

CONGRUENCE AND MISRECOGNITION: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHING
ASSISTANTS' PERCEIVED COMMENTARY ROLES AND ACTUAL
COMMENTARY PRACTICES IN FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH

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by

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DEDICATION

For Robert, who on September 9, 2003, told me, “This is why girls don’t play the game.”

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ABSTRACT

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In this study, I use qualitative research methods—semi-structured interviews and artifact analysis—to analyze the perceived commentary roles and actual commentary practices of five teaching assistants at my university. My study reveals two categories of TA commentary roles and practices: congruence and misrecognition. Teaching assistants demonstrate congruence between their perceived roles and actual practices when they do what they say they do when commenting on students' texts. Teaching assistants demonstrate a misrecognition between their perceived roles and actual practices when they say they do one thing but they do another when commenting on texts. This research study reveals that as inexperienced teachers, TAs should be exposed to direct, individual-specific research on commentary roles and practices because the TAs are not cognizant of their own congruence or misrecognition.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“I’ll just go in and wing it. It’s only the first day of class.” I listened to my fellow first-year teaching assistants (TAs) casually dismiss their first day of class, as I sat in a panic wondering what I would say and how I could ever teach writing to those forty-two college freshman. I had spent the summer sporadically refreshing myself on composition pedagogy and devouring the best books for first-year instructors. I wanted to know about others’ experiences, strategies, successes and failures, and I wanted a guarantee that when I was thrown to the wolves I wouldn’t be eaten alive.

So, while I scrambled for pedagogical resources and information on classroom interactions, workshop facilitation, and syllabus preparation, I watched and listened to other TAs who seemed unconcerned, calm, and collected. I was shocked: as my colleagues and I were cast into the role of teachers-of-record, we had the authority in the classroom. Yes, we had completed the pre-requisite eighteen hours of graduate course work, and were “deemed” ready to construct and teach composition classes of our own, choosing the material, constructing the assignments, and crafting the syllabus. But were we really ready to be responsible for the assessment of our students, to be giving the grades? While all of my previous teaching experience seemed trivial and inadequate for structuring a freshman composition class, others who also had limited teaching

experiences appeared seemingly prepared and ready to face a new challenge.

I began sharing my concerns with my fellow TAs, thinking that either a camaraderie based on concern and fear would lead us to support one another or that the other TAs would confess their fears and concerns and reveal their confidence to be a hoax, a carefully disguised cover for their own fear and insecurity. Whenever I expressed my concerns, however, I found that while I struggled to refine my own teaching philosophy and classroom practices, many of my colleagues did not know what a teaching philosophy was, much less what it might include or why it was important to begin with. While I struggled to complete a syllabus and establish a working plan for the first-day of class, my colleagues kept repeating, “Oh, I’ll just wing it the first day.” This core difference in our approaches to teaching is what prompted my interest in teacher commentary roles and practices. I wondered, for example, how the attitudes that different TAs expressed might find their way into their classroom strategies and feedback styles.

I began to refine my initial research question after reading literature on assessment, in particular Summer Smith’s article, “The Genre of the End Comment: Conventions in Teacher Responses to Student Writing.” I became less interested in the teaching philosophies of the TAs and more interested in what types of comments TAs were writing on freshman papers. In this often cited study, Smith offers three genres of teacher commentary as ways of understanding the characteristics of commentary and the roles implied in these characteristics: the judging genre focuses on evaluation, the coaching genre focuses on suggestions, and the reader response genre focuses on

response. Smith's framework was applicable to my own study, so I decided to use her action genres reframed as roles—Judging becomes Judge, Coaching becomes Coach, and Reader Response becomes Reader.

The following research questions form the foundation of my research project:

- What types of comments do first-year graduate teaching assistants make on freshman papers?
- What roles do these comments suggest TAs are adopting?
- What roles do interviews with TAs suggest that they are adopting?
- What discrepancies, if any, exist between the commentary style and roles TAs themselves articulate?

In the next chapter, I discuss the current body of literature that discusses the beliefs and attitudes behind the roles teachers adopt when commenting on student texts and the styles that reflect those adopted roles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on teacher commentary and feedback¹ is broad and far reaching: researchers talk about marginal versus end comments, roles teachers adopt in the classroom when grading papers, and the effect of commentary roles on actual commentary practices. In this study, I focus on two bodies of literature in the research on teacher commentary: the roles teachers profess to adopt when commenting and the outcomes when those roles manifest themselves in actual commentary.

¹For the purposes of this study, I will use commentary and feedback interchangeably. Both terms represent typed and/or hand-written responses given by the instructor on the student essay, and both are important to the development of the implicit teaching philosophy.

Whether teachers acknowledge it or not, they adopt a role when they comment on student papers. New teachers often want to be objective when commenting on students' texts, but as Edward M. White says, instructors should abandon "the illusory goal of objectivity in [their] teaching of writing" (Probst 75). Instructors cannot bring to the profession the premise of objectivity because it is both fraudulent and dangerous: knowledge develops in a social system and, thus, is always shaped by subjective understandings and influences. Objectivity is also dangerous because "it leads us to deny the fundamental fact of writing, which is the effort to make something of significance out of human experience" (75).

If teaching is an inherently subjective and social activity, then we must focus our attention on the contours of this subjectivity and on the ways in which writing is a social act involving social actions. We might ask, for example, how students construct their identities as writers in the composition classroom, how institutions construct identities for students and instructors, or how instructors construct identities for themselves and their students. Researchers interested specifically in the roles teachers adopt—knowingly or unknowingly—advance numerous frameworks for understanding these roles, which I will discuss in the second half of this section.

In her 1997 article, Summer Smith outlines three genres of action that TAs might use when commenting on student texts: *judging genre*, *coaching genre*, and *reader response genre*. Teachers who adopt the judging genre are concerned with evaluating student texts in both positive and negative forms. Judges evaluate student writing, making proclamations about what the student has done: "Good introduction" or "The commas

don't work here." Teachers who adopt Smith's coaching genre make suggestions and offer advice for improvement: "What other points could you use to open paragraph three?" And teachers who adopt the reader response genre respond to student writing subjectively, often referencing their own experiences, feelings, and thoughts: "Your generalization about women turns me off to your clear, well-developed other points." Smith makes clear that these genres rarely exist in isolation; in other words, when teachers comment on students' papers, they typically use comments from all of the genres, although one may be more dominant than the others.

While Smith talks specifically about the stylistic markers of her three genres, I am also interested in why instructors make comments on student texts, so I will look into two additional bodies of research. First, I will examine research that discusses the purpose for instructor commentary—what the instructor hopes to accomplish with the written comments. After looking at the reasoning behind the commentary, I will examine research into the roles that instructors may adopt when commenting on student texts. To collapse and simplify the extensive research available, I use the definitions proposed by Smith to frame my study. I use her three genres as the overarching framework to explore how graduate teaching assistants' purposes for commenting and their adopted roles are illuminated by their commentary styles. I first discuss Smith's three genres, and I then discuss the commentary purposes and roles that influence this commentary style.

SMITH'S GENRES OF COMMENTARY STYLES

JUDGING GENRE

In “The Genre of the End Comment: Conventions in Teacher Responses to Student Writing,” Summer Smith focuses first on the judging genre. Smith argues that all instructors adopt this genre when commenting on student’s texts because the judging genre makes primarily evaluative judgments about the papers—something all instructors do on various levels. As Smith concludes, “[T]he majority of the primary genres in the teacher’s commentary repertoire are tools for judging” (252), and these judging comments may be positive and/or negative. Smith also outlines the eleven specific areas unique to the judging genre: composition issues (topic, development, style, focus, organization), rhetorical issues (rhetorical development and audience accommodation), syntactical issues (correctness), holistic issues (effort, evaluation of the paper), and/or academic issues (justification of the grade) (Smith 253). Comments in the judging genre make assertions about what the student has done well and what the student has not done well; thus, these evaluative comments often address the style of the student’s text.

Instructors who use the judging genre approach student texts with specific standards for errors and expectations for completion of the assignment. They approach the text looking for places where the student has, in the evaluator’s estimation, done something well or not so well. Thus the judging genre allows the instructor to use both positively and negatively “toned” comments to address the errors of a student’s text. However, Smith notes that when using the judging genre, the instructor often uses positive comments for certain issues and negative comments for others. For example,

instructors often use fragments to make positive evaluations: “good paragraph” or “nice title” (255). Whereas comments on syntactical issues, like comma usage, may receive primarily negative comments or fragments, like “no comma here” or “introductory commas wrong” (257). Smith notes this use of positive and negative comments to demonstrate how instructors may make positive comments on some issues and negative comments on others; in fact, her research suggests that the trend in the judging genre is to make holistic comments positive and specific comments negative.

Another hallmark of the judging genre is the style behind the commentary. Smith notes that one judging trend is the use of grammatical subjects. The judging genre uses an obscure third-person subject to distance the evaluation (whether positive or negative) from the student. For example, a comment in the judging genre might be, “The second paragraph shows good coherence of ideas with main point,” or “The paper lacks organization when discussing the argument against cats.” Rather than placing the student as author of the text and thus assigning accountability for the argument constructed, the judging comment uses “the paragraph” and “the paper” for subjects and not “you,” that is, the student.

Smith notes, however, that judging comments might use a “you” to reference the student when making positive comments, which increases the praise offered (“You make a clear point, here.”). Likewise, judging comments use expletives (there is, there were, etc.) to distance the criticism and lessen the stigma of incorrect usage when commenting on the correctness of the paper (256). For example, “There are a lot of comma errors in this paper.”

Comments made in the judging genre seem to use grammatical subjects in rigid ways, but Smith notes that, in fact, the judging genre allows for flexibility with the subject of fragments and sentences when the comments are related to the assigning of grades (256). For example, when assigning a positive justification for the grade, the comment might be, “I gave you a B on this paper because you used clear, concise personal examples and argued your point effectively.” But when the comment must give a negative explanation, the use of the third-person distances responsibility, “This paper is a D paper because it does not answer the prompt.” This flexibility of subject allows the judging genre to adapt to commenting contexts: the genre employs “this paper,” or not, according to the comments the teachers wish to make (257). The judging genre uses multiple subjects for multiple comments, and these multiple subjects do not limit the commentary style to specific contexts, which could explain why teacher commentary displays some qualities of the judging genre.

COACHING GENRE

Smith also discusses the coaching genre, the genre of commentary intended to underscore that the instructor wants to work with students and to coach them through individualized instruction (258). Smith notes that coaching comments focus on aspects of revision for the current text, improvement for future texts, and assistance for the writer. The comments made in the coaching genre thus push for the most perfect text a student can produce, and because the coaching and judging genres both employ a dialogue to

help students produce the most appropriate, or perfect, texts, some additional clarification is needed.

By offering up areas that display the students' competence, coaching comments allow instructors to work with their students through individualized instruction. Therefore, coaching comments are often formed from imperative and interrogative statements. In the coaching genre, questions are intended to push the student into deeper thought, such as, "Can you think of ways to integrate your examples into a descriptive commentary on cats?" Smith also notes that in the coaching genre instructors use the imperative to maintain superficial control over comments; "Use the first-person form in a personal essay. Stay away from 'you.'" Because the interrogative and imperative forms do not allow for options, these two characteristics place the burden for improvement on the student (260) who must read the statements, interpret them, and then apply those statements to the essay or text after thoughtful consideration.

Smith notes that the one weakness in the coaching genre is that if the instructor uses suggestions, then those suggestions may actually disguise evaluations. For example, the instructor might write, "You could do some work on this essay to achieve smoother transitions and a tighter overall structure." As Smith notes, this statement suggests revision, but the main thrust of the statement is a negative evaluation of the essay's structure. Compare this example to a comment written in the judging genre: "This essay fails to achieve smooth transitions and a cohesive structure." The coaching comment is clearly not a direct evaluation of the student's ability or the text's adherence to a set standard, but there is still a hidden evaluation that motivated the coaching comment. This

tension between the desired encouragement and hidden judgment may lead the student to perceive revision as punishment, thus weakening the coaching ability of the instructor's commentary style (259).

READER RESPONSE GENRE

Smith's third commentary genre is *reader response*. When making comments in the reader response genre, instructors are expressing the reactions of an active reader, in part to develop a rapport with the student and in part to express the reactions of an audience. Reader response comments represent the thoughts of a reader who moves through the text; reader response comments also serve as reminders to students that their words do have an effect on their audience (258). For example, an instructor working with reader response comments might say, "Wow, I didn't know you grew up in such a small town, but I am having trouble following your thoughts. Still, I see how you are trying to experiment with stream of consciousness." Therefore, the reader response genre, unlike the judging and coaching genres, gives consideration to the students and allow students to experiment with both expression and style.

Reader response comments respond most directly to the text; thus, they also contain the instructor's initial perceptions and questions in a summative format. Reader response comments also offer general impressions of the text. Smith gives this example: "Your narrative seems to lead up to the climax of the meet, but when we get to that point it's quite a let-down because you don't discuss the meet at all." Because reader response

comments are meant to represent the reading experience of the instructor, they often contain “I” statements (Smith 258).

Reader response comments also focus on composition as a process, so they often note other holistic, large-scale issues by using facilitative comments. The facilitative comments of the reader response genre should not be confused with the instructing comments of the coaching genre; the reader response genre expresses facilitative commentary as an extension of the reader’s thoughts and opinions. The comments are not meant to instruct but to inform. For example, a reader response facilitative comment might read, “I was confused by the sports terms you used, as non-sports-inclined members of your audience would be” (Smith 258). A coaching genre comment, however, might be phrased, “Can you think of a way to define the sports terms for your audience? Be more specific with the lingo.” The motivations behind the reader response comments are simply to connect with the student author on a more personal level and remove the impersonal aspects of the other commentary styles.

COMMENTARY RESEARCH

DEFINING AND CLASSIFYING THE INSTRUCTOR’S COMMENTS

As I stated earlier, Summer Smith’s research on commentary genres examines the stylistic markers of the comments written by instructors as a way to classify the three genres. Smith notes that instructors’ comments can be viewed as chastizing, motivating, or educating students (250). She then attempts to distill her commentary framework into three key genres: judging, coaching, and reader response. Smith organizes her three

categories around the commentary style that arises as a byproduct of the instructor's actions. Therefore, the actions of a professor must be linked to the original purpose behind writing the comment on the student text and to the role that influences that purpose. The actions Smith describes in her three genres correspond to *how* instructors comment, while the purposes and roles accompanying these actions, as discussed by other researchers, respond to *why* instructors comment. The distinctions between *how* and *why* instructors comment resurfaces below in my discussion of the other studies on teacher commentary because both are necessary to explore the roles TAs profess to adopt and the roles they actually adopt when commenting.

Smith analyzes instructor comments to uncover what types of comments teachers often make on student texts and to identify what patterns exist within those comments. However, my research interest extends beyond the types of commentary made by TAs on freshman papers in order to include questions about the roles the TAs adopt when commenting on those texts. I look first into research that discusses the purpose behind the commentary and then into research that discusses the roles that influence the purpose and style of teacher commentary.

The ways that instructors approach texts are important to any research on commentary style because the ways that instructors read and approach texts determines how they will comment on those texts. This process is best explained by the transactions that occur between a reader and a text. These transactions are outlined by Ruth and Murphy, who point out that reading is the controlling factor during the four stages of transaction that occur during writing assessment (qtd. in Probst 71). When instructors

make a writing assignment, they first interpret the assignment. The students then read and interpret the assignment, and they compose a text to answer the assignment. The students then read, interpret, and revise their own writing. Finally, the instructors read and interpret the written text. During each stage of the transactional process, the writer and the instructor bring their own histories and experiences to the words of the text, allowing for discrepancies in understanding and interpretation.

Robert Probst in, “Transactional Theory Response to Student Writing,” uses a transactional approach to explain how meaning is created in the act of reading. Probst argues that texts derive meaning from the interaction of the reader and the words on the page. He explains that a text’s meaning is not in the denotations of the words but rather in the connotations brought by the reader through a variety of experiences (68). In other words, students’ texts have no meaning until the instructor reads them and makes the meaning (69). Thus, for Probst, the instructor’s role in commenting on those text is to help “the students to re-see and re-think within the context of an interpretive community” (70). The teacher and the text together create meaning.

In my study, I want to create a cohesive picture of the various discussions that have taken place on teacher commentary outside of Summer Smith by extending the discussion on why the instructor’s interactions with a text are important and how those interactions directly impact the written commentary. My study must also continue using the framework established by Smith’s commentary genres: judging, coaching, and reader response.

Smith creates her own genres for commentary style, but her labels and

descriptions parallel the labels used by Richard Straub, and other researchers who discuss commentary styles in different ways. In “The Concept of Control in Teacher Response: Defining the Varieties of ‘Directive’ and ‘Facilitative’ Commentary,” Straub observes that in an ideal situation, instructors would only provide feedback and support for students, never “dictating the path of revision” (223). This support, Straub argues, comes best from facilitative comments, or comments that encourage and instruct. Straub, however, knows that these are not the only comments that instructors write on student texts, so he goes on to discuss how instructional comments, like those of Smith’s coaching genre, contrast against the evaluative comments, like those of the judging genre.

Straub sees instructors’ evaluative judgments and acontextual comments as directive commentary, or commentary aligning with Smith’s judging genre, because this commentary is highly critical and highly controlling. Acknowledging the parallel between directive commentary and the judging genre, we see how both allow the instructor to outline what the student must specifically do in order to improve. For example, an instructor might write, “Keep yourself in the background. Just state your position” (227) or “Stay out of it—make it 3rd person” (228). Using harsh judgment, the directive comment tersely spells out the weaknesses of the paper and explains how exactly to correct those weaknesses. This commenting style reminds the student that the teacher is reading the paper and hoping that the student can “produce clean, formally correct prose.”

In his essay “Teacher Response as Conversation,” Straub again discusses facilitative and directive commentary, but he now uses the dualistic commentary styles to

define the features of conversational response in teacher commentary, or the third genre offered by Smith: reader response genre. Straub sees conversational comments (the comments he most closely aligns with facilitative comments) as just that, a conversation between the instructor and the student. Made in the reader response genre, conversational comments are less autonomous, discursive, and authoritative than other types (377).

Using conversational responses, instructors begin by (1) taking on an informal and spoken voice through simple word choice. They then (2) use text-specific language to establish a common ground with the writer. By using language and specific examples from the text, the instructor making reader response comments is responding to the concerns expressed by Nancy Sommers, who notes that comments are often too vague to assist students. The instructor's conversational responses continue with a (3) focus on what the writer says in the text to engage the student in a discussion about ideas and purposes (380).

This second article by Straub is derived from his concern that the loose definition of conversational, facilitative responses has become "a catch-all for any teacher response that is informal, positive, and nurturing, or even for any response that is non-prescriptive" (381). So in order to eliminate the generality of the term, Straub modifies his definition of facilitative (or conversational) response to include comments that inquire into the student's writing and explore the text and the student behind the writing. He goes on to offer three distinguishing features of conversational response. According to Straub, instructors who wish to make reader response comments should also (4) make critical comments cast as help and guidance, (5) provide direction for revision without

appropriating the text or creating rigid criteria, and (6) elaborate on the most important points of their comments (382).

However, conversational comments cannot be part of the coaching genre because they offer directions, not suggestions. Conversational comments do not pose closed questions to the students, which can be controlling because closed questions imply an evaluation of the logic of the text and the intention of the author. Conversational comments are also not part of the judging genre because the comments are not wholly corrective in nature, and as Straub notes, corrective comments, or comments made in the judging genre, are more controlling than comments that call for revision, or coaching comments (Straub 234). Corrective comments offer commands, not directions. For Straub, conversational comments are a way for teachers to avoid “cryptic, anonymous, and overly directive” comments. Such comments also allow teachers to position themselves as readers, so that reader and writer can come together to create meaning (391).

Acknowledging that it is not merely the types of comments written by the instructor that are important, Straub takes issue with the amount of commentary written on student texts. He sees the quantity of comments made by an instructor as an indicator of the amount of control exercised by the instructor (224). Just as directive comments outline a narrow agenda, instructors may also find a way to control student texts by focusing on local matters that require specific changes. Nancy Sommers also finds that when teachers’ comments demand specific changes, the comments redirect students from “their own purposes in writing a particular text and focus that attention on the teachers’

purpose in commenting” (123). This redirection of focus illuminates how comments made in the judging genre might be aiming for an audience-based text because of their concrete and specific nature; however, the comments appropriate the student’s text for instructor approval, thus removing the power of the audience. If instructors focus on writing processes and larger contexts of writing, then they are less likely to pinpoint specific changes and are thus less likely to assume control by demanding specific, non-negotiable changes.

In “Responses to Student Writing from New Composition Faculty,” Muffy E.A. Siegel also notes that instructors’ comments connect to positions of authority and responsibility. Siegel’s study aims to identify what training, if any, might be most helpful to new writing instructors—a goal I share (302). By classifying comments into five categories of form and five categories of content, Siegel found that “experienced instructors seemed to have a sense, not shared by most of the new teachers, of which errors were important enough to mark”; thus, according to Siegel, inexperienced teachers “failed to mark important errors mainly because they were busy with unnecessary or even mistaken ‘corrections’” (303).

Siegel argues that experienced teachers note two types of errors in drafts. The experienced teacher will first mark those mistakes “which look very bad to a reader but are actually relatively easy to correct—gross misspellings, aberrant capitalization and such.” The experienced teacher will then mark “those errors whose correction involves the student’s internalizing new and relatively difficult rules or habits—faulty agreement in number, vague pronouns reference, or wordiness” (304). The experienced instructors

also mark out their reading maps, first by using phrases like, “I don’t understand,” followed by an arrow marking the “Okay, I get it” point in the text. Where an inexperienced instructor might rewrite a sentence and then label it “unclear,” the experienced instructor simply writes, “You lost me here.” Experienced teachers also ask their students questions that encourage students to come up with their own revisions, and they rarely criticize students for repetition.

Siegel notes that the inexperienced teachers’ “unnecessary” corrections often include punctuation errors (from one correct form to another equally correct form) or the rewording of a phrase or sentence only to improve style slightly and to write the sentence in the instructor’s preferred manner. For example, Siegel notes the minor change in one sentence where the student writes, “...Costello is singing about society’s problems,” and the instructor changes the sentence to read, “...Costello is singing about social problems.” Not surprisingly, in Siegel’s study, the inexperienced teachers made “significantly” more markings on student texts, and it is this difference in the quantity of comments written on student texts that Siegel notes as the most significant difference between the inexperienced and experienced composition instructors.

In their article, “On Students’ Rights to Their Own Texts: A Model of Teacher Response,” Lil Brannon and Cy Knoblauch also ask questions about instructor authority and how teachers, when acting as readers, evaluate the authority of their students. Brannon and Knoblauch echo the concerns of other researchers who contend that the volume of commentary present on students’ texts is an appropriation of student texts by instructors. By appropriating the student’s texts with comments, the teacher’s agenda

overshadows the student's agenda, thus aligning with Brannon and Knoblauch's primary question: how does an instructor's commentary account, or fail to account, for the students' original intentions and the students' actual effects within the written work?

Up to this point, I have discussed why the instructor's approach to a student's text can determine the types of comments written, and I have considered alternative descriptions for the principal types of comments instructors make and how those alternative descriptions align with Smith's commentary genres (facilitative/conversational = coaching/reader response genre; directive = judging genre). Other research is concerned with the purpose and attitudes behind these various commentary styles.

THE INSTRUCTOR'S PURPOSE BEHIND THE WRITTEN COMMENTS

Elaine O. Lees uses her work with commentary to "divide the activity of commenting into seven modes" (370). While she has what appear to be labels for the types of comments instructors are making, she is actually discussing how the instructors approach a text—what the instructors will do as they write on student texts. For example, an instructor may approach a text and make what Lees' calls *correcting* comments. By correcting students' texts, the instructor hopes to draw the students' attention to their errors and offer suggestions for correcting the errors. Rather than questioning why the student uses a semicolon instead of a dash, the instructor who is correcting the text simply instructs the student to use a dash. By correcting the text, instructors place the burden of improvement on themselves rather than on students because instructors are

seeking out errors and fixing those errors. The correcting instructor does not give students an opportunity to learn and to correct their own mistakes. According to Lees, this correction only policy undermines the students' role in learning to write, preventing them from becoming competent and accountable writers. This motivation for correction aligns with comments made in the judging genre, as does the positioning of authority with the instructor and not the student.

According to Lees, other instructors spend their time *suggesting*. The suggesting instructor also offers outright editorial suggestions—suggestions that can improve the paper, but not the writer. Again, the instructor's emphasis on a correct text, a perfect product, aligns with the goals of the judging comments because the instructor is interested only in the product produced.

Lees also identifies several instructor activities that may be classified with the coaching genre. When an instructor sets out to *remind* students, the instructor writes comments that use vocabulary from in-class discussions. By reminding students, the instructor encourages students to connect class instruction to private writing. This motivation for commenting aligns with the coaching genre because the comments are student-centered: they draw on the student's knowledge from inside the classroom, hoping to create internal and external coherence. Likewise, when an instructor takes an *assigning* role with comments, the instructor actually creates another assignment based on what the student has already written, hoping that the student can expand on current texts. Thus, the assignment allows students to reconsider what they wrote initially, pushing students to do more and to take more responsibility for their work (Lees 372).

Assigning is also a way for the instructor to discover, and to test, how much of the burden for improvement the student has taken, just as suggesting and reminding allow the instructor to shift the burden for revision to the student. These three activities parallel the coaching genre because the commentary is not outlining what the student must do but rather suggesting alternative solutions for the student. These suggestions make the student's role in learning to write a top priority.

Lees also discusses instructors who hope to bring writer and reader together; these instructors accomplish their goal through *emoting*, the commentary style that gives instructors permission to express any feelings they have about the student's writing. By expressing the emotions that might be overlooked if the instructors were simply *correcting*, the instructor's comments are classified with the reader response commentary genre because the comments address the reader's reactions to the text. Instructors may also take to *describing*, which allows them to draw the student's attention to how a text affects the reader, how it arouses certain feelings.

So, instructors who are emoting are also describing because when the instructors describe, they discuss the source and cause for the emoting. By describing the point or phrase in the text that caused an emotional reaction, the instructor helps the student locate the source that sparked that original emotion. Instructors are using the reader response genre here because their comments employ the language and jargon of composition in order to encourage students to acquire a working vocabulary both inside and outside of the classroom (371).

Other instructors, says Lees, approach a student's text through *questioning*. An

instructor often does this hoping that a student will see “how little he has used his writing to discover something he couldn’t have said when he began the paper” (372). The instructor reflects this in the written commentary by asking real questions, not rhetorical questions. Because a questioning instructor asks students to explore beyond the text, he or she often uses comments from both the reader response genre and the coaching genre—the non-rhetorical questions belong to the coaching genre, and the exploration questions belong to the reader response genre. Rhetorical questions belong to the judging genre because the instructor knows the answer and simply uses the question to elicit the same response from the student.

Again, as I discussed earlier, instructors who aim to correct, emote, and describe to their students place the burden of improvement on themselves and not on their students. However, instructors who question, like those who suggest and remind, allow students to accept the burden of revision and improvement.

The characteristics of the judging genre and coaching genre overlap, as do the motivations of the instructors who make those comments. In “Writing Students Need Coaches, Not Judges,” Lynn Holaday offers a clear explanation of the differences between Judges and Coaches:

Coaches are on your side; judges are not. Coaches are friendly; judges are aloof. Coaches want you to do well; judges don’t care. Coaches believe you can do well and show you how; judges lecture you on what you should be and are not. Coaches offer encouragement; judges offer—*judgment*. (41)

Holaday continues her discussion by stating that Coaches, unlike Judges, offer hope to students by focusing on areas that display the student's competence, by seeking things to praise in every paper.

Nancy Sommers offers an equally clear articulation of reader response comments. Sommers believes that instructors comment on student writing "to dramatize the presence of a reader, to help [their] students to become that questioning reader themselves, because, ultimately, [they] believe that becoming such a reader will help them (students) to evaluate what they have written and develop control over their writing" (122-23). So Sommers sees reader response commentary as the most influential when working with students because reader response continues to shift responsibility onto the student and away from the instructor. For Sommers, the instructor acting as reader wants to connect with the student to empower the student with the skills for self-revising and self-editing. Robert E. Probst's research supports Sommers claims. For Probst, commentary should not be about a student's blind submission to the instructor, nor should it be about creating discipleship (76).

THE INSTRUCTOR'S ADOPTED ROLE WHEN WRITING COMMENTS

Up to this point, I have discussed the purpose for instructor commentary, what instructor's hope to achieve when writing on student texts. In his article, "The Teacher as Reader: An Anatomy," Alan Purves extends the discussion with his research into the roles that instructors adopt when reading student texts. Purves outlines seven common identities that an instructor may adopt when approaching a student text. Purves' seven

identities are the *common reader*, *proof-reader*, *editor*, *reviewer*, *gatekeeper*, *critic*, *diagnostician/therapist* (260-262). We can better understand Purves' seven identities by collapsing the seven roles into Smith's framework of judging, coaching, and reading.

Purves' proof-readers, editors, and reviewers make judgments about student texts. Their roles are concerned with evaluating a student's current text against the conventions of English, and the instructors do this by focusing on issues of consistency, like style and organization. As judges of student texts, proof-readers and editors gauge how presentable a text is for outside, peripheral audiences. They read the text with an outside audience in mind, and, therefore, they want a perfect product for easy "consumption." In contrast, the reviewers simply interpret the text as either readable or not. So, although the reviewers are also working for an outside audience, they are offering suggestions that indicate, for the audience, whether to read the text or not.

Because Purves' proof-readers, editors, and reviewers look at the students' texts through the eyes of an institution or community to which they, as readers, belong, all three will write verdictive comments on student texts. Verdictive comments focus on the text's adherence to or departure from proper and expected standards; such comments are made for the student's use (Phelps 51). So, rather than questioning the logic behind the subject-verb agreement error or comma splice, the instructor embodying one of these roles will simply view the student's error as a product of the writer's ability, or lack thereof. The student's ability to adhere to conventions of written language is thus a result of fixed talent, skill, ability, or knowledge (50), and it is this presumably static ability that informs judging comments. As described by Smith, the instructor who writes judging

comments believes that writers learn to write well by reading comments that generalize the principles of good writing and by applying those comments that identified the standards and conventions to their own texts. Thus the judgments made by proof-readers, reviewers, and editors suggest that their written comments fall under Smith's judging genre because it is the genre most concerned with evaluation.

Purves' gatekeeper role writes primarily final, or end, comments on student texts, which seems to indicate that gatekeepers would write comments from the coaching genre and offer suggestions. However, gatekeepers are not summing up areas that the student should work on in order to improve; gatekeepers are looking for holistic issues and performance characteristics in the text that align the text with established standards. The gatekeeper uses this alignment with the standards as a way to decide if the student will pass or fail. Because gatekeepers approach texts and their role as a "weeding out" process, the gatekeepers' comments center on an evaluation against set standards, making the comments judging comments.

The gatekeepers' comments are not only judging comments but also effective comments, comments based "on a set of shared assumptions or conventions, and both the reader and the writer subscribe to these assumptions" (Purves 263). While effective comments may also be read as verdictive comments, because they pass judgment on the text to determine whether it follows conventions or fails to meet the set standards, the gatekeeper's role in keeping students in or out of the educational system supports classifying their comments as primarily *effective*.

Purves' critic role is very different from the other approaches that readers might

take to a student's text because the critic wants to relate and to connect the text to the writer and then to the writer's culture. The critic takes an "esthetic approach to the text," considering that the text may be art (262). This interest in text rather than student demands that the critic use comments from the judging genre, the only genre primarily concerned with the text and not the student.

Smith's reader response genre of commentary includes those comments that respond directly to the text and to the student's personal experiences (257). This focus on the student's experiences has parallels in Purves' common reader, who also receives and responds to the text as a private or semi-private enterprise; thus, the common reader's comments are restricted to these foci. Purves also discusses a reader who hopes to read and to improve the text as a way to diagnose the student's underlying problems with language that manifest themselves in the text. This reader is the therapist. The "clinical" concerns of the diagnostician/therapist demand that the comments focus on the individual student. Thus, comments written in this manner are best classified in the reader response genre.

Purves' critic, therapist, and common reader are all concerned with the student and the perceptions made about the student by the audience, which makes these kinds of comments fall within the reader response genre (Purves 260-262). Brannon and Knoblauch ask how instructor commentary accounts, or fails to account, for the students' original intentions and their actual produced text. By asking this question, the researchers are asking how the instructor, as a writer of reader response commentary, interprets the writer's intention.

FOR MY STUDY

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ROLES AND COMMENTARY

The previous sections discussed transactional theory and why it is important in research about instructor commentary. Again, transactional theory encompasses how meaning is being made—through the combined experiences of the teacher and the student. It is this series of transactions that sets up the approaches and purposes the instructor brings to the students' written texts. As the research shows, the role adopted by the instructor influences the instructor's approach to commentary and the types of comments the instructor then writes on the texts.

The distinctions between how a text is read and the attitude, or purpose/approach, the instructor subsequently takes in regard to commentary are subtle but fundamental to my research. The attitude with which an instructor approaches a text indicates the role that will guide the instructor's commentary protocol. This is the "why" of instructor commentary. The way a text is read and the actions an instructor takes illuminate the comments written and the stylistic choices behind those comments. This is the "how" of instructor commentary. Summer Smith notes that instructors often develop a pattern of response (250). I contend that this pattern is directly influenced by their adopted roles and attitudes: the "why" reinforces the "how." Thus, the instructor's attitude about the assignment and reading of the text ("why") determines what comments and corrections will be made on the student's text ("how"). I will use transactional theory, in part, to explain why I collapse the research on instructor's roles and approaches under Summer

Smith's three genres.

Smith's research concerns *what* types of comments instructors are making and how those comments may be classified into three commentary genres. I chose Smith's three genres as the framework for my study because I find them manageable within the scope of my project, and I see her research as usefully encompassing the research of others, such as Purves and Lees. I also find Smith's descriptions and labels readily accessible for my readers. However, my research interests extend beyond what types of comments instructors make. I also want to explore how the TAs' perceived roles reinforce or contradict their commentary styles, and in order to do this, I must consider research that extends beyond what comments instructors write.

I contend that there is a bridge between Smith's commentary genres and the various roles discussed by other researchers, and this bridge lies in Smith's examples of the commentary styles. In fact, if we look at a few of Smith's examples and descriptions of her commentary genres against the other researchers' descriptions of the reading roles, we find that the language is the same. Smith may talk about what instructors write and the other researchers may discuss why teachers write, but the two different descriptions offer up the same points for comparison. Because the descriptions of the commentary styles align with the descriptions of the roles, I can, at least for the purposes of this study, collapse the research on how instructors read and approach student texts under Smith's commentary genres as active roles: Judge, Coach, and Reader.

GAP IN RESEARCH

The information on the attitudes behind teacher commentary and the actions that teachers take when commenting on student texts is important for my study because current discussions on instructor roles and commentary styles do not look specifically at graduate teaching assistants. This is important work, especially for English departments and writing programs, because it allows both researchers and TAs to compare, for example, the roles TAs profess to take in their approach to teaching and commenting on papers against the roles they actually practice as evidenced by the comments themselves.

By looking at instructor comments independent of the classroom, we can begin to see a frame and an image of the instructors that will help determine the roles they adopt and the nature of their teaching philosophies. The framing of instructor commentary determines how much control the instructor exerts over student writing and, therefore, the guiding principle of the teaching philosophy. Insight into the roles TAs adopt when commenting might also be used to reinforce or revise current TA preparation programs because those insights may allow researchers and TAs to compare how much information is retained during training, as well as what additional training might better serve TAs, whose final goal is, or should be, to create a cohesive and congruent teaching style and philosophy. This research will help programs and TAs to better align theory and practice through self-awareness.

HOW CURRENT RESEARCH INFORMS MY STUDY

The research reviewed above provides a framework for my own study, which uses qualitative methods to explore the TAs' comments on student papers in the first-year writing course at my university, as well as how the roles the TAs profess to adopt reinforce or contradict the comments they actually make. I use interviews to illuminate TAs' perceptions of the roles they appropriate when commenting on student papers, perceptions that may coincide or contradict the role suggested by actual commentary practice. Qualitative interviews allow the TAs, or actors, to offer up "*accounts* of their behavior [... And the] actors [may] also produce *explanations* of their behaviors" (Lindlof 167, author's emphasis). I then use Smith's three genres of judging, coaching, and reader response to establish the attitude and role of the TA. Transforming the TAs' attitudes into their subsequent actions, I analyze the comments written on the students' texts looking for the characteristics outlined by Smith.

In the introduction to Teacher Commentary on Student Papers, Ode Ogede offers a definition of commentary that encompasses the three paradigmatic roles I see in teacher commentary—Judge, Coach, and Reader. He also sees commentary, as I see it, existing beyond a clinical vacuum. For Ogede, commentary is:

[A] means of going forward, of leading student writers to find the way back from distractive digressions, and may involve the irksomeness of critique as well as the delight of praise. An exploratory procedure, it can lead students to consider material they have overlooked as well to complete information they have developed insufficiently. As such, teacher

commentary should involve the revelation of new ideas as well as assisting old ones to reach their fullest expression. Not surprisingly, the most profound teacher commentary seeks to be open-ended and to push students to bring about the full flowering of ideas that may or may not exist in their drafts. At best, then, teacher commentary issues from the confidence to build on what is merely of potential significance. So teacher response to student writing can achieve its ideal form only when it takes cognizance of standards other than the purely academic, such as student background, work context, as well as students' different needs. (7)

This definition of commentary assumes that students who listen to teachers' comments can improve their writing, that students' obsessions with grades prevent them from improving where it is necessary, and that how teachers make comments and what those comments say can affect students' academic lives. Because it affects students significantly, the commentary made by new composition instructors is particularly important to the profession because those instructors are often teaching students new to academia. The influences of new teachers on new students should not be undervalued.

METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The research on teacher commentary continues to expand, but the focus remains on how teachers read and how teachers comment on student texts. Few studies have addressed why teachers comment, so I have chosen to examine the types of comments

TAs make on student papers and what these comments suggest about the TAs' perceived roles in the writing process.

I have drawn on qualitative research in education and technical communication to support my research. Kim Sydow Campbell identifies methods of data collection appropriate to my study: literature search, artifact search, text analysis, and interview (536). In this study, I conducted the literature review to assess what others in my field have learned from teacher commentary and to determine the direction of my own study. I wanted to know the teaching assistants' narratives, so interviews with five TAs were also central to my study. Under the time constraints of one semester and the scope of this research, I did not conduct observations but, instead, let the narratives told by the TAs illuminate my artifact analysis.

I chose qualitative methods to explore my questions about the types of comments written by TAs on student papers because "fundamentally, qualitative researchers seek to preserve the form and content of human behavior and to analyze its qualities, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations" (Lindlof 21). Qualitative research also allows for narration, which is important for my study because I am interested in my participants' stories about their experiences in the classroom as instructors and as students; these stories may reveal tacit knowledge as to why instructors provide certain feedback. I also wanted to examine the comments themselves to see how they conflict or enforce the vocalized perceptions of the TAs.

I have labeled my research a case study that uses qualitative methods because this study allows me to "focus on only some partial set of relationships in group life or on one

aspect of scene” (Lindlof 21). Case studies also allow for a holistic view of a problem, provide rich detail about the participants in their own voices, demand specific research questions, and uncover tacit knowledge that may not otherwise be revealed with quantitative research methods (MacNealy 199). In addition to MacNealy and Lindlof, I have also relied, in defining my method, on John W. Creswell’s work. Creswell defines a case study as “a single entity or phenomenon [TA commentary] bounded by time and activity and collect[ing] detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time” (12). A case study method also accounted for the narrow focus of my research, and it allowed for insights into the events and behaviors of five teaching assistants in their college composition classes (MacNealy 195); the case study also allowed me to carefully design a “project to systematically collect information about an event, situation, or small group of persons or objects for the purpose of exploring, describing, and/or explaining aspects not previously known or considered” (197).

INFORMED CONSENT

Participants in a qualitative research study should receive sufficient information prior to participating in the study. “Sufficient” information includes, but is not limited to, any risks or benefits that might accompany participation in the study and the right to withdraw at any time (Breuch et al 10-11). Thomas Lindlof’s Qualitative Communication Research Methods also outlines that participants in the study should be voluntary, should understand what is expected of them during the study and should have the legal capacity

to give their consent (99).

Before I began my study, I sought permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas State University—San Marcos. I needed approval from my institution because I was using two sets of participants (graduate students and their undergraduate classes). After e-mail correspondence with the IRB, it was determined that I simply needed to obtain the proper consent forms for the study. In keeping with the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, I followed all seven criteria for human participants in a research study established in Paul Anderson’s “Ethics, Institutional Review Boards, and the Involvement of Human Participants in Composition Research”:

1. Risks are minimized
2. Risks are reasonable in relation to benefits
3. Selection of participants is equitable
4. Informed consent is obtained
5. Informed consent is documented
6. Provisions to protect confidentiality are accurate
7. Vulnerable participants are protected (Anderson 271).

The informed consent forms used in this study (see Appendices) were modeled after sample forms presented in my “Research Methods” class with Rebecca Jackson, PhD.

Informed consent is vital in protecting the ethical assumptions of a study and protecting my legal standing as a researcher, so I obtained signed and dated consent forms from my TAs and the students in their composition classes. The consent form for the TAs outlines the overarching question of my study and my status as a researcher at

my institution. I also outline what participation in the study entails and what the participant can expect from me as the researcher. I also inform the participants about the protection of their identities and their relationships with the university, regardless of their choice to participate. I have chosen to use pseudonyms even though the TA participants did not express concern about the use of their names. All participants, students and TAs, were offered a copy of their consent form.

To compare the TAs' perceptions about the roles they adopt and their commenting practices, the TAs provided photocopies of their students' graded papers. Because the students were indirectly involved with my data collection, I had them all sign appropriate consent forms, making explicit that my study would not analyze their written material or success in the class.

The consent forms for students followed the same format as that for TAs. I informed students that they were indirect participants because of their TAs' involvement. Again, I assured the students of the confidentiality of their participation and reiterated that the study is not focused on their papers, only the comments written on their papers.

METHODS

INTERVIEWS

Qualitative interviews, at best, "create an event in which one person (the interviewer) encourages another person to articulate interests or experiences freely" (Lindlof 163). Qualitative interviews also allow researchers to "gather facts, opinions, goals, plans, and insights that may not be available from any other source" (MacNealy

203). The interviews conducted with my five TA participants are, in part, a triangulation of data, as I attempt to illuminate (1) their implicit and explicit teaching philosophies, (2) their roles adopted in the classroom, and (3) their commentary protocols. I am also using the interviews to verify, validate, and comment on data obtained during my data collection (Lindlof 166), but more importantly, I am using the interviews as a way to “*understand a social actor’s own perspective [....] words that can be expressed only by someone who has ‘been there’*” (Lindlof 167, original emphasis).

I have chosen structured interviews as a way to uncover the TAs’ motivations for and perceptions of their commentary styles and to illuminate the patterns and distinctions drawn from my data collection. Using the suggestions of Seidman in “Technique Isn’t Everything But It is a Lot,” I attempted to ask open-ended questions that led my participants to tell me stories of their own experiences. I avoided leading questions frequently by asking for descriptions; I also echoed the TAs responses back to them for clarification. I did not, however, avoid reinforcing my TAs responses (74). In fact, I would frequently respond with “uh huh” or “O.K.” or “yes” (particularly in my first set of interviews) because of my inexperience interviewing participants. I continued this reinforcement, however, because I found it relaxed my participants, and because I am a teaching assistant myself, the TAs seemed to view the reinforcements as a marker of camaraderie and as my understanding of their situation or narration.

All of my interviews were semi-structured. I asked scripted questions, so that the TAs’ responses would have consistency. I also allowed the participants’ narratives to guide the conversation. The first round of questions addressed a variety of topics: general

experiences with writing and writing instructors, experiences with feedback, perceptions of commentary, how commentary issues will be addressed in the class, and overall perceptions of commentary as a method for instruction. Each interview lasted from 35 to 90 minutes. I did not transcribe the interviews in their entirety because of the sheer volume of data and time constraints. I chose, instead, to listen to the tapes repeatedly, marking points of interest, and then transcribing sections for analysis.

During the participants' first week of class, I conducted the interviews that were later partially transcribed. I wanted my interviews to be relaxed, informal, and pleasant for my participants, so one interview was conducted in a coffee house, one at a participant's home, two in the university Writing Center (a comfortable space because of participants' familiarity with it), and one in the participant's office. The location of interviews was based on convenience for my participants. I also allowed the participants to select the location, date, and time for interviews. I used a small, mini-cassette recorder placed near the participant, and while most seemed aware of its location at the opening of the interview, all the participants relaxed as the interview progressed.

My final interviews were also semi-structured. Some questions were rephrased to compare initial responses with end-of-semester responses. For example, in both interviews, I asked participants to describe their teaching philosophies, but in the final interview, I directly asked the TAs to compare their teaching philosophies at the beginning and end of the semester. Other questions were directly related to the artifact collection. I chose the times for the second interview because of hectic, competing schedules, but the TAs selected the locations most convenient for them. Again, I used a

micro-cassette recorder and transcribed sections of the interviews.

PARTICIPANTS

As a graduate student, I relied on the graduate students within my own department to provide access to comments written on freshman papers. Because I have attended my university for three years, I knew some of the participants through past working relationships and class interactions. My pre-existing rapport with the participants assisted me in gathering my artifacts and conducting my interviews. I acknowledge that my participants' pre-existing knowledge led them to attempt to predict what questions I might ask. However, I do not believe the relationships influenced the overall direction of the interviews or study.

Because our program functions like a community, I was on familiar terms with all of the participants, and we share mutual friends and acquaintances. The five graduate teaching assistants selected for this study were chosen for their willingness to participate: a female MA candidate and a female MFA candidate (poetry), one male MA candidate, and two male MFA candidates (fiction). I worked with Ernest in our university's Writing Center for a year, and I knew Jack through a co-worker. Jack agreed to be a part of the study after a family emergency required one of my previous participants to withdraw. Mary and Hannah were fellow instructional assistants, and Brad is new to the program. The ratio of men to women in my study is not indicative of the ratio within the department, but I did purposefully select candidates of both sexes. All five participants were required to participate in Teaching Practicum (English 5182) during the first seven

weeks of the semester. They also attended a one-day training session that dealt with syllabus preparation.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF TA PARTICIPANTS

MARY

Mary is a 50-year-old returning student. She started college right out of high school, but she did not finish until she was in her 40s, when she returned to a Central Texas university to earn a BA in English. Before returning to college, she worked in the music industry and as a receptionist in a law firm. Her teaching experience began with her home schooling her daughter and other children. She is an MFA student in the poetry program, but she has come to realize that she prefers writing short fiction. She was an Instructional Assistant (IA) within the university's English department the year prior to taking her teaching position. She describes her teaching strengths as "caring about the students' lives and caring about their progress"; she considers herself to be too lenient because of her mothering tendency.

JACK

Before becoming a TA, Jack worked as an IA in the Philosophy Department, where he led small discussion groups and assisted with a large lecture. He completed two years of coursework at a junior college before receiving a BA in English and philosophy from his current institution. He is 24 and a candidate in the literature program. He describes himself as a "relaxed, patient" teacher, one who is idea-driven because he is

interested in the students' "exerting themselves" in the papers.

HANNAH

Hannah is a 29-year-old graduate of a mid-western university. Her father was a law professor, and her older sister and grandmother are teachers. She holds a BA in English. She is enrolled in the literature program, and, like Mary, she was an IA before accepting her teaching position. As a teacher, she "cares about [students]" and "wants them to be successful." She likes to see them "try hard" and "think they can be successful."

BRAD

Brad entered the MFA-fiction program with a MA in literature from a mid-sized university in Tennessee, where he received a BA in English with an emphasis in creative writing. He was also an adjunct professor teaching as many as five sections at a time. He did articulate the differences in the training processes of the two universities. In Tennessee, he worked as an IA within a composition classroom, rather than a literature classroom. He is 29. He describes himself as "relaxed" in the classroom; he often uses "sarcasm to loosen [students] up," but he also acknowledges that students ask each other, "Was that funny?"

ERNEST

Ernest is 27 years old. He entered the MFA-fiction program after working for

AmeriCorps for two years on the west coast, where he taught in after-school programs in high school and ESL programs in a community college. He received a BA from a university in Tennessee. He was not an IA for the department, but he worked as a counselor in the Writing Center for one year. As a teacher, he describes himself as authoritative because he sees his students as not having “much knowledge at this point.” He also describes himself in relation to the professors he models himself after. He describes those professors, and himself, as “well-rounded,” as treating the entire student and not just their writing needs. He addresses “all” of his students by talking to them and working with them outside of class.

DATA COLLECTION

My data for this study came from two key sources: artifact analysis and interviews. The artifacts used in this study were the teaching assistants’ graded essays, complete with commentary. I collected the essays and made photocopies four times during the semester. I did not collect the students’ first essay because it was written in class and designed to give TAs an opportunity to familiarize themselves with their rubrics and commenting style. I did not collect the students’ final exam because it, too, was written in class, and the essays were graded holistically for quick turn-around with few or no comments. Because teachers’ comments vary if a teacher is commenting on a draft or a final product (see Straub and Lunsford), I collected only final copies.

CHAPTER 2

CONGRUENCE: ROLES AND STYLES

My research on instructor commentary foregrounds the intersection between instructors' perceived roles in the classroom and instructors' actual commentary practices. That is, what instructors do with student papers suggests what roles they have adopted, whether consciously or not. This intersection between roles and practices emerged in my own study when I began rereading transcripts of my interviews and analyzing the TAs' graded essays. Initially, I relied on the narratives told by the TAs to determine in which pedagogical framework they perceived themselves to be operating. I, then, relied on their self-portraits to examine the graded essays. By comparing the TAs' perceived roles with their commentary practices, I identified two categories of TA perceptions and practices: congruence and misrecognition.

The TAs who display congruence are those whose narratives about their roles in the classroom align with their actual commentary practices; three of the five TAs practice what they preach. As is always the case, identities are rarely cohesive, and such is the reality for the other two TAs participating in my study. These other TAs perceive their roles in the classroom one way, while their actual commentary practices conflict with their perceptions.

As I discuss the TAs congruence with or misrecognition of their self-portraits and

practices, it is important to remember the constant fluidity of these roles and the slippage between the TAs' narratives and practices. No TA, or instructor, is ever a full embodiment of a given role; in fact, in my study, all five of my TAs narratives offer self-descriptions that align with at least two of Smith's commentary genres. With this fluidity and slippage in mind, my primary research interest demands that I look at the TAs' written commentary, using the TAs' perceptions as a point of comparison because as transactional theory tells us, the attitude that informs an instructor's role in the classroom manifests in the style or types of comments made. I begin my discussion with those TAs who display congruence between their perceived roles and actual commentary practices.

ERNEST

Ernest most fully embodies the practices and procedures of a Judge in the classroom. Judges, as I discussed, are interested in making evaluations of students' work based on their own experiences and creating perfect texts. Ernest is a Judge because he accepts his role as an authority, admitting that he does not treat his students as collaborators: "I definitely try to keep that teacher/student power relationship in place, but I am a little more open to the mood of the class. So, I will structure or I will change my lesson plan to fit the mood." Ernest's sense of control over his classroom and students aligns him with a Judge, whose primary purpose in writing comments is to display experienced authority over the student and the text. Ernest distinguishes himself from the other TAs because his discussions on authority imply a sense of comfort with his position as the Judge.

Ernest also sees himself as the authority because of the students' age and inexperience: "Well, first and foremost they are students, and they are 18. And, I see them as there to learn from me. I am there to teach them; they are there to learn." Ernest's feeling that his students are not engaged in the freshman composition class also reinforces his position of authority: "I know that some of them, English is not their . . . this English 1310 class does not interest them." So, Ernest adopts his role to close the gap in his students' lack of interest and exercise his own experience and knowledge with writing.

As the authority in the classroom, Ernest assumes responsibility for passing writing experiences and knowledge on to students: "I do know some of the tricks of writing, and that I can give them some of the shortcuts or some of the skills that they need to write more efficiently and better." Ernest's familiarity with the "tricks of writing" give him the answers to the students "problems" with writing, and these answers lay the groundwork for his standards for performance:

So I try to raise the bar for my students more so than I think other teachers, at least the ones that I've talked to as to what they expect. Like, I think I expect a little more out of my students, but at the same time, I try to temper that with the understanding that they won't reach it and that whatever work they do *do* will be good work that I will be proud of them.

As a Judge, Ernest sets high expectations for his students' performances, but he also casts judgments about their inability to achieve his standards and meet his expectations. Ernest judges the students' abilities to succeed in his classroom.

Ernest's stated standards for students' performances include "a clear thesis and precise language, like precise examples." Ernest teaches precision by evaluating what the student wrote and offering comments on the student's self-correction. For example, one student replaced "as of right now" with "currently" during a self-annotation. Ernest writes, "You use 1 word to say same thing as 4. Yes, better." He reinforces the precision of the student's introductory clause with a positive evaluation, and evaluations, both positive and negative, belong to the judging genre.

Ernest's concern for the clarity of his students' thesis statements and the precision of their examples aligns with his desire to focus on *how* his students say something. In fact, he says outright, "The content of their argument doesn't really concern me . . . but I just want to look at *how* they're doing it, *how* they're coming to the conclusions that they're coming to . . . I do want them to be productive members of society, but that is more secondary." Ernest wants to analyze the ways in which his students construct their arguments, not what they actually argue. He is concerned with format, not content. He says: "What they're saying is not as important as how they say it."

Ernest's concern with how his students say something is reflected in his marking "where something is vague or general" in order to push his students to write more precisely. Ernest says that he encourages specificity by avoiding one-word comments, like "vague" or "unclear." Instead, he writes questions (a coaching method) to refocus the student's logic on the original assignment: "Can you specify a little more? Will you be talking about politics, economics, rhetoric?" In this case, Ernest is concerned that the student's thesis statement is too vague, and he writes the two questions as an illustration

that the student must pick one of the three available options. I classify Ernest's questions as judging comments because while the questions are intended to improve the logic and argument of the student's thesis, the questions have only one "right" answer. Thus, the questions cannot be coaching comments because they reveal an implicit evaluation.

Ernest also conveys his message of specificity and precision by writing direct comments. In this example, he writes wants the student to consider additional perspectives while developing and honing the argument. Ernest writes, "Ok, NOT ALL African-Americans live this way . . . Be Specific especially w[ith] subject of racial/gender inequality." This comment sets the standard for precision of thought, and Ernest reinforces this point by rewriting the student's sentence. The student writes, "Nevertheless, African Americans today live in bad conditions. Their housing, for example, lacks sufficient plumbing and electricity and isn't anything in great condition for living." Ernest draws a single line through the sentences, and he rewrites the sentence as a model for specificity of thought and precision of language: "Today, slum housing units recreate substandard living conditions. These houses lack sufficient plumbing and electricity and are difficult for living." Ernest has taken a student's sentence and appropriated it to meet his standards for logic and structure.

Interestingly, although Ernest does rewrite this student's sentence, he claims to have an aversion to modeling, which is a Judge characteristic: "So yeah, I try to keep my commentary, you know I don't offer them, 'Put this sentence here,' 'Make this your topic sentence,' 'Rearrange this.' I just try to point out how it's not effective, 'That this doesn't match up with this.'" Ernest's perceived aversion to modeling is accurate because his

practices illustrate that he possesses an awareness for the ineffectualness of appropriation; he has an awareness that doing the work for the student does not push his students to meet his expectations.

Ernest does, however, make limited modeling comments. These comments, however, do not contradict his anti-modeling stance because the comments are so limited, which seems to indicate that Ernest reserves modeling for specific students. Also, when Ernest does rewrite a student's sentence, he surrounds the modeling with reader response comments in order to push the student to reconsider the logic of the original argument. He has appropriated the words, a function of his judging comment, but he has not appropriated the student's structure, which he says he did not want to do.

Ernest also displays his judging tendency when discussing the lengths that students will go to in order to please him as their instructor: "They molded their writing to get more of the positive, improving comments. And a couple of them found a comfortable place, like with a B, and then would write a just a solid B paper." Ernest's is a Judge because he does not assign the improvement of the student's work to their increasing abilities or acquisition of new skills; instead, he sees the improvement as the students' desire to receive comments from him, and because Ernest sees the students' need to please their professors as a byproduct of their early parent-child interactions, he again removes their accountability and responsibility in the classroom and relegates his students to a submissive role:

They're not dumb, and they're not without some acknowledgement that—
if they do the right thing, if they do what their parents say, they're not

going to get in trouble. If they do what their high school teachers told them, everything worked out fine. They're going to be kind of looking to do things that they think that I'm going to like, and that's fine. But if I put too much of myself out there, then it's just going to warp what they do, and I want to try to foster them to disagree with me or to strike out on their own. Develop their own style, I guess, rather than conform to what I tell them.

Ernest's spoken desire for students to develop their own style and disagree with him as the instructor is an example of how the TAs may display dominant patterns of congruence (their primary role aligns with their primary commentary style) and still display moments of conflict within their interviews. Regardless of his desires, a Judge cannot foster disagreement between student and instructor because the roles are not equalized; the role of the Judge exerts authority over the classroom and the texts, keeping all participants in their appropriate roles.

Ernest's role as the Judge is tempered by his somewhat contradictory hopes that his students will become autonomous individuals, and as such, take responsibility for their own work; he illustrates this position in his belief that the students are accountable to each other and to the curriculum: "... but I hope that, at some point I do put the responsibility onto them. It's not my job to make them care. It's not my job to make them use my comments, not to say that I don't try to create the best comments for them that I can." Because the students are responsible for their own successes in the course, Ernest seems to paint himself as an outside contributor. He does his work; the students do theirs.

Each is responsible for fulfilling the obligations assigned, and there is no overlap of responsibility.

While Ernest, on some level, may want to take an attitude of authorial absence, an “I can’t make them care” approach, he continues to discuss his students as passive creatures “there to learn from [him].” Rather than being a student/teacher split or a child/parent split, Ernest sees his students as divided and separated in their own limbo state between childhood and adulthood:

But they’re also, I try to look at them in the context of being in college and being in this new role of budding adults, so I see them also testing things, figuring out what they can get away with, and trying on different aspects of their personality to see what fits . . . I try to foster that in the class as well. If whatever they’re doing isn’t working, just in the way that they interact with their peers and with me, then I give them some freedom to try other things.

Thus, Ernest seems to adopt his role of the authority figure, or Judge, as a way to accommodate the students’ new experiences with themselves and with their experiences in the university system as a whole. He seems to see his position of authority as a necessity for his students.

As a Judge, Ernest says, “I don’t ever write just ‘good’ or ‘nice job’ or anything like that. It always has to have substance to it.” His perception of his commentary protocol is accurate because his positive evaluations often connect to the text via evaluations of “substance.” For example, he writes, “It’s good to acknowledge this aspect

of the behavior. Balances your argument.” He could have simply written “good” in the margin, but he explains why he views the student’s work as good. Ernest also does this on the preceding page, to a lesser degree, when he writes, “Good. Should probably be its own ¶.” This comment blends the “substance” connection less effectively than the previous comment, but it demonstrates Ernest’s occasional use of “good” by itself. So in spite of his perception, Ernest does occasionally write positive evaluations without connections, but the instances are infrequent.

Interestingly enough, Ernest says repeatedly that he wants to write comments that connect to the nature of the students’ arguments, while he also says that he is not concerned with the opinions expressed in those arguments, as I discuss later. He says, “I try not to, just as I don’t care what they have to say on a subjective level, I don’t really think they’re going to have too much, they’re not really going to care what I have to say on the subjective level.” Ernest, thus, seems to see comments about content as a subjective undertaking and of no interest to his students. Ernest’s explicit interest with *how* the students present their argument is the controlling factor in his commentary protocol, which follows a regimented sequence designed to find out how well the student presented the argument:

Well, first thing would just be grammar. I would just tick that off . . . then I would read through about half the paper to see if it’s flowing in the right direction. If it seemed to be okay, I would start over. Just read through, looking at how they were structuring their argument. Seeing if they were following sort of that point, illustration, example to create a cohesive

paragraph. And that would be the first thing I would look at, and so my first round of comments would be to that. If they started really messing up in sort of their logic section, I would point that out to them. That would sometimes be a big comment, but I would then try to qualify it as, “The logic’s really not the most important thing here.” But that would then be my second round of comments. The final comments at the end of the page would be sort of a summary of what I thought they were attempting to do and what worked well and what was probably the biggest thing they needed to improve upon.

Ernest’s end comments reinforce his actual protocol for commenting on student texts. For example, on one text, he notes that the first half of the paper might benefit from revision. He then writes, “Avoid grammar mistakes and read your paper aloud to catch awkward sounding phrases. Also, pay attention to logic.” Ernest then goes on to explain why the logic of the third paragraph was flawed. This sequence of comments reflects his protocol because he comments on grammar, on flow, and then on logic and argument. While the imperative style of his end comment seems to align with the coaching genre, the comments are evaluations made in the judging genre because they point out what the student failed to do in the essay. The comments are not so much suggestions as they are commands for improving what was wrong.

As Ernest says, his commentary protocol is directly influenced by his desire to uncover “how [students] were structuring their argument[s],” and the order and arrangement of his end comments again reinforce how Ernest approaches the text. Ernest

likes to make summary comments, which point out something “that they did well.” He then likes to point out “something they need to improve on.” It is this balance of negative and positive comments that also reflects his inexperience as an instructor in composition. As explained by Siegel, Ernest, like other new instructors, opens his end comments on a positive note then follows with a negative one—the preferred sequence for beginning instructors. For example, “You raise a good point [positive evaluation], but fail to tie in how the Dec of Independence failed or achieved making things better [negative evaluation]” and “Your country music argument is interesting, but needs more development and better structure.”

The amount of comments that Ernest writes on papers overwhelms any other agenda he perceives himself to be working toward, which reveals why the quantity of his commentary connects to his judging approach. For example, on two essays, in addition to correcting grammatical and mechanical errors with interlinear comments (like arrows, checks, and circles), Ernest writes ten, full-sentence comments on each essay. While the number may seem low, it is the volume of information that makes these ten comments overwhelming: the comments densely fill the white space of the margins, forcing the student to sort through the information and root out the information intended for revisions.

In addition to the extensive interlinear and marginal comments, Ernest writes extensive end comments on each essay. For example, on one essay, he writes an opening line (a positive evaluation) followed by two numbered paragraphs that outline the specific areas of revision. He writes:

Your thoughts are good thoughts and your organization looks pretty good, but your paper suffers b[e]/c[ause]

- 1) Clarity – Your mechanics need some improvement and you tackle too many thoughts in a sentence. Think of saying one thing and say it straightforwardly. When you do this in your paper, your mechanics/grammar is fine and I understand the point you are trying to make.
- 2) Grammar & Mechanics – Your errors aren't horrendous or excessive, but they are present enough to know you're out of "B" paper range. Either the Writing Center or I can help you w/ these issues. Your thoughts are good and your organization is sufficient for the B paper, but the written sentence sometimes got away from you.

Let's work together during the revision stage of the next paper.

The comments that Ernest writes on this essay are specific to the student, and the end comments pick only two areas for discussion, both of which Siegel and Smith would praise. The comments seem focused and coherent on improving two issues. But the two issues are local issues not global issues—the preferred area of inexperienced instructors and Judges.

In addition to these end comments, Ernest writes extensive marginal comments and focuses on local issues on this essay. The end comments take up half of the last page, and when coupled with the extensive marginal comments that cover issues of content and reader response, the commentary is overwhelming. This is why the style and content of

the comments are almost an irrelevant point.

This issue of quantity carries over into a second sample essay, which also has extensive end comments. In fact, Ernest draws a line down the length of the page, and on one half, he actually outlines the essay's topic sentences and thesis statement. He then uses the second half of the paper to summarize his evaluation. The volume of comments on these two essays reinforces Ernest's notion that the student is the one making the mistakes and the one who must make the necessary revisions, just as he is the one who must outline the errors.

But, like all of my TAs, Ernest does not embody only one role. For Ernest, the intersection of his coaching and judging roles begins when he says that he doesn't want to tell students what to think *not* because they are autonomous co-creators of their experience but "because a lot of times [the students will] just get confused." This double dialogue of the Judge and Coach illuminates why Ernest writes both coaching and judging comments on his students' texts.

Ernest complicates his dominant role as a Judge because he says that he doesn't *always* want to be the central figure in the classroom: "The teacher is the expert opinion in that room, but should never dominate—should never tell the students what to think." And as Ernest goes on to explain why he writes on students' texts, he offers a tacit understanding of why he uses judging and coaching comments on his students' texts: "I want to show them that there is a partnership, and I just think that this is a process. That they're not expected to be good writers—that's why they're in this course. So the more feedback that I can give them, the more that it will push them along to the end result."

Ernest is right that written communication can produce a sense of partnership and cohesiveness between the instructor and student, and he demonstrates that even as a TA with a dominant Judge role, he can still express concern for his students' feelings by using coaching comments.

So, Ernest does create a sense of partnership with his students by ending the majority of his end comments with a coaching statement. On the first essays of the semester, Ernest would begin with "let's" suggestions on three out of five essays. His end comments vary from, "Let's work together during the revision stage of the next paper" to "For the next paper, let's work on structure and organization first during the plan/thesis stage." This use of "let's" indicates a shared responsibility, as Smith notes, and Ernest uses this throughout all of his end notes.

On one essay, Ernest writes seven coaching comments and seven judging comments—a balance between the two practices. The coaching comments range from instructional phrases, like, "underline or italicize," to questions intended to make the writer reconsider the logic of the original argument, like, "Wouldn't it be far too difficult to try to stage a revolution?" Ernest also offers pointed imperative statements, like, "Bring in an active agent." The end comments also contain those same coaching elements because he continues offering more suggestions: "Work now on inserting an agent (person) into the writing." Like Ernest's other questions, all these comments follow Smith's suggestions for coaching comments because they offer suggestions for revision, they address the text specifically, and they are in the imperative.

Many of Ernest's ostensibly coaching comments are judging comments, and it is

the coupling of these coaching comments with the judging comments that reveal why Ernest is primarily a Judge. On one essay, Ernest's first comment is, "You could join these ideas into one sentence." On the surface, this comment, like the others, is within the boundaries of the coaching genre because it is offering a suggestion for revision; it also lacks a direct evaluation of the two sentences, so it seems beyond the scope of the judging commentary. Because there is no discussion of content or a reader's perspective, we can rule out the reader response genre, as well. Because the thrust of this comment is not encouraging the writer to join two simple sentences into one compound sentence, the comment is an order for improvement. This comment disguises itself as a suggestion, but the judging roots reveal its source in Ernest's role as the authority on writing.

Ernest continually blends evaluation and suggestion throughout his comments. On the second page of this same text, he writes, "Instead of saying 'there is,' tell me something interesting about this comparison." Here, the suggested revision is separated from the evaluation. First, he tells the student to avoid the use of the expletive and to rely, instead, on the comparison for the controlling point of the sentence. The introductory phrase ("instead of saying 'there is'") remains in the judging category because of its disguised evaluation of what worked and did not work in the sentence. The dependent clause offers a coaching suggestion for revision work, but the student must wade through the evaluation before arriving at the suggestions.

Perhaps Ernest juxtaposes coaching comments with judging comments because he cannot write on the student's text without displaying authorial expertise. He, as a writer, reads as an Editor and proof-reader, continually seeking a perfect text and not an

improved student. As Smith reminds us, the suggestions disguised as evaluations belong to the judging genre, and the danger of combining coaching and judging comments is that the student may begin interpreting all coaching comments as disguised evaluations, thus interpreting all revision as punishment.

But Ernest's commentary style does not simply position judging and coaching comments side by side in equal numbers. In fact, he often makes large numbers of judging comments. On one essay, in fact, he makes eleven coaching comments throughout the text, and only in the end comments does he rely on a brief reader response comment. In this case, however, his eleven coaching comments are still classified as judging comments because all eleven comments are written as evaluative fragments that convey both a reader's reaction and a judge's evaluation: run-on sentence, sexist generalizations, awkward, fragment, way too long, incorrect use of semicolon.

Ernest's negative evaluations on this same text vary by length and by degree. For example, when he writes "sexist generalizations," which is vague and disconnected, he reconnects his evaluation to the text and reading assignment (a coaching maneuver) by adding, "Not true; even Horney wouldn't argue this point." He continues his evaluation of this paragraph in the right margin by adding, "You haven't proven this point." Again, these comments are responding to what the reader encounters while interacting with the text; but, the comments are judging comments because they are fragments and statements interpreting the right/wrong elements in the student's text. The comments primary function is evaluating the student's text, and they tell the student that the logic employed is flawed and that generalizations are not acceptable.

Ernest's judging style also follows the use of the grammatical subjects as established by Smith. He assigns responsibility to the students for their texts. On four out of five essays, Ernest opens his end comments with a second-person directed statement, beginning the first sentence with "you": "You raise a good point. . ." He also writes positive introductory sentences that use "you" and the variable third-person subject to assign responsibility for what went right in the essay. For example, he writes on one essay, "Your organization is better and the structure and clarity have also improved." In this evaluation, the opening sentence applauds the student for improving structure, but the second sentence suggests that the structure and clarity improved without the student's assistance because the subject moves from the student (you) to the passive third-person (structure and clarity). The second half of the comment negates the positive accountability of the first half.

Ernest also uses "you" as the subject with his negative evaluations. He writes to one student, "You evidently struggled w/ understanding the essays You don't make a thorough, developed argument." Smith defines the use of these subjects as a style characteristic of the judging genre, and Ernest unknowingly follows this style for grammatical subjects perfectly, with both positive and negative comments.

Ernest says that he does not make comments that Smith would classify in the reader-response genre because he feels that students will simply gloss over or ignore them all together. He does, however, occasionally write reader response comments ("Doing what? Oppressing and removing?" or "Why are you bringing me into this?"). Again, Ernest admits that reader comments are not the style he values because he did not

value instructors who engaged in “chit-chat” with him. So, Ernest remains loyal to his primary goal of focusing on the logic of student arguments, even when writing reader response comments.

Although Ernest uses both judging and coaching comments in dominant ways, and although he makes limited reader response comments, he displays a congruence between his perceived role and actual commentary practices. Ernest wants to be an authority figure in his classroom, and he wants to impart his own experiences and knowledge of writing to his students. Ernest wants to be a Judge, and he writes judging comments. He uses his comments as an extension of this role, and his positive and negative evaluations, attention to clarity and precision on the sentence level, and extensive directed comments create a cohesive image of a Judge.

BRAD

Brad is the second TA who demonstrates congruence between his perceptions and practices. Like Ernest, Brad is a TA with a dominant Judge role. Brad’s judging tendency begins with his desire to keep discipline in the classroom: “I also realize that this is college, so I try to keep some discipline too. I’ll maintain order and be the disciplinarian.”

Brad sets standards for himself as a writer, and, as a Judge, these standards reinforce his role. Brad expresses concern for evaluation of the students’ work and for finished products, and his reiteration of words, like “dedication,” “precision,” “proficiency,” illuminates his role. Like Ernest, he even knows what areas will catch his attention: “There are certain things that I am always going to look for and that out of

habit I am going to spot—comma problems, vague pronouns, and subject-verb—stuff like that.”

Brad also maintains a rigid set of expectations for his students: “I expect for them to demonstrate a certain proficiency . . . they do have to bring a certain devotion to the class and even if it’s only a dedication to meeting my expectations for the precision that they put into their work demonstrating a certain mastery of the language.” This emphasis on his expectations creates a role that seems to place the evaluator and Judge at the center of the composition process. Rather than focusing on what the student needs, the Judge’s need for precision becomes the focus. The responsibility lies with Brad, for he must subsequently convey these “expectations” in such a way that the students can accommodate.

As a Judge, Brad’s expectations include the “attention to detail” he demands in himself, and this detail-oriented approach is one factor that he thinks will help prepare him for evaluating his students:

I think that on one level—I think that the attention to detail that . . . my own writing demands of me or that I demand in myself in my own writing helps prepare me for evaluating my students’ writing and for sort of being able to explain to them what I expect in terms of their level of precision, their level of dedication.

He says that he wants to be able to express to his students the “level of precision” that he expects in their writing. His comments that address the need for elaboration illuminate his demands for precision. For instance, to explain why a student might choose active verbs

over expletives, Brad writes, “In conversation these work fine, but in a formal paper, you might need to be even more specific.” He tells another student, “This is vague. Are the next 2 things included in ‘many techniques’?” In both cases, Brad chooses not to write fragments or suggestions for his students; instead, he offers up a context and a question to reinforce why he wants the student to be more precise and what he wants the student to elaborate on.

Not surprisingly, Brad’s interest in the elaboration and precision of writing extends over into his interest with the content of his students’ papers. He sees *how* his students write as important as *what* his students write:

For me, it is absolutely necessary that I comment on both of those aspects. That I do the sort of repetitive commentary on sentence levels problems, on language issues. But I also feel that for my ideals of trying to create good thinkers or good people or whatever, I also feel like it is important for me to question some of what they’ve claimed in the paper to try to push them even further in terms of the argumentative or persuasive or comparative goals that I’ve set for the paper.

Brad wants to “press [students] both on mechanics and the development of ideas,” depending on the assignment. Brad also takes issue with *how* his students are completing their writing assignments, and he wants to look at the logic the students use: “All writing in an academic setting is an argument, so I want them to convince me of the merit of their argument, to make some sort of an argument.” He wants his students to follow a set standard for logic and order, a judging technique.

Brad may be a Judge who critiques what his students say, but he also strives to be relaxed with his authority, and he sees humor as the best way to do this. He hopes that humor lightens the mood and provides levity to his class discussions because he believes that “levity creates a community within the classroom.” This humor and levity is his “nature,” and as such, Brad believes it puts him and his students at ease. Brad’s comments often play on this issue of humor and levity in his classroom. He asks one student, “Yeah, but don’t faculty [parking] lots already do that? Seriously, I’m asking b[e]/c[ause] I don’t know,” and he tells another, “Be afraid of phrases like this.” These comments make judgments about the logic of the argument and the generalizations the students use, but the comments also contain humor to lighten the judgment.

Brad does not want his classroom humor to include sarcasm. While he likes to and does in fact sometimes use sarcasm during his class discussions, he fears that his students don’t “always get it.” He also worries that written sarcasm may be too pointed (a fear based in his coaching perspective), but there are moments, however, when even Brad cannot resist. One student’s essay includes a title written in 28-point font. Beside the title, in equally large font, Brad scribbles, “BIG TITLE!” This works towards the sarcasm he enjoys, and it fits with his self-description of someone who strives to be “humorous.”

Unlike Ernest who believes it is not his job to make his students “care” about their composition class, Brad has a different outlook on his students’ lack of interest in being in the composition classroom. Brad agrees that students do not want to be in the classroom, but he assigns himself with the responsibility of changing the students’ attitudes: “I believe that a lot of the students believe that they don’t want to be there [the

classroom], but I don't believe them. You can make any class be one that they, at the very least, aren't opposed to showing up to. You can make it an environment where they want to be." Brad wants his class to be tolerable for students, but by putting the responsibility on himself, just as he does when conveying his expectations for the students' writing, he reduces the students' level of accountability.

So, Brad, as a Judge, does not relinquish his complex position on student authority and responsibility in the classroom: "As much as I try to let the class inform what we learn . . . I feel like I when I sit down to grade their papers that I had a pretty clear set of goals that I wanted them to fulfill . . . a pretty clear set of accomplishments that they need to meet." He returns to his issue of precision, and he continues to hold his students to a set standard of performance.

In spite of his standards for precision and performance, in an ideal world, Brad thinks he would be a Coach because he says that he "would probably write predominately questions." He wants to write "organic, figure it out on your own, Socratic questions" on a regular basis. But wanting to ask questions, a characteristic of the coaching genre, does not mean Brad will be a Coach. In fact, the coaching questions he provides as examples reveal the primary trend in Brad's commentary style. Brad writes judging questions because he is a Judge who wants to write coaching questions; but because of his standards and demands for precision, Brad's questions are followed either by a judgment or the questions have elements of judgment built into them. Brad's questions are not true open-ended questions with a range of possible meaning; instead, the questions are constructed with one correct answer:

I would just be able to write nothing but questions that hopefully steer them in the right philosophical directions, or even in the right mechanical directions. “Why would you put that extra comma here? What do you think a comma is designed to do? What do we want to accomplish when we use a comma?” Realistically, 9 times out of 10 that can’t happen . . .

It’s (the commentary) gotta be declarative rather than inquisitive.

Brad’s first question tells the student that a comma is out of place because one does not “belong” there. The second question addresses the student’s lack of knowledge about the role of the comma in a sentence, and the third question hints at the stylistic choices behind the use of a comma.

So Brad’s imagined questions are all three questions that contain evaluations of the student and the student’s abilities, so all three questions inform his role as a Judge. All three imagined questions are further illuminated by the questions that Brad writes on students’ texts. He asks students, “How do you mean these words?” when the student’s are not fully defining and elaborating on descriptions. When a student fails to complete the requirements of the assignment, Brad asks, “What about your other issue?” And sometimes, he simply draws two arrows to create a triangle of ideas and asks, “Do these match up?” Brad misrecognizes his own questions; he does not know that the questions he asks are judgments, but even with this misrecognition, he is congruent with his dominant role as a Judge because he asks judging questions.

Brad wants to write Socratic questions to his students, and he writes on students’ papers “because of the learning that happens when they’re by themselves. Away from

class, from one-on-one conferences.” Brad believes that there is learning that can only occur when the students hear their own voices “reading the comments” written by the instructor. He writes comments for his students because he believes “there is a passion level of argumentation that can’t happen in class. Only when they are reading [his] comments.”

Again, Brad is a Judge, just as Ernest is a Judge. But Brad defines his role for himself. While Ernest maintains a student/teacher dualistic environment, Brad does not readily describe a student/teacher dynamic within his class. Instead, Brad describes his role in the classroom and his students’ roles as centered on equality and camaraderie:

Ideally they’re participant members of a community of thinkers—the colloquium and community of the classroom, and they have a responsibility with and within that classroom. They are building communication, so if they’re deathly afraid of talking, I’ll call on them.

I’ll give them Dr. Phil or tough love, whatever it takes to get them to talk in class. I’ll tell them, “Tell me you hate the reading,” and they find out that 10 other people felt the exact same way, and they are all talking.

This sense of camaraderie is tied to the secondary role Brad uses in the classroom. Brad is a Judge who uses a Coach role because he wants to create a sense of community and colloquium. By doing so, Brad places some authority in the hands of his students, and he makes them partially responsible for what they learn.

So Brad is both a Coach and Judge, and this equally split role is first seen when he describes his teaching philosophy:

The idealist in me definitely wants to think that part of our job is, I don't know, developing good citizens or developing good minds, good people. And I definitely try to bring that into class. So, I think that that idealism has to be tempered with pragmatism with my understanding that what I need to focus on probably more than trying to make them good people or to see the world differently . . . it definitely needs to be tempered with trying to instill in them a certain mastery of the language, the ability to communicate with the written word and develop a certain proficiency with that.

Brad wants to play both parts for his students, and this desire to do both manifests itself in his commentary practices. He combines what he believes to be coaching comments with judging comments, even if he is not fully cognizant that his style is always judging.

With his role as a Judge and as a Coach, Brad wants his students to be more proficient and adept with the language. He balances his judging goal with the students' needs. To accomplish this, Brad tries to offer comments that are "more immediate and applicable" for his students, and his concern for how his students interpret his commentary shows Brad's coaching inclinations. He always wants to be encouraging to his students, and he wants to be instrumental in educating them: "I try to make [comments] as utilitarian as possible and as immediately applicable to the sentence level or the paragraph as possible."

Brad's interlinear and marginal comments reflect this continual tug-of-war between his coaching inclinations and his judging inclinations, and the only resolution is

that the majority of his comments reveal a balance between the two. On one essay, Brad writes twenty-five judging comments and three coaching comments. The tug-of-war between the genres comes into play when we consider the positioning of these comments, particularly when Brad writes eight of the comments in a combination form. For example, Brad writes, “These feel like intro sentences. Maybe they belong at the ¶’s beginning.” Here, Brad has combined an evaluation of the sentences (judging technique) with a suggestion for revision (coaching technique).

This technique of combining coaching comments with judging comments is important for two reasons. First, this technique illustrates the tug-of-war Brad confronts when writing his commentary, just as all instructors face the dilemma, whether consciously or unconsciously, of using one genre over the other. Brad, like all instructors, must decide which comments accurately reflect what he wants to accomplish in the classroom, that is, what commentary style most effectively reinforces his role in the classroom. Because Brad situates evaluations so close to suggestions, he risks the student interpreting the revision suggestion as a punishment for something done wrong, as Smith notes.

Brad’s pattern of placing a question with a statement is also important because it is his dominant style for all interlinear and marginal comments. In fact, he rarely writes one without the other, and they appear in a variety of combinations. On one essay, Brad writes, “Vague. More importantly, what do ‘all [these] techniques’ promise/make you want to do?” Here, he evaluates the student’s thesis statement and provides a question intended to spawn further thought. He wants the student to reconsider and elaborate on

how the advertiser's techniques affect her. Later on in this same essay, Brad writes another combination of comments: "What does this mean? Literally to make the band's shirts' & stuff? Oh, I get it." Here, he relies on reader-response comments to demonstrate how ambiguity has left him clueless. But, Brad's evaluations do not always precede his other comments, as another text illustrates when he asks, "How does the ad buy her? Awkward." Here, he uses a reader's question to preface his evaluation of the sentence.

As I discussed earlier, Brad is concerned with what his students say and how they say it because he believes that "both (reading and writing) are integral to the class." This balance of the reading and writing also helps explain Brad's occasional use of reader response comments. When Brad writes comments on the students' texts, he is cautious and hesitant, adopting a reader role: "I think I tried to be the skeptical audience. Yeah, a disbeliever willing to be converted." Brad also lets his reader role influence his commentary procedure: "I write as I read. I sort of let the paper inform me." It is this focus on the paper "informing" him that allows Brad to focus as much on content as he does form. By writing and reading simultaneously, Brad is writing all the comments that strike him, leaving him to appropriate the students' texts with large amounts of commentary.

Brad says he writes only "enough comments for [students] to read walking across campus or in their dorm." But just as he cannot be a Coach without being a Judge, Brad admits:

I can't *not* write on the papers . . . it is almost impossible for me to read something and not annotate, not draw lines, write in the margins. I try to

do even more of that on my freshman papers but it's really just doing more of what comes naturally at this point. I comment as much out of habit as necessity.

As I note in my discussion of Ernest's comments, there is a disjuncture between what the TAs perceive as adequate or effective commentary and what research tells us is effective for inexperienced, or beginning, writers. The TAs believe that their students need the most comments they can provide, but researchers, such as Smith, note that students can better process limited comments on a few specific areas. And, even though Brad has the most experience with teaching composition, he writes the most interlinear and marginal comments of all the TAs—a habit that directly conflicts with his experience because, according to Siegel, experienced instructors tend to write limited, selective comments.

Brad's metaphor for the writing process helps explain why he always comes back to judging comments, regardless of how he balances his comments between the judging, coaching, and reader-response genres:

It's like when you are climbing stairs, and you put each foot on each step to reach the top. I see the class as a work in progress. Each paper must reach a point where they can turn it in, and it can represent the "best work" they can do at that point. Sometimes they [other instructors] say that the paper is a part of the greater whole, and it is, but it isn't individual. The real world doesn't work that way: there are deadlines, and there is a finished product. There are stages, and you have to finish A before you move on to B.

Brad seems to say that the students should be encouraged to view their work as a

progression, but he is acutely aware of the need for evaluation along the way. So while Brad shows a desire to coach his students and relate to them as a reader, his emphasis on precision and his acknowledgment of the final product keep the focus of Brad's role and comments in the judging genre.

JACK

The previous discussions have revealed that TAs often use all the roles available to them in the classroom, striking a balance between their perceived roles and actual commentary practices. Ernest is a dominant Judge, relying on his authority and experience to dictate what students need to do in order to improve their writing. Brad is a Judge who likes the precision and clarity that evaluation produces, but he also holds a deep sense of community and desire for student improvement that manifests itself in his need to write coaching comments. This brings my discussion to Jack.

Jack describes himself as relaxed and patient in the classroom. This laid-back attitude contrasts sharply with what he wants from his students: "I'm a lot more interested in the kids being able to, kind of exerting themselves in their paper. The papers that frustrated me the most weren't the [ones] that were necessarily poorly written. It was the ones where they obviously hadn't put a lot of thought into the ideas that they're going for." Jack notes that his concern with the ideas that drive his students' texts aligns with his background in philosophy; his ability to discern the "good" ideas from the "bad" ideas is also what distinguishes Jack from the other TAs.

Jack is the only TA who says that he writes on student's papers *because* he sees it

as an extension of his role. He sees the need for commenting on students' texts, but he simultaneously questions the need for labeling and even identifying his role in the classroom. But whether he labels his role or not, Jack has a role in the classroom, and his self-description of a laid-back, idea-driven role indicates a mixture of all three roles and commentary genres. Jack balances his classroom roles and practices—his role as a Judge tempers his role as a Coach, who uses reader response strategies when commenting.

Jack resists labeling himself, so much so that he does not want to assign his position a title or identify his role because, as he states:

I don't see how that would help anything necessarily. Being able to label a role—I don't see that that's helpful in really anything. *Understanding how people perceive your role and how you can use that, I think that's significant* and that's the difference between being able to tell people you know, oh, well I'm a teacher-of-record. Or however somebody might want to blow up what they perceive their role as, like, that's not important compared to understanding how you can use the way the students perceive your role to help them. (emphasis added)

Jack's interest in how others perceive his role explains why the first role to emerge from his narrative is that of a Judge; he is concerned with how he is perceived by others.

Others' perceptions of him also help Jack identify and label his position in the classroom. He is the person responsible for evaluating and judging the students' texts, and this is the role of the Judge. Jack recognizes his particular place within the classroom, even when he tries to deny it:

I'm in a specific role where they're more likely to listen to me. And in some ways, maybe my opinion shouldn't be held in much higher regard than anybody else's about their paper. In other ways, I think it's kind of a, even if they're only listening to only a handful of people, it's better than listening to nobody.

Jack accepts his role as the authority with some hesitancy, which I associate with his passion for philosophy.

Jack's sense of responsibility extends beyond his role as a Judge and also aligns with the goals of a Coach because he is tangentially concerned with teaching his students, not finding a perfect text. Jack shows an awareness for the implications of his classroom practices beyond his classroom—he knows that his role and his behaviors do have some long-term implications for students, and it is this self-awareness that helps meld Jack's role as a Judge with his role as a Coach:

One of my roles is to prepare them for the way they're going to be graded as they move on in college, so if I decide putting a comma here after an introductory statement isn't important and I just let it slide, they're going to have to deal with kinda an unnecessary shock when they get counted off for that from someone else. So, I don't see anything in particular that I'm just going to leave off.

Jack is a Judge because he is the authority, and he accepts the responsibility for teaching his students all they need to learn in his class, but he is also a Coach because his end goal is that the students improve.

Jack's sense of shared responsibility encompasses how he relates to his students. Using a sports metaphor, he defines exactly how much responsibility the students have within the class:

[Y]ou have no class without students. They make the class . . . you can have a great basketball coach, but if the players don't go out and do what they've been talking about in practice, it doesn't mean much. So I feel like ultimately the responsibility of becoming a better writer falls on them. The extent to which we [TAs] can help them is very very limited But students make the class, especially with such a student-centered syllabus and with all the peer-reviews. You can have a pretty bad teacher and a group of students who comes together and really wants to get better at writing, and they'll get better in spite of a bad teacher. So, I don't know. They're certainly a lot more important than we are.

Jack's hands-off attitude contrasts sharply with Ernest's attitude that the students are there to learn from him, but it is Jack's articulation of the student's responsibility that prevents his judging role from dominating or subverting his positions as a Coach and a Reader.

For Jack, students bear the burden of improvement in the classroom, and the students are responsible for their actions and their learning. As the instructors, the TAs still have the authority/experience to guide this learning process, whether it occurs through mentoring or straight instruction, and as a triptych Judge, Jack maintains his own standards for responsibility:

The students still have to be responsible for . . . if they don't understand something they have to come to *me*. If the student's have too little responsibility for understanding what's happening with the commentary, I think they'll be more passive in the way they take it in too. There has to be . . . I have to be there to help them and encourage them that I want to help them with their writing, but in a sense, they're not going to understand everything I am saying or else they wouldn't be making mistakes in the first place. So I think it helps for them to go through the process of maybe not exactly understanding exactly what I'm saying and then having to come to me and ask for clarification. (emphasis added)

Jack wants to share the burden for education with his students, and this burden is shared by and divided between his commentary genres. He still has a judging context because the students must come to the authority, him, for answers.

As I discussed early, all five TAs make mention of what will be the focus of their commentary—will they concentrate on *how* (Judge) the students make their point or will they concentrate on *what* (Coach) points the students are making. Jack seems to take the position that commenting on a student's content may be impossible if you do not first comment on how clearly the point was made because “you can't grade content on, ‘I hope they were trying to say this’ . . . when it comes down to it, this paper is going to be graded on how clearly did they communicate their thoughts to me.”

So, Jack plans to focus on both the content and the logic of his students' arguments, but in spite of his holistic approach, Jack admits that his commentary protocol

is based partially on “whim.” He says that he comments on whatever strikes him as “important at the time.” By relying on a “whim” when commenting, Jack reveals the role his Reader plays in his commentary protocol:

Not necessarily the amount. What I’ve always tried to do with grading is read it once, and give it a grade before I write a comment on it. Just give it what my initial response is to the paper, and then go back through and look at it. And then if I look at the comments and think maybe my first impression was wrong, then maybe I’ll change it.

Jack’s initial response seems more likely to be based on the structure of the essay than the quality of the argument or the depth of thought involved—how the student says something will be more important than what they are saying. Thus, *how* Jack reads the text and what he identifies as important in an essay determines what he marks as the instructor. His overall approach to reading the texts also illuminates why he is a TA that writes very few comments in general: he reads the text and then comments, rather than following Brad’s strategy of writing as he reads.

Jack says that he wants students to be graded on how clearly they communicate their ideas, and he thus values an effort-based grading system. He expresses a valuation for the complex connection between written commentary and the students’ feelings and perceptions about their own abilities. Jack also believes that even if a comment lacks substance, it can serve a purpose for his students: “Even the ones that aren’t necessarily very substantive, they serve a purpose and the student being able to understand, [like] ‘good work,’ ‘nice paper.’ [You should] compliment something, and even if it doesn’t

have a whole lot of substance, it can soften them up to reading the rest of the comments.” This concern for writing positive comments plays on Siegel’s research that indicates inexperienced TAs always introduce criticism with praise.

Jack shows concern for balancing out the positive and negative commentary, and he sees comments as essential to reaching the student in the first place:

You certainly have to find at least one thing to praise in every paper ‘cause it’s very easy to scare these students out of listening to anything. And so many of them, through their education before they got here, have been told that they’re bad writers . . . I think fear plays way too big a role in the way elementary school teachers prepare their students for middle school and middle school [teachers] prepare their kids for high school. I mean these kids have been told that, “You’re going to get into an intro class, and they’re going to require 10 page research papers, and you’re going to have to know how to cite everything, and if you have one sentence fragment you’re going to fail” . . . I think a very important part of what we’re doing is making sure that as long as they have thoughts and they’re committed to finding the best way to express them that they’re more than qualified to write at a college level.

Jack wants commentary to reflect the larger goal of helping students express themselves, and it is this desire that fuels his coaching comments and his use of positive comments.

Jack’s concern for his students and his principle that something positive must be written on every paper also helps illuminate the rigid structure of his end commentary.

First, it must be noted that for all of Jack's concern for his students and in spite of his team metaphor about how the students are more important than the professor, all of Jack's end comments are judging comments. Jack wants to provide his students with positive feedback, and he must in turn rely on positive evaluations, or judging comments, to convey this information.²

Jack goes so far as to open all of his end comments with a variety of positive evaluations. For example in twelve of fifteen essays, Jack writes variations of three standard sentences: "This is an excellent essay [paper/writing]" or "Overall, this is excellent [good] work" or "You make a good case [points]." These vague and unsubstantiated comments may do nothing more than lure the student into the rest of Jack's comments, but as he expressed, he is using the positive evaluations to prepare students for his other comments.

Even when Jack varies from the three sentences, he still lures the student in with a positive comment, usually a reader response statement, like, "I really enjoyed reading your paper; you make a lot of good points." So even when straying from his pattern, Jack relies on one of his pat answers to open the end comments.

Jack may open all his comments with positive evaluations, but evaluations are evaluations, and Jack is a Judge, but he also makes the *least* number of interlinear and marginal comments of all the TAs in my study. In a comparison of one standard essay from each TA, excluding single-word fragments (like "wordy" or "fragment"), Brad writes fifteen comments, Ernest writes thirteen, Mary writes nine, Jack writes five, and

² This need to make positive comments and the judging nature of Jack's end comments, however, does not place him in the "Misrecognition" chapter because he is aware of his authority and he executes a balance of all three commentary genres and their subsequent roles.

Hannah writes three. Hannah writes fewer comments than Jack on this one essay, but her comments increase throughout the semester, while Jack consistently keeps his numbers low. He also writes the shortest end comments of the TAs.

Jack says that he writes a limited number of comments because he feels that instructor's "can overdo it" with commentary. He says that the instructor needs to pick a few "spots" and use those moments in the text to let students know they have those specific errors. "If you correct every single grammar mistake or comma mistake they make, by the end, it's going to be so overwhelming, especially in the beginning of a class like this, that they're going to shut it out." Even as a first-year teaching assistant in the English department, Jack shows some awareness for the value of selective commenting. His actual commentary practices back up this philosophy because, as the essays reveal, he does not spend a great deal of time marking issues of correctness.

Jack's limited comments come from his adoption of Coach and Reader roles, as does his awareness about how excessive comments on students' papers might affect their sense of self. This notion of limited commentary surfaces again when Jack explains why he prefers to mark on the students' papers in pencil. He says, "Or if you're, you definitely have to gauge how many notes you put on a paper, so if I feel like there is something more important to get to I might go back and erase something I think is insignificant to make sure and push their attention to what I think is important."

All five TAs express a consensus that comments must be practical, tactile, and applicable. For Ernest, the comments should be "easily understood and integrated into [students'] writing." For Jack, the comments that are most beneficial are those comments

that are closely linked to classroom discussions: “The comments aren’t going to mean anything if they don’t have some kind of background that you’re commenting on to refer back to.” Without class observations, I cannot comment on how effective Jack was in connecting written commentary to class discussions, but his statement, like those regarding the quantity of commentary, shows “experience” with commentary that seems to contradict his actual teaching experience.

Jack is a Judge because he recognizes his position of authority in the classroom and because he, like Ernest and Brad, notes the importance of the clear communication of ideas. Jack accepts that his students view him as having the “final say” on their grades (because he is the authority figure and final Judge), but he also wants students to understand “how clearly they’re communicating to their peers” as well as how clearly they communicate with him: “It’s easy to figure out how to cater to one person and write something that they’re going to like. But being able to communicate across more boundaries than that is certainly part of the goal of where you’re going when you’re trying to become better at writing.” He discusses why he values the clear communication of ideas from the position of an audience member who may consume students’ texts. This attitude aligns with what Purves labels a proof-reader or copy editor, both of which, I argue, belong to Smith’s judging genre.

Jack’s concern for outside audiences is most evident in his reader response comments. Of the five TAs in my study, Jack is the only TA who writes questions that are just questions. He writes non-judgmental questions, and his questions do not function in conjunction with other comments—one of the few times his three roles do not overlap.

For example, on one essay, the only comment on the second page is, “Could knowledge of alcohol make [the] world better?” For another essay he writes, “Aren’t there ex[ample]s of people who are successful when they protest?” Both of these questions challenge a statement made by the student, and in both cases, Jack has written no other comments to interfere with his original question. He simply asks the question so the student may reconsider what obstacles are interfering with the clear communication of ideas.

Jack does not express direct empathy for his students, nor does he talk so much about how he will interact with his students; he does talk about how he hopes the students interact with his commentary. Jack hopes that when his students use and respond to his commentary, they will understand that “this is how a reasonably educated person interacts with what he’s been given. Hopefully, they’re going to want to be able to express themselves better no matter how good of a writer they are to any audience.” Jack does not consider all his students to be “good writers,” nor does he express concern for their wanting to believe they are “good.” He simply wants the students to achieve at their given level.

As discussed earlier, Jack opens his end comments with a positive evaluation, and he often uses a variance of one sentence to introduce his comments. This repetition of style and sentence choice marks another pattern in his end commentary. Jack writes positive judging comments and negative judging comments separated by a “however.” Five of his fifteen essays follow this pattern. He writes, “You make a strong case for your point. However, it would be stronger . . .” and “The second body ¶ is a good example of

PIE. However, the first body ¶ could use more explanation.” Jack uses this pattern of a positive comment to introduce a negative comment even if he omits the however: “This is a very well written paper. I think you could devote more of the paper to explaining.” This pattern holds true throughout the essays Jack graded.

Jack uses this pattern (positive evaluation [J+]; however, negative evaluation [J-]) consistently, but he intermingles the opening positive evaluation with a positive coaching evaluation, also. Jack first prepares the student for the comments by opening with a positive notation (“You make a good case for your point in the paper”), and then he moves directly into his coaching comments, where he offers suggestions to the student in an imperative form: “Make sure that you fully explain the connection between your point & its illustration in each body ¶. Avoid sentence fragments.” Interestingly enough, even in this pattern of positive evaluation and coaching suggestion, Jack relies on variations of comments. On another essay, he writes, “Make sure that you sufficiently explain connection between your point & your illustration in body ¶s.” Jack’s pattern reflects a consistency not shown by the other TAs.

Each TA in my study has a preferred system for marking issues of correctness. Ernest thinks correctness is important because he does not believe students are “just going to pick it up.” Jack disagrees; he says that “grammar changes, spellings change, but the expression of the thought that’s behind it is kinda what’s important in all writing.” But Jack quickly notes that “the content doesn’t matter much if you lose . . . if anytime you’re communicating you lose the thought behind it—if you can’t express it clearly. So, obviously there is a value in being able to explain grammar.” Jack’s philosophy that

grammar changes ultimately wins in his commentary style. He makes mention of correctness errors to his students in their end comments, but he does not spend time correcting these mistakes within the body of these essays.

On the occasional paper, Jack's comments about surface errors appear as a coaching strategy with a disguised evaluation: "More proofreading will help eliminate surface errors." Again, Jack's role as a Judge and a Coach are so intimately intertwined that the comment comes off as a point of encouragement that hides its evaluation of what the student did or did not do. Jack's end note, however, is not reinforced or supported by interlinear or marginal notes on correctness.

Jack's overall goal for the class is to make better writers of his students. He states, "I don't ever want to let, I don't want to feel like I'm a slave to this is the correct way to write, so I try to always keep in mind, 'How is this going to affect the student when they read it? Is this going to make them better at writing in the long run?'" It is this resistance to the "correct way" to write that allows Jack to mold his judging role. Just as he does not want to be barred by the boundaries of correctness and orthographical issues, Jack does not want to write comments that trap his students into "his" way of writing, which is also why he writes so few comments.

Jack may not discuss what kind of human beings his students will become when they finish with his class, but he does want his students to think beyond the classroom:

I don't want me to be the only audience that they're considering when they're writing. It's easy to figure out how to cater to one person and write something that they're going to like. But being able to communicate

across more boundaries than that is certainly part of the goal of where you're going when you're trying to become better at writing.

So, while Jack is a Judge who writes judging comments, he is a Judge who shows acute awareness beyond his classroom, tempering his role with the traits of a Coach and Reader.

CHAPTER 3

MISRECOGNITION³

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the TAs' perceived roles in the classroom were reflected in their commentary practices. The TAs' sense of their roles created a congruence between what they *said* they were doing and what they *were* doing while commenting on student texts. This chapter addresses the issue of misrecognition in the TAs' perceptions and practices, focusing on the TAs' misinterpretation of their roles in the classroom and how this misinterpretation results in the alienation of that role because the practices are in direct conflict with the perceived role.

My interviews with the TAs allowed them to construct narratives about themselves and their roles; the TAs actually described themselves and defined their perceived roles in the classroom. In this chapter, I focus first on what roles the TAs construct for themselves based on their perceptions, as discussed in their interviews. I then look at the TAs' actual classroom practices to identify and illuminate how the practices conflict with the TAs' desired roles and how the practices reveal misrecognition.

³ I borrow the term misrecognition from my work with Lacanian psychoanalysis. Misrecognition, or *méconnaissance*, occurs during the mirror stage when a child starts seeing herself as separate from the world and the dyadic unity with her mother. At first, the child's experience with the mirror is pleasurable because she recognizes the image and the image reinforces her sense of a unified, whole environment. However, the mother disrupts the child's unified image of self by entering the mirror. Suddenly, the child realizes that she is separate from her mother, and she experiences the byproduct of the mirror stage. The child is transformed by her experience during the mirror stage because (1) the child misinterprets something (an image) for herself which (2) leads to the child's alienation from herself (McCracken).

MARY

Mary is a TA whose self-descriptions and narratives indicate that she wants to be a Coach in the classroom. She says that she wants to “inspire [students], but at the same time have them walk away with something so practical and tactile . . . that they didn’t walk away from that class wondering, ‘What did I just learn?’” Providing her students with practical and tactile commentary is Mary’s overarching theme for her class and her role in the classroom. She says that she “want[s] to give them tools. And tools that they are so very aware of,” but she says that she doesn’t want simply to “impart knowledge” to her students. In fact, Mary hopes to use her role in the classroom to demystify writing for her students and end their perceptions that “good” writers are born and that those writers receive inspiration via divine intervention and white lights.

More than any of the other TAs, Mary wants to affect her students as humans, as social beings. She does not talk directly about establishing a community within her classroom, but she does discuss the creation of a social network that centers on the accountability and responsibility of beliefs and ideas. “I think that’s our goal in life—as friends, as lovers, as teachers—I think that’s our job from one human being to another, and not in a judgmental way, but again in more of a Socratic way which is just challenging what somebody thinks by asking them questions.”

Mary wants to push her students not only to explore the content of their arguments but also to maintain their pre-established standards. For example, she asks one student, “Bob—what happened? This essay lacks the clarity and cohesiveness of your last—was the subject matter less interesting for you or more difficult to understand?” Her

question is intended to elicit a conversation with her student; she wants to create a sense of accountability by holding the student to the standards he demonstrated on a previous assignment.

Mary's concern for the student-as-human puts her role not only in the Coach position but also the position of the therapist, as identified by Purves. She wants to identify the individual needs of each student: "I want to be very aware of the fact that students all learn so differently. I want to provide them with as many different ways of learning, teaching as there are ways of learning." Mary wants to encourage her students on a personal level, in the classroom, and in her office, and her drive for encouragement comes partly from her own college instructors. She recounts her relationships with them and how they "brought enthusiasm" to the classroom. She says that she would like to emulate these instructors, and the things she wishes to emulate are the ability to give just the "right amount of information" and the patience to use "Socratic questioning" to push students further—both characteristics of the Coach.

As the only parent in the study, Mary offers her own perspective on what she believes to be the connections between acting as a Coach and being a parent:

I definitely think that I am going to fall down the encouraging, Socratic [role]. So much of your philosophy of teaching is so parallel to your philosophy of raising your children . . . I think it's a lot easier to know, generally speaking, how I am going to be in the classroom because I think it's going to be along the lines, very parallel, with probably how I was as a mother, which is that I had the limit she couldn't push me beyond, but I

really liked for my daughter to figure things out for herself and to think for herself. And I was there for her, but I was more of an encourager than an authoritarian.

Mary identifies herself as a permissive parent, but she also reveals her concern that her past leniency might carry over into her relationship with her students. Mary says that throughout the semester, however, she found a balance: “There was no extreme either way, and it felt like when I needed to be firm, I was, and I got my point across, and I didn’t back down from it. I didn’t really let any big crocodile tears change my mind on anything. I felt really good about that.” It seems from Mary’s comment that even Coaches want their role validated and respected as a position of authority. With Mary, however, we will see how the desire for a validated authority is actually representative of the judging role she exercises in her commentary procedures.

As I discussed earlier, Ernest and Jack express concern about the students’ experiences as humans. Mary shares their sentiments, and she adds in her experiences as a mother, as well as her own experiences as a student. By combining her personal experiences, Mary structures her perceived role as the Coach. Just as some of the other TAs show their own levels of empathy for the position of their students—Ernest for their roles as budding adults, Jack for their roles as future college students, Hannah (as I will discuss later) for their roles as new college students—Mary shows her concern for the students’ transitional period: “Well, I guess their number one job, bless their little hearts, is to learn how to be college student[s] and not high school student[s].” Mary may have empathy for her students, but she clearly believes that students are to discover “how to

budget their time and allot their time,” to learn to be students who are active participants in their education.

Mary is aware of her students’ transitional phase, but she also knows that she can only do so much before her students must take responsibility for their actions and roles within her classroom. She wants her students to accept this responsibility as participants because they are “the determiner[s] of how much they want to get out of the class. Their role is to decide early on . . . what they want to get out of the class, and if they want to excel at it—if they just want to be mediocre student[s] . . . I think everybody gets what they want.”

Besides seeing her role as a parent, Mary sees her job as fostering a network for her students where they can gain a sense of independence. She says that she hopes to establish this network with the help of her commentary practices. In fact, she wants to begin the semester annotating her students’ texts, but she wants the students to take over this role during the course of the semester. She wants the students to know and to understand how to annotate their own work. She says, “I want my role to begin on one level and the students on another, and I want us to almost cross somehow. To where they end up teaching themselves, and I end up mentoring them.”

Mary says that she wants her students to learn to annotate their own papers, and she wants to teach her students practical and readily applicable skills. Mary also wants students to leave her class

knowing, even if it’s just one thing about writing, that it’s tactile that they can put their finger on, that they can, if somebody asked them when they

walked out of that class, “What did you learn?” they can at least say one specific thing that they learned whether that it’s, “I learned what a thesis was” or “I learned how to build an argument” or “I learned how to explicate an argument.”

This second goal places a unique burden on Mary, who must ensure that her students are, in fact, acquiring the skills she hopes, while she continues to demand that they take on responsibility for their work.

So, as a Coach, Mary wants her students to demonstrate some responsibility and accountability for their education, and her perceived role as the Coach also places Mary in a position where she says that she does not want her students writing to her: “For example, I want to find a way to help students not write to me . . . from the standpoint of they’re trying to please me.” For Mary, the way to ensure the students do not write to the professor is to give “them something that is so tactile that at the end they will actually know that they have gained something, that they won’t just have done something to make me happy and get an A.” Mary’s self-proclamation that she should give tactile comments creates a conflict between her role and her practice when she begins modeling for students, an issue I discuss later. Like Ernest, however, Mary sees a student’s willingness to write to an instructor or a desire to please a professor as intimately linked with a student’s concern over the grade, and perhaps the students’ own desires to turn the teachers into a Judge.

Mary sees the students need to please their professor as connected to a universal experience on the journey to self-discovery:

[T]he majority of students, including myself, have a tendency to write papers to please their professor and not to please themselves. And just generally speaking, from a psychological standpoint, if we learn to please ourselves early on in life, we solve so many of our problems. And I think that does have a lot to do with critical thinking—finding out who you are. I tend to probably come from a kind of a Taoist philosophy in that from that standpoint meaning that I think that our journey in life is not about becoming but about discovering who we actually are. I mean I think who we actually are is already there. It's just that the steps of the journey are discovering who that person is.

Mary does not want her students to direct their writing to her only because she believes it is often a regurgitation of information. She does not want students to make corrections and to interpret her commentary as a judgment against them as students. She wants them to interpret her comments as directions on a path to clearer communication. She wants her students to see the larger implications and her larger intentions. Ironically, Mary seems to understand that students may read her comments as a simple appropriation of their texts: “Well, I think that they probably initially are going to look at annotation as me telling them directly, again, how you can make me happy.” But, again, Mary hopes to emphasize that she does not simply want them to “make her happy,” but she does want students to find a “better” way to communicate their ideas than when they began.

I discussed earlier how the TAs take an interest either in *what* their students are saying or *how* they are saying it. Mary is easily contrasted with the TAs, like Ernest, who

are not interested in the content of students' arguments. Mary is necessarily interested in the content of her students' writing because she is concerned with creating productive citizens and human beings:

I am going to be way less concerned with punctuation, you know, and things like that as long as I feel like that they are really intellectually making connections. I am going to be a lot more concerned about encouraging that than feeling like I want to bog them down in [correctness] . . . because I think that punctuation is always something that you can go to a book and reference but making connections in ideas is something that it's like I really want to applaud that.

The difference between *what* students say and *how* students say it is reflected in these two TAs' stances. Ernest wants to look at the structure of the argument, and Mary wants to look at the meat of the argument. He wants students to effectively set up the connections and arguments, and she wants students to make the tough connections.

So far, I have discussed Mary's perceived role in the classroom and who she hopes to be as an instructor. Based on her interviews, Mary says that she wants to provide her students with clear and applicable instructions, with encouragement and support on their journey into adulthood, with the independence to annotate their own work and please themselves. Mary says that she wants her students to learn to annotate their own texts, to read her comments as directions for clearer communication, and to understand the larger implications of her classroom. She says that she wants her students to understand the difference between "somebody who communicates their ideas poorly and

somebody who communicates their ideas well.” Mary wants to be a Coach, but her perceived role and her actual commentary practices are in direct conflict. She is not cognizant of what commentary practices would reinforce the role she wants to play in the classroom. Mary has misrecognition because she wants to be a Coach, but her commentary says that she is a Judge.

Before we look specifically at Mary’s comments, it is important to note that as the TA who says she is most concerned with helping students develop into good humans by avoiding comments that control, Mary is also the only TA who uses a rubric. She says that the rubric began because she had “a really hard time assigning a number grade to something.” Rather than giving letter grades to her students and points to their essays, Mary felt that it was “easier to say that this was weak, adequate, good, or excellent.” She does not fail to note that “of course all of those [correspond] to four grades,” but she still contends that it was “psychologically” easier to tell her students that they were “adequate or weak” rather than saying, “You’re a C or D student.” She wanted the rubric to simply help her get over “the fear of that number, of evaluating [the essay] from the standpoint of a number or a grade.”⁴

As Smith notes, instructors who make comments primarily in the judging genre rely on rubrics. Mary’s rubric covers seven areas (thesis, organization, content, paragraphs, word choice, appearance, process). She then evaluates the seven areas using her scale of excellent, good, adequate, and weak. In addition to the scaled evaluation,

⁴ Mary also used her rubric to track her students’ progress. She found that the rubric was an efficient and organized way to tell her “exactly” what she needed to know about a student’s progress: “I wanted to be able to say, ‘Last time you had a problem with ...so now, yeah this has shown improvement,’ because I do grade partly on improvement.”

Mary offers written comments on the back of the rubric in five areas (thesis comments, content comments, organization comments, areas for focus, overall assignment evaluation comments).

Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with the design of Mary's rubric, but the nature of the rubric itself directly contradicts her desire to be a Coach because the rubric is primarily an evaluative tool, a tool for the Judge. The rubric restricts Mary's comments so that she is left to check off a series of criteria and assign an evaluation to each section. The sections designated for end comments are also restricted to five areas, and the space provided leads Mary to write fragmented evaluative comments.

Reinforcing the evaluative nature of Mary's rubric is the reality that on four out of nine essays, the majority of Mary's written comments are evaluations. For example, she writes vague positive evaluations. For example, on one essay, she put a check mark under the thesis comments section and writes "better" under the content and organization comments. She also writes, "So much better! → less confusing → more specific," for the content of another essay.

Mary does make positive evaluations in connection with coaching comments, as she states in her perceived goals. She tells one student, "WOW! What an improvement you made here." She then uses her typical "we" and "let's" subjects to signal cooperative effort between her and the students: "We can keep w[or]king to streamline your sentences even more." But even when making positive evaluations, Mary makes negative evaluations, like, "better but let's w[or]k together on your outline/rough draft to fine tune it even more." She also writes, "We need to work on simplifying your sentences and on

better word choice → b[e]c[ause] your sentences are too long and complex, they are confusing.” By combining her positive evaluation with a negative evaluation, she negates the emphasis of what the student did right. She cancels out her coaching emphasis.

Mary may want to provide her students with coaching comments and encouragement, but her stated goals do not match her actual commentary practices; in fact, her commentary practices stand in direct conflict with her stated goals. I separated Mary’s comments regarding her perceived role from her comments about her perceived practices because, as I stated earlier, I cannot offer additional information on what Mary did in her classroom. I can, however, consider how her perceived role in the classroom informs her actual practices.

Mary says that she wants her comments to be “helpful enough to where [the students] don’t feel lost, but not so helpful that [she doesn’t] give them the chance to show initiative.” Mary also wants to avoid comments that are vague: “If comments are too general, they’re amorphous, and it does not impart my philosophy which is to give [them] something tactical, give something practical. Don’t let them walk out of there not knowing what it was [I was] trying to teach them.” She goes on to show awareness for how subjective comments can border on the appropriation of student texts:

And then on the other end of the spectrum are the comments that are so picky or so minute that you are trying to push them into thinking a certain way or saying a certain thing that actually just makes them think, “She just wants them, so I’m just going to put it down and make her happy, and therefore I am going to get a B or an A.”

Rather than using comments that demand conformity, Mary wants to use comments that address the students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as comments that are phrased as questions that "help them understand how to think critically" or "be persuasive in their arguments."

Mary also says that she does not want to make comments that "tell" the students what or how to think, but her self-description is in direct conflict with the comments that comprise the majority of her marginal and interlinear comments. In the margins and between the lines, Mary models for her students. The issue of modeling is controversial, even among my TAs who often disagree among themselves, and along their role lines, about what is the best way to convey information to their students. Mary believes in modeling, and she sees it as an important tool:

I would also model for them. I would say, say for example, if I felt a sentence was awkward, I would underline it, turn the page over on the back, and say, "Here's an example of how you could have constructed this sentence differently." And I would write out the sentence the way I would have written it. I'd always let them know these are just suggestions but here's another way it could have been written.

Mary does not seem cognizant that modeling for students is not a suggestions but an appropriation of their words and subsequently their texts. Mary also does not seem aware that by rewriting the sentences the way she would write them she is enforcing a judging standard rather than allowing her students to work the sentences out for themselves, something a Coach would hope to do.

When Mary chooses to model for a student, she often takes a grammatically correct sentence and rewrites it into her preferred form, as she does with the following sentence. The student wrote, “Conversely, relationships on the television are different and can be a harmful influence.” Mary writes the sentence to read, “On the other hand, I believe that relationships portrayed on television can be a harmful influence.” This rewrite might be part of a coaching motive: Mary is modeling as a way to introduce the student to how “college” students transition between paragraphs. As I discussed earlier, the surrounding comments are just as important as the comment under analysis, and in this case, the surrounding comments include the judging fragment “vague.” Mary also makes surface-error corrections. So, what might have been a modeling of a college-level sentence has transformed into an appropriation of the student’s words.

Mary imagines modeling to be a part of her coaching strategy. She says that she wants to focus on development of the student as a person and on development of intellectual thoughts, and she says that she uses her comments to focus on large-scale concerns, not small-scale issues:

I think what I tried to do was target the big things early on, and then leave the little things to last What I hoped that they [the students] would do is at least take the model as at least a form of organization that they would take it and almost use it like little building blocks. It sounds simplistic, and I tried not to make it sound babyish, but for some of them, it was very applicable.

Mary seems to echo the metaphor used by Brad, who also sees his commentary as a way

to take the students from one place to another, but rather than using a building block metaphor, he sees it as teaching students to climb the stairs.

In addition to modeling for the students, Mary evaluates what the students did right and wrong within the text. On one essay, she writes, “Opening could have had a more conversational tone, like the closing.” Her comment is similar to those made by Ernest. The comment on the surface appears to be a suggestion, including Mary’s use of “could”; but her suggestion is actually a critique of the introduction, and it is a critique comparing the student’s introduction and conclusion, eliminating the coaching aspect of the comment.

These disguised suggestions show up again on another essay, where Mary writes, “The quote about the stars would have w[or]ked better here. ☆ See this comment.” Here, Mary has combined another aspect of modeling with her suggestive comment; she is actually moving pieces of the student’s text to demonstrate the need for flow within a paragraph. Again, there is nothing wrong with Mary’s decision to move a quote within the student’s paragraph as a modeling technique. But for Mary’s self-perception as a Coach to align with her commentary practices, she should avoid judging techniques.

Mary models small- and large-scales issues for her students on every essay. Instead of being a “form of organization” for her students, Mary writes students’ sentences in her own way, appropriating the student’s work and negating her coaching goals. The problem becomes, again, the misrecognition between what Mary wants to accomplish within the classroom (what she says she is doing in the classroom and on student texts) and what her comments suggest she is doing. Her commentary style, when

combined with her philosophy on modeling, conflicts with her notions of not pushing students to think a certain way. In fact, her modeling technique does just that—it sends the message that the student’s original thoughts were not accurate enough, or that the student could phrase an opening clause in a more acceptable way.

Given Mary’s perceived strategies in the classroom, her appropriation of student texts and dominant judging commentary style do not seem to be malicious or even harmful for her students. For example, she says that she often resisted marking punctuation unless “the structure made the meaning so obtuse that [she] just couldn’t understand what the person was saying.”

Mary imagines that her primary and controlling role is that of a Coach, and as such, she says that she is reluctant to control all aspects of her classroom; she continues this discussion, however, and adds that a good Coach needs to lead: “I found myself this semester after the first essay changing the dynamic in the classroom a little bit and making it a little bit more . . . teacher centered.” She says that she adds the teacher-centeredness to the classroom to strike a balance, and because she didn’t want to have the blind leading the blind: “So at least 50 percent of the time, it needs to be me modeling for them what is the correct way to do something.” Again, her words reveal that she may want and believe she is coaching her students, but her dominant expression is that of a judge because, as she says, she wants to model the “correct” way to write.

The other TAs also express a concern for correctness, though their descriptions differ slightly from those of Ernest’s. For instance, rather than being concerned with issues of the abstract or theoretical, Mary returns to her philosophy of teaching the whole

student because she wants her students to “leave feeling like they learned something specific and tactile,” and she wants them to feel “like they’ve changed as a person. Their way of thinking has changed.” She sees herself achieving this goal in her classroom by using self-expression to advance the students’ arguments. She wants “to find a way to meld the self-expression of the creative writing with the form of the academic writing . . . people feel like they have to obey form so much that they lose the . . . [T]hey lose that spark that is inherent in good creative writing. [Academic writing] sacrifices itself to form.”

Mary admits that she learned little or no grammar in high school but, instead, “picked it up” through modeling and intuition. She does acknowledge that not everyone learns that way, but “on the other hand, [she is] not sure how much that can be taught if somebody’s not interested in it.” She goes so far as to say “that punctuation is always something that you can go to a book and reference,” so she says that she spends her time writing comments that address the content of the student’s argument and, like Ernest, finds her own rhythm when writing comments:

I did get fairly consistent, I think, as time went on. I don’t do the markings like the technical markings, right. First of all, I don’t see the reason for them to be spending time looking up what that means. I’d rather them be spending that time looking at their errors and finding out what it is they did wrong, rather than spending precious minutes looking up what does that mark mean. So, that meant more writing for me because instead of using short hand I would write out long hand.

Mary, however, does mark the correctness issues she encounters when commenting on student texts, specifically on the essays she graded early on in the semester. Mary marks all types of errors, particularly commas with non-restrictive elements. Interestingly enough, the other surface error corrections are made in conjunction with Mary's modeling, meaning she has rewritten all or part of a sentence to a more accurate form. For example, Mary changes how her students are using quotations within their text. One student's sentence began, "This theory states, 'We believe that human cognitive competence . . .'" Mary transforms the sentence to read, "This theory states that 'human cognitive competence . . .'" She continues this trend throughout the essays. She also ghosts in the optional "that" indicators for her students' clauses; because sentences constructed without the "that" are just as correct as with, Mary is enforcing her stylistic preference by inserting the "that."

Mary's evaluative, judging authority overwhelms her perceived coaching strategy. Early on in the semester, Mary also exerts control through the volume of comments written on her students' texts. On these early essays, Mary comments on all areas of concern. She marks points in the text with evaluative fragments (AWK, vague, transition), she seeks clarification with fragmented questions (who?, which?), and she questions word choice for all students. Mary's preference for rewriting and modeling fits her self-description because, after all, she says that "simply showing them how the better way to do it" was a part of her classroom instruction and role.

Mary may not say that she is a Judge based on her descriptions, but she is concerned with issues of clarity and precision in her class, just as Ernest and Brad express

those same concerns. She says, “I was a lot more concerned with them speaking in such a way that they didn’t obfuscate the meaning of their argument,” but Mary’s method for achieving that clarity seems to be obfuscated by her own commentary style.

HANNAH

Hannah expresses her role in a very simple and direct way. She says that her role in the classroom is to help her students “express themselves on paper.” She goes on to say, “[F]or most of them, it seems like they are able to come up with the ideas, and they can think critically, but it’s a matter of expressing that critical thinking in writing and being able to formulate an argument.” Hannah does not express concern over affecting her students as humans, as Mary does, nor does she see them as peers or inferiors, as Ernest or Brad might. Instead, Hannah hopes to help her students find pleasure and excitement in what they produce for her class, “I hope to be able to get my students to get excited about, I mean understand that it’s their ideas and they’re developing their ideas.” Hannah’s stated concern for her students’ feelings and experiences identifies her first as a Coach who wants to help the students become their personal best. Hannah is also a reader because she demonstrates awareness for assigning emotional value directly to the students’ work.

Hannah says that she wants her students to be proud of what they accomplish because, as she says, “Class participation is really important to me. But I also want, I want them to feel comfortable asking questions and being like I want them to get what they feel like they need out of the class.” Hannah wants her students to take responsibility

for what they learn within the classroom, and she says that not only does she want them to care about what they do within the class, but she also wants “them to be accountable for what they do.”

Hannah, too, expresses concern about creating a sense of mentorship within the community of her writing classroom. Her own description of a community combines the need for praise, as expressed by Ernest, and she adds to this description her desire to create an atmosphere of camaraderie because she feels that her own experience as an undergraduate writing student was lacking this connection:

I mean I think something that I missed out on when I was developing as a writer was just the encouragement, like that anyone can write and that you sort of, just the idea of like having people take pride in their writing and take pride in what they're doing. And being able to express your ideas in the world is so important and that's what writing is about—being able to communicate and express your own and develop your ideas.

Hannah displays a unique connection with her students—an unwavering concern that they not be treated as she was treated, that they not feel they are incompetent. Her concern allows her to express, directly, that she sees the students' emotional health as playing an important role in the writing classroom.

The goal of helping students communicate with others places Hannah in the position of a Coach—an instructor who wants to meet students where they are and help them improve in whatever ways possible. Hannah's empathy for her students also reinforces her self-description as a Coach because she wants devotion, improvement, and

self-satisfaction for her students:

I really think that as much as it's frustrating to see students not putting in the effort that they need to put in, I think that, I mean I've seen a lot of my students really try hard, and that's mostly what's important to me. I want to see them feel like they can be successful. Because a lot of people, ..., a lot of people just feel like they are not good writers, and that is so frustrating.

Hannah sees the humanity of her students, even though she does not want to "treat" that aspect of her students as explicitly as Mary does.

Hannah shares the perceived coaching role of the other TAs, but she also has a reserved, almost hesitant approach to her teaching practices in the classroom. The other TAs do not display this hesitation, at least not explicitly, which is not to say they did not experience the same concerns as Hannah, who says:

You have to remind yourself that really what you set out to do was this that or the other and you actually did do that and whether your students got what you wanted them to get or not, it doesn't change what you set out to do. There's always ways you can adjust to hopefully make it so your students do get what you wanted them to get.

Hannah shows candor and honesty when recounting her daily goals and wondering if she actually "taught" her students anything.

Hannah's concern over whether or not she taught her students the necessary skills and tools is connected to her main purpose of moving her students from thinking to

writing: “To help them understand how to get from thinking it to writing it constantly analyzing what you did and how it worked and whether it was successful or not successful.” Hannah’s evaluation of herself on a daily basis reveals the empathy she shares with her students—empathy that may be connected to those experiences she had in college when she felt like her abilities were not encouraged or appreciated, or those experiences when she did not receive the tools she needed in order to succeed.

Hannah is the only TA to recount any specific negative reactions in the classroom. She transfers these experiences on to her students:

I know that I’ve been really snotty about comments in the past, and so, I think, I still flip to the back page and look for the grade, I can’t break myself of that habit. And I don’t expect my students not to do that, especially because it’s a required course.

This transference allows Hannah to keep realistic expectations for her class, and she admits that she will not expect things from her students that she was unable to fulfill while in their position. Hannah allows her empathy for her students to dominate her role, and she finds herself relating to her students after she considers her own actions. I read this balance of empathy and action as a Coach considering what it means to be a Reader, also.

Hannah’s repeated emotional connection with her students’ position enables her to make reader response comments, as defined by Smith. In fact, she makes reader response comments a priority, writing at least one reader-based comment on every paper that she grades. Hannah’s reader response comments are very traditional, almost

textbook. She often responds to the logic of the essay, like, “I’ve lost your point here at the end” or “You can’t be sure your audience agrees with you.” She also writes comments that convey her emotions while reading the material: “Yikes, I’m scared but I want to keep reading” and “I want to take the trampoline class!” Hannah even responds to the students directly, writing once, “You are also right about the need for concrete detail in your essay.”

Hannah also makes a point to comment on what must have been outside information because she also comments for one student, “P.S. Your sister is a good proofreader. She caught a lot of comma errors. Go sis!” These comments center on emotion, and because they work with the relationship between instructor and student, these reader response comments set Hannah apart from the other TAs, who might write comments that convey active readers but always limit those comments to content- and essay-based material.

As an IA at the university prior to teaching her own classes, Hannah recounts that she was a confidant and friend, only to realize that her relationship with the students wouldn’t work: “Just that dynamic of wanting them [to] think you’re cool, wanting to be their friend, and then realizing that you’re actually their teacher, and [understanding] that it’s probably not the most important thing.” Hannah is not alone in her concern for what relationship will work best in the classroom. She and Ernest both express concern that students may attempt to reject comments because they believe their TA does not “like” them. Hannah actually jokes that perhaps her students will simply use her comments to make judgments about her personality. But more than simply rejecting her suggestions,

Hannah does not want her students to seek out what they think she wants as the professor: “I think maybe it’s sometimes easy for students to pick out one thing that they realize is really important to a [professor] and do that and think that is going to make it all better.”

Hannah’s goals are not as rigid as Ernest’s or as long-term and practical as Mary’s. Instead, she simply wants her students to “use the rules so that people, so that things don’t jump out at people.” She also sets a goal for herself: she wants “emphasize to [the students] that whole bridge between thinking and writing.” For her, this bridge means that the students express their “ideas and express them in a way that makes the other person understand them in a way you want them to.” Hannah also wants clarity, so she says that she notes where her students should stop using “vague terms” and begin re-organizing their essays for more logical arguments.

Hannah, therefore, wants her students to understand *what* they are saying: “First and foremost, I want my students to be able to think about things critically. And then be able to really express what they mean in their writing.” Hannah also discusses how she wants students to understand the difference between what they think they wrote and what they actually did write. She is again returning to her concern about students thinking one thing and writing another, but she is also discussing the difference between the substance of the argument and the apparent rhetoric, or structure, of an argument. To do this, Hannah explains one aspect of her commentary protocol: “Often, I would ask questions like, ‘When you say this, what do you really mean?’”

When commenting on student texts, Hannah says that she prefers to trust her gut reaction. She performs one quick reading and one quick assessment of the entire text, and

she then marks the essay with a letter grade. She “mark[s] a tentative grade after reading it for the first time,” and then she goes “back [through the essay] to make sure that what [she] said in [her] written, in [her] end notes were actually reflective of that grade also.” Hannah’s procedure for reading and marking can be linked to her hesitancy to assign grades at all. But her procedure also accounts for her wanting to see what the students said and then analyzing if what they wanted to say meshes with what they did say. She even allows herself time to read through essays a couple of times before writing comments and assigning grades: “I always feel, like I was getting kind of brain numb and burnt out on reading the essays. I might read a couple of them and then go back, just read them over, not even making that many comments.” Hannah is consistent in limiting the number of comments she makes on a student’s text. On every essay, she does write a correctness point for improvement, like “introductory commas” or “subject/verb agreement,” at the top of the first page, but beyond that, Hannah writes far fewer comments than three of the five TAs in my study. (She and Jack write the fewest comments of all, often tying for the number of comments per essay).

Hannah’s concern for her students’ arguments, which has roots in the judging genre, as discussed in Ernest’s section, includes her coaching concerns for their ability to think and apply the subsequent thoughts: “First and foremost, I want my students to be able to think about things critically. And then be able to really express what they mean in their writing.” This concern for the students’ conflicts of what they think they wrote and what they actually did write aligns with Hannah’s goal for her written commentary: “Mostly, for me, it [writing commentary on their papers] was trying to help them

understand their own writing and what they need like what their strengths and weaknesses in their writing are.”

Based on her interviews, Hannah sees herself as a TA who encourages her students, first and foremost, and who helps them learn to clearly express themselves and say exactly what they mean to say. She says that she wants her students to be accountable for their work and, through this accountability, to develop a sense of pride in what they accomplish.

Hannah is also the only TA to express hesitancy in her teaching role. She seems to accept her position of authority reluctantly and to worry about her teaching ability. For Hannah, her point of misrecognition is that she may not feel like an authority figure, or a Judge, but her comments are heavily grounded in the judging genre. She writes at least one reader-response comment on every paper that she grades, but evaluations, both positive and negative, surround her reader response and coaching comments.

Hannah’s discusses her own struggle to identify with and to define her position in the class, a discussion that helps illuminate her misrecognition:

I think it’s gotten easier for me to have a voice in my commentary than it was in the beginning. In the beginning, it felt really foreign, and, “Who are you teacher girl?” Because for me, it was important to avoid saying things like the stereotypical teacher would say. Like the idea that if you mark something, I mean the “vague” and “awkward” thing, which I used those words still, but trying to avoid them by having like a really conversational tone in my commentary by addressing specific things the students said in

their papers or restating what they say.

Hannah says that the voice she uses and role she adopts when commenting on papers is consistent with her “conference speak,” and she describes her personal struggle with adopting a voice when commenting.

But Hannah also says that she wants her comments to have substance, unlike Mary who writes something positive in her end comments even if the comment is empty. Hannah says that she never wants her comments to “sound false or forced,” so she imagines that she “give[s] positive and negative feedback and obviously constructive criticism,” but she thinks that she also has a hard time learning to balance the positive and negative comments. To force herself into balancing her commentary, Hannah says that she tries to say “something positive” in her end comments, and she always tries to “mark one or two places in the essay where [the students] did something good.”

Although Hannah says that she wants her comments to have substance and that she wants to achieve her own voice, she does, in fact, use fragmented evaluations in her papers, like a “stereotypical” teacher might. In addition to the repetitive and continual use of “awkward,” Hannah writes a variety of fragments on nine out of ten papers. Her preferred fragments for her student’s essays are “wordy,” “confusing,” and “expand conclusion.” Each of these comments is increasingly fragmented and empty because Hannah does not re-address the comments in her end notes.

Hannah wants to be a Reader and a Coach, and though she writes at least one reader response comment on every paper she grades, the majority of her interlinear and marginal comments are judging comments. On one essay, six of the seven comments are

evaluations. The written comments include positive statements, like, “Good examples. You clarify your definition of success.” Hannah also makes evaluative fragments, using both words and symbols: “confusing/wordy” and “✓.”

Like the other TAs I have discussed, Hannah writes comments that, according to her perceived role, are intended to reflect her imagined roles of Coach and Reader. But, Hannah’s questions are written in a rhetorical tone, leaving the question to read as a disguised evaluation. For example, she writes, “Do most people really live the good life?” Given the proximity of this comment to the other evaluations, the inferred answer is, “No.” The question, thus, is not a coaching question that might spawn in-depth thought; instead, the question is actually a judging question that demands the student correct the faulty generalization.

To emphasize the crucial nature of her end comments, Hannah says that she took to typing the comments up in a memo format for her students. She says, “On one level, I think it makes it seem more professional to them to the students.” Hannah continues her procedure because she received “really good feedback” from her students. She says that the typed end comments connect with her students because the typewritten text removes the challenge of reading professors’ handwriting. Hannah also says that she wants to avoid making errors when commenting on student papers. The technical aspects of Hannah’s typed memos do align with her perceived role of a Coach who makes life easier for her students, but the content of the memos stands in contradiction to her perception. The memos are holistic evaluations of the students’ texts.

Looking at the typed memos in conjunction with Hannah’s interlinear or marginal

notes, a continued pattern of judging comments is revealed. By analyzing the comments she writes on the previously discussed essay, the pattern illuminates how the varying positive and negative judging comments set the student up for coaching suggestions. I code the sentences as a demonstration (J- is a negative evaluation, and J+ is a positive evaluation). Hannah writes:

Your thesis still needs revision [J-]. It should be one grammatically correct sentence [J-]. It is OK to say that many attributes make up the good life [J+], but you want to place the emphasis on your own ideas [J-]. You make some very general statements in the introduction [J-]. Try to engage the reader [C]. Your essay as a whole is well organized [J+].

Six of Hannah's seven comments are evaluations, both positive and negative, and as evaluations, the comments are classified under Smith's judging genre. The single coaching comment is sandwiched between a positive and negative evaluation, and because the coaching comment is preceded by a negative judgment, the most likely student interpretation is that the coaching suggestion is a mandatory revision, something that is necessary because the student did something "wrong."

The analysis of Hannah's end comments points to the most common source of misrecognition for the TAs in my study. The instructors do not understand, or they are not cognizant, that an evaluation of a student's work is a form of judgment. Whether the comment is negative or positive, the comment is still an evaluation written by a Judge. In order for the instructor to write true suggestions for improvement or encouragement, the comments must be carefully crafted without surrounding evaluations or disguised

evaluations, so the student is not left with an impression that “revision = punishment.”

Hannah says that she wants her comments to help her students explore vague terms, so she wants to “emphasize to them that that’s something that needs definition or something that needs to be expanded . . . and maybe transition wise . . . I think that the flow is important.” But as I discussed earlier, Hannah writes very few comments, and when she does write a comment, it is often a vague and empty term. For example, she might make a squiggly line under several sentences on the student’s essay, but the marginal comment will be only a, “Ugghh!” Hannah also makes a point to say that she wants to help her students understand the importance of transitions and flow, but her comments regarding transitions are often vague. On one essay, she simply writes, “↓ Transition b/t ¶s.”

Hannah also says that while her comments are very grammar oriented, she simply points out issues of correctness rather than fixing the errors. She also says that she does not fix the errors: “There is no way they are going to learn to fix it if you just fix it for them. Maybe, and I think hopefully, I’ll be able to use the handbook and actually put page numbers, like, ‘Go look at this.’” Strangely, Hannah agrees with Mary when she says that grammar “is something that takes longer . . . than a semester to make an impact on,” but she chooses to make it the focus of her commentary protocol.

Hannah’s goal for her students is simple and straightforward. She wants her students to be “thinking about . . . things, and by answering these questions, to be able to apply them to their own writing during the writing process, so even in the future if they have an idea of how to read an essay critically or to know how [she is] going to be

reading it even before they turn it in.” Hannah’s misrecognition has crept into her narrative again. She wants her students thinking and working, and she wants to be the Coach and Reader cheering her students along. But just as she wants her students to know how she will read an essay before she reads it, Hannah is the authority and Judge in her classroom; she positions herself as the evaluator of student writing. She is resistant to her role of a Judge in her interview, but her practices are characterized by judging comments. Hannah, more than any other TA, seems unaware of the sharp differences between what she says she wants to do and what she does.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

So, what does this study reveal about the types of comments that first-year graduate teaching assistants are making on freshman papers? This study reveals that regardless of congruence and misrecognition, TAs at my university are constructing and acting out perceived roles and commenting on student texts with little, or no, information on how theory and practice intertwine. My study reveals that TAs are inexperienced instructors who are not fully cognizant of how commentary protocol can both reinforce and undermine classroom practices. In this section, I discuss the outcomes of this research study as they connect to departmental and programmatic issues at my university; I then discuss how the outcomes affect the TAs who participated in my study, and other TAs in similar programs who might learn from this case study. Finally, I discuss opportunities for further research into the roles and practices of graduate teaching assistants.

DEPARTMENTAL AND PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

Whether they displayed congruence with or misrecognition of their perceived roles and practices, all five TAs knew little about research on instructor feedback and

commentary. In fact, with the exception of a brief discussion in their teaching practicum, all five TAs had little to no experience with commentary research, and, based on their interviews, they did not seek out additional research. Therefore, the TAs who present congruent images of themselves did not know their roles and practices aligned, just as the TAs who present incongruent images were unaware of their misrecognition.

The first implication of this research for English departments is that graduate teaching assistants should be aware of research into commentary practices. TAs are the often-ignored power source in departments, and at my university, they teach about half of all the freshman composition classes. Because TAs are teachers-of-record—instructors responsible for the development and execution of an entire class—they should be trained to become highly effective instructors, and I argue that the most effective instructors are those instructors who are fully cognizant of all aspects of their profession. Just as the TAs should be writing and developing teaching philosophies before they begin teaching a class, they also should be engaging in self-evaluations of their roles and practices, looking for issues like congruence and misrecognition.

A simple way to implement the self-evaluation would be to start with the teaching practicum. Teaching assistants enrolled in the required course could bring copies of the essays that they are already grading. The TAs could then use a simple evaluation sheet to record what kinds of comments they make and the number of comments they write. The evaluation sheet could then be used in conjunction with a chart, similar to the one in the appendix, so that the TAs could identify their primary commentary genre. Once the TAs identify their dominant genre, they could re-evaluate their teaching philosophies and

perceptions about their roles in the classroom to see if they are presenting congruent images to their students.

Four of the five TAs in my study adopt and implement roles as Judges in their classrooms, and while there is no inherent problem in this role, TAs must know what the adoption of the Judging role means for their students and their own role in the classroom. Freshman composition would be an impossible and unrewarding task for students if they could not receive direct and honest evaluations of their work from their TAs and instructors. However, the unique danger of TAs who have dominant judging tendencies is the obvious and often unknowing appropriation of students' texts, often through what the TAs perceive to be "harmless" modeling.

The TAs who made judging comments and adopted judging roles did not know that the amount of commentary they were writing could have negative implications for their students. They repeat over and over again in their interviews that the more information they can supply to their students the better off their students will be. Yet, research on student cognition tells us that this is just not the case, and the TAs should be exposed to research that explains the benefits and drawbacks of extensive commentary, as well as research outlining the differences between experienced and inexperienced instructors, so that they can begin to modify their commentary styles.

The TAs in this study made large quantities of comments and appropriated their students' texts for two likely reasons. First, as graduate students, they may prefer large quantities of feedback on their own work, whether the comments come from peers in a workshop or professors in a seminar. The TAs also may prefer and appreciate modeling

because modeling helps them to become acculturated into the writing style and language of their professions. Professors model and reshape the TAs words so that their writing is more fully integrated into the standards of academia, scholarly writing, and/or professional publishing.

Modeling works for graduate students because they recognize the role it serves in their own acculturation into a profession. They can readily differentiate between what the professor *wants* them to say and what they *should* say for the larger academic or professional audience. Students enrolled in freshmen composition, however, are not fully aware of those differences, and research tells us that the students often interpret modeling as the “right” way to write. TAs themselves express this same concern when they are discussing their own students’ needs to please the professor. Because students want to please their instructors, they simply make the necessary changes offered through the modeling, without ever synthesizing the exchange that has taken place between their original words and the new arrangement.

Second, the TAs write extensive comments and appropriate their students’ texts because they do not know how else to comment on the texts. All five TAs were involved in the same practicum course. During this practicum, responding to and evaluating student writing was covered on the same day as managing paper loads. On this day, TAs participated in a brief assignment of grading and commenting on a generic essay. TAs then noted key features in their comments, as a brief way to introduce them to Smith’s three commentary genres. The TAs were not fully expose the different strategies for commenting and responding to student writing, nor were they offered a benefits and

drawbacks discussion of the research material.

Because commenting on students' texts is by far the most time-consuming task of an instructor's workload, and because, I contend, commenting is the most critical part of the exchange between instructor and student, the information on commenting and responding to student writing should be left to the professor leading the practicum for two reasons. First, the professor can offer a more thorough and cohesive picture of the research than a new graduate student. Second, the professor can blend theory with practice by addressing the practical strategies the TAs might use as inexperienced composition instructors, based on the professor's own experiences. While theoretical discussions during a teaching practicum can never replace the personal experiences that TAs gain from being in their own classrooms and grading their own papers, the discussions can provide strategies for dealing with new experiences. Perhaps the TAs will use the research when they are alone and commenting on student texts.

A new approach for teaching graduate teaching assistants how to respond and comment on student texts is particularly important for my university because the TAs first experience the pressures and demands of commenting during their time as Instructional Assistants; at this time, they are commenting on and responding to student texts written in sophomore level survey literature classes. The essays they first encounter are often synthesis-based essays that ask the students enrolled in the course to respond to and analyze literature. The essays the TAs encounter in their first semester as teachers-of-record are not responses to literature but are responses to non-fiction essays. So the essays the TAs graded as instructional assistants and those they grade as teaching

assistants are distinctly different, particularly during the first semester. A more involved discussion on commentary research could address this difference.

INDIVIDUAL IMPLICATIONS

During the TAs second interviews, I asked each of them if they would like to see my research once I was finished. Brad presented the wittiest answer; he responded, “It is a little late to look in the mirror after you get home from the party.” I argue against Brad’s notion. It is never too late for instructors to learn about themselves and see themselves through another’s eyes.

Because we cannot always see the lens with which we view the world, my research offers an opportunity for the TAs to reflect on their perceived practices. They can look at the information from their interviews and see how their responses to the questions are congruent with or different from their teaching philosophies. More importantly, the analysis of their roles and practices provides an opportunity to evaluate their position and decide for themselves how their practices align with that position.

I hope that reading my study and looking at themselves objectively will help my TAs, and all inexperienced instructors, understand that identities are never cohesive. The roles that we adopt as composition instructors are forever influenced by our workload, our rapport with students, and our position on the academic calendar. But by exploring and researching the information behind our roles, we can become cognizant of what we are doing and make more informed and deliberate choices.

FURTHER RESEARCH

I hope that my study of graduate teaching assistants opens the door for a re-evaluation of past research through the lens of this unique body of instructors. One topic of discussion at the 2004 Conference on College Composition and Communication in San Antonio, Texas, was outsourcing: how the university-as-business uses adjunct faculty and graduate students to cut costs. The use of graduate students is not new, but their use as an economical tool deserves inquiry, particularly the designation of power and authority that graduate students have in their classrooms. How are the TAs using power? How are the TAs' students responding to this power? Does authority, or lack thereof, affect the adopted role and commentary practices of TAs?

In my study, the chapters on congruence and misrecognition divided along gender lines. Was this a chance division, or are the commentary styles and adopted roles of composition instructors gendered? Are female composition instructors less likely than their male counterparts to say they are the authority and evaluator in the classroom? Are male instructors less likely than female instructors to make reader response comments on students' texts? Are male instructors resistant to developing relationships with their students and commenting on the students' personal experiences because gender divisions have pre-established levels of intimacy?

Does the level of training a graduate teaching assistant receives impact the roles and practices implemented in the classroom? I hypothesize that the TAs in my study are not cognizant of their own congruence or misrecognition because roles and commentary styles were not emphasized in their training. If these issues are discussed in theoretical

and practical terms during the training process, do the TAs still display misrecognition? Can the TAs who are trained with an awareness for roles and practices explain what they will do in order to create congruent images? Does training make a difference in regard to cohesive identities?

The ways that the TAs composed their end comments also offer up interesting points for research. Ernest, the TA with the most congruence in my study, was the only TA to sign his end comments. During his interviews, Ernest alluded to the fact that signing his comments gave him a sense of ownership. What is the importance of the signature for the students, and what differences do hand-written end notes carry over typed memos or typed end notes? Also, do students prefer their end comments organized by topic, like in the rubric that Mary used? Or do students prefer a brief summary and grade justification, like Jack used?

How can we begin to distinguish more clearly between experienced and inexperienced instructors? Brad has taught in the composition classroom for five years, yet he still comments on local-issues, a focus that Siegel attributed to inexperienced instructors. Yet Mary, who is in her first year of instruction, shows an inclination for large-scale issues that are often reserved for experienced instructors. Do the ages of the graduate instructors affect whether they are classified as inexperienced or experiences, and can proper training close the awareness gap sufficiently so that the graduate instructor who is twenty-three and the graduate instructor who is fifty make similar comments on student texts?

Addressing these and other questions may help us explore more fully the

processes involved in the retention of beginning writers. We may begin to rethink and redefine the training of beginning instructors, and, best of all, we may gain further insight into ourselves as writers, teachers, and commentators.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TA Commentary on Freshman Composition Papers

You are invited to participate in a study of how Teaching Assistants at Texas State University comment on the papers in their Freshman Composition classes. I am a faculty member at Texas State, also a Graduate Assistant for the Department of English. I have five participants in this study.

If you decide to participate, I would ask you to allow me to interview you for a period of time between 40 minutes and 1 hour three times during the semester: once during the first week of class, once at mid-semester, and once at the conclusion of the semester. The interviews will be tape recorded for later transcription. You will also be asked to make copies of your students final, graded papers, complete with marginal and end comments, however you choose to comment. You will receive a \$20.00 copy card to cover the cost of the copying fees. You will submit the copies to me as you return the papers throughout the semester. You will not submit the diagnostic essay or the final exam essay; you will submit the papers from only one of your classes.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. You will be identified only by a pseudonym in the transcripts and in any final, published results of the findings.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Texas State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask me.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making the decision about whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form, should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX B

TA Commentary on Freshman Composition Papers

Your instructor has agreed to participate in a study of how Teaching Assistants at Texas State University comment on the papers in their Freshman Composition classes, as such, you are an indirect participant in the study. I am a faculty member at Texas State, also a Graduate Assistant for the Department of English. I have five participants in this study and five participating composition classes.

Because your instructor is participating in my study about TA commentary, I will collect the comments your instructor makes on your final, graded papers. Your name will not appear on the copies I receive from your instructor. Your paper will not be used for research data. I will be looking at the marginal and end comments made by the instructor. I will not be evaluating you as a student or your paper for its content. Your instructor will not submit your diagnostic essay or the final exam essay.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will not be identified with you. Your instructor will ensure that I know only your ethnicity and gender when submitting copies of their commentary.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Texas State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask me.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making the decision about whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form, should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Instructor

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C

Questions for First Interview with TAs

- State name/pseudonym and position at Texas State.
- Why did you apply for the graduate assistantship position? How does assist you in your long-term goals?
- Describe your teaching qualifications prior to applying for this position.
- Tell me about your experiences with writing—professional or academic or creative.
 - How do you feel your experiences with writing have prepared you for teaching?
 - What aspects of your previous experiences do you think you'll be able to draw upon?
- How do you think teaching composition differs from teaching literature? How do you think the other teaching assistants view the teaching of composition when compared with literature or creative writing?
- Describe your teaching philosophy.
 - How did you develop this philosophy—experience, research, training?
 - How will you implement this philosophy in your classroom?
- Describe your teaching goals for the semester. What are your expectations for a student's personal commitment to writing?
- What characteristics do you value in a writing teacher?
 - Tell me about a positive interaction you had with a professor regarding your writing. Tell me about a negative interaction with a professor.
 - How did that experience impact your teaching style or your ideas about teaching and your own teaching philosophy.
- What type of teacher feedback do you find most beneficial to your writing?
 - Describe a positive experience you had with feedback.
 - What was most/least beneficial?
- Tell me about a negative experience and its benefits, if any.
- Describe an experience where the amount/level of commentary did or did not reflect your letter grade?
 - Do you feel that the amount of commentary and feedback put into a paper reflects the letter grade? Why or why not?
- Describe your commentary protocol.
 - Tell me why you write on student papers.
 - How did you learn this method. Was it through research, workshop experience, personal experience?
- What do you foresee as your role in commenting on student papers?
- What aspect of student writing do you think will be your primary focus? What kind of comments do you envision yourself making?
- What role do you believe commentary should play in the writing classroom?
- What role do you think it DOES play?
- How do you believe students view teacher commentary?

- What do you think is an absolutely important goal in teacher commentary?
- What kinds of comments are crucial?
- What kinds of comments do you think are nice to write if you have time, but aren't essential?
- What kinds of comments are not important at all?
- Describe how you want students to use your comments. How do you think you will use your comments?
- What do you consider the goal of practicum? What are your expectations for it? How do you imagine that it might change your teaching and grading style?

APPENDIX D

Questions for Second Interview with TAs

- Create a sketch of yourself for me. Biographical information, age, degrees, work experience (past).
- How would you describe yourself as a teacher?
- How do you feel about being a teacher?
- Do you plan to stay in academia?
- Tell me about your workload this semester: classes, coursework, outside obligations, etc.
- Describe your teaching philosophy, now, as compared to the beginning of the semester. Do you think your philosophy changed? If so, what prompted changes?
- Describe the workshop setting of your classroom?
 - Did you use peer-reviews? What were the procedures?
 - Did you give the students a task-sheet?
 - What were your expectations for the students? What did you want them to learn from the peer-review days?
- During what part of the composing process did you grade/ comment?
 - How did you approach the text? Final draft, working draft?
 - Did you have a portfolio strategy?
 - Did you give opportunities for revision?
 - How did you grade and comment, together or separately?
- Tell me about how you would grade your essays. Walk me through a typical grading situation.
 - What was the environment like in which you would grade? Where? When?
 - What was going on in your surroundings?
 - What set of procedures would you follow?
 - What did you do first?
 - Did you write in the margins, at the end, on separate paper?
 - How long would you spend per essay?
 - Did you ever put an essay down before starting or halfway through?
 - What color/kind of pen did you use?
- What is your philosophy on commentary?
 - What do you think is absolutely essential? What is less important?
- What voice/role did you adopt when commenting on papers?
 - What kinds of comments did you try to write on students' papers?
 - Why? In other words, why this particular approach? How did you determine what errors to mark?
 - How did you balance the types of comments you gave, i.e., praise and criticism? What were your primary foci?

- How did you return the papers to your students? Describe the day in the classroom.
 - What would you say?
 - Was there a specific assignment that you would use?
 - Did you ask your students to respond to your comments in any way?
 - Were they required to read/respond/incorporate/correct as you deemed necessary?
- I have two papers for you to look at, one from the beginning of the semester and one from the end. Characterize the time in the semester and the overall classroom goals that accompanied these papers. Now, how would you characterize the commentary in each?
 - What similarities do you see?
 - What differences do you see?
 - In your opinion, what accounts for the similarities or differences?
- Did you do any outside research on commentary?
 - What helped you formulate your protocol?
- What were your motives in commenting on students' papers? Were they linked to class discussion, class emphasis?
- Describe how you used the information you received in practicum in your classroom this semester? What did you learn? What benefited you the most?
- Did you have a strategy for how the commentary would work within the classroom?
- Did you have students interact with the commentary? Track the commentary? Etc.?
- What were their typical reactions to your commentary? How do you know this?
- You said in your first interview that comments were crucial, do you still feel that way?
- What are "nice" comments?
- After grading papers throughout the semester, has your attitude changed about the role of commentary in the classroom? What would you do the same? What would you do differently?

APPENDIX E

Sample Essay from Ernest

people die daily for reasons far more trivial than bus rides and pool access. The point of human compassion is not to separate these issues but treat them the same. Martin Luther King Jr., "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". I feel that there is no point of hierarchical argument, it doesn't matter where it comes from point in preserving life in terms of military conflict if continued existence means segregation. The general justification for totalitarianism was that if, metaphorically, four people are on the verge of death and another patient had a skin condition, his death would be acceptable for the overall good, being that organs help the economy. The sad thing is that everybody dies. One hundred years from today all five of those patients would be dead, and whether the value of the life was made better after murder is indeterminable. In relation to institutions, one must always remember that, they exist outside of nature. Just as a pack of wolves would never form a corporation or insurance conglomerate, so must man come to terms with corporation, being subject to the people in them, the people of a false abstraction. As far as political violence is concerned, I see no point in assassinating the President to prove ideals, or even deliver rocket-propelled karma. One person in authority is just one man out of millions that support fascist war machines. The French philosopher, Michelle Foucault, stated in the 70's that governmental structures and institutions were based on false abstractions, perceptions of reality that facilitated the means of some entity, be it individual or soulless institution. At the point in which every institution is a false abstraction, I see no other option than to form personal contacts with individuals. Since I believe that all humans are sexual beings, being united by common desires, the most logical medium seemed erotic media. This genre of art is favorite to only a few, more localized areas of the populous, yet still necessary for progress.

Again, this is incoherent. You lack a central argument and don't bring any of your examples to bear on a central theme. How are skin conditions, wolves, assassinating the president & Foucault related? Your essay doesn't offer any explanation and you're relying on complex metaphors that state absolutely nothing in terms of your point.

You must ORGANIZE your PAPERS BETTER. MAKE A PLAN! REWRITE!

Why? Develop your TP to explore this issue.

This is related to your thesis. Cut the rest of this TP and start here

APPENDIX F

Sample Essay from Brad

title?

How would one describe their view on personal success? From person to person there may be a huge difference in the classification of being a successful person. For me it would be split up into several different categories that are equally important for my success as an individual. These categories would ^{are you uncertain?} (in all likelihood) consist of financial success, religious success, and the ^{what does this mean?} (overall successes that come in everyday life).

In my life I would have to say that financial success is probably one of the most important aspects of my future. I hope to achieve this by finishing out my college career and hopefully getting a job that will help me achieve this goal. ^{how do you do that?} It's not just having a lot of money that will make me successful, it's being able to support my family and myself ^{like?} with the necessary materials. I don't mean just the basic food and shelter, I'm talking about not worrying about buying something for my wife or kids. I want to be able to make their life as carefree as possible. I want my kids to be able to grow up and go to school ^{beaten} and in a safe environment, where they don't have to worry about being beat up or having their lunch money stolen ^{this is already in the sentence.} from them. Then someday when I am older I want to ^{already in there.} retire and ^{proofread.} when I do that I want to be very secure in my funds to ^{can this long sentence be simplified?} where I don't have to worry about having enough money to live off of since I won't have a job. A successful retirement for me would be to have all of my children through college, my ^{multiple houses that detail (and its description) could tell me a lot about what you mean} houses paid for, and have the opportunity to go out and enjoy things like traveling and playing golf.

I also believe that my spiritual life plays a huge role in being successful. I believe in many of the Christian beliefs. I believe if I follow the certain rules that have been set down that I will be very successful in my life. Being accountable for my actions and ^{proofread.} knowing that I could not have done most of the things I did without a little help from above. I also think that in order to be successful spiritually, you must give up the selfish

is this my paper?
am I writing it (or is Keith)

how does this happen?

This thesis seems really vague.

This is fragmented

APPENDIX G

Sample Essay from Jack

oneself and a higher being. This is just another aspect of truth that the form of meditation is not needed to obtain salvation.

Finally when ^{looking} you look at the spiritual aspects ~~you must~~ first look at what salvation really is. Salvation is the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ into ^{ones} ~~your~~ heart, soul, and spirit. Salvation cannot be bought, stolen, lost, sold, and /or found. It is an event that happens in one's life that makes one repent ^{their} ~~one's~~ sins and accept the Lord our savior in ~~one's~~ heart. Meditation is a spiritual belief, but it has no one certain time or event that changes the belief of a person. Salvation is primarily a spiritual event that leads the future of one's eternal life and being. A big difference ~~that~~ separates the two is that through meditation one must learn to trust one's mind wholly, while in salvation the only truth that can be trusted and lived by is what is learned and been taught through the heart by our Holy Lord. For the mental aspects are to guide someone's life; meditation would not be a bad tool to help live one's life truthfully and openly, but has no bearing and no need to gain a person's salvation.

The practice of meditation is a great way to attain inner peace, but it has no bearing and is not a necessity for a person to achieve salvation. Salvation is something that can be obtained from God and from God alone, with no help of any other. ^{meditation to salvation there is no} ~~this you cannot have any connection~~ through the mental beliefs, the physical practice, and the spiritual aspect.

You seem to have a good idea of what meditation offers a person. However, your argument assumes that Christian salvation is the only way to salvation. If you want to argue in this way, you must first prove that the Christian route to salvation is the only path.

APPENDIX H

Sample Essay from Mary

2

also be included. ^{AT the end of the cut} After a semester ^{after} has been completed and the students have done the ^{improvement/development} workout every day, their physical ^{WC} means will be tested. This will be done by an ^{having them do} accelerated pilates work out, ^{WC} also provided by tape. A grade will be given based on the effort put forth by the student to improve their individual pilates workout skills over the ^{course of} semester.

The next intelligence included in my pilates class is the visual art of space or spatial intelligence. Gardner claims that ^{spatial intelligence relates to this} it is imperative that a person understand their ^{Topic} surroundings. During the pilates workout, ^{Students'} the individuals' ^{cut} surroundings ^{and space only} include their mat and ^{cut} in this case, their class mates. The space ^{surroundings} around a person while ^{WC} working out will vary with workout. Sometimes this may include being alone but in my pilates class it will have the classroom environment. Spatial intelligence also includes the ^{placement} bodies' ^{WC} setting on the mat. To achieve the full potential ^{of} for the physical workout, it is ^{WC} important for the lower back to touch the mat as much as possible and to not be arched. The students will be instructed ^{on} this by the video, and points will be deducted in final testing if the teacher believes the students are not ^{performing} attempting ^{WC} the workout correctly.

Lastly, intrapersonal intelligence is by far the most important intelligence taught in ^{Topic} pilates. ^{according to Gardner is} Gardner offers the definition for intrapersonal intelligence as the "knowledge of the internal aspects of a person: ... guiding one's own behavior" (388). It is my opinion, as previously stated, that pilates works as the perfect outlet for ^{stress} all the ^{WC} pressure in my life. ^{For} While concentrating ^{demonstrated} heavily on their breathing, as ^{WC} stressed in the video, the students will not be focusing on anything ^{WC} else besides their bodies and the workout. This leaves no room for anxiety over ^{an upcoming tests or concern over any extra curricular activities} which most high school students participate in. ^{The emphasis that Pilates puts on the} Taught through intrapersonal intelligence ^{development} ^{WC} of

APPENDIX I

Sample Essay from Hannah

could say that, biologically, women are not built to the physical capacity of men. But in saying that doesn't that reinforce the idea that women are, in fact, the weaker sex? Getting jobs should be based solely on qualifications, not gender.

In the effort of achieving so-called equality is it fair that women should have such a clear cut advantage over men? I think that when you say that women are deserving of the same jobs as men that you also need to put everyone on a level playing ground. If you, male or female, can earn your position then, yes, you deserve it. Imagine that there is a man and a woman that have almost the same qualifications and they are both applying for the same job. Now let's say that although the female may be less qualified but she is handed the job because she is woman and the threat of nasty litigation is more than most employers can stomach. The point is that even though it is a good thing to have

this is
one
place
where
you could
eliminate
words.

a little "affirmative action" in the workplace, ^{not because} ~~not that~~ women need help getting jobs but ^{because} that employers need, sometimes, a gentle shove in the right direction. The affirmative action" is still necessary but it only helps to a point. If the women ^a getting the job has all the qualifications but never would have been employed without help then it is necessary and fair. It is when the women ^a is not qualified and is simply handed the job because of her sex ^{that} then it is no longer about equality.

Try
not to
use
"you"
and
"I"
Restructure
sentences

Of course, the feminist movement is very necessary since male dominance and oppression ^{are} is still far too prevalent, especially in the workplace. But again I raise the question of how far is too far. [?] ~~Take for example the issue of sexual harassment.~~ ^{For examples} Sexual harassment in the workplace is undoubtedly a problem and should not be tolerated by anyone of either sex. But when the threat of crying sexual harassment becomes a weapon, rather than an aggravating problem, justice seems to fly out the window right along with

Commentary Roles and Practices Chart

APPENDIX J

Genre	Purpose, Goal	Beliefs & Attitudes	Structure	Style Characteristics		Burden	Categories
Judging	Evaluation of Writing & Justification of Grade Error-oriented, rubrics, compare & contrast with other texts	Presentable text	Declarative sentences Directive commentary Effective & Verdictive comments	Positive fragments Large volume of commentary	<i>Grammatical Subjects</i>	Instructor to prove point and defend grade and support evaluations Redirects student's attention to instructor goals	<u>Purves</u> Proof-reader, editor, review, gatekeeper <u>Lees</u> Correcting, suggesting
		Maintains conventions of English			Vague 3 rd person: "the paper"		
		Meaning present in text			expletives		
		"Closed" text: self-contained			"I" & "you"		
		Student competence based on text's evaluation			1 st person = + grade (A, B) 3 rd person = - grade (C, D, F)		
Coaching	<i>Individualized Instruction</i>	Manager of ideas of shared community with student	Imperative sentences	Highly standardized Veiled evaluations Questions and suggestions encourage further thought, create dialogue with student		Improvement on writing = student's burden to use comments and feedback Inclusion of student	<u>Purves</u> Critic <u>Lees</u> Reminding, Assigning
	Ideas for revision	Shared responsibility in making meaning	Interrogative sentences				
	Areas for improvement		Constatative comments				
	Assistance to student						
Reader Response	<i>Active reader reactions</i>	Private, semi-private enterprise	Declarative sentences Summative comments Conversational comments	Marginal for evaluation support Positive include "I" Alignment with students' audiences		Instructor to demonstrate reactions and convey implications Students' recognize weight of words, responsibility of words	<u>Purves</u> Common Reader, Critic, Therapist <u>Lees</u> Emoting, describing, questioning
	Establish personal connection	Improve students' underlying problems					
	Demonstrate effects of words on readers	"Developing" text: portfolio process					
	Identify with students' experiences	Meaning made with reading Analytical reading					

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