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Notes on Collaboration: Assessing Student Behaviors

TED HARDIN

The relationships on the set of a film are incredibly important and interdependent and ultimately affect what gets put on film. I firmly believe this, some people may argue with that, but I firmly believe it—especially on a low budget film.

Tom DiCillo, *Living in Oblivion*

MANY CLICHÉS SUGGEST WHAT KIND OF BEHAVIOR gravitates toward particular crew positions or roles in film and video production, yet I have encountered no published studies that seek to explain this correlation. There is the *rogue director* who terrorizes *his* crew while making intriguing films. There is the *Machiavellian producer* who plays people off one another to get the film project completed and takes credit for much of the effort. Of course we must include the *cool cinematographer* (with or without an eye patch) who looks upon *his* work as an art form and always needs more time to make a masterpiece. Lesser known, but important to mention, is the *solo film artist* who uses film or video as *his* medium for personal expression. The “overly familiar” status of such clichés is certainly reinforced in several notable self-referential films: Federico Fellini’s *8 ½* (1963), François Truffaut’s *La Nuit américaine* [Day for Night] (1973), Wim Wenders’ *Der Stand der Dinge* [The State of Things] (1982), and, of course, DiCillo’s *Living in Oblivion* (1995)—all popular examples of film crew clichés operating in narrative films. The gender bias here is intentional and part of the cliché.

Several years ago, I began to collect actual data from students and colleagues about the

nature of collaboration and its intrinsic dynamics in order to investigate how interpersonal dynamics affect the final film and the education of the individual student. I wondered, what role can film schools play in affecting collaboration dynamics and gender and ethnic inequities? How can we teach crew positions so that a wide range of behaviors draw on students’ inherent strengths when making a film? How do we teach students the best ways for these roles to work collaboratively?

The clichés just described are certainly well known to most incoming student filmmakers, yet with the usual film school emphasis on teaching technology and storytelling techniques, there is often a lack of time or effort to teach management skills and an awareness of interpersonal dynamics. Furthermore, many textbooks used in film schools today—while effectively covering the range of necessary knowledge for filmmaking by often drawing on real-life anecdotes and case studies— inadvertently emulate the bottom-line pressure of the film industry and plug a tough “hire and fire” approach to crew interaction.¹ Instructors teaching in the academy often look to downplay such sentiments with reassurances that “no one will be fired in this class, yet crew changes may have to be made so that everyone plays a role.” Such placations may succeed for the short term, yet students often wonder out loud, “Will I get to do what I want? What if I don’t like the people in my group? Why can’t they be fired? That’s what would happen on a *real* production.” In his widely popular book *Film*

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Photos 1A–B: “Meet the crew.” Production stills from the narrative project *Pirates and Pills*, Practicum Course 2007.

Production Technique, a mainstay at numerous film schools, Bruce Mamer looks to soften such mixed signals in a short section titled “Team Spirit,” which points to interpersonal dynamics yet still clearly favors an efficiency-oriented, industry point of view:

Film crews tend to be an amalgamation of iconoclasts and eccentrics, individualism and ego[,] seemingly a necessary attribute to successfully staying in the field. Despite this, responsible crew members understand the need to move forward as a unified whole. They also do not make the mistake of overestimating or underestimating their contribution. Chronic complainers can poison the atmosphere on a set and make everyone wish they were somewhere else. If someone on the set does not want to be there, do yourself a favor and grant his or her wish. (49–50)

For the sake of remaining aligned with a rich tradition of liberal arts education in order to facilitate the emergence of more imaginative film innovators to the industry, film production programs must ask themselves, “Are we teaching students to make films, or are we teaching them how to become the people who make films?”

The ideal answer many film educators want to blurt out is “Both!” To this end, using inclusive language that suggests a wide range of possible behaviors, Michael Rabiger, in his seminal text *Directing*, writes,

In time, the members of a small film crew fall into roles. These may include such archetypes as prophet, diplomat, visionary, navigator, earth-mother, scribe, nurse, strong man, and fixer. Someone will always assume the role of jester or clown, for each crew develops its own special humor and in-jokes.



Photo 2: Results from the process—film still from the narrative project *Pirates and Pills*, Practicum Course 2007.

The feeling that comes from working effectively as a group is important: it can be the most exhilarating and energizing experience imaginable, and seems to be specially strong during times of crisis. Careful selection of the right partners makes anything in the world possible. A team of determined friends is unstoppable. (324)

The importance of developing “team spirit” and a sense of trust on the set suggests a need for teaching a deeper understanding of interpersonal dynamics. This does not mean that instructors need to evaluate every student using a Myers-Briggs test to determine which crew position suits them best, but it does mean that a closer look is warranted at the ways crews are formed, at what behaviors individual crews contain, and at whether there are distinctive behaviors favoring particular modes of filmmaking.

In this article, I share my observations about collaboration that occur among students on film

production projects. I draw on the analysis of two years of learning outcomes surveys, collaboration surveys, interviews, and outside review of films and videos. I also incorporate tools and behavioral charts developed by psychologist and teacher John Bilby. My aim is to gain insight into and offer experiential language for better coaching techniques regarding collaboration, as well as to more accurately reveal the nature of collective learning and shared authorship on group film-production projects.

Instruments for Measuring Collaboration

My approach to qualifying behaviors in student film collaborations comes principally from integrating the assessment data of 149 students and 24 faculty over a two-year observation window with the work of John Bilby. Bilby combines Buddhist meditation practice as taught



Photo 3: Film still from the narrative project *Forgiven*, Independent Project Course 2007.

by his mentor Mitsuo Aoki, the work of gestalt psychologists such as Fritz Perls, and Timothy Leary's adaptation of the work of Harry Stack Sullivan published as "Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality, a Functional Theory and Methodology for Personality Evaluation." Leary's work contains a balanced, counter-clockwise diagnostic tool called "the Leary Wheel," which Bilby worked with for over twenty years before his untimely death in 2007. Bilby broadened Leary's idea into a context encompassing "mindfulness" and awareness practices that culminates into a new tool called the "Wheelbook."

The Wheelbook is at the heart of Bilby's philosophy, a way of approaching the world that suggests the self is composed of two sides. The altruistic and masterful side is a set of essential qualities, an essence. It is often obscured by a set of "poorly functioning behaviors," an exaggeration of the first side, and creates an ego-driven personality. Under duress, the personality "is driven to seek selfish advantage over others" and often expresses itself excessively through a set of habitually employed manipulations or defenses. Deftly combining secular and spiritual traditions, Bilby moves beyond the Cartesian notion of self that primarily emphasizes thought and embeds a notion of self that is set deeply within experience: "The true 'I am'

is the 'I am' of 'I experience, therefore, I am.'"² Such a notion of self is useful in an educational context when thinking of collaborators engaged in the practical activity of filmmaking that needs to lead to actual outcomes.

Experience and the ability to reflect on it allow film productions to make informed compromises, attain a certain level of competency, and reach completion. At best, student collaborators are motivated by the desire to learn how to participate in making a film, yet they also bring a complex array of traits that define who they are as individuals. Bilby's work offers language that helps to facilitate deeper awareness of the self as seen in the interaction with others, and it invites students to see that "behavior that causes troubles and problems can be turned around by choice." Although there are numerous notions of self throughout history, Bilby's work emphasizes a practical starting point that breaks down human behavior into eight different types so that students can recognize strengths and weaknesses in their own behavior as well as in the behavior in others.

The game Bilby refers to in his writings is what he calls the "awareness game," and it has three basic steps: first, in one's self, recognize and drop manipulations; second, with others, recognize and step aside from their

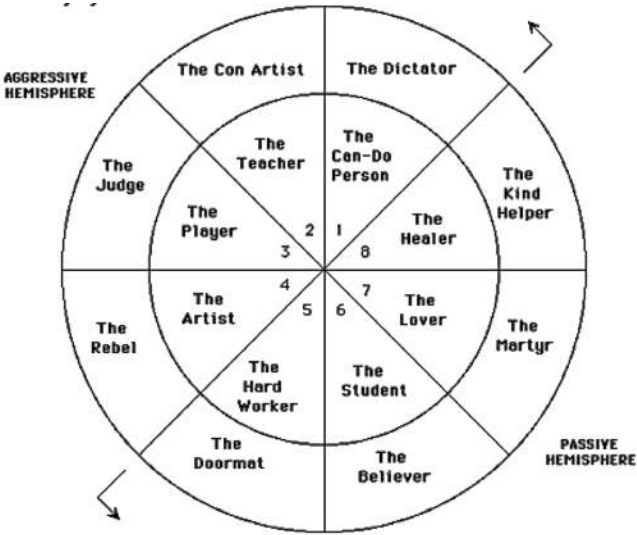


Figure 1: Inner wheel is behavior in "essence"; outer wheel is "personality."

Table 1: Experiential Thumbnail Sketches

The following extract features the eight “Experiential Thumbnail Sketches” that are at the heart of Bilby’s Wheelbook and crucial for playing the “awareness game.” The first name of each behavior type is its “essence,” as exemplified through its strengths and qualities. Under optimal circumstances, this kind of behavior refers to the student in his or her natural, or “relaxed,” state. The second, linked name is the “personality,” as exemplified through various forms of manipulation and defenses. Under extreme duress, the personality describes the student behaving in exaggerated ways. Positive and negative emotional feelings that tend to accompany each essence and personality are in parentheses. The “stake” is each personality’s underlying, motivating goal for expression. Every personality uses manipulation in order to attain various goals (or stakes).

1. *Can-Do Person/Dictator*. Brave, strong, manually competent, bold/arrogant, pushy, demanding, destructive. (Courage/Fear). In personality: wants to be respected, whether earned or not. Stake: being in control of other people.
2. *Teacher/Con Artist*. Smart, discerning, inventive, articulate/shrewd, cold, aloof, taking selfish advantage. (Solitude /Loneliness). In personality: wants to be seen as “the best.” Stake: outsmarting others, and being admired.
3. *Player/Judge*. Balanced, disciplined, wise, playful/judgmental, cynical, sarcastic, punishing. (Humor, Fun/Anger). In personality: wants to win the argument and straighten out the other person. Stake: being right (and making others wrong).
4. *Artist/Rebel*. Sensitive, attuned, unique, moving/over-sensitive, rejected, spitefully rejective, outrageous. (Artistic Sensitivity/Jealousy, “over-sensitivity”). In personality: wants, in everything, to do it their own way (for the beauty of it as they see it) and not be told what to do. Stake: not having “the beauty of it” spoiled.
5. *Hard Worker/Doormat*. Modest, understanding, willing to do the *hard* work, empathetic/shy, self-doubting, self-effacing, lazy (Sweet Rest/Shame, Depression). In personality: wants everything to be easy. Stake: comfort.
6. *Student/Believer*. Energetic, eagerly curious and interested, loyal, highly intuitive/hyper, phobic-obsessive, believes too easily, taken advantage of (Excitement, Enthusiasm/Nervousness, Anxiety). In personality: dependent on others for advice and approval. Stake: security.
7. *Lover/Martyr*. Natural, tender, spontaneous, free/melodramatic, suffering over lost love, giving love to get love, used (“martyred”). (Tenderness Love/Sadness). In personality: wants—indiscriminately—to be loved back. [The only answer to this dilemma for the many who encounter it is to learn to love with no expectation of love in return.] Stake: intimacy.
8. *Healer/Kind Helper*. Nourishing, responsible, caretaking, healing/worrying, interfering, giving help whether needed or wanted or not, undermining. (Friendly Love/Guilt). In personality: they want to have their company be safe, healthy, clean, and well-nourished. (Underlying that, they don’t want their company to take any chances in their lives, else they get hurt in life, and don’t come back.) Stake: having and keeping company. (Bilby)

manipulations; and finally, during interactions, use non-manipulative language.³ What makes Bilby’s project so appropriate and pedagogically sound for qualifying student collaborations is that it includes coaching aspects that the students can engage in as well. By learning to be “mindful” of their own tendencies toward manipulating others, becoming aware of how others may tend to manipulate them, and com-

mitting toward interaction that avoids manipulation, students set themselves up for a deeper collaboration that draws on essential strengths of each crewmember involved.

The “feminine” is not as readily present in these personality descriptions, and female students, in particular, may not recognize themselves here. Assuming leadership in collaborative decision-making contexts may be a

challenge for the more feminine filmmaker. But the feminine filmmaker also has the potential for being the most comfortable in collaborative, decision-making settings, as long as, of course, the feminine is respected within the film production context. The feminine double bind is implicit in several of Bilby's Wheelbook categories, which reveals both the cultural and the self-imposed stereotypes of collaborative behaviors. The assessment data demonstrates intriguing gender patterns that are discussed later in the findings section.

As one can see while moving around the Wheelbook, the progression of behaviors can play a role in coaching the students to become more mindful of a range that occurs within themselves and other people. Most people locate their behavior across two to three different behaviors depending on the circumstances involved. As mentioned previously, there is a linked, yet dynamic interplay between the balanced behavior located on the inside of the wheel (essence) and the more exaggerated and manipulative behavior on the outside (personality). For instructors, this dynamic is easiest to understand when reflecting on the "teacher" (essence)/ "con artist" (personality) duality. We are often at our best as teachers when we are well prepared, rested, and able to stick to a Socratic and dialogic teaching style that is unifying in its learning among teacher and students. Then there are those moments when the projector breaks, we have misplaced our notes, there is too much to cover, the clock is ticking—and we resort to a series of assertions that we insist are all very important and should be learned accordingly. We may be admired for such lectures, yet when teachers lecture *at* students, there is a sudden separation between the instructor and the students—a separation that is often consistent with the traditional classroom, yet has differing results for members of a creative team.

Tom DiCillo comments on the aggravating dynamics of production within his self-reflexive film *Living in Oblivion* as well as on the insights he wishes to share about filmmaking:

What seems to him [the director character] is that filmmaking is just one series of disappointments and compromises after another. Well, I think that unless you are a tyrant or a dictator and you refuse to make any compromises, I guess that's one way to do it. As far as my experiences have said, everything is about adjusting to the reality of what happens on the set. It's out of that that you make compromises.

Similar person-to-person interactions occur between behavioral types that are located next to one another on the Wheelbook, as well as there being a deeper interplay between the hemispheres. For instance, when the line-producer monitors the schedule by checking in with the department heads, she often discovers conflicts: for example, the director is ready to shoot the scene, yet the cinematographer needs more time to meet her goal as set in preproduction—a decision needs to be made. The crew could take more time to light the scene and hope to make up time later or compromise the lighting design and shoot the scene. Depending on where students are in their behaviors—in essence or in personality—the scenario may play out with tempers flaring and resentment growing or, alternatively, with a recognition that creative filmmaking is a series of thoughtful compromises.

The relationship between the upper, active hemisphere and the lower, passive hemisphere of the Wheelbook is most important in looking at how teams function through time in terms of leaders, supporters, and trust-building dynamics. As in the example from *Living in Oblivion*, simply reflecting on the active-passive interplay may assist the collaborative process. When the director behaves as the "Can-Do Person" in the active hemisphere, he actively directs actors and crew on the set to move the process forward. At other times the director may be focused on a particular task—rehearsing an actor, for instance—and behave as "Hard Worker" in the passive hemisphere. Both behaviors in essence are committed to working on the project. However, when the emotion of courage neces-

sary for firm leadership of the Can-Do Person is transformed through pressure, deadlines, conflicts, random mishaps, and so on into the emotion of fear, the “Dictator” emerges, and the stake for controlling others takes over. Opposite to such active manipulation is the passive behavior of the “Doormat” personality, whose stake looks toward comfort and easiness. Both examples are evident in *Living in Oblivion* and are used to great comedic effect. As the film illustrates, manipulative personalities often encourage self-critique through their own excessive behaviors. These dynamic interplays between essence/personality and active/passive behaviors offer a familiar range

of behaviors for students to discuss and reflect on during the collaborative process.

Surveys

John Bilby and Robert Sabal worked together several years ago to produce a survey based on the Wheelbook that would be useful to administer to film production students, in order to jumpstart a conversation about personal awareness within film production dynamics. The survey has seventeen multiple-choice questions with eight possible responses.⁴ The questions probe the nature of personal responses to a variety of interactive circum-



Photos 4A–4B:
Film stills from the
animation *Slash and
Mangle*, Animation
Production Studio
Course 2007.

stances within a group dynamic. Before filling out the surveys, the students are asked to reflect on their current collaboration in progress. For each question, their choice of one response out of eight possible corresponds to one of the eight behavioral modes on the Wheelbook as developed by Leary and Bilby.

In the first year, prior to being given the Wheelbook surveys, students were asked questions that qualified their sense of themselves and others as collaborators. In the second year, students were asked additionally to spotlight a “critical incident” or reflective moment of insight into collaboration. These questions were asked before major production phases, and for the latest survey groups, questions about critical incidents and the nature of collaboration were repeated after the final production phase.

Capstone Areas of Study

In order to outline the parameters of my study, I would like to briefly describe each of the four capstone initiatives in the Department of Film and Video at Columbia College Chicago, how

teams are formed, the qualities of a formative assignment, and the nature of the final films.

- **Practicum:** The faculty and the students from the four traditional concentrations—Producing, Directing, Cinematography, and Editing; Working with Sound; Production Design; and Music Composition courses—all work together in a highly structured arrangement called the Practicum.

Team formation: The Practicum is a three-semester narrative initiative. With the goal of completing six 5- to 8-minute films, faculty members from each concentration interview and screen students for entry into each course involved in the Practicum. Student screenwriters work closely with student producers during the first semester. In the spring semester before production can begin, Directing and Producing students rank their preferred choices before matching up with the remaining crew positions through a “meet and greet” event. Faculty members resolve circumstances where the same crewmember is sought by more than one team.



Photos 5A–5B: Film stills from the narrative project *Coq au Vin*, Practicum Course 2008.

Team-based learning assignment: In order to establish working relationships according to an industry chain of command model, the newly formed crews shoot a mini-film or a test shoot. The crew first encounters what interpersonal, technical, aesthetic, and narrative concerns for the project align or are in conflict for each collaborator.

Team-based outcomes: At the end of the spring semester, student crews complete six 5- to 8-minute short films up to a rough cut stage with rough musical scores. The following summer semester is spent finishing the film.

- **Animation:** Animation faculty launched a senior-level capstone course that is entirely built around collaboration, task-sharing, and modular production of a 3- to 5-minute animation. Students occupy crew positions of director, producer, character designer, and 2-D and 3-D modelers. I examined and gathered data from two sections.

Team formation: From the students' performance and demonstration of leadership skills, each faculty member assigns to the students the crew positions previously listed. Slightly different from the Practicum arrangement, the faculty member facilitates interpersonal, technical, aesthetic, and narrative concerns for each team producing the 3- to 5-minute animations beginning in the fall semester.

Team-based learning assignment: Through the instructors' prompts, the students are urged to voice technical, aesthetic, and narrative concerns for the chosen script and offer solutions (script authored by a screenwriting student). Through much discussion and charting of possible workflows, the natural leaders of each animation team emerge, and a course is charted toward beginning work on the respective project.

Team-based outcomes: Two 3- to 5-minute animations result from each team's col-



Photos 6A–6B: Film stills from the animation *Mr. Hobo*, Animation Production Studio Course 2008.

lective efforts. The project is developed by the whole group during the fall semester of each year and is produced over the fall and spring semesters.

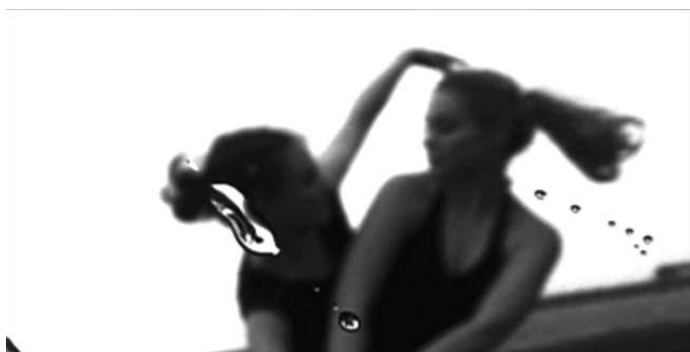
- **Independent projects:** Because of the nature of our large department, independent-minded individuals can form small groups to make films, figure out ways of getting equipment and studio space, and schedule rehearsals, shoots, and edits—all with the signature of a single faculty member.

Team formation: Writer-directors, but increasingly producers attached to a screenplay, sign up to participate in the Independent Project initiative. A single faculty member facilitates the development, production, and postproduction of these independent projects. Each semester, students attend four group sessions with others working on independent projects. The project initiators present ideas and look to find more crew members with the faculty member's assistance.

Team-based learning assignment: Similar to independent projects funded outside the studio system, the producers or directors of these 5- to 30-minute films record auditions to determine crew reliability and rely on scheduled meetings to gauge interpersonal, technical, aesthetic, and narrative concerns for their final films.

Team-based outcomes: Nine 5- to 30-minute films and videos provide material for this study from each small group of Film and Video students.

- **Alternative forms:** Increasingly more of our students seek out alternative contexts to use their knowledge to expand notions of cinema and its reception. Each instructor of the particular alternative forms course facilitates collaboration between Film and Video students and Movement Theatre, Stage Combat, and Dance students, with the goal of making a 3- to 5-minute, nonnarrative videos over several weeks.



Photos 7A–7B:
Film stills from the dance collaboration *Raindrop*, Alternative Forms Course 2007, and the stage combat collaboration *Video Puppets*, Alternative Forms Course 2008.

Team formation: The faculty member allows students to select who will record sound and operate camera. When there are conflicts, the faculty member decides how groups are formed.

Team-based learning assignment: Students work in groups of three, established early in the semester, sharing and critiquing each other's work throughout the semester. The small groups learn about the individual interests of each video artist, so that when the small group creates a 3- to 5-minute video, the project initiator engages the other crew members in a more informed dialogue as they work to realize a clear concept and theme.

Team-based outcomes: The production of 3- to 5-minute experimental videos in collaboration with Dance and Theatre students.

Methodology

1. I examined four Film and Video Department capstone-oriented initiatives involving film production that occurred in the spring semesters of 2006–08.
2. I observed classes, conducted interviews, and administered surveys oriented toward gauging levels of collaboration each spring semester from 2006 to 2008 by using a frequency tabulation process and a data coding process. In 2008 I returned to these classes with the individual Wheelbook results for each student's primary and secondary behaviors as tallied from their responses to 17 survey questions. For each class, I led a brief discussion about collaboration and the range of behavior common to such dynamic processes. In particular I pointed out to students the interplay between essence (natural behaviors of students under ideal circumstances) and personality (behaviors that are exaggerations of their combined traits that use manipulations). Toward the end of the 2008 semester, after most production was

complete, I administered a brief follow-up survey on the results of collaboration.

Findings

Following are the 2007 survey questions and coded results culled from short answers. Fifty-six out of sixty-five students responded.

1. Has collaboration been beneficial to you as a developing filmmaker?
Positive—45/56 students (80%)
Negative—8/56 students (14%)
Not sure—3/56 students (5%)
2. What kind of collaborator do you consider yourself?
Open to giving and receiving feedback—13/56 students (23%)
Hard worker—11/56 students (20%)
Leader—9/56 students (16%)
Helper and team player—4/56 students (7%)
Boss/overlord—2/56 students (4%)
3. What do you expect of other collaborators?
Commitment—8/56 students (14%)
Hard work—8/56 students (14%)
Openness to giving and receiving feedback—7/56 students (13%)
Creativity—2/56 students (4%)
Respect—2/56 students (4%)

Using a frequency tabulation, the wheelbook survey results clearly show that most students (48%) chose answers that correspond to the "Teacher/Con Artist" as primary behavior (Table 2a).

As a secondary behavior, the "Player/Judge" was the second most frequent choice at 17 percent (Table 2b).

When gender differences were incorporated, the findings become more nuanced. Fifty percent or more men chose answers that correspond to the "Teacher/Con Artist" as primary behavior, whereas less than 40 percent of female students made the same choices. It is important to note that women made a variety of choices that suggest a wider spectrum of behaviors. In both years, female students also made choices that deviate from the overall

Table 2: Wheelbook Primary and Secondary Behaviors

(a) Wheelbook Primary Behaviors										
	Men '07		Women '07		Men '08		Women '08		All	
Spring semesters 2007–08	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		%
1. Can-Do Person/Dictator	2	3%	2	14%	1	5%	6	26%	11	8%
2. Teacher/Con Artist	31	53%	8	38%	33	50%	9	39%	81	48%
3. Player/Judge	9	15%	4	19%	10	15%	6	26%	29	17%
4. Artist/Rebel	3	5%	0	0%	3	5%	0	0%	6	4%
5. Hard Worker/Doormat	4	7%	5	24%	7	10%	0	0%	17	10%
6. Student/Believer	5	8%	1	5%	7	10%	1	4%	14	8%
7. Lover/Martyr	3	5%	0	0%	1	2%	1	4%	5	3%
8. Kind Helper/Healer	2	3%	0	0%	2	3%	0	0%	4	2%
Behaviors (includes ties)	59	99%	20		64		24	99%	167	
TOTAL STUDENTS	48		17		61		23		149	
(b) Wheelbook Secondary Behaviors										
	Men '07		Women '07		Men '08		Women '08		All	
Spring semesters 2007–08	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count			%
1. Can-Do Person/Dictator	9	11%	3	10%	10	11%	4	12%	26	11%
2. Teacher/Con Artist	5	6%	7	24%	13	15%	6	17%	31	13%
3. Player/Judge	20	24%	4	14%	19	21%	7	20%	50	21%
4. Artist/Rebel	12	14%	4	14%	8	9%	2	6%	26	11%
5. Hard Worker/Doormat	11	13%	3	10%	11	12%	4	12%	29	12%
6. Student/Believer	13	15%	2	7%	12	14%	6	18%	33	14%
7. Lover/Martyr	11	13%	3	10%	9	10%	1	3%	24	10%
8. Kind Helper/Healer	4	5%	3	10%	7	8%	4	12%	18	8%
Behaviors (includes ties)	85	100%	29	99%	89	100%	34		237	
TOTAL STUDENTS	48		17		61		23		149	
(c) Wheelbook Primary Behaviors to Course										
	Practicum		Animation		Indie Projects		Alternative Forms		All	
Spring semesters 2007–08	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		%
1. Can-Do Person/Dictator	7	9%	2	4%	1	11%	1	5%	11	8%
2. Teacher/Con Artist	45	55%	22	41%	5	56%	9	40%	81	48%
3. Player/Judge	10	12%	12	22%	3	33%	4	18%	29	17%
4. Artist/Rebel	2	2%	2	4%	0	0%	2	9%	6	4%
5. Hard Worker/Doormat	6	7%	8	15%	0	0%	3	13%	17	10%
6. Student/Believer	7	9%	6	11%	0	0%	1	5%	14	8%
7. Lover/Martyr	2	2%	2	4%	0	0%	1	5%	5	3%
8. Kind Helper/Healer	3	4%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%	4	2%
Behaviors (includes ties)	82	100%	54		9	100%	22		167	
TOTAL STUDENTS	82		45		9		17		149	

secondary behaviors. In 2007, 24 percent of women made choices that correspond to “the Hard Worker/Doormat.” In 2008, 26 percent of women chose equally the “Can-Do Person/Dictator” and the “Player/Judge” as their second, most frequent behavior.

The findings are also more nuanced when course differences are incorporated (Table 2c). Whereas the overall choices conform to the norms, primary behavior of the Teacher/Con Artist and secondary behavior as the Player/Judge, there is a slightly wider spectrum of behaviors for students in Animation and Alternative Forms.

For three particular Wheelbook survey questions, there were high percentages of students choosing the same answer:

2. When you are working on a project, how do you expect to work with others in relationship to deadlines?
 - a. I expect results as soon as possible
 - b. I can wait for what I want for a long time
 - c. I expect results according to the arrangement—95/149 students (64%)
 - d. I don’t keep track of deadlines
 - e. I think there is plenty of time
 - f. I can’t wait to get started
 - g. I would rather things stay the same
 - h. I should have more time for everyone
5. When you interact with others on a project, what might you say in a moment of conflict?
 - a. “Do what I tell you to do.”
 - b. “I think that we could . . .”—125/149 students (84%).
 - c. “Why did you do that?”
 - d. “Fuck that!”
 - e. “I’m sorry.”
 - f. “You’re right.”
 - g. “How could you do that?”
 - h. “I should/shouldn’t do that.”
10. The thing that I’d find really difficult to say to another person in my group would be . . .
 - a. “Do it your own way.”
 - b. “I need your help.”
 - c. “Good job.”
 - d. “Yes.”
 - e. “I can do it now.”
 - f. “I don’t need your help.”
 - g. “Poor job”—95/149 students (64%).
 - h. “No.”

Following are the 2008 preproduction survey questions and coded results culled from short answers. Seventy-six out of eighty-four students responded.

1. Discuss briefly how you want your group to set and reset goals and priorities.
 - As a group, using each person’s strengths—20/76 students (26%)
 - Set goals according to a timeline—16/76 students (21%)
 - Set realistic goals to planned tasks—16/76 students (21%)
 - Set goals according to chain of command—11/76 students (15%)
 - Set realistic goals, yet stay open to change through communication—8/76 (11%)
2. Describe how you analyze and allocate the way you work relative to your role and responsibilities.
 - Commit to just my task and timeline—31/76 (41%)
 - Commit to my task while helping others complete theirs—22/76 (29%)
 - Build team spirit among crew—10/76 (13%)
 - See what needs to be done; delegate according to chain of command—9/76 (12%)
3. Reflect and briefly qualify how your crew is working in terms of decision making, communication, and process.
 - Positive, yet working on improving communication—29/76 (38%)
 - Communicating according to chain of command—17/76 (22%)
 - Decisions are made as a group—11 (15%)
 - Communication is not effective yet—9 (12%)
 - Project initiator/director should run the show—2/76 (3%)

4. Describe how the crew handles agreement and conflict.

Respectful communication and discussion as a group—32/76 (42%)

There is no conflict—15/76 (20%)

Department heads have final say—9/76 (12%)

Deal with conflict/agreement with a positive attitude and learn from it—6/76 (8%)

Instructor resolves it—5/76 (7%)

Agree or go away—2/76 (3%)

5. Briefly describe a recent experience in which you successfully contributed to a group task and learned something significant about how crews work from your success. Detail your contribution to the group, what you learned about crews, and how and why you learned from this experience. What does this suggest about the ideal crew you'd like to be a part of in this class?

When everyone knows their role and helps one another, it's like a machine—18/76 (24%)

Understand importance of clear, assertive communication and high morale—11/76 (15%)

Working together may be challenging with problems, but worth it—10/76 (13%)

Appreciate chain of command and importance of each position—7/76 (9%)

Building trust among the crew is key to positive leadership—4/76 (5%)

Following are the 2008 postproduction survey questions and coded results culled from short answers. Thirty-six out of eighty-four students responded.

1. Describe a challenging moment that was solved or not, and discuss what happened and how conflict was negotiated.

Challenging moment resolved as a team—13/36 (36%)

Challenging moment caused

compromise or incomplete work—10/36 (28%)

Challenging moment resolved as an individual—7/36 (19%)

2. Reflecting on what you know now, how would you collaborate differently?

Communicate more during pre-production—11/36 (31%)

Push for greater efficiency, stricter deadlines—8/36 (22%)

Communicate more during overall collaboration—6/36 (17%)

More detailed preproduction—4/36 (11%)

No changes—4/36 (11%)

3. How do the psychological/emotional dynamics of collaboration impact the process of making a film?

Stress causes people to rush and make mistakes, reducing productivity—14/36 (39%)

When dynamics are managed well, team works well together—9/36 (25%)

Dynamics create unknowns to be negotiated—4/36 (11%)

4. How do they impact the film itself?

Dynamics can slow the process so that tasks are never completed—10/36 (28%)

Dynamics are managed make a better film—10/36 (28%)

Dynamics are in the film or are the film—5/36 (14%)

Dynamics may have no effect on the final film—4/36 (11%)

Interpretation

To little surprise, advanced students in the Practicum, Animation and Independent Project initiatives find that collaboration has been overwhelmingly beneficial to them as developing filmmakers. (As presumed, students in Alternative Forms prefer working alone and were split on the benefits of collaboration.) But the question remains, what kinds of interactions among students occur while working on making films?

To approach the data from the beginning, we can look at the first survey I administered and see that students describe themselves in ways that look toward behaviors in the Wheelbook. Thirteen out of fifty-six students (23%) are “open to giving and receiving feedback.” An open, “discerning” attitude within group interaction is optimal for exchange and working through conflicting ideas. This response also predicts how the majority of the students’ Wheelbook choices fall into the behavior categories of the “Teacher/Con Artist” when looking at two years of survey data (48%). Additionally, many student responses to survey questions about communication and conflict correlate to Bilby’s description of behavior in essence of the Teacher: “smart, discerning, inventive, and articulate. . . .”

On a more poorly functioning note, a majority of student responses to questions about work allocation and moments of conflict resolution also correspond to behavior in personality of the Con Artist: “shrewd, cold, aloof, and taking selfish advantage.” Not surprisingly, these “personality” responses—the other side of the “Teacher” behavior—suggest that students are more likely to demonstrate manipulative behavior with work allocation concerns or with conflicts than around other collaborative issues. We must remember that many of our students are in their early twenties and are still forming their identities in relation to others. In the absence of coaching or dialogue about interpersonal strategies, many students align with the Con Artist. They want to be seen as “the best,” exhibiting the emotional stakes of outsmarting and being admired by others (including their instructors). Grading issues, work allocation, and notoriety for the individual may, at times, trump the importance of “team spirit” in the production classroom, but this survey data suggests that instructors can also facilitate the generous and positive behaviors of the “Teacher” for many student filmmakers.

The second most frequent behavior chosen by the students responding to the Wheelbook survey is the “Player/Judge.” Several student responses correlate loosely to Bilby’s descriptions of behavior in essence that is balanced,

disciplined, even wise, and often playful; yet many correlations to behavior in personality emerge throughout the surveys that are judgmental, often cynical, sarcastic, and occasionally punishing. At stake with the “Judge” is the need to win arguments and straighten out the other person (issues mentioned by several directors and producers in all capstone courses). Also interesting to note are the particular “blends” in student responses: the related emotions of humor and fun that occasionally give way to anger; the interplay between courage and fear; and how solitude can erode into loneliness—all of these emotions start to inform the filmmaking clichés presented at the beginning of this article.

Although more years of data need to be gathered, there are a few patterns where crew positions correlate to specific behaviors. Producers tend equally toward the Teacher/Con Artist and the Can-Do Person/Dictator, whereas directors, cinematographers, editors, sound mixers, and production designers tend primarily toward the Teacher/Con Artist. In contrast, the clichés of the rogue director, the cool cinematographer, and the solo video artist lend themselves toward the exaggerated personality of the “Rebel” and strongly align with the auteur tradition of filmmaking. These clichés “want, in everything, to do it their own way (for the beauty of it as they see it) and not be told what to do.” Surprisingly, only 4 percent of the students’ behaviors align with the Artist/Rebel, distributed equally throughout the capstone courses. What is going on here? Only the cliché of the Machiavellian producer may correlate with the findings regarding producers in this study. In personality, the Machiavellian producer looks to control others while outsmarting them and being admired, which combines the stakes for the Dictator and the Con Artist. An explanation for a lower emphasis on the Artist/Rebel behaviors may be a departmental shift away from an auteur model of filmmaking toward a producing culture that has sprung up over the last six years (and is the industry norm in the United States). Further evidence of this shift away from an auteur may explain the relatively small number (16%) of students who declared themselves leaders in

the first survey that I administered (which is a shift that my university may want to explore). Interestingly, the greatest diversity of Wheelbook behaviors occurs among student composers, with Alternative Forms and Animation students following close behind, perhaps because students in these areas receive exposure to a wider range of artistic disciplines in their studies.

There exists a sense of earnest play and a strong work ethic among the many responses. In the first survey that I administered, the second most common self-description was the “Hard Worker” (20%). Students’ most common expectation of other collaborators was “hard work” (14%) as well as “commitment” (14%). Evidence of these traits is exemplified in the high percentages of students answering three Wheelbook questions almost unanimously. The second question was about “relationship to deadlines,” to which 64 percent chose the most pragmatic answer. When asked what to say in a “moment of conflict,” 84 percent chose the most polite answer. In response to the question regarding the “hardest thing to say to another team member,” students claimed that they would avoid a direct criticism of someone’s work. It is interesting to note that pragmatism, politeness, and avoidance of direct criticism have been descriptions of Midwestern society for a long time. Although discussion of regional behavior and cultural differences deserve more attention, I would like to point out that particular patterns of behavior emerge in these surveys, about which faculty and students can dialogue. These patterns hold the potential for deepening an awareness of and conversations about values, inclinations, and the avoidance of conflict. Similar studies at other film schools may reveal the influence of the particular region where both students and faculty originate as well as cultural differences.

Women students represent 27 percent of the 149 students. Although for the academy this is a shocking inequity, relative to the overall enrollment at Columbia College Chicago, where female enrollment has been around 50 percent (out of over 12,000 students), this number matches the overall gender ratios for the film

department—76 percent men, 24 percent women. Moreover, it actually exceeds the number of women working in the film industry. As Martha Lauzen points out in a study of the film industry, only 17 percent of all above-the-line positions of the top 250 grossing films were held by women in 2005, the same percentage as in 1998 (Lauzen). At Columbia College Chicago, although the majority of women align with the men in their primary behavior of the Teacher/Con Artist, there seems to have been a shift away from the Hard Worker/Doormat behavior from 2007 to 2008. Furthermore, the wide spectrum of primary and secondary behaviors indicates how women may be more “niche”-focused—filling in where most useful and finding more positions that match their interests and skills. In both years of the study, women students were five times more likely than men to assume the behavior of the Can-Do Person/Dictator, a finding that suggests that women students are stepping up and negotiating leadership roles more actively. It is difficult to determine, however, whether this behavior is in essence (brave, strong, manually competent, bold) or in personality (arrogant, pushy, demanding, destructive). Generally, there exists a high level of awareness for others in all responses by women students. One of my favorite responses (although delivered in jest) from a female student regarding how conflict was negotiated demonstrates an awareness of what is at stake during interaction: “I barrel through challenges like a freight train and negotiate conflicts with all the tact of a bulldozer.”

One of the aspects of the overall data that struck me the most is the infrequent reference to content, aesthetics, or story concerns in the majority of student responses to questions about behavior and collaboration. One explanation could be that after the initial ideation process, most questions concerning story, theme, or even audience reception were addressed or resolved by the various teams. In a closer reading of the written responses to the various surveys, however, I find several comments that suggest that questions of story were not addressed and only one comment that states “collaboration should

support the story.” In fact, in the first survey I gave regarding general attitudes about collaboration, only two out of sixty-five students (4%) stated that they expected their collaborators to possess “creativity.” What is going on here? Are students not engaging in issues of content or in how audiences receive work? In the final surveys, students gave numerous anecdotes regarding how conflicts played out, yet most referred to technical, logistical, and practical problems during production and not to story or content quality.

Film schools often prioritize the technical, highly specialized orientation for making films, rather than the processes for realizing creative team projects. The inability to weave an emphasis on story throughout the production process and the valuation of technical expertise over storytelling knowledge can lead to films that are weak on content. Further tracking of the success of student films in competition or graduates in the field needs to be done to determine the response from festivals and employers, respectfully. The absence of survey responses about film content amplifies my concern about the influence of the industry in the minds of students and possibly instructors. To this end, Scott Berkun, while reflecting on convergence and filmmaking, adds a cautionary note: “Conflicts are natural where viewpoints converge, but success is the result of orchestration, not simply organization.”

I firmly believe that students recognize the

importance of interpersonal dynamics—that is, after all, the reality that they must negotiate in order to complete their films. In the final surveys, students were split in their responses on how collaborative “dynamics . . . slow the process” of the film or how “managing dynamics . . . make a better film.” Some students even responded with comments that suggest that the “dynamics . . . are the film.” In the final analysis these responses suggest what is most clear—students are ready for a more direct discussion and education about interpersonal dynamics in film production.

Conclusion

Film schools can play a role in improving collaboration dynamics as well as gender and ethnic inequities by educating students about the kinds of people who make films presently and those who have made them in the past and by proactively encouraging new students to reach into the future to tell their stories. Collaborators inhabit their roles, which are informed by their personal stories and backgrounds. Gaffers once came from the shipyards. Now production designers receive training in architecture and design. It is important to remember that training and necessary experiences have changed over time and that each crew member carries his or her own story.

Film schools can translate the bottom-line reality of the film industry—prioritizing craft



Photo 8: The process continues—production still from the narrative project *Pirates and Pills*, Practicum Course 2007

over process—into an educational opportunity. By facilitating students to become more aware of behavior when collaborating, instructors increase the clarity and possible depth to which heartfelt stories manifest themselves and resonate in student collaborators, and ultimately in the audience. We should resist reducing collaboration to just the evaluation and discussion of individual efforts on each film project. We should be careful with emphasizing craft over logistics or organization over “orchestration”—emphases that presume a narrow approach to performing in the various crew positions.

Each collaborator brings inherent strengths to the table when joining a creative team that realizes a story from paper to a final production. Through more mindful interaction and less manipulative discussion, students can draw on the rich and diverse history of filmmaking practices as a guiding force for producing creative stories, rather than a homogenizing one that is geared more toward conformity of practice and formulaic narratives. My goal with this study is to demonstrate both the diversity and the conformity of behavior found in students who make films. I hope others will explore patterns operating in their programs for the sake of jumpstarting a more holistic approach to the teaching and learning of interpersonal dynamics while working collaboratively to tell a story.

NOTES

1. Nicholas T. Proferes writes in his pragmatic book *Film Directing Fundamentals*, “For most of us, it is a lot easier to hire someone than to fire them. But sometimes letting someone go is absolutely the right thing to do *for the sake of the production* [author’s italics]. . . the director must take responsibility for the *entire* production . . . And this responsibility extends to the managerial/logistical aspects such as adherence to the schedule and set discipline” (98).

2. The entire passage from Bilby is as follows: “The true ‘I am’ is not the ‘I am’ of ‘I think, therefore I am.’ Nor of ‘I have emotional feelings therefore I am,’ Nor of ‘I have ego and desires therefore I am.’ Nor of ‘I have a personality that manipulates and defends, therefore I am.’ The true ‘I am’ is simply the conscious experiences of all of these human functions that one can have of one’s own ‘self.’ The true ‘I am’ is the ‘I am’ of ‘I experience, therefore, I am.’”

3. Bilby on the awareness game: “The wheelbook

illustrates both healthy and unhealthy behavior, and brings to light the corresponding healthy, productive, and highly-functioning behaviors that are blocked off and obscured by poorly functioning behaviors. Ordinarily, modern diagnostic systems tend to show up only the unhealthy, maladaptive, or “neurotic” symptoms of what is designated “sick” behavior. Yet, playing this game will show that behavior which causes troubles and problems can be turned around, by choice.”

4. Wheelbook survey for collaboration on film production:

1. How would you describe the way you contribute to a problem-solving meeting?
 - a. I give orders
 - b. I provide ideas
 - c. I evaluate the suggestions on the table
 - d. I see things from a fresh perspective
 - e. I volunteer to do some of the hard work
 - f. I support the leadership
 - g. I care about the people involved
 - h. I make sure everyone is comfortable
2. When you are working on a project, how do you expect to work with others in relationship to deadlines?
 - a. I expect results as soon as possible
 - b. I can wait for what I want for a long time
 - c. I expect results according to the arrangement
 - d. I don’t keep track of deadlines
 - e. I think there is plenty of time
 - f. I can’t wait to get started
 - g. I would rather things stay the same
 - h. I should have more time for everyone
3. When you are working on a project, what is the most important element for you?
 - a. I want to be in control of the project
 - b. I want to be admired for the work
 - c. I want to make sure that it goes according to plan
 - d. I want it to be beautiful
 - e. I want a comfortable working environment
 - f. I want to be secure in my area of responsibility
 - g. I want to get to know the people I’m working with
 - h. I want to be part of the community working together
4. What is the worst thing that can happen on a project you are working on?
 - a. It will spin out of control
 - b. No one will notice the great work I’m doing
 - c. Something will go wrong, and I won’t be prepared to fix it
 - d. My vision of the result will be compromised by other’s choices
 - e. I fail in my part of the project
 - f. I get fired
 - g. I end up hating my coworkers
 - h. Other people don’t share in the privilege of the work

5. When you interact with others on a project, what might you say in a moment of conflict?
 - a. "Do what I tell you to do."
 - b. "I think that we could . . ."
 - c. "Why did you do that?"
 - d. "Fuck that!"
 - e. "I'm sorry."
 - f. "You're right."
 - g. "How could you do that?"
 - h. "I should/shouldn't do that."
6. When working with others on a project, how might you negotiate a conflict to get what you want?
 - a. "This is the deal; take it or leave it."
 - b. "I can see all the outcomes, so the best way is . . ."
 - c. "I know right from wrong. I'm right, and you are wrong."
 - d. "To hell with the normal process; this way is better."
 - e. "Sorry, I just can't do that."
 - f. "I'll get someone else to help me take care of it."
 - g. "How can you treat me this way after all I've done for this project?"
 - h. "I should help rescue this project."
7. When working with others on a project, how do you expect others to act?
 - a. To show respect for me and to do what I ask them to do
 - b. To have faith in my ability to get the job done
 - c. To follow the procedure as it was agreed to
 - d. To let me do it my own way
 - e. To give me support in getting my work done
 - f. To tell me the truth
 - g. To respond to all of my contributions
 - h. To take care of their own problems
8. When working with others on a project, what kind of behavior would you least tolerate?
 - a. Coworkers who act "smart" or are "out of control"
 - b. Coworkers who misunderstand what you really promised
 - c. Coworkers who make stupid mistakes
 - d. Coworkers who expect you to be like them
 - e. Coworkers who are pushy
 - f. Coworkers who don't keep their promises
 - g. Coworkers who don't recognize the contribution you've made
 - h. Coworkers who take too many careless chances
9. In a moment of conflict on a group project, what might you do to get things on track?
 - a. Assign everyone a task
 - b. Explain the situation thoroughly
 - c. Refer to an authority to establish what is correct in this situation
 - d. Suggest something off the wall
 - e. Stay out of the way
 - f. Appeal for outside help
 - g. Ask everyone to commit more to the project
 - h. Remind everyone of the risks of various choices
10. The thing that I'd find really difficult to say to another person in my group would be . . .
 - a. "Do it your own way."
 - b. "I need your help."
 - c. "Good job."
 - d. "Yes."
 - e. "I can do it now."
 - f. "I don't need your help."
 - g. "Poor job."
 - h. "No."
11. What do you consider the essential strength you bring to a group project?
 - a. The ability to get things done
 - b. Creative imagination
 - c. Wisdom
 - d. Artistic sensitivity
 - e. Endurance for the long haul
 - f. Inspiration
 - g. Tenderness
 - h. Responsibility
12. What do you like about working on a film project?
 - a. Leading the work
 - b. Contributing good ideas
 - c. Having fun with other people
 - d. Creating something beautiful
 - e. Doing what I'm asked to do
 - f. Urging everyone on
 - g. Making sure that everyone has a good time
 - h. Making sure that everything is taken care of
13. What do you think you've got that can help the effort?
 - a. The muscle
 - b. The education
 - c. The balance
 - d. The taste for life
 - e. The modesty
 - f. The excitement
 - g. The caring heart
 - h. The responsibility
14. What can others count on you for?
 - a. To have the clout to do it
 - b. To find the smart way to do it
 - c. To offer frank criticism and jokes
 - d. To be sensitive to poisonous elements
 - e. To work hard and to be understanding
 - f. To be loyal and to respond quickly
 - g. To care about everyone's feelings
 - h. To take care of loose ends
15. What do you consider one of your best characteristics? "I'm . . .
 - a. Unflinching
 - b. Articulate
 - c. Candid
 - d. Innovative

- e. Peaceful
 - f. Cheerful
 - g. Passionate
 - h. Generous
16. What is most important to you?
- a. Strength
 - b. Intelligence
 - c. Wisdom
 - d. Beauty
 - e. Humility
 - f. Energy
 - g. Love
 - h. Concern for others
17. What do you like? "I like . . .
- a. To work things out
 - b. To discover
 - c. Games
 - d. Acceptance of the beauty of it
 - e. To rest
 - f. To be appreciated
 - g. Pleasure
 - h. To help

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