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Collaboration in an ad hoc grant-writing community: an ethnographic study

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Collaboration in an ad hoc grant-writing community: An ethnographic study

by

Jane M. Perkins

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF ARTS

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I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Seven years ago when he synthesized much of the conversation then occurring in the human sciences, Kenneth Bruffee ("Collaborative") linked composition studies with social constructionist thought. A good deal of social constructionist theory derives from Thomas Kuhn's proposition that scientific knowledge is produced by communities of knowledgeable peers. To Kuhn's theory, Bruffee added other social constructionist treatments, all pragmatic in origin and implications: Richard Rorty's contention that education is the process of joining "the conversation of mankind"; Stanley Fish's communitarian philosophy that, like Rorty's, eliminates the Cartesian duality; and Clifford Geertz's belief that we can learn from studying social phenomena "by placing them in local frames of awareness" (6). Bruffee's enterprise situated collaboration at the center of social constructionist practicality: In business and industry, "and in professions such as medicine, law, engineering, and architecture, where to work is to learn or fail, collaboration is the norm" ("Peer Tutoring" 14). Thus, he established the need to know more about "real world" collaboration, the way writing is produced in these occupations, and the insights such knowledge can provide for composition instruction.

Since Bruffee's groundbreaking article, composition studies incorporating various methodologies have established the important and frequent role of collaboration in
nonacademic writing. Knowledge that collaborative writing
does, in fact, constitute the way much writing is produced has
been substantiated by the sampling of articles from many
professional fields (Spears), by surveys (Faigley and Miller,
Ede and Lunsford), and by case studies (Selzer). Much of this
work recognizes the need for research which can uncover the
complex relationships and structures of meaning inherent in
collaborative writing. Specifically, Ede and Lunsford raise
the question of "How are--and should--power and authority be
constituted or achieved in collaborative work?" (125)

Although the importance of collaborative writing has been
established, much of the research has not been fashioned to
build an understanding of the complex issues involved in this
writing. However, some qualitative studies conducted in
university writing groups have articulated a number of
critical issues. Janis Forman and Patricia Katsky identified
a number of problems with student writing groups in their
research of a Field Study Program at UCLA's Graduate School of
Management. Some of these problems include "imperfect
knowledge of each other's capabilities . . . emergent
leadership . . . poor definition of task [because team members
bring to the task different conceptual frameworks] . . .
different disciplines . . . [and] sporadic, unstructured
meetings."
Forman further investigated the problems of student writing groups that used a computer system to facilitate collaboration. She concluded that problems develop because "members have a limited information about each other's abilities, values, work styles, and goals, and have neither established norms nor assigned roles" (54). Specifically, she writes, "differences in work styles, dysfunctional attitudes toward conflict, and poor understanding and execution of leadership functions contributed to inefficiencies on the teams" (68). While Forman's research identifies problems confronted by student writing groups, she suggested that additional research focused on business settings is necessary to better understand collaborative writing and how it can be used in composition instruction.

And, indeed, subsequent research in nonacademic settings has addressed some of the issues involving power negotiations that have also been raised in relation to student writing groups. Although the influence of a writing group's culture on power negotiations within the group has not been addressed directly, Glenn Broadhead and Richard Freed have identified institutional norms as playing an important role in the way writing is produced in corporate cultures. Likewise, James Paradis, David Dobrin, and Richard Miller argued that a certain amount of "organizational savvy" (302) was essential for writing successfully in a research and development
organization. Similarly, Robert Brown and Carl Herndl demonstrated that such unspoken norms determine the use of language and the formatting of documents because of their impact on "power relations" in the corporate culture.

The character of those power relations—that is, the necessary balance between personal agendas and group consensus—has provoked a good deal of theoretical debate (Bruffee, Trimbur, Clark). However, even though researchers and composition instructors have acknowledged the importance of power negotiations in collaborative writing, these negotiations have not been the focus of research in non-academic settings\(^1\), that is, where colleagues work side-by-side in the same corporate building. But much collaborative writing is produced by groups other than those who share a common physical location or an overriding corporate structure. Not all writing is created in IBM-type communities; much real world writing is produced in loosely structured groups. No research has been conducted of the collaborative writing process of such an ad hoc group.

As a result, many collaborative writing issues have not

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\(^1\)The exception is Stephen Doheny-Farina's study in which consensus played an important part in changing the company's corporate structure. In this situation, he found that "Whoever had power to establish the company's goals [in writing] had a large measure of control over the evolution of the company" (166).
been addressed in nonacademic writing situations similar to those that resemble student collaboration. The problems faced by ad hoc writing groups, especially those involving issues of power negotiations, have not been the focus of composition research. Consequently, we need but do not yet have answers to questions like the following:

- How does the lack of an established culture affect the power negotiations in ad hoc collaborative writing groups?
- How do personal and organizational agendas affect power negotiations in collaborative writing groups?
- How does the basic organizational structure of a collaborative writing group affect the way power is negotiated and established?

To answer questions like these, I have conducted a study of an ad hoc grant-writing community. Like student writing groups, this ad hoc group comprises individuals who are not well acquainted, who meet in a variety of locations to work on their project, and who are guided by no overriding procedures. They share relatively few common goals or perspectives; their group exists only to produce one document. And they are not part of an organization which has established collaborative methods. The parallels between such a loosely structured "real world" writing group and the collaborative writing groups which instructors fashion for their classrooms is
apparent. Therefore, many of the issues of power negotiation which are the focus of my research of an ad hoc group are the same issues which confront student writing groups.
II. RESEARCH METHOD

After working for a few weeks with the grant-writing group, I realized the possibilities for ethnographic research because of my position with the group, the ad hoc structure of the group, and the complexities of the collaborative writing community formed by the group. Fortunately, I had kept a detailed written log from the beginning of my involvement. And since my interest in and investigation of ethnography as a research method in nonacademic settings was developing previous to this opportunity, I eagerly adopted an ethnographic approach as a means of learning about the group's writing process. For in the words of Jeanne Halpern, "ethnography provides the most textured and complete representation of communication in action" (27).

Basically, my research was conducted in two stages. First, as the grant proposal was being formulated, drafted, and revised, I attended meetings involving various group members in many different locations: a high school boardroom, an area education agency, the offices of a community college, individual members' offices, and in one of their homes. During this first phase, my research was compiled as:

- A written log based on observations, descriptions, casual question-and-answer sessions, and meeting notes
- Copies of all drafts and revisions to the proposal
- Copies of all other related printed material
- A copy of the submitted grant proposal
The second phase of my research began after the final group meeting when the results of the grant application were discussed. From this point, I completed my research by:

- Mailing a short questionnaire to the five members of the group to focus their ideas and establish a pre-interview dialogue
- Compiling a member’s notes of meetings and other related documents, especially of early meetings previous to my involvement
- Acquiring a copy of the grant readers’ comments and evaluations

After six months’ involvement, with all of these documents in hand (and some in my data base), my more formal sifting and organizing of material began.

A fundamental question, however, had troubled me from the beginning of the research project. As I began working with the writing group, taking field notes, and making entries in my computer log, I wrestled with fundamental rhetorical decisions related to structure, person (i.e., first or third), point of view, subjectivity, objectivity, and audience.

Not so very long ago, ethnographers (as well as researchers in the human sciences generally) did not worry about such decisions. But writing ethnographic research now—especially as it situates itself within rhetorical and literary theory—presents significant problems. For example,
as she explores the possibilities of writing ethnography in depth, analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of traditional (analytical) ethnography against experimental (interpretive) ethnography, Linda Brodkey acknowledges that she is addressing a much broader issue:

I am introducing ethnography as a field in the midst of an epistemological crisis because the arguments that ethnographers are raising with respect to the source of authority are not different in kind from those being mounted in virtually all quarters of the American academy. (26)

Both Brodkey and Halpern (37) suggest pragmatically that the ethnographer needs to consider his/her audience, specifically the source of publication, for guidance in selecting an approach to writing.

As sound as this advice appears, it only complicated the issue for me. Indeed, I was made anxious by the specter of unaccepting readers who would privilege quantifiable research; of those who would endorse analytical ethnography because it "offers proofs that presume not simply that certainty is desirable, but attainable"; of those who would devalue interpretive ethnography, which "deals with uncertainty, that is, offers arguments that display rather than obviate doubt" (Brodkey 27). The choice of an ethnographic style is more fundamental than a response to audience considerations.

My aim was to involve my readers in the action of a collaborative grant-writing community so that they could
experience the events described in my field notes and sense the conflict that was pivotal in this collaborative writing group. I also wanted to discuss with my readers implications based on these scenes, augmented by details from interviews with the group’s participants, and situated within composition researchers’ current conversation about issues relating to the power negotiations in collaborative writing.

However, as I worked out this writing strategy, my uneasiness was reflected by the questions which filled the margins of my first draft. Even though I knew that the presentation of my research was consistent with the social constructionist epistemological viewpoint I was developing, my questions revealed that I was fighting the paradigm which privileges scientifically objective research, and that I was trying to justify my method of writing ethnography. Recent theoretical discussions in three areas have helped me come to terms with my uneasiness.

Gregory Clark’s emphasis on the importance of "abnormal discourse" (Rorty’s term) provides incentive for selecting the "unconventional" approach to writing ethnography. His concerns about "discourse that embodies accepted assumptions and propels the exchange toward a self-fulfilling end" (8) are a reminder that the established path is not necessarily the
most productive or beneficial. He explains that:

If a consciousness of the temporary and contingent status of socially constructed knowledge is to be preserved, the purpose of an exchange must be not to reach agreement but to sustain the process of exchange itself. Only that purpose will admit discourse that challenges existing assumptions, that keeps provisional agreements open to question and revision. (8)

In a general sense, therefore, my concerns of not writing in a traditional form have been allayed.

But other concerns about the pragmatic considerations of writing ethnography in our discipline have been enlarged by Carl Herndl as he ponders the future of ethnographers and counsels about "working against the grain in a physical and everyday sense" (331). He holds out hope for writers of ethnography "by confronting the ideological question not only in theory but also on the plane of the material and institutional" (331). Although Herndl's view is not optimistic, the very fact that his discussion is located so prominently (in College English) attests to the interest in ethnography as a research method and to the questions it evokes about how a writer "constructs a relationship between herself as an author and the representation she offers readers" (324).

Finally, Thomas Kent's hermeneutic perspective on the relationship of objectivity to ethnography validates a "non-realistic" (non-analytical) approach. His explanation alleviates any concern about establishing objectivity in
ethnography in order to create validity. Instead, all the validity ethnography requires depends on a "coherence theory of truth" (in press). In other words, credibility in writing ethnography relies on the coherence strategy of "fieldwork methodology--which generally includes activities like closely observing a subject's day-to-day life in the subject's natural setting..." If they forego the belief that they can make generalizable statements about objective truths, ethnographers need no longer worry about whether their narrative should be written in the first person or how to create an artificial objectivity in tone and format.

Supplied now, not only with the details of how I conducted this research but how I resolved my conflict in writing ethnography, the stage is set for your interpretation of the following collaborative actions.
III. THE DRAMA AND ITS DISCUSSION

PROLOGUE

I invite you to share in the interpretation of three scenes, based on my field notes, which illustrate issues of power in a collaborative ad hoc grant-writing community. Discussion of the issues will follow each scene which will incorporate group members' comments made in follow-up interviews.

The scenes take place over a period of three months, each located in a different setting. Note the time sequence; they are not presented chronologically, the better to focus on the issues of power enacted in these scenes.

The action in these scenes revolves around six members of the grant-writing group. Previous to the scene, pertinent information will be supplied about each of these members.

SCENE I  (May 17)

The Setting: a small conference room located in the administration offices of an area community college.

The Collaborative Group:

In attendance
- Lisa------Youth Specialist for Job Training Partnership Corporation
- Bill------Director of a residential shelter for troubled youth
- Kate------Substance Abuse Specialist with the local area education agency
- Narrator

Not Present
- Craig-----Principal of the area's largest high school
- Dick------Assistant Principal of an area high school
The Action

A friend and fellow teaching assistant joins me in my freshman composition classroom. Three students are finishing their finals, and as I remind them to ask any questions they might have of me before I leave, I quickly gather up my books, legal pad—on which I have been scribbling notes for the upcoming meeting that I’m rushing to attend, pens, and a stack of essays. I thank my friend for her time during this busy final week, explaining again how important this meeting is to my research. I dash to my car in the parking ramp, and I’m on my way to the meeting two hours away from campus. I begin to mentally review my list of questions and concerns that I want to share with the grant-writing group which I have been working with for the past three months.

The grant has not been funded; we were ranked seventh out of twenty-one applicants, with only the first four proposals funded. The meeting has been called to discuss the response of the grant-review committee and to evaluate how we could have done better. Additionally, the members of the group need to decide if it will be beneficial for them to continue to meet and work together. I plan to offer my help if they want to make changes and resubmit the proposal to other funding sources.

Three months earlier, I was asked to join this group to help them write, format, and edit their ideas into a proposal for an $800,000 state grant which would be awarded over a span
of four years to support a school-based program to help troubled youth. Actually, I never was asked to "join" this group; I functioned in a peripheral capacity as an employee of the group. And in this capacity, I never quite determined whether I could lead, cajole, or inspire the group in their decision making and writing process.

I hurried through the community college reception area, which had become a familiar setting to me in the last frantic days of the grant-writing process, and slipped into the small meeting room, where we had previously festooned the table and walls with charts, page after page of statistics, and demographics used to establish our need for the proposed program. Even though I had made good time on the interstate, my watch showed 2:20; the meeting had been called for 2:00.

Three members of the group sat around a small, rectangular, utilitarian, conference table chatting as they waited for me. Lisa, a youth specialist for Job Training Partnership Corporation (JTPC) which is housed in this community college administration building and offers programs in conjunction with it, acts as the informal chair for this casual meeting. The atmosphere is quiet and low-key, but the members are cautious as they begin discussing the grant proposal and its failure to gain funding. Lisa expresses surprise and disappointment; the other two, Kate, the substance abuse specialist, and Bill, the youth shelter director, are not as
surprised. Even though the initial word from the grant administrator suggested that a rural proposal would be funded, during the course of putting the program together, members have unofficially been told that their proposal misinterpreted the scope of the legislation which originated the school-based youth program. Briefly, the three members talk about the review from the grant readers. Pleased at the relatively high number of total points earned by the grant and its standing in the overall ranking, they pour over the reviewers' comments, careful not to place any blame.

Lisa, who feels primarily responsible for writing the proposal, fidgets; she is ready to move the discussion along. With a suppressed excitement, she tells the group of a new development. She has received a letter about a possible lawsuit by some of the other applicants based on their belief that the review process had been handled inappropriately. Because of her disappointment that they will not be able to implement the program, Lisa is ready to investigate this development. Kate and Bill advise a more cautious approach since they see a lawsuit as a no-win situation and because they know they need to work continually with these state agencies.

Now they look to the future. The big question appears to be whether the group should continue to meet regularly. Everyone wants to keep the communication open among their
respective agencies. They all agree to look for alternative sources of funding for the at-risk programs, making use of this existing proposal. They decide to meet in two months with an eye to the Federal Development Grants which will be available by that time. Where and when? After meeting for eight months, they decide that they really do need to work out some collaborative details: Who should call the meetings? Who should send out the memos? Where should the meetings be held? Until this time, events have just evolved, meeting by meeting, phone call by phone call. Now they express the need for a more defined structure of organization.

After about an hour, Lisa brings the meeting to an abrupt close. She must get to another appointment but first wants to bring up one further issue. Her costs. Kate immediately agrees that the printing and binding costs for the proposal, along with my fee, should be divided equally among the five organizations. The two members not in attendance, Craig and Dick, have previously agreed to my fee, and the addition of printing costs would be minimal. Originally, I had begun structuring, formatting, and editing the proposal on my computer, and Kate, the member who initially contacted me, knew that my laser printer would produce a finished product with which the group would be satisfied. However, in the week before the proposal was due, while I was out of the area attending a meeting, Lisa had her copy of the latest draft
scanned onto the community college's mainframe computer system. This resulted in a number of changes, including production costs.

Suddenly the tone of the meeting shifts. No longer a cordial wrap-up and plan for the future, Lisa suggests that her employer should be compensated for her time. Bill and Kate listen in cool silence as Lisa explains that working on the proposal has taken her away from her job responsibilities and even involved other members of the staff at Job Training Partnership Corporation. Kate counters that she thought they had all put in time on the proposal and that Lisa had appeared to volunteer to act in her role. Bill and Kate stonily agree to take the issue back to their boards. The meeting is over. No one says it, but they will not be meeting again in two months.

Discussion: How does the lack of an established culture affect the power negotiations in ad hoc collaborative writing groups?

Ad hoc writing groups lack three kinds of structure which often facilitate writing in more established organizations: interpersonal backgrounds, production procedures, and institutional norms.
Interpersonal Backgrounds

Although a few of these individuals had worked together on other professional projects, members of the writing group were not well acquainted. As a result, they had no foundation of interrelating but, instead, had to negotiate their roles in this writing process. As in most ad hoc groups, they had no appointed leader or any assumed hierarchy since these professionals all represented agencies or organizations of equal importance to the project. Although the assistant principal appeared to acquiesce to the principal of a larger district, and some gender distinctions may have been playing a part in the process, on the whole everyone was attributed equal status. It was apparent that no one wanted to assume or have the honor of leadership thrust upon them. Nor did they want to unflatteringly assert themselves or take on a huge commitment of time and work. Yet these individuals did not want to lose control. Commenting on the intricacies of the writing process, Lisa said in a follow-up interview that "This was a difficult situation, a more piecemeal process. We didn't have close communication like an in-house project."

And Kate expressed some of her frustrations: "We had no focused leadership, but instead an uncertainty about roles—different people tried to take leadership and then pulled back." And so they continued in their power negotiations, operating by committee leadership or lack of it.
Production Procedures

The lack of established production procedures and the everyday aspects of sending memos, determining a meeting location, and choosing a computer system all become avenues for creating power within groups. Whether members consciously use these opportunities to negotiate power or just take action to get the writing produced, these aspects affect the power structure within collaborative writing groups.

Generally, ad hoc groups lack a common location, an institution, or in other words--the where. Lacking an organizational structure, one of the means by which the power negotiations were played out in this writing group was through the setting of meeting locations; intentionally or unintentionally, the site of the meeting often determined the leadership for that meeting. Early on, the large, idea-gathering meetings, which often involved ten to twenty people, were more likely to be held on neutral ground, like the conference room of a public library. Other meeting sites included a school administration building, a community college activities center, a high school boardroom, a community college boardroom, and the small conference room where the final meeting took place. Some of these sites may have evolved out of convenience, but others apparently were chosen in a bid for control.
Location, then, potentially contributed to power negotiations; as did the writing of memos that called for meetings and informed about the proceedings of the group. Memos reflect the interpretation and tone of the writer toward the collaborative situation, generally move the action of the group forward (summarizing past meetings and/or forecasting future ones), and can even establish an unstated authority because of the sender's name in the memo format.

Additionally, as this collaborative writing situation illustrates, control of the computer system on which the final draft is written constitutes power. While in this situation scanning the draft onto a mainframe computer system was explained as a convenience move, it was also a move for control over the final draft of the document. Access to the computer last in the writing process equates with the final say about the contents of the document, especially in collaborative writing when no ownership of data base has been established.

**Institutional Norms**

Along with established interpersonal backgrounds and production procedures, ad hoc writing groups also lack institutional norms which affect power negotiations. According to Broadhead and Freed, "Institutional norms govern rhetorical decisions designed to make a text adhere to accepted practices within a company, profession, discipline,
or the like . . . " (12). While these norms may take the form of style manuals or production guides, they "need not be formalized in written documents; they can also result from tradition or practice . . . In their broader application to the writing process, these institutional norms reflect a writer's overall environment for thinking, composing, and revising" (12).

Collaborative writing groups usually bring together a number of institutional norms which reflect the writing standards and philosophies accepted by the discourse communities in which the individual members of the group generally work. The members of this group all represented professional organizations which subscribed to a certain consistent level of document acceptance (that is, correctness standards); furthermore, as revealed in Scene II, the members had in common a high level of education. Although these common characteristics guaranteed some consistency of norms, differences became apparent. In a follow-up interview, Lisa commented about the difficulty of direct and indirect service providers working together because of the differences in their "normal working atmospheres, styles, and expectations."

Additionally, while the institutional norms between agencies varied in some aspects, a stronger clash of norms developed between those of one agency and those subscribed to by the writing consultant. Although rhetorical decisions had to be
explained and defended in support of audience analysis and readability, in general, final decision-making power in this area was granted to the outside expert since as Kate asserted, "That's why we're paying her." Conflict of writing decisions, in this case due to institutional norms, partially represented a distrust of "academic theory" in combination with the conviction that "real world" involvement held more value.

Although ad hoc writing groups cannot change the fact that they have no interpersonal background, no set production procedures, and no institutional norms, they can establish basic formatting issues from the beginning. Would this group have functioned more smoothly if they had discussed these issues? They seemed to be trying to do so in the last meeting; perhaps they had recognized the need and found the opportunity to implement a solution. They planned to rotate sites and to have the person representing the location send out related memos for the next meeting. Thus, they proposed a smoother and more equal system for implementing their business. And although the even more compelling power issues of expenses (including use of computer and printing systems) and reimbursement for time were not addressed, the problems resulting from these issues not being clearly articulated and established from the beginning had a dramatic affect on this collaborating group.
SCENE II  (February 16, three months before Scene I)

The Setting: the largest high school in the area.

The Collaborative Group:

In Attendance
- Craig-----Ph.D. in Education Administration
- Dick------nearing completion of his Ph.D. in Education Administration
- Lisa------B.A. in Communications
- Narrator

Not Present:
- Kate------Masters Degree in Learning Disabilities, plus additional hours toward Ph.D.
- Bill------Master of Social Work

The Action

In response to a phone call from Kate during which she asked if I would be interested in helping a group prepare a proposal for a state grant, I find myself threading my way through a mass of high school students eagerly exiting their classes at the end of the school day. I reach "the office," stand in line behind two students who are explaining to the secretary about their "passes," and finally am asked to wait on the straightbacked chair provided outside the principal's office. In my initial phone conversation with her, Kate apologized for having a conflict which would prevent her from attending this meeting, but at my request, she provided me with the names and a brief background of the members' positions in their agencies. She also explained that getting the members of the group together had proven to be a major
obstacle in writing the proposal. Bill would also be unable to attend.

For the next fifteen minutes, I study the activity in the office and watch as the other two members arrive for the meeting. Lisa strides into the office and past the counter and stops outside Craig's door. Smiling, she communicates with a thumbs up/thumbs down sign and then heads down the hallway. Within a few minutes, Craig bursts from his office at the same time that Dick appears, and the three of us move down the hall to the boardroom. Dick and Craig commiserate about the difficulties of commuting to graduate classes, a topic that I am soon brought in on since the group has been briefed on my background as a teaching assistant and a graduate student in Business and Technical Communication with an interest and experience in grant writing. Given the high level of education attained by the members of the group, which supports their abilities as writers and program developers, I look forward to a productive collaborative experience.

We arrange ourselves around one part of a t-shaped boardtable. Lisa and Craig are across from each other; Dick sits kind of at the end; but appearing not to want to be at the end/head of the table, he has pulled his chair back from the table and to one side. I space myself down from Craig. Dick crosses his legs, folds his arms and seems to recede even farther from the table. Lisa leans her elbows on the table,
smiles, smacks her gum, and with shining eyes focused on Craig, waits. The stage is set for Craig to make some kind of opening remarks. He leans forward over the table and begins by explaining how I have come to be there. Apparently they have had some difficulty deciding on how the final draft of the grant would be produced. They did not know what would be "fair" to the members of the group or what would work best. Finally, even though Lisa had indicated that she would like to produce the final document, they decided to bring in an outside writer—me. They proceed to describe the project in general terms, giving me a broad idea of what they have sketched out so far. One after another, they pick up the explanation of the complicated system they are developing, sometimes elaborating, correcting, and even adding some new refinements. Although they have developed a general scheme, it sounds like they are still brainstorming, even though they have been meeting for four months.

Since Kate has provided me with the grant’s Request for Proposal previous to the meeting, I raise my concerns:

1) A great many details still need to be worked out.
2) A detailed budget is required by the RFP.
3) Letters of Support and evidence of cooperation with a number of school boards and other agencies are necessary.
4) The grant is due in six weeks.
Who is going to do what? And how is it going to all come together?

They are all willing to supply any information needed. They divide up some of the other agencies to contact, and Lisa volunteers her time, in particular, to supply details and answer questions. Craig responds by taking out a piece of paper and begins to draft a budget, asking for comments from the other two.

As they work out this preliminary budget, some of the pieces of the structure of the proposed organization fit together. And some of their individual motivations become apparent. Responding to the state’s dissemination of information about legislation which would provide up to $800,000 in funds for school-based programs to help at-risk youth, these individuals representing youth-oriented organizations united to provide a plan and fulfill the required components of the RFP. Now, in addition to this sincere and overriding goal of helping youth, the personal agendas, which came along with the individuals and the agencies they represent, surface during the budget discussion. Craig begins the budget with the $800,000 ("We might as well go after the whole pot!") and then, with the help of the group, begins to divide it up.

Dick is involved because he hopes to have his high school become one of the two initial sites for the at-risk student
services outlined in this proposal. Becoming one of these sites would provide a needed service for the students in his school and fulfill some new state requirements which mandate a plan for helping at-risk students. Funding from this grant would not only provide services needed, but accomplish the aim without investing much time, personnel, or development money. He needs to gain this group’s support for his school to be chosen as one of the sites, and he needs the approval of his principal, superintendent, and school board.

Craig’s high school, the only Division I school in the area, does not fit the proposal’s definition of a site for student services. However, in the previous year, Craig has guided the implementation of an innovative school-based program in his school which has similarities to the program proposed. He offers his school’s program as a training source for the new administrators of the proposed program. And as the budget develops, it becomes obvious that this training would be financed through the proposed grant; therefore, the proposed program would pay training fees to Craig’s school system.

Lisa, who works with youth through Job Training Partnership Corporation (JTPC), discusses how her existing programs could be integrated with the proposed program. She also suggests that the community college, with which JTPC works in conjunction, would be willing to administer the grant
for a percentage of the total amount funded. And as I work with Lisa in the weeks that follow, it becomes obvious that she will apply for one of the new program’s administrator positions if the proposal is funded. This situation becomes more stressful as the weeks pass and rumors circulate of cutbacks in the current JTPC staff.

Are Kate and Bill, the absent members, also motivated by other agendas? At this meeting and in the future, their motivation seems to derive from their desire to bring additional funds into the area to help troubled youth. Of course, they too want some say in how this can be implemented efficiently and how their agencies and the services they provide will fit into the grand scheme.

The meeting ends with plans for me to get together with Lisa in a few days after I have worked out a way to fit an explanation of this complicated plan into the RFP. They will each work on generating Letters of Support, be available for in-put of specifics, and will meet again in a couple of weeks.

Discussion: How do personal and organizational agendas affect power negotiations in collaborative writing groups?

Hopefully, the description of this meeting does more than illustrate that individuals in groups often have more than one motivation or agenda. Most of the members of this group, as further established in the follow-up interviews, believe that
a cohesive working unit was never established; perhaps their individual agendas got in the way. When asked to comment about problems they perceived in this grant-writing collaboration, Kate and Lisa both referred to personal agendas.

Kate: "The age-old problems of agency collaboration, turf issues, and people who do not know how or do not choose to be team players...You need to be aware of the underlying politics of the various agencies so that it is easier to know what people may need or want from the project."

Lisa: "I have questions about some of the members' commitment level; they just didn't think we could do it. Sometimes it seemed like a war--a struggle of power between the agencies for control and the dollars."

Trying to comment about some satisfying aspect of working with this group, Bill pondered and finally added, "There were some honest attempts to break out of agendas; sometimes these were not personal agendas but those of organizations."

How much putting aside of agendas, personal or organizational, is necessary or advantageous in collaborative writing? As we will see in Scene III, varying perspectives may be desirable since in this case an audience adjustment to accommodate area school principals and superintendents probably paid off in increased cooperation. On the other hand, the follow-up comments indicate the level of frustration
these members felt about the power negotiations motivated by personal and organizational agendas.

How did their agendas affect the power structure of the group? Ultimately, the person with the strongest personal agenda, Lisa, could be said to be the one with the most power over the document. Facing the loss of her current position and the possibility of attaining one of the proposed positions, her agenda became the strongest among the members of the group, and consequently she took the most active control over the document. She was not the person with the most education or the most experience, or the one who represented the most influential organization. What was the power strategy used by the others in response? The next scene will show that the alternative they chose was to withdraw their active support. Before viewing this next scene, discussion of the issue of consensus in collaborative writing needs to be further explored.

Cohesion

If a degree of group cohesion is desired, we might consider the work of Judith Raymon and Carole Yee in "The Collaborative Process and Professional Ethics." Part of their method of incorporating collaborative work in the classroom derives from studying the stages through which psychotherapy groups progress. They explain that even though the goals of
work groups and psychotherapy groups are different, a recognition of the stages is important since they are similar:

The initial stage involves orientation, hesitant participation, overdependence on the leader, and definition of goals, structure, and boundaries. The second stage involves conflict, dominance, and rebellion. This is the stage, naturally, everyone wants to deny and avoid, but there is no group cohesiveness without it. The third stage involves the development of cohesiveness, which "submerges" individual differences. (78)

If this description of stages is accurate and universal, this grant-writing group may have had difficulties collaborating because they had not effectively worked through all of these work group stages. In Scene I, it became apparent that the group may never have worked out all of the orientation aspects which define "goals, structure, and boundaries" in the first stage of this process. This void in orientation will be further evident in the conflict which is described in Scene III when the lack of an established collaborative method results in crisis for the group. Or perhaps as each of these scenes documents, the members of the group faced conflict situations and power struggles, partially arising from individual and organizational agendas, which are deemed to be an essential feature of the second stage. Could it be that they may have never moved beyond stage two because of a lack of communication about their goals and an inability to submerge individual agendas? Or could it be that, given
enough time, they would have reached the cohesiveness of stage three?

Raymond and Yee also stress the interactive process of small group dynamics: "Members of such a group will be in a continuously changing and adjusting relationship with one another, structuring, restructuring, adjusting, and readjusting" (78). This became obvious in the weeks that followed this meeting as the group continued its uneasy quest to work together to produce the grant proposal with various members assuming leadership and then often pulling back as individual's respective agendas took precedence, until finally the climax of these changing relationships was realized in Scene III.

Dissensus

A more complicated question is whether consensus should actually be the aim in collaborative work. While in sweeping terms Bruffee establishes the social construction of knowledge as the product of consensus, John Trimbur summarizes other critical views which decry consensus as a "dangerous and potentially totalitarian practice that stifles individual voice and creativity, suppresses differences, and enforces conformity" (602). Another line of thinking reflects leftist critics who are concerned that "there are other voices to take into account—voices constituted as otherness outside the conversation" (Trimbur 608) who will not be heard if conflict
is ignored because of overriding consensus. As an alternative, Trimbur suggests that, by emphasizing the struggle inherent in collaboration, our attention is focused on a "rhetoric of dissensus." The advantage, he explains, is that we will "look at collaborative learning not merely as a process of consensus-making but more important as a process of identifying differences and locating these differences in relation to each other" (610). Dissensus, he asserts, is more descriptive of the way the real world works and, therefore, more helpful to teaching collaboratively than Bruffee's overly optimistic view that collaborative learning models consensus in real world discourse communities (612).

Does a paradox exist between real world collaboration which emphasizes, on the one hand, efficiency and, as Ede and Lunsford's survey confirms, "writing as a means to an end," (43) and, on the other, theoretical assertions like Trimbur's which privilege dissensus? This grant-writing group was frustrated by the lack of consensus to the point of not being able to function efficiently, and yet early closure in the writing of the proposal would have alienated a significant facet of their audience. Perhaps a point of balance must be attained, or as Ede and Lunsford suggest, groups may have "cohesion (but not necessarily consensus)" (123).

Another possibility may be that the value of consensus in collaboration depends on interpretation. Gregory Clark's
concern is that "If a consciousness of the temporary and contingent status of socially constructed knowledge is to be preserved, the purpose of an exchange must be not to reach agreement but to sustain the process of exchange itself" (8). Because consensus might deny or suppress differences, Clark posits that the goal in the production of knowledge depends on a shift in the interpretation of the meaning of consensus. Consensus then can be defined as that which "brings people together not in their agreement of values and beliefs, but in their agreement to examine them" (58). In other words, writers do not need to arrive at ideological agreement, but they do need to agree to the process of listening to others and critically examining each other's assertions.

The members of the grant-writing group might have benefitted from some of this theoretical advice. At times they appeared to be coming to consensus, while actually, some of the members were just pulling back from the uneasiness of the conflict. Although their personal or organizational motivating agendas would not have been eliminated, a reminder of the benefits of honest and open dissensus could have been an impetus in sustaining their conversation.
SCENE III  (March 20, about five weeks after Scene II)

The Setting: The action stems from a phone conversation originating in the Narrator's home office.

The Collaborative Group:

   In Attendance
   ■ Narrator

   Not Present
   ■ Kate-----Substance Abuse Specialist with extensive collaborative experience in writing grants, flyers, memos, and newsletters
   ■ Lisa-----Youth Specialist who has worked with groups on federal and state grants and award nominations
   ■ Dick-----Assistant Principal who is currently working with a local group on a small grant for a school program, but basically does not have much background in collaborative writing
   ■ Bill-----Director of a youth shelter who regularly works with groups to produce grants, flyers, brochures, and presentations
   ■ Craig----Principal (collaborative experience unknown)

The Action

An ink-mazed copy of the proposal draft spreads over my computer table, layered with coded lists of further changes and additions scrawled on legal paper; all await assimilation into the expanding original on my familiar, blue screen. The phone interrupts my scrolling through the document.

"I just wanted to get back to you about our conversation earlier today." It's Kate. "I talked with my director, and she suggests that our agency withdraw from the group and the writing of this proposal. Lisa can't go on making these
changes and additions, especially if you feel they are destroying the organization and readability of the proposal."

With a little more than a week left before the deadline, the writing group is disintegrating. When Kate and I met at her house just two nights before to go over the current draft of the proposal, things seemed to be progressing--some gaps still existed, but with some adjustments, an updated draft would be ready for the writing-group meeting later in the week. What was happening? Vital decisions were being made by lone individuals, or maybe a couple of the members, but the writing group was not meeting or acting together.

At the time that Kate and I met to go over revisions, she was annoyed by some of the additions Lisa had inserted. Kate had explained that because Lisa was not an educator she was unaware of many of the existing problems in the schools; furthermore, because of her position with JTPC, she occasionally had conflicts of interest with high schools, so her biases were showing up in a few sections of the proposal. Kate suggested some revisions which would portray the schools in a more favorable light. This sounded like a solid move since the proposal would be presented to school superintendents and boards for approval and ultimately would rely on their financial backing in future years.

Another important decision was made (by whom?) concerning the training center. As Craig and the group at an earlier
meeting had planned, his school’s youth center would provide training for a fee. Now the revisions call for three training centers. This is going to be more difficult to fit into the plan’s organizational structure; in addition, Craig may not be in agreement with this decision since his school will lose considerable funds and some influence. Have the decision makers considered all the politics involved in this move?

More problems. Dick has assured the group that his school is eager to be one of the original sites. Now that he needs to secure a written Letter of Support, his superintendent and board are wavering. He wants other group members to help sell the program, but it may be too late because of constraints of calling board meetings.

Furthermore, throughout the writing of the grant, establishing need in this rural geographic area has proven difficult, especially with only one set of statistics which do not match the categories in the RFP. Lisa has requested from the state more graphs and statistics, and she has asked the director of her agency to help analyze and reconcile the information with the RFP and to revise and expand the original budget.

Finally, Kate announces that the group meeting scheduled to revise the draft has been cancelled because of individual conflicts. Since she has already sent out copies to all the
members, I urge her to have them make written comments and return the documents.

I assure Kate that it can still come together; I can work with Lisa and her changes and the other revision comments. Kate says they will see what happens, but implies that Lisa is probably all on her own now.

Discussion: How does the basic organizational structure of a collaborative writing group affect the way power is negotiated and established?

While the degree of consensus desirable in collaborative writing may be debated, it is obvious that this well-educated and experienced group of professionals suffered from a breakdown in the collaborative process. Although the conflict described in these scenes resulted from many causes, such as a lack of organizational structure and inability to overcome personal agendas, the group also faced problems because they had no established method for collaboration. In fact, the way or ways in which the group planned to collaborate were never discussed at all.

Organizing Writing Groups

While collaboration is generally thought of in holistic terms, as a word that just describes people working together, researchers have identified different methods of collaborative writing. In "Collaborative Writing in the Workplace," Charles
Stratton describes three methods of organizing technical writing groups: the horizontal division model, the sequential model, and the stratification model. In the horizontal division model, each writer completes a section of the project after which the writing is combined. This method, according to Stratton produces a product of inconsistent quality, yet it "still seems to be very popular in business, industry, and government agencies--probably because managers aren’t aware of any other way to improve on the solitary writer model" (178). He also finds the sequential model inefficient, although the process produces a more effective document. In the sequential model, one person drafts a document, and then layer after layer of editors and publication managers revise and edit the document so that "each person in the sequence contribute[s] to the entire document . . . " (179). Stratton endorses the stratification model: "Each did what he or she was really good at; all worked together, right from the start; everyone had a sense of ownership (or authorship) in the document; and the team was both effective and efficient" (179). Stratton explains that if people are not aware of the different ways of organizing group work, they may not stumble upon them as they write collaboratively--this potential for inefficiency especially appears in ad hoc groups.

As discussed following Scene I, institutional norms may determine methods used to organize collaborative work and
therefore increase efficiency. However, these norms may also stifle efforts to try organizing group work in alternative and more effective ways. Ad hoc groups, therefore, have greater freedom in establishing methods for collaboration. This freedom, however, as Scene III illustrates, requires the articulation of a collaborative plan. Despite the members' combined experience, the group did not recognize that they might be approaching their collaboration with different ideas about how to collaborate. As the follow-up interviews suggest, to some extent the group relied on their hired consultant to provide this guidance. The members each acknowledged that they were experienced in doing collaborative work, but they had not had any formal education in group writing; their composition classes had taught them to write independently. Two of the members suggested that some initial guidelines from their outside consultant in collaborative methods would have facilitated their writing process.

Hierarchical Versus Dialogic

In addition to Stratton's three methods of organizing technical collaborative work is Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's formulation in *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*. Based on their extensive survey of 1400 writers in seven different professional organizations, Ede and Lunsford describe two
distinct models of collaborative writing.\(^1\) The hierarchical model "is carefully, and often rigidly, structured driven by highly specific goals, and carried out by people playing clearly defined and delimited roles" (133). The three models which Stratton describes fit within this general classification:

These goals are most often designated by someone outside of and hierarchically superior to the immediate collaborative group or by a senior member or leader of the group. Because productivity and efficiency are of the essence in this mode of collaboration, the realities of multiple voices and shifting authority are seen as difficulties to be overcome or resolved. Knowledge in this mode is most often viewed as information to be found or a problem to be solved. (133)

The other mode of collaborative writing that Ede and Lunsford identify is "not as widespread in the professions we studied," or as easily recognizable or definable:

This dialogic mode is loosely structured and the roles enacted within it are fluid: one person may occupy multiple and shifting roles as a project progresses. In this mode, the process of articulating goals is often as important as the goals themselves and sometimes even more important. Furthermore, those participating in dialogic collaboration generally value the creative tension inherent in multivoiced and multivalent ventures. What those involved in hierarchical collaboration see as a problem to be solved, these individuals view as a strength to capitalize on and to emphasize. In dialogic

\(^1\)Although they define only two models, they also acknowledge the existence of a variety of other possibilities since "collaborative writing, like the 'self,' is not a stable or coherent construction": rather, "it appears in complex and multiple modalities" (132).
collaboration, this group effort is seen as an essential part of the production—rather than the recovery—of knowledge and as a means of individual satisfaction within the group. (133)

While their vocabulary and tone hint at their preferred mode, Ede and Lunsford are careful to point out that positioning the two as opposites is "harmfully reductive in its oversimplification" (134). In fact, they suggest that "only full-fledged ethnographic studies could provide the depth of detail and critical perspective necessary . . . " (134) to characterize collaborative writing situations in accordance with these definitions. However, as the grant-writing group members analysis of their collaboration suggests, the individual members did not agree about the mode of collaboration they had enacted.

In some situations, the mode of collaborative writing may be firmly established by institutional norms. In many ad hoc "real world" writing groups, however, the collaborative method likely needs to be explored and negotiated. This lack of a negotiated method was articulated by two of the members of the grant writing group. Bill explained that, when the focus of the plan changed without his input, he "moved out because it was then not emphasizing human services, and there was not enough dialoguing." Kate remarked that "We didn't trust each other enough to debate the issues. My director even suggested that I pull back from the project."
To better understand how the members of this group conceptualized their collaborative method, I asked each of them in follow-up interviews to read and comment on Ede and Lunsford's definitions. Their responses confirm that the group members had no unified vision of their collaboration process. Dick felt that the group could definitely be described as dialogical: "I don’t think the first definition is even collaborative. How would people feel ownership?" In contrast, Bill said: "This was more hierarchical. The philosophy seemed to be to work it out and then get people involved. I would have liked to see people more involved from the beginning. I see collaboration as organic, not mechanical." Lisa felt that neither description was accurate by itself and emphasized a contrast between the institutional norms of the two types of organizations involved in the project: "Probably a combination of both--some structure, but flexible. I see education as more hierarchical and human services as dialogical." And again Kate's response reveals this lack of a clearly defined method of collaboration: "We had people from each mind set working on the project. I was coming from dialogic; some were coming from hierarchical."
EPILOGUE

Phoenix-like, the ad hoc grant-writing group is rebuilding their collaborative relationship. Eight months after their last formal meeting, they have been rejuvenated by the possibility of legislation which will generate additional funding. Reassured that their proposed model, which ranked first of all the rural models, should be resubmitted, controlled excitement builds at the chance to implement this program.

Kate calls to inform me of the possible resubmission of the grant. Even as she expresses her enthusiasm for the project, a hesitant tone reveals her feelings about working with the collaborative writing group again. As we talk, we analyze the first collaborative writing experience. Although the sources of many of the group’s frustrations have not changed, especially their personal and organizational agendas and lack of institutional norms, they may have gained insights from this initial round of collaboration. If they can overcome any residual interpersonal problems, they will have the advantage of being able to build upon their past experience.

Kate mentions that our follow-up interview helped her realize that the members had each envisioned the concept of collaboration differently and suggests that the group’s future collaborative writing will benefit if the interviews
influenced the other members in the same way. The group may be able to convert their past problems into valuable experience and in the future build a more creative and effective collaboration.

The ad hoc grant-writing group may be strengthened by their collaborative experiences and their analyses of this writing process; perhaps other collaborators, including student writing groups, can also benefit from insights into power negotiations in collaborative writing based on this group's experience.
IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Classroom collaborative writing does not need to simulate corporate situations to be meaningful. The scenes of the ad hoc grant-writing group demonstrate the parallels between such a loosely structured "real world" writing group and classroom collaborative groups. Because many of the issues of power negotiation in the ad hoc grant-writing group are the same issues that challenge, and often frustrate, student collaborative groups, implications for teaching can be based on this real world group's collaborative writing experience.

The scenes and the follow-up discussions illustrate that the ad hoc group would have benefitted from guidance in and interactive communication about collaborative writing. The implication for composition teachers is that their students will also benefit from discussion, guidance, and a planned collaborative structure. Specifically, the three areas of discussion based on the scenes of the ad hoc group can provide issues for teachers' consideration.

**Teachers need to provide time and motivation for students to write effectively together.**

In the same manner as the ad hoc grant-writing group was challenged by the lack of an established culture (interpersonal backgrounds, production procedures, and institutional norms), classrooms also lack an established
culture, at least initially. Because most classrooms comprise students who do not know each other, teachers may want to structure opportunities for students to begin to establish interpersonal relationships. A classroom in which the students are actively engaged in learning--where students perform daily group activities such as brainstorming, writing short assignments, and peer editing--encourages students to become acquainted and to learn how to work together. Additionally, if teachers assign a major collaborative writing assignment, they will want to give the group time to work through the preliminary stage of uneasiness and establish a working relationship.

Self-disclosure is recommended by Mary Lay as a tool for establishing an interpersonal background within student groups. From her studies focusing on gender-based skills in collaborative groups, she suggests that, while teachers should encourage self-disclosure, they must also be aware of risks. Teachers may want to prepare their classes through communication games or activities.

While students usually have few problems determining locations for meetings, other production procedures may be facilitated by teacher direction. Meg Morgan, et. al. suggest that teachers may want to group students with regard to their individual schedules, thus avoiding conflicts. Other production procedures involve computer access, choice of
software programs, and printing options. Forman's study, described in the literature review, demonstrates the problems students encounter when dealing with computer programs designed for collaboration. Teachers and students will probably need to investigate options available for computer use in collaborative work. As Scene I illustrates, many aspects of computer etiquette, especially in ad hoc collaborative writing groups, need to be resolved. In situations of group "ownership" of a data base, groups need to establish guidelines from the beginning of their collaboration.

Since institutional norms usually evolve over a period of time, teachers cannot do much to supply their students with a ready-made set of norms. To some extent the teacher's style guide or assignment requirements will provide some norms, but will not provide an "overall environment" (Freed and Broadhead) for making writing decisions. Teachers can, however, encourage students to consider pertinent collaborative writing issues.

As teachers consider all of these aspects, they will need to decide how involved they want or need to be. While some teachers believe that providing any collaborative experience will benefit students because students will learn from the experience and formulate ideas for subsequent efforts (as the grant-writing group will), others believe that they can help
their students if they provide some discussion which prompts active analysis of the collaboration process. Ede and Lunsford suggest that "collaborative efforts need to be carefully organized or orchestrated ... " (64). The experience of the ad hoc grant-writing group supports this idea because of the many conflicts they dealt with, some of which resulted from a lack of careful organization, which in turn was caused at least in part by the lack of an established culture.

**Teachers need to formulate attitudes about and responses to group consensus and dissensus.**

The ad hoc grant-writing group demonstrates the important balance between consensus and conflict which is integral to collaboration. To help their students deal with this balance, teachers will first want to investigate the issue of consensus for themselves so they can develop their own philosophy about the degree of disagreement necessary to fully investigate collaborate work and at the same time arrive at group efficiency. Then they may decide that their students will benefit from exploring the issue during class discussion. They may want to share examples from their own collaborative writing experiences and encourage the students to evaluate their own.
Teachers may find that dividing the concept of conflict into two classifications is a useful heuristic. Many researchers (Lay, Morgan, et. al.) suggest that group conflict can be categorized as either interpersonal or substantive. Substantive conflict is valuable for its impetus for exploring issues; interpersonal conflict has no value for group work. While the grant-writing group’s conflicts can probably not be reduced to this simplistic division, and student groups’ conflicts may also be complex, this division may be helpful for discussion of the issue. Additionally, teachers may monitor student logs to detect student conflicts (Morgan, et. al.), they may forecast collaborative work with role playing to demonstrate small group dynamics (Raymond and Yee), or they may serve as sympathetic listeners for their students.

Teachers will want to investigate with their students the various methods of collaborative writing and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Clearly the grant-writing group had no agreed upon method for collaborative writing, and consequently, the group effort disintegrated under the weight of multiple problems. Teachers can help their students avoid a similar scenario by providing an understanding of the methods of collaboration. Beyond this basic knowledge, teachers will again need to decide how involved they want to be in their students’ group work.
Teachers can create incentive for their students to plan collaborative methods if, as part of a proposal for major writing assignments, a collaboration design is required.

Often, a teacher's most important work is done in the planning stage when he or she designs the assignment. Meg Morgan, et. al. remind teachers that they need to design assignments with the same degree of complexity that prompts real world writers to work collaboratively: "Writers in the business and the professional worlds choose collaboration when their writing tasks (1) are large enough to require a division of labor, (2) benefit from a breadth of specialized skills, or (3) need to represent the synthesis of divergent viewpoints" (20).

Beyond these assignment incentives, if teachers want classroom collaborative writing to be successful, a more fundamental pedagogical issue needs to be raised. The following questions, addressed to teachers, focus on this issue:

- Do you use a collaborative writing assignment?
- Do you have a collaborative classroom?

The difference between the two questions is that some teachers try to import a collaborative writing assignment into their basically traditional classrooms and others strive to fashion classes which are collaborative in nature. If students are expected to work collaboratively, they will probably be more
successful in an atmosphere that values collaborative work. To value collaborative work, a teacher must believe that students can contribute to their learning process and to the construction of knowledge; therefore, the aim for teachers is to align their epistemological assumptions with their approach to day-to-day classroom management.
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