



## Dream Bloggers Invent the University

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### Abstract

This essay focuses on the blogs authored by students in interdisciplinary, writing-intensive seminars on the art and science of dreaming at Queens College and Princeton University. The writing for these courses requires students to “invent the university” in the sense that they must find ways to bridge the public and private, or the theoretical and the personal. I argue that blogs have the potential to help students develop strong and distinctive voices in the pursuit of intellectual inquiry—and that because of this, they can help teachers and scholars overcome the intellectual divides between the “expressivist” and “constructivist” pedagogies represented by Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae respectively. In the concluding section, I examine blog entries in which students recount instances in which they dreamed about our course readings (and other materials). These accounts are striking because they offer evidence that students were internalizing and synthesizing course material. To explain this internalization and synthesis, I turn to recent developments in cognitive theory that offer new ways of thinking about learning that I believe will help bridge the expressivist-constructivist divide and develop methods for teaching voice as a rhetorical element of writing, one that is essential to intellectual inquiry.

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A passage from Sigmund Freud’s “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” nagged me when I made the decision in 2004 to experiment with the weblogs Princeton was piloting. In my new writing seminar on dreams, I asked students to keep public dream blogs rather than the private dream journals I had been planning. Freud (1907/1995) reminds his audience, “You will remember how I have said that the day-dreamer carefully conceals his phantasies from other people because he feels he has reasons for being ashamed of them.” He goes on to compound the claim: “I should now add that even if he were to communicate them to us he could give us no pleasure by his disclosures. Such phantasies, when we learn them, repel us or at least leave us cold” (p. 443). Freud suggests that the dreams of sleep are essentially equivalent to day-dreams, so it required only a small leap to apply his admonition to my students’ dream blogs. If Freud was right, I worried, the blogs could result in shame, embarrassment, and boredom—hardly a recipe for motivating students to seek intellectual explanations for their own and each other’s nightly dreaming.

My *hope* was that the blogs would give students a forum for writing informally and experimenting with ideas and styles, as journals do—that asking them to write about their dreams publicly, rather than privately, would engage them in collective inquiry, generate a body of material (or data even) that we could all learn from, *and* instigate a productive relationship between my students’ personal experiences and the course readings. But this was an experiment, and I wasn’t sure what would happen. A weblog, I knew, was a flexible online forum that could be adapted for multiple purposes: public diaries, literary journalism, and forums for professional organiza-

tions or hobby enthusiasts. Blogs have been championed in the press as an egalitarian medium because they are user-friendly, generally accessible, and interactive. I was skeptical of utopian claims, but I felt compelled to give it a try.

Nearly three years later, blogs have become a central component of my teaching—and, incidentally, of politics, journalism, and public life in general. In this essay, I draw on examples from two sections of a freshman writing seminar at Princeton and from a two-semester English honors seminar for seniors at Queens College. In each instance, I asked students to post one entry a couple of days before class began. I posted a model, an account of a recurrent dream of my own, and sent out an e-mail explaining the fairly simple technical procedures for personalizing the blogs. I asked students to choose a pseudonym, post a description of a dream “that felt resonant, for whatever reason,” and reflect on why it resonated. From the start, the blogs foregrounded audience, a significant emphasis in the formal writing students would complete over the course of the semester. I couldn’t have articulated it when I started, but my decision to experiment with blogs in a course that integrates the sciences and the humanities and engages the personal with the theoretical was motivated by a fairly grandiose notion that the medium would inspire my students and me to “invent the university,” to borrow the phrase David Bartholomae (1986) uses to describe the shift from high school to college writing. I was hoping it would address an implicit problem of undergraduate education—the fact that students are asked to contribute their voices to a university writing culture whose conventions they have little experience with—and turn that problem into an explicit quest to tailor those conventions to the somewhat novel enterprise of studying dreams in school. As it turns out, the blogs achieved this—and, moreover, they seemed to stimulate students to become aware of both the rhetorical and cognitive dimensions of their writing and learning.

The blogs helped me invent new strategies for teaching voice and inquiry as equally important and mutually reinforcing elements of writing. If *voice* is the persona of a writer, expressed, represented, or constructed through distinctive patterns of language, *inquiry* is the process through which that writer gathers information, generates ideas, and formulates language for communicating with an audience. Voice and inquiry are also hallmarks of two major schools of pedagogical thought, “expressivism” and “constructivism,” respectively. The development of voice, along with attention to the writing process, was a major emphasis of so-called expressivist approaches to teaching (Flower, 1979; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Elbow, 1995, 1998; Murray, 2003; Perl, 1980), which drew on early cognitive theory in order to demonstrate how writers develop and how writing facilitated learning and empowered students by affecting their identities, for which their voices were shorthand, in fundamental ways. When constructivists critiqued expressivism (Bartholomae, 1986, 1995; Harris, 1996; Bizzell, 1982; Bruffee, 1984), arguing that education is a social and political enterprise and that students benefit more from learning rhetorical approaches and their ideological implications than alternately mechanistic and touchy-feely exercises in self-improvement, they did it largely on the basis of the early cognitive theories that had influenced expressivism, which had a tendency to be mechanistic and lacked attention to social contexts. Today, constructivism dominates, and expressivism is often seen as an influential but flawed approach whose lasting contribution has been the attention to the writing process in classrooms. The expressivist emphasis on voice has been lost in the fray because it is associated with the mistaken notion that writing is somehow a pure expression of self.

Voice is an expression of self, but not a pure or unchanging one. Any writer who writes for various audiences or in various genres or at various times or in various moods knows that voice is *created* through engagement with language, both the writer’s and that of other writers. I hope to demonstrate that a course blog, if it’s designed effectively and integrated with the intellectual goals of a course, can help students develop distinctive voices and conceive them in rhetorical terms, serving a larger pedagogical goal: to help students develop the ability to adapt suitable voices for various contexts. In the final section of the essay, I hypothesize that recent cognitive theory, which has evolved nuanced explanations of mind, learning, identity, and expression, can help teachers find new ways to revive voice in the classroom—and, ultimately, to eschew an artificial divide between voice and inquiry that has been an unfortunate side-effect of academic debates.

### 1. First postings: Voice and inquiry

But first things first. Even modest success depended on the words that would begin to appear on the screen and the responses they would elicit. I was relieved and impressed by the vivid detail, moments of reflection and inquiry, and, especially, the distinctive and often highly controlled voices I encountered in the first entries stu-

dents posted. I'll give you two examples. This first was posted by a student who had chosen the pseudonym *Drei* (2004):

Strangely enough, I and my friend, Pari (its his nickname) were heading to Fujioka, Japan, right before my final-term exam by car. (Please, don't ask me how we made it through deep blue sea by car. I don't know neither.) As we were passing through thousands of high buildings, we saw a big advertisement saying, "Amateur Grand Prix Motor Racing! Winner gets 10 mullion dollar and is exempt from final term!" Pari abruptly grabbed my hand and shouted at me, "My friend you should do that for both YOU and us, I mean it!" I tried to tell him that I don't have driver's licence and I am not going to give him a penny even if I win the race, but he didn't seem to hear me at all. He bought me a new car, a red Rx-7 FC3S of Mazda, the model I was crazy about, to go for the race. But, still, the race did not tempted at all, so I just ran away. Pari strenuously came after me, making strange noise like cacophony of unprepared school rock band. His high pitched voice surely scared me, and I just ran as fast as I could without direction.

If you read on, you would learn that *Drei* does in fact enter and win the race, at the behest of a girl from Mars he meets in an abandoned factory, despite competing against a bully from his middle school who tries to sabotage him. But the dream is not so generous. *Drei* is deprived of his prize and never sees the girl again. I'll discuss *Drei*'s reflection on this dream shortly, but first, compare his hilarious, cinematic dream to a very different one posted by a student who had chosen the pseudonym *Elise Hubbard* (2004b):

I'm walking though a garden. It's a beautiful day and I'm gathered there for a celebration of some sort. However, this garden party takes place at Glenwood Cemetery, the resting place of two of my high school friends. I'm not really sure when the party takes place. It feels like it's both only a month after the accident and several anniversaries later.

As I near Scott's grave, I find his family laughing and smiling. They appear to be enjoying themselves. I watch them, studying them from afar.

For some reason, I begin crying and I run past the Cavens. However, in the dream, as I run past them, I'm also still watching them. The "me" watching sees the Cavens turn their heads as I run past. Their faces are no longer happy as they lament about how worried they are about me and how they know how affected I was by Scott's death.

Somehow, the "me" watching and the "me" running are linked, because the "me" running begins to sob even more after knowing what the "me" watching overheard.

*Drei*'s and *Elise Hubbard*'s first entries are fairly representative of the early ones in both courses, demonstrating an attention to voice and at least a gesture toward inquiry. Where *Drei*'s account is expressive, the dream almost literally animated, *Elise Hubbard*'s is reflective, the dream melancholy. Both were arresting, as were most of those first postings, some of them silly, some surreal, some disturbing. To my relief, there was nothing repellent or chilly about them. In fact, they were engaging narratives. These dream reports were delivered, as Freud's dreams are, in compelling voices, by writers with something to say. They didn't read like writing burdened with the daunting task of inventing a university their writers had only just entered. Instead, these writers seemed to be energized by the challenge of inventing their dreams in language.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the postings were insightful; they anticipated—somehow illustrated in advance—many of the concepts that I would ask students to read about in the coming weeks. *Drei*'s dream was highly plotted, which I imagined accounted for much of its resonance. But it also followed a structural pattern *Carl Jung* (1974) ascribes to "average" dreams: *exposition, development, culmination, resolution*. *Elise Hubbard*'s dream contained a distinctive form of Freud's *condensation* of two time periods, "only a month after the accident" and

<sup>1</sup> The syllabus guidelines for the blogs were simple and straightforward, but they did require short periodic discussions in class:

For the duration of the semester, every student will keep a dream blog. Most of the time, you will be describing recent dreams. You will also use your blogs, though, to respond to readings, films, and art about dreams. **Each student must post a minimum of two blog entries and two comments on others' entries per week. Please post more if you're having interesting dreams you want to document and share! (See fall semester calendar below for details.)** The blogs are intended to give you a place to write informally, communicate with an audience in mind, experiment with ideas and styles of writing, digest ideas we explore in the course, and accumulate a collection of your own dreams for interpretation. Approach the blogs informally and creatively. When I evaluate them, I will be looking for sincere effort and critical engagement, not polish, structure, or mechanics.

“several anniversaries later,” followed by an inverse-condensation, through which the dream self is split in two and then recondensed.

Because my students in both courses posted these entries before our first meeting, I had only met them through their postings. Although it was evident that he was a non-native speaker, I would only learn later that Drei was Korean and that he had never written more than a paragraph in English but was planning to major in computer science and had a great deal of experience with technology, including blogs. Elise Hubbard, on the other hand, was raised in Texas and had a history of successful academic writing but distrusted blogs as a genre and was embarrassed by the prospect of authoring one. Although I couldn't predict how the blogs would inform either student's development as a writer, I felt satisfied that two goals had been achieved. The dream blogs were engaging, even fascinating, and they were providing concrete illustrations from the students' own experience that would resonate with abstract concepts from our readings.

But were we really inventing the university here? In his influential essay, Bartholomae argues that student writers are “trying to write themselves into a new community” (1986, p. 5), a scholarly community, and that they “will need to learn to crudely mimic the ‘distinctive register’ of academic discourse before they are prepared to actually and legitimately do the work of the discourse, and before they are sophisticated enough with the refinements of tone and gesture to do it with grace or elegance” (p. 20). Bartholomae differentiates his writing pedagogy from earlier process-oriented methods. He focuses on invention, inquiry, and discourse rather than creativity, cognition, and expression. In his written “conversation” with Peter Elbow, Bartholomae (1995) argues that the personal writing encouraged by many process-oriented teachers (like Elbow) amounts to “sentimental realism,” which he contrasts with “academic writing,” which he calls “the real work of the academy” (p. 69). Personal writing, he suggests, reinforces students' own assumptions. Bartholomae even goes so far as to complain that personal writing revives post-structuralism's “dead author” as an “independent, self-creative, self-expressive subjectivity”—whereas, in Bartholomae's view, academic writing ought to be “part of a general critique of traditional humanism” (1995, p. 71). I admire the ambition Bartholomae has for students. His method encourages them to challenge assumptions, ask difficult questions, and use their writing to pursue genuine intellectual insight. He asks students to write with purpose. But when he attempts to delineate “the real work of the academy,” he installs an arbitrary divide between the public university and the private lives of students—essentially ghetto-izing what I view as two equally important facets of writing pedagogy: inquiry and voice. If the student is to be a member of the university community, her voice should make a contribution to it. In practical terms, without a notable voice—or, even better, an agile repertoire of voices—no writer can be much more than competent.<sup>2</sup>

When used to describe a quality of writing, the term *voice* is a metaphor that illustrates elements of speech that inform the creation and reception of the written word. In the introduction to his anthology *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed World*, Charles Bernstein (1998) makes the observation that “sound is an arational or nonlogical feature of language” (p. 24). To discuss the *voice* of a piece of writing is to attribute some of sound's arational or nonlogical features to the patterns of language that make a piece of writing feel distinctive, and this may be one reason that definitions of *voice* are so elusive. Nonetheless, voice is a rhetorical element, created through patterns of language, shaped by context, and developed through drafting and revision. In his influential book, *A Teaching Subject*, Joseph Harris (1996) uses voice as the vehicle for contrasting *constructivist* and *expressivist* approaches. Though Harris acknowledges that voice is important, he argues that voice tends to be “felt rather than analyzed,” that its “exact workings can never be pointed to or defined,” that pedagogies invested in voice are part of an outdated tradition in which “the study of literature. . . can be defended in quali-religious terms” (1996, p. 24–25), and finally, that too much emphasis on voice implies that “selfhood is at stake,” distracting student writers from conceiving their writing as part of a cultural dialogue. Though it may be true that certain pedagogical approaches operate along such lines, personal writing and attention to voice may be addressed in ways that help students conceive writing as a rhetorical craft and themselves as participants in cultural and intellectual dialogue.

<sup>2</sup> Some of Bartholomae's other published work suggest that his position regarding personal writing and voice is less disparaging than his rhetorical stance in “Inventing the University” and his response to Elbow implies. In his collaborations with Anthony Petrosky, the textbook *Ways of Reading* (2005) and the pedagogical guide *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts* (1986), Bartholomae consistently describes writing as a confrontation between a writer and texts and teaching as a process through which students learn to see the relationship between what they bring to texts and how those texts might change them, their beliefs, and their ability to write. That said, Bartholomae and Petrosky's (1986, 2005) position in the earlier essay has been enormously influential, and even though his other writing has implied a more nuanced approach to voice, it hasn't made an explicit argument about this nor achieved the iconic status of “Inventing the University.”

Contrary to Harris's argument, it is possible to define voice. I've been defining it as a fundamental rhetorical element of writing, as the persona of a writer, expressed, represented, or constructed through distinctive patterns of language, and as a metaphor for the "arational and nonlogical" qualities of sound that shape a reader's impressions of a piece of writing. There are many ways to define voice, and it's important for teachers to develop working definitions that encompass its persistent elusiveness but also to de-mystify the process through which a writer conveys a voice. (A simple and effective way to launch a discussion like this is to ask students to identify the language that gives rise to voice in the work of a published or student writer and then to come up with descriptive phrases to characterize this writer's voice—for example, "dense and searching," or "relentlessly ironic," or "melancholy verging on morbid.") Unfortunately, the debate between constructivism and expressivism that has led to the de-emphasis of voice has also mirrored a widespread discomfort with the personal and private among university faculty, one effect of which has been to widen a gulf between academic inquiry and the world into which we're inquiring (whether the object happens to be aesthetic, social, philosophical, physical, or cosmological).

In "Voice in Writing Again: Embracing Contraries," Peter Elbow (2007) examines how and why voice became a casualty in the war between expressivist and discourse writing pedagogies—and argues that we would do well to consider voice as an important rhetorical dimension of writing. Early in the essay, he makes the point that young people are writing more than they used to because their media of choice—blogs, social networking software, e-mail—demand writing. Establishing a distinctive voice is one of the primary aims of all this writing, but that conception of voice is far from the naïve ones to which constructivists have objected: "On blogs and websites such as MySpace, lots of people eagerly use written words to reveal 'who they really are'; while just as many use the same websites to 'construct' a self. Among the latter group, some want to disguise what they feel are their 'real selves,' some want to give voices to what they experience as multiple selves, and some don't feel they have actual selves at all until they create them with language" (Elbow, 2007, p. 171). Elbow's argument implies that all writers experience a tension between finding language to express "who they really are" and an awareness that finding such language confronts them with the question of how "to construct a self" in language. I'm arguing that course blogs can be used to develop productive ways of helping student writers become aware of this tension and to explore the development of voice as a rhetorical challenge that can help them improve their writing and become more self-conscious about their own intellectual development. A pedagogy that engages this tension productively requires a nuanced understanding of it. If it's naïve to imagine that voice is the pure expression of self, it's also overly simplistic to imagine that voices (or identities, for that matter) are constructed at will. A writer's cognitive disposition, life experience, and social context all shape voice in ways beyond the writer's control. In fact, these constraints are a fundamental and enabling element in the development of a writer's voice.

My students' dream blogs have been instructive because they have engaged them in a process of personal expression that leads fairly organically (and quickly) to genuine intellectual questions developed through engagement with an audience. By *organically*, I mean in ways that seem built in to the process, but it's important to note that their effectiveness requires a great deal of attention to the relationships between online and classroom discussion. What I couldn't have articulated until I'd seen it in action that first semester was that the blogs gave students a natural and public forum for developing their voices, and that this development informed the directions of their inquiries. Elbow emphasizes this relationship between voice and inquiry in "Voice in Writing Again":

With practice, people can learn to write prose that "has a voice" or "sounds like a person," and, interestingly, when they do, their words are more effective at *carrying a meaning*. For when we hear naturally spoken language—or when we hear a difficult text read aloud well—we don't have to work so hard to understand the meaning. Intonation or prosody *enacts* some of the meanings so that we can "hear" them... Readers usually experience "audible" voiced writing as clearer than writing they don't hear. (2007, pp. 176–77)

Of course, successful professional writers create recognizable (if flexible and evolving) voices, and these voices make their writing "more effective at *carrying a meaning*." If students enroll in our courses to learn, good teaching should help them develop voices that improve their ability to "carry" (and deliver) meaning. It may be true that students tend to believe their voices are somehow a given, intrinsic to them, beyond critique, sacrosanct, and even that too many of their teachers reinforce this belief, but classroom blogging can be a tool for re-examining such beliefs. It draws on student experience with electronic media through which they already experience tension between voice as a representation of *who they really are* and as a tool for *constructing themselves in language*. In my courses, blogging about dreams has demanded, almost by default, a multi-disciplinary approach to inquiry that helps students see their

voices as contributions to already established conversations about a little-understood phenomenon. The enterprise itself—getting acquainted with a software that allows for serial publication in an environment in which all the students are linked and in which they can give and receive comments—foregrounds audience and therefore stimulates students to experiment with voice.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly all my students express some confusion, doubt, or fear about dream blogging—excellent (and genuine) motivators for inquiry. In fact, nearly all their original postings included an explicit or implicit note of inquiry. Notice the language of Drei's concluding remarks about his animated car race dream, for example:

I had this dream two years ago. *Several things I can guess* are that the it is strongly influenced by the Japanese car racing animation I enjoyed, and I really did want to avenge the bully guy. *I think* my unconscious vanity for the heroism made this banal heroic plot, but this *somehow* void ending makes me doubt it. *I am also not sure* about the strange girl and noisy Pari, who has been always a silent guy. *Maybe* it is an embodiment of my suppressed refusal of normal surroundings around me or mere product of my imagination. (2004, emphasis added)

Drei's "several things I can guess," "I think," "I am also not sure," and "maybe" all indicate a desire to hypothesize but a need for more information. His closing statement, "Maybe it is an embodiment of my suppressed refusal of normal surroundings around me or mere product of my imagination," was typical of these first postings. Though the syntax is difficult to entangle, it represents the Freudian assumptions about dreams that most of my students revealed in their initial postings. The dichotomy signaled by Drei's final "or"—between a "suppressed" desire and a "mere" product of imagination—even anticipates debates between contemporary dream theorists about whether or not the contents of dreams are meaningful and can be interpreted—the position taken by Ernest Hartmann (2000), former president of the International Association for the Study of Dreams—or whether the focus of dream research should be on the formal, cognitive elements of dreaming, the position taken by Harvard dream researcher J. Allan Hobson (2001). Drei's gestures toward inquiry reminded me of Bartholomae's description of a student "trying on the discourse though he doesn't have the knowledge that would make the discourse more than a routine" (1986, p. 5). Drei was trying on a discourse, but this was no mere routine. His tentative steps toward inquiry were motivated by genuine questions, and he was not alone. Notice the similar language of inquiry in Elise Hubbard's (2004a) final paragraph. After some insightful and moving reflection on the content of her dream, she concluded with a general observation: "I find that my dreams tend to confront my fears more than my wild fantasies. I'm not sure why and I'd like to find out." These two final sentences condensed many of my goals for this course. They create a clear relationship between personal experience and intellectual development; they make inquiry a central focus; they suggest how crucial informal writing is to the process of inquiry; and they indicate that the course reading will be both exciting and meaningful for students. Elise Hubbard would find no *definitive* explanations for the fear in her dreams, but she would encounter plausible hypotheses and, even more meaningfully, she *could* develop more comfort with the idea of thinking critically in the absence of definitive truths. I had begun to feel the utopian impulse of the blogger.

This impulse, however, remained threaded with as much confusion, doubt, and fear as my students' dreams. Even the second time around, though I hoped that these new blogs would be as energizing and productive as the first had been, I wasn't sure what to expect. I was teaching a very different course at a very different university, with very different demographics. With some experience behind me, I was primed to spot interesting signs of voice and inquiry as well as potential problems. Mr. Mxylplyx's "dark and mad" (2006), which *began* on a note of inquiry, raised some interesting and difficult questions about voice as it developed:

Ok, this one is really, really strange, and disturbing, because I honestly have no idea where it came from or what it meant, but I am going to submit it because it was extremely resonant, almost cinematic, and perhaps by trying to write about it I will gain some insight into why the heck this insanely distorted vision came to me. . . . This dream, coincidentally, took place on the night of Pope John Paul II's death, but for the life of me I can't see any connection in the dream to it.

<sup>3</sup> Such experimentation requires careful guidance if it is to evolve in productive ways over the course of a semester. For example, it's useful to craft activities that engage students in comparing their blogs to those published by professionals in a field, or to consider the relationship between their blogger voices and their essay voices. It's also useful to ask students to see their blogs as archives from which they might glean ideas, materials, and language for the more formal writing they compose for the course.

What follows is a 4,257-word account of a dream that takes place during a round of intensive military training designed to transform or indoctrinate the soldiers involved, including the dreamer:

I do not look like myself, though I am. I am blonde, blue eyed, and white (which I am not), with very sharp middle American features, and my best friend is with me, also looking like a white-bread middle American soldier, in full dress uniform, but there is no recognition of the change in the dream. We are walking past the gates onto the tarmac of an air force base. It is night, and we are talking about how the experience we are about to begin at this camp, training to become soldiers, is going to change us. . . . There is too much deeply subconscious and disturbing in this dream, to much of the id in it to pin it down to anything so easily and consciously identifiable. I do not believe, however, that the dream is some kind of Freudian disguised wish, or irrational fear of the people or ideals I hold dear in my real life. But it was so graphic, so disturbing, and so cinematic that I have to wonder at it, and even believe that perhaps it is more than simply the random misfiring of ungoverned neurons in my brain. I hope that is all it was, but it was so realistic, such a total immersion of emotion and feeling, that I don't truly know what to think about it.

The account of the dream is notable for its length but also for its intensity of description, its reflective interruptions, its complex and artful syntax, its precision of word choice throughout, and its lack of paragraph breaks. The entry reveals a talented writer who, like the dream itself, was gunning it: pouring out artful language in an attempt at a mimetic representation of his dream, in language that is very difficult to read from start to finish, despite an abundance of intelligent speculation. For all its potential and well-executed language, the entry remained doggedly *writer-based*, as opposed to *reader-based*.<sup>4</sup> The writer seemed to be addressing himself more than an audience. It was about the most skilled example of writer-based prose as I've come across, but I hoped Mr. Mxylplyx would be interested in adapting his stance in ways that would make his often brilliant prose more readable.

As I tried to read Mr. Mxylplyx's entry—interested in the combination of intrigue and frustration it was eliciting from me—I wondered if the medium of the blogs, with their built-in audience, their comment function, and their serial quality, would nudge this writer toward a more readerly expression of his considerable talent. The case of Mr. Mxylplyx is dramatic, perhaps because of his unruly talent, but it raises an important issue relevant for all the student bloggers I've worked with: the blogging medium shapes the development of their writing in powerful ways, foregrounding audience and facilitating the development of voice and inquiry in tandem with each other, but the technology itself is not sufficient if the goal is to help each student develop some expertise on a course topic and develop his or her repertoire of strategies for communicating about that topic. To achieve this—and the achievement will always vary in terms of the success of individual students—the blogs must be integrated into a course whose other elements work in concert to build on the energy, momentum, and rough (though often excitingly original) thinking they inspire. The technology alone is no guarantee of success; working with new technology is often considerably more work than teaching without it, so its pros and cons require careful consideration.

## 2. Common space and commonplaces

Though inviting students to write online—in a common space where they share their work with each other—stimulates them to develop distinctive voices and address their audiences, it carries risks and complications as well. As a genre, blogs have a tendency to fuel contentious debate. In “The Rise of the Blogosphere,” Aaron Barlow (2007) argues that journalistic blogs are a recent development in a tradition of public writing dating at least to the early American press and advocacy journalism in the eighteenth century. Barlow makes the point that the earliest blogs of the 1990s “could provide connectivity for the like-minded” (p. 152) and that blogs remain “determinedly individualistic,” with no leaders or centers shaping the development of the genre. Barlow sees blogging as a return to a form of journalism that had become nearly taboo in the popular press, in which “opinion. . . did not masquerade as objective observation” (p. 159). A group of students (or anybody, really) encouraged to express themselves with the individualism and opinionatedness of the blogger is likely to confront some friction in the pursuit of insight. As Barlow discusses, collective blogs have established rules or guidelines to manage the chaos of heated expression.

<sup>4</sup> The distinction between writer-based and reader-based prose was originally proposed by influential cognitivist compositionist Linda Flower (1979). For an informative account of the concept's influence, see Cheryl Armstrong (1986).

Daily Kos, for example, lists twenty-six rules for diarists, including: “Diarists are strongly encouraged to back up all assertions with facts” and “Deliberately inflammatory titles. . . are prohibited” (qtd. in Barlow, 2007, p. 176). In order to participate in the common space created by Daily Kos, writers must develop voices that work within the constraints of the publication, a practice that, if mimicked in the classroom, can be productive for students working to invent voices suitable for writing in the university. An agile voice can help a student turn friction into productive debate or stimulate collective classroom inquiry that reaches beyond the “commonplace” thinking Bartholomae observes in so much student writing.

Of course, it’s part of a teacher’s job to establish guidelines and manage friction, online and in the classroom. I’ve done this mainly through conversation with students, and thus far that has worked well. That first semester, I devised an activity for the first class meeting that I hoped would emphasize the connections between the online and classroom communities, with the goal of encouraging students to consider the voices they would adopt when addressing the particular audience created by our classroom experiment. I formed students into four groups and gave each group a copy of a dream posted on the blog and a passage from Freud (1899/2003) in which he defined one of the four types of *dream-work* he identified in *The Interpretation of Dreams*—1) condensation and composite figures, 2) displacement, 3) representational resources, and 4) secondary revision. Their task was to explain the concept and make a brief presentation on its manifestation in the dream. Before we got started, we discussed the blogs: their technical specifications, the idea of writing informally and experimentally on a regular basis, and the question of privacy. The student who had chosen the pseudonym Elise Hubbard expressed some reservations about a public dream journal: “When I got your e-mail about the blogs, the first thing I thought was, ‘I didn’t sign up for this.’” She was right. The opportunity to use blogs arose after the publication of the course description, which described private dream journals, not public dream blogs. To compound matters, we had already run across a technical glitch that did away with any pretence of anonymity. The question of writing in public was complicated, but its many complications became factors—or productive constraints—in the development of my students’ voices as dream bloggers.

Fortunately, students in both courses decided collectively that they were not too concerned about privacy, because they could control what they contributed and what they held back. They *were* concerned that they lacked the expertise and authority to comment on each other’s dreams. I agreed with them and suggested (in my teacherly way) that we turn to Freud for a partial solution. Differentiating his method from those he called symbolic or decoding—methods that rely on fixed or universal symbols, Freud writes, “I expect to find that with different people and in different contexts the identical dream-content might well conceal quite a different meaning, So I have to rely on my own dreams, resorting to them as an abundant and convenient fund of material coming from a more-or-less normal person and relating to a variety of occasions in daily life” (1899/2003, p. 83). The passage prompted a discussion of interpretation, the students concluding that while any interpretation is bound to be at best a partial and subjective one, it would be particularly egregious for anyone without training to *psychoanalyze* a person based on her dreams. By asking them to comment on each other’s dreams, I was asking thoughtful commentary rooted in course concepts, not watered-down psychoanalysis—intellectual exchange, not commonplace thinking. The students would have to use their judgment and strike a balance between the public and the private. This balance required the development of a voice that could navigate the many tensions between the personal and intellectual that would arise along the way.

But telling is not teaching, and sometimes showing isn’t enough either. Early on, Elise Hubbard received a comment typical of the ones posted during the first two weeks, which tended to offer personal responses based on vague understandings of course material. Thomas P. Gundarson (2004) posted the following: “Perhaps you have an inherent mistrust of greasy, dirty old fat men. It may also be that you have some anxiety about being here at Princeton, that your place here is contingent upon your pleasing various people. You and your mother seem very close, hence your becoming sisters in the end of the dream. Did you have an unpleasant incident on the Street that would cause you to associate it with danger?” The interpretation was very literal, but that wasn’t my main concern. “The Street,” at Princeton, is the metonymic nickname for Prospect Avenue, where the student eating clubs are located, the site of virtually all binge drinking on campus. An “unpleasant experience” there might range from the condescension of an older student to alcohol poisoning or, most disturbing, sexual harassment or even assault. I’ll return to this shortly. For now, note that the comments above are examples of a student move Bartholomae (1986) sees as typical. In his words, “The student defines as his own that which is a commonplace” (p. 16). His argument hinges on the idea that when students develop past the commonplace and arm themselves with a critical vocabulary for negotiating an academic world of inquiry and citation, the result is a fair amount of inelegant writing (which often seems *voiceless*).

Elise Hubbard's (2004a) "er?" demonstrates, in shorthand, the link between a course blog's potential to become a community of voices motivated by inquiry *and* to cause friction, or at least uncertainty. She presented her dream as a question—albeit a vague one. The title indicated an easy humor and a genuine wish to engage others in finding an interpretation of her dream. However, Thomas P. Gundarson's question about "the Street" troubled me, because it probed a personal and potentially delicate subject without a clearly intellectual motivation (more MySpace than Daily Kos). Even if it was offered in a largely comic tone—a good sign if one goal is establishing community—the question represented the grey areas these blogs might open up as students reflect on their own experiences in the context of course materials, particularly when those experiences involve their dreams, the products of mental activity free from social responsibility or moral restraint.

Some of the writing about new technologies focuses on the energy and quantity of writing in electronic media but under-emphasizes, without demonstrating, how these might serve intellectual or academic goals—championing the common spaces created by such technologies without thinking enough about moving students beyond commonplace thinking. Such writing tends to overlook questions of craft and rhetoric (a criticism that has also been made of expressivist pedagogies) on the one hand and the potential hazards of making student writing public on the other. In "Made Not Only In Words: Composition in a New Key," for example, Kathleen Blake Yancey (2004) compares the new kinds of writing and literacy emerging at our own moment of technological development with the emergence of a reading public in the nineteenth century. Yancey emphasizes that new literacies are emerging without teachers or classrooms:

[L]ike the members of the newly developed reading public, the members of the writing public have learned—in this case, to write, to think together, and to act within these forums—largely without instruction and, more to the point here, largely without our instruction. They need neither self-assessment nor our assessment: they have a rhetorical situation, a purpose, a potentially worldwide audience, a choice of technology and medium—and they write. (2004, p. 302)

Yancey suggests, valiantly, that teachers might harness some of the energy and expertise developing as our students write outside school. But she implies throughout her essay that there is something automatic about the development of literacies in the new media that motivate them to do all this writing. The media she focuses on include text messages, instant messages, email, blogs, and social networking sites. I can't help wondering: But what does this writing look like? What are its rhetorical situations? Who—and how large—are its (seldom worldwide) audiences? And, finally, how might this energy be harnessed and adapted for productive classroom use? The short answer is that integrating new media requires a lot of work and imagination to find ways to adapt a student's expertise with the rhetorical situation of amassing friends on MySpace or trading barbs through text messaging to the environments of classrooms where we want our students to learn something about, say, global politics, quantum mechanics, or the aesthetics of narrative. Thomas P. Gundarson's comment above is an attempt at such adaptation. But with no instruction, no attention to questions of craft and rhetoric that arise with the use of a new writing technology, his observation would remain what Bartholomae called "commonplace thinking." That said, even though I am in complete agreement with Bartholomae about the inadequacy of commonplace thinking, I also believe his pedagogy misses an opportunity to capitalize on the *strengths* in comments like Thomas P. Gundarson's—its humor, for example. If a teacher fosters a quality like this, while asking students to re-examine the assumptions that led to "commonplace" conclusions, the voice of the writer may develop *along with* a critical vocabulary.

### 3. Dream blogs reveal signs of cognition

The development of voice is both rhetorical *and* cognitive. Dreaming, of course, is a unique form of cognition, and writing about dreams requires careful rhetoric, because they are so personal but also because they tend to elude representation. In these courses on dreaming, students tend to become aware of their own cognition in new ways when they use their dreams as primary evidence to reflect on the complexity of course concepts. They tend to engage in metacognition with little prompting. This isn't something I had anticipated consciously, but as that first course developed, student postings and comments began to reflect on their own cognition, incorporating concepts from the course readings. It became common to run across observations like "It seems to me that this dream had a lot of composites in it" (3DayDream, 2004) or "Basically I had the same sort of feeling of being two people at once that I did in my previous dream, and I was thinking about how this related to Freud's ideas of condensation" (Ilp, 2004). That first

semester, as students became involved in the reading and writing for the course, something remarkable happened: They began posting dreams involving details, concepts, or even whole passages from our theoretical reading.<sup>5</sup> For example, on October 14, [Elise Hubbard \(2004c\)](#) posted the second of many dreams about her friend Scott (“Memories”): “I receive an email that is comprised of 5 assorted pictures of Scott and then somehow, I get a hard copy of this email in the form of a brochure. In the dream, I essentially practice free association with every single picture and try to recreate the context of when it was captured.” I was fascinated to see how Elise Hubbard’s dream had adapted Freud’s free association to retrieve a non-existent past for the photographs it had manufactured. The dream seemed to imply that “association” was “invention,” and in this sense I wondered if the dream represented a subliminal critique of Freud’s method.

I was floored the first time students started to dream the course material and, therefore, both eager to see if it would happen the second time around and hesitant that I might impose my unfettered hopes that it would on my unsuspecting students. The accounts in both courses seem to offer concrete representations of crucial components of student learning—internalizing and synthesizing—that are generally difficult for teachers to witness. But if they do offer a glimpse of the elusive cognitive developments that are the nuts and bolts of intellectual development, they do it through the gauzy lens and in the notoriously oblique language of dreaming. What can a teacher learn from a student’s account of a dream involving not just scenarios from a course but the course readings? How might the metacognitive element of these accounts be related to the cognitive and rhetorical development of the voices of these student writers? In what sense might such accounts count as evidence of learning, in terms of both course content and writing? To hazard some answers, I will compare accounts from the two courses, examining them through the lens of dream theory and, to broaden the scope, through a contemporary theory of cognition, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner’s (1995, 2003) theory of “conceptual blending,” which can serve as a representative for many of the sophisticated theories of mind and thought emerging from the highly interdisciplinary field of cognitive science.

As early as September 21, a student with the pseudonym [Alice \(2004\)](#) posted a dream that dramatized Jung’s theory of *compensation*. “I had gone to bed after reading some Jung,” Alice wrote, “and I think I went to sleep thinking about his idea of dreams as a ‘compensating function of the unconscious’ (30), and dreams as a representation of the unconscious, supplementing the conscious psychological state.” Alice reported a dream involving several different story-lines, each of them concerning the same problem and offering “an alternative ‘solution’ or clarification.” When she awoke, she had no memory of the dream narratives, only the process of solving her problem through dreaming. Alice’s compensation dream, delivered in a measured, philosophical, and intimate voice, spurred a great deal of discussion on the blog and in class. Students were intrigued by what appeared to be the skeleton of a dream, all bones and no flesh, a dream about the process of Jungian dreaming.

In the second course, [John A. Dreams \(2006\)](#) posted an account uncanny for its similarity to Alice’s skeleton of a dream, this time on November 19 of the fall semester, titled “A Skeleton of a Dream (Read This!)”:

I was dreaming but I didn’t see anything. I heard my mind saying words out loud, like a chain of thoughts.

Shawn Michaels- Triple H- Stream of Consciousness- Henry James- “The Beast in the Jungle”- vomit!

Whereas the narrative content of her dream eluded Alice upon waking, John A. Dreams reported this first part of his dream as lacking narrative content altogether. It was a purely linguistic dream—what he called a “skeleton”—without any other sensory or narrative content. His second dream seemed to use the skeleton of word association to build a detailed, sensory narrative:

I suddenly woke up with a bad taste in my mouth. I washed it out and went back to bed.

Later I was dreaming again. It was like the same dream I had before, only this time it was actually in dream format. I was walking along Maple street in Asian Minor (that’s my term for Main street Flushing, because “Chinatown” was already taken) with Shawn Michaels and Triple H (professional wrestlers, and damn good ones too). It was dawn and we were going to open our stores for the day. We were talking about Henry James’ “The Beast in the Jungle,” for some reason.

The dream continued with some unremembered dialogue, the lifting of the gate, and the dreamer and his companions parting ways. John A. Dreams, whose voice in this entry and on his blog in general has been consistently playful

<sup>5</sup> See [Kip Strasma \(2002\)](#) for another example of a student dreaming about course material in a course involving digital reading and writing.

(as indicated by his “Read This!”), concluded his account with a series of questions, addressed to his peers and to me:

Have I, in this incident, uncovered the secret to dreaming? We take for granted that dreaming is a “hyper-associative state.” What if, through my unease, I was able to strip off the dream surface and look at the dream skeleton? All I heard was the association of ideas—that’s all. Later it became visualized. Maybe this is how dreaming works. Basically your brain is free-associating ideas and another part of your brain puts them into a sensory scenario.

What do you say guys: have I done it? Am I crazy? or, Have I just primed myself to have this experience somehow?

Where Alice humbly reported being influenced by Jung, probably because she’d fallen asleep reading one of his few essays on dreams, John A. Dreams offered a wryly hubristic question: “Have I, in this incident, uncovered the secret of dreaming?” The wryness here is everything, because it undercuts the hubris. The humbleness recognizes that when it comes to complex intellectual questions, the goal is not to find “the secret,” that there is no single key for solving the many puzzles of dreaming. John A. Dreams’ second question—“Have I just primed myself to have this experience somehow?”—supports this reading. Following the first, more grandiose question, as well as the reference to dreaming as a “hyper-associative state” (the language of two contemporary dream theorists, Ernest L. Hartmann and J. Allan Hobson, whose ideas I’ll discuss shortly), the question is more nuanced, more pointed, and though complex, more answerable. In fact, the writer’s question is a version of the question I’m asking here: Had the course primed students to have these dreams, and if so, what might this reveal about student learning and about a course blog’s potential to stimulate it? John A. Dreams’ account seems to suggest that particular course readings—including Freud, of course, who defines and illustrates the concept of free-association in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899/2003) and Hartmann (2000) and Hobson (2001), both of whom discuss hyper-association (though with very different aims)—are informing that attempt. Had all this reading primed John A. Dreams to have this dream? And, if so, did the dream itself, or at least the writer’s account of it, represent a genuine creative contribution to the dialogue underway in the reading?

The voices with which they deliver these reports—equal parts colloquial and professional—are one key to understanding the process through which they were internalizing and synthesizing course material. When John A. Dreams addressed his readers with the question, “What do you guys say[?]” or Elise Hubbard titled her entry “er?,” they were *mimicking* the conventions of the blogger, rather than those of the academic. But they were also adapting a highly adaptable genre to the task of academic inquiry. In his book *Language and the Internet*, linguist David Crystal (2006) identifies the informal, colloquial quality of blogs as essential to the genre:

As regards grammar, stretches of text defy conventional grammatical analysis in terms of sentences. The discourse expresses a sequence of units of thought, but these do not correspond to the kinds of sentence division we have been taught to associate with ‘elegant’ writing. . . In its unconstrained flow, [much of blog writing] is—I imagine—as close to the way writers talk as it is possible to get. Certainly, the style drives a coach and horses through everything we would be told in the grammatical tradition of the past 250 year about how we should write. (pp. 244–45)

One explanation for blog writing’s defiance of “conventional grammatical atmosphere,” according to Crystal, is a publishing context that is unfiltered or unedited in an unprecedented way: “[P]ersonal blogs do illustrate something that is not found elsewhere today: a variety of writing intended for public consumption which appears exactly as the author wrote it, which is not constrained by other genre conventions, and which privileges linguistic idiosyncrasy. I call it, on analogy with free verse, *free prose*” (2006, p. 246). In my view, blogs are a genre like any other, and therefore they do “constrain,” or at least shape, writers’ use of language in a variety of ways, but it so happens that they tend to shape writing in the direction of unconstrained prose. Though most of my students’ entries are fairly grammatical, they also contain high degrees of colloquial and idiosyncratic language.

Blogs seem to encourage certain kinds of writing—for example, the blending of the colloquial and the professional—and certain kinds of thinking—for example, the integration of various sources and points of view. Because of this, they can yoke the two kinds of cognition apparent in my students’ blogs: the development of voice and the synthesis of course concepts. This does not mean, however, that all bloggers will write or think this way, nor that the medium will not evolve in such a way that it encourages very different kinds of writing and thinking five or ten years from now. Nor does it mean that all students will respond to the medium in similar ways. Any teacher knows

that students come in a wide variety of intellectual shapes and colors (or, in the language of pedagogical theory, that they enter our classrooms with a variety of learning styles). We want them all to assimilate, internalize, and synthesize course material, but the routes through which they do this vary. A student's voice is a strong indicator for how she or he does it. Teachers respond to this intuitively all the time, when they interact with individual students, when they consider the contributions of various student voices to a classroom dynamic, when they offer written responses to student writing. But little attention has been paid to voice as a structure that houses assimilation, internalization, or synthesis, offering clear signs of any given student's learning style.

One reason a course blog seems to stimulate so much internalization and synthesis of course material is that when a student discusses the abstract ideas of a Freud or Jung or a Hobson or Hartmann in such an unconstrained voice, the relationship between the learner and the text is softened, loosened. The boundary between student and assignment becomes a little more porous. When the student writes in a voice s/he understands as contiguous with her identity, the topics under consideration seem, as process or expressionist compositionists like Peter Elbow have been arguing for decades, to become part and parcel with the student's understanding of his identity and its relationship to the course material. But that's not the whole story. Blogs help achieve the goals of constructivists like Bartholomae as well. When students are blogging, the move between colloquial and professional or academic conventions can throw each other into relief. This is a teachable moment: student blogs can help a teacher help students become conscious of how and why they make the writerly choices they do.<sup>6</sup> In addition, when students explore course topics in their vernacular but develop a community motivated by inquiry, their voices will be a hybrid of that vernacular and the discourse emerging from course materials. This is fertile ground for internalization and synthesis of course concepts, because it takes student voices seriously and pushes them to evolve in dialogue with course texts. In a course on dreaming, it's tempting to go a step further and suggest that the informal thinking and writing about dreams draws on the porous cognition of dreaming that has been widely theorized as a key component of learning, memory, and creativity.<sup>7</sup>

If I am to take a leap, I would suggest that such cognition is so efficient because the hyper-association at the heart of John A. Dreams' skeleton dream speeds up a central element of waking cognition necessary for any learning to occur—what Fauconnier and Turner (1995, 2003) call “conceptual blending.”<sup>8</sup> As they explain in the abstract for their article “Conceptual Integration and Formal Expression” (1995), “In blending, structure from two or more input mental spaces is projected to a separate ‘blended’ space, which inherits partial structure from the inputs, and has emergent structure of its own. . . . We show that meaning is not compositional in the usual sense, and that blending operates

<sup>6</sup> This can be done in a variety of ways, inside and outside the classroom. Students might be instructed to print three blog entries and circle all the verbs they use to introduce the words or ideas of other writers and then to write a page on what patterns they see. Or, they might choose three blog entries that seem different in terms of tone and write about how and why. Students might be assigned to comment on each other's voices, pointing out the language their peers use to set a tone or establish a sense of the writer as a person and a thinker. Finally, they might be asked to compare their blog entries to their formal academic writing.

<sup>7</sup> A great deal of research in the last two decades has emphasized the role of dreaming in “memory consolidation” (Stickgold, 2005), learning (Barrett, 1993, 2001), and, in less scientific terms, creative inspiration (Van de Castle, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Fauconnier and Turner's work is part of a growing body of research in cognitive science, neurobiology, and literary studies that draws on the explosion of laboratory research on the brain and offers new ways of understanding reading and writing as mental phenomena. A great deal of this research is relevant in regard to questions at the heart of expressivist-constructivist debates in composition studies. In broader terms, this research offers empirical evidence and models that cast post-structuralist insights in new light, particularly with regard to questions about identity, learning, the composition of knowledge, memory, aesthetics, empathy, and social interaction. The field is vast and highly interdisciplinary, difficult to capture in a footnote, but I will mention a few significant examples. Philosopher of mind/cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett (1991) has proposed a “multiple draft” theory of consciousness and identity; neurobiologist Antonio Damasio (2000) has proposed that narrative is fundamental to cognition and ultimately what he calls “the autobiographical self”; neurobiologists Gerald Edelman and Giulio Tononi (2001) have proposed a theory of “neural darwinism,” which explains thought, and ultimately self, as an ongoing work in progress; aside from his work with Fauconnier, literary critic Mark Turner (1998) has investigated the cognitive mechanisms involved in creating what he calls “the literary mind”; poet James Richardson (2000) and literary critic Elaine Scarry (1999) have proposed that dreaming and reading are analogous cognitive experiences, whereby intellect and imagination are stimulated, in Richardson's terms, through “the postulation of narratives in partial or total sensory isolation from the ‘real world’ (p. 80); literary critic Lisa Zunshine (2006) has adapted autism studies that focus on “theory of mind” (the ability to imagine another's thought process) to explain the capacity of readers to identify with fictional characters; and composition theorist Ann Jurecic (2007) has also drawn on autism research to explore how “neurodiversity” might affect pedagogy in years to come, as we become more familiar with neurological difference and what seems to be a rising number of students in our classrooms with autism-spectrum “disorders.” Of course, a great deal of fiction and creative nonfiction has also responded to the questions and insights emerging from cognitive science and neurobiology, including Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2004) Richard Powers' *The Echo Maker* (2007), Lauren Slater's *Lying* (2001), Steven Johnson's *Mind Wide Open* (2004), and of course, Oliver Sacks' many books on the subject.

to produce understandings of composite forms” (p. 183). Fauconnier and Turner elaborate on what they mean by the statement “meaning is not compositional in the usual sense” in this article and in their book *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and The Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (2003). They argue first that meaning and expression are overlapping but separate mental mechanisms. Meaning is the result of blends: the mind, confronted with a hypothetical scenario in which Margaret Thatcher becomes President of the United States, draws on “mental spaces” that contain relevant information and blends these with new information to produce an “emergent structure,” or new idea. This emergent structure is more than the sum of the mental spaces involved. This suggests that the mental spaces involved in the composition of meaning may be too subtle or too many to count and that their *interactions* are as important as their *contents*. Their conclusion is that *compositionality is not centered in any given mental space*; instead, it is *distributed*. Expression, they imply, involves the creation of linguistic cues that set in motion a similarly de-centered cognitive reconstruction of mental spaces that will allow a listener or reader to construct meaning that will approximate the blend the writer is expressing.<sup>9</sup> What Fauconnier and Turner call “the mind’s hidden complexities,” by which they mean the de-centered and often uncontrolled and unconscious quality of cognition, sheds some light on the elusiveness of voice. If voice is the structure that houses student expression—and therefore the composition of meaning—it makes sense that its origins would be difficult to reconstruct. It even makes sense, given the intellectual history through which human beings have attempted to explain who we are and how we got here (not to mention what here is and how it got here) that the elusiveness of voice would result in what Joseph Harris (1996) calls “quasi-religious” approaches to understanding it. Questions about identity—like questions about dreams—tend to lead pretty quickly to metaphysical hypotheses.

All this is relevant to student blogging for what it may explain and what it cannot explain. Blogs, as Aaron Barlow (2007) points out, are a relatively de-centered and uncontrolled medium. This is one reason they have the capacity to set in motion an active process of drawing on and manipulating the kinds of cognitive blending Fauconnier and Turner see as fundamental to thought. At the same time, the complexity of the Fauconnier-Turner model suggests that it’s never possible to reconstruct the sources of any given blend. To blog, a student must engage in a continuous series of blends, one obvious component of which involves mental spaces for vernacular language and for the modes of expression modeled in course readings and discussions. This stream of blends is nothing if not variable and elusive. It will differ for each student, and it will differ each time a given student sits down before the computer screen. Short of scanning students’ brains while they blog, we can only guess what’s going on in their brains. Writing technologies—from stones to blogs—are not formulas for stimulating particular cognitive processes. The mind of a writer is unpredictable, often unruly, operating through often invisible cognitive processes too complex to be reconstructed. The Fauconnier-Turner model is nonetheless pedagogically useful because it offers a nuanced explanation for what might be happening when Alice and John A. Dreams report on their skeleton dreams. The blogs have provided a formal structure for the making and expression of meaning that is both cognitive and social, and because the class is linked in this enterprise, collectively the blogs create what might be called feedback loop, whereby each student’s blog has the potential to catalyze the cognition of her fellow bloggers and vice versa.

Elbow is content to draw our attention to the tension that confronts writers faced with establishing a voice, between finding language to express “who they really are” and figuring out how, in language, to “construct a self.” But his analysis suggests a connection to Fauconnier and Turner’s distinction between the *composition* and *expression* of meaning (not to mention cognitive and neurobiological theories that address identity and consciousness; see n. 6). Of course, when compositionists discuss *composition*, they mean *expression*, and if they are constructivists like Bartholomae or Harris, they believe the making and expression of meaning are nearly impossible to distinguish. Cognitive science (as opposed to cognitivist composition!), however, focuses mainly on the composition of meaning, not its expression. Nonetheless, whether we’re awake or dreaming, the movies in our brains, as neurobiologist Antonio Damasio (2000) calls them, involve a constant stream (to borrow William James’s metaphor for consciousness) of compositions, some expressed, some not. As the movie unfolds, or the stream streams, we constantly assimilate new meanings, and through the process we continually construct our sense of self. Voice is the expression of that construction, distilled for a moment on a page or screen.

<sup>9</sup> This theory is notable for its explosion of the post-structural dogma that meaning is created through a “play of signifiers” (rather than a simple signifier-signified relationship). While this is consistent with Fauconnier and Turner’s (1995, 2003) theory, it is not the whole story. In their model, meaning and expression are differentiated, rather than collapsed. Their “mental spaces” involve the play of signifiers, but language alone does not compose them.

To demonstrate the classroom application of my leap from Elbow's discussion of voice to Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending, I'll turn to one last comparison of accounts of student dreams involving course materials—MGM's "Impasse" (2004) from the Princeton course and two brief posts by Scott Cheshire from the Queens course, "Dream 12-Lucid Dreaming" (2006) and "The Book of Job, and Sleep Paralysis" (2007). The accounts illustrate a key difference between the two courses: In the Queens course, comprised of honors students in their senior year involved in a high-stakes, two-semester research project, students were much more likely not just to dream our course materials but to follow up on those dreams and make further connections to relevant texts or ideas, either covered in class or discovered through their research. In other words, their "blends" went beyond "emergence" and became part of the course dialogue (and, by extension, the dialogues and debates in contemporary dream theory).

Nonetheless, the "theory dreams" from the Princeton course struck me as remarkable when they started to appear, because of the productive thinking they represented. MGM (2004) posted an account of a dream he had after falling asleep while reading Jung. The dream seems to make a composite, or blend, of Freud's and Jung's ideas. "At one point during my reading," MGM wrote, "one of the paragraphs ended with the word 'impasse.' Seconds after reading this word, I was back in the dream world, but the word 'impasse' had managed to creep into my subconscious." The dream that follows involved the student climbing an icy mountain with his a capella group and confronted with a literal impasse. The dream—aside from offering a pretty accurate metaphor for the more frustrating moments in the inquiry process—belongs to a sub-genre that became surprisingly common on the blogs that first semester: dreams in which words or letters flashed or were suspended in air. During our discussion of Freud's Irma dream, students had responded with strong suspicion to the detail of the chemical formula appearing before him "printed in bold type" (1899/2003, p. 79). Nobody could recall a dream experience like this one, and the students seemed to share a collective intuitive doubt of its likelihood—one not altogether unrelated to their mistrust of Freud as a narrator. Ironically, they had to re-evaluate their suspicion after a number of them reported first-hand experience with a phenomenon they had dismissed as unlikely. We had been discussing Jung's critique of Freud—as well as the personal and professional disputes between the two—and so the irony that MGM's dream had represented Jung's word in Freud's form was striking enough that it received a fair amount of commentary and made its way into class discussion. My students seemed delighted to be proven wrong, because it meant they had learned something, that they were developing an expertise grounded enough in experience to feel concrete.

Although dreams had after a student falls asleep reading for the course were common (perhaps unsurprisingly!), MGM's dream is otherwise idiosyncratic, centered as it is on a single word from the passage he'd been reading before dozing. Scott Cheshire's two accounts, one focused on sleep paralysis and the other on lucid dreaming, are more representative. Every time I've taught a course on either consciousness or dreaming, students have reported experiences with both, either to me personally or to the class as a whole—generally expressing enthusiasm (if sometimes fear as well) for lucid dreaming and terror and isolation verging on existential with regard to sleep paralysis.<sup>10</sup> Scott Cheshire's account (2006) is typical:

After much reading on lucid dreaming—something I've never experienced—I took a morning nap, about 9:00. Before you laugh and say I'm lazy, I get up at 3:30 every morning, so come 8 or 9 I usually doze for fifteen or twenty minutes. I slept and imagined that I was about to take a nap. I then dreamed that I was in fact napping, on the floor for some reason, rather than on the couch where I was. I then began to dream lucidly—but only in the dreamed dream. I was in no way in control of the dream. Rather I was aware only after I awoke that I was dreaming of a dream, in which I had conscious control. Very odd. And makes me oh so much more curious about the whole concept.

Scott Cheshire's "dreamed dream" reveals a form of meta-cognition that Freud called "secondary revision," referring to varying levels of awareness that a dream is in fact a dream, a phenomenon about which there is just starting to be some laboratory research.<sup>11</sup> That meta-cognition, even though it's faint, is important here because it allowed Scott Cheshire to reflect on the connection between his "much reading on lucid dreaming" and the "conscious control" he

<sup>10</sup> There is a great deal of published research on lucid dreaming. See La Berge (1991) and Cheyne (2003) for results of laboratory research; see Conesa-Sevilla (2004) for a cultural history and Ness (1978) for an anthropological study.

<sup>11</sup> Studies in meta-cognition and dreaming include the vast research conducted on the subject of lucid dreaming. More recently, Santa Clara University researchers Kahan et al. (2007) have investigated the relationship between meta-cognition in more ordinary dreams and the metacognition fundamental to waking thought.

experienced in his dream within a dream. That reflection led to a conclusion, delivered in the confidently halting and deliberative voice that had become characteristic of his blog, that reveals the pedagogical power of blogs: “Very odd. And makes me oh so much more curious about the whole concept.”

This same student’s account of sleep paralysis (Scott Cheshire, 2007) goes even further, making an unexpected connection between a terrifying experience and a text not among our course readings:

I seem to have the sleep paralysis thing happening quite a bit, but almost always on the sofa when napping. Just ten minutes ago, I hear (in my sleep) the horrible and inconsiderate people that live above me (in reality) running through the halls and stomping up the steps—in my dream, however, this turns into some kind of evil intruder in the hall, trying to break in. But I cannot get up and suddenly, in my dream, I’m on my couch while someone is attempting to break down the door, but I cannot move. Completely paralysed as I try and awake.

Which reminds me of this great moment in the book of Job of what sounds very much like an incubus:

“Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake, then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up; it stood still, but I could discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence and I heard a voice saying ..” (Job 4: 12–16, King James Version).

Given the context of the story, this cannot be a spirit associated with God, and it is wholly nightmarish.

Another student, Marwan (2008), posted this response: “I’d like to say awesome, but Sleep Paralysis is not a fun thing to experience. Now knowing how it feels Scott, how can you relate it to anything else that you’ve ever experienced? It TOTALLY freaked me out. On a selfish level, I now feel better knowing that I’m not alone about this.” Marwan wrote his major research project about representations of sleep paralysis in art and folklore, and Scott Cheshire wrote his about Biblical dreams (though in the Book of Revelation, not Job). The conversation is discontinuous—as conversations on blogs tend to be. The two students are conducting a dialogue, but each has his eye on his own interests. This is not a recipe for the development of a single line of thinking. Instead, it’s a good forum for instigating conceptual blends, each of which might or might not lead to further research, thought, analysis, or conversation. Whatever internalization or synthesis these dreams about course readings represent, they offer a clear example of a productive correspondence between the ideas explored in a course and the lives of students outside the classroom. The blogs, on their own, don’t fulfill the goals I have for my students. If they are to develop enough expertise about a given topic to learn something new about it for themselves and to communicate about it in polished writing, delivered in a compelling voice and bolstered by convincing evidence, they will need to use their blogs as the raw materials for a process of drafting and revision.<sup>12</sup> But the blogs do a better job of generating and archiving these raw materials and of motivating students to do the hard work involved in composing than any medium I know.

I’ll go out a little further on my limb and suggest that the synthesis of new ideas requires a learner to mimic what Freud calls the “representational resources” of dreaming—in other words, to engage us in periods of internalization without imposing critical thought. Freud makes the point that the dreaming mind works with a different set of resources than the waking mind. Contemporary dream theorists (many of those my students were studying while they authored these blogs) have made Freud’s representational resources, which are a significant but not central component of his theory of dreaming, the main focus of their research. The observation fundamental to Ernest Hartmann’s theory of dreaming is key to understanding how and why the blogs have been such a strong component of the course: “Dreaming allows us to make connections more broadly and more inclusively than when we’re awake, because dreaming avoids the ‘tightly woven’

<sup>12</sup> In her essay, Yancey (2004) emphasizes the pedagogical usefulness of what she calls “re/mediation,” the adaptation of a piece of writing from one media to another. While I might call this simply “adaptation,” I agree with Yancey that it is a very effective method for teaching writing, particularly with regard to advanced questions about revision, polishing, style, and rhetoric. In the Queens College honors seminar, students wrote formal research essays, all of which began in various versions as informal blog entries and were eventually revised again for two different contexts, a course web site and a conference, after they were turned in for a grade. When revising for a new context or audience, students are confronted with questions about craft and rhetoric that often remain unarticulated when they write an essay for a grade. An adaptation assignment is a good opportunity for discussing rationale for the conventions (including voice) that underlie both genres involved. To view the course web site mentioned above, go to <<http://blogs.qc.cuny.edu/blogs/dreams/>>.

or ‘overlearned’ regions of the mind (such as those concerned with reading, writing, and arithmetic)” (2000, p. 3). The loosened cognition of dreams enables the dreamer to make more unexpected—and often outlandish—“connections,” or “blends,” than the waking reader, writer, or mathematician would. A blog allows a writer to do something similar, in part because of the linguistic looseness Crystal observed in the genre, what he called the “free prose” of the blogger (2000, p. 246).

For three decades now, scholars of rhetoric and composition have been arguing that students benefit from low-stakes writing, presumably because, like dreaming, such writing provokes students to “avoid the ‘tightly woven’ or ‘overlearned’ regions of the mind” (Hartmann, 2000, p. 3). When Bartholomae’s students try on discourses and mimic the rhetoric of their professors, peers, and assigned readings, they aren’t likely to be successful if they haven’t engaged in something like Hartmann’s “broader connection making,” which “is especially good at noting similarities and creating metaphor” (p. 4). Such a process requires the kind of “looser” (read: less critical) cognition Hartmann describes. Hartmann elaborates on its importance when he suggests, “this broad making of connections serves a purpose” (2000, p. 4). It enables us to “integrat[e] new material,” partly because many of the cognitive boundaries that would prevent such integration when we’re awake and our attention is constrained and highly focused are absent. In pedagogical terms, the dream blogs serve a purpose analogous to Hartmann’s argument for the purposefulness of dreams. They become a medium for the integration of new ideas. The blogs instigate a process Elbow (2007) describes as central to writing pedagogy: “With practice, people can learn to write prose that ‘has a voice’ or ‘sounds like a person’, and, interestingly, when they do, their words are more effective at *carrying a meaning*” (p. 176).

While I’m already out on a limb, I’ll make one more speculative claim: in some fundamental ways, blogs are to formal essays as dreams are to waking thought. MGM’s (2004) dream, for example, is a metaphor for moving past the apparent impasse of opposition and toward the synthesis necessary for the independent thought central to the essay—which is, after all, a genre born from the verb *to essay*. Of course, a few dreams didn’t mean my students had achieved such synthesis or that the dream blogs had become a clear path to brilliant writing, but the blogs had made tangible a process that, as far as I can tell, is almost always invisible to teachers: a process through which students internalize the lessons of a course sufficiently to produce their own cognitive blends and express the emergent ideas in their own voices. Their dreams, I became convinced, were metonymic representations of these voices and this process.

I really do believe this last statement, but I’m wary of offering too grandiose a vision of the pedagogical possibilities of blogs, or any other technology. Any medium can be used to a variety of ends, and when one becomes quickly institutionalized, as so many electronic media are today, it’s important for members of the institution to integrate them with ethical and intellectual care. The journals I’d been asking my students to keep for years performed many of the same roles as these blogs, but they kept the students’ private lives, including their reservations or fears about the course or each other, private. The blogs, on the other hand, put students in the position of inventing public voices suitable for exploring the perplexity and uncertainty that propels dream research and the inherent subjectivity of studying a phenomenon so undeniably personal and intangible.

If Freud’s pessimistic admonition about the boredom- or disgust-inducing properties of dream narration worried me before I taught a course involving dream blogs, a statement by symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé (roughly contemporary with Freud) now seems a more accurate and fitting description of the result: “One should. . . be astonished that in every big city there doesn’t exist an association of dreamers who happen to be there, an association supporting a journal that recounts current events from the particular perspective of dreams” (2007, p. 23). Mallarmé’s is a vision in which cognition and social interaction are closely aligned. His association of dreamers busy recounting current events through the lens of their dreams surely arises out of his intuitive awareness that the loose cognition of dreams allows for the emergence of cognitive blends unlikely to arise from the tightly attentive cognition of waking writers. You can’t get the news from dreams but, as Mallarmé suggests, examining the news through the lens of dreams can be illuminating. With regard to student learning, the news is pretty good. Blogs made the discovery of this news possible in a very literal sense. Teaching with them helped me articulate and overcome something that had always bothered me about the Bartholomae approach to teaching writing—the emphasis on inquiry at the expense of voice. The nature of my course requires that students experiment with the conventions of several disciplines and genres, both academic and non-academic, and to do this successfully, to control those conventions, to use them to pursue genuine lines of inquiry, they must “invent” not just the university but the evolving register of their own voices within it.

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