on freewriting is that by *Writing with Power* freewriting has been linked to a writing process. It seems that by the time of the second book, the process of composing was less a matter of getting away from negative thinking and recovering from past teacherly criticism and more a matter of engaging the self in an internalized and nuanced process. In *Writing without Teachers*, the purpose for freewriting is one-sided: to help the struggling writer establish some distance between him or herself and any feedback. In 1973, the implication is that an excess of teacherly feedback has squelched ability: “The teacherless class helps your writing by providing maximum feedback. Freewriting helps you by providing no feedback at all” (*Without* 3-4). In the 1981 version of freewriting, on the other hand, the connection of this invention strategy to a writing process is made explicit. While freewriting certain was part of a composing process in Elbow’s earlier theory, the term “process” is mentioned with far greater frequency in association with freewriting in *Writing with Power*. With this new perspective, Elbow states: “The goal of freewriting is in the process, not the product” (*Power* 13). In *Writing with Power*, the benefits of freewriting include how it helps separate the producing from the revising stages, pushes people to write without inspiration, provides an emotional outlet, generates topics, and brings more voice and material from the unconscious. The list of benefits shows how

Elbow's freewriting has become connected to a writing process and that it no longer is a way to write free of difficult or internalized audiences.

Furthermore, in *Writing with Power*, Elbow fine-tunes the impact of control on composers by developing different types of writers. The two main types consist of the person who has too much control over the process such that they can also write fluently (and who suffers from boring writing) and the person who is blocked (but who produces interesting writing when they do produce). Freewriting can assist both types of writers by providing the first writer with more unconscious grit to enrich her writing and the second with a semblance of fluency that can ease blocks (*Power* 18).

Similar to the way in which his critique of writing-for-teachers in 1981 is connected to a new emphasis on the extracurriculum, Elbow's presentation on freewriting in *Writing with Power* shows tenets of self-help. Freewriting points to the extracurriculum: freewriting is not part of classroom expectations and not an assignment but instead integral to one's private, long-term progress. In discussing the uses of freewriting, Elbow advocates that writers take a long-term developmental view and to not "put a kind of short-run utilitarian pressure on the process and hinder yourself from getting all the other benefits" (*Power* 17). His view on the outcomes of freewriting is different than Macrorie's; Macrorie seemed to at least partially emphasize the speedy effect of freewriting in *Telling Writing*. In recounting one student's use of freewriting, Macrorie trumpets: "he got rid of his Engfish on the first try" (10). Like Macrorie, however, Elbow suggests doing disposable or private freewrites to further the potential for accessing one's unconscious for one's writing (*Power* 17). All in all, in 1973, freewriting did the important work of cleaning house, of reducing rid of negative

influences (including teachers) in order to provide writers with a more positive cognitive space for composing. The 1981 version of freewriting becomes less about resisting certain negative audiences and more a matter of writers' relationship to their writing process.

Voice

In *Writing without Teachers*, voice receives a handful of mentioning—unlike it's predominance in the next book. Quantity of references, however, does not necessarily correlate with the potency of the device in Elbow's theory. Key to *Writing without Teachers* is the way in which voice becomes metonymic for the reader as a writer—for the reader's entire verbal potential. Elbow equates voice with the “main source of power in your writing” and a page later amps up this description: “It's your only source of power” (*Without* 6-7). He warns readers to not try to avoid this potent device since it stands between the reader and an oblivion of no-audience anonymity: “You better back into it, no matter what you think of it. If you keep writing in it, it may change into something you like better. But if you abandon it, you'll likely never have a voice and never be heard” (*Without* 7). In his high regard of voice, Elbow joins other process theorists including Ken Macrorie, Donald Stewart, Maxine Hairston, and Donald Murray who in textbooks advocate the device to readers (Hashimoto 75-77). In *Writing with Power*, voice is part of the extracurriculum of composition in two ways: through its support for the general public's writing ability and through its critique of conventional

instruction. The centrality of voice as a composing device is evident in its inclusion in the book's final section, "Power in Writing." Voice is linked with power in this section as well as to the "power" in the book's title. Writing with power therefore means writing with voice. Upon further inspection, it becomes evident that this construct of voice in *Writing with Power* results from Elbow's extracurricular stance.

Overall, voice in writing self-help literature is frequently code for trusting the self—that the self has an internal discourse that can both be used to write and to produce interesting writing. In fact, it is not too far a stretch to say that voice *is* the writing self-help message distilled into a single device. Yet for the writing self-help authors discussed in Chapter 4, for instance, that natural ability or voice is largely implied in their argument about writing, whereas Elbow appears to increasingly broach the topic head-on between his 1973 and 1981 books. This may be because Elbow feels more of the need to address criticism of his ideas than self-help authors; he dwells in academia, after all, whereas self-help authors do not need to anticipate an agonistic response to their work. In 1973, Elbow's position resembles the less exacting conversations about voice and ability evident in self-help: "I don't know how it works, but this voice is the force that will make a reader listen to you, the energy that drives the meanings through his thick skull" (*Without* 6). Thereafter, in *Writing with Power*, Elbow makes a much more extensive case for the connection between ability and voice, and he connects it to a writing process.

Because of its infusion of orality into literacy, the concept of voice as advanced by Elbow bolsters the self-help claim of general writing ability. Admiration for voice is akin to admiration for primitive or naïve art since, excepting public speaking curricula,

spoken language is rarely trained, seldom schooled. In this sense, Elbow's appreciation for oral communication is similar to the appreciation of Hughes Mearns or Brenda Ueland for children's art or the self-taught work of Vincent van Gogh. A novice's experience with oral communication is certainly to exceed his or her experience with written communication. We simply speak more than we write during an average lifetime. Therefore, students may have to finish a certain number of research papers or expository writings to pass, but the word count of their oral exchanges outside of that classroom—even during the fifteen weeks of the semester—will exceed the word count of assigned writing. For the self-help argument, this dimension of voice contributes significantly to the discussion of writing ability. It supports the self-help reader, and it supports the view of the reader/novice writer as a seasoned user of language—if not an expert user. We see this move in both of Elbow's early composition books. Just as he had in the 1973 book, in *Writing with Power* Elbow suggests that voice is proof of everybody's verbal ability: "everyone, however, inexperienced or unskilled, has real voice available; everyone can write with power" (304). Voice also casts writing ability as a possession of the individual composer and any aberration of ability is due to problems from outside or from an audience—and not so much with the composer:

For most people, that is how writing is. They're never written unless required to do so in school, and every mistake on every piece of writing they've ever done was circled in red. No wonder most people's writing doesn't have voice—doesn't sound lively and "like them" the way their speaking usually does. (*Power* 290)

Elbow's argument for the primacy of speech over writing coincides with Walter Ong's view that oral language carries greater force than written language since the former occurs in the present moment and entails the presence of the speaker. Similar to Elbow,

Ong repeatedly links orality to “power”: “Sound signals the present use of power”; “sound cannot be sounding without the present use of power”; and oral communication as “power-driven” (“Word” 19; *Orality & Literacy* 32). Spoken communication helps naturalize writing ability: the ability to communicate is contained inside the individual present before the listener—no schooling necessary.

In *Writing with Power*, Elbow fine tunes the self-help proposition about voice and its relation to the self through his three categories of voice. According to his schemata, no voice is “dead, mechanical, faceless” and can be frequently found in bureaucratic writing and in textbooks (especially sociology—Elbow seems to have it out for this discipline) (*Power* 287-8). The second category, voice, is the semblance of a person’s speaking voice on the page (*Power* 288-291). Elbow is most intrigued by the third category, real voice, which entails using words that are reflective of an individual’s nature when not refracted, twisted, or altered by the presence of a challenging audience. That Elbow prefers real voice to the two others and that real voice is synonymous of his readers’ abilities is indicated in how he focuses only on real voice in Chapter 26: How to Get Power Through Voice. By emphasizing real voice, Elbow heightens the writing self-help argument evident in other authors as well as in his *Writing without Teachers* that invention is a deeply internal and private matter. Real voice entails such a focus on individual expression that it ultimately has to do “only with the relationship of the words to the writer” (Elbow 299). In this regard, Elbow differs from other writing self-help authors because he is more concerned about the impact of audience, therefore searches for more nuances ways writers deal with audience—and one nuance is this real voice. In his more recent scholarship, Elbow has continued his exploration of voice and is the

focus of his next book. All in all, *Writing with Power* shows Elbow examining the complexity of audience and of writing education in a far more subtle way than in either his previous book or in any of the other self-help books on writing examined in Chapter 5.

Another way in which Elbow's treatment of voice is related to the extracurriculum is its critique of traditional writing instruction. For one, Elbow broadly dismisses the ability for voice to be taught in conventional settings. Instead of being encapsulated in a fifteen-week course, voice is part of a long-term progress an individual makes in his or her writing, reflecting Elbow's influence by Piaget: "the attainment of real voice is a matter of growth and development rather than mere learning" (*Power* 302). As far as where Elbow first learned about real voice and writing power, it also occurred in an extracurricular—not traditional—context: Elbow's experience with applying for conscientious objector status and then helping others write their own applications during the Vietnam War (*Power* 311). A third sign that Elbow wants voice to be at least partly situated in the extracurriculum—to be without teachers—occurs at the end of Chapter 25. In incentivizing real voice, Elbow suggests that it can lead to publication: "before long you will be able to produce some writing that people will really want to read—even to buy" (303). Thus, the purposes of real voice lie distinctly outside the curriculum: voice is not used to pass a course or for a grade (at least not entirely) but for actual publication, maybe even profitable publication. Elbow heightens this difference in reception between writing done for schools and writing for publication by using the word "buy" instead of "publish" or "print." This slant on a monetary reward suggests that writing with real voice is transactional—is part of the "real" world, not just "real" voice, in which people

exchange labor for financial profit. As Ann Blakeslee has suggested, authentic writing tasks are ones in which the author is paid as very little writing is done gratis in the marketplace.

Elbow's groundbreaking with voice didn't purely occur outside of school settings and is not entirely based on a critique of formal education. This balancing act between the extracurricular and the curricular is one that is more evident in *Writing with Power* than it was in *Writing with Teachers*. Elbow's teaching experience plays a more central role in *Writing with Power*, and the classroom provides Elbow with opportunities to experiment and, as had Ueland, learn from his students. He explains that he advanced his ideas on the three voice categories from his teaching of a course on autobiography. In responding to the significant amount of text students generated each week, Elbow discovered that real voice was a good lens for assessing the student autobiography (*Power* 282-286). Elbow details this classroom-based experimentation for several pages in the first chapter on voice, Chapter 25, in *Writing with Power*. Notably, however, the developments with voice occur in a non-traditional writing course, not a puppy mill for five-paragraph themes.

Furthermore, when Elbow explains in Chapter 26: How to Get Power through Voice the various problems people have mainly with real voice and then offers practices to overcome those problems, Elbow does not mention teachers. In this account, people lack real voice because of premature editing, mistakenly mixing up the stages of composing with editing. People lack real voice because of restrictions imposed by an audience—or evoked by the writer when she contemplates that audience. People lack real voice because it increases their vulnerability or leads them to feelings and ideas they

normally repress (309). The final attribution for this lack of real voice is that individuals are afraid of their own potential to impact others with their words and they “run away from their power” (310). Real voice then can leave a writer in a zone of discomfort because it will first introduce the writer to memories and feelings they’d rather not acknowledge to themselves—and then rather not display to others. Elbow’s solutions to these problems with real voice largely concern taking charge of one’s proximity to audience through private free writing or through editing for voice. What is interesting in this discussion of impediments to real voice, however, is the way in which the teacher is not an obvious instigator. While teachers are hinted at in the writer’s premature editing (a defense mechanism to ward off an internalized critic), they are not explicitly cited in any of this discussion of the impact of audience. This is a subtle development since *Writing without Teachers*.

Learning about voice is an extracurricular act in the sense that it involves a devolution as well as an unlearning of one’s former writing education. For one, voice is best learned through messy and chaotic writings. Both Elbow and Macrorie maintain that freewriting is crucial to achieving voice and authenticity in their first composition books (or writing with no guarantee of outcome and frequently no audience). Secondly, according to Elbow, in order to reach real voice, many people need to essentially abandon the structures and rules they’ve obtained through formal education:

In attaining a new stage of development, you move from one mode of functioning to a more complex, sophisticated mode. In the process, skills can fall apart. There are lots of things you did well with that old mode which you now bungle. A genuine restructuring requires a deconstructing. I think I see this happening in writing: many students don’t seem to get past certain levels of adequate writing without going through a stage with lots of deteriorated writing. (*Power* 302)

In doing this deconstructing, students need to accept that their writing will enter a period of degeneration (*Power* 302). That this degeneration, while uncomfortable, is preferable to staying locked in the limbo of mediocrity of most successful school-based writing.

Elbow argues that the reason why these structures and rules are ineffectual for writing is that they have been formed out of teachers' misperceptions about writing. Teachers adopt a corrective stance toward writing and thus advocate aims that are not synonymous with excellent writing. That is, teachers' focus is in actuality about stamping out badness (typically grammatical), and as a result of their goal, teachers can neither perceive nor foster strong writing: "teachers who care more about getting rid of badness than about looking for potential excellence" (*Power* 302). This ineffective writing process is then passed on to students; it is embodied in most students' premature editing. People can engage in a lifelong censorship of their own writing out of anticipation of responses from teachers lingering in the past.

At the same time, voice becomes one of the touchstones for the process movement of the 1970's and early 1980's. Voice isn't simply a link between writing self-help and Elbow: it's also a connection between the process movement and writing self-help, with *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power* serving as the bridge. As Lad Tobin describes the process movement as "not so much a matter of teaching students new rules or strategies but of helping them gain access to their 'real' or 'authentic' voice and perspective that traditional school has taught them to distrust and suppress" (5). It seems that the writing teachers who embraced Elbow's ideas about voice during this time were expressing the same enthusiasm for individual writing potential as the writing self-help authors. The motivation of instructors and of self-help

authors was the same: to help novices access words for their experiences and to eliminate teachers or other critical audiences as an obstacle. As Randall R. Freisinger describes some academic's fascination with the impact of teaching voice and of seemingly fostering student individuality, the scene is one of exhilaration:

Many of us spent hours running from cubicle to cubicle, reading to each other the seemingly amazing things our once lip-locked students had suddenly blurted out. We all felt as if we had just witnessed the angel bid Caedmon sing or a little like Galileo staring at newly discovered planets. (188)

In "Voice as Juice: Some Reservations about Evangelic Composition," I. Hashimoto challenges this evangelical streak to voice pedagogy. Hashimoto argues that the evangelical approach teachers use with voice may not be appropriate for all students or for all writing tasks. Even more hazardous to the field is the anti-intellectualism of an evangelical action as helping students find their real voice (Hashimoto). It does seem that writing experts were as energized by their "liberation" of institutionalized students as the students themselves, suggesting that the status quo of the university is a psychic burden for faculty. Just as self-help authors sought to inculcate self-trust in their readers, writing instructors swayed by process pedagogic notions such as voice wanted to become themselves more trustworthy authorities to students. Of course, what differentiates the writing instructor from the self-help author is that the former *is* by profession that which needs to be removed—the teacher as obstacle. To help others achieve voice in their writing is to foster their individuality in an institutionalized setting.

Evidence of Self-Help in Elbow's Composing Strategies

Of all the parts of *Writing with Power*, the book's composing strategies probably most differentiate Elbow's 1981 praxis from that in *Writing without Teachers*. In 1973, Elbow's notion of process is basically two-fold: growing and cooking, whereas in the second book, he has identified seven separate strategies—each tailored to different amounts of time commitment a writer may have for an allotted task. According to Duane Roen, "*Writing with Power* offers students many more practical strategies to students. *Writing without Teachers* is interesting and thoughtful and provocative and a little more theoretical; *Power* is jam-packed with effective strategies" (interview with Roen). For example, while one of the 1981 composing methods, the Open-Ended Method, sounds virtually identical to the Growing Process from 1973, what is new is that the Open-Ended Method is geared toward a particular composing situation. Namely, the Open-Ended Method is designed for when a writer has to "bring to birth an unknown, unthought-of piece of writing—a piece of writing that is not yet in you" (Power 50). Thus, this later composing method is more fine-tuned about the state of mind the writer brings to the task and demonstrates Elbow both fostering and participating in discussions in the field at the time about the details of individual composing work. Elbow's composing strategies contribute to the move away from current-traditionalism and a product emphasis to a focus on the process students undertake to write.

The composing strategies essentially strive to prolong the canon of invention: these methods target the moment when people are generating new material and then elaborating on those new ideas. In focusing on invention or the creative moments of writing, the composing strategies attempt to demonstrate to novice writers where their real control lies over the writing process: when and how their audience enters as an

influence on the text. Namely, the 1973 and 1981 strategies which Elbow calls the Growing Process, Cooking Process, Open-Ended Process, and Loop-Writing Process are all ways to help the struggling writer manage the proximity—real or imagined—of their intended audience to the nascent text. Essentially, Elbow advocates that the person who wants to write focus on self-communication or intrapersonal communication in which attention toward an audience is delayed—if that delay helps ameliorate blocks, anxiety, or unwanted influence on content. As he says in introducing the Audience section of *Writing with Power*: “Writing is usually a communication with others. And yet the essential transaction seems to be with oneself, a speaking to one’s best self” (*Power* 179).

Another connection between the two books in the matter of the composing methods is how perfectionism or premature editing is countered. Elbow made the renunciation of writerly control one of the three main contentions of *Writing without Teachers*, since premature editing is actually a defense mechanism developed from experiences of correction from teachers which is then projected onto future (non-teacher) audiences’ reactions to one’s work. In his early composing strategies, Elbow emphasized the importance of simply producing words without regard for evaluation (either by the self or by anticipated others). Accordingly, when discussing the freewriting and brainstorming first stage of the Growing Process, Elbow advises: “Your job, as with the writing, is not to do the task well, it is to do the task” (*Without* 20). Perfectionism is a common problem with writing self-help readers—as is starting a writing task. The composing strategies, in their emphasis on generating words, are conveying the self-help critique of teachers and their unhelpful influence on texts. The methods allow “garbage”

which means disregarding audience/teacher evaluation (anticipated and actual) and in this way address issues of control (central to *Writing without Teachers*).

The composing processes of *Writing with Power* were well-received in the 1980's by universities and graduate programs in Composition-Rhetoric. At the University of Arizona in the 1980's, Elbow's impact took the form of *Writing with Power*, not *Writing without Teachers* and altered the entire writing curriculum—and beyond (interview with Roen). *Writing with Power* was adopted as a required textbook for the first-year composition course from 1983 to 1987. (interview with Roen). Faculty and teaching assistants were regularly exposed to Elbow's ideas, particularly those about composing and revising, during those years through training workshops, handouts, and a 1981-1982 academic year colloquium facilitated by Elbow. Roen had been struck by the unusual approach of *Writing without Teachers* when it first came out, crediting it along with Janet Emig's *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, Ken Macrorie's *UpTaught* and *Telling Writing*, and Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* to radically altering his teaching:

These four works, particularly Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers*, made me sick at the thought of how much I had focused on the surface features of students' papers in five or six sections of composition courses each semester for five years. But I was heartened by Elbow's suggestions for offering students strategies for generating ideas and for refining their thinking. Elbow introduced me to composing processes that I could share with students—freewriting exercises, “growing,” “cooking,” “the believing game,” and “the doubting game.” (“Teaching and Writing with Elbow” 1-2)

Although deeply changed by *Writing without Teachers*, Roen used ideas from Elbow's second book when he was teaching a methods course to undergraduate English majors, as well as to Arizona teachers in workshops funded by the Mellon Foundation (Roen 2).

According to Roen, “*Writing with Power* offers students many more practical strategies to students. *Writing without Teachers* is interesting and thoughtful and provocative and a little more theoretical; *Power* is jam-packed with effective strategies” (interview).

This more nuanced discussion of process in *Writing with Power* builds off of self-help ideas about audience and the writer first advanced in *Writing without Teachers*. In *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow attempted to blast out conventionality from his theory of writing instruction; in *Writing with Power*, he gets to tease out the implications and possibilities once that area is cleared of pre- and arguably misconceptions about the act of composing. The two chief methods, The Open-Ended and Loop Writing Processes in *Writing with Power* are built upon Elbow’s earlier idea that it is crucial for composers to separate the producing from the editing phases of their writing. In *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow says that people have been wrongly trained to think of writing as a matter of figuring out one’s thinking first and writing second (*Without* 14). According to Elbow, “virtually all of us carry this model of the writing process around in our heads” and it’s a model which “sabotages our efforts to write” (*Without* 14). In 1981, the terms for the producing and editing phases have changed to include binaries such as creativity and critical or analytical thinking and intuition and control. By “creativity,” Elbow means the generative or producing phase that so much of the 1981 composing methods are taken up by (and not any belletristic genre); by “critical” or “analytical” phase, he means essentially an awareness of audience during the revising methods in Chapters I and III in *Writing with Power*.

The construct of writing as a process fits well with the project of writing self-help literature because the writing process entails a great deal of solo or individual work in

composing—time away from a potentially critical or demanding audience. Because the writing process in the composing methods covered in both the 1973 and 1981 books allows for moments in which audience consideration is suspended, the writer is permitted more experimentation, leading to messy or dead-end writing. In fostering experimentation with no guaranteed outcome, the composing methods allow for freewriting and even disposable writing—stretches in which the writer creates text that may altogether never be read by any audience. Secondly, to see writing as a process, means perceiving it as a long-term project rather than terminating with the successful completion of a particular writing assignment. Like self-help, a writing process partially entails self-directed learning—Elbow even calls the Growing Process “developmental” in *Writing without Teachers* (18; 33).

Moreover, the writing processes detailed in the different composing methods allow for a writer’s independence from teachers—writing without teachers—in a definitive way. Specifically, the processes provide a detailed method for a writer to utilize independent of a teacher’s heuristic or assignment, much as writing self-help provides ways to write without need of a teacher. This independence is evident in Elbow’s description of the strategies as “practical, step-by-step sections constitut[ing] what is probably the core of the book” (*Power* 4). For Duane Roen, one purpose of a first-year writing course is to help students indeed learn to write without him, the professor: “students are with us for such a short period of our lives that they need to develop their skills in absence of teachers” (interview). Thus, it could be said that the goal of any writing course is fundamentally self-help: we want our students to develop ways to approach writing long after our contact with them has ended. Elbow’s

composing strategies facilitate that self-help: they can be used on any sort of writing task and are not limited to a teacher-provided assignment or a school genre. Assignment-free, these composing strategies are constructed instead on the writer's relation to his or her ideas. In other words, you pick a strategy based on where you are with a particular writing task—do you want to write it? Do you have too many ideas? Do you feel apathetic about it? And so forth. It is an assignment-free writing task zone.

Mystery and the Teachability of Writing Argument in Writing with Power

It's hard to believe Elbow could make himself more vulnerable to academic critique than he did by announcing "let's write without teachers," but in writing about voice and "magic" at the end of *Writing with Power*, he certainly did. In this chapter, he mentions matters utterly foreign to conventional academic dialog—voodoo, charms, rituals, fetishes, and spells, no less. Further proof that Elbow has stepped into academia's no-man's land is the overview of his preceding argument in *Writing with Power* that starts this chapter on magic:

It is almost as though I am saying you must magically devour what you are writing about if you want to put a successful hex on the reader—must enter into the thing or merge your soul with the soul of the thing. In the two voice chapters I say you must be in the right relationship with yourself, but it is almost as though I am saying you must purify yourself in a blameless holy rite or else your words will not have grace. When you have gotten all the steps right in the magic dance, *bang*, your words have life, they "take."
(*Power* 357)

Of any part in *Writing with Power*, the final chapter on “Writing and Magic” is probably the strongest indicator of where self-help took Elbow in his work. As Elbow says to start the chapter: “I seem to have drifted into a magical view of writing” (*Power* 357). It’s clear that this magical view has not entirely helped Elbow’s association with romanticism. In the second edition, Elbow attributes theorists’ portrayals of his work as romantic to his mention of magic and mystery (*Power* xiii). According to I. Hashimoto, Elbow’s use of “magic” in discussing voice is problematic because it tends toward anti-intellectualism. Elbow’s magical terms for voice ask students to believe and not necessarily study voice: “Metaphors for ‘voice’ such as ‘juice,’ ‘mother’s milk,’ ‘magic,’ and ‘electricity’ evoke emotion long before they evoke understanding” (“Voice as Juice” 76). Elbow is fully aware of how ludicrous his ideas may appear to fellow academics—and thus playfully advocates for “moderate” magic (*Power* 359).

That said, Elbow’s deployment of magic and mystery are not indicative of some ludicrous dimension of stereotypical self-help literature: the sort that says that you can lose 10 pounds through chanting. So you can write well magically?—that sort of mindset. In actuality, Elbow’s infusion of mystery and magic into *Writing with Power* is connected to a complex stance on whether writing or creativity can be taught—or, more specifically, which parts of these acts can be taught. In *Writing with Power*, “magic” and “mystery” also represent the matters which can’t be analyzed or approached through a conventional academic or theoretical lens.

While Chapter 29 dwells on the magical dimensions of writing and seems to serve as a capstone to the last section in the book, “Power in Writing,” references to magic and the like appear throughout the text. Specifically, the terms “magic” and “mystery”

appear with frequency—and most often in conjunction with “power.” Of his approach, Elbow says indeed that he “always want[s] to talk about what cannot quite be analyzed” (xiii). In addition to voice, mystery seeps into many of Elbow’s other key ideas. For example, Elbow says that he stands by his belief in the mysterious dimensions of composing and that this belief shapes his advocacy of felt sense, his invitation of substandard writing, and his views on sharing. In addition, Elbow was not an anomaly inside Composition Studies at the time in his emphasis on magic; rather, magic and mystery were inevitable sub-strata of the writing-as-discovery metaphor recurrent in process conversations. Maxine Hairston spoke of that connection between mystery and discovery: “One point that is becoming clear is that writing is an act of discovery for both skilled and unskilled writers; most writers have only a partial notion of what they want to say when they begin to write, and their ideas develop in the process of writing. They develop their topics intuitively, not methodically” (123). Secondly, Elbow’s emphasis on magic could have been a response to the promotion of empirical research on the writing process that was also developing in the field. In 1980, that empiricism was exemplified by Linda Flower and John Hayes’ attempt to reduce the mystery of the writing process by exploring it as a more rational matter—a cognitive matter of how writers set a rhetorical problem before themselves to write. Flower and Hayes conclude their 1980 study by supplanting mystery with cognition: “[t]he ability to explore a rhetorical problem is eminently teachable. Unlike a metaphoric ‘discovery,’ problem-finding is not a totally mysterious or magical act... A part of creative thinking is just plain thinking” (74). Elbow may be responding to views such as Flower and Hayes, and ever the dialectical thinker, be working to push his readers to think of both the ineffable and the

documentable sides of composing. Elbow acknowledges that his approach “may be extreme, but it’s extreme in two opposite directions” (xxvi). He also says in the introduction to the 1998 edition, “I’ve always raised my eyebrows at what feels like the hyper-rationality in Linda Flower’s work” (xxii).

Essentially, his message (to the lay reader or novice writer) about writing’s magic is that you can’t wait around for magic to strike, for inspiration or to be in the right mood. Elbow tries to walk readers away from the idea that the ability to write has to be some sort of mysterious matter reached upon by serendipity. It takes writing a lot and messily to reach writing that has that magical effect on others. What Elbow is doing in dismantling the conventional notion of writing-as-inspiration is saying that the magic of writing can be reached through composing methods such as the ones he advocates or has designed—freewriting, the Open-Ended Process, the Cooking Process, and so forth. Magic seems to represent the invention phase of composing as embodied in his different methods. In 1981, Chapter 1: An Approach to Writing, Elbow argues for two separate phases in composing—one of creativity/generation and a second of analysis/audience consideration/revision. However, by the introduction to the second edition in 1998, “magic” has replaced creativity in that binary. Trying to avoid binaries, Elbow proposes in the second edition that writers work fiercely at both the magical and analytical sides of composing (*Power* xxvi).

Furthermore, Elbow believes that everyone can obtain that magical effect with a little effort, although the magic may occur at first only in small amounts. In this book, “magic” and “mystery” represent aspects about creativity which can’t be approached through academic methods. In this regard, he is arguing for a new perspective, one

outside of academia—in the same sort of gesture he made when he say to write-without-teachers. However, magic and mystery are also the power of writing, the experience of writing that Elbow hopes everyone has a chance to taste. According to Elbow, “[e]ven though it’s hard to name and analyze real excellence and the more mysterious qualities of voice, life, juice, and the non-fake, *they are nevertheless not so hard to attain*, at least in snatches. And quickly—even by people who are unskilled” (*Power* xx). The inception of new writing is indeed mysterious in the sense of powerful, but everyone can approach that power and experience that magic by working on the invention phase of composing. This idea is so important to Elbow’s project that he ends *Writing with Power* on it in his final paragraph:

I return here, then, to the main theme of my book. You must learn—and for some reason you often have to relearn—how to churn out words whether or not you feel in tune with what you are writing. The precondition for writing well is being able to write badly and to write when you are not in the mood. Sometimes you cannot get to the magic except through a long valley of fake, dead writing. Though you must believe in magic, then, often you must be willing to do without it. (*Power* 373)

This view that even novices can experience writing power echoes what Elbow said about voice; for both voice and magic—and they are not unrelated in his discussion—suggest an inner capacity for writing in the general population. That affirmation of general ability in *Writing with Power* links Elbow’s second composition book to the principles of writing self-help, as discussed in Chapter 4 of this project.

His message about magic (to writing experts) is that it’s worth pursuing: despite the fact that it seems easier to go after surface correction. Elbow feels that many writing instructors, believing they are unable to achieve the magic of writing, settle for stamping

out seeming badness in writing. The worthier pursuit is to not compromise and to at least attempt to help students reach that magic:

I have sympathy for people who choose the first goal of fighting badness... We pretty much know what badness is and we can pretty much agree when we see it. And we know how to get rid of it: delete. We don't know any proven paths to excellence—indeed we often have more trouble agreeing about what excellence is, or whether some piece is excellent or not. What I don't have sympathy for, however, is the confusion of these goals: professing that one is seeking excellence but actually spending all one's energy just fighting badness, carelessness, and poor writing. (*Power xx*)

At the same time, Elbow is taking a jab at hard-core rationalism when he tries to get academics to admit that writing and by extension writing instruction do contain areas that are untouchable, unquantifiable, unresearchable, unanalytical. In a nutshell, one's expertise, if one possesses it, cannot claim a special knowledge of certain areas of composing.

That magic and mystery do cast parts of the writing act beyond the purview of academia is evident in how Elbow treats sharing as a form of mystery. In his discussion of sharing in the introduction to the second edition, it is clear that the mysteriousness of sharing is directly linked to the absence of teachers. Teachers do not figure into his description of the act of sharing except as points of criticism. Concerning sharing, Elbow commends it as “all learning, no teaching” and says that advice from amateur readers is often better than advice from teachers since teachers tend to be doctrinaire (*Power xxii*). Elbow's esteem for the extracurricular in writing's mysteries is also evident in how frequently he references the writing or imagination of children in this last chapter in the book. For instance, he says that “children have more real voice. They talk poetically more easily than adults do” (*Power 360*). As instances of magical language, Elbow cites

the language practices of so-called primitive cultures as well as non-academic language acts such as swearing and the naming of newborns. Elbow says: “In our rational and sophisticated culture, then, names and swearing remind us that all language used to be loaded but now juice is in only a few corners” (365). This preference for naïve verbal performance is one also evinced in Brenda Ueland’s *If You Want to Write* and to the work of Hughes Mearns. In the last chapter, he also mentions various superstitions of professional authors:

how many serious, professional, and otherwise rational writers dally with magic in their writing. They have to get the right pencil or chair or paper. If they get any steps wrong in the ritual dance they use in writing, they feel as though words won’t come or that the wrong words will come or that the words won’t be effective. In addition writers often have a great fear of *talking about* something they are writing or planning to write. It’s as though talking will put a jinx on it. (*Power* 358)

I would contend about this particular example that what these superstitious professional writers are doing is actually trying to control the chaos of writing by controlling their environment. Nevertheless, such an example from professional authors suggests that individuals regularly acknowledge the mystery of writing. Indeed, it almost seems as though in *Writing with Power*, “mystery” has become emblematic of Elbow’s relation with chaos and false control. By accepting and putting oneself at the service of this mystery of writing, an individual, like any superstitious act, is both reneging control to larger forces and begging a bit of control. Elbow is saying that the mystery of writing can be taught—at least partially—and that it’s worth our time to do so. The mysteries of writing are in fact the strengths of writing; to produce strong writing, one needs to mingle with those mysteries.

As an emerging discipline, Composition Studies has historically displayed a predilection for aligning itself to other disciplines and traditions in order to achieve disciplinarity. Cognitive psychology and the classical rhetorical tradition are two intellectual alliances Composition Studies has attempted to forge in its recent past. To this empiricism and to what Nan Johnson has called the “classicist approach,” I would add the extracurriculum. Namely, Composition Studies as an emerging discipline reached out to the writing that occurs outside of itself in order to fix certain problems it perceived in its praxis. More than just an absorption of the extracurriculum as has been pointed out by Gere, Applebee, and Rudolph, Composition Studies has paradoxically used writing practices external to the university to establish itself as a discipline within the university. Arguably one of the most important instances of the field’s reliance on the extracurriculum to define itself is embodied in its response to Elbow’s early work. In particular, the field’s absorption of Elbow’s notions of writing process as presented in *Writing with Power* suggests a great receptivity toward the self-help and extracurricular sides of composing.

Chapter VIII

Implications, or What is the Sound of Teaching without a Teacher?

Since its publication in 1973, Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* has served a dual function. For general readers, the book functions as a self-help text offering suggestions about composing and writer's blocks; for academic readers, on the other hand, the book's critique of their profession is an invitation to dwell with an enigma, to embrace a contrary. Can we become stronger writing teachers by resigning our postures of mastery and accepting our flaws—even our irrelevance to learning? Can we build a writing curriculum and pedagogy that include interests and perspectives from outside the academy? *Writing without Teachers*, a book seeped in metaphor and affected by twin audiences, continues to haunt experts in the field with its multiple meanings, its ambiguities (but never its ambivalence).

In the eastern tradition of spiritual learning, the enigmatic figures prominently in the form of the koan. Novices in Zen training approached master monks with a question to which the monk would reply with a seemingly inscrutable answer—either verbally or physically. Zen masters were known to resort to hitting, beating, and even maiming students, but they also used incoherence, ambiguity, imagery, and repetition to instruct. Together, the initial question and the monk's response served as a form of independent

study for the novice who would spend an unprescribed amount of time working toward its solution. As D. T. Suzuki describes the koan in *Zen Buddhism*, the koan is intended to develop Zen consciousness by surpassing the limits of logic and intellectualism: “the koan given to the uninitiated is intended to ‘destroy the root of life,’ ‘to make the calculating mind die’, ‘to root out the entire mind that has been at work since eternity’” (138). One learning outcome of the koan, so to speak, is an embracing of paradox and contradiction as part of the reality of the present, not tampered with by categories and intellect. A classic example from eastern thought of such paradox, although not a koan per se, is the Buddha’s pronouncement at a summit of monks that “Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.” In a similar fashion, *Writing without Teachers* has functioned as a koan for the discipline of Composition Studies, leading us to consider paradoxes inherent in writing instruction.

Ambiguity and room for multiple ideas and multiple roles are widely evident in *Writing without Teachers*. First, there’s the matter of the title phrase and its various ramifications. There’s *Writing without Teachers*, the 206-page book with the unobtrusive cover first published by Oxford University Press in 1973, and then there’s “writing without teachers,” the Concept. The former designates a second book published by a thirty-seven year old scholar at the cusp of becoming a figurehead in a new field of Composition Studies, a book that will become metonymic of both the scholar and the pedagogical movement that shortly occurs. Under *Writing without Teachers* falls practitioners’ by-now conventional knowledge of peer workshop, freewriting, and a developmental, phased model of composing. Foucaultian author-function aside, it is this sense of *Writing without Teachers* that the field of Composition Studies has most seemed

to understand the title phrase. For many in the field, Elbow and even this 1973 book are practically cliché. As Ed White and Shane Borrowman describe in their 2002 chapter on Elbow's impact, scholars younger in the field frequently learn of Elbow but do not encounter his work directly. Graduate students' experience of Elbow is often from secondary sources, and hence Elbow becomes an icon and a straw man rather than the proponent of an argument deserving engagement. According to Borrowman: "For me, everything that seemed strange or 'touchy-feely,' to use the term I employed then, could be clipped to my fuzzy image of Elbow; he represented those things about writing that I had never experienced—and would never truly understand until I began teaching writing for a living years later" (49-50).

The second "writing without teachers," the Concept, is contained in any writing self-help book, including ones as situated in another epoch as Eliza Leslie's 1854 *The Behaviour Book*. All writing self-help books promote writing without teachers. Above all it is this gesture which ties Elbow's first composition theory to the tradition of self-help. This concept is the core of the extracurriculum. Just as a koan acts as a sign, pointer, pointing finger, blossoming plum branch, and haiku to suggest where the novice should go in his or her investigations of Buddhism, Elbow's title phrase has pointed to where writing specialists should head with their thinking. Significant numbers of writing specialists in the last three decades have responded to Elbow's writing-without-teachers out of a fundamental ambivalence to the values of the academia and to the pedagogy of writing teachers. These individuals have used Elbow's self-help discussion in order to teach themselves a different way of instructing. As such, process-identified writing specialists have used Elbow's ideas to fashion different identities for themselves and their

students in the writing class—an activity Robert Brooke has labeled the “underlife of writing instruction.”

Undergraduate students may have a fresher perspective on *Writing without Teachers* and Elbow’s project. *They* can see its oddity as well as the paradox of such a book existing inside academic settings. On several occasions when teaching Elbow to undergraduates, non-English majors who I would guess with near certainty are unfamiliar with anything about composition theory, the students have reacted immediately to the book title: they look quizzical. For writing experts, Elbow’s ideas have become so deeply imbedded into our whole praxis for undergraduates that we often don’t recognize his influence on our ideas. Elbow is like using the same handout semester after semester that someone lent us during graduate school, the ink and the authorship of the handout becoming that much more ambiguous with each passage through the copier machine. For students, on the other hand, the title can open a whole new plane of thinking: that they could complete writing that a teacher doesn’t see—and perhaps more phenomenally—that their writing instructor would even raise this possibility. It is important to note that this book title would carry a different meaning for novices located within school (undergraduates in a first-year composition course) than for novices located outside of school (people in a Barnes & Noble writers’ group or a lone individual who wants to start a novel). The second group, those rooted in the extracurriculum and those who also constitute Elbow’s primary audience, would take it for granted that they are about to embark on writing without teachers. They look up from their table at the coffee shop or from their improvised kitchen-table writing area and find no writing professor in sight.

Like a Zen koan, “write without teachers” is not literally about what its individual words signify but instead to a larger sense, a perspective or type of consciousness. Actual Zen koan attempt to guide apprentices to the state of satori or enlightenment. As Suzuki defines satori, it is “an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it” (84). Just as koan are not to be understood solely through the items they mention and instead understood to seek a different life perspective, “write without teachers” is not literally a full renunciation of the classroom teacher. (If it did imply this renunciation, how would we understand Elbow’s own long teaching career?) In this case, it’s a question of whether the teacher-reader of Elbow’s book is ready to step aside and create a more student-centered developmental course, one which is devoted to studying with students the act of invention and does not just require a written product. As mentioned in Chapter 7 of this project, Ken Macrorie noted the outlook-changing work of Elbow’s work after *Writing without Teachers*, portraying Elbow’s 1986 *Embracing Contraries* as a “manual on how to be wise. It’s the darnedest thing—a self-help book whose central model for thinking requires you to keep turning ideas over and over until they often look good standing on their heads” (xiv in *Writing with Elbow*).

For some scholars just starting their teaching training or careers in the early to mid 1970’s, the approach of *Writing without Teachers* did strike them as a total mind shift. For Theresa Enos, Elbow’s book was the single impetus for her selection of Composition and Rhetoric as her discipline. One of her teachers in graduate school, Gary Tate, assigned *Writing without Teachers* to Enos, and she was “kind of blown away by the book” (interview with Enos). As a brand-new teaching assistant, Enos began using

freewriting in all her classes and found that “Elbow was so completely different [from the modes-based instruction at her institution]. You were actually working with the student, intervening in the writing process (which was the whole point of the process revolution). It was a 100% turn-around, and I could see the engagement of the students. I could see the cognitive process. I could see their brain working through this freewriting” (interview with Enos). Established composition theorists including Theresa Enos, Duane Roen, and Lad Tobin describe their teaching styles prior to exposure to *Writing without Teachers* as benighted—and how Elbow’s work, along with other process proponents, helped them perceive students and the purpose of teaching more clearly. Note the number of references to “seeing” the writing process in Enos’ description of her transformation through Elbow’s influence—a standard conceptual metaphor for new comprehension.

The ambiguity of *Writing without Teachers* is enhanced by its numerous paradoxes, paradoxes which resemble a koan as well as the sort that can be found in the underlife of writing instruction. Of course, one paradox of *Writing without Teachers* is how a self-help book, one addressed to non-scholars and indeed one critical of academia, would have such a lasting impact on academic writing instruction. Among the many paradoxes of *Writing without Teachers* would be the yin-yang relationship of chaos and control, solitude and readership, creativity and analysis, doubt and belief. In “East Meets West: Peter Elbow’s ‘Embracing’ of ‘Contraries’ Across Cultures,” George Kalamaras describes the ways in which Elbow has engaged paradox throughout his career. Although Kalamaras is speaking of Elbow’s overall work with doubt and belief and not of *Writing*

without Teachers in particular, Kalamaras' description is also applicable to the 1973 book:

the importance of remaining attentive to the interaction of what might on the surface be considered contradictory. This is similar to the use of Zen Buddhist *koans* (such as "What *is* your face before your parents *were* born?" [emphasis added]), whose paradoxical structure serves to sever the question from the answer (and, paradoxically, even from the questioner), reorienting one to a fresh experience of reality. (117)

And then there's the question of the identity of Elbow's "real" *Writing without Teachers* reader, given his choice to publish with a university press and given his own position inside academia. Moreover, does Elbow *really* mean that we should write totally without teachers, or is there some sort of half-way state? If we are a teacher-reader of *Writing without Teachers*, does this mean we should cease all teaching in order to teach?

Consider the paradox—or tautology—in that notion. What exactly did Elbow envision as the outcome of his proposal? Chief among the ambiguities of *Writing without Teachers* is the exact nature of the role for the writing teacher. In fact, Elbow is encouraging teacher-readers to engage in underlife, in an imaginative practice of identity formation that embodies being a teacher and a non-teacher, embodies the paradox in the title phrase.

In his 1987 article, "Underlife and Writing Instruction," Robert Brooke described the way in which students and writing teachers alike "undercut the traditional roles of the American educational system in order to substitute more complex identities in their place" (141). Brooke suggests that students demonstrate their ability to create different roles for themselves other than those provided by the university through the in-class behavior we would normally think of as disruptive or off-task. Writing faculty also engage in underlife when they strive to develop new identities for their students as writers first, students second. To foster student identities as writers, a new student-centered

pedagogy is called for: “If our goal as writing teachers is to enable students to see themselves as and to act as writers, then our role as teachers making assignments and evaluating their performance can only get in the way” (150). Applying Erving Goffman’s sociological categories for underlife, Brooke argues that students typically engage in “contained” underlife, seeking only to demonstrate some autonomy from their assigned roles, whereas faculty engage in “disruptive” underlife and seek to alter those classroom roles (148). For Brooke, the significance of underlife to writing instruction is considerable because it suggests that “the primary function of the composition classroom is to foster a particular identity or stance towards the world,” not just a writing course (151). In their roles as writers, students are encouraged by Composition Studies to explore and change social roles far beyond those occurring inside the first-year composition classroom. In essence, this more critical stance toward assigned identities both inside and outside the university is synonymous with being an original thinker. First-year composition in Brooke’s rendering is concerned with far more substantial matters than knowledge transfer, discourse and genre conventions, or the tired binary of expressivism versus social construction.

For professional academics, the act of reading *Writing without Teachers* constitutes their own underlife behavior. Reading self-help in general or turning toward the extracurriculum of composition for guidance is fundamentally an act of underlife. These acts represent underlife because they indicate that the in-house curriculum and theory of Composition Studies are not sufficient in some regard for some members of the discipline. To turn to either self-help specifically or the extracurriculum more broadly is to say that we won’t completely affiliate ourselves as scholars or teachers with the

established curriculum, with the institution of academia. Instead, we chose to turn outside, to the other, to the extracurricular for our approaches to teaching and writing. This situation would of course be true for any academic discipline—psychology comes most readily to mind—if it turned away from its peer-reviewed journals and publishing houses and turned toward popular self-help advice in its content area.

Composition scholars have never been greatly influenced by writing self-help literature. As much as books such as Lamott's *Bird by Bird* or Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* resurface on various Composition-Rhetoric list-servs (usually as gift ideas for undergraduates interested in writing or as reading material in cross-disciplinary faculty WAC workshops), to date writing self-help has not figured prominently in the field. As often as Composition Studies has raided the informal writing clubs and groups of the extracurriculum, as Ann Ruggles Gere, Arthur Applebee, and Gerald Graff have well documented for ideas for formal writing instruction, the field has not been so interested in writing self-help literature. Not so interested, that is, until 1973, and the years following the publication of *Writing without Teachers*. Elbow's book, for all the reasons I discussed, is the field's chief exposure to writing self-help advice. In other words, *Writing without Teachers* is the field's textbook on underlife. In the case of *Writing without Teachers*, the paradox is that teachers take seriously an extracurricular text in their area of expertise—of turning to self-help to learn about their own field. Again, such would be the case with any academic discipline's usage of self-help, but in the case of Elbow's book, the paradox is heightened by the fact that teacher-readers are accepting a text that makes their own extraneousness the message of its title.

When many scholars in the field took on Elbow's ideas in *Writing without Teachers*, they stepped out of their traditionally assigned role of content-master, moving away from the front of the class, so to speak, to instead sit in the rows, with the students. In general, writing self-help critiques conventional schooling and can consequentially initiate a response of underlife. Since 1973, sympathetic teacher-readers of *Writing without Teachers* have essentially been looking over the shoulders of the book's intended audience. Since Elbow's book is a sort of exposé of the ills of teachers and how to function without teachers, by absorbing *Writing without Teachers*, teachers were engaging in a similar underlife that Brooke observed in students. Just as something about the assigned role of student provokes the first-year composition student to begin whispering to his neighbor or text-messaging in class, some sort of perceived limitation about the role of professor compels the writing professor to identify herself as an alternative teacher. In this scenario of underlife, the alternative identity for the educator is one of self-proclaimed rebel or liberal; underlife doesn't seem to respond to the institution by becoming more conservative or rules-bound than the institution. Thus, the teacher engages in underlife by aligning herself with the students, even through as small a gesture as putting the chairs in a circle. In my own teaching, Elbow-based underlife manifests when I introduce myself at the beginning of a semester as "a writer first, teacher second," including other more overtly pedagogical strategies such as using contract grading or private freewriting for drafts. (That I would ambush theoretically guileless undergraduates with Elbow's *Writing without Teachers* is in itself an act of underlife.) Elbow is not unique in his stimulation of underlife response; the process movement is replete with other examples, albeit not ones of self-help. Ken Macrorie's

Telling Writing, for example, is steeped in the underlife, and Macrorie clearly attempts to set himself up as a radical teacher and to goad fellow academics into disrupting the academic status quo.

Although writing self-help books overall have not been on the forefront of academic writing theory, these books have been the primary theory and praxis for individuals outside of academia. Further study should be given to writing self-help literature, both historic and contemporary, as the text of praxis of the extracurriculum—as the equivalent to our field’s journal and book publications. As James Marshall has pointed out, the field of Composition Studies has largely overlooked connections between the earlier Progressive education and the process movement. As a result, the field has “failed to exploit a rich resource, [and] we also have missed an opportunity to study how a movement similar to our own, but larger and more comprehensive, fared in making the kinds of changes in schools that we hope to make” (Marshall 53). If process proponents have ignored this history inside the field of education, they have also ignore the history outside education—or that of self-help. This second neglect carries its avoidable perils as well. As Thomas Newkirk has argued, English Studies has regrettably defined itself against sentimental and self-help discourses that have tremendous leverage with the general public. This othering of popular discourses has both worked to establish the field as a discipline but also to set it up as elitist (“Sentimental Journeys” 28). After describing the impact of a sentimental poem on his aging mother, Newkirk says, “Attention must be paid to any form of language so powerful that it can reconcile someone to the loss of life itself” (32).

In addition to embracing, or at least respectfully considering, the value systems inherent in popular texts such as self-help, I would suggest that we examine these texts critically for their ideas about the writing process and even teaching. These writing self-help books, frequently bestsellers, have widely functioned as the general population's life-raft of choice out of writer's blocks or the loneliness of starting a dreamed-of writing project. For instance, how do writing self-help authors such as Brenda Ueland or Anne Lamott disclose details of their own writing experience in ways which classroom instructors might model? How do self-help authors use their subjective experiences with composing to motivate others? What strategies does Natalie Goldberg advise for meeting or avoiding writing blocks? These are just the beginning of many questions which could be asked in an analysis of writing self-help literature. A case study of readers who use *Writing without Teachers* or any other writing self-help literature outside of school settings would also provide worthy information on the composing processes of populations larger than students. Writing self-help books have, after all, had significant purchase with members of the general public. Their advice and their rhetoric speaks to significant populations of people.

One of the ways Elbow in *Writing without Teachers* invites us to dwell with an enigma is through positing a metaphoric "absence" for teachers. This metaphoric absence becomes a new role for writing instructors and offers an opportunity to engage in underlife. As Richard E. Miller has suggested in "The Arts of Complicity: Pragmatism and the Culture of Schooling," the field has been concerned with power issues in the classroom, and that concern has manifested itself in the debate between the so-called "expressivist" and social constructivist positions in Composition Studies. In his early

works, Elbow contributes to that focus on classroom power and roles not necessarily through any emphasis on personal expressions, as scholars sometimes claim, but through his supposition of the teacher's absence. The first part of this absence, this without-teachers, entails altering the power dynamic of the traditional learning environment. By reading *Writing without Teachers*, we accept that there are flaws in our authority (foremost among flaws, Elbow intimates, is that many writing experts don't *feel* like experts on their own writing process). Elbow encourages us to reflect on the ways we may have faltered as writing teachers or as writers. As Richard Boyd has proposed, one of Elbow's accomplishments is the deconstruction of the construct of writing teacher-as-master, an inheritance from the nineteenth century. According to Boyd, Elbow provides a different perspective on teaching because he bases his authority "not in the teacher's mastery and expertise but in his weakness and even failure" (16). In essence, we writing professionals become more necessary when we realize that we are unnecessary, stronger when we notice that we are flawed in the face of writing.

Of course, the fundamental irrelevance of teachers is the core of Elbow's book. It's an irrelevance contained in his thesis "that learning is independent of teaching" that has arguably been the most buried in the discipline's regard of *Writing without Teachers*. Elbow says, "I had come to notice a fundamental asymmetry: students can learn without teachers even though teachers cannot teach without students. The deepest dependency is not of students upon teachers, but of teachers upon students" (*Without* xviii). He adds that this most fundamental of his claims is "directly reflected in the title phrase, 'without teachers'" (xviii). As a result, the paradox of *Writing without Teachers* comes from the way in which Elbow invites writing specialists to accept their irrelevance to students'

learning and to build a different curriculum around that truth. By inserting self-help and the extracurriculum at the core of teaching practices, Elbow helps instructors ironically continue to advance their institutional teaching.

In addition to accepting our flaws, another variation of this teacherly absence is noticing our literal absences as audience to individual composer's writing. That is, "without teachers" is a response to the ways in which the edifice of traditional writing instructor is flawed, but it is also a response to the reality of writing outside of schools. Teachers may be imperfect audiences for student writing—as Elbow has well-documented in both *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power*—but teachers are also not the audience for the brunt of writing individuals do during their lifetime. We are fundamentally absent (except for lingering imagined audiences in the head) as a physical audience for the writing which students do once they graduate and continue on to jobs or personal writing projects. As Duane Roen puts it: "Students are with us for such a short period of their lives that they need to develop their skills in absence of teachers. I tell students, 'At the end of the semester, a teacher won't be around. You need to develop successful strategies for writing without a teacher'" (interview with Roen).

To embrace the enigma of our irrelevance to students' future writings some praxis entails recognizing that inevitable absence in our theory and praxis. Transactional writing examines how classroom writing tasks correspond with those our students experience in contexts not located in the university: employment, writing for social action, personal writing, creative writing, writing for publication. Discussions in the field surrounding transactionality, pseudotransactional writing, and authenticity of task in this regard can all be traced to the absence of the teacher posed by Elbow and his work in

self-help. Additionally, for some the acceptance of our finitude as audiences for our students' writing means recognizing that absence *while* in the classroom. As Theresa Enos suggests, students can engage in self-education while in the classroom context by reading *Writing without Teachers*: “[Self-help] is part of Peter Elbow’s purpose in writing *Writing without Teachers*—I mean, look at the title. Students are drawing on their own inner resources rather than what the teacher tells them. In that way, it’s self-help, of course” (interview with Enos). Much of Elbow’s theory in his first two books reconfigures the canon or phase of invention such that composing becomes a relationship of the writer to him- or herself rather than to an external audience. Unshared freewriting and the composing methods like the Open-Ended and Loop Writing resemble the type of verbal solos individuals perform when writing outside of school environments. In a nutshell, the practices which fall under the chestnut of “student-centered learning” really represent a healthy withdrawal of the teacher, an adaptation of the metaphoric absence of “write without teachers.”

In Brooke’s representation of underlife, writing instructors don’t engage in much identity-reformation of either contained or disruptive ilk. Instead, in his account, instructors’ version of challenging institutionally-provided roles for professors is a sort of half-way measure: essentially, teachers try to step aside and get out of the way of student success. Thus, teachers practicing underlife mostly try to move away from teacher-centered instruction by adopting praxis such as workshops and conferences (Brooke 150). The new identity they form for themselves then is one of withdrawal, of leaving the scene: de-centering oneself is not a role per se but rather a stance one takes toward having a role. On the other hand, process-oriented works like Elbow’s *Writing without Teachers*

along with his later writings suggest that writing instructors are building a more defined alternative identity for themselves as workers in academia. Indeed, as I discussed in Chapter 6 of this project, Elbow and other process theorists fashioned alternative ethos in their early seminal publications, and this ethos helped usher the student-centered approach of the process movement. Likewise, teacher-readers of *Writing without Teachers* were busy fashioning an alternative ethos for themselves as writing instructors—one inspired by Elbow. Elbow’s early books gave writing faculty the tools and stimulation to practice underlife and be non-conventional instructors. In his article, Brooke touches briefly upon this difference in *Writing without Teachers*, suggesting that Elbow’s book, along with Janet Emig’s chapter “Non-Magical Thinking,” altered teacher identities by making teachers more readily identify as writers (150). It seems one gap in Brooke’s important article is then by extension what happens to teachers who so-identify (as writers) inside academia. If our disruption of the status quo in and outside the university through our refashioning of students into writers has such powerful consequences on originality and social action, what then happens when faculty re-package themselves as primarily writers? It seems to me that Elbow’s first composition book speaks to that question because it encourages its teacher-readers to rethink, of course, their teaching—but it would also have relevance on their own writing. While eavesdropping in on Elbow’s conversation with struggling writers, teacher-readers not only hear about how others perceive their own profession, but they also gain access to a certain discussion of the writing process.

Theory plus self-motivation equals? A heady combination of theory and student motivation for writing instructors is evident in Elbow’s early work. First, the book lays

out a pragmatic theory about invention and the composing process—this is even more apparent in his subsequent book, *Writing with Power*. Secondly, *Writing without Teachers* positions the reader (the originally intended self-help reader) as a person who wants to write independent of any course requirement. For the writing scholar who listens in on the conversation occurring between Elbow and his self-help audience, Elbow's intended reader is readily transposable onto the scholar's audience—his or her students. Despite the fact that Elbow announces that his book is intended for a broader audience beyond students and academics, teacher-readers have been given just enough of a sensation of a pedagogy in this paradoxical book to then imagine their students as recipients of Elbow's strategies. As Brooke suggests, teachers operating under the process model tend to identify their students as writers: "They would like their students to see themselves as writers rather than as students, and their pedagogical changes are attempts to facilitate this shift in roles. Writing teachers change the classroom to help students extend their identities" (149). How Elbow positions his reader in *Writing without Teachers* as a self-motivated writer would appeal to teachers who prefer the intrinsically-motivated student over the grade-motivated one. In other words, Elbow puts his readers exactly where these teachers want to position their students—as people who write outside the university.

In this way, Elbow's book again is a foot bridge between Composition Studies and the extracurriculum: for writers—never students—compose texts in the world outside the classroom. Elbow is joined by other writing scholars, most of whom are usually linked with process pedagogy, in this repositioning of students: Don Murray, James Moffett, and Janet Emig come immediately to mind. For instance, in his 1968 *Teaching*

the Universe of Discourse, Moffett advocates that student textual production be the sole content of the course—not models, not text books, not exercises. He sees any inclusion of the latter material as intrusions, disruptions of a natural process of learning to write—unhelpful pre-teachings.

It's actually a magic act that keeps up the institution of school and the impression that the rules of a writing class must be followed. It's an illusion that keeps students in place—one which Elbow points out in *Writing with Power* when he says that no writing is actually compulsory: "It feels as though 'they' have all the power. It is true that they have authority and therefore they probably have sanctions. They can fire you or flunk you. Or hate you. But the final power is yours. You are in charge of whether you consent or refuse" (207-208). Students need to be persuaded to let the course continue in the direction and manner the teacher desires. Any teaching is persuasive in its fundamental sense, and part of that persuasion often is a performance of underlife, of appearing to provide alternative roles for students and teacher alike. As I've previously proposed, of the three strands inside English Studies, creative writing arguably most positions its students as writers, and the fields of literature and composition suffer a bit of "transactionality envy." It is not a coincidence that much of the ongoing discussion about the reconfiguration of English departments has to do with what Robert Scholes called "textual production," or the proximity of faculty and students to actual texts outside the university. Just as Elbow throws around the term "power" with all its association to self-empowerment language, Scholes links verbal power to how close a student can get to producing—and not just interpreting—a text. To posit students as writers as Elbow does

is not simply a matter of confidence-bolstering or student-centered learning: it can also be a way to revitalize writing instruction.

Another implication of underlife and of maintaining a degree of ambiguity in classroom roles has to do with the stance we take toward writing itself. When the act of composing becomes more student-centered and the teacher begins to withdraw as evaluator and orchestra conductor, composing also becomes less visible. More mysterious. Elbow encourages us time and time again to accept the enigma not just of our respective educational roles but also of the enigma of writing. As writers and writing teachers we are both in and out of control of the work of composing. The extracurricular view of writing—one which says the student-writer is more than just a student, the purpose of a student text is more than just a grade—puts parts of writing outside the teacher's purview. In this view, the writing process is expansive and larger than our own individual consciousness: like an iceberg, we only see the tip of the writing process during moments in a course. Much of writing is submerged, "under," and joins the enigmatic activities of the underlife. Brooke also points out how writing itself is fundamentally part of the underlife: "Writing involves being able to challenge one's assigned roles long enough that one can think originally; it involves living in conflict with accepted (expected) thought and action" (141). Writing, Elbow says in both *Writing without Teachers* and *Writing with Power*, is chaotic, a magic and mystery.

Several months ago, my parents, who have retired and are in the process of emptying my childhood home, brought me my writing notebooks from as far back as 1980. In one notebook, a more recent one from the early 1990's, I was stunned to find the seed for this dissertation. On a few handwritten pages, I was drawing tentative

connections between Elbow, Ueland, and Mearns long before I even knew of Composition Studies as a discipline. I have absolutely no recollection of why I, a MFA student and certainly not required to read anything of this sort, would have been thinking about Ueland. The idea and the interest submerged only to come back to me a year ago as the impetus for this project. In Elbow's work, we see this enigma of invention and how the span of a writing process cannot be predicted or snipped by a fifteen-week course parameter. When a writing expert gives him- or herself over to the extracurricular, to the notion that writing is much more vast than the classroom and that ability to write is prevalent, a certain mysticism arises. It's one that's evident in book titles spanning several decades of Elbow's career: *Writing without Teachers*, *Writing with Power*, followed by the logical pinnacle, *Everyone Can Write*. Thus, with traditional instruction, the student subordinates herself supposedly to the teacher, but with Elbow's work, you (student or teacher) subordinate yourself to the mystery of writing. This is extracurricular in the sense of powerful.

Thus the credo of a writing teacher who follows Elbow's praxis could read: *The teacher to the student: when I write, I am just as much in a space of chaos and possibility, of the unknown and of meaning that you are when you, non-teacher, write. When I teach writing, I am willing to admit this position, to show that I am open to the chaos and possibility, to the lack of certainty and to the joy of using words.*

One of the main causes of the enigma of *Writing without Teachers* is the book's twin audience. The way in which this book purports to speak to one type of person (those outside of schools and perhaps disenchanted by writing teachers) and then to admit a second audience (teachers), amplifies that ambiguity. Just as Elbow strives to embrace

contraries, it seems possible to speak to two almost contrary audiences at once. Utilizing a split or twin audience (in his case, speaking primarily to individuals disenfranchised by school but hoping that academics would also be within ear shot), may carry more rhetorical horse power than a clearly delineated, single-listener audience. For me, this is evidence that maintaining a clear-cut audience, of setting all of your rhetorical cards in order, may not always lead to as rich a discursive environment as one which blurs boundaries and rhetorical choices. In other words, it may not be sloppiness when a rhetor chooses to speak directly to one audience but then at a slant to another. Instead, it may be a powerful rhetorical decision, especially when the second party has a vested interest in eavesdropping on the conversation with the first party.

Perhaps most interesting, the exploration of *Writing without Teachers* as self-help has implications for our own scholarship in the twenty-first century. Who sponsors our writing, to adopt Deborah Brandt's terminology? As Composition scholars, would we ever contemplate seeking different sponsors for our scholarly writing as did Elbow when he wrote *Writing without Teachers*? When we publish, what would be the shaping impact of a lay audience on our theories? Could we locate or establish a rhetorical context that somehow bridges both types of readers? Self-help literature seems the most obvious site for that endeavor, in part, because it already possesses a long tradition in the United States. Although Elbow was writing in a different era—one of radicalism and personal empowerment—this lesson continues to have relevancy for scholars in the field. As scholars of writing, who do we want to speak to? Simply other scholars? The people who are scattered in the folding metal chairs at our late afternoon panel at a conference? As writing experts, do we want to our own compositions to be shaped by the political and

economic forces of the broader institution of academia and of our tenure-granting academic institutions in particular? It's not just a matter of looking at other people's literacies—we should turn to our own. What would shift in our discussions and theorizing about writing if we changed our primary audience to individuals “outside of schools,” as Elbow did in *Writing without Teachers*? What would happen, in essence, if we scholars wrote without scholars?

Indeed, *Writing without Teachers* in many regards functions as a call for writing experts to rethink their own audience for their theories of composing. As someone who has a three-hundred page draft of a self-help book on writing currently in her filing cabinet, I have learned much from studying Elbow's audience decisions in *Writing without Teachers*.

In the past thirty-seven years, Composition Studies has worked toward answering the koan of *Writing without Teachers* in its own fashion. Although the powerful claim of *Writing without Teachers*—teachers are not necessary to learning—has not been directly addressed, the field has in fact moved gently closer to its charge. In developing a student-centered praxis, some scholars and teachers in the field have partially embraced the paradox of writing without teachers. It has pondered Elbow's challenge but has not found it necessary to totally resign from teaching writing. Given the academic propensity for explicitness, thesis statements, and florescent-lit objectivity, there hasn't been much room for theory that is in itself metaphoric or said at-a-slant such as Elbow's. That may partially account for why the enigma of Elbow's title phrase hasn't been fully grappled during the past thirty-seven years—how Elbow's message of “write without teachers” has

remained an anathema and an enigma, in the words of Richard Haswell and Richard Boyd.

Throughout the process of working on this dissertation and also in the years of teaching prior to it, I have thought long and hard about my own relation to “writing without teachers.” I have given consideration to my own acts of underlife in the classroom. Ever since I was pursuing my second MFA at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and was told in a TA training session that some instructors write, “Welcome, writer!” on the chalk board on the first day, I was hooked. How is it that I can cheer along Elbow in his fiercest critiques of writing teachers and continue to be a teacher myself? How is it that I can feel so strongly about the limitations placed by writing instructors and academia on the act of writing and at the same time owe so much to my own teachers? Can I, for instance, discount the fact that a one-semester seminar taught by Peter Elbow continues to have reverberations in my teaching thirteen years after the fact? Is it vanity to think (along with everyone else) that I can be a “different kind” of teacher, one who does less harm, one who presents fewer unnecessary roadblocks to my students’ writing? Why do I have this habit of telling my students that I am a “writer first, teacher second”?

Seeking honesty, I am still weighing these ideas in my teaching practice. The one answer I have determined for myself is that it has been those teachers in my past who promoted the underlife in their classes—who through their various gestures and communications afforded my writing the possibility of an existence beyond their purview—who have made me believe that a writing education is a powerful thing indeed.

It seems that since the process movement, writing experts have become more conscious of the power dynamics—of the rhetorical situation—of teachers as audience to student writing. Elbow doesn't help the teacher-reader to end the binaries of good teacher/bad teacher but to instead to "go deeply into the dynamic interplay of the practices themselves" (Kalamaras 120). Elbow's paradox allows writing specialists to continue to teach but to simultaneously engage Elbow's notion that teachers are fundamentally unnecessary. For many, Elbow's early work has been a powerful call to rethink pedagogy. As Duane Roen described it, "The way we had been doing it [teaching] was not very effective. I don't think that he's arguing that we should not be in students' lives. We have not been in their lives in very effective ways" (interview with Roen). Elbow's "unnecessary"-ness isn't a definitive or a Western "end," but instead it's more like a condition we need to reflect on/engage/let remain. It isn't an exit or end to the profession of teaching, and neither should we try to exit or avoid this fact that we are unnecessary.

With koans, the master didn't help or provide the answers: instead, novices needed to do a lot of work on their own, a sort of self-education. Much like self-help, a koan entails life-long learning with no time-frame to resolution. It could take years (if ever) to find a resolution to the koan, much as the questions posed by Elbow in his early work still resonate with ambiguity.

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