The Effects of Coauthoring on Student Writing

Stacey E. Spector

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/ THE EFFECTS OF COAUTHORING ON
STUDENT WRITING /

by

Stacey E. Spector

A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF COAUTHORING ON STUDENT WRITING

Teaching student writing can be a very frustrating yet rewarding experience. Because there are so many ways to approach writing instruction and the writing process, there is often a disconnect between teachers' expectations and students' performances. A plethora of research has been done on teaching the writing process: peer editing, revising, and other areas of writing instruction. However, not much has been explored in terms of how writing can improve if we ask students to write together.

The goal of having students write together, or coauthor, is to allow them the chance to learn from each other and explore the complex writing process together. In this research, I studied a class of 25 ninth graders in a high-achieving high school. The students participated in a coauthoring project where they worked on the entire process from beginning to end: topic generating to final paper.

I focused on three main areas of growth regarding coauthoring: writing as a process, writing as a social experience, and the overall effects of thinking and writing. As a result of coauthoring, students were able to learn more about each of the aforementioned aspects and experienced an overall improvement in their writing. Coauthoring provided students with highly effective tool with which to approach the very complex field of writing.
THE EFFECTS OF COAUTHORING ON STUDENT WRITING

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

by

STACEY E. SPECTOR

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2010
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I. Introduction

At the root of all human interactions is the ability to communicate effectively, especially through writing. While much writing may be considered personal and private, the fact that writing is also a social process cannot be overlooked. We are all familiar with the stereotypical “writer” locked up in a dimly lit room surrounded by old books, worn journals, scribbled notes, and empty coffee mugs. This “writer” has no time to communicate with other people for the sake of devoting all of his energy to writing. Perhaps the dismal image of this struggling writer exists to show us that there is something more to writing. Is it good practice to hide from the world while at the same time trying to write to it? Most writing, especially academic writing, is written for others to read; it is a form of written conversation. In most high school classrooms as students learn to write, they are often asked to sit quietly and compose their thoughts. As countless lectures on the boundaries of intellectual property echo in their heads, students make sure they do not talk to or even look at another student in the room. There is the belief that writing is equivalent to test taking – you never share your answers, or in this case, thoughts. Why, then, if writing is a form of communication, is it so isolated? If we lock ourselves up in our own minds, who will be there to speak back?

The role of conversation and writing is of particular interest to me in the high school classroom. The goal of teaching, especially teaching writing, is to expand our students’ knowledge. From my experiences as a teacher of average level students, much of their writing is analytically underdeveloped. In an interview with high school English teacher Angela Kappler on student writing, she commented, “Overall, if I had to generalize NOT based on level/assignment, I would say most students at the high school
level are NOT good writers” (Survey 9/1/09). Many teachers complain that students “just don’t want to think.” Rather than recognizing and utilizing writing as a tool for thinking, students write essays that resemble a late-night rerun of an earlier class discussion. Their writing, predictable and scripted, does not take on any innovative form. When asked about what she wishes her students could do in their writing, Kappler responded, “Come up with original ideas about a text” (Survey 9/1/09). While I am sure teachers are partially to blame for the less than thought-provoking assignments, there must be another model available that will encourage students to see writing as an empowering tool that gives voice to their ideas, not simply a means to a grade. Perhaps the problem also lies in the voices heard in the room. Even though we have many class discussions and opportunities to share ideas, when students go home to write, they probably hear only the teacher’s voice and therefore, write what they think the teacher wants to read. If the students work collaboratively and hear each other’s voices in addition to the teacher, then perhaps they will be more inclined to produce original thought. Peter Elbow comments on a similar issue in his book “Writing Without Teachers”. He posits, “To improve your writing you don’t need advice about what changes to make; you don’t need theories of what is good and bad writing. You need movies of people’s minds while they read your words…you must write something and try to experience it through their eyes” (77). These “movies” that Elbow mentions are exactly what the students need to not only improve their thinking, but also to encourage them to take serious and personal ownership over their writing.

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1 See Appendix O for a copy of the survey
2 See Appendix O for a copy of the survey
One strategy I use to help students complicate their thinking process while interacting with each other is through a freewriting exercise. As a way of commencing a class discussion on our reading of *The Odyssey*, I asked my ninth grade English class to freewrite on what it means to be a good leader. As I walked around the room, I found some students feverishly writing, filling up page after page. Others wrote a minimal amount but spent great effort rereading each word and sentence, crossing out a phrase here, adding a comma there. Then, there were a few students who only copied down the writing prompt. They sat there staring at the paper, the board, the wall—anywhere but at their actual paper. I asked one student why he wouldn’t write anything; he assured me, “I know what I want to say—I just don’t feel like writing it.” He knew we were going to share the journals and was waiting for the chance to speak his ideas and skip the composing process. As I reflect on my reasons for asking students to freewrite and not simply share by speaking, I am reminded of theorists such as Kenneth Bruffee and Peter Elbow who recognize writing as a form of thinking. Elbow explains, “Think of writing then not as a way to transmit a message but as a way to grow and cook a message. Writing is a way to end up thinking something you couldn’t have started out thinking” (“Without Teachers” 15). I want my students to write their ideas in order to discover new ones. When we discuss the freewrites, the students most eager to share are those who refused to write down their thoughts. More often than not, these students share a very basic and simplistic response. They view the freewrite as an objective question with an obvious answer instead of something that needs time and effort to explore. The problem is, these students find the answers too easily; they lack the critical thinking that makes the actual question as complex as it is. Reassuringly, as we discuss the responses
in class, the issues are complicated and critical thinking does take place. In fact, it is common to see students change their opinions by the end of the class because of issues raised that they never previously considered. The goal then, becomes, how three different types of writers and their processes can work together to promote stronger thinking and writing among all students.

As a teacher and a writer, collaboration is integral to my life. However, this was not always the case. In high school, my typical writing pattern resembled this: my teacher assigned an essay question, I mulled it over for about a day or two, wrote my essay, and earned a good grade. Once I reached college, my process no longer helped me achieve success. Work that once earned me As was now earning me Bs and Cs. Unsure of why my grades were faltering, I began reaching out to my professors for assistance. With their help, I realized that the key to better writing and developed thinking came through conversations about writing. Recognizing that I could not rely on my professors to engage in a dialogue every time I wrote a paper, I began turning to friends and classmates. Armed with a cup of tea and a slice of chocolate cake, my peers and I discussed ideas and shared drafts. As my writing improved, I realized that this was the solution I was looking for. While I am grateful for having eventually benefited from collaboration, I wish I had these invaluable experiences earlier on in my education.

When I became a teacher, I vowed to teach my students the benefits of collaboration early on in their writing careers.

From the very nature of my dialogic classroom to my current writing process, I could not thrive without conversation. I see learning and language as social constructs and while all of our learning is social, it is mostly teacher centered. Writing, also, is too
teacher-centered. When students are asked to write, they must have the freedom to develop their own ideas. The problem arises when students do not have the tools to transcend the obvious or common ideas that have already been discussed in class, which is why they need another strategy for learning how to write. Students are expected to write within the confines of their own minds, so it is not surprising that they are not living up to the expectations of the teacher. Without feedback and questions from other classmates and teachers, how can we expect students to grow? Maybe the answer to expanding thought in writing is for teachers to look towards creating an “academic summit” in the classroom where students can put their minds together to experience an even greater level of learning.

My goal in this project was to discover a way for my students to recognize that writing and knowledge-making are inherently social events. High school English teacher, Dayna Krachtus explains the connections between thinking, speaking, and writing in terms of her personal experiences with students:

I think kids don’t really explain themselves verbally. For example, when you ask them why they don’t like something, they can rarely give a good explanation. The answer is usually, “it was boring.” I think this non-developed thinking translates to their writing. Perhaps it’s because their brains are underdeveloped. But I think when you really push them to explain themselves, they begin to realize that they absolutely do have thoughts. I think it’s the same with writing. They need to be pushed to realize that there is something going on inside their heads. That is why I think group work is extremely productive for getting ideas out. That is why I am a huge proponent of talking about what we’re writing. When I
am in the process of writing a paper, I’ll talk about it to anyone who will listen because it’s in the talking that ideas become developed and pushed and evolved. I try to get students to do this too because I think it works for them. (Survey 9/1/09)³

Krachtus’s comment about the need for students to be pushed further in their thinking is the sentiment held by many English teachers, including me. Krachtus touches upon the idea that student have difficulty explaining themselves and justifying or defending a thought. Perhaps this is because as beginning writers, they do not have the language or the confidence needed to adequately express themselves. Krachtus mentions that when she pushes her students to develop a response, they see that they are capable of forming one. It seems like the students benefit from someone who will act like a sounding board, validating and encouraging thinking. Interestingly, students are able to play these roles for each other, but not for themselves. Collaboration will address all of these concerns: students will act as model thinkers for each other to help teach and inspire language and thought development. Furthermore, by the end of the project, students will hopefully begin to self-edit, self-revise, and self-reflect.

As the main focus of this research, I conducted a coauthoring experience where three to four students work together to produce one piece of writing. My aim here was to help students identify their individual strengths and use these strengths to teach and influence their peers. Ultimately, I wanted to see if the effects of a collaborative knowledge-making process, with specific use of coauthoring, had the ability to improve student writing.

³ See Appendix O for a copy of the survey
II. Literature Review

Collaborative writing is an approach that has the potential to open up pathways for students to think and write with authority. There are two theorists who make all of this work possible. Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin are the relevant theorists whom inform my beliefs and the backbone of their theories relies on the idea that people learn through interactions with others. Bakhtin’s work, in which he claims that any form of writing or speech is conversational, focuses on the dialogic nature of writing; therefore, by creating collaborative experiences for students, I will help them enter into their own dialogues about writing. My hope is for students to be able to learn helpful skills, techniques, and strategies from peer writers while learning how to critically revise their own writing. Similarly, all thinking can be viewed as a form of inner dialogue. Therefore, when these thoughts are transferred to writing, the writing takes the form of conversation, as well. Readers of any text always have some sort of response whether it is verbal or written. This is important for making writing a social act because through peer and teacher interactions, the external feedback will become internalized. Engaging in conversations will influence the students’ thinking, or inner dialogue, as they produce and revise their writing. In his paper presented at the European Conference on Education Research titled “Students Cooperating in Writing: Teaching, Learning, and Research Based on Theories from Vygotsky and Bakhtin,” Torlaug L. Hoel references Vygotsky and explains:

...through communication and intercourse the students together can enlarge their knowledge and construct meaning, for example in solving problems they face in writing...interaction through language becomes a way of taking part in the
dynamics between the individual and surrounding world, of finding a place in a
greater cultural community, whether it is the classroom community or the world
outside the classroom (1-2).

Furthermore, each student will bring different strengths to the group and coauthoring
provides the opportunity for students to teach and learn from each other. Hopefully, they
will acquire new skills and approaches to the writing process that they will use when it
comes time to write independently.

Kenneth Bruffee’s studies on collaborative learning and peer editing also provide
strong support for my research. His research calls for a more student centered experience
where students learn by thinking together. Bruffee equates thinking with conversing,
which is what makes collaboration such a natural and healthy process. In order to
improve thinking, students must talk out their ideas and develop their conversations; after
all, conversations are based on internalized thoughts that lead to re-externalized thoughts,
or writing. In Bruffee’s article, “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of
Mankind’,” he explores the relationship between thinking, speaking, and writing.
Bruffee theorizes, “If thought is internalized public and social talk, then writing of all
kinds is internalized social talk made public and social again. If thought is internalized
conversation, then writing is internalized conversation re-externalized…Writing is a
technologically displaced form of conversation” (641). If we look at writing as
internalized talk that is in its final version, re-externalized, then writing is an inherently
social process and it should not be treated as a monologue. Hoel ties this concept into the
classroom by stating, “Shifting the emphasis from learning as an individual process to
learning as a social process induces another view of model learning” (2). Bruffee’s
theoretical explanation of the connections between speech and writing along with Hoel’s practical application forms the basic ideology behind coauthoring in the classroom.

Understanding the complex relationships between speaking, thinking, and writing is necessary in order to make the classroom an effective collaborative space. Bruffee recalls Michael Oakeshott’s idea that humans have “an ability to participate in unending conversation...the human conversation takes place within us as well as among us, and that conversation as it takes place within us is what we call reflective thought” (Bruffee, “Conversations” 638-639). Here, Bruffee and Oakeshott echo Bakhtin and Vygotsky’s early work on thinking and writing.

Elbow bases his philosophy on similar grounds, yet takes it a step further. In his essay, “The Shifting Relationship between Speech and Writing,” published one year after Bruffee’s piece, Peter Elbow adds to Bruffee’s discussion on our “unending conversations.” Elbow says writing, too is an ongoing dialogue. Throughout his perceptive article, Elbow explores the ways in which speech and writing are very different, but ultimately claims that writing is very much like speech. After making such a seemingly paradoxical statement, Elbow says that we should not get caught up worrying about the similarities and the differences, but should instead learn ways of using both speech and writing – play off of the strengths and weaknesses of both to improve thinking, speaking, and writing. In response to Bruffee, Elbow writes:

For of course the point of speech is often not to be a final or definitive statement, but rather to keep the discourse going and produce more discourse in response – to sustain an ongoing dialogue or discussion. We can easily give writing this quality too by making our course a forum for constant writing-in-response-to-
each-other’s-writing, that is, by stressing the ways in which writing naturally functions as an invitation to future writing or a reply to previous writing – which is how most writing in the world actually occurs. ("Shifting Relationships" 291)

As previously mentioned, one problem that a number of teachers face is the desire for students to share their thoughts without first writing about them. Many students don’t see the need to write out ideas when they are going to share them verbally ten minutes later. If teachers view their freewriting assignments through the lens of Elbow’s context, writing as “ongoing dialogue”, perhaps the students would be more likely to engage in the writing portion of the activity. High school English teacher Angela Kappler expresses her frustrations with the discrepancy between written and oral work in the classroom: “Students are better thinkers out loud than they are on paper. I wish they knew to 1) write down exactly what they say, 2) read their papers out loud. They hear and say things better than they write or think them. I wish I knew why this is” (Survey 9/1/09).4 Kappler’s concerns represent many teachers’ problems. There seems to be a disconnect between the verbal expression and the written expression. Coauthoring is aimed at helping students bridge this gap by putting their thoughts, ideas, and writing in constant conversation so that writing becomes as effective and fluent as speaking. As Johnson and Johnson explain, “Working together toward a shared goal leads to higher achievement than working alone, and it leads to gains in the kinds of thinking teachers like to model for students: high-level reasoning, generation of new ideas, and transfer to knowledge from one situation to another (qtd. in Dale “Co-authoring” 5). Such collaborative experiences may help reinforce the relationship between thinking, writing, and speaking.

4 See Appendix O for a copy of the survey
It becomes evident that conversation is essential to writing. As any teacher knows, even though we ask our students to talk out their ideas, the conversations may lack substance, which, in turn, can limit the thinking and writing produced. Bruffee addresses this concern when he posits, “Limitations that may be imposed, for example, by ethnocentrism, inexperience, personal anxiety, economic interests, and paradigmatic inflexibility can constrain my thinking just as they can constrain conversation. If my talk is narrow, superficial, biased, and confined to clichés, my thinking is likely to be so too” (Bruffee, “Conversations” 639). Bruffee’s statement complicates collaborative thinking and writing because not only do students need to learn how to collaborate, but the talking must be meaningful and complex. If the students fail to complicate the issue, no real thinking will take place. As a result, the writing will be bland and predictable. However, this is precisely why collaborative writing can be useful. In Co-authoring in the Classroom, Helen Dale posits:

Collaborative writing externalizes the divergent voices of text-in-process. This can help to create the productive cognitive conflict that leads to growth in language. Because competing words, ideas, and styles are expressed out loud, students are better able to learn from them. Writing together engages students in a process that enriches language; through verbal interaction we learn language options. (4)

Therefore, by working together and voicing opinions, students are more likely to experience conflict that will force them to accommodate these new experiences, which will ideally expand the limited thinking that may take place.
Some teachers may be concerned that coauthoring is not as effective as a teacher’s direct instruction. If all of the students are new to the subject and the material, then how could they possibly teach each other anything? Or, as Bruffee asks, “Isn’t collaborative learning the blind leading the blind” (“Conversations” 646). Interestingly, the answer lies in how we view knowledge: “Knowledge is the product of human beings in a state of continual negotiation or conversation. Education is not a process of assimilating ‘the truth’ but, as Rorty has put it, a process of learning to ‘take a hand in what is going on’ by joining the ‘conversation of making’” (“Conversations 646-647). Therefore, if knowledge-making is inherently social, and knowledge-making is in conjunction with writing, then writing is social, too. In reference to Vygotsky’s concept on the zone of proximal development, Hoel explains that students can provide the appropriate amount of support for each other:

The support a student will need will vary within these zones. The support a student is capable to give, will also vary: one student may know much about the topic, another may be good at structuring texts etc. According to what field they are experts in, the students will comment on different aspects in a text and thus take on complementary roles. (2)

While direct instruction may be necessary in the beginning of writing instruction, teachers should then allow students the chance to work together to accommodate this new learning.

The best way to reach a conclusion or response to my desire for students to improve thinking and writing was through a type of collaboration, specifically a coauthoring experience. Elbow bridges the gap between knowledge-making and writing.
when he aptly acknowledges, “Speech is usually social and communal, writing solitary. But we can make writing communal too by having people write together and to each other in ways that are worth spelling out in more detail…” (“Shifting Relationships” 290). Lisa Ede, a prominent theorist in the field of collaboration, also takes interest in our “unending conversations”. In her paper, “The Case for Collaboration,” presented at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication, Ede identifies one main goal or challenge for collaborative writing: “seeing the social in the individual and the individual in the social” (7). This becomes the key to successful collaboration and coauthoring. Students must be able to see that their thoughts and ideas are really part of a larger framework. Whatever they write or say is instantly put into conversation with the rest of the class, or the larger dialogic community. Likewise, just because students are asked to collaborate, they should not lose their individuality. It is counterproductive for students to simply agree with each other for the sake of agreeing. If this occurs, they are not finding the “individual in the social”. Hoel discusses how collaboration, or coauthoring, affords students the opportunity to join the larger, social community:

Shifting the emphasis from learning as an individual process to learning as a social process induces another view of model learning. A full understanding of the zone of proximal development must lead to a new evaluation of the role imitation plays in learning (Vygotsky 1978). Through imitation children will internalize the adults’ or more capable peers’ language, actions, values, and thus join their cultural community. On the other hand, they will also contribute to the culture, as the individual is always in dialogue with the world around. (2)
Again, Hoel pointedly makes the connection between educational theory and practical application, which is what coauthoring is all about.

Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford conducted their own coauthoring experience by writing one academic paper together and then reflecting on the experience. In their coauthored reflection essay, “Why Write...Together,” one of the most important lessons they learned was how talking plays an essential role in the collaborative writing process: “If you can imagine the words talk...write...talk...read...talk...write...talk...read... written in a large looping-spiral – that comes closest to a description of the process as we know it. We wish especially to emphasize the frequency and proportion of talking in this process” (152). Ede and Lunsford’s collaborative cycle echoes the work of Bruffee and Elbow. This shows that Bruffee’s and Elbow’s theories do not simply exist in space, but are realistic and can offer a structure and framework in which to use collaboration. While Elbow, in particular, does a nice job of outlining the relationship between speaking and writing, Ede and Lunsford bring it to life: “This talking, in fact, seemed to be a necessary part of co-authoring, one that made our writing more productive and efficient. Nor is this result surprising. Our ‘talks’ after all, gave us the constant benefit of dialectic, the traditional counterpart of rhetoric (“Why Write” 153). If two very talented and well established writers found coauthoring to be beneficial, then the potential for helping students who need the opportunity to constantly talk, write, and read could be profound.

Interestingly, Ede and Lunsford also address the strangeness of coauthoring. They write, “Neither of us was accustomed to having talk serve as the basis for a majority of the revisions we made. When writing alone, writers usually revise while or after reading” (“Why Write” 153). The adaptation Ede and Lunsford had to make while
revising speaks to a larger issue of coauthoring with which I must contend in the classroom. Some students may not be used to talking, or working together on a paper. They may want to take their papers home, proofread them, then hand them in. However, as part of the collaborative writing experience, students learned how to think, write, and revise together. In *Co-authoring in the Classroom*, Dale writes, “Co-authors discussed organization, ideas, mechanics, word choice, even style, and by discussing all of that, they developed a language for talking about writing, a metalanguage. Co-authoring groups create writing communities” (ix). In a similar experience, Ede and Lunsford collaborated from beginning to end: “We discovered and thought through ideas together, talked through almost every section and draft of the papers together, and often wrote drafts by talking and then recording directly” (“Why Write” 151). It is important to note that this is only one way of performing coauthoring. Often times, people will author a section independently and then put the sections together. Sometimes, even, the two authors never meet in person; they may work through e-mail and file attachments. What is important, though, is how the coauthoring experiences helped Ede and Lunsford grow: “Working as co-authors identified the difference in approach for us, and led us to balance the two styles continually against one another. As a result, one often felt we were circling endlessly, spinning our wheels, while the other alternatively felt we were roaring hell-bent towards our conclusion” (“Why Write” 154). Of course, when two people come together to accomplish one goal, there must be a tremendous amount of compromise. This became problematic at times in the high school classroom. However, the joint ownership eventually worked to the students’ benefit as it did for Ede and Lunsford who explain, “We felt, in short, a kind of synergism when we worked together.
This synergism, the sense that by combining our efforts we could in some instances achieve more together than alone, carried us through some difficult times...we each shared a respect for the other's abilities" ("Why Write" 155). This is the type of energy the students in the study felt after a successful collaborative effort.

In Sue Grief's article, "Collaborative Writing" she concludes that overall, students benefit from such an experience and noted growth and improvement in their attitudes and behaviors associated with writing. If the students learn to converse about thinking and writing in a positive and effective way then the experience becomes invaluable. Grief and her researchers noticed "...how effectively the learners worked together and how well they organised themselves. Two teachers noted that working collaboratively helped learners to focus on writing for a longer period" (8). The collaborative experience also impacted the attitudes surrounding writing: "...writing together in this way shifts the emphasis from the weaknesses of the individual to the combined strengths of the group. It encouraged the learners to value each other's knowledge and to learn from one another" (9). Focusing on people's strengths gave the struggling or basic writers the confidence boost they needed to recognize that they too can become excellent writers.

A decent amount of research also exists on the benefits of coauthoring and what teachers must keep in mind when creating a collaborative classroom. In Helen Dale's article, "Collaborative Research on Collaborative Writing," she discusses the benefits of coauthoring in a ninth grade classroom. She notes improvement in three areas: audience awareness, planning, and revising. I took this study a step further and experimented with how these benefits carried over to independent writing. In addition, Harvey Wiener's article, "Collaborative Learning in the Classroom: A Guide to Evaluation," helped me
create assignments that are of a collaborative nature and not simply group work exercises. He warns, "The risk is great, that, without clear guidelines, students will just pat each other on the back, attack each other counterproductively, or fall silent" (57). In response to his own warning, Wiener then outlines the steps that must be taken to open up the collaborative discourse, paying particular attention to the role of the teacher both in creating the assignments and carrying out the collaborative process.

Even though collaboration and coauthoring have many potential benefits for students, they are not without strong criticism. In her article, "Fighting Without Hatred: Hannah Arendt’s Agonistic Rhetoric," Patricia Roberts-Miller explores Arendt’s influential stance that argument is essential to proper thinking. Roberts-Miller writes, "Pitkin summarizes Arendt’s argument: ‘Free citizenship presupposes the ability to fight – openly, seriously, with commitment, and about things that really matter – without fanaticism, without seeking to exterminate one’s opponents’ (266).” (596). In other words, Arendt believes that people need to argue in a constructive way in order to create real and valid opinions. The argument against Arendt and agonistic rhetoric is that arguing has no good purpose:

This aversion to adversarial argument is likely to be simply the reflection of the larger cultural assumptions about agonism: Deborah Tanen’s enormously popular *The Argument Culture* both asserts and assumes that agonistic argument is bad; the phrase “from conflict to community” serves as the title for numerous books, reports, and articles; and a children’s book from the Conflict Resolution Library distinguishes between an argument and a discussion, saying about the former,
“Arguing doesn’t usually change the way another person thinks. Most arguments leave people feeling even angrier than before” (Adams 6). (Roberts-Miller 586). These concerns about arguments, that they make people even angrier and inevitably end up with winners and losers, is a belief that students may hold as well. When facing opposition, whether on the athletic field, debate room, or lunch table, students end up either winning or losing. Students rarely leave an argument feeling enlightened; instead, they usually leave with the same beliefs with which they entered the “fight”. The same issue translates to writing. Roberts-Miller cites Lynch, George, and Cooper as claiming:

In their writings, our students fall easily into one of two camps: for or against. They cling to their original positions as if those were sacred to home, country, and spiritual identity. Too frequently absent from these debates is any real knowledge of the issue at hand as anything more than a pointless argument among people who do not care very much about the outcome – except that it is always better, in the classroom, as in many other arenas, to be on the winning rather than the losing side. (586)

The fear of argument as competition is a relevant claim against collaboration in the classroom. Some students may argue for the sake of arguing and winning a fight. To them, argument is a game with a definite outcome whereas productive intellectual arguments may have no definite outcome; instead both sides may end up with more questions than with which they originally began. On the other hand, nonconfrontational students may find themselves agreeing with ideas that they don’t fully understand or support. Neither of these two models serves any purpose in the classroom.
The fear of blind consensus is just as dangerous as pointless argument: neither helps improve individual thought. Arendt’s theory of agnostic rhetoric developed from her experiences as a German assimilated Jew; she could not comprehend how thousands of everyday citizens could be turned into killing machines during the Holocaust. Her belief was that people were passive bystanders of life, allowing rules and laws to dictate their actions. Roberts-Miller adds:

For Arendt, this was not a peculiarity of the German people, but of the current human and heavily bureaucratic condition of the twentieth-century culture: we do not consciously choose to engage in life’s activities; we drift into them, or we do them out of a desire to conform. Even while we do them, we do not acknowledge an active, willed choice to do them; instead, we attribute our behavior to necessity, and we perceive ourselves as determined – determined by circumstance, by accident, by what “they” tell us to do. (588)

Teaching writing then, is not only about teaching students how to craft grammatically correct sentences, but it plays a much larger role in society. Teaching writing is synonymous with teaching independent thinking so that students do not become passive bystanders who act out of necessity and force, but instead, become active leaders who act based on choice.

An essential aspect of coauthoring that may have been impossible in previous decades is the integration of technology. With students’ overbooked schedules, finding the appropriate tool to foster collaboration both in the classroom and at home is essential. There are many different collaborative sites on the internet such as googledocs, blogspot, and wikispaces. Due to strict school board policies, a wikispace proved to be my choice
for a coauthoring experience due to the flexibility and customizability of privacy settings. On the website, “Using Wikis as Collaborative Writing Tools: Something Wiki This Way Comes –or Not!” Susan Loudermilk Garza and Tommy Hern explore the potential benefits of a wiki site, PmWiki. One of the first observations they make is “In collaborative writing situations, this flexibility allows members of a group to negotiate their shared spaces based on the demands and requirements of the specific project or task”. This flexibility is ideal especially when classes meet only 58 minutes, three to four days a week. The freedom of the wiki allows students the independence to work on their own time and in their own space:

One of the greatest advantages...is that writers are no longer restricted to one-dimensional text-on-the page writing. Students can easily incorporate links to other objects including websites, articles, visual elements, or multimedia presentations. In this way, students can be encouraged to move away from paper documents and towards the kind of writing they are likely to experience in their future workplaces. (Garza & Hern)

Since so many students are becoming accustomed to communicating and gaining knowledge from the computer, then why not use the same tools to benefit them in the classroom. In the article, “Teaching with Wikis: Toward a Networked Pedagogy,” Rebecca Wilson Lundin explains how wikis help build ownership and collaboration:

“Due to their user-editable nature, wikis carry with them notions of authorship that confound composition’s tendency to insist on, and assume, a single author” (438). By shifting the assumptions on authorship, the wiki changes the way students view writing. The wiki also allows the students the opportunity to view writing as more of a process:
Rather, when writing is seen as a living document on a wiki screen that changes, we can come to see writing not as finished documents or drafts that students twiddle and tweak and resist getting involved with but as an open invitation to learning, an invitation to “capture surprise” not on the page: as Murray wrote (1984, p.3), but on the screen, the wikiscreen that students decide how to shape and change. (Garza & Hern)

The wiki helps shape writing as an organic process that develops after much manipulation. Students have control over its growth and feel like they are creating something that is entirely theirs, leading to a more responsible and personal approach to collaborative writing:

One a pure wiki, each reader/writer has the same editing privileges and, thus, the same authority over the text. Moreover, each reader/writers has access to the same current version and the same history of edited versions, overcoming a significant material difficulty that faces productive collaboration outside a wiki environment. Given these features, wikis can challenge the practice of single authorship and help overcome the spatial and temporal hurdles to produce collaborative writing. (Lundin 438)

Because of its inherent ease of use and collaborative nature, the wiki is the ideal tool to utilize for coauthoring or any other type of collaborative writing.

Ultimately, the purpose of the coauthoring experience is for students to become active participants in a meaningful discourse about their writing and not resemble the lonely writer locked away in a room. Elbow, too, warns about the dangers of writing in isolation: “But in truth, people tend to stay stuck in their points of view. They are
prevented from growing until they get out of or move past the structure of meaning that *is* their mind...we use discourse (and writing in particular) not so much to express what we think but rather to develop and transform it” (“Shifting Relationships” 289).

Additionally, I want to expose the students to the reality that writing is a complex process with many different phases and a significant piece of writing is not something that can effectively be completed in a few hours. Overall, coauthoring is intended to give students the opportunity to improve their writing and thinking by using each other as teachers, supporters, and collaborators.
III. Research Methods

Being mainly concerned with the writing of the average high school student, I performed the research in a ninth grade college-preparatory (CP) class. The CP class is a middle tiered class that is more advanced than basic skills but below honors. I performed the research in my colleague Anne Paolucci’s class, which was composed of 25 students between the ages of 14 and 15.

After gaining consent from all of the students and their legal guardians, Paolucci spent one full week discussing effective group behavior and conducted a number of ice-breakers and team building exercises in small groups of three to four students so that everyone who came together from various middle schools could begin bonding. After the initial week of group work activities, the students were introduced to collaborative thinking and coauthoring. They were given handouts explaining the process of coauthoring and participated in discussions on defining collaborative thinking and its potential benefits. The groups then practiced coauthoring a short paragraph in which they discussed their individual strengths and weaknesses.

The research was broken down into three parts: pre-coauthoring, the coauthoring project, and post-coauthoring. The pre-coauthoring paper was an independently written paper on a hero from Greek mythology. The students were not given any requirements as far as process and strategy were concerned. This assignment was used to measure and evaluate what students do for a typical essay. The coauthoring project was about The Trojan War. For this project, students were required to work through the paper step by step: brainstorming, outlining, drafting, revising, and then the final paper. The teacher remained very passive throughout the process, allowing students to take ownership and

\[5\] See Appendix M
responsibility for their actions and learning. Even though each student was graded periodically on the daily work he/she was contributing as an individual, the students received the same grade for the outline, rough draft, and final paper. Each step of the process was worth the same amount as the final paper, which helped stress the importance of the process, not just the product. The third part, the post-coauthoring paper, was about the *Odyssey*. Similar to the first paper, students were not required to complete any sort of process; they were free to make their own choices based on their recent experiences with the coauthoring paper. The goal was to see what, if anything, changed from pre-coauthoring to post-coauthoring. Were students able to generate new and original thoughts that were not previously discussed in class? Were students more confident with their writing? Did they choose to make their writing social and discuss their ideas with another person? I was interested in seeing growth and change in the approach to writing, attitude towards writing, and overall effectiveness of the writing.

As a first step to promote a collaborative atmosphere, the students were placed in groups of three or four, each one assigned a different color as their group name. Throughout the two-month data collection period, the students kept a reflection journal and responded to various surveys. I held personal interviews at the beginning and end of the project. Furthermore, each class period was audiotape recorded so I could get a glimpse of how the students were able to collaborate and coauthor the paper. A wikispace was constructed for each group to post their brainstorming and actual writing, which could be accessed both at home and in school.
IV: Writing as a Process

Perhaps one of the biggest misconceptions about writing is that good writing can be produced quickly in a minimal amount of time. Many people, especially young high school students, conceptualize writing as a one shot deal. The teacher assigns an essay, the students write it a day or two before the due date and hand it in. Often times, the teacher is lucky if the students decide to proofread it. As a teacher, I’ve seen students submit papers with their own names misspelled. Unfortunately, writing is seen as another homework assignment, but worth more points. In reality, writing is anything but a typical assignment. In the article, “A Model for Teaching Writing: Process and Product,” Donovan Walling discusses the misconception that the final paper is more important than the process. He posits, “But the idea that process is the heart of the writing curriculum has been slow in coming, because traditionally the curriculum has focused on the product of writing, which is akin to saying that the final exam in biology, rather than the learning units leading up to the exam, is the biology curriculum” (16). As Walling explains, true writing entails a process: pre-writing, collaboration, discussion, editing, revising, and re-thinking. This process is just as important as the final paper and the students need to realize this. The Purdue OWL (online writing lab), a popular and well-respected resource, offers extensive explanation and instruction on the writing process. The website suggests following a five-step process for writing: prewriting, creating a thesis statement, developing an outline, reverse outlining (similar to a revision), and proofreading, which shows that writing at all levels, not just the college level, requires a process. Anne Paolucci, the classroom teacher, spent the first month of

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6 The Purdue OWL website can be found at the following address: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/1/. The OWL website has its roots in the theory that writing is
school teaching and modeling the writing process for her students. They worked on brainstorming, outlining, drafting, workshopping, and revising; however, the students resisted spending so much time with one piece of writing and Paolucci became skeptical about whether the students actually understood the importance of process writing.

Coauthoring aims at expanding awareness and understanding of the writing process by relying on each other’s strengths and improving their weaknesses at each phase. Writing teacher Dayna Krachtus explained that the one area of writing that causes her students the most trouble is “making it clear that they know what they’re saying... I think what’s in their brain gets fouled up between the brain and the keyboard. Then they don’t do enough revising and peer-editing. More time spent revising and editing would really help, I think” (Survey 9/1/09).7 If three or four students worked together on one piece of writing, constant attention would be on the paper at all times. Revising and peer-editing would take place continually since there are three or four sets of eyes on the writing instead of one. One purpose of coauthoring is to introduce students to the actual complexities involved with writing including the need to embrace a process approach.

Even though coauthoring seems like a panacea in theory, there are some definite challenges with which we must contend. Adopting a new writing approach can be difficult or overwhelming for some students, especially if they believe that their current writing practices work well. Some students may resist being required to work through various writing phases if their current process is more fluid and involves only one or two steps. Also, by asking students to work together and essentially learn from their peers, a

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7 See Appendix O for a copy of the survey
certain level of respect is required. Students need to view their classmates as intelligent peers who have something to offer. If students lack this respect for each other, then they will not take their peers seriously enough to reap all of the potential benefits of coauthoring.

Prior to the start of the coauthoring project, the students filled out surveys in which they answered questions about their thoughts on writing. One question asked, “What does your typical writing process look like? In other words, when you are assigned an essay, tell me about each step of your process from beginning to end. Do you brainstorm? Revise? Have a friend, parent, or teacher give you feedback?” The majority of students wrote that they brainstormed, outlined, revised, and received feedback. In fact, it seemed like the students had a complete and thorough understanding of what it takes to write an effective paper. Ninth grader Nancy commented, “I usually brainstorm, write an outline, three to four rough drafts, revise, and print out a final copy throughout my entire writing process” (Survey 10/12/09).\(^8\) Similarly, her classmate Kathy wrote, “In the beginning [I] brainstorm and write down my ideas and an outline. Next I write each paragraph using that outline. When I am done I re-read whatever I just wrote and fix any mistakes I made” (Survey 10/12/09).\(^9\) Only a handful of student responses explained a much more abbreviated process. Zoe wrote, “I usually just write an essay and try to make it good. The writing process is too much to do” (Survey 10/12/09).\(^10\) Likewise, Jake commented, “I start out by writing the essay because I feel an outline is a waste of time. After I write the essay, I usually have my mom look it over

\(^8\) See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
\(^9\) See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
\(^10\) See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
and give me advice” (Survey 10/12/09). Having taught this same class for five years, I was surprised to read that so many students voluntarily went through the entire writing process for most of their papers. Based on the generic, underdeveloped thinking and writing that I had been receiving from my students, I assumed they were treating their essays as a two-hour take-home test. In fact, other English teachers in my department were under the same impression. Krachtus described the students’ probable writing process for their essays:

1. My paper is due tomorrow – 2. Sit down to write a paper – 3. Play with Facebook – 4. Get some ideas from the internet – 5. Write paper the way they’ve learned how: write thesis statement and introduction, then topic sentences, then fill in from there – 6. (maybe) read what they’ve written and make changes – 7. (probably not) get someone else to read it and make changes. (Survey 9/1/09)

Clearly, there is a discrepancy between teachers’ impressions of what students do and what the students say they are actually doing. Either the students are not being truthful or they don’t fully understand the writing process. Another possibility is that some teachers have low expectations for their students and the students have become accustomed to writing weak papers. Whether the responses were honest or not, the important fact is that students seem to be familiar with the idea that writing has a process. The question then becomes, do the students actually go through all of the steps when they write? If not, why do they skip steps and how can we teach them the value of a process approach to writing? Or, a possible third alternative is that the students go through the steps that they

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11 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
12 See Appendix O for a copy of the survey
don’t find useful but do it just to follow directions. For instance, some students may go through the motions of brainstorming when they have actually found better success by beginning with writing a draft. The goal of coauthoring is to teach the students the benefits of each step, but to then give them the freedom to make their own choices regarding the process and how they approach it.

After the initial surveys but before the coauthoring project, the students were assigned an essay on one of three heroes from Greek mythology: Hercules, Perseus, or Theseus. They were not given any requirements as far as process was concerned and were free to spend as much time on it as they wished. After the essay was handed in, the students responded to the second survey in which they reflected on their hero papers. The first question was, “Your hero essay is due today (Friday). When did you begin working on the paper (including any brainstorming, writing, revising, etc.). Make a timeline if you’d like.” Nancy, the same student who two weeks earlier claimed she goes through about eight steps now had a very different answer: “I started working on my essay yesterday” (Survey 10/30/09). She later added, “I prefer to write whatever comes to my mind in my essays without any models/outlines...Outlines annoy me (Survey 10/30/09). Interestingly, Nancy did not follow any of the pre-writing steps that she claimed she always follows. However, Nancy is not unique in this regard. The majority of students wrote that they too began their papers only a day or two ahead of time allotting most of the time to writing the final draft. Very few students said they brainstormed, edited, revised, or received any sort of feedback because they claimed they did not have enough time. The essay topic was assigned one week before the due date.

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13 See Appendix C for a copy of the survey
14 See Appendix C for a copy of the survey
including one full weekend. Teachers Angela Kappler and Dayna Krachtus commented on the time their students spend with writing. Kappler said, "...I feel like most of them write the paper the night before it's due" (Survey 9/1/09). Similarly, Krachtus claimed, "I really wish they could spend more time with their writing. They do the work of 'writing,' but they don't realize that 'writing' is just as much editing as it is puking ideas and words onto a computer monitor" (Survey 9/1/09). Coauthoring can help address these issues because it allows the students to learn through self-discovery. They will have the opportunity to spend quality time with their writing and perhaps, coauthoring can validate the writing process.

As aforementioned, Paolucci did explain the importance of taking time for each step and often required these steps for writing assignments, but maybe the students never internalized the reasons and the value for doing all of this “extra” work. In an interview with Paolucci, she commented, “Sometimes when you lecture, kids tune things out. If they don’t get it, they don’t ask. They just don’t get it and move forward. You can teach it just so many times before there has to be some interaction between you and a student or a student and other students” (Interview 12/23/09). One goal in assigning the coauthoring project was to allow the students the chance to learn from each other and explore the process together. Yes, each step of the writing process was required, but by allowing the students the opportunity to work together towards one common goal, they may see the merit in breaking down writing into steps. Kappler added, "With college prep students, we definitely brainstorm and outline together. Sometimes I will even give them the thesis statement. These experiences generally increase student confidence and

15 See Appendix O for a copy of the survey
16 See Appendix O for a copy of the survey
17 See Appendix I for a copy of the interview questions
make the turn-in-rate for a paper much higher” (Survey 9/1/09). Therefore, since
teachers have already found some success with writing together, why not expand the
process to an even greater degree by coauthoring an entire paper from beginning to end?

The first step in the coauthoring project was to begin brainstorming for a possible
essay topic. With the use of the wiki, students posted anything they noticed, questioned,
or found interesting in regards to the Trojan War. While all students made some sort of
post, only a few truly understood how to effectively brainstorm useful ideas. For
example, Terry, a boy in the Pink group brainstormed three questions: “1. Why did the
Trojans not see the Gree[k] army at night? 2. Why had the Trojan War take[n] so long?
3. Why do all the great heroes have to die?” If this student were to work alone, he
would probably run into trouble and frustration when trying to formulate a topic from his
brainstorming. Being that he is only a freshman in high school and has had limited
experiences with analyzing textual material, he would not have known that his
brainstorming was not as helpful as it could have been. None of his questions hit on any
of the main issues or themes of the myth. Terry’s group members planned out an
imaginary paper in which they discussed what their essay would look like with Terry’s
topic:

Student A: “Um, so we would just talk about the heroes?”

Student B: “We’d talk about why they have to die.”

Student A: “Well, what do you mean why do they have to die? They are in a war.
Of course they die.”

Student C: “Yeah, and how are you supposed to write five paragraphs explaining

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18 See Appendix O for a copy of the survey
19 The wiki pages were created on the site www.wikispaces.com. Each group had two pages: an idea page
and a writing page. The idea pages were for brainstorming, questioning, outlining, and discussing while
the writing page was a space to collaboratively coauthor the actual paper.
why people die? There’s not enough to talk about.”

Terry, who believed he had a plausible idea, realized that in order for a paper topic to be effective it needs to be broad enough and strong enough to be argued. His idea, writing about why people die, does not play a large enough role in the story of the Trojan War. Besides discussing how one side killed the other, there is nothing left to argue, unless they chose to write about the motives that led to specific characters’ deaths, which Terry nor his group members mentioned. This brief conversation modeled for Terry how to evaluate an idea and think of the bigger picture while brainstorming topics.

Meanwhile, Nancy, another student in that same group posted her brainstorming and revealed one interesting idea: “everyone has at least one weakness (this shows that nobody is perfect)”.

*Student A:* “Everyone has a weakness. I vote that.”

*Student B:* “We should do the weakness topic.”

*Student C:* “Brainstorm on that. So, who has a weakness? Achilles because of his leg...”

*Student A:* “His mom dipped him in the river.”

*Student B:* “Okay, what’s another hero? And Achilles liked his mom so his weakness is that he’s a mama’s boy.”

*Student C:* “No, don’t use that.”

*Student A:* “Paris’ weakness was Helen’s beauty.”

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20 This dialogue was quoted from the audiotapes that were used during group discussions throughout the coauthoring project. Because I was not present in the room during recordings, I could not match the students’ voices with their names so the students are labeled anonymously.

21 Posted on the wiki page

22 This dialogue was quoted from the audiotapes that were used during group discussions throughout the coauthoring project.
As the group members continued brainstorming, they realized that Nancy’s topic was a strong choice and they decided to make it the focus of their paper. As a group, the students came together to envision the paper as a whole. This is a strategy that they discovered together: the need to think through a topic before committing to it. Student C encouraged his group members to brainstorm on the topic to ensure they had enough information to use. From the onset, coauthoring has allowed students to model effective brainstorming and thinking habits for each other.

Interestingly, Terry, who demonstrated weak brainstorming ability, wrote in his writing survey in response to his typical writing process, “I don’t usually write anything down beforehand but when I need something I usually think of it at the time when I need it” (Journal 10/12/09). Perhaps Terry chooses to simply begin writing and ignore the process because it has never truly worked for him. Furthermore, Terry also replied, “I don’t like writing essays because after awhile, I forget what I am writing about and it takes even longer to finish” (Journal 10/12/09). Terry may lose his focus while writing because he has not given himself any concrete direction for his paper. Without an understanding of what he is trying to prove, it is conceivable that he loses track of his thoughts. It seems like Terry would benefit from writing an outline so that he would have something to refer to while writing. Since the students will be writing an outline together, Terry’s peers can effectively model thinking, planning, and organizing, which Terry will benefit from on his next independent writing assignment.

The first major concern with the project was about unequal workloads. Since the teacher remained on the sidelines for the majority of the project, some students feared

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23 See Appendix D for a copy of the journal topic
24 See Appendix D for a copy of the journal topic
that their group members would not contribute enough. Early on in the process, student Ben wrote in his journal, “If one person does not pull their weight, the entire group may be missing a vital part of their essay or work... Other members are able to supply other ideas and arguments to support your planning and such” (Journal 11/2/09).²⁵ Ben acknowledges the very real chance that if students do not complete their share of the work, he will lose out on the full learning experience. Despite their fears, Paolucci maintained a passive role so that the students could work through their issues together. The goal was to allow the students to find motivation within themselves rather than through teacher threats and coercion.

After only a few initial group meetings, Ben, along with many other students in the class, realized the importance of contributing consistently to the group. Constant participation is essential because the entire learning experience is based on making thinking and writing social; if the students are not contributing, then they are defeating the purpose of the project. In reviewing the tape recordings of the group meetings, I noticed that all of the members of each group began taking an active role. During one of the class sessions dedicated to brainstorming a topic for the paper, the Blue group began to discuss the process of writing:

*Student A:* “Can you write a paper on ‘One mistake can lead to another’?”

*Student B:* “I think we need more broad questions.”

*After a brief discussion on the topics and the Trojan War:*

*Student C:* “Next, we’ll make full sentences and get through one paragraph at a time.”

*Student B:* “I’m not good at writing essays, though.”

²⁵ See Appendix D for a copy of the journal topic
Student A: “So should we each write a paragraph?”

Student C: “I think we should all do everything together so we all have the same writing style.”

Here, every member of the group contributes a thought or a question to help guide the group on the proper path. The students are not only beginning to take responsibility for their role in the group, but they are also developing a strong paper topic and overall plan for their paper. They agree to start writing sentences, presumably an outline, and take the paper one paragraph at a time. Student B who claims to be a poor writer may be reassured with Student C’s suggestion that the group do everything together.

Once the groups solidified a topic, they began coauthoring the outline. In reviewing the tapes from the group discussions, I noticed that the students began truly collaborating and learning from each other. The Yellow group commenced their outline writing session by revisiting their topic:

Student A: “We can’t come up with a thesis.”

Student B: “Should we change our topic?”

Student C: “We can’t write an entire essay on Eris.”

Student B: “We’ll do the women’s role in the Trojan War.”

Student D: “Let’s do whose fault it is. The Trojan War.”

Student A: “How did the whole war start?”

After a detailed discussion about solidifying their topic, the students began coauthoring the outline.

Student A: “Do we do major/minor structure for the introduction?”

Student C: “No, only for the body.”

26 This dialogue was quoted from the audiotapes that were used during group discussions throughout the coauthoring project.
Student A: “What’s our thesis for paragraph one?”

Student D: “A thesis is for a whole essay, not one paragraph.”

Student B: “I’m not good at making a thesis.”

Student C: “Who started the Trojan War? That’s our thesis.”

Student A: “You can’t write a question as a thesis.”

Towards the beginning of their discussion, one student realized that they were having a difficult time developing a thesis, so she suggested changing the topic. Even though they were supposed to be writing the outline, the students realized that they needed to revisit their brainstorming, which is exactly what process writing is all about. The group discovered, on its own, that writing is recursive. From this small exchange of questions and ideas, the students learned that writing is not linear, which is another important lesson with process writing. Walling addresses the shape of writing: “Perhaps a better model for thinking about writing is one that is more cyclic than linear, one in which the mental processes used to create a written product are reciprocal and interactive” (8). Instead of having the teacher tell the students that writing is cyclical, the Yellow group discovered it on their own.

The students continued discussing and questioning their thesis and eventually began writing sentences together. As the outline began taking shape, one student suggested that they continue writing down their ideas and they can go back and modify them later. This student modeled effective writing behavior because many times students get so caught up with generating a great idea and expressing it perfectly that they never get anything down on the paper. By showing his group that it is okay to write something

27 This dialogue was quoted from the audiotapes that were used during group discussions throughout the coauthoring project.
down and return to it, this student taught his peers a valuable lesson in not only outlining, but also the need to revisit the work. The last part of the conversation is important because it demonstrates how the students are re-teaching concepts that they are still struggling with, such as the format of a body paragraph and how to write a thesis statement. Without having the opportunity to coauthor the outline, chances are, the students would make the same mistakes each time they wrote a paper. But, by having peers catch each other’s mistake early on and explain the correct way to write something, the students may have a better chance of comprehending and retaining the information. It is also good pedagogical practice for the students who do understand structure to teach those who do not.

The next step in the coauthoring project was to revise the outlines before writing the final paper. Paolucci gave the students extensive feedback on their outlines and using those comments, she told them to improve their original work. The purpose of revising the outline was to add the necessary layer of revision to the process. As some groups had already discovered, revisiting and improving writing is usually the most important part of the writing process. Teachers can tell students to revise their papers, but unless they see the growth and improvement that can occur, they will be reluctant to do so voluntarily. The following discussion was recorded from the Blue group and demonstrates how coauthoring improves the quality of revising. Student A begins by quoting Paolucci’s comments:

Student A: “Avoid second person.”

Student B: “We obviously have to change our topic sentence.”

Student C: “What’s second person?”
Student A: “Like saying ‘you’. We need to change our topic sentence because that’s a plot point.”

Student C: “We need to change everything.”

Student A: “We have to avoid saying ‘you should’.”

Student B: “When a decision is made, think about the consequences before putting them into action.”

Student C: “Rewrite it on top of it and we’ll see if it’s good.”

Student B: “When a decision is made…”

Student D: “The whole essay should be the things that brought up the war.”

Student A: “Now we need to find new quotes. She crossed out the entire thing.”

Student B: “That’s okay guys, we can make it better.”

Student C: “Okay, I got a new quote.”

The students in the Blue group assisted each other in improving the original outline. Not only did they need to revise their word choice and sentence structure, but they found they had to rewrite actual thoughts and ideas. They even had to revisit an earlier step in the process: brainstorming. Walling explains that having to shuffle back and forth between steps is healthy practice:

Yes, it is effective to do prewriting activities and then to begin drafting; but sometimes a writer needs to go back to some prewriting activity during the drafting stage. Editing, to be effective, often requires a return to drafting, maybe even to prewriting. And so on. In real life the process of writing is messy business. The steps simply cannot be neatly boxed and ordered into a product assembly line (17).

28 This dialogue was quoted from the audiotapes that were used during group discussions throughout the coauthoring project.
Through coauthoring, the students’ natural interactions led them to understand the process better than any teacher’s lecture. Discovery is one of the most effective ways to learn and by discovering the need to negotiate back and forth from prewriting to drafting, the students were performing process writing. Bill Broz, Alice Robertson, and Barbara Smith discuss discovery learning in their article, “A Pedagogy of Community and Collaboration: A Beginning.” They write,

...students learn from meaningful, largely active experiences in which they individually interpret the content of their learning...This philosophy of learning does not allow teachers to think of their role in terms of the “transmission of knowledge” or the “banking” metaphor for teaching and learning. We cannot directly transfer our knowledge to students because their acquisition of knowledge will be gradual and developmental and because what students end up knowing is a personal and individual interpretation of the learning experience teachers structure for them. (154-155)

This is probably why Paolucci’s direct instruction lessons on the writing process were not as universally effective as she would have hoped; the students needed to discover it on their own. Since writing is largely interactive, the “transmission of knowledge” teaching approach is not sufficient. The coauthoring experience, however, offers the gradual and developmental method of learning to these young writing students.

By working together, one student’s strengths made up for another’s weaknesses. When Student C didn’t understand the comment about avoiding second person, Student A was able to teach her. Students began rethinking their own misconceptions about writing. In Blue group member Brittney’s journal, she reflected on the experience with
coauthoring the outline: “When coauthoring I faced many challenges, the process was more difficult than what I had expected” (Journal 11/17/09).\(^{29}\) Brittney did not expand on what defied her expectations, but it is worthy to note that she learned the process was not easy. For this student and many others, the misconception that writing an outline was simple proved to be untrue. Nancy wrote, “I thought coauthoring [the outline] was hard” (Journal 11/17/09).\(^{30}\) Classmate Jenn had similar feelings: “My experience with coauthoring the outline was very difficult and stressful” (Journal 1/17/09).\(^{31}\) It is unfortunate that Jenn and some of her peers found the experience stressful, but this stress is essential in learning how to write well and as Hannah Arendt theorized, learning is a stressful experience. If the students were not frustrated or stressed, then they would not be learning. The stress that the students experienced brings awareness to the writing process and all of its complexities.

Despite many distressing journal entries, the experience of coauthoring the outline turned out to be one of the most influential aspects of the entire project. Student Christy was an interesting case study. At the beginning of the project, Christy responded to the question about her typical writing process by stating, “I usually brainstorm ideas. What I first do is just write. When I’m done writing I’ll read over it and see how it looks. From there I start my essay” (Survey 10/12/09).\(^{32}\) For her hero essay, the independent paper before the coauthoring project, Christy wrote, “I started my paper two days ago. I started brainstorming when the project was first announced” (Survey 10/30/09).\(^{33}\) For the coauthoring project, Christy was required to write an outline with her group on which she

\(^{29}\) See Appendix F for a copy of the journal topic  
\(^{30}\) See Appendix F for a copy of the journal topic  
\(^{31}\) See Appendix F for a copy of the journal topic  
\(^{32}\) See Appendix F for a copy of the journal topic  
\(^{33}\) See Appendix C for a copy of the survey
reflected, “I hate[d] my experience with coauthoring the outline” (Journal 11/17/09).\textsuperscript{34} Despite Christy’s negative reaction to the outline, the experience had a positive impact on Christy as a writer. Once the final coauthoring paper was complete, Christy explained in her reflection paper, “I hated outlines. I thought they were a waste of time. This project changed my mind because without the outline we would have not had an essay. Now I think I might work a little harder on my outlines” (Assignment 12/8/09).\textsuperscript{35} Having an opportunity to apply her new knowledge, Christy said that for the independent essay following the coauthoring project, she voluntarily brainstormed, outlined, wrote a rough draft, and final paper.

Other students also claimed that their writing process had changed as a result of the coauthoring experience. Nancy wrote, “I used to write diminutive outlines with little effort put into them. I now write nice and strong outlines, which enhance the final essay. I definitely feel like a stronger writer now and this will influence my future writing assignments. I will follow the same steps and outline format I used in this assignment” (Assignment 12/8/09).\textsuperscript{36} John added, “I think that people should make outlines more often, especially when they are writing a paper” (Assignment 12/8/09).\textsuperscript{37} Even though most students commented that the outline had the most impact on them as writers, other students found the revision process to be useful. Classmate Cary reflected, “For my future essays I think I will make more drafts before I write the final essay. That way I can make mistakes and correct them a few times until I feel the essay is perfect.”

\textsuperscript{34} See Appendix F for a copy of the journal topic
\textsuperscript{35} See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
\textsuperscript{36} See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
\textsuperscript{37} See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
Some students recognized the importance in planning before writing. Jake commented in his post-coauthoring survey, "...I now see a point in the pre-writing process" (Survey 2/8/10). Perhaps the strongest testament to an increased awareness of the writing process lies in the fact that 92% of the students went from a one or two-step process in their first independent hero essay to a four-five step process in their independent, post coauthoring, *Odyssey* paper.

Skeptics may question why this increased awareness of a process approach to writing can be contributed to coauthoring. In an interview with Anne Paolucci, the classroom teacher, she explained:

I think that they are so used to 20-minute assignments in class in groups that they didn’t understand a long-term group assignment and how much effort that would take. I think they are still confused of the energy that it takes to write a paper. They are so used to subpar essays that they crank out in one night that they didn’t understand how much energy a real paper takes. It takes a lot of time and hard work. When I read the reflection papers that’s what I noticed the most. They would say, ‘I didn’t like the assignment because I thought it was a waste of time. It took too much time and I can write a paper so much easier alone.’ But when I graded their individual papers before this [project], they were horrible...I think they all agreed they learned something from the process like using quotes and a lot about the major/minor structure. Again, it’s so funny because their reflection papers would say, ‘I learned this, this, and this, but I think it was a waste of time.

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38 See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
39 See Appendix N for a copy of the survey
40 Major/Minor structure is a way of teaching and approaching a five-paragraph essay. Essentially, major/minor structure is another way of saying that you must present an argument or an idea and support it with evidence or proof.
because I could have done it faster on my own.' The reality of this is that I taught the same thing and they all did very poorly. This paper [on the Trojan War] was leaps and bounds above what they originally submitted. (Interview 12/23/09)\(^{41}\)

In support of Paolucci’s claim of the substantial improvements, the class average grade of the independently written paper was a 70.64% compared with 83.12% on the Trojan War paper. The class, as a whole, experienced a 12.48% increase in grades as a result of coauthoring. Paolucci made the point that she has taught a process approach to writing before, but the students were not able to fully grasp the lesson. She modeled effective brainstorming, outlining, and revising with the first few papers in the beginning of the year but found that the students continued to make the same mistakes with each paper: grammatical errors, weak and vague topic sentences, unsupported claims, and lack of textual evidence. The coauthoring project gave the students another opportunity to approach and learn about the process and discover the value of spending more time and effort with a piece of writing. As Paolucci acknowledged, the students did not appreciate the amount of time the writing took. This is an issue with which many writing teachers face when trying to teach writing. Unfortunately, many students don’t want to spend the extra time with writing, even though they know it will make them better writers. Even after the students experience their own improvement, it is a constant struggle for teachers to motivate their students to spend more time with their writing. One possible response could be to assign more interesting and personally relevant topics because when students are personally invested in the topic on which they are writing, they may be more motivated to produce the better writing.

\(^{41}\) See Appendix I for a copy of interview questions
Even though many students complained about the extensive amount of time they spent on one paper, the pace allowed the students the chance to learn together and from each other. Many students acted like mentors and teachers for each other, which had a positive effect on all students in the group: “Students who have the opportunity to observe writers at work may begin by imitating the modeled methods; but later, as they write more on their own, they will discard, enhance, and adapt those early imitations to fit their own personal style of processing” (Walling 18). This is exactly what happened when the students wrote their independent *Odyssey* papers; they adapted the learned writing process to suite their individual needs. Walling also adds, “Let’s admit that writing is inherently messy business and learn to live with it, to wrestle with it, and to teach students to deal with the messiness” (8). After the collaboration that the students utilized in each step of the process, they walked away with a greater understanding of what writing truly means.
V. Writing is Social

Coauthoring is built upon the idea that all writing and knowledge-making are inherently social. As discussed in the literature review, one way to discover new ideas and develop thinking both verbally and in writing is by putting ideas into conversation. Peter Elbow, a renowned writing theorist posits, "Just as two people, if they let their ideas interact, can produce ideas or points of view that neither could singly have produced, a lone person, if he learns to maximize the interaction among his own ideas or points of view, can produce new ones that didn’t seem available to him" ("Without Teachers" 50). Coauthoring is meant to provide this same experience for students. By being required to write one essay together, peers must interact with each other in a meaningful way that will lead to development in thinking and writing.

Even though most writing is usually a seemingly solitary act, there is almost always an audience involved, someone who will receive and interpret the writing. By coauthoring a paper, students will learn that when they write, whether the act is independent or collaborative, other voices need to be involved. By constantly writing and revising together, the students begin to see each other as the audience, in addition to the teacher. In an article by Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford titled, "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy," they discuss, in great detail, the role of the writer in terms of the audience, both real and fictionalized and what responsibility this has for a writer. Ede and Lunsford quote Fred Pfister and Joanne Petrik: "'students, like all writers, must fictionalize their audience'" ("Audience" 156). One valuable lesson the students in this experiment learned from coauthoring is that when they write, the reader is not always the teacher. In fact, most of
them envisioned each other as the audience and began writing sentences and ideas that would be comprehensible to their group members and not necessarily the teacher. During the final day for writing the paper, the Red group was working on their introduction and discussing what they needed to include. One student in the group reminded everyone about audience. He said, “We have to pretend that the reader doesn’t know what jealousy is so we need to define it”. His peers quickly agreed as they too realized that they are writing for an audience other than themselves. By imagining their peers as readers, students move away from the idea of writing to the teacher. At this early stage of writing, this initial shift in audience allows the students to understand that their reader(s) go beyond one person. Eventually, the students will grasp the concept that their audience can extend well beyond the people in the classroom but for beginning writers, this is a positive start. Peter Elbow discusses how the concept of an audience is essential to writing:

…I write a paper; it’s not very good; I discuss it with someone; after fifteen minutes of back-and-forth I say something in response to a question or argument of his and he says, “But why didn’t you say that? That’s good. That’s clear.” I want to shout, “But I did say that. The whole paper is saying that.” But in truth the whole paper is merely implying or leading up to or circumnavigating that. Until I could see my words and thoughts refracted through his consciousness, I couldn’t say it directly that way. (“Without Teachers” 49)

By publicizing their writing, students will be able to “refract” their words to see if they are expressing their ideas exactly as they intended. Shifting the reader from the teacher

42 This dialogue was quoted from the audiotapes that were used during group discussions throughout the coauthoring project.
or self to other students or other potential readers relieves a lot of the pressures of “trying to get it right” and opens up opportunities to disagree, experiment, and practice. Furthermore, after experiencing the conversational style of writing while coauthoring, students may be encouraged to create their own discourse communities with their future writing activities.

One challenge that a few students faced was the issue of intellectual property and ownership. Even though the majority of students were eager to collaborate on a single essay, some students were hesitant to engage with other people’s ideas. In a survey administered before the coauthoring project, I asked a question about whether the students enjoy working with peers. Keith explained, “…I think it would be good to try, but won’t be a good experience if opinions on the topic differ” (Survey 10/12/09).43 In a similar response, Carl added, “I prefer working alone to reduce conflict with other people’s ideas” (Survey 10/12/09).44 Interestingly, based on a response from the same survey, both students said they value feedback from parents, teachers, and peers even though they seem to want to avoid disagreement. Keith wrote, “Getting feedback helps perfect everything because it gives the writer different points of view” (Survey 10/12/09).45 Carl remarked, “I think feedback on your writing is helpful to improve my writing and you have to know what your readers think about your writing because in the end, it’s your readers who are going to read your writing” (Survey 10/12/09).46 Clearly, there is a discrepancy between the students’ desire for feedback and the unwillingness to collaborate for fear of disagreement.

43 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
44 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
45 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
46 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
In the article, “Moments of Argument: Agonistic Inquiry and Confrontational Cooperation,” authors Dennis A. Lynch, Diana George, Marilyn M. Cooper discuss the role of argument in classrooms. They explain that sometimes collaboration stifles productive arguments:

More recently, though, some rhetoricians have begun to suspect that the whole point of argumentation is being lost in our talk about cooperation and collaboration, that we are losing the value of challenging, opposing, and resisting ‘the interplay of social, cultural and historical forces’ that structure our lives (Bizzel, *Discourse* 284). (63)

This seems to be Keith and Carl’s problem; they both fear disagreement in collaboration. Collaboration carries the connotation that everyone must agree since its premise is built on the idea of working together. However, this is the exact opposite of how collaboration can be beneficial. Lynch, George, and Cooper add to the belief that collaboration does not and should not be all about agreement:

What we are seeking is a way of reconceiving argument that includes both confrontational and cooperative perspectives, a multifaceted process that includes moments of conflict and agonistic positioning as well as moments of understanding and communication. We want to see argument as agonistic inquiry or as confrontational cooperation, a process in which people struggle over interpretations together, deliberate on the nature of the issues that face them, and articulate and rearticulate their positions in history, culture, and circumstance. (63)
Even though some students fear disagreement, it is a necessary part in learning how to think and write and is an inevitable aspect of writing together. Roberts-Miller further explores the role of argument in terms of Arendt:

Furthermore, the competition is not ruthless; it does not imply a willingness to triumph at all costs. Instead, it involves something like having such a passion for ideas and politics that one is willing to take risks. One tries to articulate the best argument, propose the best policy, design the best laws, make the best response. This is a risk in that one might lose; advancing an argument means that one must be open to the criticism others will make of it. This situation is agonistic not because the participants manufacture or seek conflict, but because conflict is a necessary consequence of difference... she envisions one of different people who argue with passion, vehemence, and integrity. (589)

In an ideal classroom, all students will be passionate about every topic. In the real classroom, most students do not display a passion for much of the material. Roberts-Miller claims that conflict is inherent with difference and we need differences to be unique and develop thought, but the average 14 or 15 year old may not understand this concept. Carl and Keith don’t want to work collaboratively because they either lack the passion themselves or are afraid their peers may lack the passion to perform agonistic inquiry instead of plain argument for argument’s sake. If the students resist agonistic inquiry in coauthoring, then perhaps the teacher must adapt the assignment to be something about which the students will be passionate. In the case of my project, the majority of students were not passionate about the Trojan War, but their desire to do well academically inspired them to perform. However, if I assigned something more relevant
to their lives, I wonder how much better the students could have and would have performed. Also, if the students had the opportunity to coauthor later in the year, then maybe they would begin to grasp the idea behind agonistic rhetoric and embrace the approach. I noted that during the majority of the work sessions, there was a lot of quiet time. Considering all groups handed in their work on time, I wonder to what extent the students were working independently and not as a group and the reasons for this. Perhaps working alone was more efficient. Perhaps it prevented frustration caused by differing opinions. Or, perhaps students were not accustomed to being told to work together in this type of setting. Writing assignments are strongly associated with fears of plagiarism and teachers are constantly demanding that their students produce their own work. With coauthoring, students are being asked to put aside everything they’ve learned about intellectual property and instead, are being told to pool their ideas and skills together. This may be very unsettling to some students and therefore, the teacher needs to address basic issues with group work and ownership from the very beginning. As far as this study is concerned, I must note that what may seem like collaboration may really only reflect the work of one or two students per group. Despite possibly disrupting the results and conclusions of the study, a positive lesson may still be learned. The students who remained quiet and passive during the work sessions hopefully learned effective writing skills by observing their peers at work. Based on the improvement of almost all students, as I will discuss later, keeping quiet during coauthoring does not mean no learning took place.
At the onset of the coauthoring project, Paolucci discussed effective group work behavior with her students, focusing on the specific need for disagreement. Peter Elbow explains one way to assist in producing new ideas by:

...encourag[ing] conflicts or contradictions in your thinking. We are usually taught to avoid them; and we cooperate in this teaching because it is confusing or frustrating to hold two conflicting ideas at the same time. It feels like a dead end or a trap but really it is the most fruitful situation to be in. Unless you can get yourself into a contradiction, you may be stuck with no power to have any thoughts other than the ones you are already thinking. (“Shifting Relationships” 50)

At first, the students found it strange that Paolucci encouraged them to disagree throughout each group meeting, but soon realized that without challenging and introducing opposing viewpoints, there will be no growth. Student Brittney noted, “If you disagree on something you could talk about it and then realize why one idea might be better than [an]other” (Journal 10/26/09).47 However, even though the students were encouraged to accept disagreements and arguments, many had difficulty tolerating differing perspectives. Another student, Chris commented, “We would argue and criticize each other and not get too much work done” (Journal 10/26/09).48 This comment, present in many student reflections, journals, and surveys, is unfortunate but still useful. As I noticed in reviewing the recordings taken during group meetings, many students had difficulty arguing because they took the disagreement too personally. Also, for students who view themselves as leaders, relinquishing some control can be unsettling as Nancy

47 See Appendix B for a copy of the journal topic
48 See Appendix B for a copy of the journal topic
explained: "...I can relate to how some of the more powerful gods [in the study of the 12 Olympic gods] feel when they’re powerful and I want to have a major role in writing the paper" (Survey 11/17/09). For students like Nancy, the disagreement became personal and threatening. Throughout most of the group meetings, Nancy prevented other students from sharing thoughts and ideas because she believed that nothing was as good as what she could produce. Even though Nancy probably understood the need for disagreement, she is not mature enough to actually embrace it in her learning at this early stage. However, even though the students did not appreciate the disagreements at the time, it inevitably proved to be a beneficial experience. While working on the revision for their outline, the Pink group experienced disagreement when discussing the characters’ weaknesses:

*Student A:* “I don’t think we should pick Agamemnon.”

*Student B:* “What about Odysseus? Let’s pick him.”

*Student A:* “Odysseus and Agamemnon have about the same weakness.”

*Student C:* “Okay, think of another hero who has a weakness.”

*Student A:* “So, for Achilles, she said write [about] more than his heel.”

*Student B:* “I have no idea.”

*Student C:* “Okay, do either Odysseus, Agamemnon, or Hector – one of those three.”

*Student A:* “Hector doesn’t have a weakness. Who did something bad? Who is the guy who dragged the body?”

*Student C:* “We can say Achilles because he thinks he’s all that.”

*Student B:* “Should we just write the whole thing on Achilles’ weaknesses?”

*Student C:* “No, we shouldn’t do that.”

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49 See Appendix F for a copy of the survey
Student B: “One weakness is his foot, one is his friend that died, one is his chariot.”

Student C: “But that’s not enough for a whole paper. That’s only for one paragraph. I don’t think we should write our whole essay on Achilles.”

Student A: “Oh, I found one. Odysseus’ weakness is his son.”

Student C: “Yeah, but everyone is going to defend his son. We can’t use that.”

Student B: “You’re shutting down all of our ideas. Why don’t you go find one then?”

The students in the Pink group demonstrated that they had trouble revising their outline. They used each other as sounding boards to brainstorm characters and their weaknesses while Student C played the devil’s advocate. She was the only one who recognized potential problems with her group members’ ideas and voiced those concerns rather than remaining silent or complacent. Even though it seems like the rest of the group does not realize it, Student C is helping them improve their thinking and writing by challenging their ideas. Their revised outline was much stronger than their original. Each paragraph had a strong focus that supported the thesis and subsequent support for each main argument. In fact, their revision was so great that they improved their grade from a B to an A.

Unfortunately, even though Student C was an asset to the group, she eventually faced an attack from her peers. Once the other students ran out of ideas, they got frustrated and directed their negative feelings towards Student C, which is when the disagreement shifted from productive to personal. Examples like this explain why students such as Nancy became too personally involved with the writing, rather than keeping it on an academic level. Once students hit a mental block, their solution was to

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50 This dialogue was quoted from the audiotapes that were used during group discussions throughout the coauthoring project.
turn on their peers rather than use the disagreement as fuel and motivation to keep working. The ability to effectively argue and productively disagree is something that will take time, practice, and maturity.

Aside from contending with issues of ownership and disagreement, students overwhelmingly benefited from another social aspect of writing: feedback. In order to measure the students on their pre-existing notions regarding feedback, I asked them detailed questions in the pre-coauthoring survey. When questioned about the helpfulness of feedback, almost every single student in the class had positive comments. Jake wrote, “When I get feedback, I find that it helps me out on my next writing assignment by helping me correct errors I once made” (Survey 10/12/09).51 Sara added, “Yes, feedback is helpful for me. It will improve my writing for my personal best. It’s easier with feedback too. You then know what’s good about your paper” (Survey 10/12/09).52 Similarly, Jenn responded, “Feedback is very important because you need to know what other people think of your writing. Feedback helps my writing because it gives me more ideas” (Survey 10/12/09).53 In almost every survey, students recognized the importance of feedback. To the majority of the students, feedback included some sort of response, either verbal or written, that helped them identify weaknesses in their papers. Based on their enthusiastic responses in favor of feedback, it seems like they have either personally experienced the benefits or have been told about them from past teachers. Since feedback is such a powerful tool for thinking and writing and the students seem to already know this, then why do they not take advantage of this invaluable tool? Also, I must question to what extend the survey responses reflect genuine answers. The students

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51 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
52 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
53 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
were told that Paolucci would not be reading the survey responses, but they knew that another teacher would, so perhaps they were writing to the teacher as audience and simply performing the role of the good student.

Almost every single student wrote how feedback is helpful, yet based on their writing and actual processes, they do not regularly receive feedback before handing in a final paper. The independent essay was on a Greek hero, Hercules, Theseus, or Perseus, and the students were free to use any writing process they wished, which also meant that they did not have to use any process at all and instead brainstormed, planned, wrote, and revised simultaneously. The hero essay took place before the coauthoring began and was designed to see what students do when they are left to make their own choices with writing. In a random sample of ten students, only two voluntarily received feedback on their writing either before or after class or during her free time. Sara Grier, who claimed in the pre-coauthoring survey she enjoyed receiving feedback, now wrote for her hero reflection, “I just didn’t feel the need to ever bring the essay up” (Survey 10/30/09). Sara neglected to expand on why she did not feel the need to ever discuss her essay, but whatever the reason, she chose not to enter into a dialogue about her paper. Likewise, Stephanie reflected, “Nope [I did not receive feedback] because I worked on it [at] 12am. Not many people are awake” (Survey 10/30/09). Stephanie’s responses mirrored what most of the students wrote; they did not have enough time to seek feedback. As discussed in the previous section, since this survey and essay were completed before the coauthoring experience, the students did not yet have a full understanding of the benefits of process writing, including feedback. Because many students, at this point, still

54 See Appendix C for a copy of the survey
55 See Appendix C for a copy of the survey
struggled with their writing, it is not surprising to see that they waited until the last minute to write their papers and did not discuss their ideas or writing with anyone. The discrepancy between what the students said and what they did is quite baffling. Upon direct inquiry, students claim that they find feedback extremely helpful, yet when it comes time to seek feedback, none of them find it. On the surface, students may look like they lack the motivation and desire to do extra work, especially when it’s not required. However, maybe they did not seek feedback because they believe their papers reflected their best efforts and no one’s suggestions could improve anything. In other words, maybe these students reflect the average omniscient teenager who doesn’t believe anyone can help them. Or, perhaps, the students are not invested enough with the topic. If the assignment were to discuss the new provisional driver’s laws and their audience were the state lawmakers, then maybe the students would be more inclined to find feedback to make sure their arguments were as well-written and as focused as possible. An interesting future study would be to analyze what motivates students to do their best work and then attempt to merge students’ interests with the analytical work done in the classroom.

As part of the transition into the coauthoring experience, students practiced coauthoring a short paragraph exploring their strengths and weaknesses as individuals and how those traits may impact the group. This was the student’s first experience with coauthoring. Since they usually have an easier time writing about themselves, the students had the opportunity to take time to not only get to know each other, but to explore coauthoring and its challenges. Furthermore, this exercise showed the students that coauthoring could be used with any type of writing, not just analytical. After the
paragraph was completed, the students wrote a personal journal entry where they discussed their experiences working in their groups. Zoe wrote, “In the future, we will all be better writers because we have discussed writing techniques and construction of a paragraph. Everyone can benefit from group work in some way and my group has benefited greatly” (Journal 11/2/09). From one brief experience, Zoe has already learned that discussing writing and paragraph structure leads to improvement. Ben, a student in another group commented, “Working together can be very useful when brainstorming for ideas. The other members provide their perspective, which I alone [would] have been unable to do. Other members are able to supply other ideas and arguments to support your planning and such” (Journal 11/2/09). Justin had a similar perspective:

The good thing about group work is that writing an essay becomes easier. My group had diverse ideas. When I work alone these things are hard. Group work takes more thinking. In my group, I thought a lot because I wanted our work to be better. When I was stuck on something, each person had something they were good at. (Journal 11/2/09)

Justin demonstrated a strong desire to succeed with his work. Through group work, he believes he can produce a better product than if he worked alone. Besides containing an innate academic motivation, it is possible that Justin finds even greater motivation because other students rely on his efforts. When students work collaboratively, they begin to take on more responsibilities because their choices affect others, not just themselves. Because of this attitude, coauthoring can be a great tool for students who

56 See Appendix D for a copy of the journal question
57 See Appendix D for a copy of the journal question
58 See Appendix D for a copy of the journal question
lack motivation; by making them responsible for other students, they may be more inclined to put forth a greater effort. Overall, about 92% of the students reflected positively on their coauthoring experience. Many enjoyed having other students share the responsibilities of writing along with the opportunity to discuss ideas and struggles. Brittney explores this idea in her journal: “We have the ability to have on-going discussions and expand on our ideas. My group works very efficiently and we always have a lot to say. As thinkers, we can all come up with many ideas. With these ideas we are able to combine everything into one” (Journal 11/2/09). From the onset, coauthoring taught these students that when they make writing social, they learn even more than writing alone.

Some of the most meaningful interactions took place in class during collaborative work sessions. When the groups were working on writing their outlines, the Red group verbalized much of their writing before committing it to paper. One student read a supporting statement out loud and asked, “Okay, now what supports that?” to which the other group members suggested possible answers. By outlining the paper together out loud, the students not only modeled various strategies and techniques, but they also developed their thinking. One student’s idea may spark something even more original from another student. A different student in another group wrote a sentence about a character being perfect. She then asked, “What’s a better word than perfect?” One student said, “divine” and another said “flawless”. Without the help of the two group members, that first student would probably still use her word “perfect” which is not the best word she could have used. In yet another example, when the Red group began writing their final paper, one student suggested that they refer back to their notes on

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59 See Appendix D for a copy of the journal question
writing introduction paragraphs before starting their own. After conducting a brief review, they began writing the paper out loud, reminding each other to keep a sense of audience in mind and the necessity of defining vague terms. In fact, one student voluntarily left the group to refer to the dictionary to help with the definition.

Had these students written this paper alone, they would have missed out on valuable lessons. As a teacher, I know I constantly encourage my students to refer back to their notes before writing and to use dictionaries whenever possible, but I rarely see it happen in the classroom. However, by allowing the students the chance to socialize about their thinking and writing, they become even more motivated to produce better work. The collaborative nature of the assignment allows students the freedom to experiment with process and approach, which is something that lacks in an independent activity. For example, if a student were to write an independent paper about a topic that may or may not be too relevant to the assignment, the student risks earning a poor grade and a feeling of inadequacy. However, by working with peers, students are encouraged to take risks both with their choice of topic and with their writing. If this same student who wants to write about the risky topic and suggests it to his collaborators, he will receive instant feedback and guidance. The risk he takes in a group is much smaller than the risk he takes alone. By being encouraged to take risks with less fear of failure, students will feel freer to get more involved with their learning and aspire to generate thoughtful and original ideas. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of coauthoring can boost a student’s self-esteem. If I know that I am weak with choosing appropriate vocabulary words and my partner excels in this area, then my confidence in writing a
strong paper will increase. I can rely on my partners in areas where I feel weak and ultimately, by working with their strengths, I can improve my weaknesses.

After writing the outline, the students responded to another journal prompt where they reflected on their experiences coauthoring an outline. Cary succinctly summed up her experiences by claiming, “Coauthoring is about editing what you have so far as a team” (Journal 11/17/09). Cary’s comment speaks directly to the social aspect of writing. When students work together on a joint essay or on an individual piece, it is as if they are working together as a team; the feedback they receive will be beneficial towards the common goal. Another student, Amanda learned how to assess her own writing: “My group members were contributing and I learned some mistakes that I had made” (Journal 11/17/09). Amanda’s lesson is significant because coauthoring is not just about working together to complete a task, it’s also a way to shed light on each student’s strengths and weaknesses as emerging writers. Students need to be aware of their personal struggles so that they can target those areas and work towards improving them.

In order to see any more changes in attitude or growth, the students wrote a reflection paper in which they discussed their experiences with the entire coauthoring project as a whole experience. Through these reflection papers, I was able to evaluate the efficacy of the project in terms of allowing students to view writing as a social event.

In order to see any more changes in attitude or growth, the students wrote a reflection paper in which they discussed their experiences with the entire coauthoring project as a whole experience. Through these reflection papers, I was able to evaluate the efficacy of the project in terms of allowing students to view writing as a social act. Many
students commented that even though they had a difficult time staying focused in their groups, they still learned something new from working with their classmates. Jake said, “I feel that the easiest part about writing with peers was gaining ideas. As a group, we never really seemed to run out of ideas because all of us were pretty detailed and vivid with our ideas. I found that the most difficult part about writing with peers was taking all of our ideas and putting them into one great product” (Assignment 12/8/09). Jake’s first interesting point was that with the help of his classmates, he was able to come up with many ideas. Having this experience will hopefully show Jake that writing can be social from the first step of the writing process. Feedback does not have to be limited to the rough draft; it can be used at the very beginning, as well. Jake’s second point about having to put all of the ideas into one essay does perhaps speak to the concept of disagreement and cognitive conflict as an initial struggle that once negotiated, can lead to greater thinking.

Jenn noted additional benefits of the coauthoring project: “I think I would benefit from another coauthoring experience because I would have the chance to expand my knowledge by learning from new group members…Receiving feedback on your writing is very valuable because having an outsider’s opinion can make your paper better. I make adjustments to my paper with the feedback that I receive” (Assignment 12/8/09). For Jenn, feedback seems to have become an essential aspect of her writing. In her earlier survey, Jenn mentioned the idea that writing is often for an audience. She reaffirmed this idea in her survey completed after the final independent paper, post-coauthoring. She wrote, “The coauthoring process has changed my writing process

62 See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
63 See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
because I think of what other people would think about my writing. I also learned to consider other people’s ideas” (Survey 2/8/10). Jenn has recognized that writing is not a solo act and is inherently social.

Even though the majority of students claimed they benefited from coauthoring and would value another coauthoring experience, some students continued to believe that writing independently is more effective. Keith wrote:

My opinion is still that I don’t think coauthoring is as effective as single author writing an essay. However, I think feedback is important in an essay written by a single author because it prevents your mistakes from repeating. Also, it is challenging to fuse your ideas with another’s ideas. For example, if two people have different opinions on a topic, then it will be hard to mesh them together into one good topic. This is one of the most challenging things about coauthoring.

(Assignment 12/8/09)

As previously discussed, some students, like Keith, resisted coauthoring because of the unpleasant cognitive conflict that arose. Keith believes that writing a paper alone is more effective and values editing, but not necessarily constructive feedback. Coauthoring is just one tool aimed at helping improve student thinking and writing. Just like any other pedagogical theory, coauthoring will work for some students and not for others. While Keith may not want to coauthor another paper, he did learn about the benefits of receiving feedback on his paper. Coauthoring is not meant to be a panacea, but instead, offer students a unique experience with many new tools and strategies imbedded within.

Another student’s critique of the experience echoed the issue of intellectual property.

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64 See Appendix N for a copy of the survey
65 See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
She wrote, "Working independently, I feel is more rewarding in the long end process. You can get better advice on your writing too, because it is only yours. If you are in the group the advice could be for other people which can get confusing." (Assignment 12/8/09). This student raises a valid issue of a sense of individual personal success, but I believe that in order for students to achieve success, they need to learn how to succeed. Coauthoring is one vehicle that can help students succeed in future writing tasks.

Even though so many students were able to express what they learned and claimed to want to change the way they approach writing, the true test came when they wrote their independent papers on the *Odyssey* after the coauthoring was completed. The *Odyssey* paper was extremely instrumental to this study because it was the first independent paper the students wrote after the coauthoring project. Similar to the first independent paper on a Greek hero, the students were free to use whatever process they wanted including the option of seeking feedback from either peers, teachers, or parents. Based on the students’ approach to this paper, I would see if coauthoring had any positive effects on them as writers. In another random sample of ten students, nine said that they collaborated on this paper in some way, whether it was during brainstorming or the rough draft phase. Ted Elijah wrote, "Yes, I had collaborated with about 3-4 people on brainstorming ideas for a thesis. We collaborated by writing down a list of intros. It was helpful because I struggled concocting a thesis...The feedback influenced my thinking and writing by the word choice, sentence structure, and quotes from the *Odyssey*."

(Survey 2/8/10). Just like Jenn, Ted has begun to realize that writing involves an audience and if he wants his writing to be effective, he must produce his writing with the

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66 See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
67 See Appendix N for a copy of the survey
help of an audience, or collaborators. Brittney expressed a similar sentiment: “I had someone look over my rough draft for my intro. They gave me some advice on what I am missing in my essay and that really helped me out…because I feel it made my intro stronger. [The coauthoring project] has changed me because my work seemed easier to me. I used tools I learned while coauthoring in my essay” (Survey 2/8/10).68 Ted and Brittney, two students who are representative of the larger class, both wrote that in their hero essays, the pre-coauthoring papers, they did not seek any feedback or collaboration. Almost all of the students had a reason: not enough time, too busy, forgot about the assignment, or some variation of these, but for the Odyssey paper, almost every student found time to talk about their writing. When asked about how the coauthoring affected the writing process and current writing habits, Keith responded, “I look for more feedback now” (Survey 2/8/10).69 Keith’s response is important because he no longer views writing as a passive, solitary act. By looking for more feedback, he actively seeks an audience, or someone to help make his writing a social act.

The coauthoring project allowed students to see writing as a social process. It demystified the belief that writing must be completed alone and that the writer is expected to produce an elegant and well-written essay without anyone’s help. The current trend in education is to move towards more collaborative and cooperative learning due to the benefits of peer interactions. Coauthoring is a type of collaborative learning that teaches students the importance of thinking and writing together.

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68 See Appendix N for a copy of the survey
69 See Appendix N for a copy of the survey
VI. Effects on Student Writing

The main purpose of this research was to see how coauthoring could improve the quality of thinking and writing that students produce in the classroom. Teachers, including me, are tired of constantly teaching the same lessons on writing and making the same criticisms on paper after paper. Either the students resist learning to write better, or our method of teaching writing is insufficient. Paolucci explained her frustrations with teaching writing: “For me, putting the amount of time teaching and getting the kids into doing the project that we did and then having them still submit what I would consider to be not a fantastic paper frustrated me so it made me think ‘what am I doing wrong’” (Interview 12/23/09). This coauthoring project changed all of that. As discussed in the previous chapters, students who rarely spent an extra ten minutes proofreading their papers now spend a series of days working through various processes. Students who were hesitant to discuss their writing now seek out feedback from peers, parents, or teachers. Perhaps the greatest area of growth occurred in the actual thinking and writing that took place as demonstrated within the essays. In order to measure the effect coauthoring had on students, I grouped the feedback into two categories: teacher expectations and student confidence levels.

The most objective measure of growth is evident in comparing the grades from the first independent essay on a Greek hero to the second independent essay on the Odyssey. Out of 25 students, 21 earned a higher grade. Most grades increased by a 10-point margin, raising almost all of the writing scores by one full letter grade. In order to keep the classroom teacher unbiased throughout the grading process, Paolucci did not have access to any of the surveys or reflection papers. Paolucci graded all of the students’

70 See Appendix I for a copy of the interview questions
essays based on a predesigned rubric that stresses structure, organization, development, and support. Student Sara represents the growth that many of the students experienced. Sara increased her writing score by two full grades after partaking in the coauthoring experience. Her first paper, pre-coauthoring earned her a D. She had a strong hook, or opening sentence, but her introduction had no real purpose. Rather than setting up her paper and including only relevant information, she retold the plot of the Theseus myth. Her thesis was vague and indistinguishable from the rest of her paragraph. Her assumed thesis was, “In the beginning, Theseus had no idea who his dad was, so he was going on a quest. His grandfather told him to take a ship to Athens. Theseus thought that was too safe a route. He then took a more dangerous course.” Yes, all of Sara’s information is correct, but she does not present a clear focus or argument for her paper. The assignment required students to prove why their character is considered a hero based on the qualities of an archetypal hero. Unfortunately, her topic sentences follow the same summary-driven path. Her three topic sentences were, “On his way to Athens, Theseus ran into a few bad people,” “The weapon that Theseus mainly used was a sword,” and “Throughout his adventures, I would say the biggest achievement that Theseus ever made was when he killed the Minotaur”. The first two topic sentences are basic plot points while the third is an irrelevant first-person judgment of the character. None of the topic sentences relate to each other or any larger theme or issue present in the myth. Within each paragraph, Sara simply retold the story without the use of quotes or specific supporting examples. Based on her writing sample, it is clear that Sara needed assistance with the basic structure of an essay; she needs help with developing an idea and providing effective support.

71 See Appendix P for a copy of the rubric
Sara’s second independent essay, post-coauthoring showed great growth. This assignment required students to show how the events that occur in the *Odyssey* are relevant to modern-day struggles. In this paper, her thesis is clearly identifiable and presents an idea that must be supported: “It is perceptible that Odysseus does in fact have experiences that normal people have”. Each topic sentence then goes on to support and prove her thesis: “Throughout the epic poem, Odysseus has a few obstacles where he judges a book by its cover too early,” “Another way Odysseus’ problems can relate to mankind is when you have to pick between the lesser of two evils,” and “One other way that Odysseus can relate to mankind is when an individual is away from their family and loved ones for a long amount of time”. Besides the obvious grammatical and stylistic errors, Sara demonstrates a much stronger understanding of how to write an essay. Unfortunately, she does not include any direct quotes, but her supporting examples are specific details from the story that support each topic sentence. This paper, well-organized, well-written, and well-supported, earned Sara a B, which is a two grade improvement from her initial paper.

Sara’s improvement is a direct result of the coauthoring project. Of course, simply producing more writing will have a positive influence on anyone, but in reviewing Sara’s feedback on her experiences, she credits coauthoring as being the reason for her growth. In her pre-coauthoring survey, question number nine was, “If you were asked to work with other students on your writing, what would you hope to gain from the experience?” Sara responded, “I would hope to gain new ways to form an essay. I also would want to find a better way to have paragraph structure” (Survey 10/12/09). After writing the Trojan War paper with her peers, her paragraph structure greatly improved, as

72 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
evidenced by her *Odyssey* paper. Furthermore, in Sara’s post-coauthoring survey, she explained how the coauthoring project changed her as a writer: “It [made] me think of other ways to say statements” (Survey 2/8/10). Sara does not expand on what she means by this, but based on the improved clarity of her writing, it seems like she was able to imagine an audience to whom she was writing. The most telling sign of the success of the coauthoring experience was when Sara discussed her confidence with writing throughout the year: “At first it decreased because I was not interested...It has recently increased a lot though” (Survey 2/8/10). Again, Sara does not expand on her feelings, but she does say her confidence has increased a significant amount. In analyzing Sara’s growth, the coauthoring project showed her how to develop her thinking and then translate her ideas into writing.

Ben is another student who experienced growth in thinking and writing. Unlike Sara, Ben began with a stronger foundation in analytical writing. On his pre-coauthoring hero paper he earned a B. His introduction was clearly written, but extremely underdeveloped. With only three sentences, he did not provide sufficient background information on his myth, hero, or topic. Instead, he jumped straight to his main argument. Ben’s thesis statement was clear, concise, and focused: “Hercules outshines the other heroes in every aspect.” While his thesis could be developed a bit more to help direct his body paragraphs, the reader knows that he will be proving why Hercules is considered better than every other hero. His three topic statements are also clear and concise: “Of all the Greek heroes, Hercules is the best of all,” “Any hero should have superhuman powers,” and “Heroes always prevail against the overwhelming odds.” Even

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73 See Appendix N for a copy of the survey
74 See Appendix N for a copy of the survey
though all three are acceptable thesis statements especially at Ben’s stage of development, they could be better. The first topic sentence is repetitive of his thesis, the second one seems to be too opinionated, but the third sentence is effective because it is less judgmental than the second and has plenty of textual evidence for support. Ben, unlike Sara, showed evidence that he understood how to structure a paragraph; he included supporting quotes and decent supporting statements for his ideas. However, before Ben included the actual support, he often slipped into too much summary of the myth rather than getting straight to his point. On a few occasions, Ben’s summary led him off-topic. For example, in his second body paragraph when he was writing about heroes having superhuman powers, he ended up talking about how the Titan Atlas was very strong. Overall, Ben’s B paper demonstrated a decent understanding of expository writing but needed some fine-tuning in a number of areas.

Interestingly, Ben had an accurate assessment of his writing abilities as demonstrated in his surveys. In the first survey, pre-collaboration questions, he responded to the inquiry, “Do you consider yourself a good writer? Why or why not?” with the following: “No. I have good ideas, arguments, and statements, but I feel that writing them down is harder” (Survey 10/12/09). Based on his first essay, Ben is correct. His ideas are good, but he has trouble organizing them effectively without slipping into too much summary. In the survey conducted about the hero essay, one question asked, “If you could revise one section of your paper before handing it in, what would it be and why?” Ben’s response was, “The intro. The intro seems weak and short” (Survey 10/30/09). Even though there are definitely more areas where Ben can

75 See Appendix A for a copy of the survey
76 See Appendix C for a copy of the survey
improve, the fact that he recognized he had a weak introduction shows that Ben has a strong self-awareness as a writer. This would benefit Ben as he experienced the coauthoring project because he knew where he needed improvement.

Ben’s final independent paper, post-coauthoring was one of the strongest papers written in the class. This A paper showed tremendous growth from his earlier hero paper. Two of Ben’s weakest areas, the introduction and summary-driven supports were significantly improved in the Odyssey paper. His introduction, which is three times longer than the introduction in his Hercules paper, demonstrates a much stronger understanding of effective writing. He gives much more background information on the topic of the epic and focuses this information around the actual assignment – how the Odyssey represents the same struggles that the modern day mankind faces. Also, his thesis is much clearer and more focused than in his previous paper: “Odysseus is similar to man in that he faces many problems, has one goal in sight, and that he is helped out by others.” Each of his three body paragraphs focus on one of the main ideas listed in his thesis. Ben’s second major improvement is with his body paragraphs. He avoids summarizing and gets straight to his point and offers excellent support. In each paragraph, he presents his idea on how Odysseus and man face similar struggles and then he gives a supporting example from each. Overall, Ben’s second independent paper showed immense growth from his first.

Ben is an interesting case study because unlike Sara who openly attributed her success to the coauthoring experience, Ben did not. In his reflection survey on the Odyssey paper Ben commented that the coauthoring process did not change his overall writing process in any way. He also said that his confidence as a writer did not change at
all. The difficulty is, if Ben claims that the coauthoring did not change him, then how did his writing show significant improvement in only a few months? In his coauthoring reflection paper, Ben wrote, “Yes, working together easily produced more ideas, and different points of view from the different group members…The cons of coauthoring an essay like this were that we were not able to agree on certain topics and ideas. Also, we were occasionally sidetracked, and were no[t] able to get back on track very easily” (Assignment 12/8/09). Like most of the other students, Ben recognized that collaboration helps develop thinking but the downfall is that sometimes working with other people can become frustrating, especially if they argue and lose focus. I think in order to help students recognize the benefit in agonistic rhetoric, teachers need to teach the difference between arguing as a pedagogical tool and arguing to win a battle. When most of the students complained about too much arguing in their groups, they were unable to explain which type of arguing was taking place – productive or unproductive. If the complaints were about unproductive arguing then the teacher would have to address issues of classroom management. If the complaints were about productive arguing, then the students would benefit from a personal experience about how arguing can actually increase thinking. Ben also commented, “The most difficult part of the writing process was creating a thesis. Our majors and minors were fine, but the main problem was that our thesis rarely matched all of our minors and majors. So we were constantly changing our theses over and over again to match the supporting arguments” (Assignment 12/8/09). Having to revise a paper to make sure everything supports the thesis is a very important lesson that young writers need to learn. In many of my

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77 See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
78 See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
freshman papers, I noticed that students drift off-topic because they forget to constantly refer back to their thesis. In fact, by the time a student gets to the last body paragraph, he may be writing about an entirely different topic than he stated in his thesis. Learning this lesson during the coauthoring project had a great impact on Ben, whether he realized it or not. As mentioned earlier, his first hero essay drifted off topic while his *Odyssey* paper had a much stronger focus. Once becoming aware of the necessity of unity in and among paragraphs, he was able to transfer this skill to his own writing.

Ben further discredits coauthoring as having a positive effect on his writing. He claims, "This experience in coauthoring has barely changed my standard style of writing...Whether this will influence my writing in the future is debatable" (Assignment 12/8/09). It is difficult to account for why Ben does not believe that the coauthoring experience played a role in helping him improve, but the fact that Ben did improve, is unarguable. Unfortunately, even though he noted improvement in his own writing, Ben did not elaborate in his surveys or reflection paper about how, if coauthoring is not the reason, he improved with his writing. It is very plausible that Ben had a difficult time getting along with his group members and as a whole, disliked the entire group work experience. Sometimes having difficult people in your group will leave a negative feeling with the overall experience, but coauthoring definitely had positive effects as well. In reviewing Ben’s journal entries throughout the project, I noted that he started off with positive experiences and ended up very frustrated towards the end. In a journal entry following a successful work period on the outline, Ben reflected, “Our group was able to work together very well. We were able to put forth our own ideas and discuss what we should have done. We are an okay group that is collaborative and we are able to

79 See Appendix G for a copy of the assignment
form our own ideas" (Journal 11/10/09). While the group was focused and producing good work, Ben reflected positively on his experiences. However, towards the end of the project, Ben had a much different view of his group: “I learned that working in a group, most of the time is not a good idea. I prefer working alone. I know that if I am working alone, I will not forget to do my work, and not lose a lot of points because of it” (Journal 11/17/09). This comment came after Ben’s group members neglected to follow-up with their assigned section of the outline revision. Because of this, Ben lost points on his grade. Unfortunately, experiences like this tend to greater influence a student than the positive ones. As Paolucci justifies, “...I saw a lot of frustration from the kids who were more motivated but I think that the frustration was understandable to those kids who didn’t do what they were supposed to” (Interview 12/23/09). Since the most recent experiences Ben had with his group were negative – irresponsible group members, many off-topic discussions, etc., Ben was left with a negative overall impression of coauthoring. Looking beyond these reflections and focusing on Ben’s actual writing, Ben experienced significant improvement in paragraph unity and introduction paragraphs, which is exactly what he claimed he learned after the coauthoring project.

Ben and Sara represent the students who benefited from coauthoring. As mentioned earlier, only four students did not earn higher grades on the final independent paper and that was due to late submissions, which dropped their overall grade. Had those students submitted their papers on time, they would have earned higher grades. Of those students who submitted their papers on time, all of them demonstrated an increased

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80 See Appendix E for a copy of the journal entry
81 See Appendix F for copy of the journal entry
82 See Appendix I for a copy of the interview questions
ability to produce an effective analytical essay. Paolucci discussed this improvement in an interview at the end of the project:

Oh yeah, [their writing] is much better. I mean there are still things they don't get, but now they understand how to develop a paragraph even if there are still some errors in logic. It has to do with the fact that they were forced to understand. They were forced not to just walk away from it because it was too difficult. They were forced to understand what exactly they were doing.

(Interview 12/23/10) 83

Paolucci's point about being forced to understand sounds very harsh, but she makes a good point. Many students, especially those who already struggle with writing, will simply walk away from a challenging assignment such as an essay. However, when coauthoring, you can't just walk away. You are forced to face the writing and figure out a way to work through the struggles because other people are relying on you. The pressure and support from peers kept most of the students personally invested with the project while the coauthoring element allowed students the opportunity to teach others what they know. The support system is built directly into coauthoring; the students help each other overcome the challenges that they would be too reluctant to face on their own, which reduces the risk of “doing it wrong” that often immobilized students when it comes to writing. In this way, coauthoring encourages students to improve their writing in ways that traditional writing instruction cannot do.

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83 See Appendix I for a copy of the interview questions
VII. Conclusion

Coauthoring in the high school classroom demystified the writing process while offering new writing strategies and techniques to beginning writers. These students enter high school as fluent writers, but they are new to effectively transcribing their thoughts on paper, especially when it comes to analytical writing. Students learned that writing is messy and takes a great amount of time and energy to do well. Students who used to write papers in one night without ever brainstorming, prewriting, outlining, or revising learned that they can produce stronger writing by following a process approach. In an interview with a few students at the end of the entire project, one student said, “Overall it [coauthoring] improves the way you write and how you go about it. I did not like outline[s] before this but I realized it really does help.” The teacher can lecture all day on the importance of outlines but until a student discovers the purpose on his own, the lectures remain meaningless. Coauthoring encourages discovery of the tools and strategies that work for each student. The goal is not to make students conform to one type of writing, but instead to make them aware of the complexities and offer them ways of negotiating through the process.

Coauthoring also taught students that effective writing is made social. Every student I interviewed claimed that they are more likely to seek feedback as a result of the coauthoring project. One student said, “I always ask my mom to read it [the essay] but she doesn’t give the same feedback Mrs. Paolucci did or the group would.” It sounds like this student already sought feedback, but now she realizes that it may be more beneficial to ask the teacher or a classmate and receive knowledgeable feedback. Likewise, another student added, “I’ve asked my parents but that’s different than having another peer doing
it. Your parents aren’t there with you in the class. Your peers are in the class with you.”

Getting feedback is important, and these students realized that getting feedback from a classmate is invaluable. Interestingly, this was a lesson that was never intended at the onset of the study. The students learned this on their own, which shows that the benefits of coauthoring have the potential to be much greater than other types of writing instruction. Furthermore, Paolucci noticed an increased level of comfort with student feedback: “There is a peer to peer respect that happens when they conference with each other and not with the teacher. I think it was very effective. It was the first time they were asked to apply what they learned as opposed to just submitting subpar work for a grade that they didn’t really understand to begin with” (Interview 12/23/09). This goes to show that sometimes the students can learn better from each other than from the teacher.

The best measure of the effectiveness of coauthoring is evident in the improved thinking and writing in the actual essays. Most students reported increased levels of confidence in their writing after coauthoring their essays. The essays demonstrated a stronger understanding of how to structure a paragraph and the overall quality of writing was much stronger. Paolucci added:

They [the students] were really forced to interact with their writing and they were forced to care about a final product, something they submitted. In a lot of ways, the way these kids get through school is by rushing and getting Cs and being okay with it. In this case, they weren’t being allowed to pass through because they

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84 See Appendix I for a copy of the interview questions
have members in their group who want to do more than just pass through.

(Interview 12/23/10)\textsuperscript{85}

As Peter Elbow, Kenneth Bruffee, Lisa Ede, Andrea Lunsford, and many other writing theorists believe, the key to better writing is to be fully invested in it and make it a social process. As Paolucci stated, the only way to do this is to get students to really interact with their thoughts, ideas, and writing because without an engaged student, nothing will be achieved. Coauthoring motivates and challenges students to improve their writing in a safe and encouraging setting.

\textsuperscript{85} See Appendix I for a copy of the interview questions
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Appendix A
Survey: Pre-Collaboration Questions: Thoughts on Writing 10/12/09
1. What is your favorite type of writing? Why?
2. What are your thoughts on writing essays? Do you enjoy writing them? Why or why not?
3. What do you find to be the hardest part of writing an essay?
4. What is the easiest part of writing an essay for you?
5. Do you consider yourself a good writer? Why or why not?
6. What does your typical writing process look like? In other words, when you are assigned an essay, tell me about each step of your process from beginning to end. Do you brainstorm? Revise? Have a friend, parent, or teacher give you feedback?
7. Do you enjoy working with other students in class? Why or why not?
8. Have you ever worked with other students on a writing assignment or project? If so, tell me about your experience. Do you think it was a valuable experience? If not, do you think it is something you’d like to try? Why or why not?
9. If you were asked to work with other students on your writing, what would you hope to gain from the experience?
10. Do you think getting feedback on your writing is helpful? Do you think it can help improve your writing? By getting feedback, do you have an easier time writing than if you did not get any feedback?

Appendix B
Journal 1: Discuss your past experience with group work. 10/26/09
What were some benefits? What was the most difficult?
What do you wish you could change?

Appendix C
Reflections on Your Hero Essay 10/30/09
1. Your hero essay is due today (Friday). When did you begin working on the paper (including any brainstorming, writing, revising, etc.). Make a timeline if you’d like.
2. Did you discuss your ideas with anyone at any point of this process? If so, who? Was it helpful?
3. If you did not discuss your ideas with anyone, why didn’t you?
4. What was the hardest part of writing this essay?
5. What was the easiest part of writing this essay?
6. What do you think is the strongest part of your essay?
7. If you could revise one section of your paper before handing it in, what would it be and why?
8. What would you have liked help with while writing this paper?
9. Was this a typical essay for you? In other words, did you feel like you struggled just as much with this essay as with previous ones? Why/ why not?
10. If you could give yourself an honest grade on your paper, what would it be and why?
Appendix D
Journal 2: Write a journal entry about your experience working with your group so far.

11/2/09

Appendix E
Journal 3: Reflect on your experience so far. What do you find most frustrating? Most useful? Anything you would change?

11/10/09

Appendix F
Journal 4: Tell me about your experience with coauthoring the outline. What were some challenges you faced? What did you find most helpful? Least helpful? Did you learn anything about yourself? Will you take anything you learned and use it to write your paper?

11/17/09
Appendix G

Coauthoring Reflection Paper

Now that you have successfully completed your first coauthoring activity, I’d like you to reflect honestly on your experiences. Please address the following questions in your paper and expand as much as you can. Specific examples would also be very helpful.

**Paragraph One – Overall Impression**
- Did you enjoy the experience? Why or why not?
- How did you get along with your group members?
- Is this something you would do again? Why or why not?

**Paragraph Two – The Writing Process**
- What was the most difficult part of the writing process? Why?
- What was the easiest part of the writing process? Why?
- What part of this project caused you the most stress and frustration? Why?
- Writing with your peers is a unique experience. What did you find easiest? Most difficult?

**Paragraph Three – You as a Writer**
- Has this experience changed you as a writer? If so, how? If not, why?
- What specific skills did you learn from this experience? When explaining what you’ve learned, give specific information as to HOW you learned it.
  - For example, maybe you learned how to effectively incorporate a quote. Who taught you that and how?
- Do you feel like a more confident writer now? Why or why not?
- Will this experience influence your future writing assignments, whether they are collaborative or independent?

**Paragraph Four – The Future**
- Do you think you would benefit from another coauthoring experience in the future? Why or why not?
- If you were to coauthor a paper in the future, what would you change?
- What would you keep the same?
- Do you think receiving feedback on your writing is valuable? What do you do with the feedback?

**Paragraph Five – Views/ Free Space**
- Have any of your views on writing changed because of this experience? Please explain.
- Please use the rest of this paragraph to address any thoughts, comments, or issues not addressed in the first four.
- You may expand on a previous comment or introduce a new issue of your own.
Appendix H

Student Interviews- Post Project  12/11/09
1. Overall, was the coauthoring project a valuable experience? Why? Why not?
2. What specific writing skills have you learned from this assignment?
3. Do you think you could have written a better paper alone? Why? Why not?
4. How confident were you with your final paper compared with other papers you have handed in this year?
5. Many students have said that they now value feedback on their writing. Do you agree? If you do, what actions do you plan on taking in the future to recreate a similar experience, even if you’re writing an essay alone?
6. Would you suggest that we do this project again next year? Why or why not?
7. What would your advice be for students who are just beginning this project?
8. What would you change about the coauthoring project?
9. Do you think your teacher played an active enough role in the process? Please explain.
10. What did you think of using the wiki as part of this coauthoring project? Do you suggest another type of collaborative site?

Appendix I

Interview with teacher Anne Paolucci – Post Project  12/23/09
1. As the teacher, how do you effective was this assignment?
2. What role did you play throughout the process? How involved were you?
3. How did the students respond to the project initially? Did their opinions and attitudes change over time?
4. Would you change anything about how you grouped the students?
5. Were there any classroom management issues?
6. What were the benefits from this project?
7. What would you do differently?
8. What do you wish the students could have learned from this experience?
9. What do you think the students learned from this experience?
10. Would you do this again?
11. What was most frustrating for you as a teacher?
12. What do you think the most frustrating thing was for the students?
Appendix J

Hero Writing Assignment

Directions: You will be writing a five-paragraph essay exploring how your character (Perseus, Theseus, or Hercules) is considered a hero. You should use the archetypal hero notes to guide your analysis.

Requirements:
• Well developed introduction with a strong thesis statement
• Clear topic sentences that contain controlling ideas
• Majors and minors
• QUOTES from the myth with citations
  o “This is my quote from the mythology book” (Hamilton 43).

Please Remember to:
• Proofread!
• Double-space
• Submit to turnitin & bring in a hard copy
• Proper heading
• Creative title

Your paper is due:_______________________

(Both on turnitin AND in class)
Appendix K

The Trojan War
Coauthoring Assignment

You and your group will be responsible for collaborating on each phase of this assignment. As a group, you will brainstorm a topic, write an outline, and compose a final paper. Here are the requirements for this activity:

The Group Process
- Blended approach to writing (everyone writes everything together – no “splitting” the work)
- Each group member takes an active role in participating. The process is JUST as important as the product and your grades will reflect that. See the rubric for more information

The Paper
- It should represent the best piece of writing that you and your group can produce
- You should have a well-developed and supported five-paragraph essay that demonstrates mastery of the following areas:
  - Introduction paragraph
    - General → specific → thesis
  - Thesis statement
    - Not an obvious statement. It should be arguable and specific, yet broad enough to find support
  - Topic sentences (with controlling ideas)
    - Should support your thesis and give your paragraph direction. Should NOT be a fact or a question
  - Major supports
    - Support for topic sentences. Should NOT be a fact or a question. It’s a support that still needs further support
  - Minor supports
    - Facts, evidence, quotes that PROOF your major
  - Clinching sentences
    - Sum up the paragraph and transitions into the next
  - Integration of quotations for support with correct citations
    - Introduce (speaker and context) and explain each quote in relation to your major
  - Conclusion paragraph
    - Sum up the entire paper and if possible, leave your reader with something to think about
Appendix L

*The Odyssey*

Writing Assignment

As we have discussed in class, *the Odyssey* can be read as something more than an adventure story. It can be read as the story of every human being. Even though we do not face one-eyed monsters, creatures with six heads, or gods who wish to do us harm, we do face similar obstacles and challenges in our own lives.

Your job is to explore how PART ONE of the *Odyssey* can be read as the story of every human being. Each body paragraph should contain ONE main point or focus and then that entire paragraph should support and explain it.

Suggestion for Organization:
Controlling Idea: One way in which the *Odyssey* is the story of every human being
One major/minor supports: Support from the *Odyssey*
Second major/minor supports: Support from “the real world” or “every human being”

Requirements
- Five paragraphs with a strong introduction and thesis statement
- At least two majors per paragraph
- Each paragraph should contain 1 quote cited correctly. “Quote” (Homer 135-137). The numbers are LINE NUMBERS, not page numbers.
- Even though you’re being asked to connect the *Odyssey* to real life, avoid using the first and second person (“I”, “me”, “you”)
- Double-space
- Size 12, Times New Roman
- Proper Heading
- Creative Title

Your Paper is due IN CLASS on and TURNITIN by: ______________________

Remember what you’ve learned from our coauthoring experience!

*Top Three Lessons*

1. What you put in is what you get out
2. Getting feedback on your writing is invaluable
3. Outlines are difficult, yet extremely helpful
Appendix M

An Introduction to Co-authoring

1. What is co-authoring:
Co-authoring is a writing experience that allows you to actually write something with another person.

2. What do you have to gain from co-authoring?
   • It is a skill you’ll have to learn when you begin careers in government, business, and industry
   • It allows you to learn other writing strategies from your peers

3. Three types of co-authoring:
   1. Chunk: writers divide the sections to be written
   2. Raisin Bread: one writer takes pieces of work from each person to create one paper
   3. Blended: all writers work together throughout the entire process

   Which one do you think is the most effective and why?

4. List three of the most important factors that must be present while co-authoring. In other words, what three things will make a co-authoring group successful?
   1.
   2.
   3.

5. In a co-authoring experience, what do you think is more important? The final paper you all produce or the entire process of producing the paper? Why?
Appendix N

1. Did you collaborate on this paper with anyone? For example, did you brainstorm with anyone, wrote your outline with anyone, etc.? HOW did you collaborate? Was it helpful?
2. Did you get any feedback on your ideas or your drafts? Why or why not? (Feedback is different from collaboration because when you collaborate, you work together to form ideas. Feedback is a critique of what you’ve already thought of or written.)
3. If this feedback did influence your thinking and writing, explain how. If this feedback did not influence your thinking and writing, explain why.
4. Explain how the coauthoring process has changed your writing process. Why do you think your writing has changed in this way? If you think your writing has not changed after the coauthoring process, explain why the process did not make any impact on your writing.
5. Please explain your writing process for this paper. In other words, tell me everything you did after receiving the assignment.
6. How confident are you with your final paper? Please explain why you feel the way you do.
7. How confident are you with this paper compared with your other papers you wrote this year, especially the hero paper (Hercules, Theseus, Jason)? Please explain.
8. Do you consider yourself to be a good writer? Why or why not?
9. Has your confidence as a writer increased or decreased so far this year? Why?
10. How much time did you spend on this compared with the past papers? More time, about the same, less time?
11. Do you think your work ethic and motivation towards writing has increased at all since the coauthoring project? Please explain.
Appendix O

Survey: Teacher Survey on Student Writing 9/1/09

1. Do you consider your students “good” writers? Why or why not?
2. What areas of writing cause your students the most trouble?
3. What do you wish your students would be able to do with/in their writing that they are unable to do?
4. What is your biggest complaint with the writing instruction in your school?
5. What different types of strategies have you tried to improve student writing? Have they worked?
6. Do you believe there are any connections between thinking, speaking, and writing? If so, can you explain?
7. To the best of your knowledge, what processes do your students go through as they write an analytical paper?
8. Do you integrate any collaborative learning activities (brainstorming together, peer editing, peer revising, etc.) into your classes for writing instruction? Please explain. If you do, what was the experience like?
9. Have you ever had your students write collaboratively? In other words, have your students ever generated ideas and or composed writing together? If so, what was it like? If not, why? Do you think it would be a beneficial experience?
10. According to your own beliefs and experiences as a teacher, in what ways have you found success in having your students develop thinking through writing?
Appendix P
Anne Paolucci’s Grading Rubric

An ‘A’ Paper:
- Proper introduction with a thesis that was arguable (not a plot point) and enough information in the introduction to understand the thesis
- All info should be relevant to the thesis
- The intro may or may not have a proper hook.
- Topic sentences that were arguable points and not plot points.
- Major points that supported the topic sentences
- Minor points that were specific examples from the reading including some quotes
- Three majors and three minors per paragraph or two more well-developed majors and minors per paragraph

A ‘B’ Paper:
- A proper introduction with a thesis that was arguable (not a plot point)
- Information in the introduction is relevant to the thesis but may not be enough to fully understand the thesis
- Most topic sentences were arguable points
- Most major points were “because” or “how do you know?” statements
- Most minor points were specific examples from the reading but they may not have been quotes.
- Three majors and three minors per paragraph or two more developed majors and minors per paragraph

A ‘C’ Paper:
- May not have a fully arguable thesis
- Topic sentences may be plot points
- The paragraphs generally do not include 2-3 majors and minors per paragraph and the examples are not specifics
- May not fully follow major/minor structure

A ‘D’ or ‘F’ Paper:
- Severely underdeveloped with no proper thesis
- Paragraphs that do not even attempt to follow major/minor structure
August 31, 2009

Stacey Spector
30 Oak Avenue
West Orange NJ 07052

Re: IRB Number 000794: The Effects of Co-authoring on Independent Writing

Dear Ms. Spector:

After a full 1, 2 review, Montclair State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this protocol on 7/22/2009. The study is valid for one year and will expire on 7/21/2010.

Before requesting amendments, extensions, or project closure, please reference MSU’s IRB website and download the current forms.

Should you wish to make changes to the IRB-approved procedures, prior to the expiration of your approval, submit your requests using the Amendment form.

For Continuing Review, it is advised that you submit your form 60 days before the month of the expiration date above. If you have not received MSU’s IRB approval by your study’s expiration date, ALL research activities must STOP, including data analysis. If your research continues without MSU’s IRB approval, you will be in violation of Federal and other regulations.

After your study is completed, submit your Project Completion form.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB requirements, please contact me at 973-655-3182, besingj@mail.montclair.edu, or the Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]
Dr. Joan Besing
IRB Chair

cc: Dr. Jessica Restaino
Ms. Amy Aiello
Appendix R
IRB Extension

April 15, 2010

Ms. Stacey Spector
30 Oak Avenue
West Orange, NJ 07052

Re: IRB Number #000794
Project Title: The Effects of Coauthoring on Independent Writing

Dear Ms. Spector:

After an expedited review, Montclair State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved your Continuing Review request on April 13, 2010. The continuation is valid for one year and will expire on July 21, 2011.

Before requesting amendments, extensions, or project closure, please reference MSU’s IRB website and download the current forms.

Should you wish to make changes to the IRB-approved procedures, prior to the expiration of your approval, submit your requests using the Amendment form.

For Continuing Review, it is advised that you submit your form 60 days before the month of the expiration date above. If you have not received MSU’s IRB approval by your study’s expiration date, ALL research activities must STOP, including data analysis. If your research continues without MSU’s IRB approval, you will be in violation of Federal and other regulations.

After your study is completed, submit your Project Completion form.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB requirements, please contact me at [973-655-4327, reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu] or the Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Debra Zellner
Interim IRB Chair

DZ/ak

cc: Dr. Jessica Restaino, Faculty Sponsor
    Amy Aiello, Graduate School