

January 2008

The Believing Game--Methodological Believing

Peter Elbow

University of Massachusetts - Amherst, elbow@english.umass.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umass.edu/eng_faculty_pubs



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Elbow, Peter, "The Believing Game--Methodological Believing" (2008). *English Department Faculty Publication Series*. 5.
http://scholarworks.umass.edu/eng_faculty_pubs/5

This is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Department Faculty Publication Series by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

DRAFT**The Believing Game--Methodological Believing**

Peter Elbow. paper at the CCCC, New Orleans 4/08

I wandered into the believing game in 1972 when I was finishing *Writing Without Teachers*. In describing a teacherless class, I had laid down a central guideline: no arguing. If a reader responds to your writing by saying something that seems wrong, don't disagree, don't argue, just listen and try to see your text through that reader's eyes. The same for readers disagreeing with each other. "Eat like an owl: take in everything and trust your innards to digest what's useful and discard what's not" (this was actually a later formulation in *Writing With Power* 264).

But it struck me as I was finishing this first book about writing that many readers would feel it was an intellectual scandal to outlaw a central practice for good thinking. (Joe Harris made exactly this critique in 1996: "[S]tudents in his workshops . . . do not seem to be held answerable to each other as intellectuals" [31]). I decided I needed to write a justification for "no arguing," but I didn't want this theoretical writing to clutter up a very practical down to earth book--so I made it a long appendix essay. Ever since then, I've been chewing and developing the believing game; this seems to be my seventh essay (see Works Cited). Looking back on my career, I now see the believing game at the core of all my work.

I still struggle with how to name it. In my second essay, I tried a fancier more theoretically self-conscious term, calling it "methodological believing." But then I worried that this was needlessly pretentious--and I like the irreverence of "game." Yet now as I write this essay, "methodological" seems central.

In what follows, I give a short definition of the believing game; then a tiny history of believing and doubting; and finally three arguments for the believing game.

Definitions

I can define the believing game most easily and clearly by contrasting it with the doubting game. Indeed, the believing game derives from the doubting game.

The *doubting game* represents the kind of thinking most widely honored and taught in our culture. It's sometimes called "critical thinking." It's the disciplined practice of trying to be as skeptical and analytic as possible with every idea we encounter. By trying hard to doubt ideas, we can discover hidden contradictions, bad reasoning, or other weaknesses in them--especially in the case of ideas that seem true or attractive. We are using doubting as a *tool* in order to scrutinize and test.

In contrast, the *believing game* is the disciplined practice of trying to be as welcoming or accepting as possible to every idea we encounter: not just listening to views different from our own and holding back from arguing with them; not just trying to restate them without bias; but actually *trying* to believe them. We are using believing as a *tool* to scrutinize and test. But

instead of scrutinizing fashionable or widely accepted ideas for hidden flaws, the believing game asks us to scrutinize unfashionable or even repellent ideas for hidden virtues. Often we cannot see what's good in someone else's idea (or in our own!) till we work at believing it. When an idea goes against current assumptions and beliefs--or if it seems alien, dangerous, or poorly formulated--we often cannot see any merit in it.*

*I'm on slippery ground when I equate the doubting game with critical thinking, since critical thinking has come to mean almost any and every kind of thinking felt to be good. Consider the opening definition at the website of the *Foundation for Critical Thinking*

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.

It entails the examination of those structures or elements of thought implicit in all reasoning: purpose, problem, or question-at-issue; assumptions; concepts; empirical grounding; reasoning leading to conclusions; implications and consequences; objections from alternative viewpoints; and frame of reference. Critical thinking — in being responsive to variable subject matter, issues, and purposes — is incorporated in a family of interwoven modes of thinking, among them: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking, and philosophical thinking.

Critical thinking can be seen as having two components: 1) a set of information and belief generating and processing skills, and 2) the habit, based on intellectual commitment, of using those skills to guide behavior. . . . People who think critically consistently attempt to live rationally, reasonably, empathically. (Scriven and Paul)

Who could ever resist anything here (except the prose)?

I'd argue, however, that despite all attempts to de-fuse the word "critical," it nevertheless carries a connotation of criticism. The word still does that work for many fields that use it for a label. For example, in "critical theory," "critical literacy," and "critical legal theory," the word still actively signals a critique, in this case a critique of what is more generally accepted as "theory" or "literacy" or "legal theory". The OED's first meaning for *critical* is "Given to judging; esp. given to adverse or unfavourable criticism; fault-finding, censorious." Not till the sixth meaning do we get past a censorious meaning to a sense of merely "decisive" or "crucial."

In the simple fact that "critical thinking" has become a "god term" that means any kind of good thinking, I see striking evidence of the monopoly of the doubting game in our culture's conception of thinking itself. ("Burke refers to a word like honor as a god-term, because it represents an aspiration towards a kind of perfection. The ultimate term, of course, is God himself." [Goodhart])

A Short, Idealized History of Believing and Doubting

Believing seems to come first. It looks as though it was evolutionarily useful for children to believe parents and others with authority. When I was very little, my older brother and sister held out a spoonful of horse radish and said, "Here. This is good." And I ate it. After that, I wanted to distrust everything they told me, but soon I reverted to my natural trust and faith in them. I tried for systematic doubt but failed. The father in the famous story (by O

Henry?) tried to instill a more robust doubt by teaching his little child to jump off the table into his arms--and then one day standing back and letter her crash to the floor.

Unless people are vigorously trained in critical thinking, they tend to grow up into adults who have a propensity to believe what looks obvious or what they hear from people in authority or from the culture. Adults used to assumed that a rain dance could make it rain; they used to burn witches because of disease outbreaks. And plenty of people still respond gullibly to emails saying they've won hundreds of thousands of dollars and just need to send one thousand dollars for legal fees. My wife is a volunteer tax preparer and health care counselor for senior citizens and has a client who was just wiped entirely out by such a scheme.

So human *credulity* gets us into trouble. But when some people get burned enough, they learn to doubt everything. We see this most nakedly in matters of the heart: some people who feel betrayed come to resist *any* close attachment. We've been living through an era that tempts us into blanket cynicism. I catch myself starting to reject as false *by definition* any announcement that comes from the government or a big corporation. We all know people who have developed a knee-jerk skeptical temperament and reject all ideas.

But despite my feeling of betrayal by Bush and Exxon, I actually realize that it's *not* careful thinking for me to reject *any* statement or any information that comes from their direction. For I'm the inheritor of a more sophisticated kind of skepticism that has developed over the centuries. This is a tradition of systematic skepticism that I call the doubting game or methodological doubting. The goal is not to reject everything but to test for validity.

Socrates was in on the development of logic and he gave the outlines to a kind of systematic use of doubting in his adversarial dialogues. He usually fueled these conversations with skeptical questions: "But *why* is it good to obey our parents, our rulers, and our traditions?" He spurred young people to question skeptically what their elders and their culture told them to believe--and he was killed for his efforts.

Descartes is famous for a more self-consciously formal version of methodological doubting. He said, "I will doubt *everything*." But his goal was *not* to reject everything; his burning desire was to find something he could *believe*--something that *survived* the test of doubting. It was with so called Enlightenment thinking of the 18th century, with people like Voltaire undermining all religious authority, that a lot of this kind of skeptical rationality became more or less orthodox. And there was an important social dimension to enlightenment rationality. J. S. Mill gave the classic celebration of debate and argument. If we avoid censorship and instead create a truly free forum for the open debate of all ideas, he argues, we can winnow out bad thinking and find that ideas bear trust.

Note the important difference between blanket, naive, unthoughtful skepticism that rejects everything and the use of doubting as a methodological tool where the goal is not rejection but testing. Only temperamental skeptics are really good at instinctive skepticism, but when a practice gets formulated as a tool--and we teach it as a conscious method in schools--then it's more available to people of all temperaments.

Methodological doubting is central to the classical definition of scientific method (most famously formulated by Karl Popper). The method involves trying to formulate various hypotheses about some particular issue in order to try to *disprove* those hypotheses--and thereby see which ones seem to survive. But most scientists know that any faith they put in a

hypothesis they cannot disprove can only be *provisional* faith. No amount of evidence can give full certainty that a positive hypothesis is right. Certainty is only possible for negative skeptical claims such as “All swans are *not* white.”

The incredible success of science gives powerful authority to the idea of methodological or systematic doubting. We advance knowledge if we try to doubt and disprove what we’re tempted to believe. For example, many people have faith in certain drugs or herbs that give them great relief, but scientifically double blind experiments show that many of these particular drugs don’t in themselves do the job. (I know: things are not quite as simple as the classic Popper story of scientific method. I’ll acknowledge that later.)

So this is where we are. We honor systematic skepticism or the doubting game as the best form of thinking. It’s easy to doubt what’s dubious, but the whole point of systematic skepticism is to try to doubt what we find most obvious or true or right. Of course we can’t act--or even think very far--unless we accept at least some view, so we want to know which view is most worthy of trust. Scientists do their best to disprove a hypothesis not because they want to reject it but in order to see if they can show it is worth trusting--for a while anyway.

Let me continue this story briefly into the future. Note the progression so far: naive believing causes trouble, so this leads us to doubt. But total blanket rejecting is too blunt a tool--and too difficult--and so our culture learned to develop a more sophisticated methodological skepticism.

As you can guess, I think we’re ready for the other shoe to drop. That is, at the moment, we’re stuck with only naive belief. Our culture hasn’t developed methodological or systematic believing to match methodological doubting. We haven’t learned to use belief as a *tool*--as we use doubt as a tool. That is, over the centuries, we learned to separate the *process* of doubting from the *decision* to reject. But we haven’t learned to separate the *process* of believing from the *decision* to accept. This separation that we made in the case of doubting will feel difficult in the case of believing. For the process of believing has caused enormous problems--and still does--and the process of doubting has born great fruit. The process itself of believing seems tainted; our concept of belief tends to connote commitment. So we tend to feel that believing can never be a part of careful thinking.

Since that appendix essay in *Writing Without Teachers*, I’ve been trying to describe methodological believing as a discipline--decoupled from commitment--decoupled from temperament or naivete or credulity. I’ve been trying to show that it is possible and that it makes sense to *try* to believe things that we don’t believe--especially things we don’t want to believe. And that trying can lead to a kind of conditional or temporary believing. People do it all the time--especially when they tell fictional stories or write poems. Just as you don’t have to be a skeptical person to use methodological doubting, we don’t have to be credulous or weak minded to believe lots of things--temporarily--and *try* to believe even more.

If this sounds crazy, it’s probably because you’ve forgotten how hard it was hard to learn methodological doubting. When we were children, it seemed crazy for teachers to tell us that we should doubt multiple and conflicting ideas--that we should try to doubt ideas that we love. How can I doubt what seems right and precious to me--or doubt someone I trust? How can I doubt that the sun comes up in the morning?

If you still think (naively) that it's easy to practice systematic skepticism--to try to doubt what you want to believe--you need only notice that lots of very smart people still can't do it. We see lots of our colleagues with PhDs who can only doubt ideas they *don't* like. We give our schools the job of teaching this ability (whenever people make lists of goals or outcomes for education at every level, *critical thinking* is usually central and in this case the term usually connotes rational skepticism). Critical thinking or careful doubting doesn't come naturally to humans--especially to children. The point of a tool is to learn to do something that doesn't come naturally.

What especially interests me in true methodological doubting is not just the need for act of *intellect*, but also an act of *effort* or *will*. No one can *make* me doubt something I want to believe (for example, the efficacy of freewriting). It won't happen unless I actually *try*. The good news is that we've built a culture of critical thinking--at least in the academy--that makes me feel that I'm not thinking carefully unless I *do* try to doubt what I want to believe. This is good. My argument is that we need to build a richer culture of *rationality*--richer than mere doubting or critical thinking--so that people will feel that they are not thinking carefully unless they try to believe ideas they don't want to believe.

So just as methodological doubting is *not* natural, so too methodological believing is not natural. It's not natural to try to believe ideas we disagree with or even hate. It has to be a tool or game that is decoupled from temperament or commitment. In short, methodological doubting and believing are symmetrical, and I'm claiming that we need both. If we try systematically to doubt everything, we're not trying to reject everything, we're trying to find flaws we couldn't see before and see which ideas look best after this scrutiny of doubt. If we try systematically to believe everything, we're not trying to accept everything, we're trying to find virtues we couldn't see before and see which ideas look best after this scrutiny of believing. And as I'll try to show more clearly in a minute, neither tool can demonstrate that anything is actually true.

Three Arguments for the Believing Game

In the first two arguments, I'll show how the believing game helps the doubting game meet its own goal. In the third argument, I'll highlight different goals that the believing game serves.

(1) *We need the believing game to help us find flaws in our own thinking.* The doubting game is supposed to do this job, of course: find weaknesses not just in the thinking of others but in our own. But it often falls down on the job.

The flaws in our own thinking usually come from our assumptions---our ways of thinking that we accept without noticing--assumptions that are part of the very structure our thinking. And some of our assumptions are invisible to us because we are part of a community and a culture. But it's hard to doubt what we live inside of: we can't see it and we unconsciously take it for granted.

Here's where the believing game comes to the rescue. Our best hope for finding invisible flaws in what we can't see in our own thinking is to enter into *different* ways of thinking or points of view--points of view that carry different assumptions. Only from a new vantage point

can we see our normal point of view from the outside and thereby notice assumptions that our customary point of view keeps hidden.

Of course the doubting game does have a method for helping us find flaws in our own assumptions: debate. If we have others who disagree with us, and if we accept the rule of the doubting game that all ideas are fair game for debate--even our cherished shared ideas--then we have a good chance of finding flaws in what we take for granted.

But sometimes as we operate inside a community or culture, we don't find people who question what we take for granted. And even if we do, critical thinking often helps us *fend off* criticisms of our ideas or ways of seeing. We see this problem in much academic and intellectual interchange. When smart people are trained only in the tradition of the doubting game, they get better and better at criticizing the ideas of *others* that they don't like. They use this skill particularly well when they feel a threat to their ideas or unexamined assumptions.

Yet they feel justified in fending-off what they don't like because they feel they are engaged in "critical thinking." They take refuge in the feeling that they would be "unintellectual" if they said to an opponent what in fact they ought to say: "Your idea sounds really wrong to me. It must be alien to how I think. Let me try to enter into it and get a better perspective on my thinking--and see if there's something important that you can see that I can't see." In short, if we want to be good at finding flaws in our own thinking (a goal that doubters constantly trumpet), we need the believing game.

(2) *We need the believing game to help us choose among competing positions.* Again, the doubting game is supposed to do this job. But consider some of the typical arguments that swirl around us. Should we invade countries where atrocities are happening? Should we test school children with nation-wide tests in order to improve schools that leave children behind? Should we use grades in teaching?

The doubting game can reveal flaws or bad logic in *arguments* that support one position or another other. But flaws an *argument* do not demolish the *position* itself that these arguments are trying to support. We see this problem everywhere. Over and over we see illogical arguments for good ideas and logical arguments for bad ideas. We can never show that an idea or opinion or position is wrong--only that a supporting argument is wrong. No wonder people so seldom change their minds when someone finds bad reasoning in their argument.

So there are arguments for and against military intervention to stop atrocities--for and against national testing and grading. It is possible to find flaws in some of those arguments, but logic cannot show that intervention or national testing or grading are right or wrong. To decide whether to invade or test or grade--these are *decisions* that involves acts of *judgment*. Decisions or acts of judgment always depend on how much weight to give various arguments. In short--and scientists are often more explicitly aware of this--the doubting game can find flaws, but it can't make decisions for us.

In fact, historians of science have shown cases where scientists have refused to give up on hypotheses that seemed to be disproven by experiments. They say things like "Well the testing was flawed" and even, "This hypothesis is just too beautiful to give up." In effect, they're saying, "The *argument* for my hypothesis is flawed, but that doesn't mean my hypothesis is wrong." They are making an act of judgment. I'd argue that they have used the tool of the believing game and been able to see virtues in a position that the doubting game seems to disqualify.

Perhaps the disconfirmation was flawed; or perhaps there were flaws in how the position was formulated.

And suppose you are not so much trying to choose among options; you are trying to persuade people who disagree with you. You will probably use the doubting game to show flaws in their arguments. Fair enough. But often (surprise!) they don't change their mind. You haven't disproved their *position*, only their supporting arguments. They won't change their position unless you can get them to see the issue the way you see it. For that, you need the believing game. Of course you can't *make* them take the risk of playing the game--of actually *trying* to believe your position, even hypothetically and temporarily. But the believing game is inherently collaborative, so you have no leverage for asking them to play it with your position unless you start by taking the risk yourself of trying to believe *their* position--and showing that you've really given this a good faith effort--even asking for their help.

And you need to recognize the danger here. The believing game may seem permissive, but there's also a surprising principle of rigor that Wayne Booth articulated: that we cannot validly *reject* an idea till we've succeeded in dwelling in it--in effect to believe it. If you in your mind dismiss their idea as crazy--or even if you can restate their idea "nicely" but from your alien point of view--there may be something valuable and correct in it that you're still too blind to see. They may seem wrong or crazy--they may *be* wrong or crazy--but nevertheless they may still be able to see something that none of us can see. We may feel totally for or against invading to stop atrocities or national testing or grading--but usually there are gray areas: *under what conditions* or *in what senses* does it make sense to invade, test, or grade. (Most problems or disputes are deeply hermeneutic--more like interpreting a text than getting the right answer in geometry. To show that a text truly means X does not displace the claim that it also means (even if only partly) something quite contrary to X.)

Bottom line: The doubting game is a tool. It won't make a decision for us; it just puts us in a better position to judge matters that cannot be proven. The believing game is also a tool. Our judging will be more trustworthy if we can use the believing game to find hidden virtues that might exist in positions that are supported by faulty arguments. Tools help us think better. This leads to my third argument for the believing game. It's about thinking.

(3) *We need the believing game in order to achieve goals that the doubting game neglects.* The believing game develops a different kind of thinking, a different dimension of our intelligence or rationality, and also a different way of interacting with others.

This is no argument *against* the doubting game in itself, since it obviously develops an indispensable dimension of intelligence or rationality. The only thing I'm arguing against is the *monopoly* of the doubting game in our culture's notion of rationality or careful thinking--a monopoly that has led us to neglect a different and equally indispensable kind of careful thinking.

So now I'll contrast the doubting game and believing game as ways of using the mind and functioning with others:

Phenomenologically, the doubting game teaches us to fend off, guard ourselves, spit out. The believing game teaches us to welcome or swallow. For sophisticated children of the doubting game, this is not easy: trying to believe an alien idea can make us fear being changed or polluted.

With regard to learning, the doubting game teaches us to extricate or detach ourselves from ideas. In contrast, the believing game teaches us to enter into ideas--to invest or insert ourselves. Wayne Booth talks about the need to learn to “dwell in an idea” if we want to understand it. Polanyi insists that there is a “fiduciary transaction”--a core of trust--that is tacit in all learning. As children of the doubting game, we carefully invite our students to read and listen with a skeptical mind, but nevertheless that skepticism will not be very intellectually productive unless students have first *fully understood* what we want them to view skeptically. This means listening and entering into the words.

Language vs. experience. The doubting game is the rhetoric of *propositions* while the believing game is the rhetoric of *experience*. The doubting game teaches us that we can test or scrutinize points of view better if we put them into propositional form. This helps us bring logic to bear and see hidden contradictions (symbolic logic being the ideal form for scrutinizing thinking). As the rhetoric of experience, the believing game us teaches to try to understand points of view from the inside. Words can help us here, but the kind of words that help most tend to be imaginative, metaphorical, narrative, personal, even poetic.

But not *just* words. Images and sounds and body movements are particularly helpful for entering into alien ideas. Role playing--and yes, silence. When someone says what seems all wrong, the most productive response is often merely to listen and not reply at all. Teachers can productively insist on short periods of silence after a controversial point has been made. Not all cultures are so wedded to argument. (It was in order to defend nonarguing that I first worked out the idea of the believing game.)

With regard to action. The doubting game teaches us the value of pausing and disengaging from action--standing back, standing on the sidelines. This helps us see flaws we would miss if we went ahead and acted on a point of view. The believing game teaches us to engage or act. Sometimes you can't understand something till you try it or act on it. This is where role playing gets its power: understanding through doing and inhabiting--not debating.

Gender. The doubting game promotes ways of using the mind and being with others that have been associated in our culture with masculinity: arguing, resisting, saying no, pushing away, competing, being aggressive. The believing game promotes mental and social activity that has been associated in our culture with femininity: being compliant, listening, absorbing, swallowing, accepting, saying yes, not arguing back, not sticking up for own view. When women function as the doubting game invites--arguing, disagreeing, and debating--they are often seen as less feminine. When men function as the believing game invites--not arguing back, accepting, trying to help the other person's point of view--they are often seen as less masculine.

The individual and social dimensions. The doubting game promotes *both* individualism and social interaction. It promotes individualism by inviting the lone persons to question and doubt the group and see the self as separate and different. As Socrates pointed out, logic allows the individual to outvote the group. But the doubting game is also highly social, since it invites us to use others in argument and debate in order to find flaws in what looks reasonable or natural--and especially to find flaws in our own views.

So too, the doubting game promotes both social action and individualism. It invites the social process of enlisting others to help us look for virtues in what seems wrong. Here, the intellectual leverage comes from the cooperative process of merging with others.” Temporarily

at least, the individual pushes aside her differences and tries to join with others. “Help me see what you see because I can’t see it.” The believing game doesn’t strike me as highly individualistic except in this one crucial way: it invites the individual to listen and take seriously her own experience and point of view—even if it looks crazy—and not feel that one must subordinate one’s perceptions or experience or thinking to that of the group. But it supports this kind of individualism by asking for a flexible, constantly shifting methodological *groupishness*. It invites an individual who looks crazy to others to say, “Stop arguing with me and just listen for a while. In fact please help me make my position clearer and better.”

Consider a few of the ways that the believing game helps with the central activities of academic life.

Reading. The believing game helps us enter more fully into texts that we find difficult or alien—and also helps us discover and understand a wider range of interpretations. We want to teach students critical thinking, but we also want them to enter into texts that feel alien to them—to dwell in them and experience them—not just criticize them.

Discussion. Because of the dominance of critical thinking, especially in the academy, academics and students tend to feel that the best way to show they are smart is by pointing out flaws in the views of others. Discussions can take an adversarial tone. People tend to feel not-smart if they don’t see the flaws that “smart” people point out—or if they don’t criticize but rather say something like, “Tell me more about that. I’m trying to see things as you see them.” Discussions tend to be more fruitful if we have more people giving this believing game response.

Writing. Our current model for academic or essayist writing tends to be adversarial. When people write an essay arguing for a position, especially in the academy, they are usually expected start off trying to show that other points of view are wrong. There are epistemological problems with this ritual. The believing game suggests modes of writing persuasively and analytically that are nonadversarial.

Concluding Reflections

The believing game is alive—but not well—in our midst. Look more closely at people who are deeply smart and creative rather than just quick in debate; people who find new ideas and creative solutions rather than just criticizing or developing the implications of existing ideas; people who collaborate productively with others and bring about action. I think you’ll see that many of these people are using the believing game.

But because of our current model of what good thinking looks like, most of us lack the lens or the language to see their ability—to dwell genuinely in ideas alien from their own—as intellectual sophistication or careful thinking. When we see them listening and drawing out others, we call them generous or nice rather than smart. We don’t connect good listening to intelligence, and we call creativity merely a mystery. We say “Somehow they can mobilize others and actually get things done,” but we see that as a social and personal gift rather than an intellectual skill. And because our intellectual model is flawed in these ways, we don’t *teach* this ability to enter into alien ideas. (See my 2005 *College English* essay for extensive suggestions for classroom uses of the believing game.)*

*There's a fairly well accepted teaching method that seems to me to reflect a tacit understanding that we need the rhetoric of experience (central to the believing game)--as well as the rhetoric of propositions. That is, many teachers in various fields use *workshops* to help teach concepts to the students. They recognize the limitation of lectures and reading since they operate by propositions ; they acknowledge Dewey's point that we cannot hand an idea to someone like a brick--that we need to *set up an experience* that leads the learner to create the idea herself. Experiential education has grown into a lively field with various journals and many conferences.

A parting testament to the doubting game. In case you think that I'm biased against the doubting game, let me acknowledge that this essay is an exercise in skeptical doubting. All three of my arguments are themselves critical, adversarial, combative, practical, and hard-assed. They are all criticizing weaknesses or flaws in the doubting game. I am using the doubting game as a tool to try to undermine what I see as misguided faith in the doubting game itself as the only tool we need for good thinking. I'm trying to persuade you to join me playing the doubting game with the doubting game. If I wanted to use the *believing game* to persuade you of its own merits, I'd have done better to tell stories and convey experiences--whether in words or, ideally, in workshop activities. I hope this reinforces my larger non-attack message: I'm not trying to get rid of the doubting game--merely to add the believing game.

Summary. The doubting game and believing game are tools or methods. As such they cannot make decisions for us. The doubting game can't prove that a position is wrong--nor the believing game that it is right. For decisions we need to make judgments. But our judgments will be better if we get to use both sets of tools. In summary, I'm arguing for a richer and more accurate picture of rationality or intelligence or careful thinking.

An invitation to readers of this draft for response. I'm perplexed which of two terms to highlight and emphasize: "the believing game" or "methodological believing." Also, as you see, I've down played "critical thinking." I'd like to link it to the doubting game, but you'll see why I feel I have to runaway from doing so. I'd be curious to hear thoughts about this.

Works Cited

Booth, Wayne. "Blind Skepticism versus a Rhetoric of Assent." *College English*, 67.4 (March 2005): 377-88.

---. *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism*. U of Chicago, 1979.

Elbow, Peter. "Appendix Essay. The Doubting Game and the Believing Game: An Analysis of the Intellectual Process." In *Writing Without Teachers*. Oxford University Press, 1973. 147-91.

---. "The Doubting Game and the Believing Game." *Pre/Text: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal of Rhetoric* 3.4 (Winter 1982).

- . "Methodological Doubting and Believing: Contraries in Inquiry." In *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*. Oxford University Press, 1986. 254-300.
 - . "The Believing Game: A Challenge after Twenty-Five Years." In *Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing and Teaching Writing*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2000. 76-80.
 - , "Bringing the Rhetoric of Assent and The Believing Game Together--and into the Classroom." *College English* 67.4 (March 2005): 388-99.
 - . "The Believing Game and How to Make Conflicting Opinions More Fruitful." In *Nurturing the Peacemakers in Our Students: A Guide to Teaching Peace, Empathy, and Understanding*. Chris Weber, editor. Heinemann, 2006. 16-25.
- Goodheart, Eugene, *The Reign of Ideology*. NY: Columbia UP.
- Harris, Joseph. *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1997.
- Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy*. New York: Harper and Row, 1958.
- Scriven, Michael and Richard Paul. "Defining Critical Thinking." Posted prominently at the website of the Foundation for Critical Thinking. www.criticalthinking.org